

DfID/World Bank SESP preparation mission

**A brief review of the assessment of student
achievement in Kaduna, Kano and Kwara
states of Nigeria**

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Essential Abbreviations

CA	Continuous Assessment
ERC	Education Resource Centre
ESP	Education Strategic Plan
ESS	Education Support Services
ESOP	Education Strategic Operational Plan
JSCE	Junior School Certificate Examination
JSS	Junior Secondary School
LGEA	Local Government Education Authority
NCCE	National Commission for Colleges of Education
NCEE	National Common Entrance Examination
NECO	National Examinations Council
NERDC	National Education Research and Development Council
OT	Objective test
SCEE	State Common Entrance Examination
SSCE	Senior School Certificate Examination
SSS	Senior Secondary School
SUBEB	State Universal Basic Education Board
ToR	Terms of Reference
UBE	Universal Basic Education
WAEC	West African Examinations Council

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1 Introduction

This review has been conducted as part of the input to the SESP project preparation mission in September 2006. Because of time constraints it has necessarily been very rushed and has depended heavily on information provided by others (to whom we are very grateful) and written sources detailed in footnotes. It forms the basis for our recommended interventions in the general area of student assessment.

2 Interpretation of our ToR

In brief, the ToR for this consultancy require us to conduct a review of current assessment policies and strategies in the three states, the extent to which they follow national policy and the problems encountered and the capacities in the three states to meet their commitments to student assessment. The ToR identify class and school-based assessment as well as state and national examinations and require us to review the extent and quality of the processes used. We are asked to relate the work to the need to raise student achievement levels and to recommend the advice and guidance on

- concepts for school-based, state and national assessment
- any needs for the development of assessment standards
- needs for any provision of school-based assessment systems
- the expert and teacher training required
- any development of methods and instruments that is required.

We are concerned here with curriculum-embedded assessment and we have responded to these ToR in the context of wider potential developments in the provision of textbooks and support materials, processes for inspection, the provision of support and training for teachers and changes that are taking place in assessment as a result of the implementation of the National Policy for Education in Nigeria. Although it is outside the scope of basic education we have included brief discussions of the senior secondary curriculum and assessments but have not considered assessment beyond this level.

However, the student assessment processes identified in the ToR relate to three purposes for assessment that need to be clearly articulated in order to provide a clearer structure to the advice and guidance that we are giving; these are discussed in the next section.

In the limited time available for the study we have relied more heavily on information provided by others and on literature sources than on direct observation of the processes of assessment in action in the three states and in Nigeria as a whole. Whilst the discussion that follows has been largely driven by the situations in the three states that are participating in SESP, we believe that most of the information and our recommendations are, in general terms, applicable across the country as a whole.

Underpinning all of the work on student assessment is the imperative that the standards of student learning should be improved. There is ample evidence that these standards are lower than they should be; this is widely regarded as a result of a combination of factors that includes the scarcity of trained teachers, the lack of resources in schools and poor classroom practice. The recommendations that we have made later in this review are designed to address this fundamental issue in a way that builds capacity in the three states and is sustainable beyond the life of the proposed project.

3 Purposes for assessment

In addressing our ToR we have tried to distinguish some different purposes for assessment, using models that are widely recognised in many countries. This is essential if we are to conduct a coherent analysis of the issues in the three states and present constructive recommendations for project interventions. The three broad purposes are

- formative – in relation to the advancement of student learning
- for selection and/or certification of individuals
- to monitor outcomes delivered by the system or as a result of a specific intervention

The second and third purposes are generally regarded as summative in that they are concerned with identifying achievement at the end of a learning programme. However, the distinction between formative and summative purposes is rarely precise and teachers are generally involved in both, sometimes within the same assessment process. It is important to emphasise that whether an assessment has a formative or summative purpose does not determine the assessment method (observation, coursework, test or examination, continuous, group work etc.) that may be used.

We have included a more detailed description of each of these purposes in Annex 1. There is a very extensive literature on the purposes for assessment and its processes that we have not cited but that is widely referenced through the work of the International Association for Educational Assessment of which Nigeria is a leading member¹.

4 Review of current assessment policies and strategies in Nigeria

4.1 The National Policy on Education

There are several commitments in the National Policy on Education² that relate specifically to assessment. These are identified as strategies that are in pursuit of a range of specific goals either for the whole of education or for that in specific

¹ See <http://www.iaea.info/>

² *National Policy on Education* (Fourth Edition, 2004). National Educational Research and Development Council.

sectors. There are other goals and strategies that may bear directly or indirectly on the operation of assessment, but these are not listed here.

- In relation to the goals for all education: *educational assessment and evaluation shall be liberalized by their being based in whole or in part on continuous assessment of the progress of the individual*
- In relation to goals specific to primary education: *advancement from one class to another shall be based on continuous assessment and the Primary School Leaving Certificate shall be based only on continuous assessment and shall be issued locally by the head teacher of the school*
- In relation to secondary education there is a commitment for the streaming of students from junior secondary schools to appropriate senior secondary schools as follows: *the streaming shall be based on the results of tests to determine academic ability, aptitude and vocational interest; and as much as possible to achieve a transition ratio of 50:50*
- For secondary schools there are four specific commitments for certification, as follows:
 - *The Junior School Certificate (JSC) shall be based on continuous assessment and examination conducted by state and federal examination boards*
 - *The Senior School Certificate (SSC) shall be based on continuous assessment and a national examination*
 - *Tertiary institution shall be required to continuously match their admission conditions with the practices directed by the Policy*
 - *Nigeria shall use public examination bodies for conducting national examinations in order to ensure uniform standards at this level*
- In relation to mass literacy, adult and non-formal education the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education shall: *provide a nationally recognized basic education certificate*
- For science, technical and vocational education in schools and technical colleges:
 - *Minimum entry requirement shall be the Junior School Certificate (JSC). Entry could also be based on evidence of aptitude shown in the technical courses and a reasonably good performance in mathematics and science. Students who have proved exceptionally able in the artisan training centres shall also be considered for admission.*
 - *The National Business and Technical Examinations Boards (NABTEB) shall handle technical and business examinations and award that National Technical Certificate (NTC), the National Business Certificate (NBC), the Advanced National Technical Certificate (ANTC) and Advanced National Business Certificate (ANBC)/Modular Trade Certificate.*
- In relation to the planning, administration and supervision of education there is a general commitment to the collection of information about education but no specific commitment to the collection of student achievement data. There is

a commitment for the federal ministry of education to be responsible for *co-ordinating national school examinations, testing and evaluation* and for state ministries of education to have responsibility for *examinations, testing and evaluation at primary and junior secondary levels*.

The 2004 National Policy is currently under review by NERDC. On the basis of preliminary consultations by NERDC it seems likely that a number of changes will be made for the new version.³ These include

- refinements to and expansion of the underlying philosophy of the curriculum, a greater emphasis on the values curriculum and better links to a wider range of curriculum support services
- the identification of policy for basic education by merging the primary and junior secondary sections
- an improved articulation between the basic and senior secondary sectors.

Whilst there may not be much new reference to student assessment this clarification seems likely to improve the environment within which it will operate. However, we were to gather at the time of our visit that the Federal Ministry of Education was considering the reinstatement of a common entrance examination late in the primary phase and that there was some concern that there should not be a period of as much as 9 years of basic education that did not include some external assessment.

4.2 The structure of assessment in Nigerian schools

Table 1 shows the structure of assessment across Nigeria, though there are differences between states; those for Kaduna, Kano and Kwara are detailed in later sections. Classroom based assessment includes formative assessment in support of learning as well as continuous assessment described later in connection with the JSC examination. School-based assessments are concerned with internal promotion, although this should probably be automatic under UBE. The common entrance examination at the end of primary school has recently disappeared or is in the process of disappearing as UBE is achieved.

There are then various placement and qualifying examinations in addition to the JSCE and SSCE.

Table 1: Summary of assessment in Nigerian schools

Type	Level(s)	Name	Frequency	Purpose	Methods
Classroom-based	Primary, Secondary (JSS&SSS)		Daily Monthly Term-base	Diagnostic Summative Promotion	Tests Seatwork Assignments Project Practical
School-based	Primary Secondary (JSS&SSS)		Term-base	Promotion	Examination
State	Primary	SCEE (State	Annually.	Placement;	Examination;

³ From notes of a meeting at NERDC 7 September 2006.

Type	Level(s)	Name	Frequency	Purpose	Methods
		common entrance examination)	(end of primary school cycle)	Certification	CA
State	JSS	JSCE (Junior school certificate examination)	Annually (end of Junior school cycle)	Placement; Certification	Examination. (including CA)
State	JSS	STSPE (Science & Technical schools placement examination)	Annually (end of Junior school cycle)	Placement; Certification	Selection examination.
State	SSS (II)	SSCQE (Senior Secondary Certificate Qualifying Examination)	Annually	Prepare students for SSCE and to determine eligibility for state sponsorship	Selection examination
National	Primary	NCEE (National Common Entrance Examination organised by NECO)	Annually (end of Primary school cycle)	Placement in to Unity schools	Written examination
National	SSS	SSCE (Senior School Certificate Examination organised by WAEC and NECO)	Annually (end of Senior school cycle)	Certification; Placement;	Examination. (including CA)

4.3 Senior Secondary School examinations

The highest level of qualifying examination used in Nigerian schools is the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) provided by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and by the National Examinations Council (NECO) and taken at the end of SS3. The former is an independent organisation, established in 1952, offering examinations across several West African countries with Nigeria contributing over three-quarters of its candidates. NECO was finally established by the federal government in Nigeria in 1999, following a number of enquires (the first was in 1977) because WAEC had had difficulties in coping with the number of candidates taking its examinations.

In 2006 these two organisations had, between them, just over 1 million candidates, each offering a number of subjects. A rough projection suggests that there could be as many as 4 million SSCE candidates by 2012, partly as a result

of the successful implementation of UBE and an increased transition rate from JSS to SSS⁴.

These two organisations are not closely regulated by the federal government but there is a degree of oversight that is intended to ensure that they operate comparable standards. They offer almost identical ranges of examinations (though not identical papers) but these are based on the same national curriculum with identical syllabuses and very similar formats, though the two organisations offer different booklists.

The WAEC and NECO examinations have consecutive timetables so that students can take both; this is, apparently, very common with students seeking to maximise their chances of success and state ministries seemingly willing to pay the fees. Having successfully completed the WAEC or NECO SSCE with 5 or more credits, students who wish to proceed to university will enter for the university matriculation examinations of the Joint Matriculation Examination Board. Universities set their own admissions cut-offs for each of their courses. Together with the qualifying and mock examinations held in many states the stakes could hardly be raised higher.

WAEC

WAEC examinations (which are available in other countries in West Africa) are publicly regarded as having a higher status, though it is doubtful whether its standards are actually much different from those of NECO. The Council has a central office in Lagos and state offices⁵. All of its examinations have a written paper and continuous assessment in the ratio of 70:30 respectively. Most written papers include objective items and some longer-answer questions (called 'essays' but this is not always an appropriate description). The examination papers that we have seen were well designed and printed. The questions were rather traditional in style and, in many papers, there was a high level of simple recall (reflecting syllabuses that generally stressed knowledge very heavily and were also quite traditional). Many papers appeared very demanding (for example, requiring candidates to complete 100 objective items in 60 minutes).

WAEC provides no specifications in its syllabuses that identify the skills being assessed in each set of questions although it does identify the types of question in each examination paper and, normally, the sections of the syllabus to which they will refer.

The WAEC objective items that we saw were generally well constructed; whilst such items can provide effective assessment over a range of skills it is common for more limited tests to have a very high proportion of simple recall items and

⁴ Taken from the paper *The need for more Examination Bodies in Nigeria*, Professor 'Dibu Ojerinde, June 2006. Interestingly, this paper calls for strong regulation of boards that offer SSCE; the author suggests that this should be on some sort of regional basis since it will become increasingly difficult for WAEC and NECO to deal with the very large number of candidate entries that will occur over the next 5-10 years.

⁵ Information in these paragraphs comes from notes of an interview in the Kaduna office of WAEC, 6 September 2006.

this was the case with some WAEC papers. (This is also particularly noticeable in state JSC and other examinations that we have seen.)

WAEC does not specify the tasks that are to be included in continuous assessment but expects schools to ensure the suitability of these and to verify that the marks submitted are from candidates' own work and that assessments have been properly conducted. The rationale is that the curriculum specifies what has to be done and that this area is beyond WAEC's remit; it was accepted that a large part of CA is probably based on written class tests.

NECO

The general structure and approach of NECO examinations is very similar to those of WAEC, described above⁶. The fact that both organisations are calling on the same group of people as examiners, markers etc was suggested as a basis for comparability of standards and, as with WAEC, the examination outcomes are scrutinised by a Board that has the authority to ask for changes to an award that it believes to be inappropriate.

NECO accredits schools to offer its examinations for a period of 5 years and it monitors schools during the examinations to see that things are being done properly.

A scrutiny of a small sample of NECO examination papers shows that they are very similar in format to those of WAEC. They are generally reasonably well printed and there is a widespread use of multiple-choice items. There is no direct assessment of practical skills or of oral language – both are done through written papers. The question quality is reasonable though there is a preponderance of assessment of simple recall, though with considerable differences between subjects.

NECO awards are made on the basis of the written examination and continuous assessment in the ratio 70:30. Like WAEC, NECO offers no specific advice to schools about the conduct of CA, relying on the federal government circular on CA in the JSCE (see below) as the basis upon which schools will undertake CA. There are checks on schools but these seem to be occasional rather than regular though it is possible for officers visiting schools to look at the evidence produced by individual students; it is not known how often they actually do this. CA is statistically moderated using the examination scores as the moderating instrument. Though a well-established and easy method, this does have a number of limitations but other moderation methods are clearly beyond NECO's resources.

NECO claims that it reinstated CA as part of the SSCE and thus raised standards of achievement. WAEC then also began to incorporate CA. If this is the case it suggests that the federal Ministry was not properly monitoring the activities of WAEC but it is noticeable that the NECO syllabus book makes only a single mention of CA in 275 pages and there is no attempt to relate the skills assessed

⁶ Information about NECO taken from an interview with the chief executive at the head office in Minna, 18 September 2006

in CA to those assessed in the written papers, either subject by subject or overall.

There was previously a National Common Entrance Examination (NCEE - see Table 1) that was conducted by NECO for the Federal Ministry of Education. The NCEE was meant for admission of pupils who completed the primary school cycle into the national unity schools (Federal schools) of which there are between 70 and 80 across Nigeria and to which any child may be admitted on passing the examination and being successfully interviewed. NCEE is now abolished due to the 'disarticulation' of JSS from the secondary education as emphasised by the national policy on UBE. During the days of NCEE, each student paid the sum of ₦250 as fees for the examination although many states were responsible for the payment of their students' examination fees. NECO continues to operate a JSCE for the same unity schools and for a number of private schools.

4.4 The Junior Secondary Certificate examination

The JSC examinations are operated in JSS3 and are the responsibility of the states but governed by a national policy that is, in effect, a regulatory instrument with which all states should comply⁷. This policy (or set of guidelines) specifies the procedures to be used in the management of the JSCE and the form of the examination itself. It also provides for the operation of continuous assessment.

Because of their importance as the terminal examination for basic education, there is a further discussion of the JSC examination in the next section.

4.5 The State Common Entrance Examination

The State Common Entrance Examination (SCEE) was conducted by the respective state's ministries of education.⁸ This examination was intended for the placement of P6 students into the JSS. CEE is now abolished or in the process of abolition to meet the requirement of the national UBE policy. However, the disappearance of the SCEE is conditional upon CA being seen to be satisfactory and there is widely seen to be a case for an examination in P6 that would provide information to the JS schools about student achievements. Whether the JS schools could do anything with this information, given their poor resources, is another matter. For the moment, some states are retaining the SCEE.

4.6 The effect on classroom practice

It is almost impossible for classroom teachers to construct good objective items; they either use simpler question forms or borrow items from past examination papers. Moreover, the strong emphasis on objective testing that is often largely concerned with simple recall, coupled with the high stakes of JSC and SSC examinations, generates a top-down constraint on classroom practice. Thus the use of written tests to assess spoken (oral) English and the lack of direct assessment of practical skills are unfortunate.

⁷ *Guidelines on Uniform Standards for the Junior School Certificate Examinations (Revised)*. Federal Ministry of Education, December 1992

⁸ In some states, CEE was conducted by ERC

The general effect is to support learning that focuses on the narrow range of skills required to succeed in the examination and, because this is best served by rote learning, to underpin teacher-centred classroom management. Whilst the overcrowding and lack of resources in many classrooms makes it difficult for teachers to move outside this narrow teaching method, it is important that proposals in the area of student assessment encourage and support improved pedagogy where this can be achieved.

There is also a tradition in Nigerian schools of periodic testing, frequently using questions written on the blackboard by the teacher. The quality of the questions is low with the heavy focus on simple recall. There is a strong case for attempting to broaden the scope of classroom assessment both in relation to the skills that are assessed and in relation to the assessment methods used. However, this must be seen as a contribution to a much broader support for better curriculum delivery and not simply as a stand-alone development of assessment skills.

4.7 Assessment and the national curriculum

The current national curriculum documents are quite limited in the support that they give to teachers in both the interpretation of the curriculum and in the methods of assessment that they may use to determine students' achievements on any particular aspect. All teachers are likely to need, to a greater or lesser extent, some support in developing methods of presenting each aspect of the curriculum and in assessing whether students have learned what was intended. The schemes of work that they develop appear to say little about either teaching or assessment methods, so that bridging the gap between the national curriculum requirements and effective classroom practice becomes an essential requirement if learning outcomes are to improve. These schemes have to be monitored at departmental and headteacher levels within schools, by the inspectorate (which is part of the ERC) and then submitted to the SUBEB. However, it was said that the SUBEBs do not have the capacity to review these schemes⁹.

The national curriculum is under review. That for SSS will start in 2007 whilst that for basic education has recently been approved and is to be launched in stages over 7 years from September 2007¹⁰. From what is known of the new curriculum it does not provide any greater support for teachers and schools than the existing one and there may not be any enhanced capacity in schools to enable the new curriculum requirements to be met.

4.8 Teacher training

The development of improved teaching practice then becomes a matter for both initial and in-service teacher training. Both require a stronger focus on what is needed to enable all teachers to be more effective in the classrooms in which they work. There are several obvious requirements in relation to assessment that include

⁹ From our interview at NERDC 7 September 2006

¹⁰ From the internal report of a meeting with NERDC by C Kirkaldy, 19 September 2006

- contextualising assessment practice within the curriculum area that a teacher is dealing with
- providing assessment tools and methods, with examples of good practice orientated to the conditions under which they work, that teachers can immediately use
- avoiding the over-theorising of assessment and, in particular, suggesting to teachers that they should become involved in complex testing strategies
- ensuring that the assessment methods that are offered provide the means to assess the whole range of skills that are required within the curriculum.

In particular, initial teacher training should be orientated towards practical classroom activity and away from theoretical approaches to assessment. The training provided in the colleges of education is regulated by the National Commission for Colleges of Education that has established minimum standards for the Certificate in Education¹¹. In General Education there is a 2-credit compulsory module (out of a 40-credit 3 year course) on Measurement and Evaluation that is quite heavily concerned with tests and their construction and use although there is some work on Continuous Assessment and on observation, self-reporting, sociometric¹² and projective techniques. None of this is explicitly contextualised within any aspect of the curriculum and other modules that are concerned with classroom management and teaching method do not mention assessment, though do mention record keeping.

The Primary Education Studies course does not have a specific module that deals with aspects of assessment but assessment is mentioned in two method modules: these are for English and social studies and, in both of these cases, the coverage of assessment issues is slight. Thus, in two major education programmes there is very limited guidance on classroom assessment for trainee teachers and the contextualisation is poor.

4.9 Monitoring

The measurement of education system performance is a natural priority for administrators and policy makers. This may be in relation to identifying the effectiveness of a particular educational intervention, to determining whether institutions or individuals are delivering good value or meeting specific objectives or targets or to relating education system performances in one state or country to those in another.

Over the past 30 years, it has become the practice in Nigeria and elsewhere to make heavy use of student achievement data as an indicator of system performance. There are, however, some risks in making inferences about the quality of educational provision based solely on this data.

¹¹ National Commission for Colleges of Education *Minimum Standards for the Nigeria Certificate in Education* (3rd edition, 2002)

¹² Quite why sociometric measures are used it isn't clear. There are also several documents that encourage teachers to incorporate attitudinal and attendance measures into coursework but with no clear justification for this. It would be better if the purposes for each piece of assessment were more exactly justified.

- Student achievements, as identified in examination results, may only reflect a part of what schools or teachers provide for their students.
- The validity and reliability of the examinations may not be high enough to support very precise inferences that are made from the results.
- The aggregation of data across schools, districts or states may hide local differences that are significant.

The ESA Learning Achievement study¹³ provides for Nigeria the only nationally based achievement monitoring study, yielding data about student performance at Primary 4 and Primary 6 on literacy, numeracy and life skills. Each of these areas is further divided so that student achievement may be identified in relation to a number of specific areas such as geometry, algebra, grammar, vocabulary, health and science. It has a number of advantages over the use of examination results in providing an indicator of levels of student achievement.

- Its data can be used for policy formulation at both macro and micro levels of the system.
- At micro level it provides a diagnostic tool that covers specific areas of subjects for schools and state MoEs.
- If exercises of this kind use the same instruments or other instruments with known calibration on different occasions, trends in achievement can be identified.
- If the instrument design and sampling are properly conducted it provides a greater precision in making comparisons between occasions, states, student groups etc.

On the other hand such studies provide information about sample groups of students and not individuals, so that it is not generally possible to use the results in, for example, predictive studies or in monitoring the progress of individuals. These are not suitable purposes for such studies.

The report of the 2003 study makes a number of recommendations, amongst which are that

- studies of this kind should have an active follow-up that includes a proper interpretation of the results and proposed policy actions that may be taken, such as in using the information to influence future textbook content
- this monitoring should be repeated every 3-4 years.

We were told that there are no plans to repeat the 2003 study¹⁴. It is also worth noting that, whilst further studies of the MLA type may provide very desirable indicators progress in education in Nigeria, they are not ideal for monitoring the

¹³ *Monitoring of Learning Achievement Project 2003* Nigeria Education Sector Analysis, 2004. See also: Universal Basic Education Commission (2005). *National Assessment of the Universal Basic Education Programme in Nigeria*. Paper presented at the 31st Annual Conference of International Association for Educational Assessment for information about a similar study conducted as part of the UBE project.

¹⁴ Interview at NERDC, 7 September, 2006

year-on-year outcomes of the proposed project. Either the MLA study could operate more frequently (perhaps only in the 3 states) or special parallel monitoring instruments could be generated specifically for project use.

4.10 Using monitoring results alongside other information

Monitoring studies provide information that can be placed alongside that coming from other sources such as the school inspectorate and examinations. However, both of these are only useful if the basis upon which they are generated is properly understood. Thus, inspectorate reports are only of use if they are constructed within a framework common to all schools and incorporate expert qualitative judgements of aspects of school performance, based on observation and enquiry. Examination results may only be interpreted in relation to the state or level where they are generated and there is, at present, no assurance that results generated by WAEC and NECO are comparable.

In passing, it is worth noting that there appears to have been very little research on student assessment in Nigeria beyond the studies reported here¹⁵. In particular, there is little or no information that directly addresses the use of assessment in classrooms and its relationship with student learning and achievement.

4.11 General factors determining assessment quality

We may summarise the general factors that affect the quality of assessment across basic education.

- There is ample evidence that the lack of teacher expertise, coupled with difficult classroom environments and resource shortages, is strong determinant of low student achievement¹⁶. The use of poor assessment methods within the delivery of the curriculum undoubtedly contributes to this problem.
- Assessment is not sufficiently addressed by initial teacher training, in-service provision or by support provided by, for example, the inspectorate.
- The national curriculum does not provide teachers with any significant guidance on assessment methods that are appropriate to particular topics or activities within the curriculum.
- Federal, state and school policies do not sufficiently identify the role of formative assessment in learning and do not therefore make clear provision for supporting teachers in this area.
- Examinations influence classroom assessment behaviour and the limited coverage, both by skill and method, of SSC and JSC examinations does not encourage teachers to pay greater attention to the whole range of skills to be assessed, nor to use a wide range of assessment methods.

¹⁵ This point was made at our interview at NERDC where it was also said that, although there had been some spurts of training on CA, these had had relatively little effect on classroom practice.

¹⁶ This has been reviewed by Audrey Aarons in *Learning and teaching in Nigeria's primary schools: Reform strategies for the professional development of teachers* (November 2005)

5 Specific issues of assessment in basic education

5.1 Roles and responsibilities of local, state and federal organisations

The National Policy on Education¹⁷ says that there is shared responsibility for primary education but devolved responsibility for secondary, but then goes on to identify clear areas of responsibility for many areas, including assessment. In practice, it appears that the conduct of assessment for the 9 years of basic education is conducted by the states within the Policy and associated guidelines laid down by the Federal Ministry. Thus, as far as the proposed project is concerned, the conduct of assessment lies almost wholly with states although there are several areas where responsibility within states is confused or uncertain. This is particularly the case when dealing with support for teachers, where there is some confusion between the roles of the ERCs and SUBEBs, and in developing the role of the inspectors, where there are varying mixes of inspections at federal, state and LGEA levels.

The ERCs are set up and regulated by NERDC but are state funded. They provide a varying range of services including examinations and the provision of information and support for teachers. However, much more work is needed before ERCs can be effective; NERDC was said to be setting up e-networks to facilitate this support but we are not clear how far this has gone¹⁸. Although it might be possible to set up banks of support materials in ERCs there are no mechanisms that will enable most teachers to access these and little immediate prospect of essential facilities such as copiers being available in zonal or LGEA offices (responsible to SUBEB), let alone in schools.

5.2 The Junior School Certificate Examination

Because of its key role in basic education we have included below brief descriptions of the conduct of the JSCE for each of the states.

Managing the JSCE

In general, the conduct and format of the JSCE is governed by guidelines from the federal ministry¹⁹. It is a combination of written examination (60 objective items and short answer/essay questions) and continuous assessment. It is conducted from the ERCs of each of the states but is subject to a degree of co-ordination between states through and annual meeting that involves all state examination offices across Nigeria. The guidelines appear to seek standardisation amongst states through defining the structure of the examinations and through this consultation but these controls are relatively weak and it is not clear that standards are, in fact, comparable. The grading appears to be almost wholly

¹⁷ *National Policy on Education* (Fourth Edition, 2004). National Educational Research and Development Council.

¹⁸ From interview at NERDC, 7 September 2006 where it was also said that NERDC had responsibilities for regulating a number of provisions including the quality of educational materials and inspection, but that these had not been implemented.

¹⁹ *Guidelines on Uniform Standards for the Junior School Certificate Examinations*, December 1992, Federal Ministry of Education

norm-referenced on a state-by-state basis although the effects of this are difficult to understand without considerably more analysis of data from the examination.

Written papers

The JSCE written papers all contain 60 objective items; 5-option multiple choice (simple completion) items predominate. The papers then include some open response (ranging from short answer to essay questions, depending on the subject) within which there may be a degree of choice. The whole typically lasts for 2 hours and candidates write responses on an answer sheet.

The federal ministry guidelines specify that question papers are to be constructed using questions developed by teachers in workshops under the management of the state examinations office. These questions are edited and some are selected to create the final paper, by office staff assisted by technical experts. There does not appear to be any pre-testing. There are commentaries on the papers in the state reviews below but their quality varies considerably in both content and presentation.

Continuous assessment

There is quite a long history of continuous assessment in Nigerian education. This has been presented as an alternative to external written assessment²⁰ with the justification that it allows a wider range of skills to be assessed. There is a considerable amount of general guidance offered to teachers in state and national publications and workshop materials²¹ but those that we have seen tend to be rather academic and theoretical, identifying general methods that teachers may use but not relating these directly to the curriculum. In particular, connections to specific teaching topics seem generally not to be available and the methods have not usually been orientated towards the conditions under which many Nigerian teachers have to operate. It has been frequently said during the visit that it is not possible to rely on continuous assessment results generated by schools but some essential conditions that might lead to greater validity and reliability do not appear to exist, namely

- the linkage of the continuous assessment to the curriculum is poor and does not support weaker teachers with ideas and examples that are explicit and that they can use in order to gain experience and confidence
- there is no high quality support being offered to teachers either within their schools nor by inspectors; the latter appear to be largely concerned with whether the records have been completed properly rather than with the quality of information contained in them.

²⁰ for example, in Ojerinde D & Falayajo W (1984) *Continuous Assessment: A new Approach*, University Press, Ibadan
and *Guidelines on Uniform Standards for the Junior School Certificate Examinations*, December 1992, Federal Ministry of Education

²¹ One example is the booklet issued in support of a workshop organised by the ESS department of the Kwara Ministry of Education on 27 April 2006

Moreover, the large number of items of continuous assessment²² not only puts a straightjacket on curriculum delivery but aggregates scores across such a wide range of activities that the validity of the whole is very uncertain. It also has the incidental effect of placing a huge and unnecessary clerical burden on teachers in transcribing marks for submission to the state examinations departments.

Proposed methods for retrospectively aligning schools' scores to a common scale are not a solution to the problem. Current statistical methods for aligning schools are crude and depend upon gross assumptions about score distributions.

Proposals for using a moderating instrument (a written test) to align schools' results would do little to improve the quality of assessment and would defeat most of the purpose for which CA was established. No methods for moderation by inspection have been used, as far as is known²³.

The situation is now probably that CA, as it is presently conducted, is almost as damaging to learning as is the excessive use of examinations. The justification for its use is clear and supportive of the role of the teacher in assessing a wider range of skills than is possible with written examinations. However, unless there is some direct and effective support for teachers, CA will not become an effective summative assessment tool that is well aligned to the use of formative assessment.

²² The *Guidelines on Uniform Standards for the Junior School Certificate Examinations*, December 1992, Federal Ministry of Education suggests a maximum of 2 tests/subject/term, at least 3 take-home assignments/term, a class exercise/subject/week, a project/subject/term and an end of term examination.

²³ An inspection of some samples of continuous assessment scores from several schools in another state did show most marks falling in a very small high range. It was almost invariable for students to pass CA but not the examination; in that case they would not be awarded a pass grade or higher.

6 The conduct of assessment in Kaduna

6.1 Quality of Learning Achievement

Conclusions that identify levels of student achievement include²⁴

- The low learning achievement in primary and secondary levels is an issue of concern in the state. This more particularly evident at SSS level.
- A steady decline in the quality of SSCE results over the three years is a clear indication of the low achievement. In 2002/3 only 8% of the SSCE candidates measured to the national standard of 5 credits including English and mathematics. In 2005 this dropped to 1.17%
- The low level of students' achievement in the state has been traced to an inadequate number of qualified teachers, poor materials/equipment and facilities, ineffective supervision in and of schools and weak assessment methods.
- There is a high incidence of examinations malpractice at secondary level.

6.2 Institutional Assessment

A number of recommendations bear on the development of student assessment; these include²⁵

- noting the confusion and overlaps between the roles of SUBEB and other state organisations
- the need to develop a co-ordinated strategy for the development of primary in-service teacher training strategy with the need to raise the understanding of the curriculum and modern teaching methods
- the need for a focus on improving the system and extending the role of school inspection.

6.3 ESP and ESOP

The ESP and ESOP include commitments as follows²⁶

- under BE5: to abolish the transition examinations from lower (primary) to upper basic (JSS) education
- under ME1: to strengthen the inspectorate, provide inspectors with training and to require them to support the teacher in-service training programme
- under ME2: spot checks to be carried out by the inspectorate on continuous assessment and terminal examinations
- under ME2: the inspectorate to undertake random spot checks on student performance in English and mathematics from 2006

²⁴ Taken from *Editing of Kaduna Education Situational Analysis* (revised draft – May 2006)

²⁵ *Institutional Assessment and Capacity Development, Kaduna State* (July 2006)

²⁶ ESP (final draft, February 2006); ESOP (final draft, February 2006)

- under ME2: to assess student performance through a Primary Performance Examination (PPE at the end of P5) by 2007; a committee to report by June 2006
- under ME2: to continue with UBE/JSS and SSC examinations
- under ME2: EMIS to capture assessment data from late 2006
- under ME3: school records to be strengthened and maintained to include schemes of work, lesson plans and syllabus and student performance reports
- under ME3: school development plans to be available and being implemented

6.4 System of Students' Assessment

The assessment procedures in Nigeria in relation to the national policies have been presented in Table 1 above.

There are, however, some key aspects of implementation that are specific to Kaduna, which

- has adopted the national policy on continuous assessment as a basis for the placement of pupils into JSS.
- conducts a selection examination (STSPE) into Science and Technical Senior Secondary Schools for JSS.
- conducts a qualifying examination for SS2 students.

6.5 Outcomes for Kaduna from the Learning Achievement Project Study 2003

Table 2: Monitoring test scores for Kaduna

Grade	Test	Percentage test scores	
		Mean	SD
Primary 4	Numeracy	47.75	23.19
	Literacy	51.63	21.73
	Life Skills	56.78	25.19
Primary 6	Numeracy	48.31	20.84
	Literacy	55.30	17.12
	Life Skills	26.33	8.94

These mean scores (with the exception of P6 life skills) do not suggest excessively poor performance on average. However, the high standard deviations suggest that there are some students with very high and some with very low attainments.

On average

- performances in urban schools are better than those in rural schools
- there are only small gender differences in performance
- students from private schools have performed worse than students from public schools.

6.6 The examinations department of Kaduna state ERC

This department operates from rather dilapidated buildings that were formerly part of a technical college. It processes data for about 70,000 students and earns

all its income from the examination fees (N500 candidate entry) and from a small amount of outside printing work. The data processing equipment is limited or slow and there is a shortage of trained personnel. The turn-round time of its examinations is poor. Printing equipment does not appear to be well maintained and the printroom is untidy. The department handles all its own secure storage, packaging and distribution.

Common entrance

In line with national policy and because it now has UBE, Kaduna abandoned the Common Entrance Examination in 2005 and now operates continuous assessment through P1 to P6. Continuous assessment results are said to be monitored by inspectors but it is not known how effective this is and it may only extend to ensuring the records have been kept. They are used alongside interviews conducted by the schools department in the state Ministry as the basis for placement to JSS.

Little training or support has been given directly to teachers in the conduct of CA that has been in use since 1982. However, some workshops appear to have been held at 3 centres through the state but may have been directed solely at headteachers and examination officers and strongly orientated towards the conduct of CA for summative purposes rather than towards the wider issue of classroom assessment. They may have been wholly inadequate in addressing the amount of training required.

JSCE

40% of this examination, taken at the end of JS3, is written and 60% is by continuous assessment and it leads to graded certification for students at the end of JS3²⁷. For promotion to secondary school, students must have 6 passes that include mathematics and English. The main examination is taken in June, results issued in September/October and there is an opportunity for students to re-sit mathematics and/or English in December if this is all that they need to gain entry to senior secondary school. All students that apply and that pay an administration fee are interviewed for entry to the 30 state science/technical schools to which they gain entry if they subsequently get the required JSCE passes; about 10% of students enter these schools. Other students that pass the JSCE are placed in SS schools offering arts and commercial subjects (Grammar schools).

During school holidays the department holds 1-week workshops for teachers who are nominated by their schools and, with tuition and support, write objective items and other questions for the examinations. These are vetted by subject specialists and departmental staff and, from the stock of edited items, a suitable batch is chosen by the department test development team for each examination. We are not sure whether specification grids are used to regulate these selections. There does not appear to be any problem with the supply of items although there are not enough teachers with the expertise to write good items. Teachers are said to be glad to participate in these workshops because of the experience that

²⁷ The information in these paragraphs is from interviews in Kaduna on 6 September 2006

this offers. Items not included in examinations are used for training in subsequent workshops.

The examination is conducted and invigilated by the schools with some supervision by officers. There are both space and security problems. Completed scripts are returned to the department and allocated to conference marking centres. Teachers are recruited as markers, supplied with marking schemes and some training, and then mark under the supervision of team leaders who sample their work as quality control. They mark both objective test and essay sections of examination papers and are paid ₦5 per script.

Papers are, typically, 2 hours in length and have 60 objectives items plus a small number of short answer or essay questions. The items are of moderate quality but could be improved. Some are trivial and whole papers often test little more than simple recall. The presentation quality is poor: fonts are too small, printing is poor and layouts unhelpful to students. Some of these problems reflect the limited printing facilities available.

Qualifying examination

This is provided for students at the end of SS2. It is not a mock SSC examination but results may determine which students can move to SS3 (though some schools are said to allow progression even when students fail) and which students may receive state government support for SSC examination fees. In method of construction, style, management and marking this examination is similar to the JSCE and SSC but typically has 60 objective items and a more extended long answer section taking 2½ hours. There is no CA component. The papers have defects similar to those of the JSCE.

This examination does not conform to the National Policy. It was said to have been introduced as an incentive to students to work harder during SS2.

7 The conduct of assessment in Kano

7.1 Quality of learning achievement²⁸

Primary Level

- Learning achievement compares favourably with the national standard at the mid-primary level but is slightly below at the upper primary level.
- Achievement levels at private primary schools are significantly higher than those obtained for public schools. The same trend was reported for urban-rural pupils respectively.
- Girls achieve significantly higher than boys at mid- primary level. However, boys' levels of achievement are significantly higher at upper primary level.
- Children who attended pre-primary education proved significantly better than those who did not.

²⁸ Taken from the *Kano Education Situation Analysis* (first draft – August 2006)

- Continuous Assessment (CA) was not built into primary school final examination.²⁹ The reason given was that, as a 'one-off event', these assessments do not 'genuinely' evaluate the breath of pupils' development.

Secondary Level

- The quality of pupils' performance in the JSCE has improved. The mean score has increased from 53.20% in 2004 to 57.66% in 2005.
- At the senior secondary level the quality of the learning is very low. This is clearly indicated in the Qualifier examination conducted by the state and in the WAEC/NECO SSCE. Although there was considerable improvement in the students' performance in the Qualifier examination (19.37% in 2005 as against 13.61% of all candidates who sat the SSCQE), the quality does not measure up to the national standard.
- More disappointing results were recorded in the WAEC/NECO SSCE. A very low rate of not more than 4.03% of total candidates for SSCE in the past three years measured up to the national standard of 5 credits. From 2003-2005 the state witnessed high percentage of student failures in English and Mathematics at the SSCE level.
- Inadequate learning materials and basic textbooks and the number of qualified teachers are among some of the variables behind this poor students' performance.
- The state's priority is to improve the learning outcomes for the large number of students in the state, to measure up to the national standard at all levels.

7.2 ESP & ESOP³⁰

On the adoption of national policy (UBE)

- The UBE Law: The state is in the progress of implementing the law which recommends the 'disarticulation' of JSS from secondary education in line with the new 9 year basic education structure. The state has already enacted a law (Kano State Universal Basic Education Board Law, 2005). The law empowers SUBEB (State UBE Board) to implement the programme³¹. The basic school programme takes effect in September 2006.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: The policy of quality assurance is enforced in the state. The state ERC, Kano Educational Resource Department (KERD) is responsible for overall quality assurance in the education sector. In addition to school monitoring and inspection, curriculum development and other areas,

²⁹ This was the practice before the 'disarticulation' of the JSS from secondary education as prescribed in the UBE policy.

³⁰ *Education Strategic Plan 2007-2015* (first draft – August 2006) and *Education Strategic Operational Plan 2007-2009* (first draft – August 2006)

³¹ In addition, the law provides that SUBEB is to be supervised by MoE. At local level, SUBEB is to be represented by local government education authorities (LGEAs). This touches on the clarity of roles and responsibilities between the three bodies.

the department is responsible for the management of state examinations at primary, JSS and SSS levels.³²

On policy objectives and strategies

- under EA2: to increase the transition rate from primary to JSS to 99% by 2012.
- under EA2: to abolish the common entrance examination to JSS by mid 2007.³³
- under QE7: to develop minimum standards to monitor learning achievements in English and Local languages by the end of 2008.
- under QE7: to organise tests to measure literacy and numeracy standards in primary 3 and primary 6 by end of 2008.
- under STVET1: to ensure that practical skills are assessed as part of all science and technical education examinations from 2008.
- under QE3: to review textbooks, assessment and examination systems in the context of the curriculum³⁴.

7.3 System of Students' Assessment

The assessment procedures in Nigeria in relation to the national policies have been presented in Table 1 above.

There are, however, some key aspects of implementation that are specific to Kano, which

- has not clearly indicated its stand on the adoption of the national policy on Continuous Assessment as a basis for the placement of pupils into JSS.
- conducts a selection examination (STSPE) into Science and Technical Senior Secondary Schools for JSS.
- conducts a qualifying examination for SS2 students.

7.4 Outcomes for Kano from the Learning Achievement Project Study 2003

Table 3: Monitoring test scores for Kano

Grade	Test	Percentage test scores	
		Mean	SD

³² It is worth noting that there are multiple agencies with responsibilities related to monitoring and evaluation. In addition to KERD, the Department of Schools Management (Zonal Education Offices), AIED (Arabic and Islamic Education Department) and PID (Private Institutions Department) are some of the agencies engaged with monitoring and evaluation. However examinations and assessments are undertaken by KERD.

³³ No strategic plan in this respect for transition from JSS into SSS is put forward. This perhaps is due to the fact that the transition rate from JSS into SSS is considered relatively high (85%). However it is worth noting that a case for it needs to be considered because of the possible impact of the UBE Programme.

³⁴ The strategic plan also made a case for developing minimum standard for homework in addition to games/sports and extra curricular activities. This needs to be noted because homework is an aspect of classroom assessment.

Primary 4	Numeracy	36.51	21.45
	Literacy	35.46	23.40
	Life Skills	40.56	25.30
Primary 6	Numeracy	35.71	15.99
	Literacy	39.67	18.07
	Life Skills	24.04	24.43

Performances across all skills are low , similar to Kwara but lower than Kaduna. Performance in P6 life skills is especially low, but this is the same for all three states. High standard deviations at P4 suggest long tails with a very few high performers.

On average

- P4 literacy, P4 and P6 numeracy and P6 life skills means are similar for urban and rural schools
- rural schools perform worse than urban ones on P6 literacy and life skills
- there are no major differences in performance by gender
- private school students perform notably better on all skills in both grades

7.5 The examinations department of Kano state KERD³⁵

The examinations department in KERD (the Kano Educational Resource Department that is the ERC for Kano) conducts three examinations: the CEE, the JSCE and an SS qualifying examination. We will discuss these in turn although there are some elements that they have in common.

KERD only gets income from its examination fees plus a very small amount of commercial printing. The salaries of its staff and accommodation are paid by the some but it has to pay for the fuel needed for the generator that is essential during most of the year.

The KERD offices are reasonably equipped and include a well-ordered printshop that is able to print all three examinations plus all the stationery, together with a small amount of commercial work. There is adequate secure storage and just about enough space for collation and despatch. However, networking between computers is incomplete, there is limited internet access and the computer system is so unreliable that handwritten paper copies of all account entries have to be kept.

CEE

Although the federal government expects the CEE to be phased out when UBE is achieved, this is conditional on there being adequate provision for continuous assessment. Kano does not yet believe that this is the case and there is no date set for the ending of the CEE. Moreover, there is still a shortfall in JSS places

³⁵ Taken from interviews at the examinations offices in the Kano Educational Resource Department (the ERC for Kano) on 19 September 2006

though this is reducing³⁶. In any case, it is contended that a primary examination offers information about student achievement that is valuable to JSS schools.

Continuous assessment is conducted largely without the benefit of training from KERD or SUBEB. There is a system of supervision that is described below under the JSCE but this is more concerned with the maintenance of records than with the quality of the assessments done by teachers.

The written papers only use multiple-choice objective tests; these follow the same pattern as those used in the JSCE. Although we did not see any examples of these we believe that they have the same limitations as those for JSCE.

KERD currently has 120,000 candidates offering 4 subjects each at CEE. There is a fee of ₦50 per candidate.

JSCE

Although the JSCE is intended for selection to different types of SS school most Kano SS schools are comprehensive and provide a full range of programmes. The JSCE is available in a range of core and optional subjects with candidates typically taking up to 11 subjects in all. There were 47,000 candidates in 2006. The registration fee is ₦20 and subjects cost ₦20 apiece. The JSCE consists of a written examination (70%) and CA (30%).

The written papers are reasonably well printed with type faces that are generally large enough. However, layouts are very cramped (especially with the objective items) and the paper allows quite a lot of print-through. The proof-reading could be better. Candidates answer the objective test on a sheet that is scanned by an optical mark reader that can deal with 50 candidates per minute. Written answers are on an answer sheet that is manually marked.

Written papers are compiled by teachers working in teams led by subject inspectors. Questions are edited within each team and a selection is subsequently made by the team leader. Two papers are compiled in each subject; the second is a fall back to be used when there is a security breach. Team leaders have a rather limited template for question paper construction and the KERD team needs help in operating banks of items in which each item is tagged with identifications by content area, skill tested and, perhaps, level of difficulty. The question setting teams have little training and the quality of the questions could be much better. There is an overwhelming emphasis on simple recall in both objective and open-response questions. This is an area where KERD recognises the need for training and technical assistance.

KERD has attempted to tighten up on CA by appointing a committee in each school, chaired by the member of the SMT responsible for curriculum and with the school counsellor and two nominated teachers. This committee is required to monitor the operation of CA in the school, verify that it is properly operated and records properly kept. Unfortunately, the process requires a very large amount of

³⁶ Figures are unreliable since school returns have sometimes been inflated by headteachers.

clerical work by each teacher and it has been difficult to maintain the records when teachers have very large classes and full teaching workloads³⁷.

The curriculum section KERD has issued schemes of work for JSS that are related to the national curriculum in each subject. These do not include assistance with student assessment but might be a useful basis for training materials at some time in the future.

Qualifying examination

This examination is conducted in SS2 to determine those candidates whose fees will be paid by the SMOE. It had about 20,000 candidates in 2006.

8 The conduct of assessment in Kwara

8.1 The Quality of Learning Achievement³⁸

Primary Level

- Learning achievement at mid-primary level is averagely at par with national standard. At the upper primary level it is below the national level.
- Disparity between private and public pupils in levels of achievement is reported with private pupils gaining upper hand.
- No significant difference between urban and rural pupils in levels of achievement at lower and mid- primary. However, at upper primary level, urban pupils prove superior.
- On gender difference, boys consistently achieve higher than girls.
- Children who attend pre-primary schools achieve higher than those who do not.

Secondary level

- Learning achievement is very high at JSS but low in SSS. From 2001-2005, 79%-91% candidates were successful in JSCE core subjects.
- At SSS level, less than 24% of the SSCE candidates in 2004 WAEC/NECO obtained the national standard of 5 credits including English and mathematics. 24% and 19% of the candidates had passes in English and mathematics respectively. This is clearly evident in the UME examination leading to the placement of less than 10% of all school leavers in the state.
- Reasons for low achievement in the SSS level have been attributed to many factors such as ineffective monitoring and evaluation in and of schools, low

³⁷ In fact, KERD has replaced a federal ministry record book with its own and thereby somewhat reduced teachers' workloads. However, the clerical overhead is still very high indeed and is primarily a result of inappropriate federal guidelines for CA that ask for far too many pieces of work. This has the additional effect of reducing the amount of time available for learning and formative assessment and is a consequence of regarding all classroom assessment as, essentially, appropriate material for incorporation into the summative examination.

³⁸ From *Kwara Education Situation Analysis* (first draft – August 2006)

school attendance (60% at 2004), lack of essential textbooks in English, mathematics and sciences and an acute shortage of qualified teachers. Other reasons include the use of outdated methods of teaching.

8.2 ESP & ESOP

On the adoption of national policy (UBE)³⁹.

- The UBE Law: Kwara state is in the progress of implementing the national policy on UBE that empowers SUBEB (State UBE Board) to implement the 9-year basic education. To that effect the basic school programme takes very soon.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: The policy of quality assurance is enforced in the state by several agencies. The Inspectorate Department of the State's Ministry of Education and those of SUBEB, TSC (Teachers Service Commission), and AME (Agency for Mass Education) participate in inspection, performance monitoring and evaluation.⁴⁰

On policy objectives and strategies⁴¹

- under ME1: within its policy objectives on monitoring and evaluation of student performance, the state expects by 2008 to develop and to make operational criterion referenced tests; to enable this, the state will develop strategies to improve that capacity of the examinations section.
- under BE3: as part of the provision of good quality basic education the state intends that the GER of lower Basic be increased first to 80% and then to 100%; for JSS the targeted increase is first to 90% and later to 100%.⁴² Alongside this the state will review the assessment system to create more appropriate forms and styles and abolish the State Entrance Examination into JSS.
- under SE3: to achieve senior national accreditation standards is targeted by the year 2010.
- under SE3: to review the existing assessment system to provide more appropriate forms and styles.⁴³

8.3 System of Students' Assessment

The assessment procedures in Nigeria in relation to the national policies have been presented in Table 1 above.

³⁹ Kwara Education Situational Analysis, August 2006.

⁴⁰ See the Situation Analysis, p15 and ESOP Appendix II, p17. The state's ESP has not stated categorically which of these agencies is responsible for examination and assessment in schools and whether the state has an ERC to ensure this responsibility. However, the state proposes to establish inspectorate, examinations department and continuous assessment department under the Ministry of Education to oversee the affairs of monitoring, evaluation and assessment.

⁴¹ Kwara ESOP, draft, July 2006

⁴² Exact dates for the realisation of the targeted increase are not provided in ESOP.

⁴³ It is not clear whether this will be in line with the national policy on CA.

There are, however, some key aspects of implementation that are specific to Kwara,

- which has adopted the national policy on Continuous Assessment as a basis for the placement of students into JSS.
- that conducts a selection examination (STSPE) into Science and Technical Senior Secondary Schools for JSS.
- that conducts a qualifying examination for SS2 students; however, whereas in Kaduna and Kano the Qualifying examination is conducted by SMOE through ERC, in Kwara state the examination is the sole responsibility of the state's chapter of ANCOSP (Association of National Council of Secondary Principals).

8.4 Outcomes for Kwara from the Learning Achievement Project Study 2003

Table 4: Monitoring test scores for Kwara

Grade	Test	Percentage test scores	
		Mean	SD
Primary 4	Numeracy	32.59	15.99
	Literacy	41.59	18.07
	Life Skills	44.18	24.43
Primary 6	Numeracy	35.74	14.95
	Literacy	40.65	16.68
	Life Skills	24.70	7.51

Performances across all skills are low, similar to Kano but lower than Kaduna. Performance in P6 life skills is especially low, but this is the same for all three states. A high standard deviation for P4 life skills suggests a long tail with a few high performers; otherwise the distributions are unexceptional.

On average

- except for numeracy at P6 (where urban schools perform notably better) there are no major differences between student performances in urban and rural schools
- there are no major differences in performances by gender
- there are modestly better performances at P4 in private schools but, at P6, in literacy and numeracy, these schools perform much better.

8.5 The examinations department of Kwara state ERC⁴⁴

Junior School Certificate Examination

The JSCE is operated by the examinations department that is part of the Kwara Education Support Services (ESS) curriculum unit. The examinations (written and continuous assessment) appear to follow the federal guidelines very closely. Thus, question papers are set by teachers attending workshops organised by the department and these are moderated by officers of the department after which a

⁴⁴ This section is taken from notes of an interview with the director of the examinations department on 13 September 2006

selection is made for each operational paper. The papers that we have seen are generally 8-page unstapled booklets of about A5 size and are generally well laid out and printed; this is contracted out by the department. The objective items tend to be simple recall and are not arranged by topic so that, in some papers such as integrated science, the paper does read rather haphazardly. The open-response (short answer, problem or short essay questions) are very often also of the simple recall type, so that many whole papers hardly venture into any higher skill areas. Exceptions seen were English (where candidates are asked to respond to texts) and mathematics where there were some slightly more extended problems, though these rarely went beyond standard tasks.

Students write their answers on a standard answer sheet that includes a grid for indicating multiple choice item responses. This is hand marked with the responses to the open-response questions – there is no OMR in the department. The answer sheet is printed on white paper in a rather pale blue ink and the fonts used for the grid are very small; in a poorly lit room it is not easy to read and quite possible that a candidate or marker could make an error in entering or interpreting the response.

Conference marking is used with team leaders meeting beforehand to standardise the marking scheme and then, in their own groups, sampling markers' work to check for accuracy. Answer sheets are returned to the office and batched for the conference marking teams so that markers do not work on scripts from their own schools. Subsequently, data entry takes a month so that interval between examination and results is about 3 months. Results are available at the start of the term following the examination.

For continuous assessment the department provides support through annual workshops for principals, counsellors and examination officers; the most recent was conducted in April 2006. Although we haven't seen the programme for this workshop we have looked at a quite extensive and well-written booklet produced as support material. It is quite theoretical in its approach, providing background information rather than very specific help and advice and it certainly would be of limited help to teachers who have to devise and conduct the assessments although the workshop audience would probably have found it useful.

Records of continuous assessment must be kept in accordance with federal requirements and teachers must total and scale the marks. They also have to transcribe the school records onto a departmental form from which data is entered. These are large clerical tasks that are obviously liable to error and are a poor use of teacher time.

The department has identified a need for better training for its specialist personnel and the desirability of an OMR that would speed data capture for the objective test results. This would also have the advantage of making possible post-examination analysis of the objective tests, thus offering the chance to improve examination quality.

Mock SSC examination

We were told of mock SSC examinations conducted during SS3, operated on a zonal basis within Kwara by the Association of Principals. We have not seen any

examples of the examination papers nor been able to discuss the organisation or purpose of the examination though we do understand that marking is by SS teachers in a conference marking environment.

9 Options for intervention

The foregoing discussion suggests that there may be six areas where intervention might be possible within the framework of the present project. We discuss each of these in turn below.

9.1 Reform of the Senior Certificate Examination

Possible interventions

There appear to be several areas where the SSCE could be improved; these are in

- the regulation, by the federal Ministry, of the examinations offered by WAEC an NECO and the enlargement of the examination system to cope with greatly increased candidate entries
- the content and presentation of the examination papers
- the assessment of a wider range of skills
- the management of continuous assessment

Advantages of these interventions

The powerful backwash effect of the SSCE is such that changes would influence the delivery of the SSS curriculum, the approach to the JSCE and the conduct of assessment in basic education. The changes would also enable the SSCE better to reflect the balance of skills within the curriculum.

Disadvantages of these interventions

Interventions in relation to the SSCE cannot be made without the close involvement of the federal Ministry of Education and would undoubtedly take a long time to bring about. Such changes would be well beyond the scope of the proposed project and might be easier to implement in the wake of a successful project rather than in advance of improvements in basic education.

9.2 Reform of the Junior School Certificate Examination

Possible interventions

Studies of the JSCE in the three states have shown a number of common features that might be addressed within this project.

- The content and presentation of the written examination papers might be improved through further training and support for writing, editing and production personnel.
- The continuous assessment component of the examinations may be improved through interventions at the school level, seeking to develop much better support for teachers.

Advantages of these interventions

The JSCE has a strong impact on the way in which the BE curriculum is perceived and delivered. Improvements in classroom practice will be strongly inhibited if (a) the existing written papers continue to emphasise simple recall and (b) continuous assessment remains very unstructured and unsupported. Improvements of the latter may be seen as an integral component of a wider improvement to classroom assessment practice.

Disadvantages of these interventions

Within the lifetime of the proposed project it will almost certainly be impossible to relax the dependence on objective tests in the JSCE; to do so will require an intervention by the federal government and is likely to be opposed on the grounds that their use reflects practice in the SSCE. The retention of objective tests makes it less likely that good written papers can be produced (since setting items that assess higher skills is difficult and may be beyond the limited expertise available in the states) and maintains a gap between the examinations and classroom practice where it is almost impossible for teachers to use this style of questioning.

It is unlikely that an intervention in the JSCE will show any significant impact on student achievement in the life of the proposed project.

9.3 Develop improved monitoring of levels of educational achievement

Possible interventions

Two requirements may need to be met: the first to institute a regular monitoring programme that may be used to provide dependable information on progress in achievement across all Nigeria while the second is to enable monitoring of outputs within the proposed project.

The possible interventions are

- either to ensure to continuation of existing monitoring programmes, using earlier studies as baselines
- or to develop, in the three states, monitoring instruments that will yield data suitable for monitoring project outputs.

Advantages of these interventions

The absence of dependable and regular data on achievement levels is a serious limitation of the present system.

Disadvantages of these interventions

An intervention that promoted the regular use of a national monitoring programme must be a preferred option since it will have economy of scale across the whole country and would make best use of limited expertise in this area. It may, however, fall outside the scope of the project. A best compromise might be the development of instruments to be used in the three states for the period of the project; these may later be made more widely available.

9.4 Improve continuous assessment

Possible interventions

The significant lack of support for teachers in operating continuous assessment might be remedied through improved information and support, perhaps linked to a training programme. This would probably need to be implemented through the state examination departments.

Advantages of these interventions

The dependence on written tests and examinations will not be reduced without improvements in the methods that teachers use to assess a wider range of skills. Equally, the poor quality of continuous assessments is unlikely to be remedied only by the application of tighter controls on record keeping.

Disadvantages of these interventions

The federal government guidelines on CA are resulting in far too much assessment for this purpose at the expense of formative assessment. Interventions on CA alone may have very limited impact on student achievement unless they are contextualised within a broader programme of improving classroom pedagogy, including formative assessment.

9.5 Strengthening inspection

Possible interventions

To give training to inspectors that would enable them to check on teachers' progress in applying improved teaching and assessment methods and provide further support to schools in operating their own in-service programmes.

Advantages of these interventions

In the absence of any structures for direct support for student assessment in the classroom the inspectors provide the only available cadre with the experience and access to schools that will allow follow-up to any teacher training programmes that are provided in the proposed project. Building inspector roles well beyond the checking of systems and records may be the only way, in the short to medium term, of sustaining the effects of teacher training interventions.

Disadvantages of these interventions

The various layers of inspection that exist should ideally be streamlined so as to provide a much more efficient back-up to schools. This may require federal government intervention. Ultimately, if there is to be any reasonable level of in-service support for teachers there will need to be some re-definition of the inspectors' roles.

9.6 Improving formative assessment

Possible interventions

The most fundamental intervention would be to attempt to bring about some changes in classroom practice in assessment, embedded within the delivery of the curriculum. It would require a large training programme.

Advantages of these interventions

Since all other aspects of assessment depend upon this, it is likely to yield the greatest long-term benefits. Such training could embrace improvements to continuous assessment for summative purposes such as the JCSE.

Disadvantages of these interventions

Since classroom assessment is intricately bound up with the delivery of the curriculum, training could (or should) be linked to improved curriculum support such as in teachers' guides. It should be embedded within the subject(s) that each teacher is delivering and should take account of the conditions under which teachers work. The intervention will thus be extremely difficult to bring off effectively and will not show quick returns. It will also need effective follow-up.

The effectiveness of the intervention is also limited by the treatment of assessment within initial teacher training programmes. This cannot easily be addressed by the three states within this project.

10 Recommended interventions

We have reviewed the options described above and are recommending the following interventions that are written to be in general alignment with the ESPs and ESOPs of the three states and the workplans that were subsequently developed. They are, however, not tailored to the specific priorities of each state.

Our recommendations for intervention fall into three broad areas, namely

- direct improvements to the quality of classroom assessment
- improvements to the examinations conducted by the states
- an improved student achievement monitoring programme.

There is then a further general recommendation that falls outside the scope of the proposed project but which is put on the record here because of its long-term underlying importance.

These recommendations are specifically aimed at building capacity within the states, particularly within the schools in relation to classroom assessment and within the ERCs in relation to the conduct of examinations. By linking student assessment closely to teacher development, the provision of textbooks and teacher guides and the delivery of the curriculum they are aimed at providing a model that is sustainable and that may be exported to other states in due course. The fourth general recommendation then relates to underlying issues that need urgent attention at federal level if a coherent approach to assessment is to be sustained.

Each of these will now be discussed in general terms.

Recommendation 1: improving classroom assessment

We recommend **that a substantial intervention be made in order to develop teachers' skills in assessment in the classroom.** This will include assessment that is made for summative purposes, such as for the JSCE. The

training should be directed at all teachers entering or in service. All of the training should be

- curriculum-embedded, placed in the context of the curriculum that the teachers are delivering
- broad-based, dealing with a wide range of assessment methods
- practical, providing teachers with help that they can use within the resources that they have available
- accompanied by support materials

and should be supported through

- assistance to schools to manage their own training, alongside that provided through the project, on a self-help basis
- guidance and monitoring from the inspection service that has, in turn, been trained to provide this.

It is likely that this training may be delivered alongside, or as a component of, wider training in curriculum delivery. However, we have described it here as a stand-alone provision that is delivered within either zones or school clusters or in LGEAs. In addition, the programme is based on the premise that assessment support will be provided through the proposed teachers' guides to accompany the new textbooks.

We envisage that this recommendation will break down into seven strands:

- 1.1 to improve initial teacher training to make it broader and curriculum-embedded
- 1.2 to develop assessment support materials
- 1.3 to develop and provide in-service training that improves teachers' classroom assessment skills in the context of the curriculum
- 1.4 to support improved guidance and materials on continuous assessment for summative purposes, consistent with that used in wider in-service training
- 1.5 to incorporate student assessment and relevant teacher support materials within the ERC
- 1.6 to support inspection services in monitoring assessment quality
- 1.7 to ensure that school development plans incorporate commitments to the improvement of classroom assessment and to providing teachers with time and opportunity to develop their expertise

We provide some notes on the implementation of each of these strands in Annex 2 and notes on a procedure that teachers can use to discuss their assessments in Annex 3.

Recommendation 2: an improved student achievement monitoring programme

We recommend that a **student monitoring programme be established in the three states, having a common structure, in order to provide reliable data about the levels of student achievement in several specific areas.**

This proposal should either use the methods of, or build on the work done for, the MLA monitoring study in 2003 and should break down into the following strands

- 2.1 to establish an agreed programme and methodology for a country-wide monitoring programme
- 2.2 to design and pilot instruments to extend the study into additional agreed areas at P4 and P6
- 2.3 to design and pilot instruments to extend the study into JS2
- 2.4 to set up 2008 monitoring study
- 2.5 to conduct the 2008 study and to analyse the outcomes
- 2.6 to report and disseminate outcomes
- 2.7 to add results to EMIS
- 2.8 to provide for further studies in 2011 and 2014

This study should, in our view, provide a model for the regular use of a monitoring study in Nigeria that will make it possible to make comparisons over time and between states and, above all, will make it possible for each state to monitor progress towards its goals in relation to a range of basic skills. At present the MLA study covers literacy, numeracy and life skills at P4 and P6; it is probably sensible to extend this to JS2 and possibly worth covering a wider range of assessments, subject to the requirements of the three states.

The implementation of this recommendation will be at the federal level for its planning and implementation, with the study being carried out in each participating state. It is very important that there is a regular quality monitoring programme that will track improvements in achievement levels independently of the examinations system so that, while the implementation of this recommendation might fall outside the workplans of the three states participating in the proposed project, it is essential that there is a federal-level intervention of this kind.

Recommendation 3: improving state examinations

We recommend **that the JSS examinations in each state (and any other examinations operated by the states at primary and SS levels) be reviewed and improved** so as to ensure that they adequately reflect the expected curriculum outputs that will result from other project interventions.

We recognise that there are differences between the states' JSS examinations and between their SS and primary provision for external examinations. However, we believe that there are several common issues that may need to be addressed; amongst these are

- the technical quality of the questions
- the extent to which questions are too heavily focused on simple knowledge recall

- question paper presentation
- the data handling capacity of examination departments and the turn-round of results
- the methods used for determining grade cut-offs.

We envisage that this recommendation will break down into the following strands.

- 3.1: to provide support for the ERC and/or the examination department in improving its equipment
- 3.2: to support for the ERC and/or the examination department in improving the quality of their written examinations and examination management systems
- 3.3: support improvements to continuous assessment
- 3.4: to enter examination results data onto EMIS

We have included some notes on these strands in Annex 4.

Recommendation 4: long term assessment improvements

This fourth recommendation falls outside the scope of the proposed project but is nevertheless of the greatest importance. High stakes examinations in Nigeria undoubtedly have a limiting effect on curriculum improvement. Particularly at JSS level, they assess too narrow a range of objectives using very limited forms of assessment, and curriculum delivery in the junior and senior secondary phases is constrained by this. The use of continuous assessment has little effect in offsetting this effect since it is, in practice, too focused on written forms of assessment and far too extensive, sacrificing quality for quantity. Some essential practical, oral and other skills are rarely assessed properly and there is little or no effective support given to schools in managing this aspect of the examinations.

We recommend that the federal government urgently

- conducts a full review of the JSC and SSC examinations in Nigeria, looking to modernise them so as to better reflect achievement within the curriculum
- reviews the guidance that it provides on continuous assessment, so as to give far greater support for teachers that they can realistically implement within the constraints of the classroom.

The underlying need is to properly support the raising of achievement levels through improved monitoring and regulation. Unless this is done, the JSC and SSC examinations will continue to limit student achievement.

Annex 1: Three principal purposes for assessment

In section 3 we identified three purposes for assessment and describe these briefly. There are rather more extended descriptions here; for more detailed descriptions of the characteristics of formative and summative assessment see the website of the Assessment Reform Group.⁴⁵

Formative assessment

Assessment is a natural part of learning and a natural part of classroom interaction. It is a method used by a teacher to discover what each student has learned and it is sometimes referred to as 'assessment for learning'. In the light of each assessment outcome, a good teacher will adjust the next stages of learning so that they build naturally on previous achievements or remedy shortcomings. Formative assessment is thus an individual process that attempts to meet the needs of all students as individuals. In practice, however, there is often a large element of whole-class activity, especially where teachers are coping with large classes or have limited resources.

Formative assessment is thus an aspect of good pedagogy and is the most fundamental of all assessment processes. It is often very informal (such as asking questions or observing students doing a task) but may sometimes use formal methods (such as a whole class test). Key aspects are the feedback and discussion that follow the assessment – it is only possible to plan for the next steps in learning if the nature and extent of each student's achievement has been identified. Ideally, this is a process that is shared between the teacher and each student, however cursorily, and is a contribution to the development of the student's capacity to manage his or her own learning (a vital skill for adult life).

We must emphasise that the setting, marking and recording of marks from a weekly test (common in many classrooms) does not constitute formative assessment unless that is clearly directed towards the goal of supporting learning progression and involves detailed feedback that can facilitate this.

In relation to the current analysis, we are therefore concerned to understand the extent to which classroom practice may embrace formative assessment and the extent to which teachers should be proficient in using assessment for this purpose. Kellaghan & Greaney⁴⁶ comment that *...the improvement of classroom assessment has received little attention in reforms. However, given its central role in the teaching-learning process, such improvement should be accorded high priority in any reform that has as its objective the improvement of students' learning...*

Selection and Certification

A major aspect of assessment is the use of summative assessments whose results will be used either to select students or to certificate their achievements

⁴⁵ <http://arg.educ.cam.ac.uk/>

⁴⁶ Kellaghan T & Greaney V (2003) *Monitoring Performance: Assessment and Examinations in Africa* (draft version). Association for the Development of Education in Africa

at some specified point in their educational careers; this certification may later be used for a selection process. Both of these purposes are relatively public and involve choices between those who will be selected and those who will not. There is therefore a public concern that these assessments shall be fair and equitable and not influenced improperly.

The result is that assessments for these purposes are constrained to be of particular types, conducted under relatively stringent conditions. Written examinations and tests predominate and their technical quality will be of public concern, so that they will often be created and managed by specialist organisations such as examination boards. This area of assessment of course includes a very wide range of occupation-specific certification whose standards are linked to professional standards established outside the education system.

Although there are countries where teacher assessments are a substantial part of assessment for selection and certification, the trend over recent years has been towards the wider use of external controls and management with state-wide or country-wide examinations being more and more widely used. Where it is used, teacher assessment has often been subject to progressively stricter controls. Its inclusion is almost always justified on the grounds that teachers are better able to assess competencies across a wider range of skills such as those that may be displayed in carrying out an extended project or captured through a written test format, or in assessing ephemeral performances. Kellaghan & Greaney comment that

Several examination systems in Africa have introduced, or are planning to introduce, an element of school-based assessment in their public examinations. Indeed, some would hope ultimately, especially at the primary school level, to replace external examining completely with school-based assessment, perceiving that to be the only way in which the range of competencies specified in curricula can be validly assessed, and in which the negative effects of external examinations on teaching and learning can be removed. However, the implementation of school-based assessment as a component of public examinations has proved problematic. While the aspiration and motivation to introduce it have been high, practical difficulties have on more than one occasion resulted in failure, postponement, or the limitation of the school-based element to a minimal, almost token, amount.

Assessments for selection and certification are widely used as indicators of system performance, although this is not their primary function and, for a variety of reasons, they may not be as suitable for this purpose as specially designed monitoring instruments. At the present time, most of these assessments are of limited use in providing comparisons between performances in different countries.

Assessments conducted for selection and certification purposes are called 'high stakes' assessments because of their potential impact on students' life chances. Consequently, they are vulnerable to misuse and corruption, are generally managed under conditions of some confidentiality or secrecy and have a disproportionate influence on the curriculum and how it is delivered by teachers. The methods used (largely written tests) exert a strong influence on the

assessment methods that teachers use in the classroom and training programmes in assessment often concentrate on the technical characteristics of these methods to exclusion of other types of assessment. It is difficult to persuade teachers and other stakeholders not to regard written examinations (and the results that they generate) as a 'gold standard' to which all assessments should aspire.

Annex 2: Proposed training programmes

Recommendation 1 is centred around a substantial teacher training programme, to improve methods of classroom assessment. In order to be effective this programme needs to bring together a number of strands.

- 1.1: improve initial teacher training to make it broader and curriculum-embedded
- 1.2: develop assessment support materials
- 1.3: develop and provide in-service training that improves teachers' classroom assessment skills in the context of the curriculum
- 1.4: support improved guidance and materials on continuous assessment for summative purposes, consistent with that used in wider in-service training
- 1.5: incorporate students' assessment and relevant teacher support materials within the ERC
- 1.6: support inspection services in monitoring assessment quality
- 1.7: ensure that school development plans incorporate commitments to the improvement of classroom assessment and to providing teachers with time and opportunity to develop their expertise

Training programme approach

The argument for integrating the assessment training (formative assessment in the classroom and continuous assessment) into wider training in curriculum delivery is overwhelming: it saves money and time (compared to separate training programmes) and it puts the work on assessment into the context of the teaching. Moreover, there is a strong argument for ensuring the teachers are provided with examples, ideas and materials that are context-specific and that they can take away to use in their own classrooms.

Further than this, work on assessment needs to be stripped down to those aspects that are of direct help to teachers. General instruction on, for example, statistical methods for scaling marks or extended discussions of the theoretical background to continuous assessment, should take second place to the discussion of practical methods for developing and using assessment methods in the classroom.

The training programme should provide ample opportunities for teachers to practise a range of assessment methods, discuss with each other and with course leaders their conduct of assessments and the basis upon which they would make assessment decisions. The emphasis of the programme is thus on developing practical experience that teachers can immediately apply in their classrooms and upon which they can build in due course.

Suggested programme

Training workshops will often cover several subjects in the same programme. There is no problem with this since much of the work will take place in small

groups, facilitated by the workshop leaders. The amounts of presentation should be kept to a minimum.

A 3 day workshop (probably for teachers of the same grade or adjacent grades) might

- start with an orientation session that describes the relationship between learning and assessment
- present a number of simple options for assessing student achievement – ask workshop groups to develop assessment strategies for selected parts of the curriculum that they are teaching
- review the outcomes and move to groups developing simple assessment methods for one selected topic; these should be complete with descriptions of the tasks and the assessment criteria
- for the whole group, discuss the process of feedback and review with students
- repeat this process with a widening range of assessment methods and topics so as to build a repertory of skills and experience; at each stage to accompany this with peer discussion and review of the methods used
- extend the work to include discussion of and practice with continuous assessment
- relate each stage to materials prepared for the programme and encourage teachers to build folders of these interspersed with their own materials, to take back to their schools.

Materials

Where teachers' guides are available these should be used as a major source for the training programmes and all teachers should have a guide or guides relevant to the subjects that they are teaching. Where guides are not available, or where they need supplementing, materials need to be developed that relate assessment methods to curriculum topics and provide tools (such as simple tests, observation notes and schedules, criteria for assessing group work or performances, methods of class questioning, schedules for assessing speaking skills etc). It is essential that participants have materials that they can use immediately or outlines that they can extend in the course of the training.

The materials should also include practice advice on the management of continuous assessment (if this is not already available) and clear advice on the methods to be used and areas to be assessed in each subject. The aim should be to give teachers unambiguous guidance and specific practical help in implementing good quality continuous assessment.

Inspection training

Inspector training is designed to equip inspectors to be effective in identifying and reporting on good curriculum delivery and assessment practice in the classroom and to monitor continuous assessment effectively. To be able to do this they need specific instruction and help on

- how to conduct classroom observations

- what questions to ask teachers and students
- what materials to scrutinise while they are in schools
- the advice and help that they should be giving to teachers.

Their training programmes should include discussion of these issues interspersed with practice that might use video recordings of classrooms that they might observe, examples of assessments that have been conducted and records that they may encounter. The materials supplied to them as part of the training should include clear, practical checklists of tasks, criteria for making judgements and formats that should use for reporting. The emphasis should be on support rather than criticism but with a clear commitment to arriving at objective judgements on all aspects of classroom practice.

In each state these may be additional duties for inspectors and the training programme must therefore consider how inspectors should be managing their time in order to carry out all the tasks assigned to them. States should be encouraged to develop inspection manuals with criteria and checklists that are also available to schools, so that the process is as transparent as possible.

Annex 3: Agreement trialling in schools

Training programmes for teachers provide an important input to building expertise but they have limited effect unless

- they are accompanied by materials that teachers can use in the classroom within improved practice
- there are opportunities for teachers to pool their experience and learn from colleagues.

There is ample evidence that the process whereby teachers review their own experience and reflect upon it in the company of colleagues is a key component of professional development.

The provision of support materials is part of our proposals for teacher training and is supported by the provision of teachers' guides in support of the textbooks. This short note is concerned with methods that may be used by teachers in their own schools to develop expertise in student assessment. The process is called **agreement trialling**.

What it is

Agreement trialling is a professional development process. Its purpose is to assist the participating teachers to develop their understanding of student assessment as it is applied to specific pieces of student work. It operates with teachers who have a common interest such as the teaching of a particular subject to students in one grade.

Agreement trialling sessions are normally quite short – no more than 2-3 hours for each session. Most schools that have used this process hold several sessions in each year. It is not necessary for all groups of teachers to meet together on the same occasion.

Most agreement trialling sessions are led by one of the teachers, not by an outside trainer. However, there may be occasions when an outsider is available, and he or she can be included in the session, to advise the teachers.

It is important that agreement trialling is made possible and supported within a school management plan, as a key aspect of professional development for the teachers. Teachers need time for, and should be encouraged to arrange, trialling sessions. The support of headteachers and principals is essential.

How it works

Teachers arrange to hold a trial and agree on the subject, grade and curriculum topic that they wish to work on. This should be an area where the teachers believe that they will benefit from discussing the assessment of student work. This may be written work, a project, an activity, artwork, a performance or any other work done for the chosen topic. It is possible to look at tests that students have done but this is not normally as useful as looking at larger or more complex tasks. The objectives for the work should be clear and it should be a piece of work that has been completed.

Examples of the work of a small number of students are brought to the meeting. If the teachers wish to discuss the assessment of a performance they will have to arrange to see or hear it (it could be in sport or music) so that they can all make their own decisions on it.

For each piece of work the teachers use the assessment criteria or marking scheme to make independent judgements about the quality of the students' work. They may each award a mark or a grade for each assessment criterion and, before starting discussion, look at several pieces of work. Preferably, these should be of varying quality so that teachers see a range from the best to the poorest examples. Normally, looking at 5 or 6 examples will be quite sufficient. This stage of the agreement trial might take a third to a half of the available time.

The group should then see whether their judgements have agreed. It is important to do this in relation to each assessment criterion and to discuss the aspects of the work that are important, especially where the teachers have not agreed about the assessment.

Outcomes

The greatest value of agreement trialling is when the decisions made by teachers are recorded and, if possible, some examples of student work are kept in the school so that they and the notes of the decisions can be referred to in the future, especially by teachers that are new to the school. Many schools build **portfolios** of examples of this kind and make them available to all teachers, together with materials from training programmes, as support packages.