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Prime Minister  
Do you want me  
to write as  
proposed.

PRIME MINISTER

15 January 1988

PRC6  
15/1

Yes no

National Curriculum : Task Group on  
Assessment and Testing (TGAT) Report

I seem to  
remember that

we are not

committed to the detail  
only to the broad

as you  
hurdled  
agreed.  
PRC6

The Report on assessment and testing was published last  
Monday

concept of  
a framework for

- It was welcomed by Kenneth Baker as the broad framework into which attainment targets for the subject groups could be fitted. *the subject*
- It was also welcomed by Mr Jack Straw and the NUT. *World War*
- The TES leader published today described it as "a remarkable job"; while sceptical when it was first set they have been "confounded" by the result. *check?*

This is enough to make one sense trouble .... and sure  
enough ....

A Clever Document

The Report is a cleverly written document which has been  
prepared over a short period of time. Its aim is to provide  
a framework within which attainment targets can be set and  
pupils assessed and tested. This it does.

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The good features of the report are:

- the notion that an effective assessment system lies at the heart of promoting good learning and teaching;
- its recommendation that assessment at 7, 11, 14 and 16 is both practical and desirable;
- its proposal that the results of assessment of a whole class or school should be available to parents and the general public (though as part of a broader report).

### Six Criticisms

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On closer reading however the Report's conclusions and sympathies are far more disturbing than have yet been realised;

- From an administrative point of view it is an enormously elaborate, complex exercise for which the Committee has even developed its own private language. The Committee has produced a Rolls-Royce design regardless of cost, when a more modest proposal might be just as effective.

The administration of the scheme involves setting up two new powerful bodies, (the Schools and Examination Council and the National Curriculum Council,) "the delivery of assessment and testing items and arrangements, the organisation of moderation procedures, the collection and collation of results", as well as new publications and the careful monitoring of the whole process by other bodies.

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- Its philosophy of testing is that tests are only a part of assessment and that the major purpose of assessment is "diagnostic" and "formative" (recognising positive achievements) rather than summative ("recording the overall achievement of a pupil in a systematic way"): this new jargon allows the Report to hardly ever mention the word fail.

"The meaning given to testing is often too narrow. Much of the discussion about testing seems to be based on a particular image. This image is frequently of an externally-prescribed paper and pencil test, formal and unimaginative in scope, to be attempted in a set time on a formal occasion and marked according to set rules. The system that we recommend must include the use of tests, but far more broadly conceived." (para 45)

- The method of assessment is teacher dominated - teachers play a key role in forming judgements over many of the elements of assessment: general impressions, marking course work and assignments, using pupils' self-assessment and group moderation by which individual teachers' judgements are brought into line with their colleagues.
- the costs of the exercise are nowhere mentioned: yet they must be huge because to quote the Report introducing a national curriculum will:

"require additions to the facilities and resources of schools, the recruitment of teachers in appropriate distributions across schools and across the subject areas of the curriculum, and the pre-service and in-service education and training of these teachers to ensure that they were able to work well". (para 206)

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"the new work required for age 14 would imply a training operation roughly comparable in scale to the GCSE programme". (para 211)

"for the primary phase, the whole operation would be more extensive than the GCSE programme because all the teachers involved will need to be trained in the assessment of all curricular areas". (para 211)

the LEAs "will have a major part to play in implementing the proposals" (para 215) preparation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, "preparing and overseeing local strategies for giving advice and help to schools" (para 216): their services "however will need to be enhanced". (para 217)

the new assessment system cannot be introduced in less than five years.

It is no wonder that the report has been welcomed by the teacher unions and the Labour Party!

The Report is the embodiment of modern educational thinking and the best news for teacher unions for many a year.

### The Way Forward

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I am taking soundings on the report from various quarters (Donald Naismith, Prof Prais, the CPS education group) to find out if they have similar reservations.

If they do and if you share them I would suggest that you write to the Secretary of State expressing your disquiet and asking him to put certain questions to the Committee. I attach a few.

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*Brian Griffiths*

BRIAN GRIFFITHS

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS TO TGAT ARISING FROM THEIR REPORT

1. Teachers' Costs

- a. Has the group considered what are the likely costs in the training of teachers prior to the implementation of the first assessments, tests and moderation procedures?
- b. Similarly, the likely teachers' costs in implementing the assessments, tests and moderation procedures each year?

2. Pupils' Costs

Has the group considered what is the fraction of pupils' time at school that will be absorbed by the full range of assessments and tests proposed?

3. Reliability

What are the risks of a pupil being wrongly classified by a teacher into (for example) level 1 when he ought to be in level 2; and vice versa? Have assessments and tests of this sort been carried out on sufficiently large and representative samples of pupils, and with sufficiently large and representative samples of teachers, to allow statistical measures of reliability etc to be calculated?

4. Experience

Is there any large group of schools in an LEA (anywhere in the world) that has put into practice a scheme of this degree of elaboration?