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PRIME MINISTER

**NATIONAL SYSTEM FOR ASSESSMENT AND TESTING**

*E(EP)(88)612 attached*

1. As agreed at E(EP) on 25 May, I am circulating - attached - a Parliamentary Answer announcing our intentions for a national system for assessment and testing. This reflects the points made at E(EP) and the additional passage suggested by Peter Walker.

2. I intend to make the announcement and to publish the Task Group on Assessment and Testing's supplementary reports on 7 June. I should be grateful for any comments by Monday morning 6 June.

3. I am copying this minute to members of E(EP), Tom King and Sir Robin Butler.

*K.B.*

KB  
Department of Education and Science

2 June 1988

DRAFT PARLIAMENTARY ANSWER

NATIONAL SYSTEM FOR ASSESSMENT AND TESTING

1. When my Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Wales and I published in January the Report of the Task Group on Assessment and Testing, I asked the Group to give further advice on the administrative and other arrangements needed to support their recommendations, on the application of the framework they proposed to the full range of National Curriculum core and other foundation subjects, and on any modifications they might suggest in the light of comment on their Report. They have submitted that advice, and we are publishing it today.

2. The recommendations of the Group, ~~which gave effect to the Government's main requirements on assessment,~~ have been well received, and ~~its further work indicates broadly that they are practicable and appropriate.~~ The Government has therefore decided, in the light of the responses to TGAT's recommendations, and to the interim reports of the Mathematics and Science Working Groups, and to consultations on the National Curriculum, to adopt the following main principles as the basis for a national system of assessment and testing related to the National Curriculum attainment targets:-

- (a) attainment targets will be set which establish what children ~~of different maturities and abilities~~ should normally be expected to know, understand and be able to do at the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16; these will enable the progress of each child to be measured against national standards.
- (b) pupils' performance in relation to attainment targets should be assessed and reported on at ages 7, 11, 14, and 16. Attainment targets should be grouped for this purpose to make the assessment and reporting manageable.

- (c) different levels of attainment and overall pupil progress demonstrated by tests and assessment should be registered on a 10 point scale covering all the years of compulsory schooling.
- (d) assessment should be by a combination of national external tests and assessment by teachers. At age 16 the GCSE will be the main form of assessment, especially in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science.
- (e) the results of tests and other assessments should be used both formatively to help better teaching and to inform decisions about next steps for a pupil, and summatively at ages 7, 11, 14 and 16 to inform parents about their child's progress.
- (f) <sup>detailed</sup> results of assessments of individual pupils should <sup>be</sup> ~~always be made available~~ <sup>given</sup> in full to parents, and the Government attaches great importance to the principle that these reports should be (simple and) clear. Individuals' results should not be published, but aggregated results at the ages of 11, 14 and 16 should be so that the wider public can make informed judgments about attainment in a school or LEA. There should be no legal requirement for schools to publish such results for 7 year olds, though it is strongly recommended that schools should do so.
- (g) in order to safeguard standards, assessments made by teachers should be compared with the results of the national tests and with the judgments of other teachers.

3. We expect these principles to inform the consultations which will take place later this year on the recommendations of the National Curriculum Mathematics and Science Working Groups, and likewise to inform the thinking of the Working

Groups on English and on Design and Technology which we announced last month.

4. There is a considerable amount of work to be done on the detail of cost-effective arrangements needed to support such a system. The suggestions made by the Task Group on Assessment and Testing in its third supplementary report on the moderation system appear complicated and costly; whilst the Government recognises that the issues involved are complex, the support arrangements adopted must be sufficiently simple to enable good progress to be made in introducing the national assessment system. We shall be discussing the issues with the local education authorities, the examining groups and other appropriate organisations. We shall also set in hand work on the development of in-service training for teachers, and on the development and piloting of national tests, starting with an examination of available tests to see whether they can appropriately be used. [ On all these matters we shall want advice from the shadow School Examinations and Assessment Council and where appropriate, the National Curriculum Council, before we take decisions. We shall also want the Councils' advice on the methods and forms of reporting to explain the results of assessments - in detail to parents, and more generally to the wider public. ]

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5. As I have already informed the House, our intention is that the first cohort of pupils in primary schools should begin work in Autumn 1989 on National Curriculum attainment targets and programmes of study for the three core subjects of mathematics, science and English and if possible on technology which is closely linked with science in the primary phase. We also expect first year pupils in secondary school - 11-12 year olds - to start work on attainment targets and programmes of study for mathematics and science in Autumn 1989. These subjects will be introduced in Wales on a similar timetable. In addition my Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Wales expects to introduce Welsh for the early years of both primary and secondary schools in Autumn 1990. We shall give priority to developing assessment

and testing arrangements for these subjects and age groups with first results expected for 7 year olds in 1991 and 14 year olds in 1992. However, the arrangements will be tried out in schools before there is any formal public reporting of results. We therefore expect that the first results of assessment and testing for 7 year olds will be available to parents and for publication in the summer of 1992, and for 14 year olds in the summer of 1993. Assessment in other subjects and for other age groups will be brought in progressively thereafter.



File MJ  
CCBS

10 DOWNING STREET  
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*From the Private Secretary*

7 June 1988

*Dear Tom,*

PARLIAMENTARY ANSWERS ON ASSESSMENT AND TESTING  
AND ON HIGGINSON COMMITTEE REPORT

The Prime Minister was very grateful for your Secretary of State's two separate minutes dated 2 June. This is to confirm that the Prime Minister is content for Parliamentary answers to be given today, subject to the amendments discussed between us.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to members of E(EP), David Watkins (Northern Ireland Office) and to Sir Robin Butler.

*Yours,  
P.G.*

Paul Gray

Tom Jeffery, Esq.,  
Department of Education and Science.

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Prime Minister

Content - still these changes?

PRIME MINISTER

3 June 1988

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Assessment and Testing

Kenneth Baker has sent his draft Parliamentary answer on this subject. I would suggest two changes and one addition.

First in para 2(a) the words "of different maturities and abilities" should be deleted. This expression is simply a back door through which the whole concept of attainment targets can and will be undermined.

agree deletion

will have suggested other deletions  
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mt

Second in para 2(f) the word "simple" in the fourth line should be deleted. Parents want clear reports but simple suggests the possibility of an unacceptably high level of aggregation.

Third, assessment is at present being done by a combination of national external tests and assessment by teachers. There is real value in the results of national external tests being published separately from the subjective assessment of teaching. It is ultimately the only proper check on the performance of pupils.

Why not suggest that the results of tests and other assessments should be published separately?

Brian Griffiths

BRIAN GRIFFITHS