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# Assessment reform in primary schools

Results of a poll of 350 teachers, with Schoolzone commentary

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# Background

Assessment in primary schools is mostly used for planning purposes, rather than, as in secondary schools, for predicting grades: in other words it's to serve teaching and learning – ongoing assessment allows primary teachers to plan lessons (“do I need to revisit that topic or can I go on to the next?”) rather than being so much concerned whether their students are meeting national requirements, as at secondary. The removal of NC levels is often seen as being a cause for concern because of the loss of standardisation they facilitated, but in practice, they were used mostly for planning (“are we moving through the curriculum at the right pace for the year”). The loss of levels has caused something of a crisis for planning, rather than for assessment.

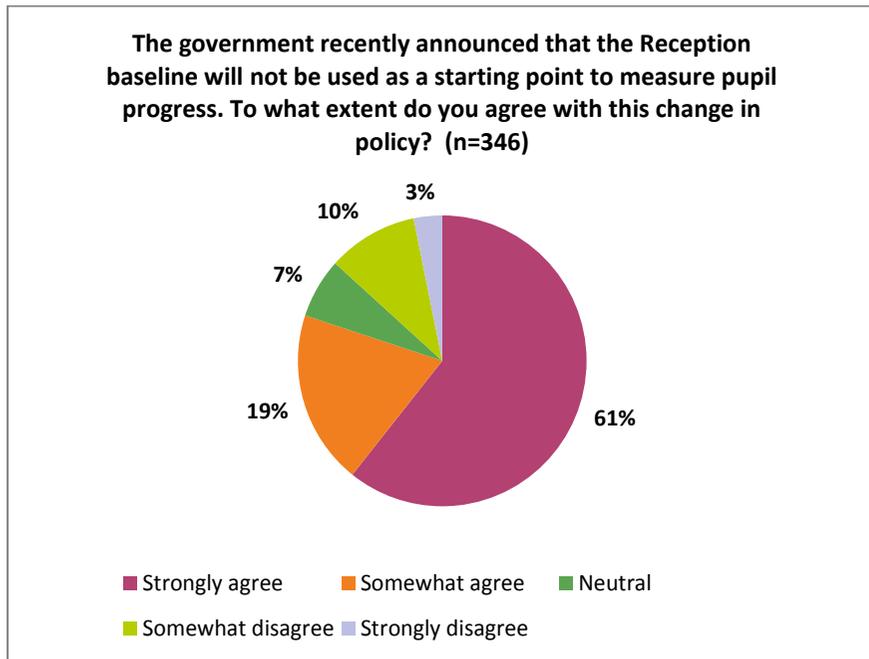
A bigger issue for most primary schools is the *amount* of assessment that's required nationally – and really this concern arises from the fact that SATs and

baseline testing don't contribute anything to the child (unlike at secondary level), but some form of assessment is obviously useful, as elsewhere in the education system. At present, the pace of reform is unrelenting, and this puts ever-increasing pressure on teachers: it's in this context that we conducted this short survey of teachers about the primary assessment aspects of the current white paper, [\*Educational Excellence Everywhere\*](#).

This study was prompted by our [overview research into teachers' responses](#) (at primary and secondary levels) to the white paper. Noting primary teachers' concerns about assessment (via our Talking Heads focus groups), we decided to investigate further.

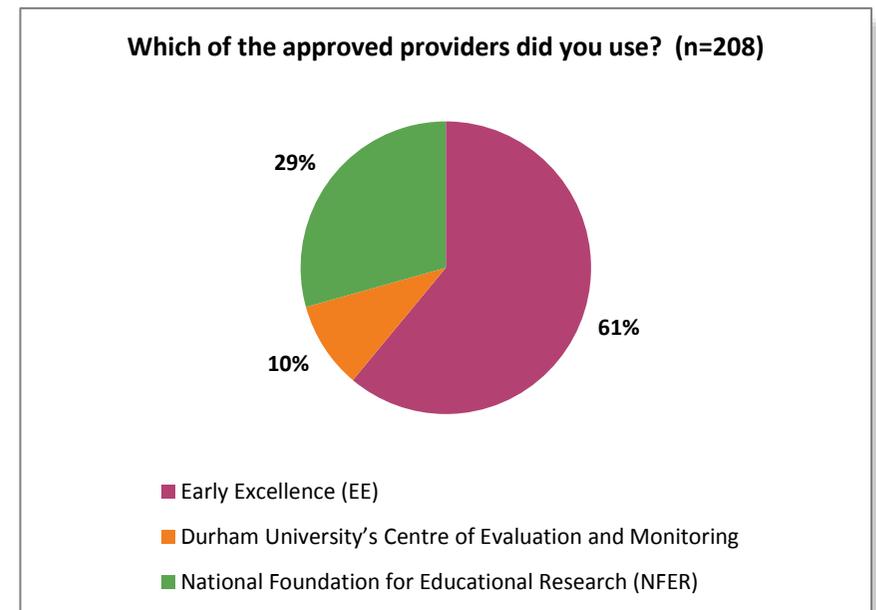
# Response to withdrawal of the reception baseline

The government U-turn in using the Reception baseline as a starting point to measure pupil progress has been welcomed by the teaching profession: 80% agreed with this change in policy, and three quarters of those 'strongly agreed'.



The most widely adopted 2015 baseline provider was Early Excellence (EE), used by 61% of survey respondents. Least popular was the Durham CEM assessment, used by only 10%. This reflects a strong preference for practice-led assessment, based on observations of children using practitioners' judgements

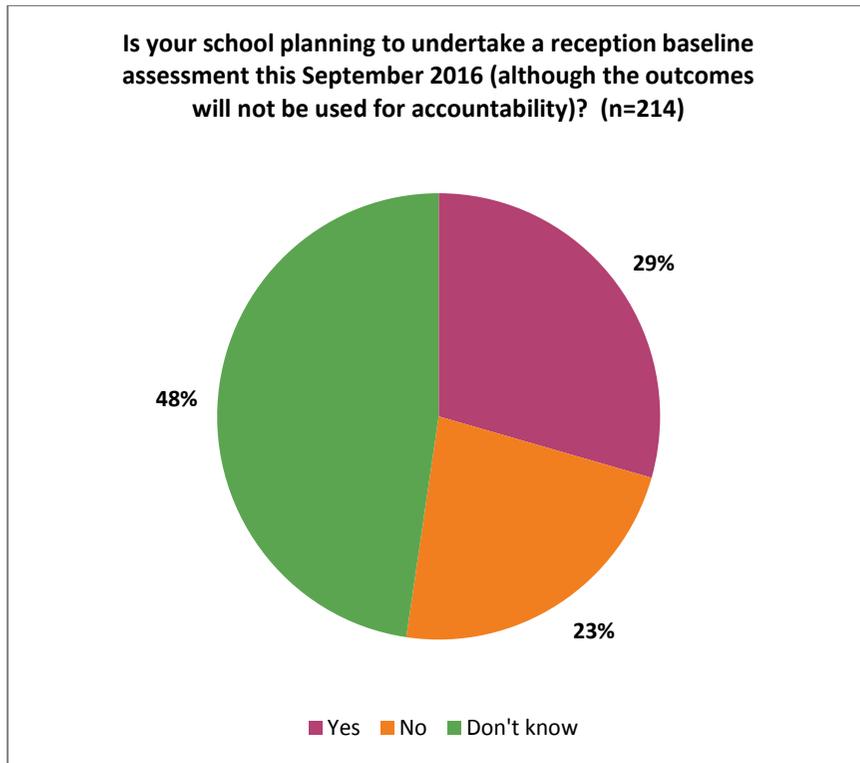
(as seen in the EE baseline), compared to tasks / tests which form the basis of the CEM / NFER assessments.



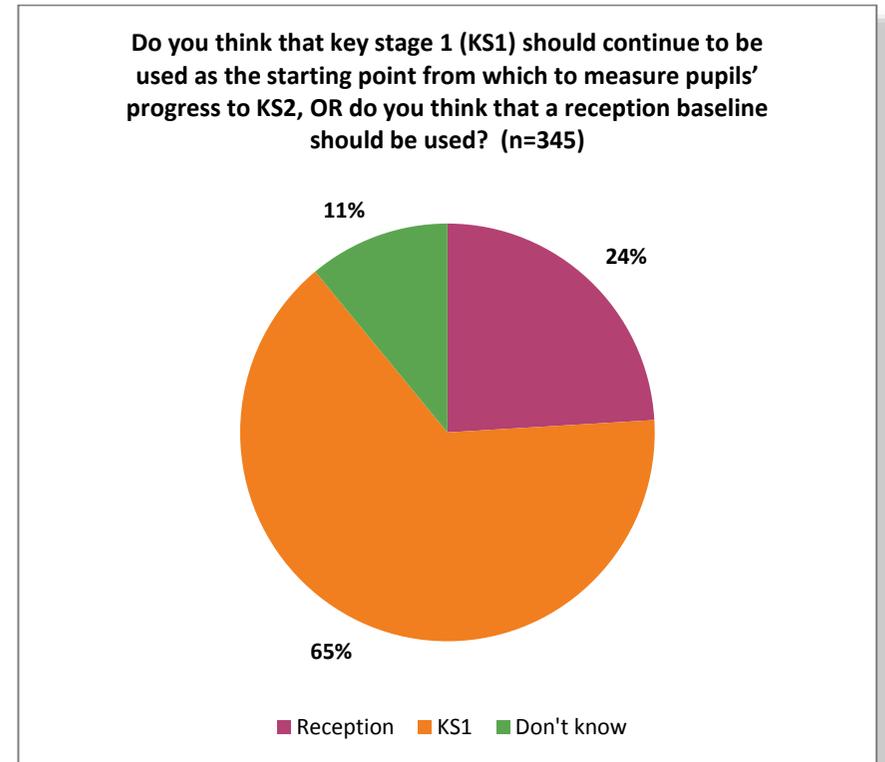
Given that so many agreed with the removal of mandatory baseline testing in Reception, it is surprising that 29% still planned to opt-in for the assessment in 2016 (compared to 23% who are opting out), even though these outcomes will not be used for accountability. This could indicate that, whilst teachers don't agree with the baseline being imposed on them, or with it being used as a

starting point for pupil progress, some do find it useful for identifying pupils in need of additional support, at an early stage in their school life.

This survey was carried out very soon after the announcement to withdraw the baseline assessments, so it will be interesting to revisit this issue in the coming months, when more schools have decided whether or not to opt-in.

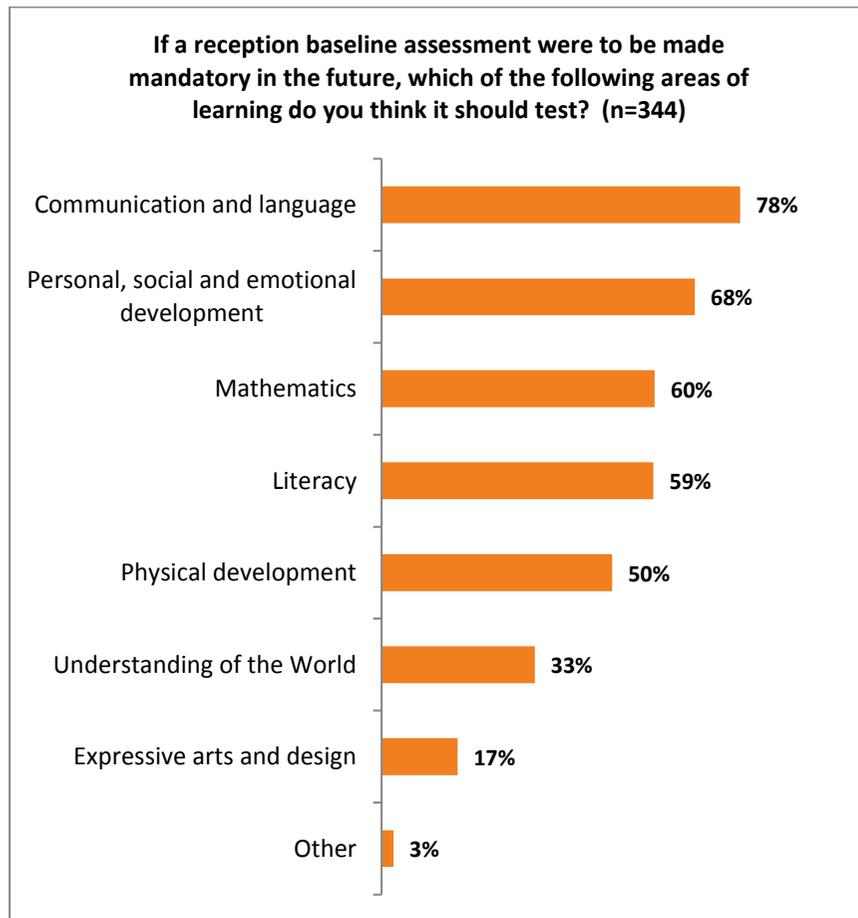


The majority feel that KS1 should be used as a starting point for pupil progress, instead of Reception:



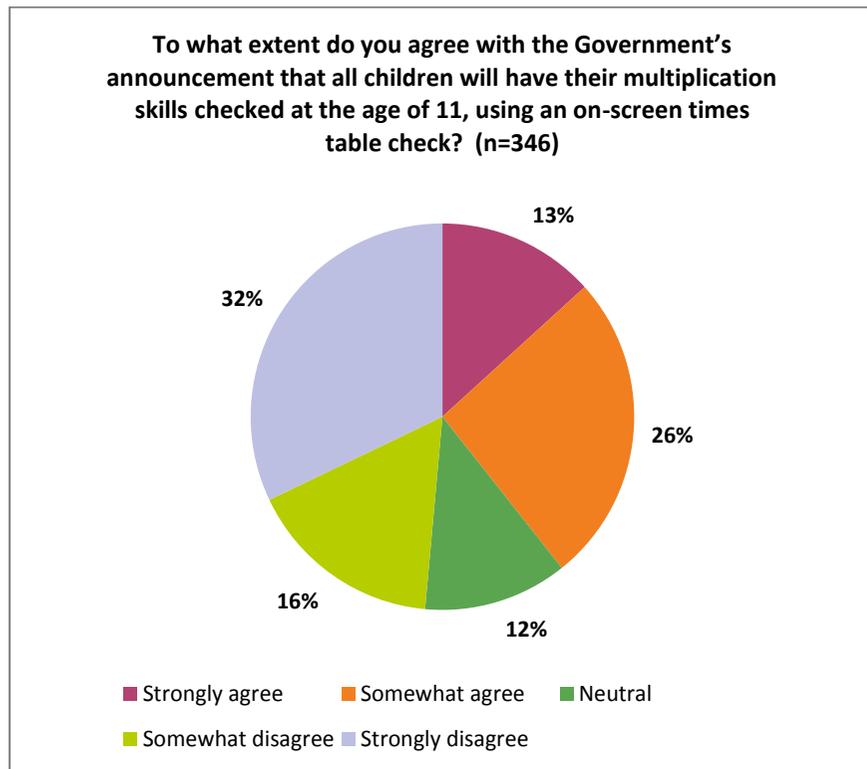
However, if there were to be a Reception baseline implemented, many felt that it should cover the three Prime Areas of Learning (PSED, C&L and PD), as well as the Specific Areas of Literacy and Maths. A smaller percentage thought it

should also address Understanding of the World (9%), and Expressive Arts and Design (5%).

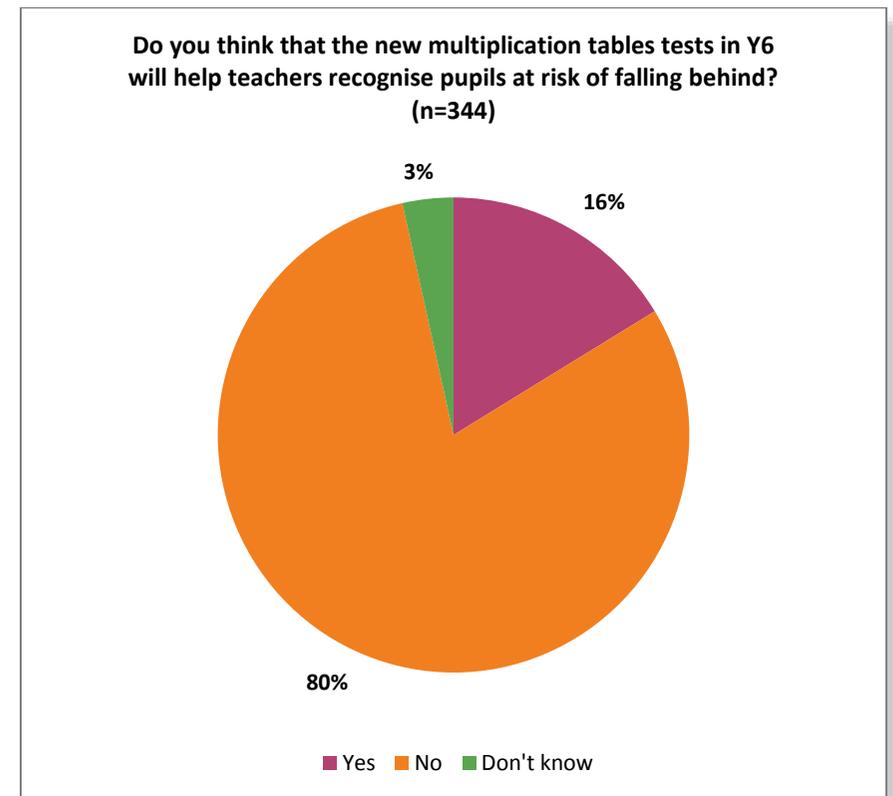


## Response to the introduction of multiplication testing in Y6

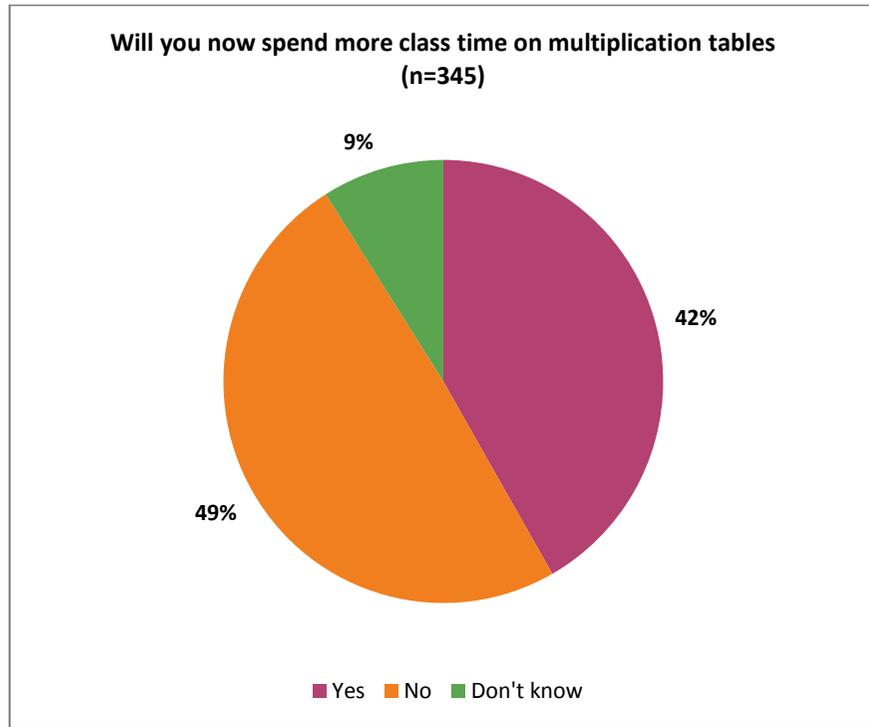
The announcement that Y6 children will have their multiplication skills tested using an on-screen times table check received a mixed response, although a notably higher percentage strongly opposed the idea (32%), than were strongly in favour (13%).



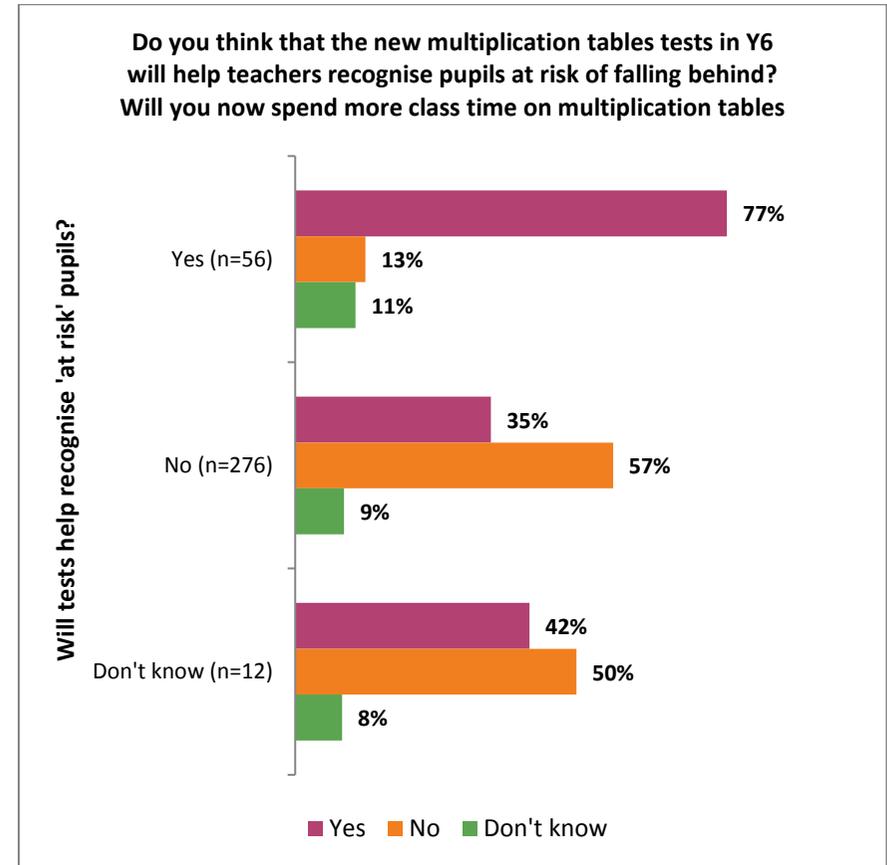
Four in every five teachers doubted that these tests would help them to recognise pupils at risk of falling behind, bringing the very purpose of these tests into question.



42% anticipated that the introduction of this policy would increase the amount of time spent in class on multiplication tables:

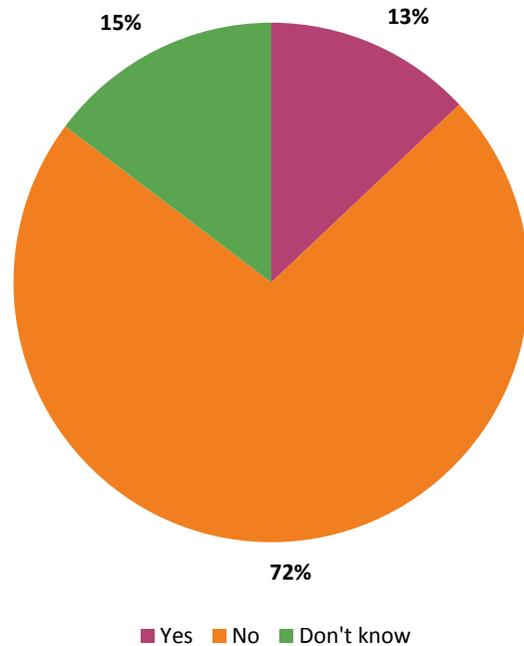


This casts doubt on the value of these tests: 35% of the teachers surveyed didn't think the tests would help to identify 'at risk' pupils, yet they are still going to spend more class time on multiplication tables. This shows how teachers are influenced to 'teach to the test', despite feeling that the tests won't have any real benefit to teaching and learning.



For the most part, teachers think that they will be able to prepare children for the new multiplication tests using their existing suite of resources:

**Will you need any additional resources to support children in learning their multiplication tables? (n=346)**



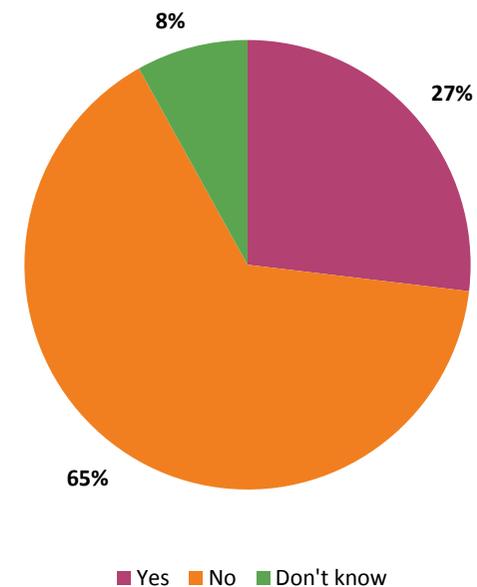
Those who said that they would require new resources said they needed the following:

- Computer programmes similar to the test to practice
- Training / support for parents
- Interactive software e.g. games for use on iPads / tablets

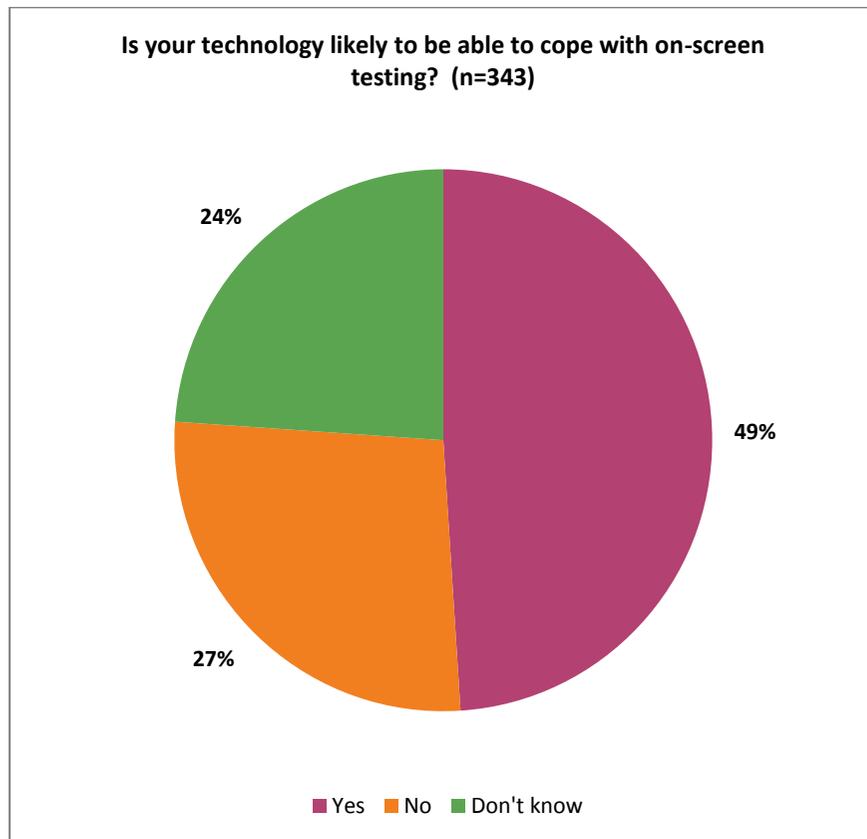
Teachers questioned the suitability and feasibility of on-screen testing, as shown in the next series of charts. Around two thirds of the sample agreed that on-screen testing wouldn't be appropriate for all children in Y6, raising concerns over the proposed format of the tests. Specific groups they were worried about included SEN and EAL.

*"SEN children need less testing, timed on screen assessments which provide a pass or fail result are unhelpful to both the child and the teacher."*

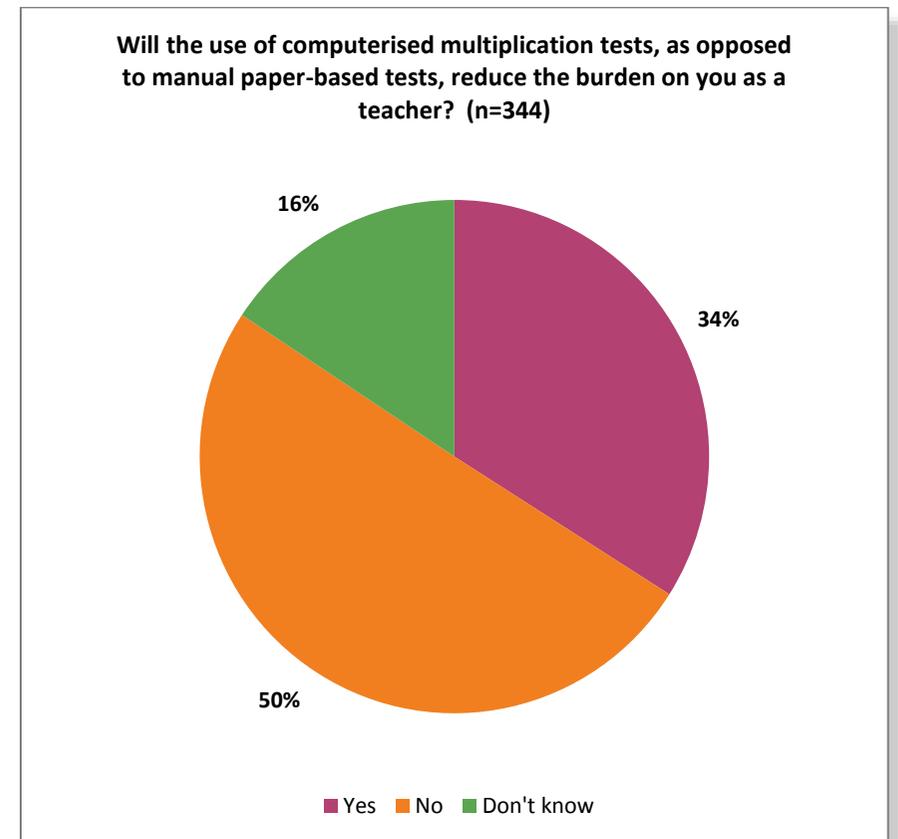
**Do you think that on-screen testing is appropriate for all children in Year 6? (n=346)**



Just over a quarter of respondents didn't think that their technology in school would be able to support digital testing. This has a financial implication for schools, who are already experiencing diminishing budgets, and may need to purchase new hardware.



With half of the sample in agreement that there would be no benefit of on-screen testing in terms of reducing teacher workload, there are clear questions raised over the benefits of introducing a digital test format, as opposed to a printed format.





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