Teachers’ response to curriculum reforms: Secondary

Schoolzone Syndicated Research

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Executive Summary

SCHOOLS’ RESPONSES TO DATE

Across the different schools and subjects, responses consistently show that little change has been made so far in response to the forthcoming reforms, though planning is quite advanced in some schools. However, this is rather tentative, since most departments are waiting to see what the new GCSEs look like (draft specifications are available in May) before making any firm plans regarding the curriculum. Schools are generally following developments and beginning discussions but in a climate of constant change many feel they have not yet had enough time to consider the implications fully.

In addition, some schools are still grappling with previous changes and with budget cuts, impacting on their ability to respond. There is also a reluctance to make any changes whilst details of the specifications and requirements remain vague.

Accountability measures

Senior leaders seem most concerned about the implications for options choices and the continuity of courses currently on offer. They are worried about the impact on the lower performing students, in the absence of, for example, single science and with the reduced value (for accountability purposes) of vocational qualifications. On-going uncertainty about the contribution of other level 2 qualifications to accountability measures also confuses the decision-making process.

Many have not yet grasped the implications of progress measures: they tend to regard it in the same way as value-added measures: as something additional to the floor standards (falling below which performance triggers Ofsted interest) and they are concerned that there will be negative repercussions on lower performing students. They have not really come to terms with the fact that these lower attainers could still make good progress and that strategies need to be based on addressing this, rather than getting enough students to a particular grade.

The double weighting of English and maths is of concern to option subjects, which see themselves being side-lined. English and maths teachers are not generally supportive either, as there will be even more pressure to achieve results.

English teachers are pleased that there will be a greater incentive for students to take literature, but question whether this method (language can be double weighted if literature is also taken) is the best way to do this. Additionally, there is considerable uncertainty surrounding this feature.

Maths teachers are worried about the value-added component relating to lower attaining students: it is more difficult, in their experience, to achieve three levels of progress with these students, than with the higher attaining ones.

Implications: Schools have been very adept at choosing courses to maximise student performance and this will largely be replaced by a greater focus on differentiation and individualised teaching and learning. The focus will shift from maximising the number of students achieving a grade C, to maximising the potential for all students. This will also necessitate a greater focus on assessment and monitoring as well as increasing the demand for differentiation and the need for assessment and differentiation to be more closely aligned.

As in other aspects of the reforms, lower attaining students will need additional support to make the same rates of progress as for the higher attaining ones, though it remains to be seen whether the new system will require them to do so.
The performance measures could impact on the number of students taking some subjects which would result in the use of more non-specialist teachers at KS3, who would need additional support. This will probably take some time to settle down though, as schools work out the best options for their student profile.

It is very likely that there will be a contraction in the number of options in schools, not only in subjects leading to vocational qualifications, whose currency in the new measure is devalued, but in GCSEs too, as a result of needed to meet the specific requirements of Performance Eight. This will be a challenge for schools as they need to meet the needs of students who have not previously been expected to achieve success at GCSE. However, they may achieve sufficient progress but, if schools perceive that they are unlikely to do so, they may continue to offer level 2 qualifications which, while they do not contribute to P8, at least still give students something to aim for.

New accountability measures are also being delivered on top of the new Ofsted framework for inspection, new (more challenging) performance management targets, closer scrutiny of spending (eg of pupil premium funding), greater focus on numeracy and literacy and many other initiatives, so any impacts will be wrapped up with the implications of these.

While double or paired GCSEs are well established in the other core subjects, maths is rarely offered in this way to significant numbers of students and the double weighting may go some way towards balancing this, however it may also lead to increased demand for the linked pair alternative, staff permitting.

Assessment and monitoring

Teachers are generally very positive about the removal of coursework and controlled assessment as it was very admin heavy, required a lot of marking and used up valuable teaching time, as well as being disruptive to other subjects at times. However, there is general concern about the impact on lower performing students whose performance could be boosted by resubmissions. Overall there seems to be a move of pressure away from teachers towards students, and responses to this vary.

Some subjects, particularly the practical ones, are concerned that the removal of coursework and controlled assessment will mean that students take the development of skills less seriously. There does not seem to be a great deal of anxiety about this, but teachers are currently unsure about how these skills will be assessed in written exams. In geography, the removal of this form of assessment may mean that senior leadership teams give them less priority.

There is a possibility that the removal of coursework will favour boys, because the long-standing gender gap in performance has been widely attributed to girls achieving higher grades in this aspect of assessment. Only MFL teachers mentioned this as concern, however.

The removal of modules and the potential for retaking will particularly hit the lower performers. It potentially has a negative impact on all students’ performance though, because frequent high stakes assessment helped keep teachers informed and students motivated.

Teachers in subjects which are losing tiering of exam papers are understandably concerned, partly because they fear that less talented students will perform badly and partly because the more gifted will not have enough chance to demonstrate their ability. This is very new territory for schools because in the old O-level system there was a separate qualification for the lower attaining students, the CSE.

At KS3, the removal of levels is not currently seen as an issue, because teachers expect to carry on using them regardless. However, it is difficult to see how, in most subjects, this will be possible unless schools ignore the changes to the national curriculum.
Teachers in some subjects may well relish the opportunity to change the way they assess their students, for example English teachers welcome the chance to use more creative approaches than has previously been possible under the confines of national curriculum levels.

There are concerns about some subject specific changes to assessment, such as speaking and listening in English and assessment of fieldwork in geography or practical skills in science and technology. Mostly these concerns are, again, for the lower performing students.

The new accountability measures mean that students will begin secondary school with a predicted GCSE grade. Teachers are sceptical that these will be very reliable, even though the accountability measures are based on them. This scepticism is based on prior experience, with students arriving in Y7 with widely ranging SAT scores and teacher-assessed levels. However they also share a more fundamental concern that predicted grades will be based only on performance in English and maths at KS2.

There will be no nationally comparative data to measure progress through KS3 or KS4 and schools can use whatever tools suits them, provided they can convince Ofsted that they are using them effectively. At present teachers are expecting that schools will develop their own, perhaps in clusters, for example under the leadership of their local teaching school. Most subjects would prefer not to have to do this, but they do value the flexibility this brings.

**Implications:** The reforms offer a great opportunity for schools to review their assessment and monitoring practices – it will be more important for them to do so, and the removal of levels means that there is a chance to develop assessment regimes that use the same basis throughout KS3 and KS4. While teachers often found it demanding to award levels confidently, they did value the ability to compare the performance of their students to the national picture, so there is likely to be a high degree of demand for a tool to allow them to do this, provided it is flexible enough to suit their own needs.

The government’s intention that local clusters of schools will develop their own assessment schemes seems ambitious, though some will certainly do so, there is likely to be too little consistency over what it taught, delivery methods and scheduling for this to be feasible in all but the most closely linked schools, such as academy chains. In other schools there remains a high degree of competition, which acts as a further barrier to liaison.

Teachers will also struggle at first to judge attainment in the new KS3 and GCSE and will value support materials that allow them to do this, especially in arts subjects where standardisation is difficult, and teachers will value reliable exemplar materials. At KS3 this could be more valuable than content-based resources because the new NC allows for a high degree of variation. At KS4, teachers will be very concerned to have reliable attainment measures particularly in the first few years of introduction of the new courses. These will probably need to be applied more frequently than at present (eg via standardised homework tasks) and to identify progress in bands which are more finely tuned than grades, even with the additional grade to be introduced at GCSE.

Removal of tiers does not necessarily impact on how students are set but some schools anticipate that they may well want to change their current arrangements, with some suggesting more streaming and others, less. Whether they will have the flexibility in the timetable to do more is difficult to know.

Curriculum

There are some fears that additional time required for delivering the new maths GCSE (expected to require an additional hour per week) may result in a reduction of time for other subjects, but most schools do not seem to have laid any plans for coping with this requirement as yet.

Maths departments are concerned about recruitment, however. More time required to deliver GCSE, combined with additional pressure from the double weighting and impending changes to A-level (making them more challenging) all
mean that there will be greater pressure on maths specialists and these, despite government efforts to help, are still very difficult to find.

The removal of coursework and controlled assessment will have a beneficial impact on teaching time, including subjects which do not currently have it as part of their assessment requirements: it could be very disruptive as some schools periodically suspended timetables to accommodate it.

Similarly, the removal of modular exams frees up teaching time which would previously have been used for revision. However this will mean that many subjects will try to complete courses early to leave plenty of time for revision and exam preparation. Schools will also need to find ways to revisit work covered earlier in the course, so the additional time may not actually materialise. Additional content in the new GCSEs may also occupy time available.

It seems likely that schools will use Y9 to begin teaching GCSE courses more frequently: while there has been general move in this direction, foundation subjects in some schools have avoided doing so because not all students would go on to follow the subject and because children are not necessarily mature enough for GCSE material. The new accountability measures mean that the EBacc subjects are much more likely to be taken in all schools, so these subjects in particular are likely to move more towards a Y9 start. Furthermore the detail in the new National Curriculum is slight, so departments which are more concerned about their GCSE performance will have room for manoeuvre at KS3. Some subjects, such as history, seem more resistant to the Y9 start, though.

Core subjects often entered students for a module in Y9, which obviously is no longer the case, but they are likely to continue with Y9 starts because of the increased level of demand, the removal of single award science and the double weighting of maths and English.

Terminal exam structures also incline teachers to complete the GCSE course early in order to allow time for revision, so a Y9 start would facilitate this, too. However the terminal exam does mean that a Y9 start will mean students retaining their learning for longer.

**Implications**: while there are potential gains and losses to curriculum time as a result of a combination of the various forthcoming reforms, it seems likely that students will have to remain engaged and retain learning for longer. Schools are likely to build in regular iterations of topics to keep it fresh and so will need resources to support this. Integration with assessment materials is likely to be more important than has previously been the case, and these will need to be closely aligned to the new performance measures.

Some maths teachers report that they are already facing or delivering increased teaching time or support time – mostly from the recent whole school focus on numeracy or to drive up maths performance. They anticipate that with an extended maths GCSE and the double weighting, there could be even more demand, which many schools will find difficult to meet, given staffing and funding constraints.

There are some fears that the new primary accountability measures may mean that foundation subjects receive less attention, so that more will have to be done to catch up in Y7. Meanwhile, at GCSE, the removal of early entries and module tests means that more revision sessions may need to be laid on in the Easter holidays and via after-schools sessions. Increased targeting of those students who are not progressing according to targets may also result in much more catch-up time being needed: previously this has tended to focus on C/D borderline students, but now this could potentially be students at all performance levels, other than the very top.

Students may be expected to do more work outside the classroom to become more independent and less reliant on teachers. This is likely to be a particular issue for maths.
Resources

Teachers are not unduly concerned about providing resources for the new KS3 curriculum content: they expect to find or create their own teaching and learning resources. They are more concerned about assessment resources however – see above.

At KS4, students benefit greatly from access to past papers and mark schemes, however these will not be available at first, so schools will welcome any sample assessment materials (SAMs) which they obtain from a trustworthy source. Of course they trust their awarding bodies most, but if these are not forthcoming, they are likely to trust publishers with whom they associate their awarding body.

While previous Schoolzone studies have shown that over three quarters of teachers prefer textbooks to be closely matched to their specification, there seems to be little concern over the fact that their current resources will not match the new specs, nor that (or perhaps because) they will not have the budget to restock. This may simply be because they have not looked at the details of the new GCSEs or because there has been more discussion about the new assessment regime rather than about the actual content.

Teachers do not seem overly concerned about any potential restriction over awarding bodies’ ability to approve particular textbooks. This seems to be because they have built up enough trust in the publishers of textbooks to trust them to provide appropriate coverage of new specifications.

Dictionaries may be useful across the curriculum as literacy is now almost 10% of the exam grade for some subjects.

Implications: teachers will presumably want new resources to match the new specifications, and we will examine this question more fully once the new draft specifications are published later this year. However, it may be that use of awarding body approved GCSE assessment resources becomes more significant for the new specifications. At KS3 a reliable, standardised assessment package, flexible enough to accommodate a widely varying key stage three curriculum, would be of great benefit.

In the shorter term, teachers will look for top-up resources at KS3 and probably, at least in the first year of introduction, at GCSE, too. Top of the list at GCSE is likely to be exam preparation materials to use as SAMs.

Many textbooks are currently available as foundation or higher tier editions and, while this may not be necessary for exam entry, teachers are likely to continue to want clear differentiation in textbooks and say that two or three differentiated versions are desirable. The uncertainty as to the impact on setting and schools’ close attention to student progress means that users will want clear indications in resources of GCSE grade-based levels however the resources are presented. They will also need a clear indication of progress, possibly with assessment intervals more narrowly defined than GCSE grades.

An alternative presentation of resources likely to find favour, at least in the short term, is a division along the same lines as the exams, eg paper 1 and paper 2 volumes.

Linear assessment structures mean that there is greater flexibility in the sequencing of course content, so closer attention will need to be paid to providing greater differentiation in some units than was previously the case. Exams will expect more synoptic responses and teachers will want resources to reflect this to provide students with practice in responding to these types of questions.

The speed of the reforms leads teachers to be concerned about the quality of textbooks, based on previous experience, when some were rushed out by publishers and contained too many errors.
Whether or not the amount of training teachers receive in service has increased or decreased in recent years is a moot point. However there does seem to have been a general move towards more and more in-house or cluster-based training, focusing more on whole school improvement and less on subject development. This is largely driven by national initiatives to improve literacy and numeracy for example, or to meet Ofsted guidelines.

In preparation for the curriculum reforms, schools seem to think that training will follow a similar pattern, but hope that subject-based training will be provided by awarding bodies, as has been the case in the past. In the current absence of draft specifications however, teachers are unable to assess the extent to which they might need this.

It seems unlikely that schools will be able to allocate additional budget for training in preparation for the curriculum reforms. Departments reported that they rarely have a dedicated CPD budget of their own.

While many teachers lament the fact that training has moved online, they seem to be becoming more accepting of it. It is obviously more accessible and generally cheaper, though teachers miss the face-to-face contact of traditional forms.

**Implications:** online training, developed in close liaison with teachers, and delivered with a strong synchronous component, seems to be the best way forward. It needs to be more engaging than many teachers report has been their experience.

Teachers can be sceptical of online training because they are usually required to do this in their own time, so if schools were incentivised to allow teachers some form of compensation for this, then it may be more successful.

There does not seem to be any special requirements for the CPD which supports the new reforms to be face to face; online is as likely to be successful for this purpose as for exam feedback and preparation, for example.

Some teachers describe the positive impact on CPD made by their teaching schools, but this provision is not, as yet, at the front of teachers’ minds when they consider the provision of training to deliver the reforms, as the government has hoped they would be. This is probably because teachers do not perceive that they will know anything more than what they know themselves, as yet. However, they are a good route to supporting teachers in this way if they have the capacity to develop the provision which schools will require.
Methodology

A forum was set up with 6 sub-forums and 21 questions in total. Topics covered were general concerns about the curriculum reforms and the impact on schemes of work, resources, assessment practices, exam preparation, and CPD.

37 teachers took part and the forum was open for 2 weeks. Contributions ranged from 1 to 42 posts, with the average being 15 posts.

Profile of Participants

TYPE OF SCHOOLS

- 17 Academy schools
- 10 Local Authority schools
- 4 Voluntary Aided schools
- 4 Independent schools
- 2 Grammar schools

REGION

Participants came from schools across the country: 11 from the South East, 7 from the North West, 6 from the South West, 4 from the West Midlands, 3 from London, 3 from the East, 2 from the East Midlands and 1 from Yorkshire.

JOB ROLE

- 13 Subject Coordinators
- 13 Teachers
- 6 Heads of Year
- 3 Deputy heads
- 2 Seconds in Department

SUBJECT SPECIALISM

12 different subjects were covered: Business Studies, Citizenship, D&T, English, Geography, History, ICT, Maths, Modern Foreign Languages (incl. French, German and Spanish), PSHE, RE and Science.
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Findings by subject

ENGLISH

General

CONCERNS

English teachers raised concerns over assessment, coursework, early entries, tiering, subject specific changes and the reasoning and logic behind the reforms.

There are mixed views over the removal of external assessment at KS3. Some English teachers feel that it makes measurement of progress in this key stage difficult, particularly where there is ambiguity over the use of levels or grades. However, some English teachers are looking forward to designing their own assessment model and there is some support for the value-added approach, “so long as it is used intelligently”.

There is little consensus over the loss of coursework and controlled assessments. Some teachers note that they had never been a reliable method for accurate assessment (perhaps more so in English than in other subjects) and were a burden for teachers. However, losing the assessed speaking grade could be a considerable disadvantage for those that could articulate themselves more effectively verbally rather than in writing.

Loss of early entries and the move to terminal exams also generate a range of responses. A modular structure was preferred by students and terminal exams would be detrimental to them, according to some teachers. As one teacher put it, there is an unhealthy “obsession with what's essentially one long memory test”. Another however felt relieved now that the pressures of early entry would be going – teachers have often felt a degree of pressure and anxiety about which students to enter and when – and at what tier.

English teachers are mostly united in their concerns over the removal of tiering. In particular they are worried that lower ability students would not find a universal exam accessible because they need all the support they can get. Additionally, it might not provide the challenge that more able students require in order to demonstrate their true ability.

The enhanced position of Literature (Language can be double weighted if Literature is also taken) is also welcome, both within English departments and in support of whole-school strategies. However, one participating teacher is concerned that the return to ‘classic’ text would put many students off, as they may find them inaccessible and irrelevant.

There is also some concern that increasing the SPAG element in English Language would disadvantage dyslexic students.

As elsewhere, English teachers find it infuriating that major decisions are being made by politicians whom, teachers say, are removed from reality.

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO DATE

There have been varying rates of progress from English departments in responding to the changes. Some have moved quite quickly with considerable discussion already completed and personalised routes of progression through the subject already designed for students: eg whether to follow IGCSE, Language or Literature. In some schools, whilst
there has been a detailed response within the English department, the overall school response has apparently been slower in its approach, for example having “a working party due to be formed to look at the impact”.

Other schools are following the information as it comes out and considering different KS4 examination options including IGCSE. However, the uncertainty surrounding the contribution of these alternative level 2 qualifications will make to league tables leaves their usefulness uncertain at present. One teacher takes a pragmatic approach, commenting:

“We just have to go with the flow and adapt to the new syllabus as and when it arrives. We are becoming quite accustomed to revamping schemes of work, adapting approaches to teaching and obtaining new resources. It would be good if they stuck with one system for more than a couple of years.”

There are also more pressing demands on schools to adapt their practices, such as Ofsted pressures, literacy strategies, changes to assessment structures and wider timetabling changes, meaning that English departments do not yet have time to focus much on a response.

**DOUBLE WEIGHTING OF ENGLISH AND MATHS**

English teachers generally feel that it is a mistake to add extra weight to English and maths:

“I feel that each subject has its own importance and significance. Pupils don't tend to be good at all subjects, do they? Why should they be penalised because English or Maths isn't their strong point?”

“More marking, more pressure from parents; more pressure to do extra classes after school and in holidays”.

“Maths and English are now being seen as the be-all and end-all subjects… with an unnecessary focus on these two subjects at the expense of many others.”

“[Students] need to be prepared as learners- not just to be knowledgeable.”

There is some positive feeling that that English Literature and English Language now being given the same weighting in the P8 accountability measure and there is a glimmer of hope that there will be more funding available for the subject in future.

**Scheme of Work**

**LANGUAGES AT KS2**

English teachers raise a range of issues about compulsory foreign languages in primary schools and the impact at KS3.

A small number are adamant about the importance of literacy at KS2 above and beyond learning other languages, feeling that it may, for example, result in a stronger focus on grammar at the expense of other skills, or that increased KS2 MFL content may result in a reduction of English literacy time.

It will also be more important for greater communication between primary and secondary schools to aid the transition for students: this can be highly problematic given the large number of feeder primaries for some secondary schools.

The issue of recruitment and training is also likely to be an issue at KS2.
English teachers see little potential for any major impact in their own subject area at KS3, though there is a broader consideration that German or perhaps another language may be needed, in addition to the current offerings of French and Spanish, depending on what is on offer at KS2.

**CONTACT TIME FOR YOUR SUBJECT**

Some English teachers fear that reforms will probably mean there may be longer hours and more contact time on each teacher’s timetable, owing to the need to provide additional support.

Most teachers though do not really see any direct impact on their teaching time.

**IMPACT OF REMOVING CONTROLLED ASSESSMENT**

Two distinct impacts arose in responses from English teachers. The first was that there would be a greater emphasis on the exam which might well include more exam practice, in depth revision, past papers etc. The second element would be the freedom to focus on the syllabus without distractions and with more time, although possibly also more content.

**TEACHING FOCUS**

English teachers are split over starting GCSE in Y9: some already use a three year KS4 structure with their students. Some adamantly state that they were sticking with a two year programme. Others question if it will constantly encroach across KS3 to the point that GCSE really begins in Y7, eventually.

In part, this range of approaches is created by several factors, including:

- Academies do not need to follow the National Curriculum
- While the NC for English is detailed, it is less so in other subjects, leading them to adopt three year KS4, putting pressure on English depts. to do so
- Not all GCSE students do the same Language/Literature options in all schools, so Y9 GCSE course preparation requirements are different for individual students.

**Resources**

**LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT RESOURCES WITH THE NEW CURRICULUM**

Exemplar work and examiner feedback would be important for English teachers: more so that specimen papers and mark schemes, as requested by teachers of other subjects. However, as one teacher noted it is difficult to have confidence that criteria and formats will be consistent with any specimen papers and that grade boundaries won’t change without notice.

Funding is an issue for some teachers and there is concern that the applicability and usefulness of new exam preparation resources will be low, at least initially.

There is likely to be increased demand for resources to support cross-curricular literacy, including extended writing, some teachers say.
STUDENT SUPPORT

New technology is seen by many teachers as being important in supporting students. Some like the general idea of interactive apps, including for KS3. Others feel that the most important form of support is the student-teacher partnership, using TAs and teacher interventions to provide essential support.

Another important aspect of support for students was exam help, including:

- Exemplar graded answers
- Resources to help lower ability students decode exam questions
- Help to learn how to tackle timed extended writing (frames/model answers).

Assessment

MONITORING PROGRESS: KS3

Most English teachers envisage KS3 assessment to be based on a levelling system of some kind. Some will continue to use the existing levels, though one asks: “there has to be a generic benchmark surely?”

Other schools (see below) will devise their own, or adapt their existing level-based schemes. For example, one teacher states that her department devised its own levelling system a couple of years ago, matching the ‘I Can’ primary system with the criteria from GCSE. She reports that it is working well and it is “a bit more student friendly”.

MONITORING PROGRESS: KS4

Most English teachers say that they will continue in the same way as now:

“Rigorous teacher assessments, mock exams and smile and carry on!”

One teacher described formative assessment as important together with controlled assessment style tasks from Y7- Y11 to track students and intervene with students where necessary. This seems likely to be more important in the new progress-based view of assessment, with schools adopting strategies such as ‘traffic light’ monitoring system that is informed by teacher assessment and mock exams.

Some English departments also report that mock exams would be used more frequently - right from Y7 – so students become more familiar with exams by the time they reach Y11 and so that schools have a clear idea of their progress.

VALUE ADDED MEASURES

Value added was received with mixed feelings by English teachers. Whilst it was seen to be a much fairer measure it was also perceived to be a ‘minefield’: “it’s hard to judge progress from an internally assessed system to an externally assessed one. Similarly we have a very mobile student body- there are always students arriving on our door- where will this fit in?” Teacher assessment is perceived as being very difficult in English, since moderation or standardisation are so difficult: teachers will find it difficult to know whether their students are making sufficient progress against the new measures.

Progress in English will at least have the advantage that the baseline scores will be based on subject-relevant SATs, unlike other subject areas, but there is concern that English is a difficult subject to assess fairly, by means of an exam, as the skills that can be assessed by this method are rather limited.
NEW ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Most English teachers expect to be using their own in-house system in the new assessment regime, partly perhaps because of the difficulties in assessing English, but also because teachers want to reflect student achievements:

“We’ll develop our own as nobody knows the students better than the teacher sitting in front of them!”

KS4 Exam preparation

INITIAL REQUIREMENTS

English teachers are particularly concerned about assessing written work – it was a difficult thing to standardise in the current system and they expect, at first anyway, that it will be difficult in the new one. However, they don't anticipate a great deal of change to the content or style, based on previous experience of changes to GCSEs and, where necessary, they will devise their own exam preparation materials to supplement those produced by awarding bodies.

“The fundamental underlying skills and techniques, use of language, set texts, approach to poetry etc essentially remain the same; it’s about developing those skills and then applying them to questions in whatever format the new exam takes but the requirements basically stay the same.”

LINEAR EXAMS

English teachers are generally in favour of the change to a linear assessment structure – it allows them greater flexibility in delivery and their scheduling doesn't have to follow the test dates. Some also consider that the new system is fairer and will allow students to develop a more holistic view of the subject, as well as to enable students to integrate Y9 learning more effectively.

They do anticipate some negative impacts, though – including that students only get one chance for success and that it may be that schools will focus on “dull exam prep” and teaching to past papers. It may also be more difficult to keep less well motivated students engaged over the two year period.

While there isn't likely to be much increased demand for new resources arising from the move to linear alone, teachers may look for ways to break the course into smaller units or to source materials which are more integrated across units than those which they currently use.

Continuing Professional Development

CURRENT TRAINING

For English teachers, whilst some have seen a decline in the amount of training, most note an improvement in the quality of in-house training, with it being better suited to their needs:

“We don’t sit around in the hall listening to someone droning on all day anymore, but select our own needs and form research groups, etc. It’s been infinitely more valuable”. 
FUTURE TRAINING

English teachers are not entirely clear of what new training would entail specifically, since they haven’t seen the new GCSEs or details of assessment requirements, but there is some feeling that more provision from exam boards would be needed, partly to address the demands of introducing new specifications and partly to assist in (internal) moderation.

CPD PROVIDERS (NEW REFORMS)

English teachers recognised the importance of both external training opportunities and in house options. External providers could deliver the initial training and colleagues could then filter the relevant information and share it with colleagues back at school.

CPD BUDGETS

Generally, English teachers are not aware of any additional training budget and some say that most of their training is done in-house. Another common model is that there is no fixed training budget within either the school or the department; teachers ask for approval for courses they consider to be useful.

ONLINE

Most English teachers appear open to the idea of online training. For example they see the benefit of “good quality input” which was not always achieved in existing twilight training at their school. Another liked the flexibility it offered, allowing teachers “to do it when they have time”.

Synchronous training seems to be a more popular approach than asynchronous: “I did a month’s online training for the IB diploma, and it was an utter waste of time (as well as being soul destroying).”
Teachers’ response to curriculum reforms: Secondary maths

MATHS

General

CONCERNS

In maths there are perhaps fewer issues relating to the reforms as controlled assessment has not been a part of specifications for a while and tiering will remain. However, maths teachers have raised concerns over assessment, early entries and subject content. Some are also concerned that changes were being rushed through without careful checking and review.

Assessment, particularly through KS3, is seen as an issue. For example, the new grading system may be confusing as old grades at GCSE and old levels at KS3 might now need to become new numbers at both KS3 and KS4. Generally all concerns over assessment and exam structure stem from concern for students. At KS3 this relates to the recognition that many students still struggle with maths and enter at NC Level 3 or below:

“We need an appropriate provision for them that recognises that 3 levels of progress to a D is an extremely challenging target”.

This compared to those entering at Level 5 which is seen as easier progress to make to get a B at GCSE. Interventions can be seen as a distraction from quality teaching: “give us the time to get it right first time”.

Regarding early entry, there has been a mixed response from maths departments: some teachers feel particularly strongly that this will have a negative impact. It could benefit some students, allowing them to gain confidence, have a go at the exam with no pressure and experience a more varied curriculum. This feeds into concerns over increased pressure to produce results and accommodate changes without proper reflection. One maths teacher also commented that “It all seems very impersonal” and another teacher supported this saying it “was branding every school the same”.

For borderline students, early entries helped to drive them forward and there was a feeling that it will just mean “more exam practice, Easter schools and stress”.

Some teachers though say that removal of early entry will not be problematic as they had not used it; “pupils in maths have not been mature enough to take exams seriously in Ys0”. It may also result in a more level playing field, although for C/D borderline students this may not be beneficial.

Maths curriculum changes are seen to be returning to a more traditional syllabus, with little reasoning behind the changes: “No idea why Venn diagrams have suddenly become so important again for example”. Some teachers say that content is being moved about without taking account of all students and the perceived importance of maths is creating an unnecessary atmosphere of resentment and pressure.

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO DATE

Maths departments are engaging with the information available but not making any significant changes yet. Departments are typically analysing the new measures and keeping up with developments but awaiting further clarification. One teacher felt that exam specifications were far more influential than the syllabus and commented on the lack of detail available:

“I have been on consultation groups with exam boards, but because they haven’t produced anything yet, it is impossible to even start thinking about it.”

With many changes to deal with and budget cuts, teachers feel that there is enough to focus on at the moment without making further adjustments to their schemes of work and delivery of the subject. One teacher reported that their department was still focusing on the last set of changes and their response at KS3. It seems likely that gained time during the summer term would be the likely time to focus on these reforms.
DOUBLE WEIGHTING OF ENGLISH AND MATHS

Maths teachers show a mixed response to the double weighting issue.

As in other subjects, some maths teachers worry that non-core subjects would continue to be more and more side-lined and there is some feeling that schools may choose to enter students for English Literature without them actually sitting the exam to gain the double weighting for English language.

Like English teachers, maths teachers are concerned about the additional pressure and the impact on other subjects:

"We have been told that we already get more than our share of curriculum time so we just have to get on with it. More pressure, more children, more results."

Maths is seen to merit double weighting by some teachers, in order to match the opportunities in English and science that already have two GCSEs.

CONTACT TIME FOR YOUR SUBJECT

There were mixed responses from maths teachers. Some teachers reported an increase in teaching hours, either recently or next year, although this inevitably impacts on other subjects. In other schools there will be additional individual help, enrichment opportunities and teacher availability. However, in some, funding and timetabling restrictions mean that there will be no additional staffing or timetabled hours for students.

IMPACT OF REMOVING CONTROLLED ASSESSMENT

Maths has not had controlled assessment for a considerable time so there will be no impact for them.

TEACHING FOCUS

Maths participants have very different responses to their KS3 and KS4 programmes. Some start GCSE from Y7 as the foundation tier starts at Grade E which is equivalent to a level 5: “Boost everyone up to the level they should be when they enter secondary school”.

Most but begin GCSE in Y9, though often only in the summer term to "smooth the transition and bridge the gap". Generally the easier topics are chosen to begin with, such as the Handling Data content which is accessible and easy to revisit at the end if necessary.

However, some maths departments felt less pressured to achieve the grades at GCSE and prefer a two-year KS3 programme:

“This gives us the opportunity to teach well without being driven by practice papers and revision, and to develop thinking skills in order to tackle the functional questions in GCSE with ease.

If we get KS3 right - and raise pupils and teachers expectations for the end of Y9 - then pupils go into KS4 at the right level, with a can-do approach, ready to take on GCSEs”

There was one other option explained by one participant who does not seem to concentrate on 'KS3' or 'KS4' but instead uses Maths Mastery, applied in Ark Academies.

Resources
LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT RESOURCES WITH THE NEW CURRICULUM

Maths teachers generally feel that any limitations to their current curriculum resources would be dealt with by adapting current resources, or looking online. Budget is identified as a significant issue, with online resources being relied upon to adapt to new changes.

Teachers would like to see student-friendly online resources with more exam practice and independent study for students. Some see the value of iPads as the future of resources and whilst more expensive initially, provide more versatility in the long term.

Assessment

MONITORING PROGRESS: KS3

As in other subjects many maths departments envisage carrying on with levels, using SATs papers in this case, but some have moved to using GCSE grades already, with some teachers commenting that KS3 scores serve no purpose, though others saying that they provide a reliable indication of GCSE grades.

It seems likely that maths would benefit from a continuous assessment scheme running through KS3 and KS4 – perhaps more so than other subjects. Maths teachers are similarly concerned about the issue of moderation and gaining a reliable picture of student progress.

MONITORING PROGRESS: KS4

Maths departments are more likely than others to use regular, frequent formative assessment and to analyse the resultant data at a more discrete level. This is perhaps in the nature of the subject but also because maths assessments are relatively easy to mark and analyse. Typically half term formal assessments are used, but also standardised homework tasks.

VALUE ADDED MEASURES

Value added is seen as great in principle though there are some concerns about it being used in performance management: “Ridiculous!” as one teacher put it.

NEW ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Maths teachers have been very well informed by the results analysis services provided by their awarding bodies and would welcome this kind of approach in any new assessment system used at KS3, too. Some lament the fact that Results Plus Progress has been removed by Edexcel at GCSE and hope that they will have access to something similar for the new GCSEs.

Most departments seem to rely quite heavily on past papers as part of their current formative assessment programme and are very concerned about the lack of availability of these for the new specifications. Maths teachers are more concerned about this than other subjects because the change is expected to be more significant.
KS4 Exam preparation

INITIAL REQUIREMENTS

Maths teachers do not think they will change much from their current approach to exam preparation although as new resources and material comes out from the exam boards, they will re-evaluate this. The feeling that exams change regularly anyway is clear and exam boards are seen to be particularly helpful in producing the necessary exemplar material for schools.

LINEAR EXAMS

Overall, maths teachers feel that more time will need to be dedicated to exam practice and that students will need to be monitored more carefully. Internal assessments will be necessary to make sure students are on track as there won’t be exam results to rely on. One teacher suggested “regular question level analysis to identify topics for reteaching – personalised to target groups”. Students may be expected to do more work outside the classroom to become more independent and less reliant on teachers. Revision is also seen as needing more time as students will have more to remember.

Some teachers, however, do not see any real changes being needed. One commented:

“It really only changes in what students need to remember…
Combining what you teach with relevant links does not really change how your SOW should run.”

Continuing Professional Development

CURRENT TRAINING

Maths teachers generally report poor CPD experiences. Most say there has been an increase in internal opportunities, although the majority do not find they are relevant or of good quality. One teacher comments that it is mainly towards ‘essay based subjects’, another that there is a lot regarding ‘outstanding lessons’ and a third that they “haven’t had quality CPD that has really made me think for several years now.” Overall, it does not seem to be a positive picture although one teacher does comment that training offered by exam boards has increased.

FUTURE TRAINING

Maths teachers generally say that they need to see the actual specification changes before doing any training or making any adjustments to syllabuses. Many departments will simply address the changes themselves “as usual”.

Input from Ofsted is also seen as important to ensure that any changes to resources and teaching methods would still be in line with their criteria.

CPD PROVIDERS (NEW REFORMS)

Training from exam boards or Ofsted seemed to be the preferred option for maths teachers as it offered a level of confidence in the requirements and criteria. External providers are often preferred as they are “a new face and something different is always more engaging”. As several teachers point out, given a lack of funding, free exam board training is often what is relied upon.
CPD BUDGETS

No participating maths teachers report any increase in budget for CPD: “Not really a huge amount of money around, rely on free exam board training and not from outside agents necessarily.”

ONLINE

Some maths teachers want more online training to allow the whole department to access it at the same time and learn together. Most maths teachers were very supportive of the idea:

“... the best way to train a lot of staff like a faculty at one time, without the unnecessary cost of going elsewhere, travel costs etc.”

However, it would be important that teachers felt it was worthwhile otherwise they wouldn’t take part; it seems that this is more important for online training than face to face.
SCIENCE

General

CONCERNS

Science teachers concerns mainly focus on coursework. There is a consensus that removing coursework is a positive step. Nevertheless, some teachers feel that a practical component should remain within the exam structure, perhaps with set practicals to carry out in lessons which are then tested in the written paper. Good reasons for changing the current system identified by teachers include:

- To get a grade A students have to produce A-level grade work
- Poor moderation and consistency in marking and practices across schools
- Unpredictable results.

One concern over early entry is that brighter students will not be able to progress at their own pace and that students would not get that “much needed kick” to do better. Assessing progress across KS3 is seen to be problematic now that there was no unified system across schools for this.

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO DATE

Science departments are generally only in the discussion stages as they await more precise information on the specification requirements. Some schools are considering whether the IGCSE remains a good science option, though uncertainty prevails.

DOUBLE WEIGHTING OF ENGLISH AND MATHS

Science teachers generally feel that their subject has been drifting and losing importance for a while now. Whilst they also can offer double and triple science options they are not always given the teaching time to do this successfully. One teacher comments that it is definitely more pressure and larger cohorts and classes make it more difficult to deliver. Another teacher noted that science would not feel the effects as strongly as humanities subjects but also warned:

“There is a logic to emphasising these crucial core subjects but it may create an imbalance in the school curriculum.”

Scheme of Work

CONTACT TIME FOR YOUR SUBJECT

There is little change anticipated for science departments, although one teacher commented that his school is planning to reduce the number of GCSEs offered across the school in order to address the changes to accountability. A third teacher felt that staffing numbers might reduce although they currently offer a variety of courses and are increasing Engineering and programming options.
IMPACT OF REMOVING CONTROLLED ASSESSMENT

This should provide additional time to concentrate on the core topics, though there is some concern over the reduced focus on practical skills. There is some anxiety that reduced priority for practical skills will result in reduced budgets, too.

TEACHING FOCUS

There are mixed views over starting the GCSE syllabus in Y9. Some schools have been teaching GCSE from Year 9 for several years now and say that it works well, while others are moving towards this to reduce the pressure in Y10 and to enrich the syllabus. However, some teachers feel that it is too long between the learning of content and the examining and so have left teaching to start in Y10 or will move to this system as a result of the move to linear.

Resources

LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT RESOURCES WITH THE NEW CURRICULUM

Three main elements were identified by science teachers as likely to be missing from their current resources when the specifications change:

- A bank of exam questions (past or model) with answers and feedback for students
- Practical work with links to specification to show relevance
- Extended writing opportunities to help with literacy skills.

STUDENT SUPPORT

With regard to supporting students, teachers generally extended on their responses to the limitations of current resources:

- Exam questions: pupil friendly mark schemes, perhaps interactive with dynamic responses to engage students
- Writing: Pre-prepared extended writing frames with pupil friendly mark schemes.

Assessment

MONITORING PROGRESS: KS3

Science teachers were fairly united in that they would continue to use levels, finding them the only clear way to assess students as they are understood by all. Obviously the current levels will not be an exact match to the new specifications, but this does not seem to trouble teachers, who may not necessarily change what they teach at KS3 anyway.

MONITORING PROGRESS: KS4

Science teachers consistently reported that there would be no change in assessment methods at KS4. This involves rigorous teacher assessment, both formative and summative.
VALUE ADDED MEASURES

Some science teachers feel that value added levels will be useful and will level the playing field, particularly the use of subject level data. However, some teachers are concerned that primary school teacher assessments are unreliable and that this would be problematic for any value added measures.

NEW ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

The preference for this subject area is for an in-house system based on levels. Nevertheless, there was a willingness to explore all available options especially as levels may not really work to support the new GCSEs. Departments will need to monitor progress in a meaningful way, allowing them to target potential (unfamiliar) GCSE grades.

KS4 Exam preparation

INITIAL REQUIREMENTS

"We have to do this many times over the years… it is not new to teachers!"

Science teachers feel that they will be able to pull together what will be needed to prepare for exams, once they have the specification as they have had to cope with many changes over the years. One felt that they could pull together existing questions and omit the bits that were no longer relevant. In order to prepare one teacher suggested:

"A good SOW from the spec is key. All teachers must look at the whole picture"

LINEAR EXAMS

Two aspects are a cause for concern in a linear approach. Firstly, science teachers are broadly supportive of having more time "to put things together and in context". They also feel that it allows for a "more cohesive approach" with "time to link all parts of the specification".

"That modules can be seen to link together more fluidly as there won't be an emphasis on teaching in modular order and thus it should help students to see the bigger picture"

It also allows more time to recap and revise before the final exam.

Exam preparation is seen as particularly important as there are "no second chances so higher stakes" exam and this is the second aspect highlighted. One teacher felt particularly strongly that one sitting was better:

"The current mind-set of I can re-sit again and again is not conducive to ascertaining a realistic assessment of ability. Nor does it do the pupil any long term favours."

Continuing Professional Development

CURRENT TRAINING

Of the two science teachers that responded, one had seen a massive increase particularly with regard to teaching and learning and offered in house. The other had not seen considerable change and opportunities are shared within the department with those that attend feeding back to their colleagues on return.
FUTURE TRAINING

There is a general feeling that it is too early to say what training needs will be in response to the latest reforms. However, Science teachers feel that support from their department and colleagues is likely to be an effective solution, allowing experiences to be shared rather than paying for expensive external courses. Obviously input from exam boards would also be useful.

CPD PROVIDERS (NEW REFORMS)

In-house options are preferred by science teachers; either an SLE or a trusted colleague, or anyone who has attended a course and can cascade their learning to colleagues. It is seen as an effective use of time and a way of making training more relevant as colleagues can filter it for practicality.

CPD BUDGETS

Participants note that there isn’t likely to be an increase in budget but that the focus was now on in-house training wherever possible.

ONLINE

Some teachers feel that it is too easy to disengage from the training if it is offered online. However, others are more positive, noting that having used online options already they can be “as effective as actually attending”. However there is an increased fear that teachers might be expected to do this training in their own time but should be given time to do it without distractions.
GEOGRAPHY

General

CONCERNS

Geography teachers’ concerns cover fieldwork, early entries, tiering, accountability and student uptake, subject content and the reasoning and consultation of reforms.

There is general consensus among geography teachers over controlled assessment. Whilst they feel that current systems are not a realistic assessment of students’ ability and that the proposals were better and fairer, they do see fieldwork as an essential element to geography. Without the coursework element, it is therefore considered that in the future it would be more difficult to obtain permission and funding for any offsite work.

As in other subjects, geography teachers won’t miss the availability of early entries but untiered exams might cause more difficulties - at present they feel that more information would be needed.

The EBacc was seen by teachers as a selling point for humanities and geography in particular, however the new measures somewhat mitigate this recent gain since geography is somewhat diluted in performance eight measures. There was also concern that students may suit other routes better, for example vocational subjects, which can only have a limited contribution to performance eight measures.

“Parents need educating about changes too. There have been too many mixed messages about education over recent years that very few ‘outsiders’ have a clue what is going on!”

One teacher was particularly concerned that KS3 was too content heavy and raised concern over how seriously the subject is taken at KS1 and KS2 to support this. There is also some feeling that the changes are being rushed through with too little consultation and without due consideration, and that as a result they may backfire as teachers struggle to cope. Moreover, the benefit to pupils and schools is not clear.

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO DATE

Geography departments are engaging with the changes. One teacher, from an independent school, said they were keen to be consistent with the rest of the country but that there would be considerable change in content and an associated cost for resourcing this which would not be popular. Another said that the curriculum and any changes were dependent on staffing and budgets. However, with KS3 changes still underway and little detailed information currently available, another teacher commented that very little had been done so far on KS4 and KS5.

DOUBLE WEIGHTING OF ENGLISH AND MATHS

There was a mixed response to the double weighting of English and maths. Some teachers think that Language is important enough that it should be double weighted regardless of whether Literature is also taken.

“We are all responsible for teaching English skills but it’s hard when lessons lose focus on the subject in hand in order to concentrate on writing decent answers.”

Whilst agreeing to the double weighting in principle, one teacher felt that in practice it will only lead to optional subjects being side-lined and pupils being pulled out of lessons for additional English and maths; all this, whilst still being under pressure to obtain target grades.

“We need good numeracy and literacy skills in pupils, but not at the detriment of other subjects.”
Scheme of Work

CONTACT TIME FOR YOUR SUBJECT

Although geography teachers did not generally feel there would be much change, an increased demand at KS4 (for example, arising out of EBacc options) might result in an increase in non-specialist teaching of the subject; something that is not ideal for students or teachers.

IMPACT OF REMOVING CONTROLLED ASSESSMENT

Removal of controlled assessment should allow more time for covering the content and honing skills, although it was also felt that curriculum alterations would be a learning curve for all, which would reduce this effect in the short term. In addition the new requirement for two contrasting pieces of fieldwork would potentially be costly in terms of time and money – senior leadership teams may not be prepared to allow this as corresponding skills will only carry 5% of the GCSE marks.

TEACHING FOCUS

Geography teachers reported that they were already following, or were likely to move to, a 3 year GCSE programme. Some department find the additional time invaluable for covering all the required content, or report that other departments in the same school do so.

There are pressures from the growth in other subjects too, as noted by one teacher: “it means ‘ditching’ compulsory humanities at the end of Year 8 we offer an enrichment programme in history/geography in Year 9 for those who do not opt for either subject. Sadly this is being axed next year to make way for ‘Computing’”

Resources

LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT RESOURCES WITH THE NEW CURRICULUM

The main issue with the new changes would be for any new resources to accurately reflect new expectations. One teacher comments that publishers often rush out new textbooks quickly, resulting in with too many errors. Particularly in a climate of tight budgets, quality would be essential. She also recognised that expensive printed resources might not be the way forward but that they are often cheaper than electronic resources.

Teachers clearly also have, as yet, some difficulty in looking at KS3 resources when KS4 changes are still so vague and uncertain. There seems to be an expectation that the KS3 curriculum may well be led by the changes at GCSE.

STUDENT SUPPORT

Teachers are generally in support of technology solutions to support students: more ‘on the go’ apps would help if they were exam board specific. Other suggestions were for model answers, clearly annotated and marked, pupil friendly mark schemes, colourful revision materials and extended writing support.
Assessment

MONITORING PROGRESS: KS3
Levels are seen as being important aspects of assessment by most schools, both independent and state, according to geography teachers. Whilst one teacher said they would be devising their own levels, another felt that the existing ones would be kept in her school. However, she was not supportive of this saying they are “far too wordy and vague to apply” and are “no longer fit for purpose in the way we report on data currently”.

One teacher suggested:

“maybe we need a national assessment progression from KS1-5 so that all of the progress and assessments actually make sense?!”

MONITORING PROGRESS: KS4
At KS4, teachers say they will be continuing with existing methods of internal assessment. For one teacher that means “half termly grades for attainment plus quantitative analysis of marks throughout the term. Use of baseline data to track along the way”. Commonly, progress is monitored through “lots of regular past paper questions in class and homeworks, and every topic a test and then a mock at the end of exam teaching. As much of our assessment as possible is based on exam board criteria and mark schemes”.

It seems that, like teachers in other foundation subjects (at least), there is an expectation that geography departments will continue to monitor progress at KS3 and 4 in much the same way as they do now, unless another national system can be found to allow for effective nationalised standardisation.

VALUE ADDED MEASURES
While geography teachers are in favour of increasing the representation of value added in accountability measures, they are sceptical about the validity of the KS2 baseline measure, given that it will be based on English and maths. Furthermore, it will be difficult to add value to students who had a disproportionately high score in a KS2 SAT exam, or where primary schools have artificially boosted performance through specific coaching.

Teachers also wonder how anyone can know what expected levels of performance in geography should be, based on a new baseline measure (norm-referenced KS2 scores) using new style SATs, with a new KS3 geography and (eventually) a new GCSE.

Geography has also suffered something of a decline in primary schools in recent years as a result of the greater focus on English and maths, so students are inadequately prepared in Y7. This is likely to be exaggerated under the new primary accountability measures meaning that it becomes even harder to reach the expected levels of improvement through KS3.

NEW ASSESSMENT SYSTEM
Geography teachers seem quite resigned to having to design their own assessment schemes at KS3 as they don’t anticipate that there will be any commercial schemes available in time. Some say they will do this in local clusters of schools. However, most would want to buy into a reliable published scheme because they are uncertain that they will be able to devise appropriate tasks to monitor progress at the required rate.
At KS4 there is even greater demand for external assistance, not least from the awarding bodies, which they trust to be more accurate, valid and reliable in assessing their own specifications. This may be more important than previously because of the potential disassociation of publishers and awarding bodies in the production of textbooks.

### KS4 Exam preparation

**INITIAL REQUIREMENTS**

As in other subjects, teachers of geography have a fairly low opinion of specimen papers, which rarely seem to match the actual papers set and where grade boundaries are unclear – a situation which is likely to be worsened when new grade descriptors are introduced on top of new content.

Geography teachers would previously have borrowed questions from past papers in previous specifications to use as practise papers, but further difficulties are likely to be created by the removal of tiers, meaning that past paper questions from previous exams will not be usable, even if the content is the same. Not only that, but lower performing students will have their confidence knocked if they sit inaccurate specimen papers designed to challenge the most able.

Geographers also face the additional challenge of examining fieldwork, which was previously assessed via controlled assessments or coursework, so they do not know quite what to expect of exam questions on this aspect.

**LINEAR EXAMS**

Geography teachers are quite happy about the move to linear saying, for example that: “tests students’ ability to learn along the way and build their knowledge gradually” and “There will be more time available for consolidation of skills and practise”. A further benefit is that “it will give a more holistic view of the subject- and allow the students to become more skilful at transferring skills from one topic to the next, and even using knowledge and understanding from year 9.”.

### Continuing Professional Development

**CURRENT TRAINING**

Geography teachers currently have a range of experiences of CPD. As seen in other subjects, there is a reported overall decrease in CPD but ‘whole school’ training has increased. They saw the out-of-school CPD as valuable as it was an opportunity for colleagues to share expertise and experiences. Teachers don’t always feel that in house training is always relevant to everyone as it tends to focus on whole school initiatives and the ability to choose between different opportunities would be better. It seems likely that this decline in subject-based CPD has arisen from the plethora of whole-school initiatives which have arisen, largely owing to the activities of Ofsted and the demands for school-level accountability.

**FUTURE TRAINING**

Teachers are slightly apprehensive that a certain amount of ‘relearning’ will need to take place of curriculum content, but that this would not be problematic and in fact for some would be “an interesting learning curve”, as one teacher put it. It is probably a little early to anticipate actual CPD needs as teachers say they will have to wait until specifications...
are released, however, they seem to anticipate that lots of guidance will be needed to ensure that students are appropriately prepared and “we don’t let our pupils down by misinterpreting specs based on our out dated knowledge”.

CPD PROVIDERS (NEW REFORMS)

Input from exam boards was seen as essential; teachers want initial training offered by them. Delivery by colleagues or clusters will also be acceptable so long as the exam board focus/information was there. There was also a suggestion that becoming an examiner for the relevant exam boards would help provide invaluable experience and understanding although this is not always a popular option with staff.

CPD BUDGETS

Most teachers report they would not be receiving any more than normal funding or that budgets are diminishing in general. There is an assumption that in-house or cluster training would probably increase as a result.

ONLINE

Whilst geography teachers are receptive to the idea of online training they also recognise its potential limitations and problems. Benefits identified included being able to access it at home and being able to do it at a more convenient time. Nevertheless, this requires a commitment on the part of the teacher and they may not be able to complete this training in their own time, nor should there be an expectation on behalf of the school for teachers to do so.

“Too many teachers have commitments out of school hours and often twilights start too early”

“It is impossible to insist that someone does online [training] after school. I am always willing, but others in my department are not and that then means they constantly miss out (and unfortunately they are the ones who would benefit the most!”

One teacher suggested that extra pay for completing training in their own time would be great, although perhaps not likely

A mix of approaches to training is important to make it accessible to all, teachers say.
HISTORY

General

CONCERNS

History teachers did not raise a large number of concerns generally. One teacher noted that the removal of coursework and controlled assessments was probably good given that there was considerable inconsistency between schools and often ethical difficulties between school and student interests. They also noted that the content of the history curriculum has increased with no foreseeable increase in contact time and that there was insufficient time to prepare and adjust to the changes.

Early entries were raised by two teachers with one commenting that it levels the playing fields and makes it easier to judge schools whilst the other reflects that for the less able students it is a pity.

Another teacher felt that it all “seems to be retrograde – we are not going forward”!

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO DATE

No changes have been implemented in schools so far, according to history teachers there is general attitude of ‘wait and see’ as there are a great many other matters to deal with currently arising, for example from Ofsted and various national initiatives. The reforms are expected to be a focus for later in the year, when schools are not so busy dealing with the other changes. One teacher commented that they would adopt changes “with a pinch of salt”. They hoped that as an academy they would have the flexibility to use the national curriculum content they liked and ‘bin’ the rest. There is also a feeling that the content and structure of the new GCSEs are likely to have a bigger impact on decisions about KS3.

DOUBLE WEIGHTING OF ENGLISH AND MATHS

There is a mixed reaction to double weighting from history teachers. Some feel that core subjects (referring to English and maths) should be given double weighting and ‘less heavy weight’ subjects should not be equally weighted with EBacc subjects. However, others feel that the perception of history and similar subjects would suffer as the focus would be firmly placed on the core subjects. Furthermore, pupils are often withdrawn from timetabled lessons in order to attend additional English and maths revisions sessions and these subjects always take precedence.

Scheme of Work

LANGUAGES AT KS3

History teachers have mixed views over the impact of language reform at KS2. Half feel strongly that English and grammar should be a focus over and above any additional languages, particularly in schools with significant numbers of EAL students.

KS2 languages might improve uptake of MFL at GCSE and this could then be a problem for history which is often in competition with them in the option blocks.
CONTACT TIME FOR YOUR SUBJECT

All history participants report that the reforms would not impact on their timetabling or staffing allocations.

IMPACT OF REMOVING CONTROLLED ASSESSMENT

The general feeling is a positive one in that without controlled assessment there will be more time to focus on content and exam technique: “not such a squeeze on teaching other areas of the course”. The reduced marking load should free up time for planning and preparation of resources, too.

TEACHING FOCUS

Generally, GCSE does not begin in Y9 for History departments, except for one participant who reported beginning in June of Y9. There were mixed reasons for this:

“My school has made a conscientious effort to not reduce key stage three”

“Ultimately if every other school does it then we may have no choice but to follow suit in order to keep up!”

“I feel they need proper basics in the subject before they move on to GCSE”

Resources

LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT RESOURCES WITH THE NEW CURRICULUM

Exemplar questions and answers and a clear sense of expectations are essential to history teachers. Budgets are also a significant issue: whilst new resources will be needed, many of these will have to be created by the teachers themselves rather than bought in.

STUDENT SUPPORT

History examinations are not currently tiered but teachers mention other aspects of support for students that need to be addressed:

- New technology – apps, interactive websites, online questions etc. though important that they are exam board specific to avoid misleading students
- Lower ability students – more apprenticeships and vocational options would help here

Assessment

MONITORING PROGRESS: KS3

The majority of history teachers say that they will continue to use levels although there are concerns that it would be difficult to compare on a regional basis and that changes to history at KS3 are not yet fully clear. Some teachers also envisage bringing in GCSE style assessments or mark schemes for Y9.

“Always seemed strange to me how they don’t have something that goes from KS1-5!”
MONITORING PROGRESS: KS4

All history responses indicate that departments will be maintaining existing methods and practices for monitoring progress at KS4; they will substitute internal testing for module exams and continue to monitor homework performance and so on. Few seem to use the same basis at KS3 and KS4, where there is a switch between levels and GCSE grades. Different subject departments use different methods too – one teacher reflected that “a more joined up approach is needed - there is always a slight feeling that the bigger picture is missed”.

VALUE ADDED MEASURES

In principle, history teachers are extremely positive about value added measures. It is seen as a more realistic measure that reflects students’ abilities and efforts. However, grammar school teachers are more concerned that it is difficult to prove value added to already high achieving students. As in other subjects there is concern about KS2 levels, questioning their accuracy and validity.

NEW ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

History teachers expect to be using a system tailored to or devised entirely by their school. History is a subject which may be less likely to adhere to the national curriculum, in academies at least, and so the content and approach is likely to be very wide ranging, nationally.

One teacher commented that he would definitely not buy in a product, preferring to use the school’s own methods. One teacher finds it difficult to reconcile consistency with competitiveness:

“This is not the first change we are dealing with!”

Teachers will largely rely on exam boards to support the introduction of the new course with CPD. There is a big task ahead in providing new exam preparation resources, with money and time needing to be spent: most history teachers say that they will probably create their own papers: “we have been doing so for a long time and it works!”

KS4 Exam preparation

INITIAL REQUIREMENTS

“Unless government policy changes, generic and consensual approaches are never going to happen. Current policy is very much in favour of competition so I can't envisage a system where they want all schools to adopt the same form of assessment.”

LINEAR EXAMS

Most history teachers report either using linear exams historically or little impact from changing. History teachers seem particularly positive about the potential that it would allow students to grasp the subject matter in a more holistic manner. As one teacher put it:

“The sense of journey and the big picture will be good”
There was also a feeling that more work could be covered in Y10 to allow more revision time in Y11. One teacher shared her department’s practice of dedicating one lesson a fortnight in Y11 to revising Y10 topics which she says has worked well.

Continuing Professional Development

CURRENT TRAINING

Most history teachers have not seen any significant change over the past three years in training opportunities. There is a tendency for it to be very Ofsted-centred and will continue to be as they focus on their areas for improvement.

There has been an increase in whole-school training delivered in-house and of training devised and delivered within departments, but that this had less impact than specialist training from outside experts.

Only one teacher reported an increase in CPD as they are coordinating a lot of it. The offering at her school includes lots of external, ‘inspirational’ people.

FUTURE TRAINING

Teachers of history are waiting to see more details on the changes before making any decisions about CPD, but they also generally feel that with some input from exam boards they should be able to make the necessary changes themselves: “just time and effort will be the barrier!”

CPD PROVIDERS (NEW REFORMS)

History teachers seem open to training from anyone appropriate, choosing the option that would best suit their needs. Some feel that a specific exam board focus would be important and one teacher noted that external CPD is often a starting point with relevant information filtered down to colleagues.

CPD BUDGETS

History departments rarely have dedicated CPD budgets and teachers report no particular change in funding available, other than a greater focus on in-house training. Generally teachers request to attend relevant courses and they report that these are usually approved.

ONLINE

There is a very mixed reaction to online training. Some think it could be really useful and felt willing to try anything. Others are more “dubious, but happy to be convinced”. Some have had a bad experience and are somewhat reluctant:

“The online ones I have experiences so far have been very dull and it is much easier to get distracted!”
Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)

General

Concerns

MFL teachers have raised concerns over controlled assessment, early entries, tiering, assessment, content and general uncertainty.

The majority of languages teachers seem to think that the removal of controlled assessments/coursework was a positive step. The negative aspects of coursework identified were:

- "Students who have a good memory can do better than those with linguistic ability if they get help"
- Too much time spent preparing for these assessments rather than teaching
- Easy to manipulate and stretch rules: “Very uneven playing field”
- Huge pressure on individual teachers to get results: “I think every teacher can understand how the pressure for results can push some teachers to overstep the mark.”
- Narrowing of experience to small set of skills and topics
- Poor preparation for A-level.

However, there are obviously concerns about a return to exam-based testing: one MFL teacher suggesting that past research suggests this would penalise girls; certainly coursework has widely been linked to the performance gap between genders.

One German teacher commented on early entries: “[It] is clearly more suited to some subjects than others. It can leave pupils free to concentrate on other subjects, but can place them under a lot of pressure to perform earlier in their GCSE course. The pressure on year 11 pupils seems to have really rocketed in the last 5 years.” The same teacher also felt that untiered exams would allow all pupils to be assessed equally without limiting their expectations by the tier they are placed on.

KS3 testing was seen by three teachers as giving more freedom and autonomy to teachers and acknowledging professionalism. However, there are concerns over the validity of assessment and how consistency might be reached across schools or between KS2 and KS3. This is particularly pertinent, given teachers lack of confidence in primary SAT scores and the fact that Y7 pupils will arrive with a wide variety of experience of languages, even when compulsory at KS2. Nevertheless, one German teacher was more positive: “I believe that it should allow for a much freer curriculum at Key Stage 3 and less ‘teaching to the test’”.

The move away from controlled assessments is seen as part of a solution to the concern that students can learn by rote and get good grades without gaining a firm foundation for A-level.

“Numbers for A level languages are slipping as the word gets round that the famous step up to A Level work is so difficult, even more difficult than before.”

Terminal exams are seen by several MFL teachers as ensuring fairness, with no outside interference. However, one French teacher felt that there was insufficient change to address this in the current proposals. This would likely depend on the nature of the terminal exam.

A further concern regarding exams related to the weighting of criteria. The suggestion was made that exam boards should focus less on accuracy in MFL, allowing students to write more adventurously. The implication was that the current system gave greater acknowledgement to those that play it safe and write accurately but at a basic level rather than those that are more original but make some mistakes.
One Spanish teacher was particularly concerned about the potential addition of A-level topics into GCSE. She was worried that there would be insufficient time for teachers to teach it and insufficient maturity on the part of the students to assimilate it.

French and Spanish teachers also raised several questions where they remained uncertain as to what the proposals were suggesting:

- What is the exact nature of the proposed assessments in speaking and writing?
- Nature of languages at KS4, will they be mandatory?
- If primary schools can choose MFL they teach how will this be coordinated with secondary schools?
- With Year 7s due to enter this September, what will be the structure of the exam at KS4 they need to be prepared for?
- For schools that start GCSE in Y9, will publishers begin producing materials for a 3 year rather than a 2 year course? “Everything that is published seems to work on the assumption of a 2 year GCSE starting in Year 10”.

**SCHOOL RESPONSE TO DATE**

French and Spanish respondents communicated their concern over the lack of information currently available.

“I think I know when, but don’t really know what, and have no idea about why”

“[I] was surprised that even some HoDs were so vague about what the changes were and precisely when they would take effect.”

No participants reported changes currently being made in their departments.

**DOUBLE WEIGHTING OF ENGLISH AND MATHS**

Languages teachers are apprehensive about the double weighting of English and maths in the new accountability measures. With only 20% of teaching time compared to English and maths, languages are still expected to achieve comparable levels, its teachers’ say. Some also noted that this would raise the pressure on English and maths teachers considerably, both in workload and expectations. For one teacher it was simply a poor design overall: “the exam structure seems to have been devised first (weightings, tierings, etc.) and then the secondary consideration is the subject content.”

**Scheme of Work**

**LANGUAGES AT KS3**

Language teachers feel very strongly that consistency between primary and secondary will be extremely difficult to achieve. All teachers raised difficulties with the amount of language learnt in each primary school and the choice of language. Most feel that they have started again with students at KS3 anyway, given the huge variety of knowledge that students enter with. One teacher suggested that the most helpful element from KS2 would be a firm grounding in English structure to help with other languages later.
CONTACT TIME FOR YOUR SUBJECT
MFL teachers seem unsure about how the interplay between the various developments will affect the amount of teaching time and staffing levels. On one hand the fact that two languages can contribute to performance measures is good news for the subject, but the position of languages in EBacc means that it tends to have a disproportionate impact on EBacc performance. Overall though, teachers seem relatively positive about the changes so far as they anticipate them currently.

IMPACT OF REMOVING CONTROLLED ASSESSMENT
MFL teachers are hugely positive about the removal of controlled assessment. They feel that they will have more time to teach the language rather than focusing on preparation for the assessments:

"We will be able to teach more language in languages"

"Can’t wait to teach languages to kids, rather than memorisation techniques"

"Now we will be able to teach more new things and focus on one end of course exam. It’s fairer and I will prefer it."

TEACHING FOCUS
MFL departments appear to have been a little more reluctant to move to a three year KS4; as one teacher put it: “Have people seen better results having started a GCSE in Year 9?” Some report that they previously used this strategy, but since MFL is no longer compulsory, they cannot guarantee that all students will pursue a language at GCSE, so it doesn’t make much sense to start it in Y9. EBacc has caused some schools to be more directing about language options but this does not necessarily correlate with starting GCSEs in Y9.

Resources

LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT RESOURCES WITH THE NEW CURRICULUM
Languages teachers seem relatively unconcerned about whether their current resources match the new curriculum content: they envisage that the content will be largely unchanged and since the exam is terminal, it doesn’t really matter what order they teach it. They tend to anticipate that current resources would be adapted as money is a key issue and they will not be thinking of buying anything new. However, there is a strong demand for exam preparation resources, including specimen papers, model answers etc.

STUDENT SUPPORT
French teachers say that the following items would be helpful in supporting students:

- Writing frames and worked examples for each grade
- Interactive gap-fill programmes
- Samples of work and guidelines to understand new marking structure
- Online, self-access support to test comprehension (self-marked with improvement tips).
Assessment

MONITORING PROGRESS: KS3
As in other subjects, MFL teachers expect that they will continue in the short term with the NC levels system as teachers and pupils understand them and can apply them consistently. However one of these teachers had heard mutterings of a change:

“We will invent a new system and get rid of levelling. I can’t believe we are out there coming up with a myriad of different systems to track progress”

MONITORING PROGRESS: KS4
Regular and frequent testing is the most common approach taken by MFL departments at KS4:

“Lots of mocks and internal tests to ensure they can do what they need to be able to do in the real exam. We then will log all the data and report on it regularly – internally and externally”

However, for one of the teachers this is all seen as over the top and counter-productive for students’ learning:

“How does this foster ‘a love of life-long learning’?

VALUE ADDED MEASURES
Language teachers feel that value added is problematic since there is too much variation in Ks2 data, as well as in the amount of foreign language taught at primary school and which language they are taught.

NEW ASSESSMENT SYSTEM
French teachers will look to the exam boards and linked publishers for assessment materials. They feel strongly against each school devising their own system. A standardised system with assessment resources for lower down the school is seen as the way forward for comparing progress, though not all are terribly concerned about the need to monitor progress continuously.

KS4 Exam preparation

INITIAL REQUIREMENTS
Without having a clearer understanding of the changes and how different the assessments might or might not be, it appears to be difficult for French teachers to envisage much change in the preparation for exams. Once the specimen papers and specification are published then the required resources will be produced and the relevant adjustments made. One teacher also said they would be applying to be an examiner to better understand the specification.

LINEAR EXAMS
For languages teachers, there is no real change as they have not followed a modular structure.
Continuing Professional Development

CURRENT TRAINING

French teachers report that they currently receive mostly in-house training, although some have more choice than others on what they attend. For example this may be very focused training on specific groups of children, with subject specific courses being managed within departments and generally cascaded. One MFL teacher described an experiment allowing teachers considerable freedom of choice over the training they attend in-house – this seems to be largely a result of the involvement of a local teaching school.

FUTURE TRAINING

Generally, French teachers consider that exam boards are going to be important providers of the training they will need. They do not feel they “know what to put on the shopping list” at the moment as there is still a lack of clarity over proposed changes. Previous experience showed cheap and useful courses from exam boards and teachers feel that this would be essential again now.

“We can’t have the blind leading the blind during preparations for the new exams.”

On the other hand, some teachers say that rather than looking externally, colleagues would discuss the changes together and adapt and share practice: “we’ll train each other”.

CPD BUDGETS

No increase in budgets is expected. A typical picture is that SMT have been on training days about the changes and that subject leaders receive briefings to keep updated. This seems to be the preferred options for participants’ schools although the limitation of this is also acknowledged. Schools might also cluster together to secure training from providers within budget, though this does not seem to be widespread practice.

ONLINE

French teachers identify both advantages and disadvantages to online training. On the one hand it is seen to be easy to access and can work well for twilight INSETs where the whole department can complete it together. However, the expectation can often be for teachers to complete it in their own time for free.
CITIZENSHIP, PSHE & RE

General

CONCERNS

Citizenship, PSHE and RE teachers have mixed views over the proposed changes. Issues that have arisen are around assessment, coursework, early entries, tiering, timescales and the reasoning around change.

The removal of KS3 assessment has been warmly received by some who see it as freeing up staff time and allowing them to use their own professional judgement on student progress. One teacher expressed distrust of progress predictions at GCSE based on KS2 and KS3 data where there doesn't always appear to be a correlation. Some of this stems from distrust of primary school assessment.

With regard to coursework, some participants were particularly supportive of this change: coursework has allowed some schools to play the game; others felt that it had been pressured and had promoted a negative working relationship between some students, teachers and parents. Instead, it was felt that the value of extended writing opportunities should be integrated into KS3 without being formally examined and that at KS4 it is a good idea for it all to be external.

Early entry, allowing students to take multiple re-sits, was seen as problematic by some teachers who felt it unfair that some subjects could take advantage of this and others not. One teacher mentioned that some subjects in her school had higher grades but without advertising their retake numbers. Removing early entries was therefore seen to be levelling the field. However, some teachers saw early entries as beneficial for brighter students who could progress onto A-level earlier, or take additional qualifications, and therefore saw their removal as problematic. For one RE teacher the ability for students to get 50% of their GCSE before Year 11 was seen as a real benefit that was not to be taken away.

Tiered papers for RE were requested by one teacher in response to only maths and science remaining tiered. However, they also noted that the tiered system can limit achievement depending on the choice of tier. Another teacher who was a Principal Examiner for several years saw tiered papers as being extremely useful for differentiating candidates and commented that ”something had to be done about the ‘dumbing down’ of GCSEs”. There was also a suggestion that removing tiers returns to a one-size fits all approach, penalising the bottom and the top ability students.

Overall there was concern that the changes are being rushed and that the logic behind them is not evident.

"It’s crazy that those who are not on the front line of teaching have so much power to determine what matters most in education.”

"It’s all so crazy, confusing and overwhelming.”

Responses suggest distrust between participants and the government and further pressure on teachers to implement changes they do not feel respond to pupils’ needs.

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO DATE

Generally, participants said that their schools were currently debating and discussing the issues. One school has asked departments to map out and submit all schemes of work with assessment points. The teacher suggests this may be so they can consider contact time across the curriculum and is concerned for less valued subjects:

“Time will tell but it feels a very uncertain time at the moment!”
Given all the competing priorities and tasks demanded, one RE teacher felt it was unsurprising that subject leaders were vague about changes at the moment. In her school there has not been considerable change so far, though there is now an expectation to report an end of KS3 grade in all subjects, and changes to early entry have had an impact on other subjects.

**DOUBLE WEIGHTING OF ENGLISH AND MATHS**

Generally, it was felt that this would give disproportionate importance to maths and English, cementing them as the ‘giants’ whilst other subjects would be regarded as inferior.

“Citizenship, RE, MFL already struggle to gain kudos - this does not help.”

One teacher commented that it’s another USP for maths and English teachers and helps with student motivation, interest and effort, but she questions what makes these two subjects so “deserving of this honour”. Another stated that much of the English and maths content is never used beyond school and other subjects contribute comparably to other aspects of life. One RE teacher specifically questions “shouldn’t the value of learning be about learning instead of about assessment.”

Ultimately, the responses suggest that Citizenship, PSHE and RE teachers feel that their subjects are already undervalued and that, as a result of the extra pressure on the ‘giants’, there would be ‘further squeezing’ of option subjects and reduced contact time and funding.

**Scheme of Work**

**CONTACT TIME**

Generally RE teachers did not feel that their contact time would be affected by any reforms at this stage. Some teachers have been told by SLT that any changes would have to be cost neutral. There were concerns raised by teachers that non-specialists might be used to teach more, across the school.

There are some fears that additional time required for delivering the new maths GCSE (expected to require an additional hour per week) may result in a reduction of time for PSHE or Citizenship, since the time will have to come from somewhere. However, none of these teachers had been consulted about this in their own schools as yet.

**IMPACT OF REMOVING CONTROLLED ASSESSMENT**

There has not been controlled assessment in RE, Citizenship or PSHE and therefore there will not be a direct impact for these teachers. However, PSHE and RE teachers did offer some general thoughts on its removal:

- Reduce stress on teachers across the school who have “tried to cram controlled assessments into an already full KS4 curriculum”
- Less opportunity for subjects to lose teaching time to other subjects’ controlled assessment
- Teachers can use their professional judgement to keep students aware of their progress.

**TEACHING FOCUS**

Schools will generally begin delivering the GCSE syllabus from Year 9, with January being the month most commonly used to start. This was seen as beneficial for the following reasons:
• Y11 cannot be counted as a complete school year for teaching and so Y9 helps cover lost ground
• More revision time before the linear exam at the end of Y11
• Time to complete the syllabus due to minimal contact time.

There are concerns about the three year KS4 approach, particularly in the linear assessment structure, as students forget their Y9 work by the time they come to Y11.

Resources

LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT RESOURCES WITH THE NEW CURRICULUM

Exam specifications and specimen papers are very important for teachers, both in selecting the course and in supporting students. There will be a need to review and overhaul KS3 schemes of work to better link with KS4, although timing was raised as a barrier here together with lack of clarity of KS4 and KS5 changes. This is more important in subjects which have little in the way of KS3 national curriculum content. It was suggested that exam boards consult with teachers to enable them to input into the format of any resources to help deliver the new curriculum.

There is some thought that dictionaries will be essential across the curriculum as literacy is now almost 10% of the exam grade for some subjects.

STUDENT SUPPORT

To better support students, teachers’ suggestions were:

• Tiering and setting with a TA in every classroom, allowing for small group work and more individual attention
• Sample scripts across a range of grades as worked examples
• Interactive revision resources
• Pupil friendly mark schemes
• Apps to help support student progression

A further comment raised by one RE teacher was more fundamental:

“Also students just need to be encouraged to push for their best all the time and not allow their expectations to be limited.”

Assessment

MONITORING PROGRESS: KS3

Generally, teachers report that they will be continuing to use levels, although with some necessary adjustments. They are also likely to continue to use unit tests and Y9 exams to give an end of KS3 result. For one RE teacher, the lack of creativity in assessment methods was frustrating: “why does using levels have to be the only way? Is thinking this way a reflection of the extent to which the independence of our professional judgement has been impaired?”
MONITORING PROGRESS: KS4

PSHE and RE teachers do not see current methods changing at KS4. A variety of methods involving testing are used:

- Ongoing lesson-by-lesson informal observations, in-house progress tests and report writing
- End of topic tests and mock exams
- End of unit testing, mock exams eg in June of Y10 and January of Y11, moderation and interventions

Earlier intervention was seen to be even more important to ensure they can make progress before it’s too late.

Informal assessment will be an inferior method of monitoring progress however, as internal examination results do not always correlate with the actual GCSE exam results due to different student attitudes to each exam.

VALUE ADDED MEASURES

Whilst in principle teachers support the idea, the widespread distrust that exists between secondary schools and primary schools, particularly with regard to reported KS2 levels, prevents teachers being more supportive of this measure. Furthermore, some teachers (eg RE) raise the problem of accurately counting value added for their subject that is not formally assessed at KS2. One teacher suggests “it would be more useful to have subject value added taking into account individual subjects and true moderation of KS2 levels between schools.”

NEW ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Some teachers say that they will continue to use their own in-house system or an adjusted levels-based process. This might be in consultation with other partner schools as there is no longer a subject specialist consultant in the LA.

However, other teachers question the idea that each school knows their own students best and can design their own system:

“The students change each year and with each intake; so how can one develop assessment systems based on one group that will be applicable to all future groups?”

“This leads to standards varying across the nation.”

A suggestion was made to use a generic approach across all schools to ensure a consistent standard is maintained and everyone is working to a level playing field. Another developed this, further suggesting a resource that was available and used to regularly assess across the country.

With regard to published systems, one teacher preferred the availability of a (“free”) system for KS3, like that available from KS4 and KS5 exam boards. She felt that the exam boards were the most objective in the subject systems they produce and hoped for better connections from KS3 to KS4 and KS5. In particular KS3 learning boards can:

“devise learning specifications that are broad but also feed into developing knowledge, understanding and skills that feed into KS4 and 5... [and] not be exam driven.”
KS4 Exam preparation

INITIAL REQUIREMENTS

The specification and exam board input was seen as important in the first instance to allow teachers to best prepare themselves for readying students for the new examinations. The following were all identified as useful tools or resources:

- Specimen papers
- Q&A with exam boards
- Professional judgements
- Experience of delivering exams
- New and old specification comparison
- Tailoring existing resources
- Talking to other schools to see what they are doing.

LINEAR EXAMS

RE teachers have reported following a linear structure, either currently or recently, with their students. The changes will therefore not heavily impact on the delivery of the subject for them. Examples of structure are:

“I’ll just teach the two units we do, one after the other, with end of Topic tests, one mock per unit in each academic year, with more time to revise. This means we start our GCSE in Y9 to create more revision time in year 11.”

“I will continue with ensuring that students are supported to revise properly and that intervention lessons begin early. I will also carry out the usual revision over Easter holidays and half term to allow all students to achieve”

Continuing Professional Development

CURRENT TRAINING

With regard to existing training, RE teachers feel that they had received more training in the past three years, but often due to taking a proactive approach. Other teachers felt that due to funding constraints, there has been a decline in training opportunities and often in the quality of the training as well.

There appears to have been an increase in training delivered in-house, probably due to budgets. However, there seems to be huge variation in the quality and focus of training and the strategy behind it.

FUTURE TRAINING

Exam boards will need to be prepared to address schools’ concerns and offer training to them, preferably free, to help with the new reforms. They are seen by RE teachers as holding the key information needed to help teachers navigate the changes and prepare their students appropriately. Participants generally noted that the full extent of training needs is currently unknown as departments are still learning about, and making sense of, the anticipated changes.

One suggestion to help aid departments through the new process was to have three opportunities throughout the year for departments to sit down and examine the changes: 1. Plan the teaching and learning response, 2. Mid-way review, 3. Plan improvements for the next year.
CPD PROVIDERS (NEW REFORMS)

An essential element to any delivery would be the involvement of exam boards. Some teachers say that only an external expert from the exam boards would be able to offer reliable training in the light of the new reforms. In some schools, initial training could come from the exam boards and then experienced colleagues would cascade and develop this further within their departments. More confident schools will use SLT or other staff members to deliver training with the support of exam boards or Ofsted to ensure it was relevant, however, these schools are rather less common.

BUDGETS

None of the responses showed there would be an increase to budgets to take account of the new curriculum. It is clear that some teachers are concerned that, where there are massive changes, training will be needed, but there is a high degree of uncertainty that schools will increase expenditure on external courses or increase provision of in-house trainers. Some teachers report minimal whole-school discussion around the new curriculum, training needs and any plan to respond.

ONLINE

Some teachers are very positive about the idea of online training and there appears to be a growing acceptance of its advantages, including:

- Eliminates need to travel
- Flexibility around other commitments
- Undertaken wherever comfortable and convenient
- Reduced cost.

Suggestions to make it worthwhile included the involvement of teachers in designing the training and keeping it relevant, engaging and interesting. Some teachers report good experiences with this type of training.

However, some teachers are particularly concerned that schools sometimes expect this to be done in teachers’ own time and it does not form part of the allocated INSET hours. It is also more difficult to engage with online training.
VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

General

CONCERNS

Vocational and technical subject teachers have raised concerns over controlled assessment and coursework. One teacher was also concerned that non-core subjects were disappearing from view:

"Unless I am missing something: DT, which not that long ago became a core and compulsory subject, has now slipped off the radar to an "other subject" or doesn't even warrant a mention at A Level."

There is a general concern that some subjects are being prioritised over others, potentially leading to a reduced number of subjects on offer to students.

"I am very unhappy with the gradual enforced demise of vocational courses as they are the ideal option for many students."

There is also concern that there would be further pressure to ensure 'continued' progress and performance even though, with the introduction of the changes there would probably be a dip.

With regard to controlled assessment, there are differing views over its removal, the most significant being that it would impact on results for core subjects, as coursework often boosted the overall grade. Another is that without controlled assignments it could be difficult to "bring the topic alive with current practical work with life skills attached. Hands on running business and evaluation bring so many learning opportunities". Alternatives to a written examination benefit other learning styles, too.

However, teachers also feel that the removal of coursework should level the playing field and prevent some schools from manipulating the rules.

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO DATE

Generally, departments have not made any changes yet with regard to the reforms. One teacher commented that they have not changed anything since the school responded to the EBacc, introducing an EBacc stream for two thirds of students. Most are thinking about the qualifications they offer and are awaiting exact specification requirements.

For ICT, several other subjects have commented that their schools are reducing the teaching time for this subject due to the changes.

DOUBLE WEIGHTING OF ENGLISH AND MATHS

There was an overwhelming sense from these subjects that they are being pushed out of the curriculum with a reduced status and importance in the long term. Whilst the importance of literacy is recognised, the value of other subjects cannot be forgotten:

"Our education system was intended to offer a broad and balance experience for children of all abilities. this move is counterproductive and devalues the other subjects. Subjects such as DT, vital to the regrowth of British manufacturing are withering on the vine."
Teachers’ response to curriculum reforms: Secondary vocational and technical subjects

Scheme of Work

CONTACT TIME FOR YOUR SUBJECT

Teachers in these subject areas think that their contact time allocation would change with the reforms. One Business Studies teacher reported that he follows the Guided Learning Hours recommended by the exam boards and that there is a good student uptake for the subject so teaching allocation should not be affected in any way. Another DT teacher reflected on the difficulties for rural schools with funding and the use of teachers with little or no experience.

IMPACT OF REMOVING CONTROLLED ASSESSMENT

There was not seen to be a significant impact by ICT, DT and Business Studies teachers, although one did suggest that it would allow more time for mock exams before the final exams.

TEACHING FOCUS

Generally, these teachers say that the three year KS3 and two year KS4 system was the way things would run in their schools and one felt extremely strongly that this was the right way to do it. Only one teacher reported starting Y10 work in Y9, and this was only in the final half term. This allowed full inductions of the GCSE/BTEC courses to be delivered.

Resources

LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT RESOURCES WITH THE NEW CURRICULUM

Teachers say that the biggest elements missing from current resources are mock papers, with mark schemes, and independent study materials. Exam papers that take account of a linear rather than modular structure will also be required.

STUDENT SUPPORT

With regard to support for students, interactive resources that embrace new technology were requested to take account of students’ access to and literacy in technology, for example apps. There was also a suggestion for resources with exam questions and model answers from several teachers.

One DT teacher did feel that the biggest resource would be time with a qualified teacher, potentially with smaller class sizes and TA support. He also felt that DT textbooks could be improved with better reference material and detail to aid students.

Assessment

MONITORING PROGRESS: KS3

Teachers are generally continuing as they did before; for one participant that meant continuing to use the levels, for another, evaluations and professional judgement. A third teacher reported using amended levels - several local schools and colleges had adapted the levels to make them more focused on the new specification and to suit their own needs.
MONITORING PROGRESS: KS4

Not much is likely to change according to participants, though departments are likely to increase the use of mock exams, probably two or three each year in Y10 and Y11.

VALUE ADDED MEASURES

There are mixed views on the usefulness of value added:

“Value added at a subject level would be beneficial as it allows schools to target areas of development within its curriculum”

“What does value added do for a child or a parent... nothing. It is another of the measurement tools that consistently fail resulting in good schools suffering.”

All respondents felt that value added could only ever be as good as the starting measurement and there was little trust in the KS2 levels.

NEW ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

Most teachers were keen on developing and using their own in-house systems that works for them and are adapted to their own requirements. One is already using a system based on newly devised levels and using it to report to parents. Nevertheless, there is openness to buy published systems. One teacher would still want to be able to adapt them and another mentioned Star4schools/go4schools as being very good.

KS4 Exam preparation

INITIAL REQUIREMENTS

“We have had that many new curriculums we have learnt to cope”

Teachers reflected on the amount of change they have had to deal with in the past and feel that they will be able to adjust resources and adapt what the exam boards produce to help prepare students. One teacher said that he would be buying in “any resources that give us some indication of exam structure/papers.”

LINEAR EXAMS

Whilst there has been little change for DT as a result of the reforms, with coursework still a vital component, ICT and Business Studies have had more upheaval. However, one teacher comments that they simply need to “revert back to old practices”. Another teacher thinks that it will lead to a greater focus on exam preparation, mock exams and revision.
Continuing Professional Development

CURRENT TRAINING

Most teachers of these subjects report an increase over the past three years, particularly with a teaching and learning focus, but not at a subject specific level and most of this has been in-house.

FUTURE TRAINING

ICT and Business studies teachers requested more input from exam boards to explain the new structures and processes for assessment. DT suggested that NQT teachers needed further training as they are not sufficiently equipped with the necessary skills: “Blue Peter projects have a very limited impact on students who benefit from the inspirational skills of a qualified and trained specialist”.

CPD PROVIDERS (NEW REFORMS)

Schools are likely to look to their exam board for exam preparation CPD. One teacher noted that cascading from colleagues can often be done poorly, although another was more open to training from whoever was appropriate; SLE, a colleague, an exam board etc.

CPD BUDGETS

When asked whether departments are likely to have increased CPD budgets to support the introduction of reforms, participants gave a variety of answers from ‘Yes’ to ‘No’ to ‘Unknown’. One teacher said their school is “very fortunate in that there is a healthy CPD budget” but another said the budget would remain the same and more training would be delivered within the school.

ONLINE

There was general support from teachers for online training. Advantages given were:

- Avoid travel costs
- Just as good as face to face training
- Easier to access

However, one teacher did state that if it was expected to be completed by a teacher in their own time then they should be paid for it.
Price: £400