



Department  
for Education

**Consultation Response Form**

**Consultation closing date: 18 December 2014**

**Your comments must reach us by that date**

**Performance descriptors for use in key  
stage 1 and 2 statutory teacher assessment  
for 2015 / 2016**

If you would prefer to respond online to this consultation please use the following link: <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations>

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes, primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

If you want all, or any part, of your response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it to be confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

The Department will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

<b>Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reason for confidentiality:	

Name: Marianne Cutler and David Reedy	
Please tick if you are responding on behalf of your organisation.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Name of Organisation (if applicable): Cambridge Primary Review Trust (CPRT)	
Address: Derwent College M/103, University of York, York, YO10 5DD	

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the Ministerial and Public Communications Division by e-mail: [consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk) or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the Gov.uk '[Contact Us](#)' page.

Please insert an 'x' into one of the following boxes which best describes you as a respondent.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/>	Parent	<input type="checkbox"/>	School
<input type="checkbox"/>	Governor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Local Authority	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other

This response is a collaborative response from the Cambridge Primary Review Trust (CPRT), successor to the Cambridge Primary Review (CPR). The Review stands as the largest and most comprehensive enquiry into English primary education for half a century. It collected, *inter alia*, substantial evidence on primary standards, assessment and accountability. The Trust has now completed the process of updating this research evidence and very recently published the report by Professor Wynn Harlen on assessment cited below.

**For the Review's findings and proposals on primary school standards, assessment and accountability, see:**

Alexander, R.J. (ed) *Children, their World, their Education: final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review*, Routledge, chapters 16 ('Assessment, learning and accountability') and 17 ('Attainment, standards and quality'), and pp 496-8) (conclusions and recommendations on assessment and testing).

**For the Review's specially-commissioned reviews of national and international research on standards and assessment, see:**

Alexander, R.J. *et al* (ed) *The Cambridge Primary Review Research Surveys*, Routledge, chapters 17 (Tymms & Merrell on national evidence on standards over time), 18 (Whetton, Ruddock & Twist on international evidence on standards over time), 19 (Harlen on assessment alternatives for primary education), 28 (Cunningham & Raymont on quality assurance in primary education) and 29 (Wyse, McCreery & Torrance on the impact of recent assessment reforms).

**For the Trust's specially-commissioned reviews of national and international research on standards and assessment, see:**

Harlen, W. (2014) *Assessment, Standards and Quality of Learning in Primary Education* (CPRT Research Survey 1), York: Cambridge Primary Review Trust. ISMB 978-0-9931032-0-9

**The Review also presented both oral and written evidence to the Bew Review of KS2 assessment.** The written evidence is available at:  
[http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/downloads/PDFs/Assessment\\_review\\_submission.pdf](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/downloads/PDFs/Assessment_review_submission.pdf)

**Assessment reform is one of the eight priorities of the Cambridge Primary Review Trust.**

The Trust was formally launched in September 2013. We hope that the Department will be prepared to discuss our work in this area as it develops through the Trust's programmes of research, school leadership and professional development.

1 Do the names of the draft performance descriptors allow teachers and parents to understand the meaning of, and differentiate between, each performance descriptor?

If no, please provide details.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not Sure
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**Comments:**

The names and the range of performance descriptors at each key stage are inconsistent, confusing and over complicated.

They are inconsistent both within and across subjects. For example in Reading there are four descriptors in KS1 but only 1 at KS2. Mathematics is the same. In writing there are 4 descriptors at KS1 and 5 at KS2. In Science, there is only one descriptor, at national standard, for both KS1 and KS2. There should be consistency between the Key Stages (see answer to question 2 below for suggestions).

The names are also confusing. 'Working towards' the national standard and 'below' national standard mean essentially the same thing – below. As working towards implies a continuum it is almost impossible to define at a fixed point.

Mastery is also problematic term. Surely if children have met the national standard that implies that they are competent for their age in that area. In addition how can a seven year old be a 'master' of a subject like mathematics? 'Mastery' implies a level of knowledge, understanding, and skill which few of us could say with confidence that we have achieved as adults. It therefore does not seem an appropriate term for children of primary school age. 'Exceeding National Standard' would be preferable (see below), if these different levels were to be maintained.

It would be better in all cases for there to be a single national standard in each subject at both Key Stages, as there is for Science here. In doing so, we are reminded of the purposes of assessment and the unintended consequences of the

previous complex assessment system with (many) levels. It is important that we remember lessons learned from previous assessment systems.

If the current descriptors are retained it could simply be seen/interpreted as reverting to levels under another name. As the Cambridge Primary Review final Report pointed out: reducing children's learning to a single level 'serves to label children rather than enlighten parents and other children about the range of their achievements.' (p.316) The names of the new descriptors are likely to encourage this kind of continued labelling and could even make it worse – being Level 2 does not necessarily have the same pejorative connotation as being 'below' the national standard. This represents cause for concern, since levels were removed due to the Expert panel's accepted recommendations in this regard.

2 Are the performance descriptors spaced effectively across the range of pupils' performance to support accurate and consistent judgements?

If no, please provide details.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not Sure
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Comments:

Given the problems outlined in our response to question 1 it seems sensible to completely review the consistency and names of the descriptors.

For consistency it seems more sensible for every subject to have a single set of criteria defining the national standard at each key stage. Teachers could then make straightforward summative assessments under the following headings:

**working towards the *expected* national standard:** this means that the children are not fully secure in their attainment of all the standards yet (teachers can highlight which ones)

**meeting the *expected* national standard:** this means that children are secure in most of the standards

**exceeding the *expected* national standard:** for these children the standards are embedded and they comfortably demonstrate their use all the time as a result of opportunities provided to explore the curriculum in greater depth and to build on the breadth of their knowledge and skills within any key stage

Another benefit of the above would be that Teacher Assessment would then be brought more into line with the judgements made at the end of the EYFS. The connection with these is not currently clear. If the above were accepted, this would

ensure better coherence across the whole of the primary age range.

Alternatively a limited number (10 or 12?) key criteria per “subject could be could be drawn up” (mathematics, writing, science, reading etc.) at the end of each Key Stage and require each teacher to judge each child’s progress in relation to each of these and then to produce NOT a single overall descriptor or level, but a spread of judgments to be shared with parents and receiving teachers. If those criteria could include one or two related to children’s attitude towards, and effort in the subject, then the spreadsheet would not necessarily involve a comprehensive series of negative judgments for lower attaining pupils.

Both of these systems would be preferable to the current proposals.

3 In your opinion, are the performance descriptors clear and easy to understand?

If no, which bullets lack sufficient clarity to allow for effective teacher assessment?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not Sure
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Comments:

No. The performance descriptors are not clear. In Reading and Writing there are a considerable number of adjectives capable of different interpretations, e.g.; some, mostly, judicious, etc. These are ambiguous. With only one National Standard (see above), these confusing indications of degree would not be necessary.

In handwriting there is the use of the word ‘correctly’ for holding a pencil. Nowhere is ‘correctly’ defined nor any indication that there are a range of ways a child can hold a pencil comfortably to be an efficient handwriter. The term ‘correctly’ implies only one.

4 In your opinion, does the content of the performance descriptors adequately reflect the national curriculum programmes of study?

If no, please state what amendments are required.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not Sure
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Comments:

In Reading and Writing there are many cases where the performance descriptors are not assessment statements, but a re-statement of NC programmes of study slightly amended. This is a particular feature of the mathematics descriptors, with some examples as such for the Science descriptors too.

This results in an incredible amount of unnecessary detail, particularly in mathematics.

This level of detail, again, particularly for mathematics, effectively redefines the statutory expectations of the National Curriculum – thereby dispensing with it. At a minimum – the ‘standard’ or ‘mastery’ level will set the outcomes which schools will have to deliver. Especially in KS1 in mathematics and in the writing appendices on grammar and spelling, these focus on inappropriate procedural skills and item knowledge ( labelling the grammatical function of words in sentences) which will once again drive ‘rote learning’ back onto the agenda without an understanding of how this knowledge is put to use for different purposes.

A KS1 teacher assessing whether a child is not yet at national standard across reading, writing, maths and science would have to consider 129 assessment bullet points, at KS2 this increases to 144. It will thus increase the time teachers now take in making end of key stage summative judgements and thus impact on workload and teaching time.

A considerable reduction is thus needed.

5 Should any element of the performance descriptors be weighted (i.e. should any element be considered more important or less important than others?).

If yes, please detail which performance descriptor(s), which element(s) and why.

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

The descriptors are already weighted implicitly, due to the number of items related to different elements. In writing, there is already an implicit weighting towards transcriptional elements, and on decoding in reading. This should be corrected to give equal weighting to composition and comprehension. In mathematics there is an overwhelming emphasis on number whereas there are almost no elements of 'thinking mathematically'; applying number to problem solving and developing deeper conceptual understanding. In Science, there is a welcome emphasis on 'working scientifically', reflecting its importance in the Science programme of study.

As is clear from research (Harlen 2014) assessment has an unavoidable impact on the curriculum content and pedagogy experienced by pupils. If the descriptors are unbalanced, as they are currently, then the curriculum as experienced will inevitably be so too.

These issues need to be addressed so that current weightings are rebalanced.

6 If you have any further comments regarding the performance descriptors, please provide details. For example, is there further supporting information that would be helpful in understanding and using the performance descriptors?



Comments:

- The performance descriptors are only focused on a limited range of subjects taught in Primary schools; the core subjects of English (though excluding spoken language), mathematics and science. The aims of primary education should both encompass and extend well beyond this.
- Primary education, as the CPR evidence revealed unequivocally, should provide a curriculum, expertly taught, that enables every child to experience high quality learning across the full range of a broad, balanced and rich curriculum. We agree that all children should be confident in the areas of English, mathematics and science and should be ambitious about their continuous improvement and attainment. We do not, however, accept that achievement in these areas of the curriculum alone should be recorded and then used to judge whether a child or a school is successful or not.
- Primary education is about enabling every aspect of a child's development to flourish and grow in the moment rather than in preparation for an unknown future. Further, the argument that the 'basics' alone define and measure what matters flies in the face of evidence showing (a) the developmental



and cultural importance of the arts and humanities in their own right and (b) the way that learning in one area directly impacts on, and enhances, learning in others. As we have frequently noted previously, HMI and Ofsted inspection evidence is clear that there is an association between high standards as measured in KS2 tests and summative assessments and the breadth and quality of the wider curriculum. Having performance descriptors for a limited range of subjects exacerbates the problem of seeing the 'core' as centrally important and the rest as optional once 'the basics' have been addressed.

- Like the new curriculum, these performance descriptors constitute a mechanical view of what children's achievement is expected to look like at the end of the first two Key Stages. For example, not enough attention has been focused on children's development as readers and writers with their own enthusiasms, purposes and patterns of experience. Where reading is concerned, there is also a lack of understanding of the demands made on the young learner by the complexity of English orthography and also on the cognitive resources that young learners possess that enable them to make sense of such complexity. Consequently there is a lack of attention to the broader approaches to word identification that involve larger units than phoneme-grapheme correspondences, pattern recognition, and use of syntactic and semantic cues. In terms of writing, there is too little attention to the increasing range and sharpness of focus in addressing different audiences.
- Exemplification that indicates clearly what the National Standard might look like is essential

General points about the Performance Descriptors as set out in the consultation document:

1. An important criticism of levels ( see Tim Oates video on DFE site) was that 'the whole system has been focussed on getting kids to move quickly through the levels' and move them on to harder, more advanced learning, rather than deep conceptual understanding and focusing on fewer things in greater depth. However, particularly in mathematics, the new curriculum and these associated performance descriptors repeat this problem.
2. There is likely to be a loss of quality in data passed on to secondary schools if primary schools can only communicate whether a pupil has met / not met the standard (alongside a test score).

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

<b>Please acknowledge this reply.</b>	
E-mail address for acknowledgement:	

Here at the Department for Education we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, please confirm below if you would be willing to be contacted again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
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All DfE public consultations are required to meet the Cabinet Office [Principles on Consultation](#)

The key Consultation Principles are:

- departments will follow a range of timescales rather than defaulting to a 12-week period, particularly where extensive engagement has occurred before
- departments will need to give more thought to how they engage with and use real discussion with affected parties and experts as well as the expertise of civil service learning to make well informed decisions
- departments should explain what responses they have received and how these have been used in formulating policy
- consultation should be 'digital by default', but other forms should be used where these are needed to reach the groups affected by a policy
- the principles of the Compact between government and the voluntary and community sector will continue to be respected.

If you have any comments on how DfE consultations are conducted, please contact Aileen Shaw, DfE Consultation Coordinator, tel: 0370 000 2288 / email: [aileen.shaw@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:aileen.shaw@education.gsi.gov.uk)

**Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.**

Completed responses should be sent to the address shown below by 18 December 2014

Send by post to:

Rashida Akbar/Jennifer Conlon  
Department for Education

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Send by e-mail to: [PerformanceDescriptor.consultation@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:PerformanceDescriptor.consultation@education.gsi.gov.uk)