



2014 National Reading and Numeracy Tests: UCAC Feedback

Introduction

Following the second round of the national reading and literacy tests, held between 7 and 13 May 2014, UCAC asked members' opinions on various aspects of the tests.

This document outlines the main themes highlighted in those responses. We present this feedback in order to try to improve on the system for next year's tests.

Background

The tests were held between 7 and 13 May 2014 for children in Years 2-9.

This year for the first time, a Numeracy: Reasoning test was held as well as the Numeracy: Procedural test, and the reading test.

Learners following a Welsh study programme sit an English as well as a Welsh reading test in Years 4-9.

Foundation Phase

There continues to be a strong feeling this year that the tests are not suitable for children in the Foundation Phase, and certainly not for Year 2:

- the tests are not in line with the methodology and philosophy of the Foundation Phase
- they undermine the children's confidence and discourage them

"I feel for the children, particularly the less confident ones, it destroys their self-confidence to sit an EXAMINATION at seven years of age, bearing in mind that these tests take place about half way through the year."

The Level of Challenge

Generally, it is felt that there is too much work to complete within the time limits, particularly in the primary sector tests.

"I have a class which includes many children who are good at Mathematics, but they were working 'flat out' for the whole of the time right up to the last minute. They had no chance to check their work. I emphasise the checking of work to my learners, and am disappointed that this was not possible because, in my opinion, half an hour was not a sensible length of time for these tests. This was the opinion across the years in our school."

Differentiation/Grading of questions

There was a strong opinion among the responses again this year that the tests were too challenging for the weakest children and children with additional learning needs, and that account of this is not taken in the design of the tests:

- there is no differentiation/grading within the tests, that is to say, they do not begin with easier questions and move on to the more difficult
- this means a very discouraging experience for less able children who are demoralised from the very beginning
- it can undermine confidence and create a negative attitude towards education, or the specific subject

"Throughout the year there is pressure on teachers to differentiate. Is there any point in

our doing this if, when we come to the tests, the children of lower ability still have to sit the same tests as the children of higher ability? I felt very sorry for less able children during the timetable of tests.”

allowed the pupils additional time "to be fair to the children"! The pupils of my school would have benefited greatly from having over half an hour extra.”

“Since there is no consistency in the administration of the tests, it is unfair to compare schools with one another. At present I have no faith in the system so I shall place a greater focus on the school's other assessments this year, when analysing data and self-evaluating.”

The nature of the questions/content/format

- The need to turn back and forth between pages created difficulties, particularly for dyslexic children.
- Concern was expressed about differences between questions on an ‘ordinary’ test paper and the corresponding large print test paper, including the fact that it was black and white.
- There was an issue of confusion in the Year 8 Numeracy: Reasoning test where a price needed to be calculated for the number of letters in a particular word, i.e. ‘you’ in English and ‘chi’ in Welsh. The use of a ‘double’ letter, i.e. ‘ch’ caused confusion and ambiguity. This kind of confusion ought to be foreseen and avoided in the preparation of the tests.

Administration

- Five days is not long enough for Welsh-medium schools who have to administer 4 tests in Key Stages 2 and 3.
- The information for parents had not reached schools early enough:
 - this information should go out in the first term or at the beginning of the second term
- There is far too much inconsistency from school to school with regard to the administration of the tests:
 - clearer instructions are needed
 - it was suggested that heads could exchange or work in a different school for the testing period in order to ensure that the tests are administered in accordance with the guidelines

“I have newly been appointed as a head and followed the administration guidelines closely. I was very disappointed, therefore, to hear from teachers in other schools that they had

Marking

The Welsh Government had stated that the Numeracy: Reasoning tests would be marked externally. However, that did not happen. Late in the day, schools were informed that they would be responsible for marking these along with the rest, and that a nominee from each school would be invited to attend a regional ‘guided marking’ event. A very clear opinion was expressed by UCAC’s members that the tests should be marked externally by specialists:

- in order to give the tests status
- to avoid an unreasonable workload
- to avoid inconsistency from school to school as regards who takes the work on and what the terms are (in some schools £0.30 was paid per paper, in others £0.60, while non-contact time was given in others; the work was carried out by a mixture of assistants, teachers and heads)

The arrangements should be determined a year in advance and kept to.

Results

The results were issued on 15 July – just days before the end of the school year.

The feeling of school leaders was that there was a lack of clear communication concerning the exact date for the release of the results. Although there were messages in the DYSG newsletter, there was no direct communication with the school leaders themselves.

There is a clear feeling that the results are released too late:

- it is not possible for teachers to refer to them in their annual reports to parents
- it can be a problem to send the results to parents so close to the end of term
- from the point of view of organising support for children needing literacy or numeracy interventions, the results are too late to be of assistance

“It is my responsibility as SENCo to organise support for children needing numeracy or literacy interventions. The tests are of no use to me because we do not receive the learners’ results until the last days of term. This is too late to analyse, determine which children require support, and arrange timetables and provision before September. Consequently, we as a school continue to carry out internal assessments of literacy and numeracy which are more reliable and where we can have results immediately.”

The Welsh Government told schools, and parents, that they would provide standardised scores and

be provided this year. This was disappointing for UCAC’s members:

- because it is felt that it is the progress score that is most useful
- because schools are expected to fulfil their side of the bargain with regard to administering and marking the tests, and feeding the results back promptly to the Government, but the Government has not fulfilled its part

Recommendations

- Do away with the tests in the Foundation Phase; once the Early Years Development and Assessment Framework (EYDAF) is in place, it should be sufficient by itself
- Introduce a differentiating/graded approach to the tests (i.e. to ensure that the questions become gradually more difficult through the paper) in order to give all learners a strong starting point
- Ensure a better balance between the length of the tests and the amount of work to be completed within the time
- Consider how to ensure better consistency with regard to administering the tests, including more specific guidelines
- Ensure that material reaches schools more promptly (material for parents; administration guidelines)
- Mark the tests externally
- Release the results earlier

progress scores. At the time the results were issued, it was indicated that only standardised scores would



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