

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and
Education Committee
Y Bil Drafft Anghenion Dysgu Ychwanegol a'r Tribiwnlys Addysg
(Cymru) | The Draft Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal
(Wales) Bill

ALN 13

Ymateb gan : GL Assessment

Response from : GL Assessment

What are your views on the draft Bill? Please outline below any concerns you have, or areas that you think the Committee should explore further before the Bill is formally introduced.

GL Assessment is the leading provider of formative assessments to UK schools.

We specialise in literacy, numeracy, reasoning and attitudinal assessments, including assessments that support children with Additional Learning Needs (ALN). We have relationships with over two thirds of primary and secondary schools in Wales and we have recently acquired Lucid Research, a specialist provider of assessments for children with ALN. Tests are nationally standardised, giving measures such as standard age scores, and include parental reporting where appropriate.

We have a distinct philosophy of good assessment practice. We believe in a 'whole pupil' approach, examining a child's attitude, ability and attainment to provide a complete understanding of their needs. This enables schools to get to know each pupil as an individual, appreciating their strengths, identifying areas where they might need support and intervention, and removing any obstacles that are impacting negatively on attainment. Crucially, this philosophy places the individual pupil at the heart of a school's programme of assessment.

Introduction: The need for the Bill to encourage good assessment practice

GL Assessment welcomes the Bill's focus on an "integrated, collaborative, process of assessment, planning and monitoring which facilitates early and timely intervention". Teacher assessment will form the foundation of this process as teachers and early years professionals are best placed to observe behaviour and performance that may be indicative of additional learning needs. It is therefore crucial that teachers are well versed in good assessment practice.

However, the Donaldson Report identified assessment and professional development relating to assessment as a particular weakness of the Welsh education system. The Committee should explore further how the Department for Education and Skills' plans to support the development of good assessment practice to fully realise the aims of the Bill.

Below is what we consider to be best practice in the use of formative assessments to identify and support pupils with ALN. The progress of pupils with ALN should be continually tracked, appropriate educational interventions used to raise attainment, and a clear assessment made as to the effective of such interventions. Formative assessments have a crucial role to play throughout this process.

Identifying pupils with low ability: early intervention

Formative assessments are a valuable tool in the process of early identification of those with additional learning needs. Importantly, assessments such as those produced by GL Assessment and Lucid Research, are age standardised, meaning that low attainment due to a summer birth date will not be misidentified as being caused by ALN.

It is crucial that special educational needs are identified during early years and Key Stage 1. If these issues are not addressed they can become entrenched and prove much harder to tackle later on.

In 2011, the Centre for Reading and Language at the University of York published research which was conducted as part of the standardisation of our *York Assessment of Reading for Comprehension* (YARC). It highlighted problems with the current process of identifying pupils with reading difficulties within primary and secondary schools. The study found that some students in every secondary school year group were identified with a reading age of 6 or 7 years and a substantial proportion of pupils who experience reading difficulties were not identified on the school's SEN/ALN Register. The report said:

"The most striking finding is the under-reporting of children with significant reading difficulties. If half of children with reading difficulties are not on the SEN Register by Year 7, this suggests to me that it's unlikely that their reading problems will be attended to during their secondary schooling."

"The data we collected are striking in showing that in each year group, there are substantial numbers of children with significant reading difficulties, many reading below the 7-year level. This finding underlines the fact that it is critical to identify children at risk of reading difficulties early, certainly well before secondary school, and for appropriate interventions to be put in place."

Maximising pupil attainment: continuous assessment

Clearly every school must work to maximise the attainment of pupils with ALN. Formative assessments can play an important role in helping these pupils exceed expectations.

To take one example, our New Group Reading Test (NGRT) supports teachers in monitoring pupils' ability to read and how well they understand what they are reading. These assessments provide teachers with a comprehensive overview of a pupil's reading and comprehension ability while providing a wealth of diagnostic information identifying areas where they may be experiencing difficulties.

Torfaen Local Authority recently adopted the NGRT to help raise standards across its 33 schools after an inspection report stated that performance in secondary schools was among the lowest in Wales on four of the five main indicators set by the Welsh Government.

Torfaen decided that teachers needed an additional, reliable and independent benchmark to inform their judgements regarding pupil progress and ALN, and introduced the New Group Reading Test across the Local Authority. The core objectives were to support teachers' own assessment, to provide important diagnostic information that would help to inform teaching, and to provide an additional means to identify children with ALN. As Sharon Davies, Torfaen's Head of Learning, explains:

"We believe that of our schools should have hard evidence on which to base their target-setting. We need to have a robust benchmark and we need to be outcome driven. How can you monitor

progress effectively if you don't have a clear starting point? This is what NGRT gives us. It's a highly valuable check and balance. We decided to administer NGRT in January 2015 so that we could use the data as mid-year marker, with the National Tests every summer. We now know where our weaknesses are and how we can address them sooner than we could before."

Most schools in Torfaen chose to use the digital version of NGRT, which is also adaptive; in other words, children see different questions depending on how they move through the test. As Sharon explains:

"Using the digital version of the assessment gave children confidence. When you have a child with an Additional Learning Need or a child with a lower ability, their confidence can get easily knocked. With the questions changing according to their capacity to answer the questions, it's a comfortable journey for them – they're not aware that they are doing different questions."

"We need to make sure we're doing everything we can for our learners, otherwise we're not being fair to them. They need more – and this is what we're continually aiming for."

The diagnostic information and narrative reports has indeed meant that NGRT has enabled the LA to identify children who should have been on the SEN Register and put the relevant interventions in place.

Supporting children with Additional Learning Needs

When a young person demonstrates poor literacy or numeracy skills, tests can be used to identify if they in fact have a learning disability. Assessments such as GL Assessment's *Dyslexia Screener* and Lucid Research's *Rapid Dyslexia Screener* can identify dyslexic tendencies in young people from the age of four upwards. The screeners recommend intervention strategies and can play an important part in helping both specialist and non-specialist teachers distinguish between those individuals who have poor maths or literacy attainment and those whose difficulties are associated with dyscalculia or dyslexia.

Many teachers are uneasy about applying diagnostic labels at an early age, and Lucid has developed assessments that do not demand that the label 'dyslexia' is used. For example, its *Cognitive Profiling System* enables teachers to understand the cognitive limitations that lie behind dyslexia in children aged four to eight and to tackle these directly without needing to be concerned about labels unless they choose to. The *Lucid Assessment System for Schools* continues this process for ages 8-15. These assessments enable teachers to identify potential problems before they even register a pattern of difficulty and therefore structure a suitable support programme for use in class before learning issues become established.

Conclusion

GL Assessment welcomes the Bill's focus on improving the means by which pupils with ALN are identified and supported. The use of appropriate formative assessments to facilitate this will be a vital aspect of this process. However, with the Donaldson Review having identified the use of assessments as an area requiring improvement, we think that it is important that the Committee scrutinise how the Welsh Government proposes to improve assessment practice to mirror the changes proposed by this piece of legislation.

Please highlight below your main concerns in relation to the Additional Learning Needs system. Let us know whether, in your view, the Bill addresses these concerns or if further

work is needed.

N/A

Do you have any other comments or issues you wish to raise that have not been covered above?

N/A