

A starter guide

life
after
levels





Meet the author Mick Walker

Mick loves education and is passionate about Life after Levels. He believes this is the teaching profession's time to define the future of assessment.

His teaching career extended over eighteen years. He has taught in secondary, sixth form and further education institutions, worked as an external examiner and been an advisory teacher for a local authority. He has also held the posts of Chief Examiner and Senior Moderator.

Following Mick's position as Head of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's (QCA) regulatory monitoring programme, he played a key role in the National Assessment Authority's (NAA) modernisation programme which led to the creation of what is now the Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors (CIEA). After the delivery failures of national curriculum tests in 2008, Mick took over the post of Acting Managing Director of the NAA and is credited with re-building the national curriculum assessment system.



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What you should know

Everything has changed in education. There is a new curriculum, new accountability measures and a new inspection focus for Ofsted on progression. This is a huge opportunity for education in England - we're about to make learning personal.

In response to all this change, the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) set up an independent commission to review the role of assessment in schools. This resulted in a set of agreed principles, a design checklist and a practical assessment framework. The report can be downloaded below.

[Click here to see the full NAHT evidence-based report](#)

Life after Levels delivers on the report's key recommendations. This eBook is one of many resources to support senior leaders through this exciting time.

1

Take a deep breath

Before you jump into anything new take some time out to review the way you assess now, what works and what doesn't. Once you know where you are, look at the new curriculum and assessment requirements and identify what needs to change.

A skills audit is useful to identify the strengths you already have in your team. You may have teachers who taught before levels were introduced. They will have useful advice and ideas. What about examiners, markers in school? They will all have valuable knowledge too.

Do your research. There is support out there but make sure you follow the advice that works for your school. Set a good plan of action – hasty decisions can result in expensive mistakes.



2

Plan

Who will you involve?

Once you know the skills and experience you've got in school, you can identify any gaps.

Now's the time to think about the people you want to get involved. Which teachers have been/are already involved in curriculum and assessment development. Do you have any rising stars in school who could take the lead?

Some Head Teachers have found it useful to create informal clusters with other primary or secondary schools so together they can set standards.

Whoever you involve, make sure you get along well as you'll be having some challenging conversations later down the line.



3

Review

Review your school's current assessment procedures.

Get everyone who is involved in teaching and learning to be part the review process. It's important to get them together and on board right from the start.

Make sure you fully understand the changes to the curriculum, assessment and accountability measures. Some require modifications to pedagogy, some need to happen immediately. You need a clear plan of action stating what, when and who.

Ask yourselves:

- Is our curriculum suited to our pupils' needs?
- Do we completely understand what progression looks like for our pupils?
- Do our assessment processes support our principles of assessment? If not, what do we need to do to make our school's assessment framework fit for purpose?



4

Agree

Agree your curriculum and assessment principles.

The curriculum is the starting point, assessment should follow. Make sure year-on-year progression is clearly understood.

The principles and the design checklist, both below, will help you develop your own assessment framework. Once you've agreed your principles they will be the foundations of your future curriculum and assessment framework. They are a great reference tool when reviewing your processes. Use them to keep you on track so everything you implement is fit for purpose..



5

Design

Design a new assessment framework.

If you need a helping hand, the NAHT has designed a framework and it's available at www.naht.org.uk

Have a think about your school's approach to, method and use of assessment.

Ask yourselves:

What are you measuring?

Is it clearly related to your curriculum?

How will you know pupils have 'got it'? Importantly, what will you do if they haven't?

How will you measure? Why? When?

How will you report it and to whom?

Once you've made these decisions, check everything is still in line with your principles. The NAHT design checklist is a useful reference tool. Here's a summary:

Approach to assessment

- Make assessment integral to teaching and learning.
- Provide ongoing staff training.
- Appoint a senior leader responsible for assessment.

Method of assessment

- Create short, qualitative and concrete descriptors of what pupils are expected to know and be able to do by the end of each year. These should link to the school's curriculum (and back to the national curriculum).
- Break down these descriptors into a hierarchy so they can be used at different points throughout the year to assess progress. There will be an ongoing process of refinement so set aside time and resources for this throughout the year.
- Discuss how you will collect the body of evidence to back up assessment judgments.

Use of assessment

Think about how you will use your new assessment framework to:

- summarise and analyse attainment and progress without levels.
- inform teaching and learning needs.
- analyse data across the school.
- ensure vulnerable pupils are making progress and that all pupils are being suitably stretched.
- provide rich, qualitative feedback to pupils and parents.
- celebrate achievement across sport, art, performance, behaviour and social and emotional development.

Assessment tip

Use descriptive profiles, not numbers. Some schools are using the old level descriptors against the new national curriculum. Make sure your school is only doing this as a guide to help during the crossover, as the old levels do not align with the new curriculum. Numbers have their place but they don't give you the detail you to help. That's why they've been dropped. This is your chance to make assessment about teaching and learning. This opportunity does not come around often. Seize the moment!

6

Develop

What do you want your pupils to learn?

This is when the magic starts to happen. It's a fantastic opportunity to get every teacher around the table and plan what you're going to teach each child throughout their education. This really is worth the time and effort. It ensures your curriculum is joined up, that you're teaching the whole curriculum, your pupils are being taught something different year on year, they're being stretched and making progress.

It can be a scary thought, and it's quite daunting for teachers to bare their soul to each other. But it works. Schools already adopting this approach have gained useful insight into what's currently being covered and where there are gaps. Their advice is not to assume the curriculum is covered by all teachers or that all pupils have mastered the 'big ideas'.

Having this holistic and inclusive approach guarantees a more successful learning journey for every child.



7

Standardise

Put a robust standardisation process in place.

Standardisation is key, It's a procedure that:

- ensures everyone assessing work, at whatever level, knows the standards that apply.
- is run by someone who has knowledge of the expected standard and what the standard may look like.
- ensures all assessors involved in the assessment of pupils' performances do so accurately and consistently.
- establishes a common standard for the work being assessed that helps maintain quality of marking, both during the marking period and across a programme over time.
- is underpinned by a mark scheme.
- is carried out before anyone assesses a piece of work.



8

Moderate

Put a robust moderation process in place.

Moderation ensures the assessment is reliable, fair and consistent with the required standards. It is useful:

- to appoint a moderator. This post can be rotated so that everyone in the assessment team takes responsibility for the role. It can also be the same person who looked at the standardisation procedure.
- for the moderator to take samples of other assessors' work during the assessment process and feed back to the assessor: accurate, harsh, lenient, inconsistent etc. This allows the assessments to be standardised across a team of assessors and highlights any training needs.
- once assessments have been standardised, moderated and agreed internally, to put samples into a standards file. This can be used for future reference to help in standardisation procedures.

A standards file contains a collection of pupils' work that exemplifies the expected standards of performance against the KPIs. Schools should have a process in place to collect and verify examples for the standards file.



9

Evaluate

Evaluate your framework.

The NAHT design checklist is a useful evaluation tool. Before you make the final decision it's important to consider how the assessment system will be used in your school.

- Integrate the development of your assessment system into your school development plan, with time and resources allocated particularly to staff training.
- Make sure you constantly review your processes and that they deliver your agreed assessment principles.
- Identify a trained assessment lead – it could be the rising star you identified. They will take the lead for your school, or group of schools.
- Build common understanding:
 - Participate in external moderation.
 - Work with your cluster schools.

To be successful, your assessment framework should be used consistently, and you will need to build trust in the new way of doing things. Teacher trust is essential for any system to succeed in your school.

Think about how to use IT:

- as an assessment tool.
- to communicate outcomes (e.g. through developing e-profiles to support parent access and input).
- to track progress, collect and report assessment information.
- to extend a professional dialogue on assessment (e.g. through online communities).

Communicate your assessment framework to stakeholders.

Once your teachers are on board, pupils, parents, governors and the wider community will all need to access and understand the new system.



10

Go public with your curriculum

Levels were intended to provide consistency and uniformity within education. But they often became a shorthand that did not give the finer detail of a pupil's strengths and weaknesses. Future assessment should give a rich, rounded description of pupil achievement and underpin teaching and learning. A robust assessment framework will build recognition of teachers as valued professionals.

This is our time as a teaching profession to define the future of assessment. If we get this right, we have the opportunity to teach every child like they are the only one in the classroom.

But don't rush into anything too quickly. Take time to think about what's right for your school and what you want to teach your children.

For more resources visit: www.lifeafterlevels.com

life after levels

Life after Levels is a ground breaking initiative that brings together the UK's leading assessment gurus.

Frog, BETT ICT Company of the Year 2015, launched this campaign in response to the recent changes to the National Curriculum. Schools have been left to decide for themselves how they are going to measure a pupil's progress. The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) collaborated with Frog on a series of seminars across the UK to educate Senior Leaders on what to do next - together they helped over 1,000 Head Teachers. If you missed the events, the content is available on www.lifeafterlevels.com

Life after Levels will continue to publish research, reports and resources to guide Senior Leaders and ensure they grasp this exciting opportunity.

About Frog

Frog is one of the UK's leading education technology companies. We are passionate about using technology to improve school performance and make learning fun. We work with primary and secondary schools across the world to help them engage students and raise education attainment.

We have 14 years of experience in developing technology that improves learning and engages pupils. Our technology is used by 12 million students, teachers and parents worldwide.

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