



# Measuring what Matters

Short discussion paper to inform the  
Department of Education's Review of  
the Accountability Framework

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## Introduction

Arising from the request by the Department of Education for initial NEU views on the Accountability Framework Review, this short NEU paper is not simply focussed on the 'symptom' of workload, but on its causes – which we ascribe to the accountability system, and to its policing and the behaviours, practices, unintended consequences and effects which derive from it. The root causes, we see, as:

- Centrally driven, targets, set from political level downwards.
- Too many examinations/tests, notably at Years 7 and 12.
- Narrow systemic curriculum focus to address international performance targets (PISA, TIMMS, PIRLS etc).
- Narrow metrics to determine 'achievement' notably to the detriment of vocational education, non-academic skills routes and "different routes of equal value"
- A culture of Performance Managerialism, to achieve results 'at all costs'
- The overwrought application of new technology, notably "big data", diagnostic testing (to the detriment of teachers' professional judgement), and as a managerial and tracking tool.

## The Target Culture

We know that high performing education systems are characterised by high trust, high discretion work environments as well as high autonomy, self-directed accountability systems. Target driven **managerialism can be appropriate**, especially to drive low performance

systems from poor to average. Northern Ireland is **not a poor system**. It is average or better by international comparison. Segments of the system could be described as globally leading.

The P4G achievement targets have a narrow **focus on the lodestar** of 5 GCSE's Grades A\* - C. These targets lead to unintended consequences, such as: **gaming the system**, choosing 'easy' exams/exam boards, not entering (or entering privately) pupils who might **contaminate** the statistics, in-school cramming, teaching to the test; a crude focus on the **C/D grade boundary**; widespread private tutoring outside school amongst other practices<sup>1</sup>. The focus on the "gold standard" of 5 GCSE grade A\* - C leads to the under-valuation of non-academic achievement routes, downgrading vocational education and skills.

International comparisons are instructive. TIMMS and PIRLS research showed the NI Primary school system (at P6) as a world leader in Reading and above average in Science and Mathematics. PISA results showed the secondary schooling system as just average. The OECD (even within Northern Ireland's selective system) noted that we do not stretch our '**high-fliers**' ('gifted and talented' or 'best and brightest'). Internationally, Northern Ireland under-achieves for "high performing" pupils as well as failing our historic "long-tail" of under-achievers.

The lodestar target of five good GCSE's is **too crude** and **distorts behaviour**. We need **broader, wider indicators** – in tandem with better more sophisticated value-added measures.

<sup>1</sup> For a thorough analysis, see Warwick Mansell: Education by Numbers, the Tyranny of Testing: Politico's Press, 2007 ISBN 978-1-84275-199-2

The **first rule of accountability** is that we need to make people accountable for things they can genuinely influence and change – not what they cannot change.

- We need a value-added approach to Inspection – where there has been significant class bias in inspection outcomes.
- We need a value-added approach to school evaluation.
- We need a value-added approach to pupil assessment.
- We also need a value-added approach to PRSD/teacher appraisal.

We need to use **broader tools** such as the sophisticated GIS that NISRA has, to hand, like attitudinal, motivational and well-being surveys teasing out the link between motivation to learning and performance. We need baselines not just for literacy and numeracy but for oracy and productive language.

## Inspection

At the apex of the accountability system, aside from 'results', is our system of inspection. There has been significant unease and contention around **inspection**. Until recently, when a new Chief Inspector was appointed, the profession was ill at ease with a punitive, "*name and shame*" style of judgemental inspection. The Northern Ireland Assembly's Education Committee produced its detailed Inquiry Report in November 2013, which teachers' unions welcomed. The most important recommendations, however, remain unaddressed. These were:

- Recommendation 2, that "school improvement services should be aligned with school inspection in a single organisation in line with the practice in Scotland." This recommendation sought to steer inspection in the more appropriate,

supportive, developmental (and no less robust) direction taken in Scotland as opposed to the failed approach of OFSTED in England.

- Recommendation 4, that "*school inspection complaints should explicitly allow for the possibility of a revision to an inspection finding and that consideration should be given to a reformed school inspection complaints procedure which would allow for investigation by personnel outside of the Inspectorate or the Department of Education.*"

NEU would go further and recommend that an **Independent Commissioner**, or a **Professional Arbitration Panel** be established and constituted as the endpoint of the ETI's Complaints system (similar to the Labour Relations Agency's Arbitration Panel which is the endpoint of the TNC's Grievance and Disciplinary procedures) It cannot be that the ETI's complaints system remains "above the law", exempt from external scrutiny.

Inspection and good accountability require a change of emphasis and culture, as well as thorough-going reform, at the Education and Training Inspectorate. The previous Chief Inspector had, effectively, "*lost the dressing room*" of the teaching workforce. NEU were not wrong in identifying the ETI as a key progenitor of many of the behaviours, practices, procedures, and culture which feeds the hyper-accountability at the heart of workload concerns. And whilst a new Chief Inspector has moved towards a more inclusive, collaborative approach, change and reform need to be 'systemic' and formally embedded.

## Key Stage Assessment

There is contention over the ultra-bureaucratic End of Key Stage Assessment arrangements which have been the subject of Industrial action by unions since 2013. These are widely seen within the profession (including by many Principals) as of nugatory educational value and often characterised as *"getting in the way of learning"*.

None of this would be 'news' to both sides of the TNC. NEU has identified these trends for some years and, over recent years, has developed or endorsed two significant position papers:

- 'Striking the Right Balance' is a GTC document endorsed by NEU that makes 20 recommendations on Inspection and Accountability, prepared for the Assembly's 2013 Inquiry.
- 'Rising to the Challenge' is a response to the OECD report tabled at negotiations in 2014 to resolve the current industrial action on Assessment.

These analyses remain extant and valid.

## Choices - High road or Low Road?

At this juncture, our education system faces a choice of whether we – to use a Scots phrase – take the **"high road"** or the **"low road"**. The **high road** is characterised by high trust workplaces, high levels of reflective, professional discretion and autonomy encouraging high levels of performance.

Set against this is a **low road** approach characterised by a *'command and control'* culture, low trust workplaces working to centrally driven micro targets, *"name and shame"* inspection, more prescriptive curricula – driving

and prodding pupils, cattle like, towards distinctly average system performance.

The argument is not to avoid accountability - we are going to have accountability. The debate needs to be about *"What Targets"* are appropriate and *"What does **good accountability** look like?"*

## NEU's Principles on Accountability

In summary, the NEU's key principles on Accountability are as follows:

- Accountability is a duty on all public servants but especially those entrusted with the education of future generations.
- Accountability must be balanced against professional autonomy and the holistic needs of children/pupils.
- The current system gives undue weight to the centralised/centrally set targets of government, particularly through a regime of test data and ETI inspection data.
- This leads to a narrowing of the curriculum and mitigates against professional reflection, innovation and creativity.
- Undue emphasis is placed on testing, assessing, monitoring, tracking and examining. This "weigh and measure" culture is to the detriment of a broad-based education.
- Target and data driven education is not only anti-professional, but unaffordable in current circumstances.
- Schools are also accountable to parents, the governing body and, often, the local community.
- The accountability system must rebalance these interests.
- It is no longer appropriate to hold schools to account purely on an individual basis for the achievement or the well-being of their pupils.

- Accountability should take full account of context, notably social context.

We believe that the Review of Accountability provides a 'space' for urgent debate and thought about the purposes and means of the accountability system.

### Accountability: 'measure' what matters

Over the last two decades there has been an ever-increasing emphasis on data collection and analysis in education to inform insights into pupils, schools and, even into the progress and achievement of countries. As a result, **what gets measured** is what **appears** to matter most. This trend has been powerfully reinforced by international measures such as the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which evaluates education systems worldwide by **testing** a representative sample of 15-year-olds in key subjects. A dip in performance in PISA can send shockwaves through education systems.

Until now, policy makers here have used broad levels in literacy and numeracy and five A\* - C's at GCSE as a proxy for pupil and school success in Northern Ireland. However, as the world changes quickly and societies and economies become more interconnected, employers, business leaders, politicians, educators and international organisations around the globe (including the OECD) are questioning whether the narrow emphasis on literacy, numeracy and performance in academic exams provides the right skills set for success in this rapidly changing world.

**There is now a broad consensus that "21st century skills", which were clearly defined within the Northern Ireland Curriculum a decade ago, need to be more systematically encouraged and taught and more intentionally and effectively assessed.**

We welcome the Department of Education's stated aim to develop a *'broader range of measures to give us a more holistic picture of how our system, schools and pupils are performing'*.

Clarity is required about how we can ensure that:

- the system of measuring performance is fair?
- it focuses on progress as well as achievement?
- it takes account of context and intake as well as outcomes?
- that it gives credit for work with all pupils? and
- the users and uses of school and system level data

Getting the mechanics of assessment right by clarifying the separate nature, purpose and uses of system, school, classroom, and individual pupil level data would help to reduce the bureaucratic pressure on schools and teachers to allow them to focus on the explicit teaching of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and personal capabilities which employers, parents, politicians, and international bodies value so highly.

The challenge is to garner and access different data for different purposes, ensuring that it is easy to gather, robust and fair, and most importantly that it does not distort the very purposes for which it is being gathered – which is ultimately to improve teaching and learning and to enhance the broad education, well-being and life chances of all young people.



## Freeing time for what matters: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

The sensible non-bureaucratic gathering and analysis of data as diagnostic indicators of potential would free-up teachers to focus on many of the things that cannot be easily measured and counted but which actually count a great deal in terms of helping pupils to make progress – valuable things such as:

- nurturing self-esteem, social skills.
- the ability to engage with and think about real world challenges.
- to assess and manage complex and often conflicting information.
- to solve multi-faceted problems.
- to make informed and responsible and if possible creative decisions.
- to become autonomous and self-motivated learners who can manage their own learning as well as work collaboratively and effectively with others.
- to support pupils in developing the self-belief and confidence to take calculated risks when needed, and.
- communicate their ideas effectively (in oral, written, visual, graphical and moving image format) with passion and skill.

If this type of learning, which prepares young people for the immense challenges they face in the modern world, is what pupils, parents, teachers, politicians, and employers want, **then** we need to uplift the accountability agenda to become more intelligent, more sensitive, less bureaucratic and less focused on narrow numbers, which only provide part of the story.

In this regard, the review of Accountability should consider:

- The loss of learning and development time involved in regard to selection at 10/11.
- The loss of learning and development time involved in the continuation of GCSE examinations, given the shift in the statutory school/education leaving age to 18.
- The merits of a Transition Year such as that successfully pursued in the Republic of Ireland.

However, because assessment and examinations will remain important, if we are going to deliver on the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills agenda we need:

- to stop simply valuing what we currently assess just because it is easily assessable, and start assessing what we really value.
- on-going teaching learning and assessment within schools and our external examinations focus explicitly on the skills that are already clearly outlined in the Northern Ireland Curriculum.
- Employers to find explicit ways of valuing them in recruitment.

This will require different forms of assessment, examining, and recruitment. Great models exist in some subject areas. Great models exist around the world. Assessing 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills is not, however, easy. It is time to stop paying lip service to what we say we value and find more effective ways of 'measuring' what matters.

NEU believes this task can only be undertaken, particularly in the absence of a functioning General Teaching Council, through a **Professional Teachers' Panel**.

## NEU's Accountability Recommendations

We recommend serious consideration of the following:

- i) **At government level** the Minister politicians and the Department want a simple measure that tells them know how the system is performing overall. This could be gathered by means of a **non-intrusive sampling of 10% of the school population** (considered by research to be a sufficient indicator of the whole school cohort) supported by periodic data from international assessment. DE could also **test an anonymised stratified sample of pupils (10%)** to provide indicative system data.

If standardised test data is to be shared with EA, CCMS and ETI this also needs to be done very sensitively.

We need to encourage schools to gather the data diagnostically, i.e., sit the tests around Oct/Nov, to avoid *teaching to the test* at all costs.

**School context and Baseline** data also needs to be in place first so that EA, CCMS and ETI are looking at **value added**, not raw scores.

- ii) **At system support level**, the education authority, the sectoral support bodies and boards of governors, need more reliable insights into the 'added value' that individual schools are making to the young people in their care, so that resource and support needs can be more clearly identified.

This requires **better base-line measures than just free school meals**. There are many examples from around the world of easily gathered baseline data. Some countries, such as New Zealand for

example, categorise schools into decile bands according to a whole range of economic indicators. Mothers' education and productive language on entry to school are considered some of the strongest predictors of future educational potential and performance. The latter would be a very helpful measure for teachers to be aware of.

- iii) **At school level**, principals, teachers, and Boards of Governors need to know about the needs and potential of each year group. There are a wide range of existing **standardised tools many of which are computer based and non-bureaucratic** which schools are already using effectively to assess pupil potential and to target interventions to maximise pupil progress. **Aggregated data from these sources can be shared with and used sensitively by support bodies and inspectors**: to illuminate year group progress and to identify specific school and cohort-related challenges that may need different types of interventionist support.
- iv) **At classroom level**, individual **pupil snapshots** provided to teachers – enhanced by on-going teacher assessment – can be used **to tailor differentiated teaching and learning**; to select appropriate interventions and to provide carefully mediated, constructive feedback to pupils and parents on progress against each pupil's own baseline, while providing explicit advice on next steps in learning.

**On-going teacher assessment** and professional judgement is a key part of this process, supported by moderation as a professional development activity, **to assist teachers in knowing what good looks like and how work can be**

**improved.** However, teacher assessment should not be used as the sole measure of school accountability, which distorts its primary purpose.

The accountability of teachers needs to be balanced by an easy accessibility programme of CPD (Continued Professional Development). Teachers should be enabled and encouraged to reach Master's level qualifications (which is compulsory in countries such as Finland and Estonia), with much more emphasis on teachers taking more control of their own CPD.

## Teacher Professionalism

NEU believes that teachers as professionals must be recognised and valued for their knowledge, expertise and judgement, at the level of the individual pupil and in articulating the role of education in increasing social justice.

Teachers are amongst the key guardians of education. It is vital that teachers' voices are the driving force for educational improvement and development, particularly at a time when the education system faces so many challenges and conflicting pressures.

Perceptions of teaching are key to education policy. Our view of teaching is far wider than a short-term political concept of it as a 'craft'. Our members know that teachers need to innovate, to be able to support children and young people's learning through an ever-changing society. That innovation is driven by a professionalism based on critical and effective self-reflection, professional autonomy and respect for the role.

Teachers need to be valued, as well as paid appropriately as graduate (and post-graduate) professionals. A statement on teacher professionalism is required to underpin emerging arrangements. NEU have provided a draft statement for consideration.

## Workload: What are the problems

Teachers' Workload has long been flagged as an issue in Northern Ireland. The TNC's 2011 Workload Agreement will constitute a separate and distinct review, parallel to that of Accountability. What is clear, however, is that the Accountability system drives workload, that workload is a symptom of the Accountability system.

**One suggestion, however, is for a regular "State of Workforce" Survey, to be commissioned and undertaken, perhaps on a rolling three-year cycle, to consider Job Satisfaction, Motivation, Attitudes, Autonomy, Discretion, Health and Well-Being work-life balance, etc in order to inform the work of the TNC, education employers and the Department of Education.**



## NEU Recommendations:

NEU propose the following recommendations, for consideration within the Review of Accountability.

### i) General Recommendations

- Constitution of an agreed Standing Committee – or **Teachers' Professional Panel**, to agree a Statement on Teacher Professionalism and to determine the Accountability framework and the means of assessment (including assessment of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills) to be adopted for the NI schools system.
- An agreed **Statement on Teachers' Professionalism**.
- An agreed **Statement and flow-chart describing the accountability system** at each level.
- Agreed strategy to promote, provide focus for a broader education including **21<sup>st</sup> century skills**.
- **A consolidated Statutory and contractual framework governing teachers' pay and conditions (Essentially, a Northern Ireland index of TNC policies, DE circulars, statutory and EU directives relevant to teachers' terms and conditions, a web-referenced consolidation of NI Teachers Terms and Conditions).**
- **All employment and staffing policies, and new initiatives at school level to be subject to consultation and agreement with recognised unions with both a Workload Impact Assessments and an Educational Impact Assessment.**

### ii) ETI Reform Recommendations

The process of inspection should be reviewed by an independent party to ensure that all inspectors are well-trained, with current experience in the subjects/phases that they teach, and to ensure that:

- **Inspections won't require additional bureaucracy to that already produced for the school's own use.**
- **Inspectors won't expect to see lessons/books/data in any particular format.**
- **Inspection reports are written in a way that doesn't promote particular ways of working.**

In addition, we recommend that:

- **Pre-Inspection data and preparation review:** Agreed terms of reference for a review of workload burdens of ETI inspection process; Based on agreed pro-forma of a maximum of 8 pages of A4.
- **Work-Life balance to be inspected;** Based on the revised TNC Workload Agreement.
- **PPA arrangements to be inspected,** based on TNC practice guidance on PPA.
- **Full implementation** of all Recommendations (and notably Recommendations 2 and 4) of the Northern Ireland Assembly's Education Committee Inspection Inquiry of 2013.
- Institution of Independent **Professional Arbitration Panel** as the endpoint of the ETI's Complaints system.

**iii) Examination pressures:** Reducing examination and test accountability pressures to accommodate more time for learning and less time-wastage on unnecessary 'staging posts'. Recommendations may include:

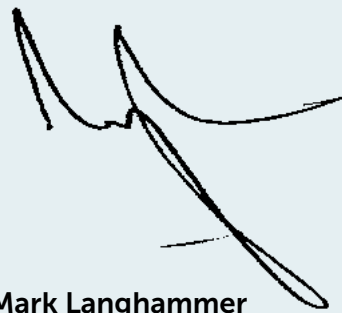
- a) Finding 'space' to promote 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills.
- b) Reviewing the volume of high-stakes tests and examinations, notably at age 10/11 (selection for post-primary transfer) and at 16 (GCSEs being no longer a terminal stage).
- c) Promoting the option of a Transition Years analogous to that in the Republic of Ireland.

#### iv) Workload Recommendations

- a) **Workload Agreement 2011 Review:** The Review of the 2011 Workload Agreement will run parallel to the Review of Accountability. This may retain much of the current Workload Agreement but could helpfully focus on how it should be embedded, culturally, within schools. In effect, this contains a statutory and contractual requirement to ensure the work/life balance of teachers and the principal. In practice, this may mean:
  - Addressing workload, and the causes of workload (see at Introduction, p1).
  - A publicity campaign aimed at the teaching workforce, Governors etc.
  - A training programme on the necessity for reasonable workloads, work-life balance and the measures contained in the Workload Agreement.
  - Further embedding of the 2020 agreement on Time Budgets.
  - The school calendar will be published by the end of the summer term to include an agreed limit to "August Days" within the 195 maxima.

- Directed time calendar to be subject to consultation and agreement with teachers at the school and subject to early consideration by the Joint Consultative Committee at the school.
  - Changes to the school calendar and timetable by consultation and agreement and where there are sound educational reasons for doing so.
  - A statutory maximum class size.
  - Guaranteed leadership and management time on the timetable for teachers with leadership and management responsibilities:
  - Further embedding, as per the 2020 agreement, of a minimum 10% guaranteed planning, preparation and assessment time for all teachers with a timetabled teaching commitment
  - No requirement on teachers to carry out routine administrative or clerical tasks.
- b) **Working Time Directive:** Is confirmed by the 2020 Agreement as 48 hours in education (regardless of 'Brexit')
  - c) **Applying the "Educational Value" test** to all school procedures, especially accountability procedures: To be agreed by the **Teachers' Professional Panel**.
  - d) Agreeing a framework for and applying a **Workload Impact Assessment** and an **Educational Impact Assessment** to all new initiatives and all existing school procedure
  - e) A **comprehensive strategy for CPD on workload**
    - That leadership qualifications/ training includes managing workload and well-being and maintaining standards/improving teaching and learning without excessive paperwork

- That ITT and CPD for teachers includes reflection on workload as well as time-management strategies; and builds on the recognition that new teachers will need to plan extensively in the beginning but supports them to develop quicker ways of planning, as well as moving from individual planning to collaborative
  - That mentors/coaches in school are given adequate time off-timetable for coaching and mentoring, and for preparation and follow-up
- iv) 'Policing' Arrangements
- **"State of Workforce" Survey:** A 3 yearly, rolling, Workforce Survey to inform the TNC (amongst others) on Job Satisfaction, Motivation, attitudes, Autonomy, Discretion, Health and Well-Being work-life balance, etc. This could be similar to, or linked with, the OECD's TALIS survey.
  - **Joint Consultative Committees:** Institute JCC's in each large school to monitor workload or Work-Life balance on a whole school basis.
  - A **protocol for Government policy implementation:** Building on the immediate task of managing New Initiatives, Government should commit to a process of policy development that ensures schools have sufficient 'lead-in' time, with all guidance etc available in schools, to any change of policy or practice.
  - Subject to the considerations of the TNC Review on Teachers' Health and Well-Being, a **Health and well-being requirement** such as the NICE guidance at <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng13/chapter/Recommendations>), essentially that all schools are required to make health and well-being a priority for staff and pupils; and that leaders are supported with training and guidance to do that. Further, that governors/school leadership are encouraged to carry out regular staff surveys of workload and well-being, and to act on the results.



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