Education for the future: principles for curriculum and assessment

The National Curriculum was last reformed in 2014, with the new specification GCSE 9-1 grades rolled out from 2017. In primary school, learners are formally assessed at four separate points: Reception Baseline, Phonics Check, Multiple Times Table Check, and KS2 Sats. In secondary school, students have no external exams until age 16 when they typically take between 7 and 9 GCSEs with the average pupil taking 22 exams lasting 33 hours.

The toll on young people's mental health

Eight in ten (80%) primary school teachers agree that current assessments contribute to increased mental health problems for young people, with **26%** strongly agreeing. In secondary, it is slightly lower with **six in ten** (63%) agreeing, and **15%** strongly agreeing.

A curriculum too full for flexibility

A squeeze on classroom time is felt by teachers: **68%** agree with the statement that they don't explore student interests due to curriculum content pressure. Each year when we ask if teachers are on track to finish the curriculum, **1 in 4** primary school teachers say there is a good chance that they won't finish, with **5%** reporting that they definitely won't. In secondary this figure is smaller, with just over **1 in 10** saying there is a good chance they won't finish.

The future of assessment

Teachers are relatively risk-averse when it comes to changing exam formats; when asked if they want 'on demand' exams – a change that would see the end to the 'summer exam' season, **60%** of teachers said no they wanted ALL subjects to be assessed at fixed points. Attitudes to change also depend significantly on subject, e.g. language, science and maths teachers are more in favour of linear exams; art, humanities and English teachers prefer modular.

Technology in assessments

One in four secondary school teachers would like a move to digital exams in the next ten years; and around **half** of teachers would like to see assessments with AI capabilities, such as adaptive testing, being used. That is not to say there aren't challenges with digital exams. Over **two-thirds** (68%) are concerned about the expense of buying enough laptops and hardware and **half** are worried that digital exams would exacerbate the digital divide.

Which of the following would you like to see incorporated into assessments in the next 10 years?

	Primary (N=1,468)	Secondary (N=3,292)
Adaptive, personalised testing	52%	52%
On-demand testing –	25%	39%
Virtual assessment with remote invigilation	17%	27%
Coursework or project-based assessments	36%	30%
Onscreen assessment (rather than on paper)	39%	44%
Collaborative assessment (teamwork)	28%	19%
Assessment of life and social emotional skills	32%	23%
Virtual reality and immersive tech	27%	17%
Digital badge certification to recognise skills	24%	26%
Gamification	10%	8%
None of the above	12%	14%

Question answered by 4,760 teachers on 30/03/2023 (results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics)