

Introduction

The Welsh Government consulted on proposals to strengthen teacher assessment arrangements (Teacher Assessment: Strengthening arrangements to improve reliability, consistency and confidence) from December 2014 to March 2015. The proposals included strengthening cluster moderation and the introduction of an external verification programme.

A key outcome of this consultation was the announcement of a national programme, commencing in summer 2015, to provide external verification of mathematics and science in year 1, with the focus moving in year 2, to: English/Welsh 2nd Language in English medium schools; and Welsh/English in Welsh medium schools.

The contract to manage the verification process was awarded to a partnership consisting of the four regional consortia, ADEW and CDSM Interactive Solutions. The 'Partnership' jointly managed and implemented the programme in conjunction with school leaders and subject specialists.

The key focus of the programme was to strengthen the accuracy and consistency of teacher assessment through high quality feedback to teachers, head teachers and all key stakeholders. The Welsh Government and the 'Partnership' consider the programme a step towards rebuilding confidence in the system.

The Programme

A number of key tasks were undertaken, which were to:

- Develop common processes and procedures for the Verification process, including common templates to be used by all verifiers and Lead Verifiers.
- Deliver a nationally consistent training programme for all Lead Verifiers and Verifiers
- Develop and implement a school sampling methodology, in order to undertake visits to 10% of the schools in Wales.
- Develop a national process to deal with any disagreements in judgements
- Provide key information to selected schools about the process and the school visit
- Establish Quality Assurance measures to ensure agreed processes were followed and reports were completed as per national guidance
- Commission an external independent review of the programme
- Provide all materials and resources bilingually.

Verifier Allocation

Each consortium appointed a Lead Verifier to be responsible for a team of verifiers and to oversee the verification process in a different consortium area to their own.

- Lead Verifier for CSC, from EAS
- Lead Verifier for EAS from CSC
- Lead Verifier for ERW from GwE
- Lead Verifier for GwE from ERW.

The majority of verifiers were practising headteachers / subject leaders from schools within the consortium of the lead verifier. To strengthen the credibility of the programme, team members undertook a proportion of visits in a different consortium area to their own and the main one to which they were allocated.

Year 1 – Visit Summary

A total of 55 verifiers were deployed to 149 schools. Of these schools:

- 71 were English medium KS2 settings
- 35 were Welsh medium KS2 settings
- 28 were English medium KS3 settings
- 15 were Welsh medium KS3 settings

In primary schools verification focused on both mathematics and science. Secondary schools were selected for either mathematics (22) or science (21).

As part of the programme verifiers were required to look at learner profiles submitted to cluster moderation events and the work of randomly selected pupils.

Year 1 - Actions

There were important lessons to be learned from year 1 of the programme. These have been used to further develop the verification programme for Year 2 – 2015-16.

The initial draft report (July 2015) identified tasks that needed to be undertaken by the consortia, during the autumn term 2015, to enable them to consistently support their schools and clusters, in strengthening and developing teacher assessment arrangements. This resulted in the publication of the following guidance documentation:

- A brief guide to assessment in schools
- Moderating teacher assessment Guidance for schools and clusters 2015/2016

- Moderating teacher assessment Subject specific guidance for schools and clusters 2015/2016.

Year 1 – Findings Summary

- In many instances verifiers agreed with the judgements of schools. However, there was variance between key stages and subjects. They also found that the quality of evidence used to support teacher assessment was variable. In the best examples, pupils' work represented full curriculum coverage and teacher assessment had sufficient detail to support the levels awarded. However, in both primary and secondary schools across Wales, overall the work of a few pupils had insufficient evidence for the verifier to be able to agree the level.

Year 2 - Programme

As part of the contract there were a number of planned changes to the delivery of the programme of year 2. These included

- A change of subject focus to: Welsh, English and Welsh 2nd Language
- An increase in sample size to 15% of schools at each key stage
- The implementation of a small proportion (10%) of visits to cluster moderation meetings.

In light of lessons learnt from the delivery of the programme in year 1, the Partnership Board recommended to the WG Contract Board:

- An increase in the proportion of cluster visits to 20%, with the school visit sample reduced accordingly to 10%, which in effect remained the same as year 1.

This was agreed and subsequently implemented.

Year 2 – Visit Summary

It must be stated at the outset that comparison with the previous year is not possible due to the change in the subjects being verified.

A total of 59 verifiers were deployed to 154 schools. Verifiers were recruited from staff in schools by the consortia, following common guidelines. Where it was not possible to recruit school based staff a small number of staff, with the necessary expertise, were recruited from consortium school improvement teams.

Of the schools:

- 88 were English medium KS2 settings
- 42 were Welsh medium KS2 settings

- 16 were English medium KS3 settings
- 8 were Welsh medium KS3 settings

Of the clusters:

- 16 were English medium - English
- 14 were English medium – Welsh 2nd Language
- 7 were Welsh medium – Welsh
- 6 were Welsh medium – English

In all schools verification focused on one subject which was randomly selected for the individual school, but balanced according to the proportion of settings in Wales. As part of the programme verifiers were required to look at learner profiles submitted to cluster moderation events and the work of three randomly selected pupils.

Year 2 – Main Initial Findings

Cluster Moderation

- The organisation of cluster meetings has improved. Nearly all meetings are chaired by a headteacher or senior leader and are managed effectively, with dates agreed well in advance.
- A local authority / consortium representative attended the majority of cluster meetings visited. In most cases this was to fulfil the Local Authority's statutory responsibilities in relation to teacher assessment.
- The consortia guidance for schools to use an individual learner's book, rather than selected samples of work, provided participants with a broader range of evidence on which to base their judgement. However, there were still inconsistencies in the application of this new approach.
- In a minority of instances, there was variation in the use of teacher commentary, both within and between consortia. In a few cases this resulted in insufficient information being available to support a best-fit judgement.
- Clusters employ a range of strategies to make evidence for oracy and reading available. Many schools employ technical solutions to share audio / video evidence, including the use of QR (Quick Response) codes. A few clusters, used facilities to upload evidence to a website before the meeting. These systems improved the range of primary evidence available in the meetings. However, not all the evidence presented at cluster meetings was sufficient in both range and quality to support accurate judgements for both oracy, and to a lesser extent reading.

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- In a few cases insufficient time was allocated to enable the moderation of all profiles for each school in the cluster.
- There is evidence that there is increased challenge from primary to secondary colleagues, particularly in relation to work at Level 5 and in the quality of the commentary.
- Teachers' commentary does not always provide the context for the activity or identify how the pupil has demonstrated the characteristics of the level awarded.
- Whilst there is a statutory requirement for schools to implement the determinations and decisions of the school moderation cluster group, in a very few instances where there is disagreement, there is no evidence available to confirm subsequent compliance.
- A very few headteachers commented on the need for an independent view where disagreement occurs.
- Nearly all clusters provide a general written feedback report. Most of these reports include recommendations for the whole cluster, however only a minority provide detailed feedback to individual schools.

School Verification

In year 2 of the programme, verifiers identified improved sufficiency in the evidence used to support teacher assessment within individual schools. However, variation still exists between individual schools. In the best examples, the range of evidence provided to justify a level is supported by teacher annotation. This often consists of day-to-day teacher comments and feedback written in the learner's book, which is sufficiently detailed to fully support the level awarded.

In most instances the verifier agreed with the judgements of the school. However in both primary and secondary schools a very few profiles have insufficient evidence for the verifier to be able to agree the level. In a few schools there was insufficient range and quality of evidence to support the judgements for oracy, and to a lesser extent reading.

In nearly all the schools verified, best-fit principles were applied effectively.

Next Steps

- Provide feedback to schools, professional associations, local authorities and the consortia, by: (Sept 2016)
- In the light of any lessons learned from 2016 programme, support the consortia in reviewing their "Moderating teacher assessment Guidance for schools and clusters 2015/2016", and associated subject specific guidance, in (Nov 2016)

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- Complete the final report to Welsh Government (Dec 2016)
- Complete exemplification materials (Dec 2016)
- Develop an outline plan for year 3 of the programme – 2017-18 (Dec 2016)

There are important lessons to be learned from the first two years of the programme. These will be used to further develop the verification programme for Year 3 – 2017.