



Key Stage 2 (KS2) Writing Moderation: Evaluation of the 2011/12 Interim Arrangements

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Introduction and Background

In response to the 2011 Bew review of Key Stage 2 (KS2) testing, assessment and accountability, the Government announced it will make moderated teacher assessment of writing at KS2 statutory in 2013, alongside the new, externally marked test of grammar punctuation and spelling. In 2012, non-statutory interim arrangements for the assessment of KS2 writing were put in place. Pupils' writing was assessed by teachers, informed by a test. Teachers' judgements in a minimum of 15% of schools (per local authority) were subject to external moderation.

The moderation process was designed to be flexible and minimise the burden for schools and, as far as possible to reflect existing Key Stage 1 (KS1) assessments. It was overseen by the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) in the summer of 2012 and the DfE commissioned NatCen Social research, through the CAYT Research Centre¹, to undertake an evaluation of the process.

Surveys of LA moderation managers; moderators; headteachers and Y6 lead teachers were undertaken during June and July 2012. The aims of the evaluation were to explore the impact of the 2012 KS2 writing moderation arrangements on a representative sample of local authority (LA) moderation managers, moderators and schools to explore if the new process is effective and minimises the burden on schools.

Key Findings

- Overall, the new moderation process appears to have been successful.
- Schools' confidence in their moderators was very high – 97% of headteachers and Year 6 lead teachers were very or fairly confident in them.
- At least 80% of headteachers and Year 6 lead teachers thought there were positive benefits and outcomes as a result of the new moderation process. Many thought it had improved teachers' confidence in assessing writing at Key Stage 2.
- On average each moderator assessed 28.9 pupils' work and visited 3.9 schools, equating to 8 assessments per school. Moderators found that 84% of the judgements they looked at were assessed at the right level by teachers – 10% were too high and 5% too low.

¹ NatCen Social Research have undertaken this work through 'The Centre for Analysis of Youth Transitions' (CAYT) – a DfE funded research centre that brings together leading educationalists and social scientists from the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the Institute of Education, and the National Centre for Social Research.

<http://www.ifs.org.uk/centres/cayt>

- Headteachers and Year 6 lead teachers said they had changed the way they approached their teacher assessments in 2011/12 compared with previous years. The most common changes had been to introduce more, more regular or more thorough internal moderation in the school itself and the introduction of cross school / cluster moderation.
- Schools spent on average 14.1 hours on the moderation process. This was mainly spent on preparatory work (2.2 hours on preparatory training and 5.2 hours on other preparations for the visit). Whilst this may seem a relatively long time, it should be noted that some of the tasks represent general good teacher assessment practice and were not necessarily the result of being selected for a visit.
- Year 6 lead teachers spent on average 4.9 hours on the moderation process compared with 3.1 hours by the senior management team and 2.5 hours by the headteacher.
- The majority of moderation managers (80%) said the quality of reports written by moderators were up to the required standard all of the time and 21% most of the time.
- Only 19% of moderation managers were contacted by schools disagreeing with moderation decisions. On average they dealt with 1.5 disagreements.
- When moderators carried out assessments in schools where National Curriculum writing tests were available (67% of visits), the correlation between these and teacher assessments were high (95% said very or quite correlated).
- The majority of local authority moderation managers (87%) thought the information, guidance and support provided for the Key Stage 2 process was good.
- Nonetheless, they also felt there was scope to improve the information, guidance and support they were given, for example over half felt the need for more timely information (52%).
- Both headteachers and year 6 lead teachers felt the moderation process was a slight burden and typically felt that it was slightly more burdensome than the KS2 writing assessment approach taken in previous years (i.e. externally-marked tests).
- But the majority of stakeholders felt the moderation process took the right amount of time to accommodate and administer: Headteachers (89%); Year 6 lead teachers (88%) and moderators (96%) agreed.
- Most schools made sufficient preparations for the moderation, with 97% making an appropriate space available, and 98% preparing a list of initial teacher assessments.
- Nearly half (44%) of moderator managers felt that the standardisation exercise alone did not identify which moderators would be effective and credible as it required potential moderators to assess only one piece of work, rather than a range (as they would be asked to do in the actual moderation process). However, LAs had been advised that the standardisation exercise should be used as one part of their wider recruitment processes, and was never intended to be the only competency check of moderators; it was designed to be used alongside other checks, such as interviews.
- 91% of moderators were *always* able to look at a range of work that covered Year 6 classes in the school and 94% said that it *always* covered pupils with a range of abilities. In contrast, only 43% of moderators felt that they *always* had a broad enough range of work to evidence teachers' judgments (50% said they usually did).

Methodology

Data was collected through a postal survey of headteachers and Y6 lead teachers; a telephone survey of LA moderation managers and a postal survey of moderators. All the fieldwork took place in June and July 2012.

Every moderation manager in every LA in England (152) was sent a questionnaire. In total responses were received from 73%. On average, LAs each employed 10 moderators and a total of 509 completed questionnaires were received from moderators (an estimated 33% response rate). 2138 schools were in the 15% sample of schools surveyed and 41% of headteachers and 41% of Year 6 lead teachers in these schools responded.

Findings

Moderator recruitment and experience

Moderators were recruited by moderation managers using advertising in schools (29%), head hunting people with a specific background (19%) and asking schools to nominate potential moderators (17%).

Most moderation managers (88%) did not have problems recruiting. Of the 22% that did, the most common problems were difficulties with the standardisation exercise (i.e. candidates did not pass as expected), a lack of interest in being a moderator and teachers having to take time off school to take part in the recruitment activities.

LAs reported that 84% of their moderators were current (67%) or ex-primary school teachers (17%) with LA advisory staff forming the next largest category (14%). Fewer than half a per cent of moderators said they were not qualified teachers and 43% were current Y6 teachers. Over one third (34%) had worked as moderators before.

Overall, 81% of moderators passed the standardisation exercise. Pass rates varied and were lowest for those moderation managers who put forward larger numbers of candidates (67% pass rate for 15+ candidates). Of those who passed the standardisation exercise the majority found it 'fairly easy' (65%) or 'very easy' (14%). The majority (97%) of moderation managers found it 'very easy' or 'fairly easy' to administer.

Nearly half of moderation managers (44%) thought that the standardisation exercises alone did not identify the best moderators. The most common reason was because the exercise was based on the assessment of just one pupil's work. This view was echoed by moderators themselves. Over half (55%) thought the standardisation exercise should be based on a range of work.

Quality assurance of moderators

A large proportion of managers (83%) used other methods, besides the standardisation exercise, to assure the quality of their moderators. This included additional training and face to face support and supervision in schools.

In 69% of local authorities, moderators worked in pairs – though it was not always explicitly stated that it was done for quality assurance purposes.

Information, guidance and training

On the whole, moderation managers thought that the information, guidance and support provided was very good or fairly good (87%) but 83% thought there was some scope for improvement. The main issue appeared to be timeliness, with 80% of managers saying information arrived too late.

Moderators were also generally positive, 92% thought the support provided by the DfE was 'very' or 'fairly useful' and 98% agreed that the support provided by the LA was 'very' or 'fairly useful'.

The majority of year 6 lead teachers felt the information guidance and support provided by the DfE, was 'good' or 'fairly good' (89%). Headteachers were less positive with 68% rating it 'good' or 'fairly good' and nearly a quarter (23%) feeling that it was 'not very good', or 'not at all good'. More timely information was the most frequent suggestion for improvement.

The majority of moderation managers ran training sessions with their team of moderators (62%), with levelling guidance being the most frequently cited content for these sessions. Moderators received an average of six hours training on how to carry out moderation visits.

More typically, schools received training materials rather than face to face training. Just under a third of managers said they had run training days, workshops or sessions for schools (32%).

The moderation process

On average, local authorities carried out moderation visits to 25 schools, typically using a team of 10 moderators. The average number of schools visited by each moderator was reported as 2.8. This varied according to size of authority – moderators in large authorities carried out more school visits than those in smaller authorities.

Moderators themselves reported visiting an average of 3.9 schools. On average they moderated 28.9 pupils' writing.

Most schools followed the guidance documents and prepared for the moderator visit with at least 95% reporting that they: ensured there was an appropriate space available; prepared an initial list of teacher assessments; provided access to Y6 exercise books and other work and made sure Y6 teachers and senior management were available for discussion. Eighty four per cent of head teachers reported that internally marked writing test results were available for the moderator to look at and 10% had externally marked test results available.

Moderator guidance stated explicitly that portfolios were not required for the moderator visit. Nevertheless, 37% of schools collected portfolios of pupil's work.

Some moderators (28%) reported that schools were not always fully prepared. Amongst these, 33% thought the range of evidence provided for assessments was insufficient.

When asked about the different kinds of evidence available, moderators reported always being able to look at a range of work from all Year 6 classes in the school (91%); and from pupils with a range of abilities (94%). Less widely available was written work in a range of forms for different purposes and audiences (52% said always available) and a broad enough range of work to justify teachers' judgements (43% said always available). Nearly a quarter of moderators mentioned 'other' evidence they would have liked to have seen and more comprehensive evidence was most commonly stated here.

Moderators carried out pupil selection in different ways in schools, with over half of moderators purposely selecting pupils to cover a range of levels (51%), and over one third selecting borderline cases, and expanding it to include pupils more securely in the middle of a level (36%).

Perceptions of burden and challenge

Head and Year 6 lead teachers were asked to rate how burdensome the moderation process was, compared with assessing KS2 writing in previous years. They scored the moderation process as a moderate burden (mean of 4.4 and 4.6 out of 10 respectively; median 4). However, they also felt that it was more burdensome than the previous approach taken to writing KS2 writing assessments (mean of 4.0 and 3.9 respectively).

It is not clear whether this difference is due to a genuine increase in burden or unfamiliarity of the process. But most headteachers, Year 6 lead teachers and moderators felt the process took about the right time to accommodate and administer (89%, 88% and 96% respectively).

Nearly a third of moderation managers felt that differences between the KS2 writing assessment moderation process and the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and KS1 assessments had caused them some difficulty (29%). Relationship problems with schools were the most commonly reported problem (e.g. due to short timescale for moderation process or schools being moderated for both KS2 and KS1).

Costs and time spent on the moderation process

On average, moderation managers spent 88.8 hours on the moderation process. 13.4 hours of this time was spent familiarising themselves with the new process - given that this is the first year that KS2 writing assessments have been externally moderated, much of this time would not be required in future years.

Moderators spent an average of 5.9 hours per school visit (1.3 hours preparation, 3.4 hours in the school, and 1.2 hours reporting back). This is in addition to 6 hours they spent training.

Schools spent an average of 14.1 hours on the moderation process. This was mainly spent on preparatory work (2.2 hours on preparatory training and 5.2 hours on other preparations for the visit). Whilst this may seem a relatively long time, it should be noted that some of the tasks represent general good teacher assessment practice and were not necessarily the result of being selected for a visit. The moderation visit itself was relatively undemanding - schools only spent a modest amount of time on this (2.2 hours).

The average cost of the moderation process for LAs was £13,207. Larger authorities spent more than smaller authorities. The biggest expenditures were moderator pay and expenses (average of £5,628). Recruiting and training moderators cost £2,632 on average and supply staff to cover moderator absences £2,749.

The majority of moderation managers felt that moderation process costs would be the same next year (61%). Some 29% thought costs would rise, mainly because they intend to moderate more schools.

Sixty-two per cent of schools incurred monetary expenses as a result of the moderation process, spending an average of £330. This was spent mainly on wages, meals and refreshments for supply staff and meetings with other schools about the process.

Fifty-six per cent of moderators also incurred expenses. These were almost exclusively travel expenses and the average incurred was £93.

Moderation outcomes, reports and appeals

Moderators each assessed 28.9 pupils' work on average. Considering all the teacher assessments they looked at, they judged that 84% of the assessments had been made at the right level, with 10% being judged to be too high, and 5% too low.

The most common reason for changing assessments was that insufficient evidence was provided to support the assessment (55%), for example, the class work not supporting the level awarded. The second most common reason was incorrect use of levelling criteria by teachers (24%).

In terms of teacher bias, 62% of moderators said they felt that teachers were 'sometimes' or 'usually' influenced by their personal feelings about particular pupils during assessments. Length (54%) and presentation (53%) of written work 'sometimes' or 'usually' influenced teachers in moderators' opinions. But they were less likely to think that teachers were 'sometimes' or 'usually' influenced by whether pupils spoke English as an additional language (37%) or their gender (13%).

Where moderators carried out visits in schools where National Curriculum writing tests results were available (67%), a very high proportion (95%) of moderators thought these results and the teacher assessments were 'very' or 'quite strongly' correlated. Ninety seven per cent of moderators thought teacher judgements across schools were 'very' or 'quite' consistent.

Eighty per cent of moderation managers said that moderators' reports to the LA were up to the required standard. Only 19% of moderation managers had been contacted by schools that disagreed with

moderator decisions, on average by 1.5 schools. In two thirds of instances the managers agreed with the moderators' decisions. Disagreements were usually resolved through undertaking further moderation or reviewing decisions with headteachers.

Perceptions of impact on school practice

Many headteachers (44%) and Year 6 lead teachers (51%) said that the writing moderation process had changed the way they approached teacher assessments in 2011/12 compared with previous years. The most common changes being more /more regular /more thorough internal moderation and the introduction of cross school /cluster moderation.

The majority of headteachers (80%) and Year 6 lead teachers (82%) thought there had been some benefits or positive outcomes as a result of the moderation process. The most commonly reported benefits were increased confidence in teachers' ability to make judgments, the assessments they arrived at and their overall confidence in the process. Two thirds of Year 6 lead teachers also thought they would be more confident in assessing KS2 writing in the future (66%).

At least 97% of headteachers and Year 6 lead teachers were 'very' or 'fairly' confident in their moderator's ability.

Suggested improvements from respondents

All the survey groups made suggestions for improvements – 87% of moderation managers; 52% of moderators and one third of teachers (37% of Heads and 34% of Year 6 leads).

The most common themes from all stakeholders were to revise the timings of the visits (suggestions included providing a longer time frame for the visits; longer notice periods; moving moderation to a quieter time of year) and to ensure the information and guidance was clear and consistent from the outset and provided in one go. Suggestions were also made about improving the guidance and giving more details about the evidence that schools would be required to provide.

Conclusions

Overall, the KS2 moderation process appears to have been a success. There is room for improvement and suggestions have been put forward by moderation managers, moderators, headteachers and Year 6 lead teachers.

Moderation managers suggest that the standardisation exercise more closely mirrors actual practice and should be based on a range of work. This will improve the process for identifying good moderators and make sure that potentially good candidates are not rejected for incorrectly assessing one example of work.

All respondents agreed that timeliness, as well as improvements in the information, guidance and support would be helpful. Moderation managers thought there was room for improvement in the information that they received, more so than headteachers and Y6 lead teachers.

Moderators would like schools to provide a greater range of work to support teachers' judgements.

Considering this was a new process, the burden on schools does not appear to be too great, with most participants agreeing that the moderation process took about the right time to accommodate and administer.

Many school heads and teachers thought there were positive benefits and that staff were now more confident about writing assessments.

Additional Information

The full report can be accessed at <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/>
Further information about this research can be obtained from
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The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

The Centre for Analysis of Youth Transitions (CAYT) is an independent research centre with funding from the Department for Education. It is a partnership between leading researchers from the Institute of Education, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, and the National Centre for Social Research. <http://www.ifs.org.uk/centres/cayt>