



Standards
& Testing
Agency

Standards and Testing Agency business plan

1 April 2019 to 31 March 2024

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1 Standards and Testing Agency

Purpose

The Standards and Testing Agency (STA) is an executive agency of the Department for Education (DfE). Our primary purpose is to provide an effective and robust testing, assessment and moderation system to measure and monitor pupils' progress and attainment between reception and the end of key stage 2 (KS2).

Year group	Statutory assessment	Description
Reception	Early years foundation stage profile (EYFSP)	The EYFSP summarises and describes pupil attainment at the end of the early years foundation stage. EYFSP data is published at national and local authority (LA) level. Individual pupil data is used to understand individual education and development needs and to support transition to year 1.
Reception	Reception baseline assessment (RBA)	From autumn 2020, a new RBA is scheduled to be introduced to provide the starting point for the KS2 progress measure. This short practitioner-administered assessment will provide the basis for a new way of measuring the progress primary schools make with their pupils. Unlike the current progress measure, this will give schools credit for the important work they do with their pupils between reception and year 2. A national voluntary pilot will commence in autumn 2019.
Year 1	Phonics screening check	A light-touch statutory screening check administered by teachers, the check assesses a pupil's phonics decoding ability, a key element of reading, to identify pupils needing additional support. School-level data is not published. National and LA level results are published. Pupils who do not meet the required standard in year 1 are required to take the check again in year 2.
Year 2	End of key stage 1 (KS1) national curriculum assessments	Teacher assessment judgements are made using the teacher assessment frameworks. The judgements are

Year group	Statutory assessment	Description
		<p>reported in mathematics, English reading (each informed by statutory, internally-marked national curriculum tests), science and English writing.</p> <p>These teacher assessments are externally moderated by LAs, who sample 25% of schools each year. The assessments form the current baseline for measuring progress made between key stages 1 and 2. The proportions of pupils achieving the expected standard in English reading, English writing, mathematics and science are published at national and LA level, but not at school level.</p> <p>The English grammar, punctuation and spelling test at the end of KS1 is optional.</p> <p>We intend to make KS1 assessments non-statutory from 2023, subject to the successful introduction of the RBA.</p>
Year 4	Multiplication tables check (MTC)	<p>A new check for this key mathematical skill for pupils at the end of year 4 will be introduced from 2020, with a national voluntary rollout for all schools with year 4 pupils during April to June 2019. This is the first digital assessment delivered by STA for primary-aged pupils.</p>
Year 6	End of KS2 national curriculum assessments	<p>Pupils take externally marked tests in mathematics, English reading, and English grammar, punctuation and spelling. From 2019, teacher assessment judgements at KS2 will only be made in English writing and science. English writing teacher assessment is moderated by LAs in a similar way to KS1.</p> <p>The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading and mathematics (based on test data) and writing (based on teacher assessment judgements) are published at national, LA and school level. The results are used to calculate the progress that pupils make between key stages 1 and 2.</p>

Year group	Statutory assessment	Description
Year 6	Science sampling tests	These are conducted every two years, with the most recent tests administered in June 2018. We plan to run the next sampling test in June 2020. A sample of approximately 9,500 pupils across 1,900 schools is randomly selected to sit science tests, based on 5 pupils from each school. Results are reported as national data only and individual results are not returned to schools or pupils. This assessment provides an understanding of national performance in science over time.

We are responsible for the development and delivery of national curriculum tests and assessments in England, under statutory instruments, on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education. We are regulated by Ofqual for our work on national curriculum assessments.

In carrying out these functions, we:

- develop high quality and rigorous national curriculum tests and assessments in line with government policy
- undertake operational delivery of national curriculum tests and assessments (including printing, test administration, distribution, provision of systems, marking, data capture and investigations of maladministration)
- set and maintain test standards, including standards related to marking
- produce test administration guidance and exemplification materials for KS1 and KS2 English writing teacher assessments
- support the moderation of teacher assessment judgements of pupil performance, so the data it generates is reliable and can be used for national statistics
- develop pre-key stage standards for pupils working below the level of the national curriculum assessments

STA's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) signs off the content of the national curriculum tests, and sets and maintains test standards. The CEO acts independently of DfE and ministers to ensure confidence in the validity of test outcomes.

In addition to the development and delivery of national curriculum assessments and testing in England, we are also responsible for:

- supporting schools to develop their own assessment practice
- managing the development of the professional skills tests for prospective teachers

- managing the general qualifications logistics service provided to exam centres and examiners, which collects exam scripts from schools and delivers them to awarding organisations for marking

Vision

The work of DfE lies at the heart of the government’s drive to provide world-class education, training and care for everyone, whatever their background.

STA will support DfE’s vision by developing and delivering high-quality statutory assessments that provide reliable and valid data on the achievements of individual pupils and schools.

For STA staff, our internal vision statement is:

‘The agency will strive to achieve excellence, consistently delivering high-quality assessments efficiently, which promote fairness and trust in the assessment system.’

Values

The Civil Service is an integral part of the government of the United Kingdom. It supports the government in developing and implementing its policies, and in delivering public services. Civil servants are accountable to ministers, who in turn are accountable to Parliament.

As civil servants, our staff are appointed on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. Staff are expected to carry out their role with dedication and a commitment to the Civil Service and its core values—integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality. In this code:

- ‘integrity’ is putting the obligations of public service above your own personal interests
- ‘honesty’ is being truthful and open
- ‘objectivity’ is basing your advice and decisions on rigorous analysis of the evidence
- ‘impartiality’ is acting solely according to the merits of the case and serving equally well governments of different political persuasions

For STA staff, our cultural values are:

- STA’s workplace should be welcoming, inclusive and organised, with all staff supporting and collaborating with one another
- all STA staff should be valued and respected, allowing for a workplace that is happy and professional

- every staff member should be committed to our work and be flexible in meeting collective aims, while the agency should ensure all within it are empowered to maximise their expertise
- STA leaders should be supportive, visible and approachable—they should be receptive to all views, treating staff fairly and consistently
- STA leaders should be passionate about the agency’s work, and inspire staff to engage and develop

We asked our staff what values are important to them and what the agency should be striving to achieve. Their responses are detailed below.



Objectives

As of April 2019, we are responsible for:

- the development and operational delivery of KS1 tests in English reading, mathematics and the optional English grammar, punctuation and spelling test
- the development and operational delivery of the phonics screening check
- the development and operational delivery of KS2 tests in English reading, mathematics and English grammar, punctuation and spelling
- collecting statutory teacher assessment data for KS2
- ensuring the consistency and accuracy of data generated by teacher assessments for KS1 and KS2 English writing through the monitoring and scrutiny of LAs
- the development and operational delivery of the KS2 science sampling tests
- the development of the professional skills tests for prospective teachers

- developing the MTC to be introduced as a statutory assessment in 2020
- developing the RBA to form the baseline for measuring progress in primary school, scheduled to be introduced from 2020
- providing a logistics service for the collection of test materials from centres and delivery to examiners for general qualifications, functional skills and other accreditations
- developing and implementing assessment policy for schools, including assessment arrangements for pupils working below the standard of the national curriculum tests

STA publishes annual assessment and reporting arrangements which contain the statutory guidance on all aspects of national curriculum assessments and reporting arrangements for [EYFSP](#)¹, [KS1](#)² and [KS2](#)³. They cover topics such as:

- administering tests or checks
- access arrangements
- teacher assessment
- reporting pupils' achievements to parents

The standard-maintenance process includes the review of statistical evidence to ensure that standards that were set in the first year of a new assessment are maintained for future years. This is carried out in the presence of Ofqual and teacher association representatives.

The scale of our operational delivery includes:

- oversight of the printing and distribution of KS1 and KS2 test materials to schools
- collection of KS2 test scripts from approximately 16,500 participating schools
- recruitment, training and ongoing quality assurance of a pool of approximately 4,000 markers for KS2 tests
- ensuring over 3.6 million KS2 test script components are marked in a 3-week period to deliver return of results on schedule
- management of the successful collection of over 30 million general qualification exam scripts from approximately 5,800 exam centres across England

¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/2019-early-years-foundation-stage-assessment-and-reporting-arrangements-ara

² www.gov.uk/government/publications/2019-key-stage-1-assessment-and-reporting-arrangements-ara

³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/2019-key-stage-2-assessment-and-reporting-arrangements-ara

Priorities for 2019 and beyond

Test operations services programme

In October 2015, we started the procurement process to select a supplier to deliver a new model of test operations services. The procurement was conducted through a competitive dialogue process due to the complexity and risk level of the services, and to allow new suppliers to come forward.

The contract was awarded to Capita Business Services (“Capita”) in July 2018. It will be in place for the delivery of the 2020 to 2024 KS1 and KS2 tests in English and mathematics, and the phonics screening check. The contract includes an option to extend for a further test cycle.

The contract brings together the following services, currently delivered through a number of separate contracts:

- print
- collation
- logistics
- marking
- data
- helpline
- systems

This should enable more effective and integrated operational delivery.

STA staff are working with Capita to prepare for the delivery of the first test cycle. Set-up for delivery will be completed by 31 August 2019. The work with Capita on set-up, STA’s transition to a different operating model and exit arrangements for existing supplier contracts are being managed together as a programme. This enables appropriate oversight of this change.

Reforms to the primary assessment system

This primary assessment consultation ran from March to June 2017 and the government published its [response](#)⁴ in September 2017. STA has been delivering the assessment policies set out in this consultation response:

- in 2018, schools used a new teacher assessment framework to provide writing judgements at KS1 and KS2

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/primary-assessment-in-england

- from 2019, primary schools will no longer have to submit teacher assessment judgements in reading or mathematics at KS2
- in the summer of 2019, schools will pilot the new MTC, ahead of national roll-out in the summer of 2020
- in the autumn of 2019, schools will pilot the new RBA, ahead of national roll-out in the autumn of 2020

The government also carried out a consultation on the recommendations of the Rochford Review. We published our [response](#)⁵ to that consultation in September 2017. STA has been implementing the assessment policies set out in the response by:

- removing P scales 5-8 and replacing them with new pre-key stage standards, for first use in the 2018/19 academic year
- piloting the 7 aspects of engagement approach as the means of assessing pupils currently working at P scales 1-4, for first use in the 2020/21 academic year

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/primary-school-pupil-assessment-rochford-review-recommendations

2 Organisational design

The agency consists of 3 divisions:

- Assessment Services
- Assessment Development
- Assessment Delivery

Assessment Services Division is responsible for:

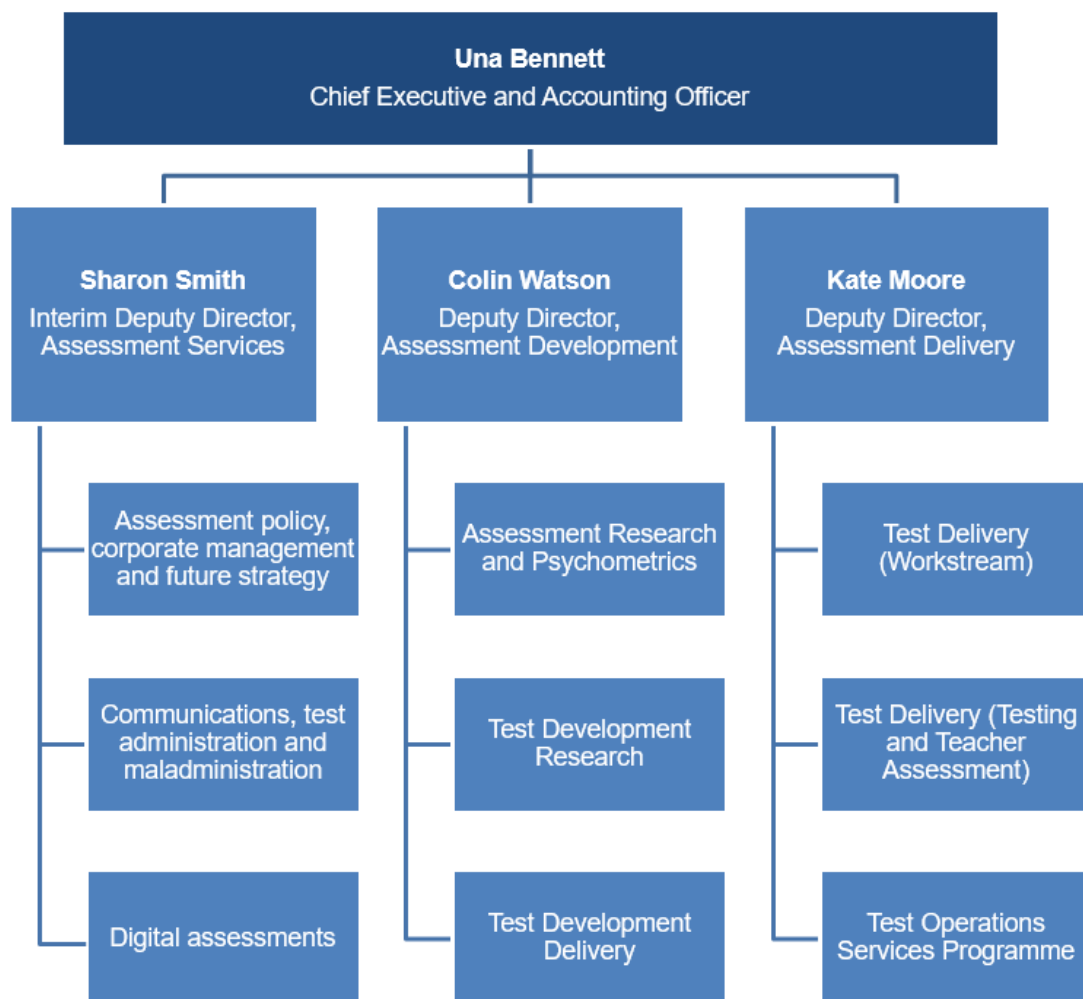
- leading the development and delivery of digital assessments
- the agency's corporate management and future strategy
- leading the development and implementation of government policy on assessment
- supporting schools to administer national curriculum tests and checks
- dealing with maladministration
- communications with the agency's stakeholders and customers

Assessment Development Division is responsible for developing high-quality and rigorous national curriculum assessments, in line with ministerial policy, and the development of the professional skills tests.

Assessment Delivery Division is responsible for undertaking operational delivery of tests and assessments, including:

- transition to a new operating model including supplier management
- supporting schools and stakeholders to deliver assessments
- implementing arrangements for moderation of teacher assessments
- managing the general qualification logistics service

Management structure



People

Our people are the key to our success. They are skilled, energetic, motivated and dedicated to delivery. They care about the agency's objectives and believe in what they do.

We aim to be a high-performing organisation, driven by a top-quality workforce and recognised as an employer of choice. We are striving to build a constructive, collaborative and corporate culture across the agency in which our people:

- fully engage with our organisational values and act as advocates for the agency
- understand and support the delivery of our strategy
- are flexible and dynamic, with the will to take on new assignments and challenges
- take responsibility for their own professional development

In return, we will ensure that our people:

- are managed by strong line managers who are recruited and developed to have the skills and interest to lead others

- are rewarded fairly
- have flexible working opportunities to balance business and personal needs
- are accountable for what they deliver in a workplace where performance is routinely reviewed relative to peers, with consequences for both good and poor performers

To operate our workforce strategy during 2019 and beyond, and in line with DfE's strategic workforce plan, we will focus on:

- creating an inclusive workforce
- targeted recruitment activity for hard-to-fill roles
- further development of resource pools and collaborative recruitment particularly on sites outside London
- development programmes and talent management frameworks for leaders and managers
- better identification of business-critical posts and appropriate succession plans
- use of DfE's new performance management system which reviews staff monthly in a lighter-touch way than the twice-yearly system used previously

3 Delivery

Programmes of work

Assessment policy	
Assessment policy	<p>STA is responsible for developing assessment policy in schools in line with ministerial priorities. The focus for 2019/20 is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deliver the policies outlined in the consultation response on the long-term future of primary assessment in England • continue to engage the teaching profession and other stakeholders on the primary assessment reform programme • support schools with their increased assessment freedoms
Key stage 1	
English and mathematics tests	<p>The statutory KS1 national curriculum tests are designed to help inform the final teacher assessment judgements reported for each pupil at the end of KS1. Since the 2016/17 academic year, STA has been responsible for developing and delivering tests to reflect the national curriculum introduced in 2014. An optional test in English grammar, punctuation and spelling at the end of KS1 is also made available.</p>
English, mathematics and science teacher assessment and moderation	<p>Teacher assessment is used to assess pupils at the end of KS1 in English writing, reading, mathematics and science. It is also used to assess pre-key stage standards. Teachers use the teacher assessment frameworks. Support is in the form of the development and publication of the teacher assessment frameworks, teacher assessment guidance, data submission guidance and exemplification materials. STA is responsible for ensuring the consistency and accuracy of data generated by teacher assessment judgements. We do this by scrutinising practice in LAs and undertaking external moderation visits to a sample of LAs to ensure compliance with statutory responsibilities. Since 2017, STA has provided training and assessment exercises for local authority moderators in English writing to provide assurance and ensure a consistent national standard.</p>
Phonics screening check	<p>The phonics screening check determines whether pupils have met an age-appropriate standard in phonic decoding by the end of year 1. Pupils in year 2 must also take the check if they do not meet the required standard in year 1 or have not taken it before. STA is responsible for developing and delivering the check.</p>

Key stage 2	
English and mathematics tests	<p>Statutory tests in mathematics, English reading and English grammar, punctuation and spelling are administered to pupils at the end of KS2 in May each year. The results are used in the school accountability framework. STA is responsible for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing tests for the current and future years • organising our resources, and the services of our suppliers, in preparation for the 2019 and 2020 test cycles and beyond <p>This involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • writing test questions • undertaking review by experts (including teachers) • trialling test questions • constructing test papers • printing, collating and delivering test materials • developing and managing systems • managing test administration (including access arrangements, communicating with schools, external marking, managing a review service, investigating maladministration, data management and returning results to schools)
Science sampling tests	<p>Science sampling tests monitor national standards in science at the end of KS2. The tests are conducted every two years with the last tests taking place in June 2018. STA is responsible for developing and delivering them.</p>
Teacher assessment	<p>Teacher assessment is used to assess pupils at the end of KS2. Teachers use the teacher assessment frameworks. STA is responsible for ensuring the consistency and accuracy of data generated by teacher assessment judgements. STA supports schools with statutory teacher assessment in English writing. In addition, there is statutory teacher assessment for pre-key stage. Support is in the form of the development and publication of the teacher assessment frameworks, teacher assessment guidance, data submission guidance and exemplification materials.</p>
Moderation of teacher assessment	<p>STA is responsible for supporting and ensuring the implementation of the arrangements to moderate teacher assessments. We do this by monitoring practice in LAs and undertaking external moderation visits to a sample of LAs. This is to ensure compliance with statutory responsibilities. Since 2017, STA has provided training and assessment exercises for local authority moderators in English writing to provide assurance and ensure a consistent national standard.</p>

New test development	
RBA and MTC	<p>In response to the primary assessment consultation and the government's manifesto commitments, we are in the process of delivering 2 new assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a new RBA is being developed for scheduled introduction in the autumn of 2020, following a large-scale pilot in the 2019/20 academic year • a new MTC for pupils at the end of year 4 will be introduced from 2020, with a national voluntary rollout for all schools with year 4 pupils during April to June 2019
General qualifications logistics	
General qualifications logistics	<p>STA provides a traceable exam scripts dispatch service for exam centres via Parcelforce Worldwide, known as the yellow label service. This delivers unmarked exam scripts, coursework and controlled assessments for externally assessed general qualifications, functional skills and other eligible accredited qualifications to examiners.</p>
Professional skills tests for prospective teachers	
Skills tests	<p>The skills tests were established to assess the skills and knowledge required by prospective teachers to carry out their wider professional role effectively. STA is responsible for developing the tests.</p>

4 Monitoring and performance

Key performance indicators

STA has 5 key performance indicators which we use to measure our areas of delivery. These indicators are at the centre of a performance framework which is used to monitor our performance.

Area of delivery	Measure
Provision of KS2 results	99.9% of schools assessing pupils must receive a complete set of test results data, containing a correct test result (notwithstanding any marking or process reviews) for every test taken by a pupil, by an agreed date.
Return of KS2 test scripts to schools	99.9% of schools assessing pupils must receive a complete set of test scripts marked on screen through the script return website.
Helpline service	85% of all calls received must be resolved at first contact.
Web-based systems to support schools	The school-facing portal must be available 24 hours a day with an availability of at least 99.8%.
General qualifications logistics	99% of all consignments must be collected from centres and delivered for marking.

Assurance

The agency is independently regulated by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual). Ofqual has a duty to keep all aspects of national testing and assessment arrangements under review. It will report to the Secretary of State if it appears that there is, or is likely to be, a significant failing in the arrangements. Ofqual has 2 statutory objectives:

- to promote national test and assessment standards
- to promote public confidence in national curriculum tests and assessments

STA receives internal audit and assurance services from the Government Internal Audit Agency. The Government Internal Audit Agency provides independent assurance to the chief executive on the adequacy of the agency framework of governance, risk management and control. It does this by measuring the agency's effectiveness in achieving its agreed objectives.

STA also works closely with the Infrastructure and Projects Authority on major change programmes, where appropriate.

5 Risk management

The agency has an established risk management framework which is maintained and overseen by our audit and risk committee. The framework is based on the [government risk management framework](#)⁶ and [HM Treasury's 'Orange Book: Management of risk—Principles and Concepts'](#)⁷, both of which comprise recognised sets of principles and processes for managing risk.

Risk appetite is the threshold, set by the agency, which is unacceptable to go beyond. It may be expressed using more than one threshold depending on strategic priorities and objectives. Due to the high reputational damage that could be caused by failure of the testing programme, the agency's risk appetite is low (risk averse).

STA manages risk using the following principles:

- risks must be managed at the lowest appropriate level within the agency's established governance arrangements
- risks must be systematically identified and assessed by each governance level
- risks must be clearly articulated to demonstrate the potential cause of a risk and the proposed measures to address it
- responsibility for overseeing risk, countermeasures and contingency plans should be allocated to named individuals
- risks are managed within the defined risk appetite

Types of risk

STA manages 2 levels of risk.

Agency-level risk management

Operational delivery risks include programme, project or business-as-usual risks that would jeopardise STA's ability to successfully develop and deliver testing and assessment to meet performance measures.

Corporate risks include resourcing, delivery support arrangements and strategies.

⁶ www.gov.uk/government/publications/management-of-risk-in-government-framework

⁷ www.gov.uk/government/publications/orange-book

Departmental-level risk management

DfE has a number of strategic risks that, if realised, will have a major effect, potentially causing irreparable damage to the reputation of the department, ministers or HM government. STA is responsible for one of these risks: 'that the primary school testing system does not work'.

STA risk and security committee

STA's risk and security committee has been strengthened to support its scrutiny of risk management within the agency. It meets monthly and comprises STA's senior management team and an independent representative from a related policy area with a standing invitation to Government Internal Audit Agency. The committee's role is to:

- challenge, scrutinise and interrogate STA risks and issues through open discussion at regular intervals, improving agency-wide risk management
- discuss and agree the reliability, suitability and integrity of controls
- approve the management, closure and escalation of risks to the executive management board (EMB)
- ensure arrangements meet the requirements of internal audits and support the implementation of the departmental strategic risk management framework

Matters for internal escalation are reported to STA's EMB, chaired by the CEO. From EMB, matters are then escalated to the STA strategic performance review, chaired by the Director General, Early Years and Schools Group, or the departmental audit and risk committee, as appropriate. Matters for external escalation are reported to Ofqual, as appropriate.

6 Budget information

For the 2019-20 financial year, STA plans to spend:

Area of spend	Amount
Administration budget	£3.27m
Programme budget	£50.06m
Capital budget	£1.90m
Total	£55.23m



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