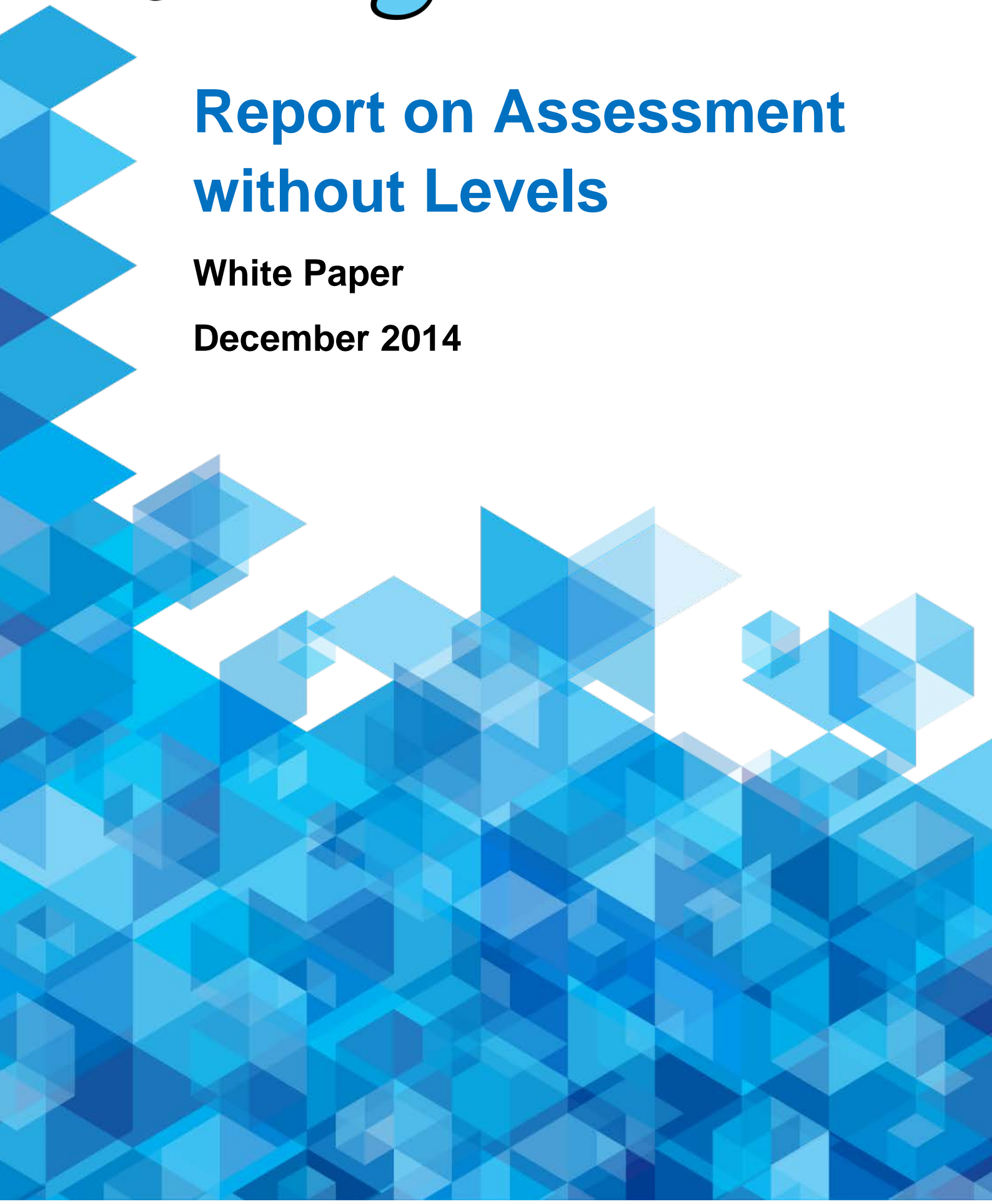




Report on Assessment without Levels

White Paper

December 2014



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Executive Summary

- This white paper draws on the experiences and findings of EDLounge when conducting research into assessment without levels
- Assessment without levels signifies the arrival of the new, internally devised, personalised system of assessment to be developed by each school
- Many schools are in the development phase of implementing a new assessment method
- Ensuring pathways of progression are clear for pupils and parents is a top priority
- An easy way for data to be recorded is essential, as is the need for this data to be attached to concrete meaning which demonstrates exactly what skills a pupil has developed and what needs to be done to progress
- A follow up report will be released in 2015 to analyse the progress of assessment without levels

Introduction

Background

The National Curriculum was introduced in 1988 to ensure that all pupils across the country were receiving the same standard of education. The curriculum specified the knowledge and skills pupils should attain at the end of each Key Stage in order to adequately prepare pupils for life after they have completed secondary education.

A review of the National Curriculum in 1993 replaced the original 10-level assessment scale with 8-level descriptors for each subject. This criterion for assessing pupils' progress allowed comparisons to be made between pupils of the same age. The eight-level scales served to measure pupils against national expectations for each curriculum subject and to create targets for key stage attainment on a 'best-fit' basis.

There is a widespread and justified belief amongst teachers and assessors that the assessment goalposts have not stopped moving since about 1985

Murphy & Wilmut, *Educational Assessment in an Era of Reform*, 2002

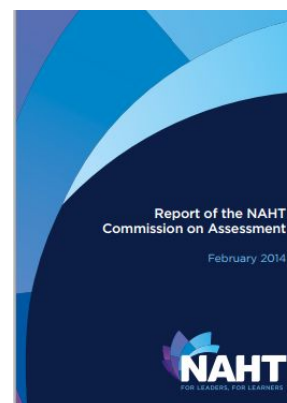
Levels served to provide a national reference point, allowing comparison to be made between not only pupils but also schools.

In order to create an effective method of assessment, we need to re-evaluate the reasons for assessment and evaluate how we can achieve these outcomes more effectively. Secondly, we need to identify the weaknesses that existed in assessment levels to ensure these flaws are not repeated in a new assessment framework.

The main reasons for assessing include:

- Ensuring pupils leave school prepared for life after education
- Ensuring teachers are effectively providing a high level of education
- To provide a comparison between schools and authorities
- Demonstration of a school's accountability for the outcome of pupils

After the announcement of the removal of levels, the [NAHT](#) released a report recommending methods of good practice and important aspects to consider when devising an assessment system. These recommendations highlighted the importance of assessing pupils based on objective criteria as opposed to a system based on ranking one pupil against another through norm-referenced assessment and grading based on relative performance. Criterion based master statements or ipsative assessments are therefore preferable to incorporate into an assessment framework.



Assessment Reforms

September 1st2014 signified the end to National Curriculum levels and the arrival of the new, internally devised, personalised system of assessment to be developed by each school.

This has been a time of major educational reform with the introduction of a new National Curriculum and a more rigorous GCSE framework, with grades to change A*-G to 9-1 to come into effect from 2017.

As with any major educational reform, the dissolution of assessment levels has been a large source of anxiety for the teaching profession, with very little time to put changes into place. The then secretary of state for education, Michael Gove, announced the changes to assessment in June 2013 at the NCTL 'Seizing Success' conference. Gove announced the decision to remove national curriculum levels to measure pupils' progress with no standard replacement to come into effect. Schools would therefore be given total autonomy in devising and implementing their method of assessment as they saw fit.

At this stage, it is clear that many schools are still in the initial stages of devising and developing their own methods for assessment. This being the case, this white paper will cover suggested methods and ideas to consider when devising or tweaking your own system.

This report will start by looking at the new focus for assessment and evaluate the reasons behind the removal of National Curriculum levels. By doing this we can analyse how their removal can inform our adoption of a new assessment strategy; ideas for which will be discussed in section three, looking at ways we can approach 'life after levels'. Finally, we will look at the *EDLounge* method, evaluating our new software to see how it can enhance a school's new assessment framework.

We all know the importance of an effective assessment framework. When done well, assessment serves to drive pupils' learning, evaluate learning outcomes, school effectiveness and accountability along with improving teacher performance.

Now we look to evaluate the current progress of the formation of new assessment methods through our own personal experiences. We will also be releasing a follow-up report in 2015, evaluating the progress of the new assessment frameworks.

Assessment without Levels

'The programmes of study within the new National Curriculum (NC) set out expectations at the end of each key stage, and all maintained schools will be free to develop a curriculum relevant to their pupils that teaches this content. The curriculum must include an assessment system which enables schools to check what pupils have learned and whether they are on track to meet expectations at the end of the key stage, and to report regularly to parents.'

National curriculum and assessment from September 2014: information for schools

The Department for Education (DfE) issued a statement referring to the level system of assessment as 'complicated', particularly for parents to understand. The adoption of unofficial sub-levels has caused even greater confusion. This raises an important question to consider when devising a new method: how should assessment information be reported to parents? We will be looking at this important question in the *EDLounge* method later in this document.

Although levels were introduced to standardise assessment, it is clear that following this structure has been inconsistent and quite vague in interpretation. As Hargreaves questions in *Assessment for Learning and Teacher Learning Communities: UK teachers' experiences*, 'What does a level 3, 4, 5 mean different pupils can do? The number covers such a wide range of attainment that it has little meaning when comparing pupils who may 'know' different things and have a variety of skills' (Hargreaves, 2013).

This addresses the problem inherent in the level system – even using solely as a basis of comparison between two pupils it is flawed; those two pupils may be labelled with the same 'level', yet have completely differing skills and understanding of a specific subject. Moving on from this question is the equally troubling introduction of sub-levels. What, for example, is the difference between a 3b and a 3c? Each National Curriculum level contained 3 sub-levels – a C to mean the pupil is working at the lower end of that particular level, a B to mean they are working comfortably in that level and an A to mean they are at the top of that level – this unofficial scale caused more confusion rather than clarification.

The New Focus

These reforms have largely focused upon giving schools greater autonomy and giving them the freedom and flexibility to devise their own methods of formative assessment.

One major reason for the removal of this levelled assessment is the introduction of the new National Curriculum. It is clear that the 8-level system of assessment will not correspond with the new National Curriculum, thus making the old level system incompatible.

Although levels clearly have their drawbacks, there has been a somewhat reluctant approach for some schools to adopt a new system. This is evidenced by the fact that some schools have identified their intention to stick with the current use of levels to measure attainment. Although a continued use of levels may be suitable for a transition period, the largest problem with this approach is that the old levels have no bearing on the new National Curriculum. It is therefore advisable that the use of levels is withdrawn as quickly as possible and new methods are put in place.

Being able to demonstrate progress through comprehensive data that have concrete meaning and proactively applied to teaching is of prime importance. Similarly, having a system that provides clear paths for improvement by setting attainable targets needs to be in place.

One foreseen complication is the correlation of assessment practices between one school and another. Assessment was standardised with National Curriculum levels so that a pupil could move to a different school for whatever reason and a basis of comparison could still be established. Similarly, between primary and secondary schools, transition is easier when there is a universal benchmark to compare prior and current attainment between schools.

It is the issue of standardisation that appears to be causing the most concern. For its faults, the level system did provide a national framework to ensure consistency in the reporting of a child's progress; however, the question is whether this was susceptible to manipulation by staff. In 2011, [The Telegraph](#) reported on three separate studies that uncovered evidence of falsifying marks in order to inflate school results.

The NAHT report advised feeder primary schools and secondary schools to work together when devising their methods for assessment without levels so that there may be a logical correlation when the transition takes place.

On speaking to a variety of schools, one popular option is to line up KS2 and KS3 assessment with the GCSE assessment framework, ensuring pupil progress flows in a consistent manner throughout a pupil's time in the education system, working towards individualised and personalised goals and

achievement statements from baseline tests, mock exams and ipsative assessment.

Whatever system is put into place, it needs to be not only easy for teachers to understand but also comprehensive for students and their parents. The system of simply giving a level or grade has often been criticised for its inability to provide a sound meaning of what a pupil needs to do in order to progress.

Providing clear guidelines to ensure pathways to progression is vital for the pupil and teachers alike. If assessment is transparent to each individual pupil, they are able to achieve greater autonomy by having a clear route of progression, developing their skills of self-evaluation and reflection, knowing the skills they need to develop to progress and achieve their full potential. Similarly, parents are also able to understand their child's learning pathways.

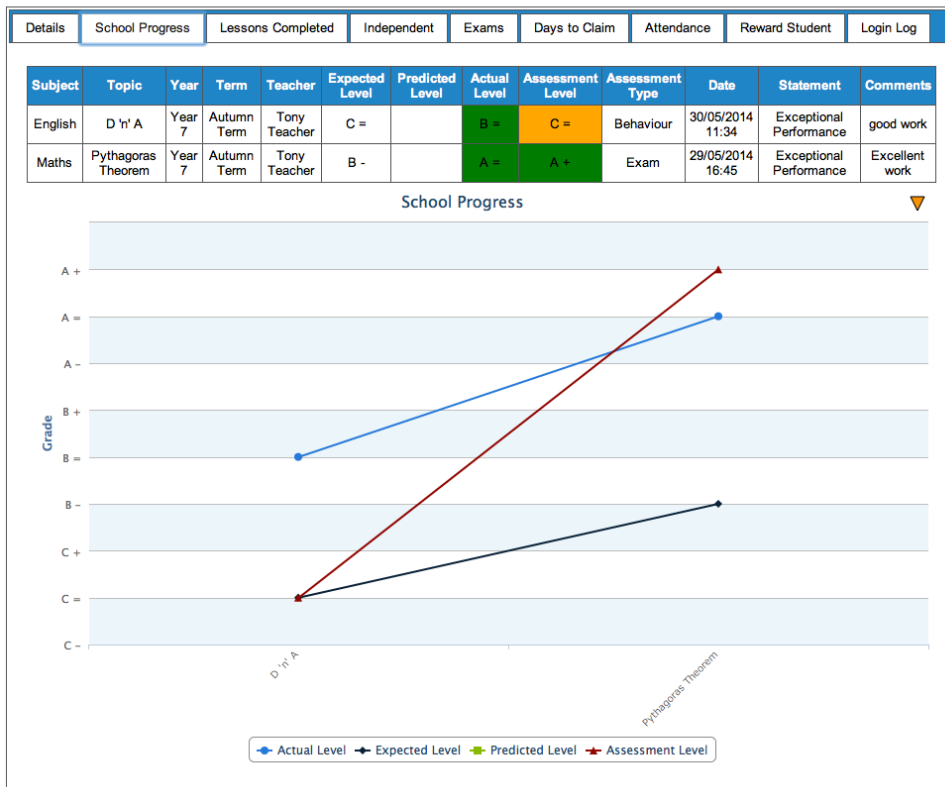
The EDLounge Method

By taking on board recommendations from the DfE, *EDLounge* has created assessment software that gives a school:

1. A facility to have a range of assessment types to recognise the opportunities arising from the new curriculum and the removal of levels
2. The ability to have a bespoke system to meet the needs of specific assessment policies
3. Comprehensive new tracking that provides schools leaders with data to enable progress to be monitored across year groups and over time

Student Report: Jamie Simpson

[Print this page](#)



When devising the EDLounge assessment software, we continually kept in mind the importance of tracking all types of formative and summative assessment in order to create a well-rounded profile of each pupil. We also knew that this information needed to be available at a glance and be comprehensible for teachers, pupils and parents alike.

Assessment should be clear to pupils, pupils can in turn gain greater autonomy by having a clear route of progression, developing their skills of self-evaluation

and reflection, knowing the skills they need to develop to progress and attain their full potential and achieving targets. By having a series of learning ladders, master statements, student expectation statements, a bespoke building tool, school objectives and comment banks within the EDLounge Assessment software, pupils can view their attainment in a specific subject and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses in order to progress. The *learning ladders* within the system allow a step-by-step learning pathway for a child, parent or department to follow. The students can reference this in and out of lessons. There is a flight path for each student from each learning ladder and master statement.

The *EDLounge master statements* outline key areas of development within a specific subject, providing clear guidelines for progression. Pupils are also able to view their effort, behaviour, attainment, strengths and weaknesses and are encouraged to set their own targets. This encouragement of self-evaluation is highly beneficial to a pupil as they are able to gain greater independence and autonomy to take control of their own learning journey.

The *curriculum builder* feature enables the entry of topic objectives, graded objective expectations and school expectations, along with the ability to reward pupils for meeting or exceeding expectations.

The self-evaluation encouraged through the *student expectations* statements enables pupils to have greater control over their own progress and work actively work towards acquiring the next set of skills or improvement of knowledge to progress.

Teachers are able to input grades, comments, strengths, weaknesses and feedback from teacher observations and class work so that diagnostic, formative and summative feedback can all be collated and easily accessible. Students can also tick if they can achieve, exceed or are on task, which can then be identified to the parents and teachers.

Tracking, monitoring and evaluating progress are key for any assessment method, along with ensuring that this information is used in a way that illuminates clear progression routes.

The student profile that is generated identifies a pupil's strengths, weaknesses, effort and behaviour and compares it against the expectations for that pupil, enabling teachers to identify if that particular pupil is on track to meet the end of Key Stage expectations along with school or department objectives. This allows information about a child's progression and attainment to be easily understood and accessed by the child and allowing you to explain what this means.

A large problem with national curriculum levels was the confusion caused to parents. As mentioned earlier in this report, the question of how to report to parents needs to be a top priority in the formation of an assessment plan.

Level data provided no clear routes to progress and failed to explain what skills a child had acquired and what that child had actually learnt, leaving a parent with quantitative data that had little qualitative data to make it meaningful.

All information is stored in one place, allowing you to see a pupil's progress by lesson, topic or subject. Teachers are then able to include high quality written feedback that can be printed to use internally, and for discussions with pupils and their parents.

Conclusion

The next few months will signify the transition period, a time to implement and adapt methods based on on-going experiences, chopping and changing as necessary as we go along. This is the time to be flexible in order to identify what works and what does not and enables constant assessment of the effectiveness of your method.

Ensuring the new method of assessment does not simply capture progress but drives it forward is essential to the development of each pupil. This involves measuring for meaning so that it achieves the primary goals of assessment; to drive student attainment and prepare them for life beyond primary and secondary education; to improve the quality of teaching; and to demonstrate a school's accountability.

With the facility to incorporate different types of formative assessment with the intention of building up a well-rounded profile of each individual, with grades that don't simply label a child, but offer clear routes of progression.

Ensuring a system is clear for all involved including teaching staff, pupils and parents needs to be the primary objective for new assessment strategies. Moving away from a one-size fits all model, we need to ensure we have put the needs of the pupil at the forefront of the framework. By tracking this information in a system such as the *EDLounge* assessment software, assessment data is easily accessible and presented in a straightforward manner.

Please contact *EDLounge* on 01909 568 338 if you wish to look at our assessment software and to see if it can be suitably fitted into your assessment model.

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