

Teacher Workload Advisory Group's report: *Making data work*

Introduction

This briefing sets out the main findings of the Teacher Workload Advisory Group's report, *Making data work*. The report reaches particularly significant conclusions about the use of pupil performance data in setting performance management targets for teachers and school leaders, as well as the workload implications of the use of data by schools more generally.

Background and context

The NASUWT has continued to challenge the use by schools of crude pupil performance targets as performance management objectives for teachers. The Union's advice and guidance on performance management makes clear that the use of such targets for this purpose is unacceptable.

Objectives of this type fail to reflect the principle that they should relate to matters that are within the complete control of individual teachers if they are to be reasonable and meaningful. In practice, pupils' performance in assessments depends on a range of factors, both internal and external to the school, that are not in teachers' reasonable individual control.

It is also clear that pupil assessments are designed to report the progress and achievement of pupils, not to measure teachers' performance. In any event, all assessments are subject to significant reliability and validity limitations.

For all these reasons, the NASUWT insists that pupil assessment data should not be used to make highly consequential decisions about teachers, such as their ability to access pay progression, or to form definitive judgements about the effectiveness of their professional practice.

The NASUWT has also stressed that the over-collection of assessment data and the ways in which commercial assessment packages are used in schools are not only of questionable educational value but also add to unnecessary and excessive workload burdens for teachers.

In March 2018, the Secretary of State for Education commissioned a follow-up report on the use of data by schools. The purpose of the Teacher Workload Advisory Group, convened to undertake this work, was to build on the outcomes of the first Department for Education (DfE)-commissioned report on data, published in April 2016, and the 2015 report of the Commission on Assessment without Levels. The issues examined by the Group included the burdens associated with typical data practices in schools, as well as the use of this data in performance management. The Group's final report, *Making data work*, was published on 5 November 2018.

Key findings

The report echoes many of the NASUWT's longstanding concerns about the use of data in schools, including its use in teachers' performance management. Specifically, the report confirms that:

- teachers should have goals that are within their control, that are closely tied to actionable behaviours, and that are aspirational and achievable;
- the performance of a single exam class should not be used as a principal measure of teaching quality in a performance management system;
- pay progression 'should never be dependent upon quantitative assessment metrics, such as test results';

- while data based on commercially produced predictions can play a helpful role in informing professional conversations about pupil achievement and the work of teachers, these systems produce ranges of grade estimates and inaccurate grade targets, and should therefore not be treated as accurate targets;
- current practice in using pupil attainment data in teacher performance management systems is often poor;
- research demonstrates that using quantitative metrics to judge teacher performance is difficult since few of the practices that can be codified and measured straightforwardly are highly correlated with teacher quality;
- pupil assessment scores, grades in lesson observations, and scores following book scrutiny are all poor proxies for whether or not somebody is teaching well; and
- if teachers are held to account for things that are largely outside their own control, such as a pupil's test performance or progress based on flight paths, it is not only unfair, but induces high levels of stress and is likely to lead to burnout and ultimately attrition from the profession.

The Group's report confirms that 'data drops' based on summative assessment outcomes, if they happen at all, should not take place more than two or three times per year.

Implications

The DfE has confirmed that it will amend its guidance for schools on performance management to take account of the report's findings. The NASUWT will engage with the Government to ensure that the amended guidance reflects the Group's analysis of these critical areas. Ofsted has also made clear that it will *'continue to ensure that inspectors do not ask to see performance management targets based on assessment data during inspections.'*

The report lends further, highly credible, support to the NASUWT's position that the use of data targets in performance management to deny pay progression to teachers or to call their performance into question is not acceptable. The report should be cited in discussions with schools and employers where necessary to challenge this practice.

Next steps and further support

The NASUWT will produce updated advice and guidance for members on the use of data in schools to take account of the Group's findings.

Members with concerns about any aspect of their performance management, including the use of data, should contact the NASUWT's Member Support Advice Team on 03333 145550 for support and guidance. Calls are free in any inclusive minute package from a landline or mobile phone. Alternatively, support can be obtained by email at advice@mail.nasuwt.org.uk.



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