



# New assessments for key stage 2 science and key stage 3

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**A**fter the removal of the key stage 2 science tests and of the key stage 3 tests in English, mathematics and science, it was proposed that these would be replaced by a national monitoring survey.

A key purpose of a national monitoring survey is to monitor standards in different subjects over time, although they are also frequently used to provide research information about the performance of different groups of pupils, the strengths and weaknesses of pupils in different areas of the curriculum, or relationships between pupil attitudes to different subjects and their attainment in those subjects.

National monitoring surveys are usually designed so there are a large number of different questions covering the whole curriculum, and different groups of pupils take different sub-sets of the questions in paper-based booklets. This means that the tests can provide more information about performance across the whole curriculum than the national curriculum tests, which were limited by the number of questions that any one pupil would find manageable. The paper tests are sometimes supplemented with assessments in other modes, such as speaking and listening tests, practical assessments or group activities, so that the full range of skills can be assessed, rather than only those that can be assessed on paper.

Only a small proportion of the whole

year-group of pupils would normally take the tests, perhaps in the English context about 10 per cent of the cohort in any year, reducing the overall burden of testing on the system. Results would not normally be provided to individual pupils, teachers or schools, reducing the stress caused by the tests.

The current proposal in England is for the national monitoring surveys to be first used formally in 2012, with pilots taking place in 2011 for surveys which follow a new model. It is not yet clear what the new model will look like in England. There will be paper-and-pencil booklets, but it is not yet confirmed if there will be supplementary assessments in addition to those, or if attitude questionnaires will be used to collect information about the context of the



test results. NFER has hosted seminars and written papers discussing the possible options for the surveys at key stage 2 and 3 and making recommendations about how they could be designed.

A first run-through of a survey took place in May this year, when a number of schools sat the key stage 2 science papers that were developed for 2010. This provided the opportunity to try out a sample approach and started to provide some information about how the tests will function in the new context. One key difference will be that the tests are no longer high stakes for the pupils or schools – it will be interesting to see whether this has an impact on results. However, it will be of most interest to see the pilot surveys for 2011, when the style of the new tests will become apparent, and the different information that will become available based on the surveys.

These surveys could provide a new and interesting perspective on what pupils can do in science at the end of the primary phase, and in English, mathematics and science as they come to the end of the lower secondary phase.

## Further information

The NFER papers for options at key stage 2 and 3 are available in the Publications area of the NFER website.

[www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/policy-papers/](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/policy-papers/)