

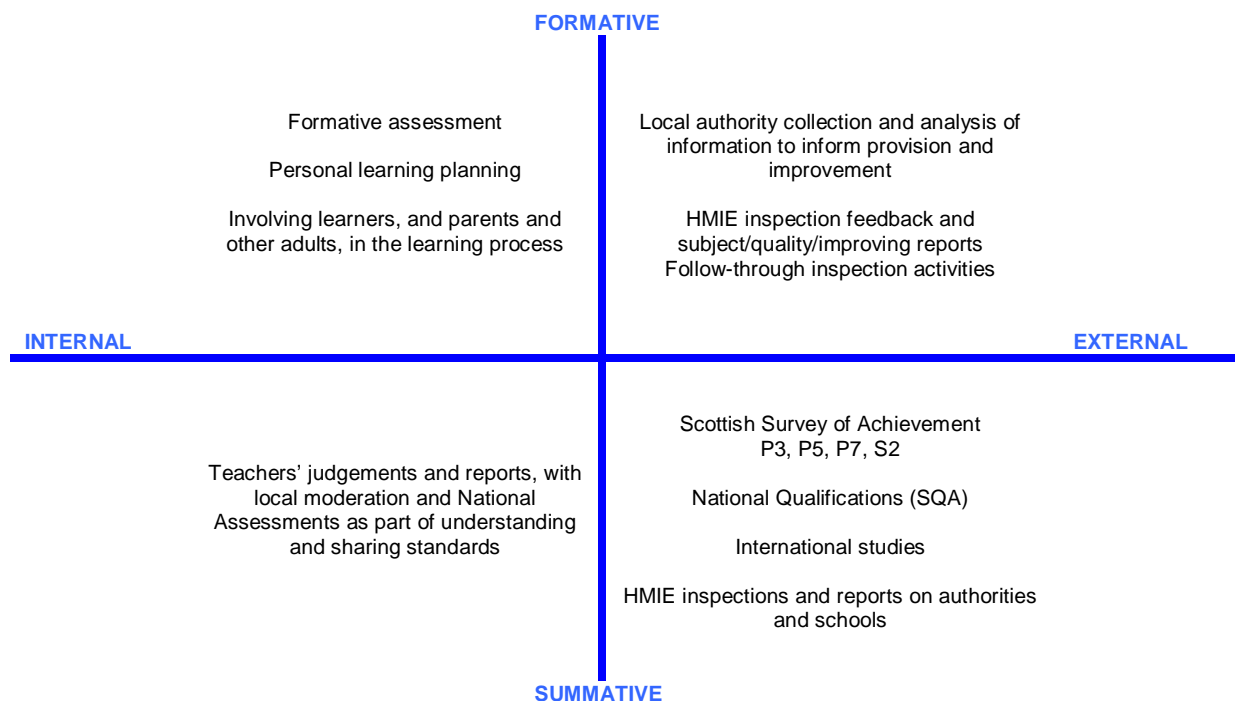
## National Monitoring System in Scotland: making the most of an opportunity

This paper is intended to provide the background to the national monitoring system in Scotland. The seminar presentation will explore how the Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA) has been received by the different partners, in particular teachers and schools, and what the potential benefits are to the education system, beyond simply reporting attainment.

### The national assessment system

Feedback from the *Assessment, Testing and Reporting 3-14: consultation on partnership commitments* within *The National Debate on Education* in Scotland led the way for the development of a 'streamlined and coherent system of assessment' (see Scottish Executive Circular No 02 June 2005).

The following diagram is used to illustrate how each of the various partners in education has an important role to play in generating and using dependable assessment information to inform judgements, choices and decisions about learning, and to inform planning for improvement.



Three main strands of activity are identified as being crucial to the successful implementation of the national assessment system:

1. Assessment to support learning (also known as Formative assessment)
2. Sound quality assurance of teachers' assessments in schools and local authorities (using National Assessments and local moderation)
3. A robust national monitoring system (Scottish Survey of Achievement).

It is the third strand of the system which is the focus for this presentation.

## The Scottish Survey of Achievement

Until 2005, the Scottish Executive gathered information about levels of attainment through the Assessment of Achievement Programme (AAP) using a national sample of pupils, and from local authorities, who in turn gathered it from their schools. Pupils completed National Tests in Reading, Writing and Mathematics to confirm teachers' judgements of attainment at a particular level. This information was used not only for national monitoring purposes, but also to set targets for individual schools. The use of this attainment information for target setting was criticised for creating a negative washback effect as teachers felt under pressure to concentrate on a narrow range of subjects and skills and to 'get children through the tests'.

The introduction of the SSA in 2005 clearly separated national monitoring (external/summative) from classroom-based (internal/formative) assessment. The SSA, held in May and June of each year, monitors the attainment of a representative sample of children across Scotland on a broad range of content and skills over a 4 year rolling programme in the following subjects: English language, Mathematics, Science and Social Subjects. Core skills ie literacy, numeracy, ICT, problem-solving and working together, are assessed each year in the context of the subject in focus. The SSA uses nationally devised written and practical assessments which are externally marked and collects pupil attainment data on each pupil selected to take part in the survey.

Broadly speaking, the objectives of the SSA are to:

- Assess pupils' attainment at P3, P5, P7, S2 stages in particular subjects, at national level and where possible local authority level.
- Assess pupils' attainment in core skills (including numeracy, reading, writing, working with others, problem solving and ICT) at P3, P5, P7, S2 stages at national level and where possible local authority level.
- Gather and report nationally on pupils' and teachers' experience of, and views on, learning and teaching.

Local authorities are asked to support the SSA by encouraging invited schools to participate and may opt to receive a report at authority level if they commit to providing the necessary sample size. Although it is possible to report at local authority level if the sample is sufficiently large, there is no reporting for individual schools or pupils.

A sample of schools is drawn separately from the survey sample and invited to participate in the pre-testing and trialling of assessment tasks. Teachers are given the opportunity to comment on individual tasks and receive a small payment for their participation.

Teachers are nominated by local authorities to participate in task development and moderation of writing and to act as field officers for the practical element of the survey.

Assessment tasks in reading, writing and numeracy used in the SSA are subsequently made available to teachers, downloadable from an electronic assessment bank, to complement their own class-based assessments. These 'National Assessments' replaced the National Tests mentioned above which were developed outwith the national survey system.

### **Bonus or burden?**

While the SSA generates valuable information for policy makers, it is viewed by some as an additional, unwelcome burden with no perceived benefits for those required to organise and administer the assessment tasks.

The presentation will attempt to highlight the potential gains for the individual partners in addition to providing attainment information for Scottish Executive Education Department.

The following questions will be explored:

- How can the SSA help teachers understand and share standards?
- How can the data from the SSA be used to better inform learning and teaching?
- What are the advantages of the SSA over alternative national monitoring systems?