



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority

P scales consultation report

March 2007

QCA/07/3103

Contents

Section 1: Summary of consultation on the mandatory collection of P scales data in 2007	3
Methodology	3
Findings	4
Recommendations.....	8
Section 2: Tables.....	9
Table 1: percentage of responses	9
Table 2: number of respondents by category	9
Table 3: number of 'agree' and 'disagree' responses from different categories of respondents.....	10
Table 4: responses by percentage who 'agree' or 'disagree' by category	11
Appendix	12
Results summary.....	12

Section 1: Summary of consultation on the mandatory collection of P scales data in 2007

In this consultation QCA received 1003 responses and six series of comments via email. 81% of total respondents indicated that they agreed with the proposal to make the collection of P scales data mandatory for 2007. The response rate from some categories of respondents was very low, in particular responses from subject associations and teacher associations. There may be some correlation between those respondents who wanted to vote 'yes' and those who actually voted, as the 'yes' votes came in first (in particular those from Local Authorities).

In general there was a strong similarity in the comments sent in by both those voting 'yes' and those voting 'no'. Positive comments focused on the potential for benchmarking and reporting progress of individual children through P scales data. The greatest anxiety was the concern about the possible inappropriate use of P scales data to construct performance tables.

Methodology

The web-based consultation on the mandatory collection of P scales data in 2007 originally ran for 12 weeks until 29 November 2006. It was then extended until 5 February 2007 to allow governors and teacher and subject associations further time to respond. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed with the proposal to make mandatory the collection of P scales data on children with special educational needs working below level 1 of the national curriculum. To do so respondents were asked to respond 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know'. In addition, respondents were asked to identify themselves by category, as shown in table 2 (page 9), and to send comments if they chose to do so. Five people sent separate comments via email, two of whom also responded to the question but it is unclear whether the three other email respondents participated in the web-based consultation.

As part of the information offered in the consultation, materials explaining the nature of the P scales could be viewed or downloaded from the response screen. The screen also had a link to further QCA/ DfES materials on the P scales.

The results were collated electronically and the results interrogated by fields identified by QCA. The results of this analysis are provided in the tables section of this report (pages 9 - 11) and in the attached appendix.

Comments were trawled by QCA staff and key issues were identified mainly through frequency of occurrence. If comments of a similar nature were stated less than 10 times, only those comments that are of particular significance to the progress of the project are cited. In the findings section, quotations have been selected according to two criteria: firstly comment that was representative of many responses and secondly comment that captured the overall tone of the comments received.

Findings

The statistical findings are provided in the tables section of this report (pages 9 - 11) and the appendix. A total of 1003 responses were received with 601 comments. 81% of all respondents were in favour of the proposal to make the collection of P scales data mandatory from 2007. There were six areas of concern voiced by respondents, regardless of their response to the question posed.

Performance tables

This area generated an overwhelming response both from those voting 'yes' and those voting 'no'.

'Yes, whilst we consider the use of P scales extremely helpful we would not like them to be used as another indicator for league tables.'

'Yes, fervently against any notion of league tables BUT children with SEN should have their progress recognised appropriately and at present the P levels assessments are the best way to do this.'

The latter comment provides the reason why so many respondents were in favour of the proposal. The recognition of progress, the potential for benchmarking individual progress and the progress of groups of pupils within a school were all frequently mentioned.

However, the potential for data to be used in a variety of ways that were not considered helpful or appropriate led some respondents who commented to vote 'no'. They did this even though they already have the data to hand and agree that the reporting of progress of pupils operating below level 1 of the national curriculum should be a meaningful task.

'No, we have been assessing using the p scales for several years now. It would be good to see recognition of those assessments. A 'W' has always been meaningless. ...I would

not want to see those assessments being used for imposed whole school target-setting however. Our children don't work like that.'

'No, P scales are used to describe achievement of SEN students operating below National Curriculum level 1. The Government's own documentation states: The P scales are not designed to be used:

- as a crude performance indicator for making staff or schools accountable for effectiveness*
- as labels to describe pupils*
- as targets for individual pupils. The broad, subject-focused nature of the P scale level descriptors means that they do not make good short-term targets for addressing the individual needs of particular pupils.*

Yet the proposals involve adding the data to Raise online. This implies that they will be used for setting targets and as an indicator of effectiveness.'

Considerable strength of feeling was expressed concerning the use of the P scales data as comparative performance indicators between schools. The comment below illustrates this concern over the use of P scales data in performance tables:

'This is to mis-use the P scales. Many students move both up and down the scales depending on their, often, complex needs. Others may stay on the same scale for ever. The implication that they may be used to set targets is, therefore, most worrying and one which we felt we should make representation about. This is another example of assessment designed for one purpose or set of purposes being used for another, quite different, purposes. The P scales are supposed to allow teachers to better understand the needs and progress of individual students, and to communicate them to one another and to parents. The proposal would see them used to measure the effectiveness of teachers, schools and the education system. They are not suitable for such a use, and will produce mis-information rather than useful data. Further, there will inevitably be a distorting effect on their use for their intended purposes, upon their reliability, and upon the educational practice that underpins them. School leaders are surprised that nothing seems to have been learned about the over use and mis-use of tests in this way.'

Bureaucracy

Many respondents who voted 'no' including teacher associations, and some of those who voted 'yes' expressed concern over the issue of bureaucracy.

'No, Do you take me for a mug? I will have to spend a lot of staff time trying to make my data fit your templates and what will I get back? How is any of this going to be of the slightest use to my children-we already use this data and take part in the Durham project' (A voluntary data collection project where schools obtain feedback on their P scales results).

'Yes, but don't make it complicated. We do not need an army of moderators and overseers to do something we have been doing for 5 years.'

Training

Whilst some 'no' respondents cited the lack of appropriate training on the use of the P scales as a barrier to introducing data collection in 2007, it was the respondents who voted 'yes' who most frequently highlighted this issue.

'Yes, we are in favour of all children's achievements being recorded and recognised, wherever they are based. However, it will be important that DfES/QCA information in the future includes P scales; that there is P scales training at TTA level, and that raise online or other packages include P scales. Training will need to be made available, as well as moderation opportunities.'

'Yes, we have some students who are working below level 1 and using the P scales in mainstream would help us set more effective targets for them. In mainstream, we are not trained to use them and I think we need to be.'

'No, P Scales are already widely used in the area of Special needs. I think it would be better to provide more training for staff on their use as this would focus on more paperwork for staff already overloaded with paperwork in small special schools.'

Moderation

This too generated a high percentage of comments, focusing on the need for common standards across schools.

'Yes, there needs to be some standardisation of assessment whereby children with more complex needs may have their progress monitored and charted.'

'Yes, my only concern is that it must be ensured that there is consistency especially if we are relying on Teacher Assessment.'

'No, there needs to be a common moderation process across the country for this to be worthwhile.'

Progression across all levels

Special schools that voted 'yes' were most likely to raise concerns about the inability of the data capture to accommodate accurately the very uneven attainment profiles of some of their pupils. This applied both across different aspects of learning for the same child and across very different groups of pupils within the same institution.

'Yes, use of P scales within statutory assessment will enable the progress of all children to be recognised and celebrated. However, as a school which has tried to submit values in P scales, care will have to be taken to ensure that children working across both P and national curriculum levels within subjects can be correctly recorded. To date there have been problems with children at the end of Key Stage 2 who may be operating at level 1 or above in for example 'number' while still operating within the P scales in other aspects of mathematics. There is also care needed for children operating at P3 and below who may be operating above this in one aspect.'

Other concerns expressed by more than ten respondents

- Using the P scales as just one part of information gathering:

'No, students' achievement is of more value than academic progress.'

- Using the p scales without distorting the curriculum:

'Yes but children need to learn to make progress, the p scales are not the be all and end all, they are just a measure.'

- Not using the P scales with foundation stage or year one learners:

'I have seen them used in a school with three year olds and there is no doubt the content of the lessons changed because of the P scales. Children this age need a child centred curriculum, not literacy lessons.'

One respondent noted the inappropriate use of the P scales in post-16 units with similar deleterious effects on learning stemming from a complete mismatch between the resulting

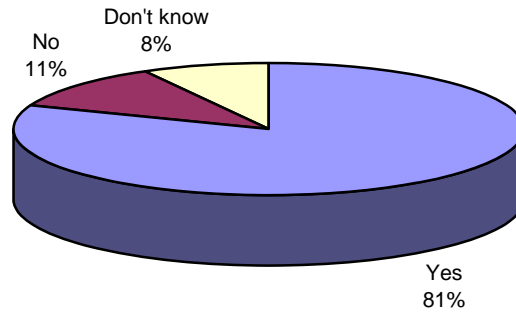
curriculum and the learning and social needs of the child. However, contrary to QCA advice, two responses advocated extending the scope of the P scales to these learners.

Recommendations

1. A clear purpose to the data collection project should be articulated and actively communicated.
2. A need has been identified by many respondents for further training on the use of the P scales and data analysis.
3. Bureaucracy, on the other hand, has been identified as a major concern by many respondents. It is likely that existing materials on the P scales can be better promoted and that these would meet both recommendations 2 and 3.
4. It will be necessary to ensure that national expectations about the purpose, nature and limitations of the P scales are set out by Government and understood by schools.

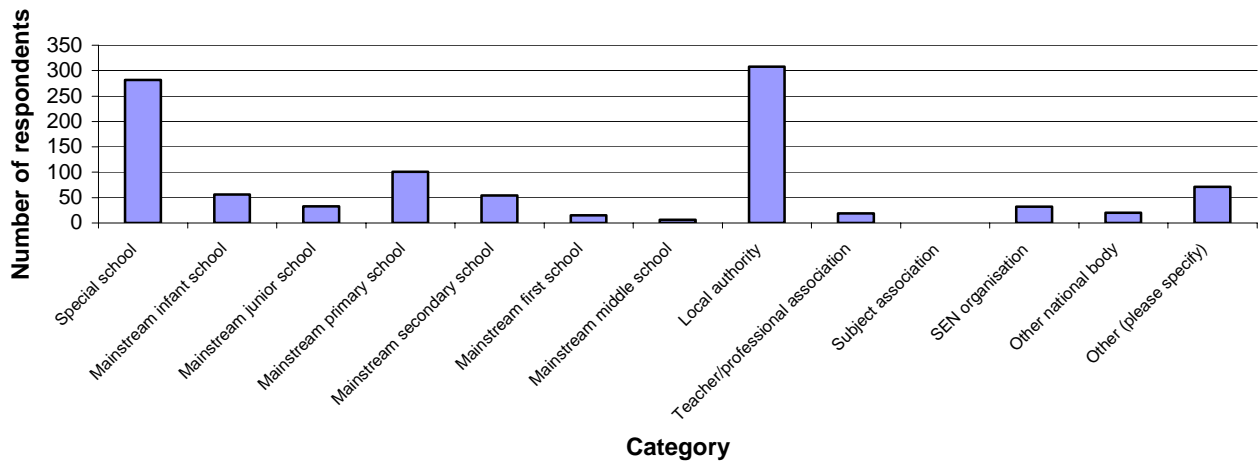
Section 2: Tables

Table 1: percentage of responses



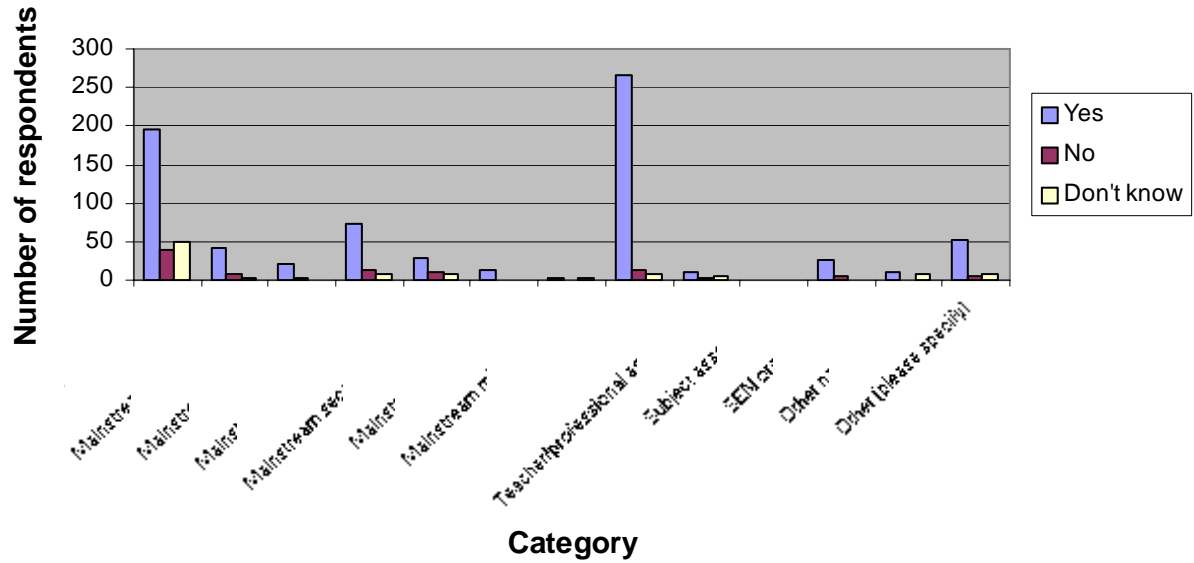
The great majority of responses from the consultation 'AGREE' with the proposal to make the use of P scales and collection of data mandatory from summer 2007 for all maintained schools.

Table 2: number of respondents by category



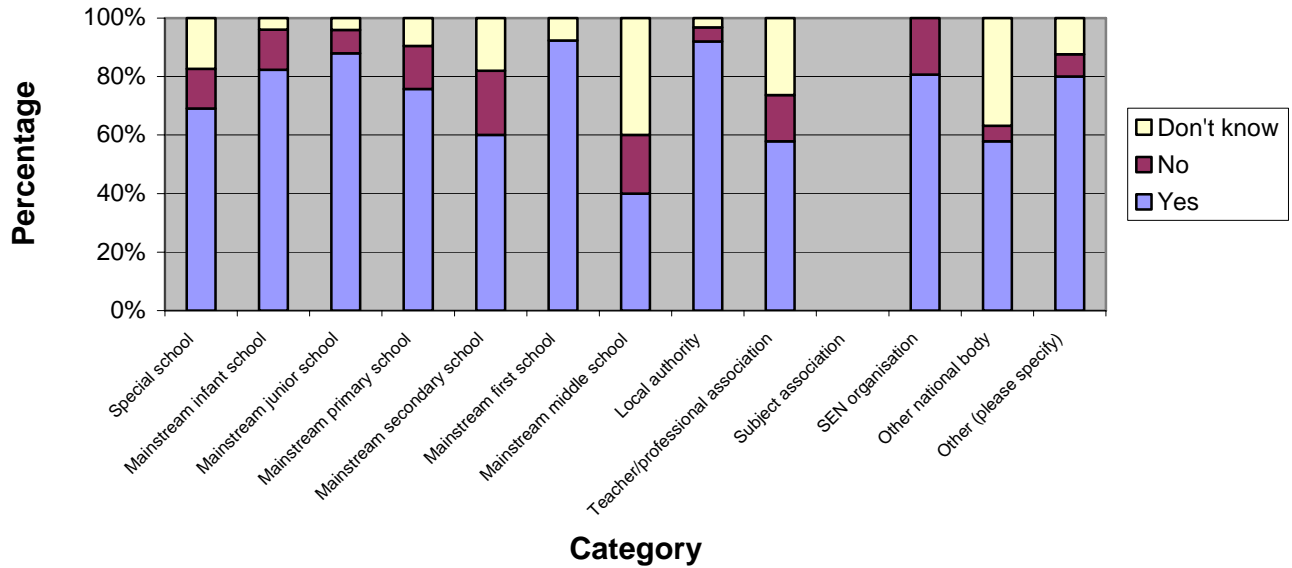
It can be seen that Local Authorities sent in the highest number of responses. They were also the quickest to respond, mainly within the first week of the consultation. There were no responses from subject associations, despite specifically targeted emails.

Table 3: number of ‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ responses from different categories of respondents



It can be seen that a higher number of Local Authorities and Special Schools ‘agree’ to make P scales mandatory from summer 2007. Local Authorities and Special Schools had higher responses to the consultation overall.

Table 4: responses by percentage who ‘agree’ or ‘disagree’ by category













It can be seen that even from the category most likely to vote ‘no’ – mainstream middle schools, less than 20% of these respondents actually voted ‘no’. The category most likely to vote ‘yes’ were mainstream first schools.

Appendix

Results summary

Total respondents: 1003

Information about respondents			
1. Please tick one of the following boxes to show which best describes the context/organisation in which you work.			
		Response Percent	Response Total
Special school		28.4%	283
Mainstream infant school		5.6%	56
Mainstream junior school		3.3%	33
Mainstream secondary school		5.3%	53
Mainstream first school		1.5%	15
Mainstream middle school		0.6%	6
Local authority		30.7%	306
Teacher/professional association		1.9%	20
Subject association		0%	2
SEN organisation		3.2%	32
Other national body		2%	20

Other (please specify)		17.5%	174
Total Respondents			1003
(skipped this question)			1

2. If you ticked 'Special school' above please describe the type of special school in the box below, eg MLD.




Total Respondents	271
(skipped this question)	726

3. Name of school/organisation.

Total Respondents	666
(skipped this question)	331

Consultation question

1. Do you agree with the proposal to make the use of P scales and collection of data mandatory from summer 2007 for all maintained schools?

		Response Percent	Response Total
Yes		80.7%	742
No		11.1%	104
Don't know		8.2%	76
Total Respondents			917
(skipped this question)			80

2. Please provide your comments below.

Total Respondents		600
(skipped this question)		406