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# Year 1 Phonics Screening Check Consultation

## Consultation Response Form

The closing date for this consultation is: 14 February 2011  
Your comments must reach us by that date.

**THIS FORM IS NOT INTERACTIVE. If you wish to respond electronically please use the online or offline response facility available on the Department for Education e-consultation website ([www.education.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations)).**

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes, primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

If you want all, or any part, of your response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it to be confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

The Department will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

**Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.**

Reason for confidentiality:

Name	Pauline Cue (Secretary)
Organisation (if applicable)	Association for Achievement and Improvement through Assessment ( AAIA)
Address:	18 Churchill Way, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 1LP

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the Department on 0370 000 2288.

By e-mail: [year1phonics.consultation@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:year1phonics.consultation@education.gsi.gov.uk)

If you have a query relating to the consultation process you can contact the Consultation Unit on 0370 000 2288 or via email [consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk)

Please mark an X in **one** box below that **best** describes you as a respondent.

<input type="checkbox"/> Parent / Carer	<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher	<input type="checkbox"/> Headteacher
<input type="checkbox"/> Other School Staff	<input type="checkbox"/> Local Authority(Please specify role)	<input type="checkbox"/> Child / Young person
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Professional Body / Association	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

Please Specify: Association for Achievement and Improvement through Assessment ( AAIA)

Q1) Do you agree that this screening check should be focused on phonic decoding as described in paragraph 3.2?

Yes

X No

Not Sure

Comments:

This question assumes that this screening check should be introduced. Materials to support phonics teaching would do more good than a check on one aspect of reading competence which most teachers will know already. Reading has many aspects.

The screening will not identify reading problems to do with:

- identifying words which are phonically irregular,
- recognising that meaning will be constructed from cues other than phonic ones
- engaging with reading

Q2) Do you agree that the screening check should be a maximum of 40 items?

X Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

Assuming that such a check was implemented in addition to daily teaching and assessment of reading, it would not need to cover more than 40 items.

Q3) Do you agree that the screening check should contain a mixture of words and non-words?

Yes

X No

Not Sure

Comments:

The inclusion of non-words will confuse children who are learning to see reading as a process through which enables them to make meaning. Reading skills other than pure phonics are rewarded when children read 'cow' to rhyme with 'now' rather than with the phonically plausible rhyme of 'blow' (c.f. the alternative pronunciations of 'bow'). In the case of the reading of non - words, no such credit is given. Including non-words alters the nature of the assessment for those items only.

When confronted with the puzzle of simply 'decoding' made-up words, especially outside the context of running text, able, gifted and talented readers sometimes substitute closely related real words. The inclusion of non-words, therefore, produces results which gave an unrepresentative picture of their reading ability.

With real words such as 'pert' already included in the sample, it is unlikely that all the words chosen will be within most children's reading experience or repertoire. Therefore the synthetic phonic decoding function will have already been achieved, without the need for "non-words".

Q4) Are the different elements of phonic decoding knowledge introduced in the right section of the screening check?

Yes

No

X Not Sure

Comments:

It is important that children aged 5-6 learn words in context as well as the phonic code. At this stage of language acquisition, phonically plausible attempts are encouraged in class. Therefore, to introduce children to a screening check which condemns such attempts is confusing, and can only lead to misleading results. Although the sequence of words in the example increase in blending complexity, some, such as 'bread' call on non-phonological strategies if they are to be 'decoded' accurately.

As for the idea of interspersing 'non-words' in the check, see the answer given to Q3.

Q5) Is mid-June the most appropriate time for this screening check to be administered?

If you answered no to this question, please suggest when you think the screening check should take place

X Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

Q6) Is it correct that this screening check should be administered by teachers?

X Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

It is best that any such screening is conducted 'light-touch' with minimum stress, so a fully trained adult with whom the child is most familiar would be best to conduct the screening. It would not be appropriate for an unfamiliar teacher to conduct it, nor for an untrained TA.

However, the training and budget implications of this would be considerable.

Q7) Should only one teacher in each school administer the screening check?

Yes

X No

Not Sure

Comments: The declared purpose of the screening check is that of diagnosis. The teacher with prime responsibility for teaching the child to read is best placed to act upon any findings from the screening. That means that, in many schools, more than one class teacher will be needed to conduct the screening.

The aim of consistency would not be achieved if some children know and are comfortable with the teacher and others are not.

Furthermore, there would be cost implications of supply cover if one experienced teacher were to be relieved from teaching duties in order to conduct a screening check for the entire year 1 cohort.

Q8) Is providing video guidance to screening check administrators appropriate?

Yes

X No

Not Sure

Comments:

Video guidance would not be sufficient. Face-to-face mediation would be essential if consistent approaches to such issues as over-formality, accent, the tolerance of self-correction and children's specific learning difficulties (EAL, SEN, HI, VI etc.) were to be developed and the check administered fairly and consistently.

Q9) How long do you think the administration window should be?

<input type="checkbox"/> 1 day	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 - 3 days	<input type="checkbox"/> 4 - 5 days
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Sure	

Comments:

Such a 'light-touch' screening check needs to be administered swiftly and with the minimum disruption.

However, all the choices offered have implications for the teaching of the classes affected.

Q10) Is it necessary to have a different screening check for each day of the administration window?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Sure
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Comments:

This stated purpose of this check is diagnostic. Different checks would be needed only if the purposes were wider than this.

As one of the cited researchers, Greg Brooks, observes, the educational distortions caused by high-stakes testing are well-researched. Quite apart from the anxiety different checks might induce in children, parents and teachers, different screening checks would be financially burdensome if they are to be valid and reliable. There would be significant costs in trialling, administration, security, ensuring comparability, as well as the costs of administration, the awarding of contracts for test development, distribution, processing and reporting.

Q11) Do you agree that schools should decide on the appropriate catch-up support for each child?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

Yes, schools are in the best position to determine, carry out and evaluate the impact of appropriate catch – up support for individuals and groups. Such measures require resourcing and schools should be provided with the wherewithal to put these in place and support them.

Q12) Is it right that the repeat administration of the screening check should take place in the Autumn term?

If you answered no to this question, please suggest when you think the screening check should be repeated.

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

If the purpose of the test is diagnostic and actions are then taken, it will not need to be repeated.

Some children will have moved beyond the need for another check by the autumn term. Others will not be ready in the autumn term, and some of those with special educational needs might not be ready for years. If it has to be repeated then one method and one timescale for all children will be unhelpful. If they fail again, will the test be repeated again and again?

Furthermore, if such a check contained the identical words, there would be issues of validity; if it contained different but equally difficult words, there would be the issue of expensive quality assurance as mentioned in our answer to Q 10.

Q13) Is 10 seconds long enough to be able to conclude that the child could not read the word?

Yes

No

X Not Sure

Comments:

The trials will help to answer this question.

If non-words are included, there might be delays, especially for more able readers, not because children cannot read the item but because they are confused. (see answer to Q3)

There is a very real danger that the implementation of this check results in 'machine gun' administrations that make no allowance for normal human thought processes.

Q14) Should some element of self-correction be allowed as part of this screening check?

X Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

Yes, self-correction should be allowed. When a child employs self-correction this would provide further evidence about their reading development. Any screening seriously concerned with diagnosing stages of reading development would want to reward such behaviour.

Also, the children will be reading words out of context and need time to adjust for this (see response to Q13). If they rely purely on phonological decoding, they may need to adjust to 'look and say' methods when pronouncing a reading of 'cow' or 'bread' as referred to earlier in answers to Qs 3 & 4.

Graphemes with alternative pronunciations will be included in the screening check. We propose that real words should be pronounced correctly for pupils to receive a mark (for example, 'cow' could not be pronounced to rhyme with 'blow' even though this would be a plausible attempt phonically).

This approach would help to ensure that children learn accepted pronunciations of words. For the non-words in the screening check, we propose that graphemes could be pronounced in any way which is phonemically accurate (so, a non-word ending in the 'ow' vowel digraph could be pronounced to rhyme with 'blow' or 'cow').

Q15) Is this approach to scoring alternative pronunciations of graphemes appropriate?

Yes

X No

Not Sure

Comments:

If the purpose is to identify correct decoding, expecting correct pronunciation as well is irrelevant – especially as some children will not know all the real words used.

Taking two different approaches as suggested here will be measuring different skills. Whereas reading skills other than pure phonics are rewarded when children read 'cow' to rhyme with 'now' rather than with the phonically plausible rhyme of 'blow' (cf the alternative pronunciations of 'bow'), in the case of the reading of made-up words, no such credit is given.

As well as variations in regional accent, we would reiterate the points we made in answer to Qs 3 & 4.

When determining how to make the screening check accessible for as many pupils as possible we will consider the best approach for children with visual or hearing impairments, children with dyslexia, children with speech, language and communication difficulties, and children with autism.

Q16) Are there any other groups we should consider in particular?

Comments

EAL pupils – especially new arrivals  
Pupils with ADHD,  
Pupils with other behavioural difficulties  
Children with cerebral palsy

Q17) Should the minimum requirement for reporting the results to parents be a simple recognition of whether the pupil has reached the expected level?

Yes

No

X Not Sure

Comments:

Test results should be reported to parents but used as part of a broader assessment of reading.

The experience of many teachers and head teachers is that reporting 'test' results alone, i.e. a single number, is not helpful to parents. Such information requires significant contextualising and explaining to parents if they are not to draw erroneous conclusions from the figures they are given. We would expect the government to take responsibility for ensuring that parents have clear and helpful information about the check and its significance for their child/children.

The case is by no means proven that there is a correlation between early phonics acquisition and enduring progress in reading in its fuller sense.

Q18) Should parents be told whether the pupil had reached the standard on each section of the screening check, even if this makes it longer?

Yes

X No

Not Sure

Comments:

Any relevant information gathered from screening should not be withheld from the parent, and the results will be part of the child's curriculum record. However, a requirement for more detailed reporting would demand a more protracted check and place disproportionate emphasis on this aspect of reading. It might emphasise failure rather than success or set up unrealistic expectations of later reading ability.

The check, if instituted, must be recognised by parents, teachers and government as spotlighting but one of the many facets of the reading process. There is little virtue in schools developing first class decoders who have no understanding of the words they are reading.

Q19) Do you agree that it is reasonable to include the results in RAISEOnline?

Yes

X No

Not Sure

Comments:

To include the results of a 'light-touch screening check' in RAISE online would not help to further the declared diagnostic purposes outlined at the front of the consultation document.

If it were published there would be a greater need for data checking and moderation. To include the results in RAISE online makes this high-stakes testing rather than a light touch screening check and raises all the concerns alluded to by Greg Brooks in his published response to these proposals.

Q20 a) Do you agree that parents should be informed about their school's performance?

Yes

X No

Not Sure

Comments:

If the screening test is about supporting the children's learning and ensuring that they make a sound start to their reading, there is no reason why the parents SHOULD be informed about anything other than their own child's progress. To inform parents about school results changes the purpose of this screening from that declared at the front of these proposals. What value would such information have, especially if this is not contextualised? The danger of parents drawing erroneous conclusions based on such data is considerable.

20 b) Do you agree that school by school results should **not** be published in the Achievement and Attainment Tables?

X Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

This would not support the purpose of the screening check as outlined earlier.

Publishing data concerning one isolated, decontextualised and potentially imperfectly understood aspect of reading would lead to pressure for higher scores. In turn this would lead to a narrowing of the reading curriculum to the detriment of other aspects.

If results were to be published the issues noted in q 19 would need to be addressed.

Q20 c) Do you have any comments about how best to make data available?

Comments:

Should such a screening check be introduced annually for 600,000 children, it would need to be 'light-touch'. As in the declared purposes, it is better employed in diagnosing the needs of individuals with a view to triggering tailored interventions. Schools could then exercise their skill and judgement to make use of any findings /data for internal purposes.

In its proposed structure and size such a screening cannot claim the validity and reliability that any broader reporting assumes. The screening requires checks and balances, including training and moderation, to ensure a degree of legitimacy, which will require financing. As Greg Brooks\* proposes, the money earmarked for such screening would be better spent on resources and support to improve teaching, implement focused interventions and support the monitoring and tracking of progress in early reading.

\*Greg Brooks December 2010, UKLA website

[http://www.ukla.org/news/story/professor\\_greg\\_brooks\\_critiques\\_the\\_governments\\_proposed\\_decoding\\_test](http://www.ukla.org/news/story/professor_greg_brooks_critiques_the_governments_proposed_decoding_test)

Q21) Do you agree that national, regional and local authority level results should be published from this screening check?

Yes No Not Sure

Comments:

To aggregate and publish such a small sample of data relating to an aspect of reading, would risk misrepresenting the complex picture of early reading progress. The declared purposes of such a screening check are for individual diagnosis and targeted intervention to improve the skills of individuals and groups of pupils, not for general comparative or summative use.

Q22) Do you have any further comments about the proposal for this screening check?

Comments:

The font used in the example presents a font without ligatures. In such a font a 'q' is the mirror image of a 'p'. However, if an alternative font with ligatures were to be used, decoding might be less ambiguous, especially if children were used to using ligatured fonts in classrooms.

In order to make data from the check usable, it would have to be secure, reliable, valid and comparable. The proposals do not make it clear how this would be achieved, nor the cost implications. As stated in previous responses, these might include:

- piloting and ensuring consistency of administration
- screening development, distribution and data collection
- supply cover for classes while teachers administer the check
- moderation, security and spot-checks
- access and disapplication arrangements
- access to on-going training to allow for staff turnover

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

**Please acknowledge this reply x**

**Email address for acknowledgement** [AaiaSecretary@aaia.org.uk](mailto:AaiaSecretary@aaia.org.uk)

Here at the Department for Education we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

X Yes

No

All DfE public consultations are required to conform to the following criteria within the Government Code of Practice on Consultation:

Criterion 1: Formal consultation should take place at a stage when there is scope to influence the policy outcome.

Criterion 2: Consultations should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible.

Criterion 3: Consultation documents should be clear about the consultation process, what is being proposed, the scope to influence and the expected costs and benefits of the proposals.

Criterion 4: Consultation exercises should be designed to be accessible to, and clearly targeted at, those people the exercise is intended to reach.

Criterion 5: Keeping the burden of consultation to a minimum is essential if consultations are to be effective and if consultees' buy-in to the process is to be obtained.

Criterion 6: Consultation responses should be analysed carefully and clear feedback should be provided to participants following the consultation.

Criterion 7: Officials running consultations should seek guidance in how to run an effective consultation exercise and share what they have learned from the experience.

If you have any comments on how DfE consultations are conducted, please contact Donna Harrison, DfE Consultation Co-ordinator, tel: 01928 438212 email: [donna.harrison@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:donna.harrison@education.gsi.gov.uk)

**Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.**

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 14 February 2011

Send by post to:

Phil Elks  
School Standards Group  
Department for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT

Send by e-mail to: [year1phonics.consultation@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:year1phonics.consultation@education.gsi.gov.uk)