

Notes of a discussion with Ian Dixon, 23rd July 2019

I fed back a positive comment (also given to Richard) that it is “*useful to have this 2 way communication with STA.*” This view was echoed by London members from LAs and schools during a recent regional meeting. In addition, there were congratulatory comments passed to Ian from members in several regions whose experience of external moderation had been much improved, especially when compared with past years:

I want to say how much better it was not having a ‘pass’ or ‘fail’ judgment. I am glad they have taken on board the idea of giving 3 positive feedbacks and up to 3 areas of improvement.

Feedback was more useful and we will get areas of strength as well as areas of development. Plus we got a form helpfully showing what OEM would be looking for. OEM’s had checked documents on the website and then just checked nothing had changed.

It was a much better, more constructive meeting than last year when I was externally moderated for KS2!

This year ...more transparency.

Please thank Ian Dixon for listening. (Done! LD)

Ian’s response:

He was pleased that moderation managers were identifying that external moderation had had been a productive and supportive experience.

As part of their training, external moderators were instructed to ensure that there would be ‘no surprises’ in the official letters that LAs received following visits. They were directed to look for aspects to praise as well as highlighting areas for development. Ian emphasised his concern that there should be a consistency of approach in the guidance that was given.

ARAs

It would be helpful to have highlighted what has changed. Some changes are very subtle and may not be picked up from reading the ARA.

Ian’s response:

The section at the beginning of the ARA tries to capture everything that has changed and present it all in one place. Where there has been rewording of a section, e.g. TA guidance, this is not included as the information has been clarified rather than altered.

KS1 and KS2 – standards ‘gaps’

KS1 - Borderline between WTS and PKS4 – significant gap between the two 2 standards

KS2 - Borderline between WTS and PKS6 – significant gap between to 2 standards – a few schools with issues.

Ian’s response:

He recognised that questions such as these being asked. Currently, under the PKS ‘umbrella’, STA are looking at evidence from data evaluation and feedback from schools to ascertain how much of an issue these ‘gaps’ are. If these sources of information identify anomalies, then action will be taken. To what extent the removal of TA has exacerbated the ‘gap’ at KS2 is another aspect to be considered.

Exemplification materials

The exemplification materials need to match the STA training sessions, especially the more finely nuanced GD judgement. Can we have some examples that are a better match to the training sessions?

It is very useful to have the commentaries say why the work is or is not greater depth / expected / working towards etc. Could we have more of this?

Please could the materials be placed somewhere other than (or as well as) on NCA tools? This is so that they are more accessible to teachers. Many head teachers are reluctant to share access to NCA tools and as a result, many teachers are not aware of the materials

Ian's responses:

There is no intention to amend or adapt the materials at this stage; they are what they are, i.e. exemplification of the standards. The STA training sessions take the exemplification further and explore the standards more deeply to enhance the skills and understanding of those present.

Ian noted that number of schools and LAs use the exemplification materials successfully for training purposes.

The process of identifying and preparing collections for 2020 is underway at the moment.

Unfortunately government policy does not allow access to these materials anywhere else except on NCA tools (and on its successor in the future).

Data submission

Can we clarify with STA the time frame for notification to schools, when local agreements are in place? In the LAs at our meeting it ranges from 24hrs – 48Hrs!

'Cusp' children – when is the final data set actually final? For example, an issue with HT not wanting to sign off as he had not checked the data himself. HT didn't have a specific child in mind, so couldn't even say they were cusps. Moderator insisted that it needed to be final data set. STA seemed happy with this. We would welcome more specific guidance about this.

Ian's responses:

The guidance suggests 2 days; this window can be shortened, but why would LAs give schools less time? Establishing and maintaining good, respectful relationships with schools is important and Ian advised that, with this in mind, no less than 2 days' notice be given, except if less time is negotiated by mutual agreement.

The guidance is clear in the ARA as to the deadline – the last date is just that, the last date. This was 27th June 2019 for KS1 and 2.

Special Schools and the moderation cycle

Special schools – what happens if it's their turn in the 4 yr cycle but they have no children at WTS or above? Do they go on the list again for the next year, until they do have anyone to moderate? Do they only appear again in 4 more years? Can we have some clarification please?

Ian's response:

His advice was to treat special schools as a separate group. For example, have a register of special schools and institute an annual 25% moderation cycle for them. This will probably focus on only 2 or 3 schools each year, possibly less and even then there may be years/successive years in which some or all of the chosen 25% have no children at all for whom moderation of the assessment of their learning is in any way appropriate.

Support for schools that are in and not in the moderation cycle

What is to be done with the 75% of schools not being moderated in any one year? There is no guidance though some LAs have established a culture of an expectation that all schools attend training. This is dependent on resources being available both financial and human,

which are very stretched. In some LAs a folk myth has grown up that if you don't attend training you will be moderated.

A 'round robin' of those present at the regional meeting identified huge variations in moderation and training support for schools involved in as well as those not involved in the 25%.

Ian's responses:

This issue is outside STA's gift. STA takes the view that 25% of schools is a sufficiently robust sample to be moderated. What LAs elect to do or not to do with the remaining 75% is a matter that is not within its remit and about which it is unable to give guidance.

Regrettably, the variations that AAIA members identify are symptomatic of the current educational landscape and the budgetary and associated pressures that LAs are having to grapple with. However, those ultimately i/c education in a Local Authority have a responsibility to ensure that moderation and training activities are quality assured as are all their services to schools.

Inconsistencies in the interpretation of standards and the moderation processes

LAs are getting a lot of flack re inconsistencies in practice and interpretation of the moderation process, as well as for the interpretation of standards. Please can we have back/copies of the 'moderation briefings' as well as the training on interpretations of standards?

Consistency of messages from STA. Difficulty of having no interpretation of requirements, e.g. Handwriting – what is acceptable, what isn't? We consider STA is in a position to iron out inconsistencies.

Ian's responses:

STA's training for moderation managers/lead moderators has a focus on certain elements of the standards – last year this was GD, this year it will be WTS and PKS. This, together with undertaking the standardisation exercise, should furnish those attending with clear interpretations of the standards for cascading to all LA moderators. Guidance on how the moderation process should be implemented was laid out in the *KS1 Teacher Assessment Guidance* document published in November 2018 and for KS2 Writing in the *KS2 Teacher Assessment Guidance* document published in November 2018. These guidance materials will be reviewed before October 2019. Relevant materials to support standardisation and moderation have been published on the NCA tools site.

Ian suspected that the query about the consistency of messages from STA had, possibly, a link to concerns that different, sometimes conflicting answers were given by the helpline. He wanted to assure members that he does all he can to train the helpline staff well and provide them with a comprehensive list of FAQs and responses for reference. However, they are 'lay' people and not STA employees as the helpline is outsourced.* The questions they are asked do not get passed on to Ian and his 4 colleagues – it would be impossible for the STA staff to handle all these queries and to do so would negate the rationale for having a helpline.

*After Easter 2020 Capita will provide the helpline.

Greater depth concerns

Greater depth is really hard to justify; so often GD is excellent 'expected'. It is crippling and so many resources are being thrown at it – get rid of it! (There was general agreement with this view amongst the region's members present).

Lot of issues around very good expected writers rather than GDs. A concern is that non-moderated schools may have numbers of GD assessments that are possibly inaccurate.

Ian's responses:

Greater depth is more fully described as being "Greater depth **within the expected standard**" so there is a sense in which it is an artificial construct, but a standard nevertheless and embedded within the TAFs.

If schools not being moderated appear to have unusually high levels of GD assessments, then moderation managers need to identify them for moderation during the next year. STA has looked at this potential issue with a national data comparison exercise using the results from moderated and non-moderated schools. There is no discernible indication of unusually high levels of GDs in either.

Range of writing evidence

Range of writing – clearer guidance would be welcome as to what this looks like / how much writing. Where is the boundary for systematic lack of evidence?

Ian's response:

What constitutes sufficient evidence in all cases is difficult to quantify without becoming unnecessarily pedantic and potentially misleading. Where a moderator recognises that the evidence presented has been well selected and convincingly supports the teacher's judgement of meeting the standard awarded, then the range presented would be deemed to be sufficient. More concerning is when the evidence presented is sparse and/or randomly selected and unrepresentative. Further exploration may reveal that the standards are incorrectly identified because the TAFs or TA are not being used or the former has been misinterpreted.