

# Assessment Strategy 2012

## Curriculum and Assessment Policy: Education for Individual and Social Development

This document develops the assessment aims of the policy to deliver an assessment strategy that is designed to deliver the educational outcomes required by the ministry of education and training's intention to reform both curriculum and assessment in line with the national goals and aspirations.

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## *Executive Summary*

This summary is intended as a synopsis of the proposed changes to allow quick and easy reading. The supporting arguments for each will be found in the body of the document.

### *Grades 1 to 3*

The focus will be on implementing a new style of CASS based around proven assessment **for** learning strategies. This will involve moving away from the current test-orientated culture in the classroom to a learning culture. It has been designed to help teachers improve achievement i.e. reduce drop-out and repetition rates by ensuring learners gain the skills they need to progress to the next grade. As part of this tests as they are currently used will be abolished; instead fit-for-purpose continual assessment will be introduced to ensure all learners achieve success as measured against clear and defensible standards.

### *Grades 4 to 7*

The same philosophy as grades 1 to 3 will be used for CASS. As teachers become more confident with formative assessment, schools can share this experience and apply it with growing confidence to grades 4 to 7, supported by a programme of in-service training, organized both within schools and by regional and central bodies.

### *National Monitoring*

The Grade 4 survey will take place early in Grade 4 and focus on ensuring learners are achieving the base-line skills of numeracy and literacy required to become life-long learners. The tests will be standardized across years to allow stakeholders to monitor the effects of interventions on standards and the health of the education system.

The Grade 7 National Assessment will be based on CASS outcomes supported by a national survey to ensure that the standards are reliably reported. This approach is designed to be cost-effective whilst still giving accurate information on the state of the system. Until the system is embedded it is proposed the PSLE is continued to provide reassurance, but that it is phased out as soon as is feasible to free resources and save costs.

### *Progression and certification*

Progression will be based on the statements of success and learners demonstrating that they have the skills and knowledge required to achieve the next grade. Similarly the statements of success will allow learners to move between schools and systems by giving clear indications of what the learner can do. Similarly for employment or other uses the statements of success will encapsulate the learners achievements.



## Overview of the assessment strategy

This strategy starts with the premise that there is no single solution to the educational issues facing Lesotho or to allow the reforms to be the success they need to be. The needs of learners in Grade 1 are different from the needs of learners in Grade 10 and the assessment strategy will reflect this and adapt with the child as they mature.

This strategy also reflects the reality that assessment by itself cannot create good learning and teaching but needs to be used in close conjunction with all the other educational tools available to the Ministry. The support and active engagement of all stakeholders is required to make any educational reform take root and flourish.

The policy clearly defines the overarching assessment policy needed to meet the challenges facing Lesotho in education. This strategy document details how the policy should be implemented and how the policy will work in the class-room.

It is also important to acknowledge the large amounts of excellent practice that already happens in the classroom and in assessment and build on that. It is important we do not undermine the good practices currently in place.

This policy also comes with the proviso that its success will rest on having a curriculum that is clearly structured with unambiguous learning outcomes and/or attainment targets. At the time of writing this strategy, curriculum documentation had not been prepared and so some extrapolation had to be used. That said, for grades 1 – 3 numeracy and literacy it is very unlikely that the core learning outcomes and standards will differ greatly from those used in most countries and primary curricula.

In the unlikely event that the new curriculum's introduction is delayed this strategy will apply equally well to the current curriculum.

## Fit for purpose assessments

The policy highlights three main purposes of assessment with the Lesotho education system:

- Formative assessment

## Assessment for learning

Throughout the educational cycle, the strategy will focus on supporting a dialogue between teachers and learners to create an environment where good education can flourish.

“Assessment for Learning (AfL) means using evidence and dialogue to identify where pupils are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.”

To ensure that summative high-stakes assessment does not drive the learning agenda, the strategy will ensure that assessment of learning and assessment for learning are clearly differentiated and used appropriately.



- Monitoring of educational progress
- Summative

Many previous reforms in other countries have stumbled as they have tried to combine these aspects. To avoid these problems, and because these three forms of assessment have very different purposes, formats and requirements, the policy is very right to keep them clearly differentiated. Throughout the stages of the educational cycle these three assessment purposes will be clearly differentiated and defined to allow them to be used effectively and efficiently. This will also help teachers, learners and parents to be aware of the different uses of assessment and to understand and use the outcomes.

### *Formative assessment*

Formative assessment will be used in schools at all levels of education to check the learning progress. It will be used by teachers for diagnosis of learner's difficulties to identify areas requiring extra attention.

These assessments will be used 'continuously' as part of an ongoing dialogue between teachers and learners to improve the learning that happens in the class room.

These assessments can, and should, take a wide variety of formats and should not be restricted to pen and paper tests. Indeed, oral questioning and other modes of assessment can be more effective and also ease the burden on the teacher.

These formative tests should be informal and low-stakes; they should encourage the child to explore their own learning and understand why they have made a mistake and how to correct it. They should not make the child nervous or intimidated.

To help both teachers and learners understand what they are being assessed on, and the standards they are being assessed against, there will be clear assessment outcomes, written as success criteria, linked to defined learning outcomes.

Having these clear assessment outcomes and success criteria will be vital in allowing teachers to be able to apply the correct standards when it comes to evaluating learners. The outcomes should also be shared with

### CASS



It is important to distinguish the various forms of continuous assessment (CASS).

Here when we talk about CASS we mean *formative assessments* and *assessment for learning*.

Many CASS schemes are used for high-stakes summative assessment and the research evidence is very clear that these can never be used effectively for AfL.

These summative schemes place a large burden on teachers and educational authorities and will **not** be used here.

When we refer to CASS we mean child-friendly, formative assessments.



the learners so that they understand their own strengths and weaknesses and can participate in group work and peer review.

To allow learners to participate in their own learning, the success criteria will be written in child-friendly language.

### *Feedback*

The research evidence is very clear that good feedback is vital for effective formative assessment. The giving of effective feedback should become a key skill for teachers. Teachers need to be aware of the impact that comments, marks and grades can have on learners' confidence and enthusiasm to learn. Teachers should be as constructive as possible in the feedback that they give. Feedback needs to be linked to the success criteria and provide suggestions or opportunities for the learner to improve.

To ensure that the CASS is as child-friendly as possible teachers should not use negative marking or the use of crosses, insulting comments etc. The key importance of feedback is establishing a learning dialogue between the teacher and the learner, as one primary teacher interviewed in preparation for this strategy very succinctly put it “if you are not communicating you are just complaining.”

For work where the marking is subjective, e.g. writing a letter, the marking should not be done using any marks but focus on what is good and what needs to be improved. In cases where the marking is more objective, i.e. the answer is right or wrong, such as in mathematics questions teachers can use ticks but should avoid crosses. Instead of crosses teachers should circle or underline errors and encourage the learners to understand the error and how to correct it in future.

To help ease the burden of teacher marking and to placate parents who will want evidence that the teacher has marked the work even if there is not a 8/10 shown, schemes such as ‘3 stars and a wish’ should be trialed as they have been effective in other contexts and will allow learners and parents better ownership of the learning.

For Grades 1 to 4, the use of marks as a means of feeding back to students on their achievements will be banned. The use of marks in Grades 4 to 7 will be reviewed after the results of the pilot. From Grade 8 onwards learners will start to be prepared for summative examinations and marks may be started to use but again the focus should be on feedback not marks – if feedback is not given it does not count as continuous assessment. School inspectors and District Resource Teachers should be focused on the quality of feedback given by teachers.

### *Continuous*

It is important to note that when we say ‘continuously’ here we mean throughout the learning experience; we do not mean every student, every day. It is a current fact of life for teachers in Lesotho that they can be faced with large class sizes and it is logistically impossible for a single teacher to assess adequately in every lesson every child; instead teachers need to structure their assessments so that over



a reasonable period of time they assess all learners against the required assessment outcomes. This may well involve assessing the fastest learners only once but concentrating on the weaker learners to identify and correct areas of weakness.

### *What is CASS?*

CASS is, as already stated, a system for helping support teachers in making the day-to-day judgments of learners to help them improve their learning. It should also be structured to allow learners to actively participate in their own learning.

- It is first and foremost a formative assessment, specifically assessment for learning.
- It should be integrated with teaching and curriculum (as exemplified by tight links between key learning outcomes and assessment outcomes).
- It is a system to allow a climate that encourages assessment for learning in the classroom.
- It will provide feedback on the learning progress.
- It allows teachers to formulate strategies to improve teaching and learning.
- It will clearly indicate what learners know and can do and, equally importantly, what they need to do to improve their learning and move to the next stage.
- It uses all forms of appropriate assessment, including informal, oral, project work, drawings, posters etc.
- Not all CASS needs to be recorded, indeed most should not be recorded.
- The outputs can be used for low-stakes summative purposes by reference to achieved competencies (statements of success).

### *What CASS is not?*

Many continuous assessment schemes have failed to achieve the educational benefits they set out to. This was often because they included assessment aspects that were incompatible with their original aims or the schemes of assessment could not be made to work in practice. To avoid this CASS in Lesotho will be designed specifically to avoid the more common pit-falls. To this end it is necessary to specify some common misconceptions about CASS.

- It is NOT a series of continuous tests.
- It is NOT a book full of marks.
- It is NOT going to be used in high-stakes summative tests.
- It is NOT something that can be used by itself for competitive selection.
- It is NOT automatic promotion, students will need to demonstrate they have the core skills and competencies they need to succeed at the next grade before they can progress.
- It is NOT a golden bullet that will improve education by itself, but it is a key part of improving education and allied with teacher professional development, curriculum reform, etc. it will be very effective.
- It is NOT a change that will happen overnight.



## Monitoring of educational progression

The policy has monitoring of educational assessment at the end of grades 4, 7 and 9 (Form B). These three stages of educational monitoring all have their own purposes and this will impact upon their designs.

The grade 4 monitoring is to be conducted as a survey and will not necessarily cover all learners. The purpose of this test is to monitor the health of the education system up to Grade 4 and report back on issues and areas that need remediative work at a systemic level.

At grade 7 the assessment has two purposes:

1. to check the attainment of competencies for individual learners and whether they can proceed to grade 8;
2. to monitor the health of the education system.

At grade 9 (Form B), assessment will be in the form of a national survey focusing on broad educational objectives.

As all these monitoring tests will need to be able to compare data between years and provide stakeholders with accurate information on the progress of the education system they cannot be 'norm' referenced but will need to be standards based. If these tests are to be truly diagnostic and provide highly detailed profiles of the education system then they will need to involve item level analysis and report on a matrix of data.

Where, for example in the grade 7 National Assessment, there exists more than one purpose to the test there may develop contradictions that could undermine the intended goals. We will investigate these later when we discuss the strategy for monitoring assessments in detail.

At this stage it is just necessary to note that these monitoring assessments are intended to allow key stakeholders to gain a good understanding of the state of the education system and where, and what, interventions might be necessary. By separating these tests from the summative assessments at grade 10 and 12 the policy allows for better monitoring of the system.

## Summative Assessments

In the policy, summative assessments are defined as assessments for *selection* and for *certification*. In strict assessment terminology the national assessments at grade 7 and 9 are summative assessments in that they measure the summation of the individuals learning until that point and report on it and, most importantly, are not expected to feed-back into the individual student's learning.

Selection and certification are vital parts of a well-functioning education system. Education is not just about learning but also about individual empowerment and creating opportunities for the individual.



Learners go to school not merely to attend school and for the joy of learning (although this should be a large factor in the motivation) but to improve their, and their families, life-chances and to improve the standard of living in the country as a whole.

As a part of the assessment strategy we will look at what certification learners need within Lesotho and in the surrounding countries, where they may seek employment or further education.

Certification and selection place additional restrictions on assessments and require schemes that are fair, transparent and accurate. Importantly, they need to be publically seen to be all these things.

### *How will these three types of assessment work in practice?*

This strategy assumes a single philosophy throughout but this evolves to meet the needs of the learners as they mature and their needs change. At its heart is CASS, formative assessment to improve learning and results, but at key exit points in a learner's school career, appropriate certification and summative assessment need to be included. In parallel to these individual learner assessments, there will be monitoring assessments to allow key stakeholders to monitor and manage the education system. As the policy is aimed around the needs of the learner so it is best to follow the assessment as it develops from the point of view of the learner, starting at grade 1.

#### *Grades 1-7*

The grades 1 to 3 are vital stages in a learner's education and in training a child to be an active learner. It is therefore especially vital that the assessment meets the needs of the child. Currently the system in use focuses very much on the use of tests and summative assessment to the detriment of learning. Many stakeholders feel that this is good in that it encourages competition and this forces children to learn; at the same time there is a tacit assumption that many children will be left behind in this race. The needs of the nation cannot support a large underclass of poorly educated adults failed by the school system. One of the aims of the policy is to help these currently failing children and help guide them past the barriers to their learning so they can reach their full potential, lead full lives and contribute to society.

To this end, the strategy is focused on converting the continuous assessment practices away from summative practices and into formative assessment practices. There is evidence of much good formative work being used in classrooms but this is often not appreciated as being continuous assessment or is overshadowed by the test-culture.

#### *Grades 1-3*

At grades 1 to 3, and possibly including grade 4, the assessment culture will be very much assessment for learning built around the key competencies and skills that we wish these children to acquire so they can then engage with the rest of their learning. This strategy will focus on literacy and numeracy as the two main areas that are currently the largest barriers to learning as children progress up the



educational ladder. But it is also important that after the initial development of assessment support materials for literacy and numeracy that materials for the other learning areas are developed and monitored to ensure that teachers are encouraged to teach the whole curriculum.

Each learning outcome in the curriculum (see appendix 2 for expansion on learning outcomes) will have a clearly stated assessment outcome and success criteria<sup>1</sup>. Teachers are expected to share these with their learners so they can understand what they need to learn in order to succeed. The curriculum documents need to include very clear learning outcomes and associated success criteria e.g.:

#### 1.1 Learning outcome - Introduction to greetings

Content - learning about the greetings: good morning, good day, good afternoon, good evening, good night.

Success criteria:

- Can recite the correct greeting and response following the teacher
- Can use the correct response given the greeting as a prompt
- Can use the correct greeting unprompted

How these learning outcomes link together as the child progresses through the curriculum also needs to be made very clear so that teachers can understand the child's progression. It will also be vital that these clear routes and linkages exist to allow ECoL to collate all the learning outcomes in the learning areas into hierarchies so that monitoring tests can be constructed and so that the assessment does not become fragmented.

Teachers will be given example assessment tasks, questions etc. covering a broad range of assessment types (e.g. oral quizzes, spelling bees, group work, worksheets etc.) to be used in class. Teachers are expected to use these throughout the lessons along with their own interactions to form justified opinions of whether each child has met a criteria. Support officers and inspectors should be trained to identify good assessment for learning in class and to be able to support teachers. There is no need for such assessment for learning to be recorded on a daily basis but children will be expected to show their work including the teachers' comments and feedback to school inspectors or ECoL staff. Especially if there is need to confirm standards are being applied uniformly and for ECoL and support teachers to feedback to teachers and support them. If each child collates a portfolio of their work (usually their school exercise book<sup>2</sup>) as they learn it will help guide their learning and, at the end of the year, clearly show what they can do and justify decisions made to advance individual learners to the next level.

Instead of recording each assessment centrally, teachers should record key intermediate milestones in a child's education development in each learning area e.g. the ability to recognize and write all the letters of the alphabet, be able to multiply two numbers correctly etc. and record these. Teachers will be

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<sup>1</sup> This does assume that the attainment targets in the curriculum are sufficiently well written to allow this.

<sup>2</sup> The portfolio should not be a selected sample of the learners work but the entire learner's work.



expected to complete a list of such skills by ticking a table for each child. This will also help principals, support teachers and inspectors quickly identify children at risk of early failure and implement remediation strategies in a timely manner. To support teacher assessments and to confirm that the child has successfully embedded their learning of key outcomes, there will be quarterly<sup>3</sup> checkpoint assessments which will include synoptic assessment and extension activities to stretch the brighter children and encourage higher order skills. These assessments will be produced by ECoL (for grades 1-3 (+4?) only) and will not change from year-to-year but will be updated periodically. The tasks should be printed in laminated books and designed to be used without access to photocopying or printing. These assessments may contain oral components, teacher prompt cards, written quizzes etc. and should be as child friendly as possible. In some instances there may be extension parts to the assessments to stretch the faster learners and include higher order skills (see below). Teachers will assess them according to the supplied marking criteria. These assessments will act as checkpoints not only on learners but also on teachers allowing them to compare their own assessments against one designed by educational assessment experts and allow teachers regular opportunities to bring themselves into line with other teachers. These assessments will also be designed to show a good range of good practice and ideas to stimulate teachers in their classroom activities.

Each assessment outcome will be listed as required, desired or extended.

- **Required** means that these criteria will be needed for the learner to succeed at the next level and will tend to reflect the levels of knowledge or guided application of knowledge within Bloom's taxonomy of learning. Students who have only achieved the required criteria may struggle at the next level but will have the necessary basics skills and knowledge to be successful e.g. multiply and add numbers when told explicitly to do so.
- **Desired** means that these criteria should be achieved by learners who have confidently acquired the basics and can apply them in novel situations. Desired outcomes will be the harder knowledge concepts and criteria reflecting application and comprehension in Bloom's taxonomy, e.g. being able to use addition and multiplication without explicit guidance to answer simple problems.
- **Extended** means these should only be achieved by the best learners, learners who have reached Bloom's higher order skills of analysis, evaluation and synthesis. These will also include the hardest knowledge that requires these skills and a clear understanding of other knowledge before learners can understand it. Tasks testing extended knowledge will be more open ended and will often use a novel situation and require learners to select methods e.g. using multiplication and addition correctly and in combination to solve mathematical puzzles.

At grade 1 it is not expected most learners will have advanced significantly through Bloom's hierarchy of skills and there will be only required knowledge (with no desired or extended content) and a simple

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<sup>3</sup> ECoL will need to discuss with other stakeholders whether these will be fixed time point assessments or linked to key stages in a child's learning and/or whether schools should be allowed to determine when these assessments are used. It is likely that the current practice of fixed time point assessments will be used although schools should not be deterred from using them as 'when ready' assessments.



assessment of whether the basic knowledge has been achieved. In higher grades there will be a three tier reporting of outcomes reflecting the three broad assessment levels that stem from Bloom's taxonomy.

- Passed – this indicates the learner has successfully acquired the basic knowledge required and has some understanding of it and how to use it.
- Passed with merit – this indicates that the learner can apply that knowledge and skills with competence.
- Passed with distinction – this indicates that the learner has a very sound grasp of the required knowledge and skills and can use them in complex, novel and synoptic ways.

As mentioned, for each learner schools should keep a list of all the assessment outcomes (the key milestones) and score them on a scale of 1-3 (as a tick at grade 1). The results of the checkpoint tests will allow teachers an opportunity to fill in blanks if learners have previously failed to demonstrate achievement and also to help confirm their assessment of higher order skills. This list will act as a clear means of flagging learners who are at risk or have barriers to learning so they can be helped overcome them. This list will also allow schools at the end of the year to give learners a score (a simple total of all the levels in the list) and assign pass, pass with merit, pass with distinction grades if they wish.

- To pass a student must have achieved at least a 1 in every required assessment outcome.
- To gain a pass with merit a student must have both achieved all the required outcomes but also a more than a fixed score (to be determined but suggested as) of  $2 \times (\text{total number of required outcomes}) + 1.5 \times (\text{total number of desired outcomes})$ .
- To gain a pass with distinction a student must have both achieved all the required outcomes but also (to be determined but suggested as) a score of more than  $3 \times (\text{total number of required outcomes}) + 2 \times (\text{total number of desired and extended outcomes})$ .

This will also maintain the idea of competition for the brightest but allow the weaker learners to have clear targets to attain which are not linked to the other students in the class.

In addition to an overall mark, schools should also include the key areas with a learning area that make up that skill e.g. speaking and listening, reading and writing, comprehension, composition etc.

The marking criteria could also provide guidance in future (after analysis of the trial results) to teachers on any problems their children might be facing e.g. if a significant number of your learners are failing to get question 3 right then you might want to revisit section x of the syllabus or check they are not making listed common misconceptions.

Key requirements:

- Support materials to help teachers make the transition (produced by ECoL and consisting of a CASS Guide plus assessment packages in Numeracy and Literacy for each Grade).
- Training and professional development for all support teachers, primary inspectors, teachers and principals (a cadre of 30 trainers have been trained to lead this).



- Making full use of the currently existing school centres to ensure standards and share experience.
- A sensitization programme for the public will be needed to achieve a smooth transition and grass-roots support; the move away from traditional marking (which evidence shows is meaningless and counter-productive) might prove difficult for some sectors to accept and they will need to be educated into the reasons and benefits of the move.

### *Training and support*

All stakeholders agree that teacher training and good support mechanisms are vital to the success of the policy. To accompany the new CASS schemes there must be good assessment support materials that are clear and easy to use. There must also be comprehensive teacher workshops on using the materials and how to integrate them with good classroom practice. Prior to this there must also be preparation and training of principals, inspectors and education officers so they understand the new materials and policy and can help support it. All stakeholders must be singing with one voice.

### *Numeracy and literacy*

Deficiencies in numeracy and literacy are major barriers to success, both in further learning and in life. They are also easier to measure accurately by monitoring tests than creativity or entrepreneurial skills. This strategy therefore suggests that the National Monitoring survey at Grade 4 is limited to these two learning areas, although it could also encompass attitudes to learning and school. This is not to say that the other learning areas are not important, indeed other mechanisms to monitor them will be put in place to ensure they are taught, just that a cost-benefit analysis at grade 4 suggests most benefit can be gained by giving policy makers and educationalists clear and accurate feedback about these 2 areas in particular.

### *Other subject areas*

The curriculum will contain clear assessment outcomes linked to learning outcomes. To allow flexibility to teachers they will be expected to create their own assessment strategies (using the literacy and numeracy templates) to monitor these outcomes in their children. As in the overall strategy, teachers are not expected to record all the assessments but they will be expected to record key milestones and whether each child has or has not met that milestone. Teachers will also be expected to conduct quarterly tests clearly linked to the assessment objectives and/or attainment targets.

### *The role of key stakeholders*

CASS will not only involve teachers but will also involve teacher trainers, principals, school boards, education officers, inspectors and ECoL staff.

All have important and well specified roles supporting teachers make accurate and good assessments of students learning.

- Teacher training agencies have a key role in making sure teachers entering the system are fully up-to-date with current thinking on assessment and have a good grasp of assessment strategies for the classroom.

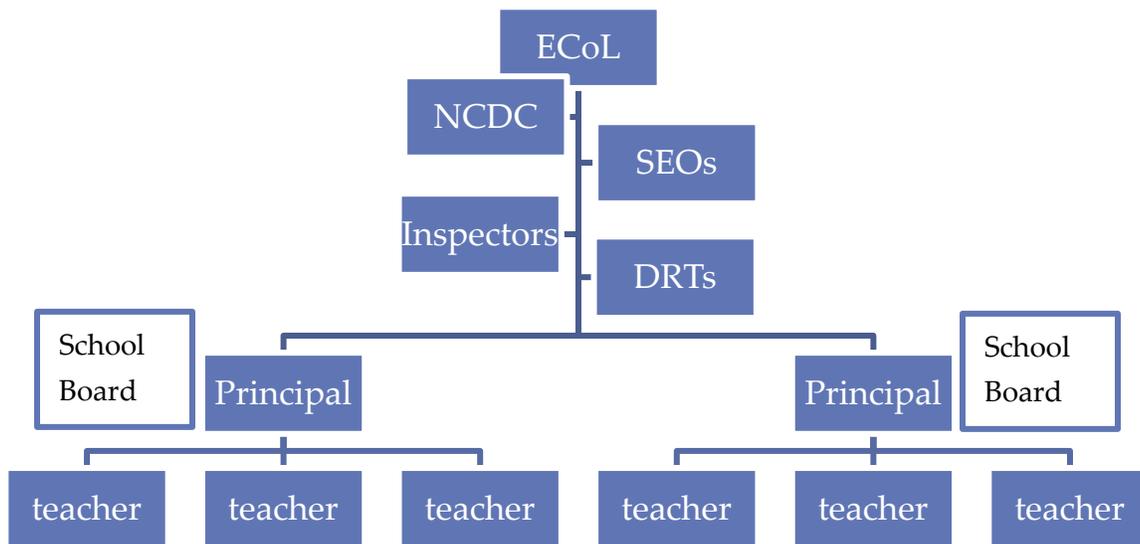


- Principals have a key role in ensuring CASS is applied evenly across the school, supporting teachers and advising teachers who are struggling.
- School boards have a key role in monitoring how their school is doing and ensuring the principal is doing their job well. They are also responsible for the reputation of the school as having a good understanding of standards, within their cluster and nationally, and for promoting learning.
- Education officers, support teachers and inspectors have a key role in monitoring what is happening across schools and that best practice is shared and in supporting teachers to make good assessments and monitoring what happens in classrooms. They should not be looking for paper-trails but actively monitoring how learning is occurring in the classroom.
- ECoL has a key role in ensuring that good monitoring and effective moderation of teacher assessments occurs.

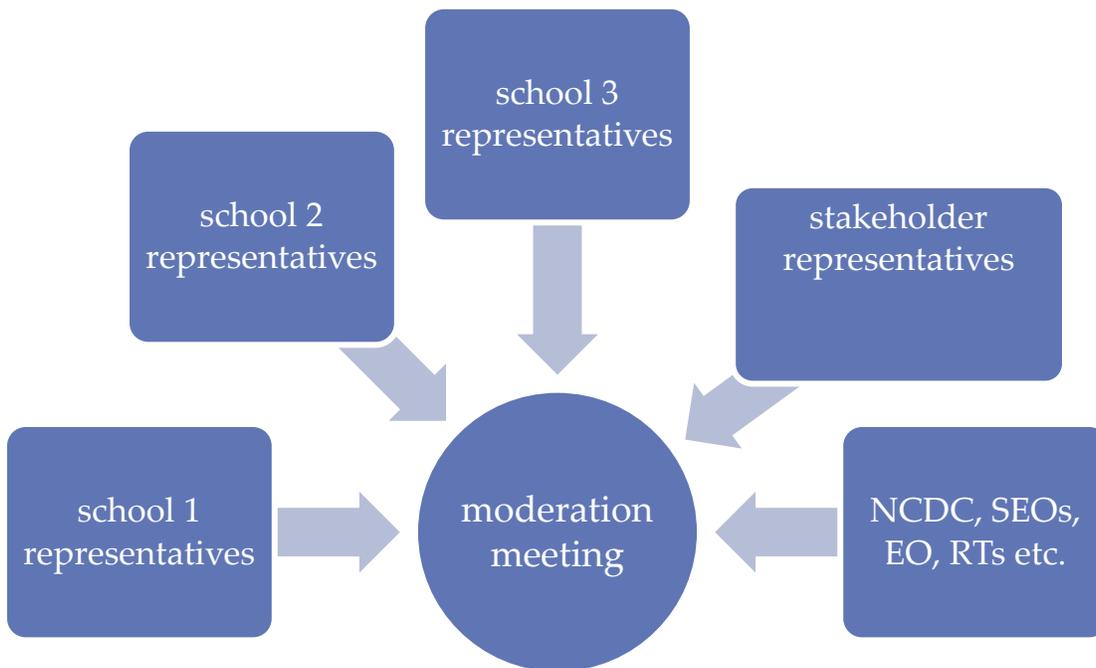
### *Moderation*

Moderation of continuous assessment is a tricky and delicate issue and must rest on ensuring teachers understand the standards and apply them fairly and evenly. There are many models of moderation but given the resources available and the need for CASS to support assessment for learning strategies, the model proposed here focuses on social moderation strategies, i.e. ensuring teachers actively strive to comply rather than try and subvert the system. It is proposed that schools should form into clusters (centres) who meet once a year and review the work of each other's pupils, share good practice and affirm the standards. Which centres are to be used needs to be discussed as there currently exists different groupings of schools used for different purposes.

The focus of these meetings is not which school has the best results but which schools are the best assessors and which add greatest value to their learning. If schools feel one school has misunderstood the assessment criteria then they can ask the school to take remedial action and request further training and support for that school. If the remedial action does not rectify the situation schools can make a formal request to ECoL to check the standards in the school. ECoL needs to be able to apply sanctions in collaboration with the other school monitoring authorities.



How monitoring and moderation will work within a cluster



This moderation scheme relies on transparency and ensuring it is not in the schools best-interests to have their reputation questioned. By having very clear and easily understood standards it will be evident if schools are passing children as numerate and literate who are not. These standards will need to be developed by ECoL in collaboration with NCDC.



The model for supporting teachers uses the same model except that the hierarchy of the stakeholders is inverted. For monitoring, the principal is the first-point of monitoring, and the school is then monitored by the education officers, RTs and the school board. Then NCDC monitors that all these are applying the curriculum and standards properly with oversight from ECoL, which acts as the 'standards keeper' and the final arbitrator on standards. For support ECoL acts as the provider of the basic support for grades 1 to 3 CASS in the form of assessment guidance materials and exemplar assessments. NCDC support and conduct training using these materials, through principals and down to teachers.

### *Progression between Grades*

Progression between grades should be the remit of the school. The learner should have achieved all the success criteria for that year listed as required. If learners are transferring between schools then the learner's profile should give the receiving school a clear idea of what the learner is capable of and any remediation that may be required. Where a child is just below a borderline for a pass, the school may elect on its own criteria whether to allow a child to pass for the next level, taking into account other factors e.g. home circumstances, the child's motivation and attitudes to learning etc.

### *Monitoring assessment at grade 4 – timing and content*

Currently the policy states that there will be a national educational assessment at the end of grade 4. This timing might be reviewed in light of ECoL and schools other commitments and resources. There is no need for this style of educational survey to be conducted at the end of a school year. Indeed many countries now conduct them at the start of a school year to ensure teachers see it as an educational support tool and not a summative assessment or end-of-year test. Having the survey earlier in the grade 4 cycle would also allow ECoL to better analyze the grade 3 outcomes against it and use it as part of their moderation strategy and also allow time for remediation at a national level if needed. Setting the main survey earlier in the year would also allow school inspectors and educational support officer etc. to use copies to check standards where there is concern schools may be misapplying the standards. If this is done schools need to understand these tests are NOT to be retained and any schools found in possession of such tests should be severely reprimanded (these tests need to remain valid and schools should not be encouraged to practice for these tests).

Whenever it is decided these tests should run (and it may be over a period of weeks as these are no longer high-stakes tests) these tests will need to be developed, run and analyzed according to strict psychometric principles.

At grade 4 only numeracy and literacy should be surveyed, although the other learning areas should be 'soft' surveyed by the usual monitoring channels. Each test should be short, no more than 30 minutes but preferably 20, to allow for such young learners' concentration times. The tests will cover the key required milestones from years 1-3 (and 4 depending on decisions made by ECoL) and as in the CASS assessments focus on defined learning outcomes and include higher order skills. The test should cover the entire ability range.



The format should be short answer (e.g. MC, cloze, simple response, ringing the answer etc.) for questions testing knowledge, where more open response items are needed, e.g. composition, the marking will be done on a 2 or 3 point scale linked to Bloom's taxonomy (e.g. levels of response in literacy or in mathematics 1 mark for selecting the right technique and one mark for correct substitution etc.) to ensure comparability and ease of marking. Oral sections e.g. dictation may be used supported by teacher cue cards.

All items will need to be pre-tested. At this level there is not likely to be enough marks on a paper to allow a pre-test section to be included with the live tests (although ECoL could do this by having many different versions of the tests each with a shorter pre-test section but this is likely to overly complex to organize). Each survey will need to include a small number of anchor items. Results will need to be analyzed at item level using Rasch.

The sample should be about 10-20% of the total cohort depending on what purpose the results will be used for. If the test is only to be used to check on the educational development of the system and not to monitor schools or teachers directly, i.e. it is low stakes, then each test can be used multiple times. It may even be possible to develop just 1 assessment in each of literacy and mathematics.

If the survey is going to be used to monitor school performance then the sample rate will need to be much higher (possibly 100% in smaller classes) and more variants of the test will be required to stop teachers trying to subvert the test.

It is recommended at this stage the purpose of the survey is solely to measure and evaluate the system as a whole and not used for school monitoring or target setting.<sup>4</sup> If it is required to survey all the learning areas this might be done effectively by asking selected sample schools to provide ECoL with their data on pupil achievements. ECoL could send out simple forms which schools could complete from their record books. Some of the learning areas e.g. personal, spiritual, creativity etc. are notoriously difficult to survey by tests and so this data is likely to be as valid (assuming all the partners in the educational system are performing their roles adequately) as any tests ECoL could devise.

### *Mother tongue*

For students whose mother tongue is not Sesotho the monitoring should study the impact on this on their learning.

### *Costs and implications*

These sorts of surveys are not cheap or easy to run and will likely require 2 dedicated ECoL staff to develop and manage them (1 in mathematics and 1 in literacy). If the suggestion that the survey is only

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<sup>4</sup> The experience in other countries in such use is that it tends to dominate the educational aspects and leads to over-focus on the test.



used to monitor the health of the system is accepted then this will reduce the burden on ECoL and the staff members can also run the grade 7 surveys.

The surveys will also need development of IT infrastructure to capture the data and analyze the results. The Hamlet systems currently used by ECoL may be able to do this aspect already, but if not then development may be needed. Analysis can be done through commercial packages or excel.

Test papers will need to be printed, distributed, collected and marked.

Following analysis ECoL will need to produce a report on the state of the educational system and a longitudinal survey of the data. ECoL may also think to produce simple feedback booklets based on the outcomes (possibly in collaboration with other stakeholders) for teachers highlighting areas of strength and weakness to help them develop.

#### *CASS and Quarterly assessments in Grades 4-7*

The situation will get more complex as we move up the age ranges. The curriculum content becomes more complex, learning outcomes branch and we increasingly need to cater for the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy and cope with greater breadth of learner ability. Many of the strategies used in grades 1-4 will still be applicable, but it will not probably be feasible for ECoL to produce a complete set of quarterly tests and distribute them to schools (a total of 80 separate assessments). The current practice of schools producing their own tests will probably need to be retained. It is not feasible within the current staffing or financial constraints for all teachers to be made competent, let alone skilled, assessment design experts; nor is it feasible for ECoL to moderate and review every assessment or result. Careful thought will need to be made about how to meet this challenge and an early admission that it will not be possible<sup>5</sup> to produce a perfect solution. The strategy will need to concentrate on finding the 'least bad' solution and decide which compromises can be accommodated in the interests of improving learning within Lesotho and which pose a danger to either learning or the credibility of the education and exams system. All stakeholders need to appreciate this strategy is merely the first step in a journey and it will be by making small, incremental improvements, and by removing the largest barriers first, that educational outcomes will start to measurably rise.

#### *National assessment at grade 7*

This survey serves 2 purposes: a progression test to grade 8; and as a monitoring system for the education system as a whole. There is an inherent risk in this in that the progression test aspects may become over-stated by stakeholders, especially schools, and the assessment becomes simply a PSLE replacement. Care will need to be taken to avoid this.

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<sup>5</sup> as indeed it has proven impossible everywhere else that has tried it, this statement is no reflection on Lesotho, just on the scale and complexity of the issue



If the CASS system and moderation is working well then the format of the assessments and the outputs should be reliable and clear enough to act as the main means of progression from grade 7 to grade 8. The model proposed here should also be reliable enough to allow low-stakes certification of primary education (which might be desirable by learner's who wish or need to leave the system earlier than the end of basic level). The model proposed also provides very simply the **statements of success** required by the policy by listing key milestones on the learner's journey. However as we approach grade 7 some of the learning outcomes will not be as clearly defined and some learning areas will be more subjectively assessed than others, this means that the CASS outcomes are likely to show more variation than at grades 1-3. The moderation proposed should ensure that the majority of schools are within tolerance and schools that are out of tolerance will very likely be schools who are struggling to teach; poor assessment is likely to be a symptom of more worrying concerns.

This will relieve a lot of the pressure on the grade 7 national assessment as a national survey tool. But this will not be in place until the new grade 7 curriculum is in place which may be as late as 2019 depending how the new curriculum is introduced but will certainly be no earlier than 2015.

To further stop the grade 7 assessment becoming a replacement PSLE and focusing more on progression and differentiation of candidates rather than measuring their success, it is proposed that only the three levels previously discussed are reported, i.e. basic achievement, achievement with merit and achievement with distinction.

But this does assume that the curriculum documentation has clearly defined attainment targets that define the skills, knowledge and understanding that students are meant to acquire as they progress. If some, or all, of the curriculum is written in terms of educational activities and aspirations then much work will need to be done to produce an assessment syllabus that translates the curriculum into attainment targets that can be understood by teachers and assessors. This is contrary to most trends in primary education and assessment where a single document combines both in order to better integrate teaching and assessment to provide for better learning. There is a real danger that if this approach is required due to the structure of the curriculum documentation then the assessment documentation will become the *de facto* teaching curriculum.

With any integrated approach to teaching it can be difficult to assess, if ECoL does need to provide an end of primary assessment then it will need to distil from the curriculum documents the key attainment targets that students are expected to achieve by the end of grade 7 and structure an assessment instrument around those.

#### *Cost implications for the Grade 7 National Assessment*

To run a full national assessment at Grade 7 would have major cost-implications with limited benefits, especially with the shift to a longer period of primary education. The same benefits (and avoiding some



of the potential problems associated with current PSLE) can be achieved by using a mixed approach of CASS results, supported and monitored by a National Standards Survey at a much lower cost.

### *Progression to Grade 8 and statements of success*

As stated above, provided the curriculum is well structured and clear and the learning outcomes can be linked to equally clear assessment outcomes then schools should have a very good idea of which learners are capable of progressing to the grade 8 and beyond. They should also provide clear statements of success listing the knowledge, skills and understanding that a learner has achieved.<sup>6</sup>

It is the ultimate intention that all students should stay in education until grade 10 and so progression at grade 7/grade 8 *should* not need to be highly selective. The grade 7 schools should be capable and empowered to define which learners are ready to move to the next level and which they want to keep for another year to fill in gaps in their statements of success. If the receiving schools feel they need to select students then this should be their responsibility, either from the learners profile or by their own administered tests.

The national assessment should not be used for selection purposes.

### *Grade 9 national assessment*

As in the grade 7 national assessment, it will be simple to devise such an assessment once the attainment targets required have been clearly stated.

## Special Educational Needs

In the discussions with stakeholders, it became clear that the assessment of special educational needs (SEN) learners requires urgent attention. The policy of inclusion requires much more than just opening the gate. In many instances SEN learners are given the same assessments as other learners even if they are inappropriate. This stops SEN learners demonstrating what they can actually achieve and, more worryingly, may stop them learning. Each SEN learner should have a clear assessment statement explaining to the teacher how they should be assessed, e.g. communication for a deaf student should be done by a signer or in writing and not orally. SEN students should be encouraged to participate as much as they are capable with other student assessments. There will be time when this is not appropriate and special considerations must be made. Similarly there will be some attainment targets that are not applicable to SEN learners. In each individual case a decision must be made whether to find equal attainment targets as substitution or to exempt the learner from these targets. Some key skills cannot be exempted but if a child is thought fit to be included in mainstream education then they should be capable of achieving (and being certificated as achieving) success, as appropriate to them individually.

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<sup>6</sup> Again this assumes that clear and valid attainment targets exist in the curriculum



## The role of ECoL

The role of ECoL is to support teachers making assessments and to establish standards and measure the education system against them. ECoL's role should not be a highly interventionist one or that of policeman against bad education. ECoL may need to support NCDC in writing good attainment targets based on clear learning outcomes linked to Bloom's taxonomy and work closely with all stakeholders, including directly teachers, in ensuring good assessment both within the class room and at a national level.

With many challenges facing ECoL, including localization, ECoL needs to ensure that any additional roles it accrues are properly resourced.

## The role of other partners within the strategy

Any successful education system is a partnership with many stakeholders; NCDC need to supply a curriculum that can be taught and assessed and encourages good learning, the school principals need to act as the first line of monitoring and support, the school inspectors need to be able to identify good learning and have a good grasp of the expected standards, the various support cadres need to be able to assist teachers in promoting good learning and to steer teachers when they drift off standards.

## Some issues that may impact effective implementation

The biggest issue is that of teacher training. Teachers need to be instructed in the nature and application of the new assessments. Principals, EOs, RTs etc. all need to be trained, preferably before the teachers.

The number of EOs and RTs might also be currently insufficient to allow good monitoring and support which will be key for the success of this project. The number and quality of trained individuals to act as monitoring agents and teacher support needs to be reviewed.

This system has been designed to be no-more and ideally less labour intensive for teachers but there will be large costs involved in training teachers and providing on-going training and support and these need to be budgeted for.

Teacher training institutions need to review their curricula and include more work on AfL and formative assessment practices to mirror the changes happening due to the new curriculum.

Communication is also a vital factor in gaining public trust and support and needs to be planned.

## Communication of the strategy

As with the new curriculum, there needs to be a clear and decisive communication of the changes. Reassurance needs to be given to the public that the changes do not reflect a dramatic change but more an enhancement and refinement of current practices. The ideas of AfL need to be communicated clearly and concisely to teachers, principals and parents. As a first stage all the supporting bodies, e.g.



inspectors, district resource teachers, education officers, need to be trained. Teachers also need to be given simple guides before they are trained so they can prepare themselves ( a sample is given in Appendix 1). Areas where ECoL knows there is likely to be resistance need to be identified and FAQs prepared to help deal with the media and to prepare the public. Key points are:

- It is not automatic progression.
- The use of feedback and not marks at grades 1 to 3.
- The removal of tests in favor of better forms of assessment and an explanation of feedback.
- How the new reports will look.
- How parents can monitor progress of their children without the tests e.g. by the use of a learning ladder as a concept.
- What is happening with PSLE?
- Why it is being done and the expected benefits.



## Appendix 1: Sample teacher guide

### Assessment For Learning – A Teacher’s Guide

Assessment **for** Learning also commonly referred to as formative assessment or educative assessment. Assessment is considered ‘formative’ when the feedback from learning activities is actually used to adapt the teaching to meet the needs (Black and William).

One definition states this in a nice and clear way.

*“Assessment for Learning (AfL) means using **evidence** and **dialogue** to identify where pupils are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.*

*In practice, this means clear evidence about how to drive up individual attainment; clear feedback for and from pupils so there is clarity on what they need to improve and how best they can do so; and a clear link between student learning and lesson planning.”*

There is also Summative Assessment , sometimes referred to as assessment **of** learning or terminal assessment which summarises the development of a learner at a specific point in time, usually the end of the course. These are normally high stake exams, e.g. the PSLE or O Level, which give the learner a qualification and/or grade.

Both types of assessment are important but as formative assessment is usually carried out by the teacher (although they may use supplied tests and analysis software) they need to understand the principles.

Firstly, it should be an integral part of the learning programme and be a regular occurrence whether on homework, tasks in the class room, during coursework projects or with end of topic tests. Most teachers do this as a matter of course even if they do not necessarily think of it as assessment for learning.

The Assessment Reform Group has produced some excellent booklets and guides on this, which can be downloaded from their site at the University of Cambridge Faculty of Education. The publication Assessment for Learning: Beyond the Black Box and the poster Assessment for Learning: 10 Principles are clear and easy guides. <http://arg.educ.cam.ac.uk/index.html>

In education there is usually controversy and contradiction with different studies finding different outcomes, the good news is that when it comes to student feedback there is a very strong and clear consensus from all the studies. Good feedback, NOT grades, NOT praise, leads to improved learning. If you wish your students to do better, learn to give good feedback! You should also avoid comparing students with their fellow students (this can be difficult as it is natural for them to want to know how they stand) but focus on their learning needs. The feedback should be specific and contain a clear



instruction for future action to the student on what they need to do to improve or extend their ability (not just 'work harder!' or 'well done'). Dylan Wiliam's 1999 paper on Formative Assessment in Maths makes a strong case for feedback and any teacher interested in learning more would do well to start there.



## Appendix 2: Learning outcomes – how to write good ones

### What is a learning outcome?

A learning outcome clearly expresses the knowledge, understanding and skills we want a learner to acquire.

But writing a clear learning outcome is not easy.

- It may be made up from a series of sub-criteria (which we will call **success criteria** here as they link to the assessment outcomes and CASS).
- It needs to have very clear limits or indications of level/depth required.
- It needs to be appropriate to the age and unit.
- It needs to form part of the attainment targets (or be a logical step on the way to them).
- It needs to be clear to a teacher reading it for the first time who does not have time to read through the whole curriculum to determine what they should teach.
- It should be written in child friendly language.

For example the learning outcome “1.1 greet and respond appropriately” could mean many things and at many levels - should a teacher worry about greeting elders or age-mates? Does this include writing letters? How do does a teacher judge if their children are doing it right? All obvious questions, if we know the curriculum very well. But for a new teacher or a teacher without much support these are all valid questions and ones likely to be asked.

How does the following phrasing seem? Is it clearer? Think about why.

1.2 Introduction to greetings, learning about the greetings: good morning, good day, good afternoon, good evening, good night.

Success criteria:

- Can recite the correct greeting and response, guided by the teacher
- Can use the correct response given the greeting as a prompt
- Can use the correct greeting unprompted

As a teacher does this make it clearer what you need to teach?

### Self-test

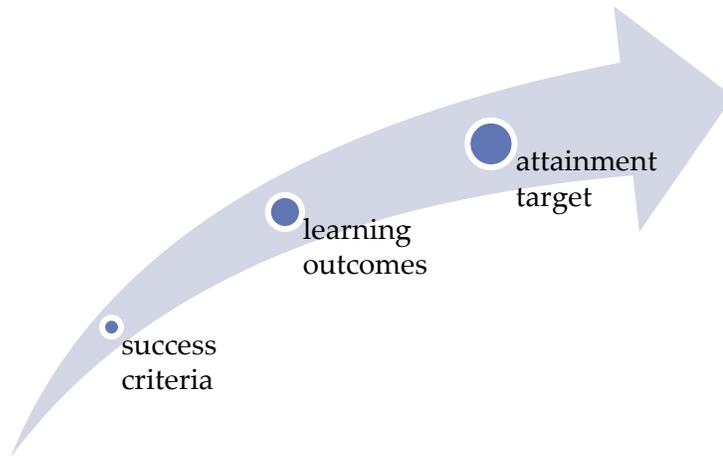
Here are three (made up) examples. Read through them and decide (without looking at the answers given at the end) whether each one is a good learning outcome or not.

- |   |  |        |
|---|--|--------|
| 1 | Can role-play an argument  | yes/no |
| 2 | Can rearrange the mixed up numbers 1 to 10 into the correct order      | yes/no |
| 3 | Can use scientific principles to address a problem in their daily life | yes/no |

(answers and discussion at the end)



## How do learning outcomes link to success criteria and attainment targets?



Success criteria make up the individual stages that lead to a learning outcome. In the example above on greetings, they are the three 'can do' statements. Success criteria allow teachers and learners to know what they have to do to successfully reach a learning outcome. They also allow us to identify where learners may be struggling with a learning outcome or where they are only partially achieving it.

Success criteria build (often in a hierarchical way linked to Bloom's taxonomy) for the learning outcomes.

Similarly the learning outcomes all add together to build up the attainment targets and allow us to understand if a child has successfully met the attainment targets, to what level. Equally importantly they allow teachers to know if the learner is failing some learning outcomes so that teachers can help.

### Checklist to see if it is a valid learning outcome

Ask yourself the following questions, if you cannot answer any of them easily by looking at the learning outcome then it will need reviewing.

- What is being learnt here?
- Can I plan a lesson around it?
- Can I assess it?
- Is it clear? If you can't understand it **immediately** assume nobody else will!

Also think about:

- Does it link to the learning that precedes it? (in terms of content, required knowledge, Bloom's taxonomy, difficulty etc.)
- Does it link to the learning that follows it?



- Is it appropriate for the age range? (does it contain appropriate language and content e.g. no upsetting content, will the learners understand it at their age?)

### Answers to the self-test quiz

Only 2 is a valid learning outcome. It is clear what is expected of the learners and a teacher could easily devise learning plans and assessment plans from it.

1 is really a teaching activity. What is being learnt here? It is impossible to tell. To be a proper learning outcome this would need to be rephrased along the lines of : "can use appropriate behaviours to defuse an argument, as demonstrated through role-play."

3 this is a context or topic, it is too big to be a learning outcome. This contains a huge number of learning outcomes e.g. has the knowledge required to understand the science relevant to daily life (a huge amount! think about it, where do we draw the line?), can identify a problem in daily life, can analyse the problem, can propose a hypothesis, can identify the relevant variables, can identify the linkages between variables etc. etc.. You need to really keep the expectations you are making of the learners in mind.



## Appendix 3: Report on findings from key stakeholder meetings

### Key issues identified

1. There is a very clear and all-pervading focus on testing rather than assessment. This is potentially damaging to learning and will under-mine the policy's focus on formative assessment and improving learning. To move away from this teachers need to be retrained (and all the supporting structures including DRTs and teacher training colleges etc.) to focus on **improving** learning rather than merely recording marks i.e. using this information to inform classroom practice.
2. There is a widely held perception that some learners cannot learn or are not going to achieve very highly. At grades 1 to 3 children are developing at different rates and many have issues beyond the class room that may slow their initial learning; to categorize them at this age is very damaging. If Lesotho is going to reduce the large failure rates in literacy and numeracy this perception also needs to be changed and teachers need to focus on the barriers to learning, especially at grades 1- 3, where acquisition of key fundamental numeracy and literacy skills is vital. By breaking numeracy and literacy into key learning outcomes supported by clear success criteria and standards we can hope to encourage more of these learners to succeed.
3. The variability in teacher qualifications and teacher continuing professional development. Teachers at primary level have a wide range of professional qualifications ranging from Junior Certificate, COSC, DipEd, HDipEd, BEd, Masters etc. Any strategy to improve classroom assessment practices needs to take this into account and be very simple to use and couched in accessible language.
4. The number and capability of key staff to act as a resource for teachers. The number of EOs and RTs is very limited and probably not enough to ensure adequate dissemination of the new curriculum and assessment materials much less in ensuring it is fully embedded. Also the understanding of key educational issues varied greatly and most would benefit from being retrained, especially on the more modern aspects of the new curriculum and assessment and the changes in teaching styles it requires.
5. Whilst in terms of map area Lesotho is relatively small, in terms of logistics and time-of-travel it is very large; all the strategies for monitoring and moderation need to factor this into account.
6. ECoL resources are limited, especially with localization looming on the very near horizon, any strategies must take into account the feasibility considering available resources.

### Key strengths

1. The staff in all the departments seemed very keen and committed to improving education; if they can be convinced of the educational merits of the new curriculum and assessments they will support it whole-heartedly. Some very talented and knowledgeable individuals exist within the system which should make implementation and local ownership attainable.
2. The primary teachers met were very enthusiastic and hard-working and dedicated to their learners. They just need to be given the tools and support to improve learning.
3. A lot of good assessment practices currently exist in classrooms. But they are not often appreciated as assessment or targeted effectively. A good formative assessment strategy backed up by good, easy to understand support materials should prove effective.
4. The group work project seems to be delivering good educational returns. It also seems to be delivering, according to anecdotal evidence, aspects of good formative assessment based around self- and peer-review.