Secondary school overview

This paper provides an overview of some of the important changes currently taking place to secondary education performance data, self evaluation and target setting in schools and LAs. It also outlines the value and relevance of Fischer Family Trust data in a changing environment.

Contextual Value-Added

Contextual value-added analyses (FFT SX model) were developed by FFT in 2003. The SX model was designed to support detailed self-evaluation with an important principle being accuracy and consistency across a wide range of indicators and pupil characteristics.

Following the decision by DfE to discontinue the publication of CVA (introduced in 2004 with many similarities but some important differences from FFT SX), we have been asked, on a number of occasions, whether this means that FFT will remove analyses based upon the SX model. The answer to that is no. There are three reasons for this:

- We believe that different types of analysis (attainment, value-added and contextual value-added) all have their place as each type of measure seeks to answer different questions about performance
  - Contextual value-added analyses provide, in the views of many schools and researchers, accurate insights to support the evaluation of school effectiveness. Having CVA removes the risks that these evaluations are incomplete because no other progress measure accounts for the characteristics of similar pupils and similar schools in one measure. It would be misleading for example to conclude that an intervention with a particular pupil group resulted in below average results without also accounting for the fact that they were all boys born early in the year. The intervention may have been effective and be worth developing further in the future, the CVA measure may indicate this.
  - What CVA measures do not do is to address questions of whether pupils are attaining sufficiently well to prepare them for the next stage of their education or whether they are making sufficient progress irrespective of their background and other characteristics. For this reason we argue that analyses of attainment must be set alongside analyses of pupil progress.
- Feedback from schools, professional organisations and LAs indicates a wish to continue to receive contextual value-added data.
- Contextual value-added models are NOT used to calculate forward-looking estimates. Despite some requests to do this we have always refused on the grounds that the inappropriate use of such estimates could lead to a lowering of expectation for some groups of pupils.

Another important feature of FFT's approach to both value-added and contextual value-added is that the models are applied consistently over all years. If we do make any improvements to the models they are applied to all previous years – this is quite a task, so we don't do it too often! Why is this important? Trends, over a 3 year period, are an important part of FFT's approach and it is only valid to calculate trends if models are consistent over all years.

Estimates, Target Setting and Raising Expectations

Analyses to support the process of target setting have been a key element of FFT's approach to improvement. Whilst recent changes to legislation have removed the requirement for schools to provide targets to the DfE, target setting itself is still at the heart of good planning to support continuous school improvement and is intended to challenge expectations for both pupils and schools.

The FFT approach has always been to:

- Use national census and prior attainment data to calculate pupil, school and LA level estimates
- Provide a range of estimates (both contextualised and non-contextualised) in order to inform and, where necessary, challenge expectations

We will continue to provide estimates as part a wide range of analyses to support improvement. Future estimates illustrate the trajectory of possible performance over the coming years and can be used to identify where intervention may be necessary, particularly where schools may at risk of being close to or below floor standards.

We believe that the removal of a statutory requirement to provide targets to DfE may actually be an opportunity to move away from the 'you must use type D only' approach (which has never been FFT's view) into more considered and effective approaches which are both challenging and realistic. Perhaps schools can now set their plans for further improvement around ranges (60% to 65%) rather than single numbers (we will attain 63%).

Expected Progress

Indicators looking at expected progress in English and Mathematics are receiving increasing attention. They are published in performance tables and also used in the assessment of floor standards for schools.

In addition to the indicator published by DfE, FFT calculate a range of additional indicators:

Key Stage	Indicator	DfE	FFT	Description
KS2->3	Expected Progress		•	2 NC levels of progress
KS2->3	Good Progress		•	3 NC levels of progress
KS3->4	Expected Progress		•	Equivalent of 2 levels of progress
KS2->4	Expected Progress	•	•	Equivalent of 3 levels of progress
KS2->4	Good Progress		•	Equivalent of 4 levels of progress

These indicators are included in both the value-added and estimates sections of FFT Live. There are some significant differences in the methodology used by FFT when compared to that used by DfE:

- DfE use whole levels and a 'subject to subject' approach.
- FFT use sublevels and fine grades where available and take into account attainment in all core subjects.

Why do we take this approach? Here are some illustrations:

- 66% of pupils with Level 4 in mathematics at KS2 attained grade C or higher in mathematics at KS4.
- If we split those pupils into three bands (4C, 4B, 4A) we find that the percentage making expected progress varies from 44% (for 4C) to 85% (for 4A).
- If we look at prior-attainment in English we find – for pupils who attained level 4 in mathematics at KS2 - that the percentage making expected progress varies from 44% (level 3 in English) to 82% (level 5 in English)
- These variations increase when we look in greater detail by using fine grades derived from test marks.

Subject Value-Added and Estimates

FFT analyses include value-added and estimates data for a wide range of subjects at KS4 and KS5. The analyses cover almost all subjects and subject types at both key stages.

Our approach uses a statistical method which analyses grade distributions (the percentage of pupils attaining each grade). Critically, this approach does not depend upon assumptions that the interval (level of difficulty) between grades is the same.

In addition, analyses for KS5 take into account both overall prior-attainment (KS4 average points score) and attainment in the subject most closely related to the subject being studied at KS5. For example, if a pupil was studying A-Level chemistry we would take into account either their KS4 attainment in chemistry (if available) and, if not, their best science grade at KS4. This approach brings about worthwhile improvements in accuracy for around 25% of pupils when compared to other approaches.

Overall, we believe that the range of analyses and data available through the FFT Data Analysis Project provide a comprehensive range of information which can support schools, local authorities and others in the process of school improvement.