



**An Evaluation of AFL Initiatives in Jersey
Final report**

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Background

The Department for Education, Sport and Culture (DfESC) in Jersey invited researchers from the University of Sussex School of Education to evaluate the Assessment for Learning (AfL) work undertaken in its schools over the last 3 years. The evaluation was intended to provide feedback to DfESC and the schools on what was working well, what might be improved and to give recommendations for the future. The history of this work is given in more detail below, but since 2003-2004 involved a cohort-based system which was given the name 'Jersey Actioning Formative Assessment', or Jafa, where each cohort received various forms of support to develop AfL. The third Jafa cohort was constituted at the end of 2005 and was therefore at an early stage of its work at the time of the evaluation. The cohorts were supported by a team from King's College London who visited Jersey each term to lead workshops and to conduct observations of classroom practice in the cohort schools. One teacher in each school was appointed as Jafa lead teacher, using a cascade model to disseminate the initiative.

Initial scoping meetings were held at the end of February 2006 with the aim of clarifying the objectives of the evaluation and how it was to be carried out. This involved discussions with DfESC senior management, followed by two focus group meetings, the first with AfL lead teachers from primary schools (6) and the second with AfL lead teachers from secondary schools (5 – one invited school did not attend) who belonged to different Jafa cohorts. One of the designated primary and one designated secondary were special schools. Discussions at these meetings also allowed the researchers some insights into issues the evaluation might address.

The foci of the evaluation were clarified as being to:

1. Explore differences between the experiences of each JAFa cohort
2. Highlight good practice
3. Identify the impact of AfL on teaching and learning
4. Explore the relationship of AfL and critical skills work
5. Gain teachers' perceptions of the contribution of external input
6. Gain teachers' perceptions of DfESC's role in supporting schools

DfESC representatives noted the importance of acknowledging the differences between the Jersey education system and that of England, and that this be taken into account in the evaluation (see description of the Jersey context below).

Methodology

The researchers proposed that six case study schools be identified to span a range of schools as well as the different JAFa cohorts. These schools would be visited for one day each, at a time arranged in consultation with the school. It was suggested that this included an interview with senior management, an interview with the AfL lead teacher, two lesson observations of classes from different year groups, discussions with the teachers of the observed lessons, a focus group discussion with some of the pupils involved, and documentary analysis of a range of texts (e.g. school prospectus, website material, marking practice, school development plans, AfL action plans, staff meeting notes). Those at the scoping meetings confirmed that this plan for school visits was likely to be acceptable to whichever schools were chosen. The mix of schools should try to take account of sector distinctions (primary, secondary, special), geographical location, feeder school associations and the size of primary schools.

All other schools were invited to a focus group meeting so that their views could be included in the evaluation. At the suggestion of the participants in both the Primary and Secondary scoping meetings, both the AfL lead teacher and the head teacher were invited in order that their different perspectives could be represented, although the lead teachers did not feel it was necessary for them to attend separately from their head teachers. DfESC agreed to provide funding for supply cover so that these meetings could be held during school hours. Six focus group meetings each lasting approximately one and a half hours were therefore arranged on two separate days in March and April, and were attended by 26 schools. Five schools did not attend, so were subsequently asked if they wished to respond to the focus group questions in writing. Two schools returned written responses. The focus group schools were requested to provide their JAFa action plan for documentary analysis; this was available for all but three schools.

A further issue raised in school scoping meetings was the need to investigate the extent that teaching assistants (TAs) had been involved in AfL training or practice, so a focus group meeting was arranged with a TA group. This took place following an after-school TA training session organised by DfESC and was attended by approximately 20 TAs.

One member of the King's team was interviewed on the telephone but no sessions undertaken by Kings were observed as part of the evaluation.

Action plans arising from participation in the different phases of JAFAs were requested and received from all but 3 schools, all from JAFAs 2. These were reviewed, and provided initial insights into the development of the JAFAs programme and teachers' responses to various aspects of this.

Case study schools were selected to encompass a range of geographical locations, size and JAFAs cohorts, and were identified in consultation with a member of DfES immediately after the initial scoping discussions. Invitations to participate in the evaluation were sent out to the six case study schools by UoS, but inexplicably never arrived at the schools. An email was then sent to the schools, but arrived on the last day of term before the Easter break, causing some initial consternation. Despite this inauspicious start, all six schools agreed to participate in the evaluation, and the remaining arrangements were made speedily through email and telephone contact. The school visits took place in May and June. A wealth of documentation was provided by the case study schools. They were also highly responsive in the arrangements made for the visit and in many cases additional conversations or observation opportunities were proposed over and above those requested.

In more detail, 12 lesson observations were carried out, involving the following year groups and subject foci: Yr 2 History, Yr 3 Maths, Yr 3 literacy, Yr 4 literacy (2), Yr 6 Science, Yr 6 Literacy, Yr 6 Maths, Yr 7 Science, Yr 8 English, Yr 9 Technology, Yr 10 Maths. No nursery classes were observed, although one school created the opportunity for a walk-through of their nursery facilities, and were eager to highlight the 'whole school' approach to incorporating elements of AfL (as well as other initiatives) into their practice.

Short focus group interviews with 3-5 pupils selected by the teacher to represent a range of abilities took place after these lessons for most observations; in two lessons where group work allowed this, pupils could be approached briefly during the lesson. There was an opportunity to discuss the lesson with the teacher concerned in all schools, and in most cases also to ask them about AfL developments in their school. In some cases the school arranged for the teacher to be replaced in their classroom to allow the time for our conversation. In three of the six schools, one of the observations involved the current AfL lead teacher. Three telephone interviews were carried out after the one day visit either to follow up on some questions, in one case where time had run out during the visit. Additional interviews or meetings that schools proposed included an interview with a Year 6 teacher to discuss their teacher assessment developments, an interview with a T&L coordinator to discuss the integration of AfL and critical skills work, attendance at a parents' meeting to present the school's use of AfL, and attendance at a staff meeting where AfL was discussed following staff's participation in a recent JAFAs INSET. Some additional short interviews were also requested as the opportunities arose, these being with a teaching assistant, a parent helper, a learning support teacher, and a lead teacher from a non-case study school. All were readily agreed to.

The researchers provided a brief draft of the evaluation's emerging findings and possible recommendations to the case study schools, and this was discussed at a combined meeting of those who attended the two initial scoping meetings and in two separate meetings with staff from DfESC. In response to these discussions, the draft evaluation report was refined. The final evaluation was sent to the main stakeholders, policy makers, DfESC, and schools.

Jersey Context

The education system in Jersey has distinctive characteristics that DfESC highlighted from the outset. The education authorities have declared a commitment to a vision of lifelong learning. An important landmark in constructing this vision was a major '21st Century Learning Conference' organized by DfESC in September 2001 and attended by all teaching staff. Wragg (2004) quotes Clare Downey in describing the conference as '*opening teachers' eyes to the content driven nature of curriculum, rather than it being about learning and learners' future needs*'. Various strands of teacher development arose from around that time. In particular, DfESC began 'critical thinking skills' training programmes for its teachers early in 2002, delivered by two trainers. This training continues, following a very positive evaluation of these programmes and their outcomes by Wragg (2004). DfESC provide central funding for the critical skills courses but schools are responsible for funding the supply cover involved.

Jersey is also distinctive in that it has ceased to participate in the standardized testing of pupils in Years 2, 6 and 9 (national curriculum tests). Resistance to using tests began in schools and was subsequently reflected in an island-wide policy after DfESC had conducted two pilot studies of using teacher assessment to report levels to parents and to the local education authority in Years 2 and 6. The KS1 pilot was conducted in 2003 and involved six schools. The second pilot focused on KS2 and was conducted the following year. This is reported to have '*snowballed*', with many schools seeking to participate. The demise of tests was confirmed with a change in charging policy for the administration of them by the English authorities. As part of the pilots, teacher assessment discussion groups were formed and are ongoing, although function separately from the AfL initiative. An evaluation of the effectiveness of teacher assessment had recently been carried out (Richardson, 2005). This concluded that teacher assessment was being successfully implemented and that this was particularly evident in schools that had developed initiatives such as assessment for learning and critical skills.

On the whole, Jersey schools use the English National Curriculum, although history, geography and French are adapted to take account of the local context. Pupils sit GCSE and A Level examinations offered by English examination boards. Jersey is reviewing its school evaluation process and currently there is no equivalent to OFSTED. Schools are able to request targeted support evaluations from external bodies such as SERCO and are asked to provide performance data to DfESC on an annual basis but no performance tables are produced.

A further feature of the Jersey environment is the mix of state-funded, fee-paying and private schools. The Education Department runs 22 primary schools (17 with nursery units), and 5 secondary schools. There are also 2 fee-paying and 7 private primary schools and 2 fee-paying and 3 private secondary schools on the island. In the wholly state-funded sector there are approximately 8,900 school children while private and fee paying schools encompass around 4,400 pupils. At the age of 14+, pupils can apply to attend a selective state-funded school; entry is based on the results of cognitive ability tests (CATs) and teacher assessment. The other four state-funded secondary schools are non-selective.

History of JAFAs Initiative

After the 2001 Conference, at which Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam were among the guest speakers, DfESC decided to take AfL work forward in conjunction with King's College London. A cohort-based system was set up supported by King's to develop teachers' formative assessment practice (Jersey Actioning Formative Assessment, or JAFAs). This used a cascade model, where a lead teacher from each school participating in a JAFAs cohort had contact with King's, but was also expected to disseminate AfL within their own school. All Jersey schools were invited to join. Heads could select the cohort most appropriate to the school's needs, although the composition of the cohorts was finalised by DfESC. More schools applied for the first cohort than could be accommodated. They were arranged so that each of the four geographical 'clusters' of Jersey schools were represented on the different cohorts, as well as a mix of secondary and primary schools, with some special schools, leading to the following JAFAs cohorts:

JAFAs 1: 2003-2004, involving 8 primaries and 5 secondaries;

JAFAs 2: 2004-2005, involving 9 primaries, 2 secondaries and 1 school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties;

JAFAs 3: 2005-2006, involving 9 primaries, 2 secondaries, 1 school for pupils with physical disabilities and 1 school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The King's team provided INSET days for the lead teachers of each JAFAs cohort and also came to visit and usually observe AfL lead teachers in their classrooms. This typically involved a 3 day visit to Jersey each term. DfESC invited schools in JAFAs 1 to bid for time and allocated days on that basis. The budget for JAFAs 2 provided six days supply cover to each school, and 2 days in subsequent years to use as the lead teacher felt fit (and therefore was more restricted than for JAFAs 1). The sharing of practice between schools in different JAFAs was encouraged by having subsequent cohorts visit (or be visited by) the teachers from earlier JAFAs cohorts. The King's team were also commissioned to undertake research on transition in the JAFAs 1 schools alongside the AfL development work with the teachers. This research included teacher interviews and classroom observations.

In addition to their work with the different JAFAs cohorts, the King's team led an AfL conference for head teachers in May 2003. All teachers were invited to an AfL conference launching the JAFAs initiative led by the King's team early in January 2004.

Two one-day INSET sessions were given by Shirley Clarke in February 2004. A number of sessions on AfL techniques that were open to all teachers were also held during that year, again led by King's. So, teachers who were not involved in Jafa cohorts nevertheless, had various other opportunities to attend AfL events organised by DfESC, in addition to any work that individuals or schools may have engaged in themselves, sometimes prior to King's' involvement on the island, independently of centrally-funded initiatives. King's also offered 'open' twilight sessions on a variety of AfL topics when they visited. A further important strand of discussion on assessment arose from the work on teacher assessment which replaced testing, led by Cliff Chipperfield of DfESC.

Report of Findings from Documentary Evidence, Focus Group Meetings and School Case Studies

This section addresses the different foci of the evaluation outlined earlier, although in a slightly different order to represent the data in a coherent narrative. Partly for the sake of anonymity, the different sources of data are presented in an aggregated way, with no attribution made to any particular school.

Input from external sources

The initial Battle of Britain day conference in 2001, which included input from the King's team, was an important event for constructing a distinctive vision for the island's educational provision. Teachers were clearly responsive to this, and there was evidence of a high level of professional engagement by the island's teachers that could include prior involvement or awareness of ongoing research. One school had begun developing AfL drawing on the King's publications before the Jafa initiative. Later conferences received more variable responses, in some cases they were felt to be inspiring, but particularly for secondary schools, responses were much less enthusiastic, leaving some schools with a need to rebuild impetus behind AfL. The teachers who were brought over to speak about good practice were not all felt to be good presenters and sometimes their input was not relevant in terms of individual teachers' subject focus or specializations. Some schools felt that their own practice was already ahead of that described in presentations, particularly where they had begun to develop AfL drawing upon King's publications before the Jafa initiative.

The input of the King's workshops was recognised as being different from other 'training courses', in the sense of not 'telling people what to do'. There was a mixed response to this. The advantages of letting schools work the ideas through their practice were recognised, but some felt it to be not practical enough, or to lack direction. Others welcomed the opportunity for high quality input, particularly given the constraints of the island's geographical location. The single day inputs provided by Shirley Clarke were seen as valuable for practical ideas that could be used in the classroom. Responses to a recent workshop focussing on AfL in Science also seemed very positive. Nevertheless, some teachers dismissed the language used by Shirley Clarke as jargon that seemed

'gimmicky'. The value of the work undertaken by the critical skills trainers and other consultants who are able to work in a more extended way with teachers was reported.

Visits to schools by the King's team received variable comments, in some cases within the same school, one teacher could describe the experience valuable, and another not. Considerable variation was reported in the extent to which members of the King's team interacted with teachers, in the amounts of feedback given (though this seemed to have been addressed more recently), leading in some cases in both JAFAs 1 and 2 to feelings that teachers were participating as 'guinea pigs' in the research. Action plans also suggested variable responses to the visits from the external consultants:

Agreed we do not want anyone in to observe lessons because we do not get any useful feedback.

On the other hand, some members of the King's team were praised in action plans, as having given excellent feedback, or reflected enthusiasm that staff brought back from that. More feedback seemed to have been given in JAJFA 3 visits which happened during the period of the evaluation and this was welcomed (see below). Some teachers were also more proactive in directing King's involvement than others (e.g. by requesting an MFL specialist, continuity in who visited the school, or directing an observer towards a particular aspect of practice). A minority appeared to have established a co-researcher relationship.

Action plans also indicated variable responses to conference inputs; one felt the day '*only scratched the surface*', and went on to speak of trialing and adapting the ideas in their own context. Comments from the King's team would suggest that this is exactly the approach they intended since responsibility for developing the work in schools would lie with the school itself. A further comment from a JAJFA 1 action plan reinforces this view:

King's Visit: It was agreed that this was not very helpful for us and we now need to 'go it alone', we are the experts and it's up to us to share good practice around the school.

Subsequent data emerging from the focus groups suggest that this tension was widespread between wanting to be told what to do and recognising the longer term benefits, including capacity building, of schools taking responsibility for their own development, which was exacerbated by tensions felt between the research and development roles of the initiative.

Teachers from JAJFA 3 schools attending the focus groups also expressed a lack of clarity over the intended purposes of the school visits and observations, though they had not yet experienced any of them. These schools appeared to be less clear of the overall vision, since together with JAJFA 2 schools, given the time that had elapsed since the whole island/all teacher conference launch. There may be a danger that the initiative has less momentum than it did previously, since some schools had started incorporating AfL into

their planning prior to JAFa involvement (see below). Nevertheless, the value of King's visits in keeping up the profile of the initiative for some schools (reinforced by the support from DfESC) was acknowledged.

Support from Jersey DfESC

This section describes DfESC's shaping of the JAFa initiative and schools' responses to this. The vision of Clare Downey was noted as important by many, and the ongoing work of Sarah Johnson in keeping up the impetus in the AfL initiative was also reported to be very significant. They listened to teachers' concerns, kept the dialogue going and raised the profile of AfL. This evaluation, commissioned by DfESC, may also have contributed to this, through encouraging an element of self-evaluation.

Great value was attributed to the JAFa cohort structure for having created forums for professional dialogue about practice, sometimes across sectors, and this was attributed to the foresight of the DfESC. There was strong support for the continuation of this aspect of the JAFa system. JAFa action plans confirmed that resources had been directed almost exclusively towards funding staff cover to enable sharing of practice through observations, both within and between schools, but also was sometimes used to create reading and discussion time. Action plans always involved sharing of practice, in some schools with a focus on one particular AfL technique, shifting from one to another as a whole staff, feeding back to each other at team or staff meetings and then to wider staff meetings in cases where a 'whole school' approach was not possible. In other cases, teachers within one school adopted different foci. In most cases, visits seemed to involve the more senior JAFa lead teacher visiting the less senior. In two cases, lead teachers requested funding for material items related to setting up assessment tracking systems, which seemed to overlap with summative assessment reporting needs. In some instances publications were purchased (often Shirley Clarke literature, with some Black and Wiliam publications). These seemed to be the only items that did not relate to human resources, making this by far the most important expenditure element of the JAFa initiative.

Many one-form primary schools opted for a 'whole school' approach to development, with the aim of bringing all staff on board. Most two-form schools had formed a 'team', although sometimes the action plan indicated that teaching staff beyond the JAFa team were also involved. The rationale for forming these teams was sometimes given, and could involve overlaps with other training initiatives already undertaken (critical skills in particular, and in early plans University of the First Age work was also mentioned), promoted posts, or a desire to cover different key stages. Sometimes the plan reflected a concern for continuity across year groups.

In secondary schools, teams could be formed with representatives of different subject areas with the aim that the team after initial pilots, then cascaded AfL across their departments (alternatively, one JAFa 3 secondary school was opting to focus on one year group). Again, cascading AfL practice took some time, and evidence from a variety of sources suggests success was variable. Designating a head of department as lead teacher

raised the issue of a possible overload. A further problematic outcome of the setting up of a 'team' to develop AfL could be that other teachers who had perhaps already engaged of their own volition with AfL practice, disengaged and awaited further input from the AfL team. At the beginning of the JAFA initiative, school evaluations had just occurred, so the action plan documentation sometimes reflected the need to improve areas in which the school felt lacking. In one instance, this led to a school initiative focusing on marking practice, which seem to take place in addition to the work arising from the creation of a JAFA team, who developed AfL within their different subject areas.

Some schools described their activities as involving an action research approach and indeed were using evaluation or audit methods involving interviews or questionnaires as well as observation. In some cases, this was linked to CPD such as the NPQH qualification, and in others to 'students as researchers' interventions (see below).

Focus groups and case study work suggested that across all sectors while some teachers had had opportunity to engage with AfL and changes in their practice in some cases were significant (often incorporating this alongside other initiatives), the impact of the initiative could not be assumed to have reached all members of staff or all schools. Variations in engagement were frequently reported. Factors influencing this are suggested in later sections of the report.

Other fora such as the headteachers' forum, were also reported to have contributed to ongoing dialogue about assessment, with those involved in teacher assessment pilots having additional advantages in terms of engaging with assessment issues. This seemed particularly valuable for those involved in the initial pilot; differing understandings of assessment were apparent in discussions with teachers. The separation of the teacher assessment discussion forum organised by DfESC and the AfL initiative was queried by some teachers. Clusters did not feature strongly in accounts of practice sharing, although one cluster was referred to as a *go-getter* and in another cluster, development work on transition was mentioned.

Many teachers spoke appreciatively of a supportive climate that recognised that change in professional practice took time. This was expressed about DfESC's approach as well as at a school level:

This term's focus will be feedback. Next term, peer and self assessment. Moving slowly so that non-one feels pressured. It also allows for opportunities to grow and support one another as we share ideas and focus. (Lead Teacher notes)

The action plans also provided evidence of the flexibility allowed by central authorities in the way funding could be used and this was also valued (a small exception being time restrictions from DfESC in terms of using supply cover funding up within financial periods, particularly given the limited availability of appropriate supply cover).

Nevertheless, some schools were now topping up this funding themselves, while still potentially giving considerable support to JAFA 3. The drop in funding of AfL that

occurred after Jafa 1, where Jafa 2 and 3 schools had six days supply cover during their own Jafa phase, falling to 2 days cover to participate in later cohorts, may have contributed to some differential experience of the cohorts, although all supply cover granted was certainly welcomed. Given that an outcome of the Jafa initiative (and others) could involve substantial rethinking of both the curriculum and teaching, learning and assessment policies (see below), support requirements and difficulties in sustaining ongoing developments were also spoken of. Some schools raised concerns about losing key personnel, through staff moves or long-term leave, and the ensuing 'dilution' of their AfL capacities. Concerns were voiced about replacing key teachers, or finding supply teachers, given the evolution of their school culture and changes in their practice. The need for induction of new staff as well as newly qualified teachers was highlighted, and criticisms were also voiced of current teacher training in England.

While the initial island conference was significant in constructing a vision of education that teachers often spoke of as inspiring, teachers reflected differing levels of certainty about the direction of educational policy on the island. The need for a holistic vision was expressed, related to concerns that individual initiatives might be attributed too great an importance and over-optimistic scenarios constructed. Action plans also suggested that at one point the number of new initiatives was somewhat overwhelming:

Assessment, Inclusion, SEN are major focus in SDP – tricky to keep up with all the developments as they all impact on assessment.

While some respondents felt that DfESC was committed to a period that would allow existing initiatives time to develop, others were less sure. There was also uncertainty about future support for AfL, and whether for example this was the 'last Jafa'. Sometimes concerns related to the abandonment of standardised testing, with doubts about whether a reversal of this might happen in the future. Concern was also voiced about difficulties associated with teacher assessment in the face of parental pressures related to selective school entry procedures, although on the whole the end of standardised testing was welcomed.

Teaching assistant involvement in AfL work seemed variable, although in some cases was highly valued and had involved them as researchers of the classroom, either in interviewing pupils or in observing teacher's AfL work. Both were felt to have advantages for the TA's learning as well as supporting the teachers. One school spoke of creating systematic opportunities for classroom TAs to discuss planning with their teacher, and here it seemed the TAs were able to make a valuable contribution to providing rich feedback in the classroom. A teacher spoke of planning her timing of feedback moments for when her TA was present. Funding of TAs was also reported as becoming more difficult however.

It emerged from the TA focus group discussions that many TAs were not aware of the term AfL but some had picked up the language of success criteria, learning intentions, WALTs (We Are Learning To), WILFs (What I'm Looking For), traffic lighting from their classroom involvement (this seemed also to be the case for critical skills). TAs

commented on not having formal learning opportunities to engage with AfL, and although there was a willingness to engage, the more recognition of their training needs and the issue of their contracts not covering time for training or planning were raised. As is commonplace, some TAs were attached to particular pupils, and others to classes. TAs made comments about the benefits of AfL for pupils, and pupils' positive responses to peer assessment. In a secondary school focus group, pupils commented upon the approachability of TAs and the usefulness of their feedback. Some TAs commented on AfL and CS working well together (although again others did not know what CS entailed). In some cases, teachers or head teachers were felt to be barriers to the uptake of new initiatives, although the number of new initiatives was also raised as confusing their implementation.

The experiences of the different JAFAs cohorts

Several factors have already been raised that clearly contribute to differences in the experiences of the JAFAs cohorts. Apart from funding levels, a key difference relates to the impetus of the initial launch of the JAFAs programme and the island-wide conference that raised the profile of AfL (even if there were variations in responses to this event, as reported above). Given the high profile this constructed for AfL, those schools who were not in the first cohort, nevertheless engaged in trying out some AfL practices, often drawing upon Shirley Clarke literature. This engagement was sometimes described using metaphors such as 'dabbling' or 'dipping our toes in the water' suggesting that it was somewhat tentative, although action plans also show that AfL was rapidly integrated within school policy documents.

So, for example, while some schools in JAFAs 1 reported beginning with an audit of current assessment practice, some JAFAs 2 schools reported carrying out an audit of *existing* AfL practice. Documentation from all JAFAs 3 schools emphasized their *continued* development of AfL, which was already incorporated in school development plans:

Assessment for Learning (AfL) was part of last year's school development plan. Due to staff changes and inclusion in the JAFAs 3 programme, there is a need for this area to continue to be a focus of the SDP.

Unless ownership of AfL initiatives is devolved to teachers, this may make it more likely that efforts to encourage AfL practice are experienced as a 'top-down', rather than a 'bottom-up' initiative. However conversations with those involved in JAFAs 3 suggested that teachers were making conscious efforts to ensure that a maximum number of staff were involved in workshops offered.

In contrast to JAFAs 1, JAFAs 2 seems to have had a slightly hesitant start. The initiation of JAFAs 2 was also affected by the non-availability of a key King's team member. Action plans from JAFAs 2 schools were considerably less well-developed in most cases than those of JAFAs 1 and JAFAs 3; it seems that lead teachers were encouraged to formulate these during an AfL training day, so they tended to be hand-written and rather brief, whereas for JAFAs 1 and 3 they benefited from being developed after there had

been time for some negotiation with key players in school, often when a team within the school had been formulated so that details of the team's formation and implementation could be given. The evaluation was underway as early JAFAs 3 visits were taking place. While JAFAs 3 participants expressed some hesitancy in early focus group conversations, later conversations suggested that earlier criticisms of workshops provided and of the consultants' approach to school visits and observations seemed to have been addressed.

Being in the second or third phase nevertheless involved a complex mix of professional relations, where there was an appreciation that later JAFAs could benefit from the experience of those in earlier phases, but at the same time also involved some ambivalences arising from the sense of being at different levels of experience. It was seen as important that time was allowed for change to work through practice as had been allowed for the first cohort, and that this was not experienced as a '*done to*', as one JAFAs 3 participant put it. Again even those in JAFAs 1 expressed the need for time to continue to develop practice and to extend involvement to others in their schools. It also became apparent from focus group discussions that principals played a pivotal role in shaping an institution's engagement; in a small minority of cases this had excluded some from any involvement.

Interaction of AfL with Critical Skills (CS) and other initiatives

Teachers and teaching assistants expressed the view that CS and AfL are complementary, although also recognised differences in the terminology each employed. They reported that CS courses had been amended to take account of AfL initiatives since the beginning of the JAFAs system. Several suggested that support for both initiatives might be integrated.

Teachers attributed different relative importance to one or the other. Some felt AfL gave an overall philosophy or acted as an '*overarching umbrella*', others felt AfL lacked any overall philosophy, and was more like a set of tools. Others argued for a more holistic view in which both AfL and CS work had a place in a wider agenda that focused on student learning and saw dangers in assuming that either could work as a '*magic bullet*'.

AfL was described as having sharpened the focus of CS work which created opportunities for developing social skills, group work and brainstorming in early phases of a new area of work, then led to individual work that contributed to the assessment profile. It also allowed teachers to stand back and observe, which supported teachers' formative assessment. One teacher described their interaction in this way:

[Critical skills work] gives you the building blocks for you to work well, in terms of group work, it gives you rules, and it gives you tools. While AfL looks at the person, how you feel and where you want to go. And I see the two just working so well together. [Description of CS challenge work, involving group collaboration.] I think the AfL takes it to the individual, and says I want to talk to you within that group, and within that structure, and say what did you do, what do you feel, where do you want to go with it? Do you like what you're doing?

Although some lesson observations were rooted firmly in AfL approaches, the majority involved part of a critical skills challenge, or sometimes a mini-challenge, in which elements of self, peer and teacher formative assessment were incorporated. Student focus groups strongly confirmed high levels of engagement in CS tasks, particularly more extended and authentic tasks, and group assessment of these worked harmoniously, with the diffusion of assessment judgements across the group being a benefit that pupils recognised. CS work was also described as useful in transition, through creating a common language and common approach to group work.

Other initiatives such as student voice/students as researchers, learning styles work, or a solutions-focused approach (EBD based), sometimes overlapped, particularly for groups with EBD or in learning support work. Further sharing of practice in these areas is seen as contributing to the development of inclusion.

Changes in teaching practice and pupil outcomes

It is difficult to attribute pupil learning outcomes to AfL specifically since any changes could reflect other initiatives, in particular, the critical skills work. For some schools, in particular those in Jafa 3, though also some others, it seems too soon to know what the likely pupil outcomes will be. Teachers were aware of the danger of generalisations. Taking these limitations into account the AfL initiatives are seen as contributing to:

- Greater clarity in learning objectives, developing teachers' and pupils' awareness of criteria and greater clarity in what counts as good work from pupils. It has contributed to increased confidence, self esteem and better behaviour (subsequently leading to improved learning). But variability was reported within and across schools.
- In at least one school, there was evidence of improvement in GCSE results, although the school attributed this to a combination of initiatives. In another school, GCSE results were felt to be highly variable given that numbers departing for the state-funded selective school varied so much from year to year, making any correlation with GCSE results problematic.
- Changes in lesson planning which has become more ongoing and more responsive to feedback from AfL.
- Ongoing developments in schools' teaching, learning and assessment policies and a rethinking of the curriculum. This sometimes involved major in-school developments, such as the elaboration of a new framework of literacy learning outcomes. This raises the important need of ensuring that such initiatives can be both debated and shared widely. A similar issue emerged for curriculum debates.
- In some lessons, classroom management was observed to be outstandingly good, drawing upon AfL strategies, which were recognised by pupils as creating a classroom environment that supported their learning and their engagement.
- Teaching that is more responsive to learner needs (reducing behavioural issues). A different relationship between teachers and students has developed in some classes and some students are more articulate and positive about learning and demonstrate greater engagement. This leads to greater depth of learning.

- Considerable professional development through having created space and time provided through supply cover for professional dialogue. This has enabled revisiting of practice and re-auditing.

Good practice identified in pupil learning

- Where AfL is combined with critical skills excitement and engagement were noted. In these situations, synergies between AfL and critical skills created a focus on social relations and learning processes. However, AfL without critical skills can still lead to effective practice that pupils recognised as supportive, for example in the orchestration of alternating peer discussion (sometimes in mixed ability groups) with group responses that fed into plenary discussions.
- The use of high quality exemplars from which task criteria were developed in discussion with pupils, rather than simply stated (e.g. the use of a poem in which metaphors were embedded where pupils unpicked what a metaphor was and what it added to the poem, as a precursor to writing metaphors in their own poems).
- The use of critical skills challenges encouraged teachers to stand back, and the development of longer and authentic tasks created pupil engagement. The use of challenges to assess learning allowed pupils to use complex skills and created opportunities for whole-class formative assessment in plenary review sessions.
- The emphasis on working in groups promoted through critical skills facilitated peer assessment in AfL.
- Challenge work across two year groups or across two classes, allowed practice-sharing and led to benefits in children's confidence (e.g. super learning days, cross-curricular extended tasks).
- Both initiatives encouraged dialogue about learning and contributed to pupils' ability to articulate their ideas about learning; this seemed to be reflected in pupil focus groups.
- In many classrooms, the classroom atmosphere allowed students to say 'I don't know' in response to teacher questioning, suggesting a supportive teacher-student relationship and making it more likely that teaching could respond to their needs.

Good practice in school organisation

- The sharing of staff opportunities to attend outside events, gives ownership to staff.
- A non-threatening ethos was spoken of as productive for sharing practice, particularly through lesson observation. This has been helped by using short, frequent observations, rather than observing whole lessons. The teacher determines the timing and focus of observations and invites the observer in for feedback.
- In one school, the use of video for sharing practice and for pupils assessing themselves is highly valued. It is also used for assessment of challenges with pupils. It is regularly used in staff meetings and as part of, or whole of staff development sessions.
- A drip feed approach is seen as more helpful in most schools, where AfL is regularly raised in weekly staff meetings, as well as longer INSET meetings.

- Teaching assistants feel most effectively involved when they attend regularly scheduled meetings with the teacher to discuss planning, they are able to join in with AfL practices. Documentary evidence reported examples of TAs being involved as ‘researchers’ in the classroom which was productive in giving them insights into AfL.
- Effective practice was reported through the involvement of parents in classroom, and also in informing parents about AfL and critical skills work. Schools vary in their capacity to draw on parents as classroom helpers according to geographical and socio-economic characteristics of their context.

Facilitating factors

- The leadership and support of the headteacher was crucial through time allocated to the lead teacher, recognition of timescale needed for change, coupled with freedom to shape the initiative in school.
- Support from DfESC in terms of funding allowed teacher cover, but also flexibility in use of funding was helpful.
- Education department’s and King’s team recognition that change needed time, but encouraged schools to work it through themselves.
- Open school ethos assisted developments.
- Involvement of a figure of authority as lead teacher, although used in supportive way.
- Explicit links being made between AfL and teacher assessment developments linked to phasing out of tests. In relation to teacher assessment, pilot 1 involved more dialogue and had greater support than pilot 2.
- Larger primary schools (two form entry), allows sharing of planning across year group (and *possibility* of serendipitous transfer to other years from staff movement), whereas smaller ones (one form entry) allows whole school approach.
- In years 2, 6 and 9, the curriculum benefits from not needing to focus on tests were apparent though uncertainties and insecurities were expressed (e.g. ‘are we doing it properly’) about teacher assessment.
- Involvement with wider research or professional community was helpful (e.g. initial teacher training with ‘investigative ethos’, NPQH, earlier involvement in research, or wider reading). The teacher assessment forum has been very useful.

Barriers

- Coherence of vision for the island has reduced since initial launch of initiative, some uncertainty about the future vision.
- Time and curriculum pressures.
- Lack of differentiation of AfL input (subject specialisms in Jafa 1, or special school needs).
- The label ‘lead teacher’ constructs that person as the ‘expert’ whereas their confidence might only be just ahead of others.
- Problematic overload if lead teacher also has significant other responsibilities (particularly in secondary schools).

- Difficulty in larger primary schools of involving all staff, resulting in considerable gaps in some years, pupils moving between very different cultures. Difficulty in secondary schools of all subject teachers being time-tabled at the same time, making observation or sharing practice problematic.
- Implications of staff turnover and sometimes staff illness for continuity and progression in AfL.
- Difficulties in getting supply teachers who are trained in AfL & critical skills, particularly in special schools, demands greater flexibility in the use of supply cover time.
- Funding post-JAFA, schools devoting own development funding to this, a lot for schools to take this forward, some possibly may not do so.
- Particularly in JAFA 1, a minority suggested they were suffering from ‘initiative overload’ where schools seem to have been hit with AfL, critical skills and other initiatives at the same time. While acknowledging that the DfESC recently limited the number of new initiatives, the perception of overload may lead to a danger of AfL being seen as tips for teachers, gimmicky, and thereby dismissed. It may also lead some to resist, possibly more so in older staff.

Recommendations

Overall

The evidence from this evaluation provides support for the continuation and further development of AfL in Jersey schools and colleges. It suggests that some exemplary practice is developing, strongly supported by the extensive energy of lead teachers, leadership from headteachers and investment, vision and coordination provided by the DfESC.

The teachers who participated in the evaluation did so with enthusiasm, commitment and interest. They gave generously in terms of time, insights and ideas. Many of the recommendations which follow have come from them.

1. **Refine and re-launch future vision.** The time lapse since the initial launch of AfL and changes in personnel are creating concerns and uncertainties about the direction in which the education provision should be developing in the next phase. There is a need for a clear vision of the ‘bigger picture’ for the next phase to be communicated, to which schools and local authority staff can sign up.
2. Need to **integrate critical skills and AfL** initiatives and promote staff development that covers both, with greater emphasis on classroom culture (role allocation, purposes of self, peer and teacher assessment). CS work can provide clarity about social interactions in the classroom that enhance the provision of constructive feedback in AfL.
3. Integrate developments in **teacher assessment** relating to the phasing out of

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‘high stakes’ testing, with AfL. It seems important to develop and maintain confidence in teacher assessment judgements through opportunities for moderation. The positive experience of the teacher assessment forum needs extending to other year groups, within and across schools, JAFAs cohorts and across sectors, partly focusing on moderation of work, partly on discussion of literature that would encourage awareness of assessment issues. Continue to develop the central library of assessment literature and increase access to electronic literature resources.

4. Sustain and **further develop time** in two senses:

4.1 Flexible funding has enabled release time which has been a major facilitator in allowing the planning time needed for curriculum and assessment development work, implementing these and sharing practice, lesson observation, visits to other schools, etc.

4.2 Recognition of a realistic timescale for implementation of new teaching, learning & assessment policies and changes in culture. Frequent drip-feeding is needed. The initiatives may not yet have established strong enough foundations to withstand staff turnover or illness. Schools are at different stages and future developments need to recognise and build on this.

5. Need for staff to continue to have **opportunities for sharing practice** within and across schools and for reflection upon this in school. Consider developing and maintaining a website to assist this. Extend opportunities for lesson observation which is seen as important for NQTs and incoming staff as well as established staff. Explore ways of rewarding schools/teachers who are willing to host showcasing of good practice.

6. Acknowledge and develop the mainstream provision to meet the specific needs of those identified as having **special needs**. Extend the links between special schools, units and mainstream schools on critical skills and AfL. Significant overlaps were noted between the role allocation in critical skills and AfL classroom management techniques that seem likely to be of benefit to those labelled as less able or as having emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD).

7. Develop a more consistent approach to **involving the TAs** in planning and staff development to support AfL and critical skills in schools. Create spaces for them to have TA meetings. Some schools appear to have contracts for TAs that enable this to happen. Consider options for extending opportunities for them to access more formal training (e.g. Higher Level Teaching Assistant qualification). This could extend Jersey’s teacher trainer capacity to support TAs.

8. Consider **reconfiguring lead teachers’ responsibilities in AfL** and critical skills as a role that supports inquiry/research. Opportunities to make more use of existing research as well as to undertake research might be supported through this role. Research capacity in Jersey could be further developed through Masters and Doctoral opportunities that would develop links with universities including King’s, and continuing to encourage schools to make their own links with HEIs.

9. Recognise and continue to develop the value of an **identified leader in the local authority** who promotes liaison between schools.

10. Ensure that **isolation on the island is minimised** by continuing to invite high quality speakers from other countries, promoting visits in both directions, etc.