

Independent evaluation of *Rising Stars* Optional Tests – Phase one results

Introduction

Rising Stars is working with Shift Learning and AlphaPlus to analyse the full range of *Rising Stars Optional Tests* for Year 5. These partners were chosen for their expertise and to ensure the research is independent. The purpose of the research is to evaluate the *Optional Tests* in terms of their quality and reliability. The project started in May 2015 and will finish in summer 2016. This summary:

- describes the sample of schools involved in the research
- provides an overview of the analysis undertaken
- presents the key findings to date
- highlights the implications of the findings, and
- outlines the second phase of the research.

The sample

A total of 39 schools (over 1,100 pupils) from across England (representing a range of rural and urban settings) participated in the first phase of the research by voluntarily sharing their results of the Year 5 *Optional Tests* for English (Reading, and Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling) and mathematics. The tests were taken between 1 June and 17 July 2015.

	Test		
Measures	Mathematics	Reading	Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling
Range of scores attained	1-110 (max = 110)	0-45 (max = 50)	0-69 (max = 70)
Average scoring for the test as a whole	fairly low	low	quite high
Reliability	excellent	good (on the cusp of being 'excellent')	excellent

The data analysis

A range of statistical analyses was carried out on the results of the Year 5 *Optional Tests*. These included evaluation against key criteria recommended by the Education Endowment Fund for tests of this nature. Both total test scores and individual questions within tests were scrutinised. For the **total test scores**, the following key measures were considered:

- **central tendency**
- **dispersion/spread of scores**
- **skewness**
- the overall **reliability** of data gathered in respect of the tests.

For individual questions, the study focused on:

- **question facility** and/or **difficulty**
- **discrimination** – the extent to which each particular question tends to be answered correctly

by those who are strong overall, and answered incorrectly by those who are weak overall in the test

- **missing data** – a count of 'omitted' and 'not reached' responses

Phase 1 research findings

The table above summarises the main results for the three sets of Year 5 *Optional Tests*. The average scoring for each subject reflects what schools reported to Rising Stars during the summer term – that the reading and mathematics tests were challenging for many pupils. It would not be expected for results for the separate subjects to be exactly the same due to the different nature of the tests, the focus and demand of the new national curriculum and the way in which they are assessed.

Next steps

In light of the research findings, all items identified as being outside of the guideline values for discrimination and facility are being evaluated and reconsidered by Rising Stars with the editors and authors and, where appropriate, questions are being modified or replaced. This review is taking place alongside development of the new editions of *Optional Tests* to ensure they are in line with the final test frameworks published by the DfE at the end of June 2015. A number of the more challenging questions had already been eased as part of the new edition work, reflecting the changes to the test specifications. Further information about the new editions is available at www.risingstars-uk.com/optionaltests.

Phase 2 of the research will be undertaken in late spring and summer 2016 and will involve all schools and pupils that participated in Phase 1. Pupils will take both the *Rising Stars Optional Tests* for Year 6 and the 2016 Key Stage 2 national curriculum tests for English and mathematics. A summary of this part of the research will be published in 2016.



Overall, these findings suggest that the *Rising Stars Optional Tests* are high-quality tests providing effective measurement of pupils' knowledge, understanding and application of the new national curriculum.



About Shift Learning and AlphaPlus

Shift Learning is a market research company specialising in the education and learning sector. It is responsible for recruiting schools to the project and managing all aspects of the data collection. AlphaPlus is an education consultancy that specialises in the design, development and use of assessments, and in the evaluation of their performance and impact. AlphaPlus is carrying out all the data analysis and interpreting the findings.

Websites for further information:

Rising Stars Optional Tests • www.risingstars-uk.com/optionaltests

AlphaPlus • www.alphaplusconsultancy.co.uk

Shift Learning • www.shift-learning.co.uk