

## Section 2: General views on curriculum, assessment, and qualifications pathways

### **10. What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways are *working well* to support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?**

The current curriculum is defined in a very restricted sense in the Call for Evidence as “all of the content (both knowledge and skills) that pupils study during key stage 1, key stage 2, key stage 3, key stage 4 and 16-19 education”. Given the focus on a mere list of content to be covered it would be more accurate to define what we have today as a national syllabus rather than a national curriculum.

To address this question in relation to the curriculum it is necessary to refer to the Programmes of Study that are set out in ‘The national curriculum in England Framework document’. These set out a common entitlement to a given body of knowledge, the acquisition of a given set of skills, and the securing of an understanding of a given set of concepts. They set out what is expected to be taught at each key stage in a way that each key stage builds on work taught previously.

The Programmes of Study operate in such a way as to direct the attention of schools and teachers to the detail of the twin aims of the national syllabus at the outset of curriculum design and the process of planning to teach. The first aim addresses the ‘essential knowledge’ that pupils need to be educated citizens and the second ‘provides an outline of the core knowledge around which teachers can develop exciting and stimulating lessons’. The Programmes of Study are set out for each national curriculum subject as required by the framework.

This arrangement offers advantages for clear sequencing of content but does no more than provide the basis for the development of a comprehensive curriculum for all to 16.

### **11. What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways should be *targeted for improvements* to better support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?**

There is an urgent need for action. Since 2010 there have been many reforms based on inappropriate and excessive marketization, centralization and managerialism. There have been many negative effects (Brighouse and Waters 2022) in the development of a fragmented system in which it is now hard to know precisely what schools are doing in relation to curriculum. Schools are underfunded, have been subjected to chaotic policy announcements, no longer have the support of local

education authorities, have experienced weakened links with university departments of education and are subject to unfair criticisms. Schools must compete against each other in a fragmented system. England (unlike the other nations of the United Kingdom) does not have an aims-based curriculum and as such there is an absence of a coherent system.

It is important to develop an appropriate characterisation of 'curriculum'. Rather than arguing that the curriculum is "all of the content (both knowledge and skills)", there is a need for a more expansive approach. DES (1985) suggested something of much greater value than that which is given in the guidelines to this document, i.e., "A school's curriculum consists of all those activities designed or encouraged within its organizational framework to promote the intellectual, personal, social and physical development of its pupils. It includes not only the formal programme of lessons, but also the 'informal' programme of so-called extracurricular activities as well as all those features which produce the school's 'ethos', such as the quality of relationships, the concern for equality of opportunity, the values exemplified in the way the school sets about its task and the way in which it is organized and managed. Teaching and learning styles strongly influence the curriculum and in practice they cannot be separated from it. Since pupils learn from all these things, it needs to be ensured that all are consistent in supporting the school's intentions".

The National Curriculum currently applies only to the local authority-maintained sector of schools, so the argument of a common entitlement to a given body of knowledge, the acquisition of a given set of skills and the securing of an understanding of a given set of concepts does not apply to all learners.

This Review is very welcome as is the Working Principle to a "comprehensive curriculum for all to 16" and the decision that when it is implemented, all state schools, including academies, will be required to teach the national curriculum.

It is argued that the National Curriculum is so full that there is insufficient time to consider matters beyond it. The very heavy emphasis on the detail of subject content and its sequencing in the National Curriculum can be overwhelming for teachers. As reported by the Chair of the Review Panel in her article for Schools Week of the 8th November 2024, teachers feel "disempowered and deprofessionalised by overstimulation and the challenge to cover content" in the curriculum.

The language used to describe National Curriculum is too narrowly focused on knowledge. Learning is about the acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding. The NC should be an enabler of learning in this wider interpretation including opportunities to embed critical thinking skills

Whilst expressing the NC in terms of "traditional" subjects may be a helpful way in expressing what is expected to be taught, more thought should be invested in looking for cross-curricular links which support understanding in each subject and can show concrete applications of abstract ideas across subjects. This opens possibilities for teachers to plan some of their teaching across more than one subject at a time.

Multidisciplinary learning helps students to understand the connections and links between subject knowledge and enables greater creativity and deepening of the learning process.

Further to this point, there are ways of “knowing how” that apply across subjects, such as reasoning, conjecturing, questioning, testing, representing, etc. that could benefit teaching and learning by their explicit statement. For the most part these are hidden below statements of ‘knowledge that’.

Earlier versions of the NC recognised cross-curricular elements, and these were stated in NCC Circular 6 (1989) as three non-statutory aspects: dimensions; skills and themes.

The dimensions which express the values which underpin a society based on Labour and Cooperative values included:

- Committing to the provision of equality of opportunity
- Ensuring all learners access the curriculum
- Giving especial attention to those with special educational needs
- Developing open-mindedness
- Preparing for adult life in a multicultural society

The skills to be taught, learnt and applied across all subjects included:

- Communication
- Numeracy
- Study
- Problem solving
- Personal and social
- Information technology

The themes included

- Environmental Education
- Education for Citizenship
- Economic and industrial Understanding
- Careers Education and Guidance, and
- Health Education

There is merit in designing a curriculum with both weft and warp in this way. It prevents the false silos of subjects; it accounts for some of what is to be learnt not fitting into any subject box; and prepares pupils as autonomous learners.

Critically, the weft and warp of a curriculum widens the scope of what is meant by progress. In a linear curriculum progress is defined as knowing more, understanding more and acquiring new skills. In this multi-dimensional model, progress can be extended to knowing more deeply, understanding more clearly and applying skills in a wider range of contexts. This deeper progress can prepare better each pupil for moving onto their next key stage.

Whilst there is no recommendation here to replicate the earliest cross-curricular elements in detail, there is a strong recommendation that they are included in principle in the design of the curriculum.

With regard to the assessment system whilst teachers may assess pupils across the full range of NC content through, say, observing pupils working on tasks, the national assessments do not. What is accessible through testing is limited and is a subset of NC content. Because schools are judged on the outcomes of these tests and examinations, there is a tendency to limit what is taught to those items of content that are tested and examined. This limited curriculum disadvantages those learners whose talents and interests may lie outside the restricted test and examination focused curriculum and, in some cases, lead to their rejection of the school system.

Types of assessment that are valued and open to young people should be broad ranging and give learners options which allow them to demonstrate their strengths. Assessment types should provide positive and flexible options for those who are neurodiverse with specific atypical skills, for those who are strong in creativity and practical skills and so on. Assessment types should reflect the skills, knowledge, concepts and attitudes including ways of working that our society wants and needs young people to acquire - literacy, numeracy, communication skills and the ability to work in teams. Unless absolutely necessary, don't invent new names for programmes of study or qualifications: keep the names of awards simple and understandable by the wider community.

Further, one could accept the assessment is essential, but also question its purpose and form. Assessment overwhelmingly is individualistic, competitive, focused on (academic) memory and relates to subjects. It emerges from an approach which highlights the relationship between schools and the economy (including seeing learners as future employees). This may be an essential **part** of schools, but produces alienation in those pupils who know they are set up to fail and provides an unbalanced education for all. We need an assessment and evaluation system that is more criterion based, has continuous evaluations - otherwise all the aspects of education mentioned above, such as being critical thinkers, cannot be evaluated. The main purpose of assessment is to enable improvement and understanding, which in turn involves positive recognition of improvement. There should be continuous, practical, individual and group assessment and evaluation.

Currently, a qualification pathway is linked to getting a conventional job through the study of subjects in a narrow sense. However, although employers do want good subject knowledge they also want employees to have developed in areas such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity. These skills are deemed as essential in the modern world where pupils may enter a job market and will be changing jobs regularly. Hence, these aspects need to be built into any qualifications pathways.

## Section 3: Social justice and inclusion

### **12. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation (class ceilings) for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage?**

It is vital to see the curriculum in context. Key barriers for learners are associated with societal issues and the ways in which education works for some and not others. The age at which children become consciously aware of class, status and socio-economic differences may vary, but research has shown that children are fully conscious of differences before they leave primary school (Tudor J.F., 1971) 'The development of class awareness in children', *Social Forces* 49: 470–476.). This awareness of how other people perceive one's status affects a child's physiology, cognitive performance and emotions. Research studies (Leventhal, T.; Brooks-Gunn, J. (2000) 'The neighbourhoods they live in: the effects of neighbourhood residence on child and adolescent outcomes', *Psychology Bulletin* 126, 309-37.) have asked why children living in more expensive neighbourhoods do better in school and these studies have generally found that children living in affluent neighbourhoods exhibit greater school readiness and higher attainment than the counterparts living in neighbourhoods with people of lower socio-economic status. This is most likely because the more affluent neighbourhoods have better resources, or because relationships between people are better in affluent neighbourhoods, or because expectations are different. The introduction of statutory minimum funding levels in 2020 disproportionately benefited schools in more affluent areas and reduced the share of total funding provided for schools in more disadvantaged areas.

More specifically, we wish to highlight three key barriers regarding the removal of barriers to the curriculum. First the curriculum delivery, as is, negates student input. This suppresses students' natural instinct to be enquiring, to question, to challenge and to 'speak up'. Oracy seems to be discouraged rather than encouraged in the state education system in the state education system particularly since the removal of the statutory speaking and listening element from GCSE English in 2013. Knowledge is, of course, vital in any curriculum but the current curriculum is overly biased towards the transmission of knowledge rather than the development of skills and creativity that are so essential to progress through life.

The second specific barrier is that the Arts (Drama, Music and Art) have been badly marginalized over the past decade - and this affects disadvantaged students disproportionately. Their parents are more likely to be financially challenged to fill in this gap in their child's development. For socioeconomically disadvantaged learners, school trips to Art Galleries, Theatres and Concerts need to be financed by Government and greater encouragement should be given to encourage more visiting performers - across the Arts spectrum - into Schools to perform and hold workshops. What was called TiE (Theatre in Education) now should be called AFD (Arts for Development).

Thirdly, regarding specific barriers to the curriculum, we need to pay proper attention to educating people about, through and for social justice. Currently, the social curriculum is low status and incoherent. We need an umbrella title (e.g. citizenship education) which allows for proper, conceptually based learning about the public/private interface. This means ensuring a meaningful PSE (which could incorporate things such as health, careers, interpersonal matters) and those areas which are often seen as being principally about society (rights, duties, justice, tolerance, diversity and inclusion in relation to things such as community, the environment, the legal and political system and so on). The public and the private are interrelated and have rich educational potential for developing understanding of and enhancing learners' capacities to engage in ways that are aligned with socially just environments. .

In general, the point is that pupils need to be recognised for their many possible aptitudes, not forced into developing one aptitude - passing written exams. This also means valuing equally many types of abilities.

Again, we return to the need for the curriculum to be seen in context. The barriers are mostly unrelated to curriculum design. Children may be disadvantaged by virtue of being hungry, not being able to afford a uniform, being from an overcrowded home (or none) with nowhere to study at home. Children from families with health needs, drug dependencies, domestic violence are likely not to be able to focus on their schoolwork. The age at which children become consciously aware of class, status and socio-economic differences may vary, but research has shown that children are fully conscious of differences before they leave primary school (Tudor J.F., 1971) 'The development of class awareness in children', *Social Forces* 49: 470–476.). This awareness of how other people perceive one's status affects a child's physiology, cognitive performance and emotions. Research studies (Leventhal, T. & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2000) 'The neighbourhoods they live in: the effects of neighbourhood residence on child and adolescent outcomes', *Psychology Bulletin* 126, 309-37.) have asked why children living in more expensive neighbourhoods do better in school and these studies have generally found that children living in affluent neighbourhoods exhibit greater school readiness and higher attainment than the counterparts living in neighbourhoods with people of lower socio-economic status. This is most likely because the more affluent neighbourhoods have better resources, or because relationships between people are better in affluent neighbourhoods, or because expectations are different.

The introduction of statutory minimum funding levels in 2020 disproportionately benefited schools in more affluent areas and reduced the share of total funding provided for schools in more disadvantaged areas.

In these cases, access to school life should take priority over access to the curriculum. That said, the curriculum should refer to real-life contexts that are recognisable to all children.

There is an urgent need to reverse the current situation with children in disadvantaged areas being less likely to benefit from the education system.

Evidence suggests that there is a relationship between income inequality and educational outcomes across the economic spectrum - in other words, even the children of well-educated and affluent parents perform better in more equal societies (Willms, J.D. (1999) 'Quality and inequality in children';s literacy: the effects of families, schools, and communities', in Keating, D.P. and Hertzman, C. (eds) Developmental Health and the Wealth of Nations, New York: Guilford Press).

Child development research has shown that if children are already behind in terms of school readiness and cognitive development when they start school, then unfavourable educational outcomes are much more likely, in spite of good schooling (Heckman, J.J. (2006) 'Skill formation and the economics of investing disadvantaged children', Science 312, 1900-1902.).

There are examples where troubled children find it hard to follow schools' behaviour expectations. These children are often removed from the classroom and, in extremis, excluded from the school. Across the compulsory school age range, more learning is missed by removal and exclusion than from absence.

A higher proportion of disadvantaged pupils are removed from the classroom or excluded from the school than their peers. (DfE data) This means their educational progress is interrupted which can risk limiting their life chances.

**13. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation which may disproportionately impact pupils based on other characteristics (e.g. disability, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion or belief etc.)**

Yes, by focusing on a particular type of activity others are neglected and so form a barrier to attainment. For example, the view of science as objective and neutral is not only 500 years out of date, but also hides that it is a social and emotional activity ridden with values. As a result, science as taught is more likely to appeal to those pupils who like to learn in isolation, while those who like to engage with social and emotional aspects are less likely to feel that science is a subject for them. In fact it is both logical and social and so should appeal to everyone.

Performance data and exclusion data continue to show variation across different groups of pupils.

**14. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers in continuing to improve attainment, progress, access or participation for learners with SEND?**

Too many barriers are built into the current assessment process - in particular the abolition of testing through oral assessment.

Pupils with SEND are more likely to be removed from the classroom and excluded from school than other groups. (DfE data). This means their educational progress is interrupted which can risk limiting their life chances.

The curriculum and accompanying assessment tools should be designed in a way that allows teachers to design bespoke learning pathways tailored to meet needs and overcome personal barriers.

**15. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any *enablers* that support attainment, progress, access or participation for the groups listed above?**

In the primary sector barriers can be addressed through early childhood interventions such as 'Sure Start' and in the secondary sector through policies like the pupil premium, but these strategies and programmes will not be sufficient by themselves unless the root causes of educational inequality are addressed. Essential for early learning is a stimulating social environment. Babies and young children need to be in caring, responsive environments with strong attachments to those who care for them. They need to be talked to, loved, and interacted with. They need opportunities to play, talk and explore their world, and they need to be encouraged within safe limits, rather than restricted in their activities or punished. A focus on the critical first 1000 days of a child's life through for example the provision of baby boxes being delivered through the Children's Foundation Box campaign takes a developmental approach to ensuring that vulnerable babies have the very best start in life.

Early age high-quality childcare coverage, especially for children at risk, should be a priority, to strengthen child development and help parents to work, thereby reducing family poverty. Properly resourced catch-up interventions for children falling behind, such as reading tuition, are effective enablers to support progress. Small group intervention needs appropriate resourcing and at the moment school budgets are insufficient for this.

The educational settings serving areas of highest disadvantage should be supported to address the manifestations of poverty (e.g. hunger) for all children within the school (rather than relying on families having to access the individual support for their children). Universal free school meals should be the ambition for all schools but can be initially targeted in areas with the most disadvantaged populations. Automatic registration of eligible families for free school meals should be implemented immediately given that 11% of total eligible pupils are not registered for means-tested FSM. Free nutritious meals for every child in primary schools would help to reduce the stigma attached to claiming this entitlement.

A scheme which has made a positive difference for the most socio- economically disadvantaged pupils and their families is the 'Headstart' program 2016-2022 which



focused on multiple stakeholders working alongside schools to prepare more inclusive learning environments.

Successful solutions usually involve multiple stakeholders working together and sharing information to help children growing up in families who do not have enough money for the things that they need. Educational infrastructure should be used to close the gaps through which many families fall. This should include improved resources for more pastoral support, family workers, educational psychologists and youth workers, breakfast clubs, after-school clubs, extended school opening, and enrichment activities such as creative and cultural programs, music, drama, dance, and holiday plays schemes for all primary school age children. Many schools are providing some of these but they are having to do so within limited resources.

Children do well when they are supported by their families and with appropriate community involvement. There is a need therefore to support a culture of lifelong learning and schools as community centres. Schools can also link with existing community and advice centres to further develop out of school hours opportunities. Community/neighbourhood development is an essential component for enabling success in schools

A case study that exemplifies how whole system change can transform education throughout society is offered by Finland, which provides a wholly non-selective system from early childhood to age 16 and whose pupils score consistently higher on the international PISA tests (Benn, M. & Millar, F. (2006) *A comprehensive future: Quality and equality for all our children*. London: Compass) Finland underwent wholesale reform 40 years ago moving to an entirely comprehensive schooling system, improving the quality of teacher training and raising the status of the teaching profession. All teachers have a Masters degree and they also have a high degree of autonomy in what and how they teach, within a national curriculum framework. Children start school at a later age, are subject to less standardised testing, and have more break time during the school day.

Enablement is more associated with the efforts and expertise of teachers than to the design of the curriculum. There is an argument that the curriculum should have more real-life contexts so that learners more readily see relevance, which, in turn, motivates learning. This will include recognizing and supporting the creativity and dynamism of teachers as they, for example, work beyond as well as within the school, involving community partners and leading learning expeditions.

Of course, it should not be forgotten that subjects have intrinsic value. There is great value in introducing learners to a memorable piece of art or literature; the awe and wonder of nature or scientific discovery; the satisfaction of a problem solved; or the fascination with a piece of engineering or design. These experiences can prove transformative and should remain as part of the taught curriculum.

There is a need to differentiate between the whole curriculum and the national curriculum. Schools need space for locally determined content, aims and outcomes and space and time for experimentation in order to achieve greater diversity.

## Section 4: Ensuring an excellent foundation in maths and English

**16. To what extent does the content of the national curriculum at *primary level* (key stages 1 and 2) enable pupils to gain an excellent foundation in a) English and b) maths? Are there ways in which the content could change to better support this aim? Please note, we invite views specifically on transitions between key stages in section 9.**

The original expectations set out in KS1 were designed before the expectations set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework had been written. With high-stakes assessment, this has created a deleterious washback onto EYFS where, in order to reach EKS1 expectations, children are being pushed faster than their natural rate of development. It should be remembered that at age of transfer into KS1 the age difference of a year represents 20% of child development. KS1 NC should be constructed to build on this realistic start point. Too much is currently expected at KS1 so foundations for progress thereafter are likely to be insecure. Getting the start to the education journey right is fundamental to later success.

We wish again to make the point that the curriculum should be seen in context. Some students are not as ready for learning as others. Currently 48% of those eligible for free school meals are not school ready, compared to 38% of those not eligible and they are also those more likely to fall behind in learning. So there needs to be a strong focus on early years support.

The Programme of Study for Mathematics is set out at the introduction to the attainment targets for all key stages at both primary and secondary. As such it represents a long-term vision for a broad and balanced curriculum that runs counter to the overall thrust of the framework. **The purpose** of studying mathematics is spelled out at the outset in terms of describing the nature of the subject in terms of being a creative and highly inter-connected discipline that has been developed over centuries, providing the solution to some of history's most intriguing problems. It is described as essential to everyday life, critical to science, technology, and engineering, and necessary for financial literacy and most forms of employment. Furthermore, a high-quality mathematics education is seen to provide a foundation for understanding the world, the ability to reason mathematically, an appreciation of the beauty and power of mathematics, and a sense of enjoyment and curiosity about the subject.

**The aims** of the national curriculum for mathematics focus on **becoming fluent** in the fundamentals of mathematics including through varied and frequent practice with increasingly complex problems over time; being able to **reason mathematically** by following a line of enquiry, conjecturing relationships and generalisations, and developing an argument, justification or proof using mathematical language and

being able to **solve problems** by applying their mathematics to a variety of routine and non-routine problems with increasing sophistication.

Mathematics is described as an interconnected subject in which pupils need to be able to move fluently between representations of mathematical ideas. Pupils should make rich connections across mathematical ideas to develop fluency, mathematical reasoning and competence in **solving increasingly sophisticated problems**. They should also apply their mathematical knowledge to science and other subjects.

The national curriculum for mathematics reflects the importance of **spoken language** in pupils' development across the whole curriculum – cognitively, socially and linguistically. The quality and variety of language that pupils hear and speak are key factors in developing their mathematical vocabulary and presenting a mathematical justification, argument or proof. It is argued that they must be assisted in making their thinking clear to themselves as well as others and teachers should ensure that pupils build secure foundations by using discussion to probe and remedy their misconceptions.

As such this broad statement of purpose and these broad aims of the mathematics curriculum framework highlight the incoherence and dysfunctionality of the “Structure” of the National Curriculum framework as set out in section 3.3. There is no logic of reasoning that leads from the narrow aims of the framework document to this broader and altogether more inspiring statement of aims and purposes. The over-emphasis on knowledge at the outset, the over-prescription of content and the overwhelming nature of the detailed sequencing serves to drown out this very laudable statement of purpose and aims in practice.

**17. To what extent do the English and maths *primary assessments*<sup>20</sup> support pupils to gain an excellent foundation in these key subjects? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support this aim?**

PIRLS ( Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) assessment of year 5 pupils in 2021 (announced last year) gave England the fourth highest reading score behind Singapore, Hong Kong and Russia. However, this is at the expense of other learning such as mentioned above in Q16, regarding indications that the phonics screener is counterproductive. Disadvantage gaps have widened since their inception and the washback effect down to EYFS has caused teaching to move at a pace faster than the secure learning it intends to deliver. The emphasis on ability to decode runs alongside a decrease in reading for pleasure.

KS2 assessments sample only those elements of the NC that can be readily assessed through timed written tests. In this regard, the assessment is not a valid measure of what pupils know and can do across the whole of the KS2 curriculum.

Pupils should be assessed in order to inform good teaching and to ascertain how much of the taught curriculum has been learnt. Teachers are best placed to make these assessments.

National trends may be measured through sample assessments.

Content is less important than the conceptual framework which applies for the whole curriculum and for each 'subject'. Content should relate to the aims and purpose of a curriculum and is given meaning through the processes that are aligned with those aspects.

**18. To what extent does the content of the a) English and b) maths national curriculum at secondary level (key stages 3 and 4) equip pupils with the knowledge and skills they need for life and further study? Are there ways in which the content could change to better support this aim?**

See the response to Q16 regarding the Programme of Study for Mathematics which applies to all key stages.

**19. To what extent do the current maths and English qualifications at a) pre-16 and b) 16-19 support pupils and learners to gain, and adequately demonstrate that they have achieved, the skills and knowledge they need? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support these outcomes?**

Currently there is an expectation that all students should complete their education having gained a grade 4 in Mathematics and English. Those who do not achieve this grade in the first instance are expected to retake until they do.

Without lowering the expectation, it would be beneficial to teachers, learners and employers to have a qualification more tilted towards application. A list of key outcomes could define what might be called functional literacy and functional numeracy. Like a driving test this could be taken at any time between the ages of 14 and 18.

Whilst a written test may best assess some of these things, others could be assessed in the context of their application. For example, some aspects of literacy and numeracy might be assessed by observing students applying them whilst working on projects and tasks which form part of other qualification pathways.

Like a driving test, its assessment is both theory and practice. Like a driving test, its passing proves competence in a given set of competencies. This is not the same as a GCSE qualification where achieving a given grade is related to marks awarded to answers to questions across the whole paper. In other words, for example, a Grade 4 GCSE does not give a clear indication of what the student knows or can do.

A criterion based qualification does give such an indication and this is why it would have meaningful value with employers. There would be no reason not to extend this to a further qualification, akin to an advanced driving test.

These points should be seen in context. We are not suggesting that the curriculum should be reduced to a set of measurable outcomes. Rather, there should be an explicit statement about the aims of schools and an appropriate balance that operates in the interests of all students with perhaps varying emphases at particular points in students' educational journeys. There is a need to recognize arguments about the drivers of the curriculum. Some will favour a form of liberal content (as discussed by the philosopher Paul Hirst and as seen largely in terms of providing suitable content for the academic student); an objectives approach (connected with a wide range of views including those who see education as being primarily about the economy, social justice or whatever); and a process model (for those who see education as principally being concerned with the growth of the child). All three drivers are in practice used in schools and it is necessary to ensure that there is clarity - theoretically and practically - about the nature of the curriculum offered. It will be essential to capture the value of each approach in relation to the recent welcome emphasis on well-being (see for example <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/nov/06/phillipson-to-ask-schools-to-end-exam-tunnel-vision-and-look-to-wellbeing>). Each of the 'drivers' does not threaten the acquisition of knowledge but the characterization of that knowledge and the purposes of it will require very careful explication if we are to avoid the sterility of debates about the supposed value of remembering information.

**20. How can we better support learners who do not achieve level 2 in English and maths by 16 to learn what they need to thrive as citizens in work and life? In particular, do we have the right qualifications at level 2 for these 16-19 learners (including the maths and English study requirement)?**

See answer to question 19.

In addition, the English and Maths GCSE study requirement needs to incorporate more real life communication and real world situations including speaking and listening. (The practical Literacy and numeracy assessments, for example.)

**21. Are there any particular challenges with regard to the English and maths a) curricula and b) assessment for learners in need of additional support (e.g. learners with SEND, socioeconomic disadvantage, English as an additional language (EAL))? Are there any changes you would suggest to overcome these challenges?**

Both Level 2 GCSE's need formative assessment and coursework built in to support these groups.

The content of the English/English Literature GCSE needs to include more accessible texts (Like the American novels Mice and Men and Kill a Mockingbird that were removed in 2014.)

## Section 5: Curriculum and qualification content

*Please provide detail on specific key stages where appropriate.*

- 22. Are there particular curriculum or qualifications subjects<sup>27</sup> where:**
- a. there is too much content; not enough content, or content is missing;**
  - b. the content is out-of-date;**
  - c. the content is unhelpfully sequenced (for example to support good curriculum design or pedagogy);**
  - d. there is a need for greater flexibility (for example to provide the space for teachers to develop and adapt content)?**

Although it is important to recognize the current subject driven nature of the curriculum (the National Curriculum and other forms that are currently in use in the majority of schools that are not required to follow the National Curriculum), it is necessary to reflect on much more than subject content. To quote again from the DES document of 1985, “the curriculum should aim to be broad by bringing all pupils into contact with an agreed range of areas of learning and experience... In addition, each major component should have breadth, balance and relevance and should incorporate a progression in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding. The various curricular areas should reinforce and complement one another so that the knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes developed in one area may be put to use and provide insight in another”. (DES 1985)

That document went on to explain that the curriculum of all schools should involve pupils in:

- aesthetic and creative
- human and social
- linguistic and literary
- mathematical
- moral
- physical
- scientific
- spiritual
- technological

The original National Curriculum was designed as an essential minimum entitlement for all. It was intended to support and sit inside the wider school curriculum.

1990 Curriculum Guidance 3 states: “The full potential of the NC will only be realised if, in curriculum planning, schools seek to identify the considerable overlaps which inevitably exist both in content and in skills”.

The preference of most schools to organise their curriculum by subject prevents overlaps being exploited and inhibits curriculum coherence from the learner point of view and inhibits time saving from the school point of view.

In this way there may be too much content to teach, but there may not be too much content to learn.

The curriculum landscape presented by key stages can assist teachers design learning pathways that benefit different groups of students so that there is secure progress in their learning. There is no single pathway (sequence) that is suitable for all students. It is important that the curriculum is sufficiently flexible for teachers to design the most appropriate pathways through the curriculum landscape for their groups of learners.

**23. Are there particular changes that could be made to ensure the curriculum (including qualification content) is more diverse and representative of society?**

There is a need to ensure that curriculum (including assessment, pedagogy, accountability and so on) are seen as linked. In relation to pedagogy, teachers must be recognized as having expertise in a constructivist approach that allows for partnership in which communities are enriched and students empowered. They are experts in their academic field and in ways of working with others. A wide variety of approaches will be used that are contextually dependent and rely on wide-ranging partnerships. The teacher’s role is not, exclusively, that of a facilitator, a social worker, an assessor, an academic in a specialist subject. This is an argument for teachers to be recognized as educationalists who are able to understand and enact learning **in partnership**. Teachers need to be ‘multilingual’ – experts in their field and expert communicators and practitioners.

The 21st century deserves schools that are culturally responsive in a properly supported sustainable environment. All schools are composed of people with diverse identities, experiences, cultures, goals and needs. As such education policies need to be explicit about where teachers can gather information regarding these differences and receive training to inform their teaching. This requires placing pupils, family and staff voices at the centre of policy development.

Educational equity and access to a more diverse curriculum must focus on pupils having what they really need. This implies a measurable frame for equity and a humanising approach that prioritises the well-being and social emotional needs of pupils, their families and staff.

Curriculum elements that affirm culture, race and identity build on the knowledge and culture that pupils bring with them to the classroom. Student voice should be a critical part of developing curriculum policy elements.

The knowledge-based curriculum for learners has been reduced to data and schema to be stored in memory rather than learning which can enable pupils to expand in a variety of diverse situations in a constructive way.

More narrowly, and cautiously given the comments that are made elsewhere in this response about the unhelpful use of subjects as standalone silos of content, it is essential to ensure that what could broadly be described as the social curriculum is reformed. PSE is of varying quality across schools. Citizenship education is under significant pressure. If we want to be inclusive we need to proceed in partnership and we need to educate young people about, through and for social justice. Learning and teaching which helps develop collaborative skills should be a priority. These should include citizenship skills beyond those just of British values and embrace global citizenship. There are many very practical examples of good work in England that would meet these points. We can have an inclusive approach if we want it - unfortunately, the experience of recent years is that this has not been a priority for the Government.

**24. To what extent does the current curriculum (including qualification content) support students to positively engage with, be knowledgeable about and respect others? Are there elements that could be improved?**

By continuing to teach students to learn in isolation - and in competition with each other - we have sent a clear message to students that the self is of more importance than the collective. There can be no surprise then that a sense of the community has been eroded both in and out of school. The best schools are themselves communities, and are part of and contribute to a range of communities including those that are local, national and global.

The present curriculum with its overloaded content *prevents* the development of social skills such as learning to empathise, be self-reflective and be co-operative. Other countries have Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programmes, while under the last Labour Government it developed the Social and Emotional Aspect of Learning (SEAL). Unfortunately, the latter programme was designed to improve attendance and behaviour, rather than seeing the development of social and emotional skills as important in their own right. An alternative approach that integrates social and emotional development with subject learning has been outlined by Matthews (2006) on developing emotional literacy. Emotional literacy is about developing the emotions with others, not individually as in many other programmes. SEL approaches are similar to subject teaching in that everyone is supposed to develop, say listening skills or become empathetic, at the same time. Matthews's approach allows the pupil to develop skills at their own pace.



We would like to point out that the question asked in this section, and in many others, would have received many more useful answers if it had asked *What do you need in a curriculum in order to enable pupils to engage and respect each other?* It is then, in our view, obvious that the current curriculum is unsupportive and could be seen to prevent such outcomes. Asking such a question is an aims-based approach to curriculum development.

Matthews, B. (2006). *Engaging Education. Developing Emotional Literacy, Equity and Co-education.* Buckingham: McGraw-Hill/Open University Press.

**25. In which ways does the current *primary* curriculum support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for life and further study and what could we change to better support this?**

As stated in answers to earlier questions, the over-crowded and too-demanding KS1 curriculum risks teachers rushing the teaching from the start of Reception (and earlier). This can lead to insecure learning at the outset with teachers having to re-teach “the basics” in subsequent years and even into secondary school.

Furthermore, the over-demanding KS1 curriculum, which has a deleterious effect on FS2 by putting pressure on teachers to teach at a rate faster than children learn, squeezes out necessary time to develop the social skills and habits of learning that are vital to subsequent educational success.

We recommend reducing the KS1 content and adopting EYFS planning and pedagogies until the age of 7 so that firm foundations are established. Once established, progress through KS2 and beyond is better secured. It is significant that in other educationally successful countries, “formal” education starts when children reach age 7. Redesignating KS1 as FS3 (Foundation Stage 3) is worth consideration.

**26. In which ways do the current *secondary* curriculum and qualification pathways support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?**

There are students who complete KS4 without some of their skills and talents being recognised. This is because available qualification pathways have been restricted to those which count most in the accountability measures ( Progress 8 and the English Baccalaureate, for instance), typically those of an academic rather than practical nature. In this sense the available qualification pathways are exclusive and not inclusive.

Replacing the universal requirement to follow GCSE qualification pathways towards English and mathematics in KS4 with the practical literacy and numeracy proficiency assessments, as described earlier), and reintroducing and recognising a range of Level 1 and 2 qualifications in practical and creative subjects will provide a more

inclusive curriculum that is likely to retain the motivation of learners and reveal and recognize talent that is currently not known.

**27. In which ways do the current qualification pathways and content at 16-19 support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?**

The range of courses available at 16-19 need development beyond traditional A levels. The Education Policy Institute's recent report in July 2024 states that the 16-19 economically disadvantaged attainment gap has returned to pre-2019 levels. The Vocational/Academic divide is still built in with A levels (academic) and Btec and T levels (vocational). T levels need solid apprenticeship offers and take up to be successful qualifications. Reforms to apprenticeship funding are needed. The FE sector is hampered by a recruitment and retention crisis

There is a need for more emphasis on the 4Cs: Communication, Creativity, Critical thinking, and Collaboration.

## **Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum**

**28. To what extent does the current *primary* curriculum support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?**

The comments above about areas of knowledge indicate ways in which the current curriculum is inadequate. The fragmentation of the system since 2010 means that there is little or no entitlement to forms of knowledge. As such across both primary and secondary there is an absence of a broad and balanced curriculum.

**29. To what extent do the current *secondary* curriculum and qualifications pathways support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?**

Re-introduce AS levels or something similar.

**30. To what extent do the current qualifications pathways at 16-19 support learners to study a broad curriculum which gives them the right knowledge and skills to progress? Should anything change to better support this?**

It is necessary to distinguish between the written National Curriculum and RE (together defined in the 1988 ERA as the "Basic Curriculum"), the school curriculum, the taught curriculum, the curriculum that is externally tested, and the learnt curriculum.

Whilst the basic curriculum in its written form might be described as broad and balanced, the taught curriculum is not necessarily so. Influences on schools to organise their curriculum by subjects, and pressures to focus on externally tested elements of the curriculum combine to restrict the curriculum to the extent that

creativity and learner agency are squeezed out. This restricted taught curriculum restricts the learnt curriculum.

Recasting the NC whilst neglecting the influences and pressures on schools described above is unlikely to have any effect on breadth and balance.

Many pupils find pathways because of their social and emotional skills that enable them to have a career in important jobs, yet these are not built into the curriculum or pathways.

**31. To what extent do the current curriculum (at primary and secondary) and qualifications pathways (at secondary and 16-19) ensure that pupils and learners are able to develop creative skills and have access to creative subjects?**

A commitment to a broad and balanced curriculum means that there is a very serious problem if some subjects, which are designed to be reflective of the general purpose of the curriculum, are declining. If those subjects are simply boxes of content then of course it is no problem at all if they decline. We need to establish a coherent entitlement to education (with appropriate governance and accountability) rather than gauging the extent to which particular subjects are seen to lack meaning and are growing or declining as a result of the mismanagement of schooling during recent years.

The way in which question 31 is posed is rather unhelpful. There are important issues about the curriculum which will allow for attention to be paid to creativity. Of course, there may be a perfectly understandable use of a shorthand term to indicate certain subjects in everyday language are regarded as being 'creative'. But that label is unhelpful if we are to engage with the development of a creative curriculum in which there is learning across all aspects of what is done.

**32. Do you have any explanations for the trends outlined in the analysis and/or suggestions to address any that might be of concern?**

The work of Bernstein (1971) is relevant. He argued that the degree of specificity about classification (i.e., the distinctions between areas/subjects) and form (i.e., the fixity of the relationships between those involved in a teaching/learning process) would need to be carefully positioned so as to allow for creative dynamism. All areas need to be both sufficiently distinct to allow for coherent meaning and sufficiently plastic to allow for creativity. All subjects are to some extent meaningful entities that carry status and also exist as hybrids. Subject titles are of essential use but in a fairly limited way.

Within these 'subjects' or 'themes' we must ensure that there is a coherent conceptual framework. There is a need to identify not just the content (although that will almost inevitably be included in almost every lesson and is for various reasons an important thing to establish) but, principally, the substantive concepts (what is this 'subject' about?) and procedural concepts (how must this 'subject' be studied in order to achieve learning?) of what is being done (See Hudson and Shelton 2021). It

is good to see that at least some of the recent reviews of subject teaching by Ofsted recognize this important point.

The explanation of why we do not have a better curriculum is partly due to the characterisation of it as “content”. While it is vital to identify content (and almost impossible to avoid) it is a significantly limiting way of discussing curriculum.

## References

Berstein, B. (1971) *Class, Codes and Control Theoretical Studies towards a Sociology of Language*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

Hudson, B and Shelton, C. (2021) *The Curriculum: developing powerful knowledge and creative know-how*. In B. Hudson, M. Leask, and S. Younie. (2021) *Education System Design: Foundations, Policy Options and Consequences*. Abingdon, Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 141-153.

## Key stage 4 Technical Awards

### **33. To what extent and how do pupils benefit from being able to take vocational or applied qualifications in secondary schools alongside more academically focused GCSEs?**

Since the advent of progress measures like the English baccalaureate and Progress 8 students and schools are less inclined to A) offer technical pathways and B) Encourage students( particularly the more able) to choose them if they are there.

This is a real area of weakness.

A subject like Media Studies has had the creative technical element of its course at GCSE and A level curtailed making it more of an academic subject.

### **34. To what extent does the current pre-16 vocational offer equip pupils with the necessary knowledge and skills and prepare them for further study options, including 16-19 technical pathways and/or A levels? Could the pre-16 vocational offer be improved?**

## Section 7: Assessment and accountability

### Primary and national curriculum assessments

### **35. Is the volume of statutory assessment at key stages 1 and 2 right for the purposes set out above?**

It is extremely unhelpful to undertake a review of curriculum in which assessment is seen principally in relation to testing. Assessment is an essential part of almost every educational encounter. Summative testing (or, assessment of learning) may be useful in certain circumstances, but teachers for the most part in their day-to-day work rely heavily on assessment for learning, using insights from their students to

hone their impact on learning. Teachers usually have an integrated understanding of norm referencing (assessing students in the context of other students), criteria referencing (assessing using particular objectives) and ipsative referencing (assessing individual and groups of students against the progress that they themselves have made). They have that understanding as a result of using a wide range of tasks and interactions and they communicate about such matters by reporting to various audiences using different styles. (Black and Wiliam 1998).

There are many modes to assessment, ranging from observing children working on a task, listening to children's descriptions and explanations of their work, scrutinising the outcome of a child's work on a particular task, checking their responses to given questions in oral or written form. Teachers' knowledge of each child gained through their multi-modal assessment enables them to inform parents, identify where each learner is on the curriculum landscape, and plan next steps on their learning journey. Moreover, this multi-modal assessment enables teachers to identify gaps or errors in each child's learning and put in place appropriate strategies to remediate them.

Statutory assessments do not fulfil this useful and necessary purpose. The singular mode of external testing necessarily fails to recognise all that a child knows or can do.

**36. Are there any changes that could be made to improve efficacy without having a negative impact on pupils' learning or the wider education system?**

A more sophisticated understanding of assessment would help enormously. It would also help to ensure that when practical arrangements are developed there is recognition of a variety of practical ways forward. There seems currently to be insufficient attention to the value of assessment that occurs beyond closed formal contexts.

Move to teacher assessment which is a more valid measure of what a child knows and can do.

Change the language and consideration from "performance" to "achievement".

Adopt a system wide valid and reliable exercise to sample pupils as well as sample elements of the NC for assessment. This will allow inferences to be drawn on outcomes across different groups and outcomes over time.

**37. Are there other changes to the statutory assessment system at key stages 1 and 2 that could be made to improve pupils' experience of assessment, without having a negative impact on either pupils' learning or the wider education system?**

Yes. Move to teacher assessment which is a more valid measure of what a child knows and can do. Assessment should be a process which teachers undertake with children. Not something that is done to them.

**38. What can we do to ensure the assessment system at key stages 1 and 2 works well for all learners, including learners in need of additional support in their education (for example SEND, disadvantage, EAL)?**

Move to teacher assessment. In focusing on what a child knows and can do, does not bring with it the connotations of pass and fail. Every child achieves, even those who do not perform to the expected level in a test.

### **Secondary assessment**

**39. Is the volume of assessment required for GCSEs right for the purposes set out above? Are there any changes that could be made without having a negative impact on either pupils' learning or the wider education system?**

The assessment system is geared to a 'knowledge on the day test.' It is simply not nuanced enough to assess a student's understanding, skills and abilities.

**40. What more can we do to ensure that: a) the assessment requirements for GCSEs capture and support the development of knowledge and skills of every young person; and b) young people's wellbeing is effectively considered when assessments are developed, giving pupils the best chance to show what they can do to support their progression?**

Incorporate formative continuous assessment, Viva voce, (oral assessment) Internal interim assessments moderated by the boards. This is in addition to summative testing.

**41. Are there particular GCSE subjects where changes could be made to the qualification content and/or assessment that would be beneficial for pupils' learning?**

English Literature needs to return to the use texts more freely from across the world including America.

Subjects need to be less hamstrung by prescriptive content.

Media Studies needs to return to 50% practical media with far more choice for students to create something individual rather than prescribed briefs.

There needs to be a return to an opportunity for students to study Arts subjects without it impeding their chances or 'Status'

**42. Are there ways in which we could support improvement in pupil progress and outcomes at key stage 3?**

Design units that are multidisciplinary and provide themes that make sense to learners.

**43. Are there ways in which we could support pupils who do not meet the expected standard at key stage 2?**

Bespoke Literacy and numeracy units for the first term at Key Stage 3 studied during one lesson of English/Maths, registration, after school or during citizenship in Year 7.

## Accountability

**44. To what extent, and in what ways, does the accountability system influence curriculum and assessment decisions in schools and colleges?**

The current Ofsted framework is (despite some media comment) potentially valuable. Great care will be needed in the development of a new framework (currently, there seems to be an absence of an informed professional and wider community debate about such matters).

The accountability system inhibits rather than enhances equality of opportunity to curriculum access and progress.

It has magnified the statistical quantity of “performance” and suppressed the human quality of “achievement”, which leads to a culture of chasing scores rather than focussing on individual learners, especially those who may have little chance of reaching a “performance threshold”.

This has an impact on pupil groupings, choice of qualification pathways, and time spent on particular curriculum areas.

**45. How well does the current accountability system support and recognise progress for all pupils and learners? What works well and what could be improved?**

The current accountability system is constructed around measures of pupil performance, with reliability informing design. It should be altered to be constructed around pupil achievement, with validity more prominently informing design.

The accountability system inhibits rather than enhances equality of opportunity to curriculum access and progress. (see above).

The impact on pupil groupings, choice of qualification pathways, and time spent on particular curriculum areas means that provision is unlikely to be aligned with the ambitions and needs of all learners.

Accountability is essential. Communication about inspection is weak. Partnership is a part of some of the work emerging from the current framework but the general

perception of what is happening (even when those perceptions are unfairly generated) is very bad indeed. There is a need to generate trust between all those who are part of the accountability process. That means rigour in safeguarding the physical, emotional, attainment and achievement of young people as well as valuing partnership. Current inspection processes are potentially reasonable but the context for that work is disastrous.

Any curriculum will not be effective without support. It is vital there is evaluation (i.e., research and professional investigations in which goals and processes are clarified and improved) and also that there is scaffolding (i.e., partnership across a wide range of individuals and organizations in which education is a shared responsibility). Unless there is effective action by policy makers, researchers, inspectors, community-based workers and others, schools will not flourish. Teachers cannot do the job by themselves.

In relation to the support that is necessary for schools we wish to highlight the need for teacher education. Teacher training in the UK does not systematically include specific consideration of the meaning of social class and inequality within education. Children do better or worse depending on what their teachers expect of them. The biggest barriers to initiating appropriate interventions in schools are teaching time and teacher training and development. We need teacher training which explicitly addresses issues of social class and socio-economic status and their relevance in the classroom (Reay, D. (2006) 'The zombie stalking English schools: social class and educational inequality', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 54, 288-307.).

If we are to develop a curriculum that has meaning for all, 'Citizenship Education' is arguably not just one of the subjects taught in a silo but is the *raison d'etre* for schools to exist. Schools should develop the citizens for the future. And everything that is explored in a school should contribute to that end.

There are other forms of support that we wish to emphasize. Schools and teachers need a national database on the effectiveness of appropriate interventions. Attention should be given to valuable work done in the past such as that described in the Cambridge Primary Review (Children, their world, their education' 2009) and the Tomlinson report of 2004 (all students should work toward the attainment of one overarching qualification). The vision for education set out by the Cambridge Primary Review has 12 laudable aims for primary education: including encouraging respect, promoting independence and sustainability, empowering local, national and global citizenship, celebrating culture and community, and enacting dialogue. Particularly important is a discretionary budget for schools, which helps to bring additional capacity when schools need to release staff - for example, in peer led school improvement programs.

**46. Should there be any changes to the current accountability system in order to better support progress and incentivise inclusion for young people with SEND and/or from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds? If so, what should those changes be?**



Widen the modes of assessment to recognise and reach better what every learner knows and can do.

Redesign accountability system around achievement not performance.

## Section 8: Qualification pathways 16-19

**47. To what extent does the range of programmes and qualifications on offer at each level meet the needs and aspirations of learners?**

- a. Level 3
- b. Level 2
- c. Level 1 and entry level

Level 3- Good for academic; Fair/Poor for Vocational

Level 2- Good for academic; Fair for all other students

**48. Are there particular changes that could be made to the following programmes and qualifications and/or their assessment that would be beneficial to learners:**

- a. AS/A level qualifications
- b. T Level and T Level Foundation Year programmes
- c. Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 3
- d. Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 2 and below

**49. How can we improve learners' understanding of how the different programmes and qualifications on offer will prepare them for university, employment (including apprenticeships) and/or further technical study?**

This varies between schools. A package from the central government with steers supporting videos etc would help.

**50. To what extent is there enough scope and flexibility in the system to support learners who may need to change course?**

This can happen but only at the beginning of the year. Funding, teacher recruitment staffing and examination board protocols have meant that courses have a tight schedule currently. It is difficult for students to change courses in mid-stream.

**51. Are there additional skills, subjects, or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19 education, regardless of their chosen programmes and qualifications, to support them to be prepared for life and work?**

The International Baccalaureate (IB) has an extended essay/critical thinking and creativity, active, service component. This structure with traditional A levels/Vocational studies would be far better for preparing students for life and work.

Political literacy and citizenship should be incorporated in the critical thinking component.

## **Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views**

### **Transitions**

We are keen to understand views on how we can best support pupils to transition from one key stage to the next.

**52. How can the curriculum, assessment and wraparound support better enable transitions between key stages to ensure continuous learning and support attainment?**

### **Technology**

We also want to understand views on the role that technology can play in supporting curriculum, assessment and qualifications. When effectively planned and implemented, technology can provide opportunities for inclusion, teaching and learning.

**53. How could technology be used to improve how we deliver the curriculum, assessment and qualifications in England?**

We refer you to the detailed responses from the Technology, Pedagogy and Education Association ([TPEA.ac.uk](http://TPEA.ac.uk)) - the learned society for this area. Our members who are also members of this society have researched and published books and articles detailing how educational technologies are being effectively deployed in the classroom.

In brief Ed Tech is being used to

- support online active learning of concepts across many topics at all levels from EYS to the end of schooling - from letter formation to online teaching helping learners with concepts covered in class but which an individual has not yet grasped fully eg see the Khan Academy
- support assessment and recording of individual progress eg on maths tasks for example, through quizzes, through portfolio development.
- support teacher updating and communication between researchers and teachers see for example [www.meshguides.org](http://www.meshguides.org) and the National Archives for resources invested in under the previous Labour Administration)
- support catch up learning and wider learning

What we do not recommend EdTech for up to the Key Stage three stage, is trying to replace the teacher by prescribing content for every lesson as learners previous experience and the local context they are in shape how teachers plan their learning and assessment. Once a learner has grasped the basics of a subject then they are more able to benefit from online courses.

As a society, we led the world with the establishment of the Open University providing opportunities for those for whom going to university full time is not an option. For access to key stage 4 and 5 qualifications and technical/vocational qualifications we have a serious problem with something like 140,000 young people out of school and a population which has missed opportunities for a broad education under the coalition and conservative government 2010-2024. We could learn from the Australian online models of provision for education 14-19 and create a National Open School- with subsidised and fee paying places to ensure that life long education is available to all. Existing technologies mean that almost anyone anywhere in the UK could access further learning if provision was coordinated and well publicised.

## Further Views

**54. Do you have any further views on anything else associated with the Curriculum and Assessment Review not covered in the questions throughout the call for evidence?**

### Context

We wish to use this opportunity to focus on the importance of addressing the aims and values of a revised curriculum for young people in England. In doing so we draw on the outcomes of the open seminar on this aspect that was held at the House of Commons on Tuesday 19th November which was sponsored by Catherine Atkinson MP and organised in conjunction with the Fabian Education Policy Group.

At the outset the Review was welcomed as called for by the FEPG in the paper from its Curriculum Working Group in November 2022

[https://www.fabianeducation.com/\\_files/ugd/6e348a\\_16d586097a244eeeb9be36c01900e0ed.pdf](https://www.fabianeducation.com/_files/ugd/6e348a_16d586097a244eeeb9be36c01900e0ed.pdf)

Furthermore, the decision that when it is implemented, all state schools, including academies, will be required to teach the national curriculum (p7, CfE) was welcomed. This development was flagged up in the Labour Party manifesto (p83) with reference to reforms that ‘will build on the hard work of teachers who have brought their subjects alive with knowledge-rich syllabuses, to deliver a curriculum which is rich and broad, inclusive, and innovative’. It was noted that this statement is reflected in the Aims, Terms of Reference and Working Principles of the Review (p1).

### Key Issues and Recommendations

We recommend recognition of and clear statements about the areas outlined below. Our recommendations are presented in three overarching categories. These categories require input from all those engaged in the development of education including policy makers, HMI, researchers, teachers, NGOs, parents, carers, community leaders, students and others. It is likely that although people in all these groups will engage in this process, we have indicated those people who we think will have a primary role in each of the three areas.

Section A is about a policy led curriculum review and implementation. It highlights our recommendations for the principles and purpose of a curriculum; and the process of establishing it. It is expected that policy makers will, as in this Review, be responsible for ensuring an effective, inclusive dialogue and in supporting implementation aligned with these principles and purposes.

Section B is about establishing the fundamental educational perspectives of a curriculum. It highlights our recommendations for definitions and characterizations of curriculum and of knowledge. Our recommendations are made positively and also with reference to the unhelpful context between 2010 and 2024. There is a significant role to be played in this area using the expertise of researchers, teacher educators, teachers as well as others.

Section C is about some of the work that would need to be done to ensure that all our recommendations can be developed and experienced. It highlights our recommendations regarding pedagogy and assessment. We are not advocating prescriptive approaches but we do favour a dynamic professional approach that is in harmony with the inclusivity necessary to establish the curriculum referred to in the previous sections. We suggest that teachers, schools, examination boards, teacher educators – as well as all other players – will be working closely with parents, carers and students in this area.

### Section A

## i) Principles and Purpose

We recommend that the principles and purpose of the curriculum are clearly stated in relation to four areas.

Firstly, a clear statement of what our country sees as a good childhood and youth is vital. Within this statement we would expect there to be a strong commitment to well-being in the context of secure, free, responsible, happy individuals and communities.

Secondly, we recommend that the seven principles emphasized by Education Scotland in 2016 (<https://education.gov.scot/media/m1nlboum/cfe-statement.pdf>) should provide an overarching commitment to what the curriculum should be characterized by: i.e., challenge and enjoyment; breadth; progression; depth; personalization and choice; coherence; and, relevance.

Thirdly, we recommend that there should be an acceptance of the importance of the three main drivers of curriculum (i.e., the development of understanding across areas of knowledge; an objective led approach which allows for matters to do with citizenship, social justice, the economy and other matters to be fulfilled; and, a commitment to child development which allows for personal growth).

Fourthly, we have emphasized in the main body of our response the importance of establishing a curriculum that will enhance for all cognitive, affective, creative and practical knowledge, understanding, skills and dispositions. It will be vital to embrace the valuable approaches taken by others including the OECD who have called for an emphasis to be placed on the 4 Cs (i.e., critical thinking; collaboration; creativity and communication).

## ii) Process of Establishing a Curriculum

We recommend that the principles and purposes of the curriculum within and beyond schools should be established through a carefully constructed dynamism. The curriculum would serve the agreed purposes that emerge from a partnership process. The current Review is a very useful starting point. The commitment to high standards will be achieved through partnership across policy makers, academics, professionals, parents/carers, students and other learners within and beyond school. There will be many different ways in which these mutually supportive conversations may occur. An inclusive approach would allow for a 'civic conversation', using methods such as citizen's juries.

The partnership that we recommend is especially necessary given that we have witnessed over recent years the entry of the Schools Minister as a dominant actor and influence on the framing of the curriculum in the educational field and in

promoting a particular orthodoxy about it. We trust that this will not be the case with the new Government.

This level of intervention in the educational field can also be seen through the way in which Ofsted operated in relation to its research review for mathematics which is described by Compton and Boylan (2024) as 'Policy-based evidence'. Using features of education review quality, the authors analyse Ofsted's departure from scholarly norms, identifying a lack of transparency, weakness of research design and search strategy, and lack of rigour in the selection of evidence. Further, they argue that cited research was frequently misinterpreted and unwarranted causal claims made due to overgeneralisation and oversimplification. A specific example of this is the misappropriation of research on problem solving leading to recommendations conflicting with both the National Curriculum in England and the findings of other, more rigorous, research reviews. They highlight that Ofsted's restricted view of problem solving, reducing it to word problems with predictable structures, used to apply algorithms differs from established understandings in mathematics focused on novel problems where solution strategies are not immediately obvious.

What we need to see from this review is a commitment to the development of an aims- and values-based curriculum framework that recognises the curriculum as a living process and which involves clear roles for policy makers and professionals. We are calling for a partnership that allows for accountability through a positive evaluative and developmental process.

## Section B

### i) The Need for a Clear and Appropriate Definition of Curriculum

Following from our comments in Section A about the need to establish appropriate purposes, we note that the curriculum is defined in the Call for Evidence as follows:

*When referring to the 'curriculum' we mean all of the content (both knowledge and skills) that pupils study during key stage 1, key stage 2, key stage 3, key stage 4 and 16-19 education. (p13)*

This is a very restricted view of the meaning of curriculum and given its focus on a mere list of content to be covered it would be more accurate to define what we have today as a national syllabus rather than a national curriculum. The nature of the term 'curriculum' is complex, multi-layered and contested (Jung and Pinar, 2016) and as Stenhouse (1985) observed:

*What is curriculum as we now understand the word? ... It is not a syllabus – a mere list of content to be covered – nor even is it what German speakers would call a Lehrplan ... Nor is it in our understanding of a list of objectives. Let me claim that it is a symbolic or meaningful object, like Shakespeare's first folio, not like a lawnmower; like the pieces and board of chess, not like an*

*apple tree. It has a physical existence but also a meaning incarnate in words or pictures or sound or games or whatever ... by virtue of their meaningfulness curricula are not simply means to improve teaching but are expressions of ideas to improve teachers. Of course, they have day-to-day instructional utility: cathedrals must keep the rain out...*  
(Stenhouse, 1985, p67)

The word itself derives from the Latin word *currere* meaning 'to run the course'. It can be thought about in terms of the planned curriculum which sets out what is intended to be taught and learned overall; the enacted curriculum in terms of the curriculum enacted by teachers in school and the experienced curriculum by students at the classroom level where curriculum and pedagogy effectively merge. As such it is a dynamic and multi-layered process that can be seen to be operating at the policy level, the programmatic level and the classroom level.

## ii) The Need for a Clear and Appropriate Characterization of 'Knowledge'

We wish to emphasize the need for clarity around the underpinning view of the nature of knowledge. We wish to avoid an unhelpful reliance on knowledge as content or information. Such unhelpful approaches may be seen in statements by the former Schools Minister Nick Gibb (e.g., to the Social Market Foundation in 2021 <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-importance-of-a-knowledge-rich-curriculum>). A blog post on the Chartered College of Teaching traces this to a restricted reliance on cognitive science and an over emphasis on memorisation (<https://my.chartered.college/early-career-hub/what-is-a-knowledge-rich-curriculum/>). The speech from the former Minister is quite illuminating in the way in which it highlights a reliance on the cultural literacy approach of E. D. Hirsh (1988) which is a very particular and restricted view of knowledge. The terminology is inconsistent and switches between knowledge-rich and knowledge-based in the process of which the work of Michael Young regarding the idea of "powerful knowledge" is completely misrepresented.

## Section C

### iii) Recognize the relevance of pedagogy in the characterization of knowledge that underpins the curriculum

We have commented several times on the need to avoid an overly prescriptive approach. Teachers need to have sufficient professional flexibility. The necessary rigour and creativity enacted by teachers may be achieved through a pedagogy informed by a coherent and appropriate characterization of knowledge and a socially just process aligned with the needs of individuals and groups. In the achievement of this, what needs to be recognised is that knowledge is transformed from the policy level when enacted by teachers in schools and experienced by students at the classrooms. To use the terminology of Bernstein (1971) knowledge is



recontextualised from the field of production to the educational fields of recontextualization and reproduction in classrooms. The concept of framing in education (Bernstein, 2000) is also of relevance. This is a way of describing the locus of control over the selection, sequencing, pacing and criteria for evaluating or assessing what counts as legitimate knowledge. Case studies, exemplar materials, commitment to initial teacher education and continuing professional development are some of the ways in which a positive dialogue may be developed around pedagogical matters in relation to the purposes and principles of the curriculum whilst avoiding the dead hand of prescription around methods.

#### iv) Assessment

We recommend that assessment must be looked at concurrently with the curriculum to ensure congruence.

It will be necessary to recognize the justifiable use of summative assessments in a variety of contexts and also to accept that formative assessment for learning is the most commonly used and most valuable approach of teachers. We need to ensure that sufficient respect is given to that vital educational work. We must embrace the methods of assessment that allow for people to achieve in a fast changing world with recognition of the value of coursework, oracy, group as well as individual projects and so on.

We recommend that although in practice various perspectives on norm and criteria based assessment will be hard to disentangle (we only know what criteria mean in relation to a variety of things including what is done by learners), we must strive to end the commitment to high stakes testing. If we do not do so we may deepen the already deleterious effects of what in some countries is known as 'examination hell'.

The contributions of the Panel members to the discussion at the House of Commons event on the 19th November were made by Mick Waters who was formerly Director of Curriculum at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; Valerie Bossman-Quarshie who is an Islington Councillor and vice-chair of Islington's Children's Scrutiny Committee; Dr Tony Breslin who is a public policy analyst and writer specialising in education; Professor Sarah Younie who is currently chair of the International Council on Education for Teaching (ICET) and a representative on the UNESCO International Teacher Task Force and Brian Matthews as Chair of the Fabian Education Policy Group (FEPG). The meeting was chaired by Professor Brian Hudson as convenor of the FEPG Curriculum Working Group. A detailed paper documenting the contributions to and discussions at this event is in preparation.