



Department
for Education

Reform of the national curriculum in England

**Government response to the
consultation conducted February – April
2013**

July 2013

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Introduction

The national curriculum review was launched in January 2011 with the following aims:

- to ensure that the new national curriculum embodies rigour and high standards and creates coherence in what is taught in schools
- to ensure that all children are taught the essential knowledge in the key subject disciplines
- beyond that core, to allow teachers greater freedom to use their professionalism and expertise to help all children realise their potential.

The proposals that we published in February this year embodied a vision for a national curriculum that is slimmer, focused on essential subject knowledge and which, especially in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, compares favourably with the curricula taught in the most successful education jurisdictions.

In the period since publishing our proposals we have seen a vigorous national debate on the content and purpose of the national curriculum. Whether it has been through the pages of our newspapers, our television screens or via social media, a vast range of views has been expressed. We have welcomed this debate – the matter of what is taught in our schools is an issue of vital importance to the future of this country.

In addition, our formal public consultation on the national curriculum, which closed on 16 April, attracted unprecedented levels of interest. We received over 17,000 submissions from a wide range of respondents including headteachers, teachers, teaching unions, colleges and universities, subject associations, local authorities, employers, parents and young people. This document sets out our response on the main issues arising from that consultation. It should be read alongside the report of responses to the consultation which is available [here](#) and the revised national curriculum framework document and programmes of study which were published on 8 July and are available [here](#).

Aims of the national curriculum

Government proposal and consultation response

The draft national curriculum framework document published on 7 February set out proposed overarching aims for the national curriculum. Some respondents welcomed their brevity and the greater curricular freedom that they allowed schools and teachers. Others raised concerns about the emphasis on core knowledge as opposed to an explicit focus on developing pupils' understanding and skills.

The overarching aims are focused on the purpose of the national curriculum, which is to set out the essential knowledge that all pupils should learn at each stage of their school career. Refocusing the national curriculum on essential knowledge was one of the fundamental purposes of the review, as set out in the original remit. The national curriculum is one element of the wider school curriculum and the aims have been designed to reflect this – they are not, as some respondents interpreted them, intended to capture everything that schools teach and do. It is the role of schools and teachers to design and develop a balanced and broadly based wider school curriculum which develops pupils' understanding and skills in order to give them a sound foundation from which to progress.¹

Given the balance of views expressed, we were not convinced that the aims should be changed, but recognised the arguments that their purpose and status should be clarified. The revised framework document published on 8 July reflects this, and we will also seek other opportunities to convey this message.

¹ Section 78 of the 2002 Education Act <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/section/78>

Subject level aims

Government proposal and consultation response

The draft national curriculum programmes of study published in February each included a set of subject level aims. We wanted to test whether teachers in particular would think that the inclusion of these subject aims would be helpful in supporting teaching, or whether they would rather shape their own curriculum aims based on the content of the programmes of study. Respondents who agreed with the proposal to remove the subject level aims felt that they would add little to the curriculum content. Respondents who disagreed and believed that the aims should be retained felt that they were essential to inform teaching and help schools, parents and pupils to understand the intended curriculum outcomes.

Respondents who were supportive of the proposal to remove subject level aims believed that curriculum design should be the sole responsibility of schools and teachers, without any central prescription and guidance. Respondents who believed that the aims should be retained argued strongly that they provided an essential framework to inform standard-setting and consistency in teaching across schools, and were used in high-performing jurisdictions to provide a common focus. Subject level aims were also seen as particularly important in informing assessment and progression in the absence of levels and level descriptions.

We have considered carefully the arguments presented both in favour of the proposal and against. Noting that views on this matter were divided, we have been convinced of the merit of retaining subject level aims within the national curriculum programmes of study to support and guide schools in their teaching and to help parents and pupils understand the desired outcomes of the curriculum. The revised programmes of study published on 8 July reflect this. We have also revised both the subject aims and the purpose of study sections to make them more consistent across subjects and to reduce duplication.

National curriculum programmes of study

Government proposal and consultation response

The government invited views on the content of the programmes of study for all national curriculum subjects except key stage 4 English, mathematics and science, which will be subject to a separate consultation process later this year. Respondents commented on many aspects of the programmes of study, with a variety of views being expressed. The draft programmes of study for design and technology and history were the subject of particularly vigorous debate.

We have reviewed the content of the national curriculum in line with consultation feedback and through valuable discussions with subject experts, representative organisations, headteachers and teachers. In doing so, we have been mindful of the guiding principles of the review and our fundamental aim of returning the national curriculum to its original purpose as a guide to study in key subjects. It is not the role of government to specify in detail all that pupils should learn in school. Instead, the national curriculum should provide a core upon which teachers can build their wider curriculum and assessment approaches, whilst remaining confident that they are providing a rich and rigorous education for their pupils.

We want the new national curriculum to embody excellence and high standards, particularly in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science which are so crucial to individual pupils' life chances and to this country's future prosperity. In primary schools, where far too many pupils, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds, are failing to achieve acceptable standards in literacy and numeracy, the new curriculum will represent a step-change in what we expect pupils and teachers to achieve.

We have listened closely to the views of respondents to the consultation - particularly subject experts and teachers - and have made a range of detailed changes to the draft programmes of study in response. In particular, we have:

- revised the primary English programmes of study to include a new section on spoken language skills and included further content on the importance of vocabulary development
- revised the programmes of study for design and technology in response to concerns that the draft published for consultation was not sufficiently aspirational. Working with the Design and Technology Association (DATA), the Royal Academy of Engineering (RAEng) and a broad range of industrial representatives, we have now prepared a curriculum that has greater flexibility and a broader range of industrial applications than its precursor – whilst stressing high level technical skills
- removed the proposed list of languages from the key stage 2 programme of study for foreign languages, to give schools a free choice over which modern or ancient language pupils should study over the four years of key stage 2
- added explicit references to climate change at key stage 3 in the geography curriculum. This is in addition to the content that was already present in both science

and geography which will give pupils a rigorous, fact-based understanding of the science underpinning climate change

- revised the programmes of study for history to respond to concerns that the draft subject content published in February was too prescriptive, attempted to cover too much ground at key stage 2, and could have matched the subject aims more effectively, particularly in its coverage of world history. Having weighed these views, and taking into account the support expressed by some eminent historians for the principles that underpinned those drafts, we have slimmed down the new programmes of study, making clear where content is included as optional guidance rather than a legal requirement, and included additional content on world history. At the same time we have retained a core focus on teaching the history of Britain and its relationship with the world within a clear chronological framework.

National curriculum - standards

Government proposal and consultation response

Following the decision to remove the current restrictive system of levels and level descriptions, the government sought views on the proposed attainment targets set out in the draft national curriculum, and on the extent to which the draft programmes of study would support effective progression between key stages. Respondents called for further clarification to enable schools to define the standard and support consistency in teaching and assessment.

Our decision to remove levels and level descriptions has been informed by evidence² which showed that the current approach can lead teachers to focus on giving pupils the right 'label', rather than on setting high expectations and putting measures in place to ensure that every pupil receives the support they need to succeed.

Evidence shows that there are a number of common characteristics in the most successful school systems – these include greater autonomy in individual schools to design curricula and establish assessment policies.³ Previous curriculum reviews in England have resulted in a significant increase in centrally prescribed guidance and initiatives telling teachers what and how to teach in ever greater detail.

Our new national curriculum provides a more direct relationship between what pupils are taught and what is assessed. It creates genuine opportunities for greater school autonomy over curriculum and assessment and focuses teaching on the core content rather than on a set of opaque level descriptions.

Headteachers and teachers should, working in partnership with parents, be responsible for designing a school curriculum that guarantees pupils a rigorous and balanced education. This should ensure that pupils meet the end of key stage expectations set out in the programmes of study, but leaves schools free to determine the pace at which the core content should be taught. Schools are required to publish this curriculum on their website.

In turn, schools should then be free to design their approaches to assessment to support pupil attainment and progression. The assessment framework must be built into the curriculum, so that schools can check what pupils have learned and whether they are on track to meet expectations at the end of the key stage, and so that they can report regularly to parents.

We have been clear that we will not prescribe a national system for schools' ongoing assessment.⁴ Ofsted's inspections will be informed by the pupil tracking data systems that individual schools choose to keep. Schools will continue to benchmark their performance through statutory end of key stage assessments, including national curriculum tests. In a

² DfE (2011), *The Framework for the National Curriculum: A report by the Expert Panel for the national curriculum review*

³ OECD (2009), *PISA 2009 Results: What makes a school successful? Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV)*

⁴ <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/curriculum/nationalcurriculum2014/a00225864/assessing-without-levels>

separate consultation on primary assessment and accountability, we will consult on the core principles for a school's assessment system.

To support schools in designing their own assessment systems and in response to comments received during the consultation, we have made a number of detailed changes to the individual subject programmes of study to make clearer the expected progression between key stages.

Replacing the ICT curriculum with a computing curriculum at all four key stages

Government proposal and consultation response

The government sought views on a proposal to replace the existing ICT curriculum with a new computing curriculum, to reflect more appropriately the content of the new programmes of study. Respondents who agreed with the proposal cited the 'bad reputation' of ICT and the need to improve the status of the subject to signal a change in the level of ambition for schools, parents and pupils. Those who disagreed argued that the term 'computing' implied too narrow a focus and did not place equal value on all aspects of the subject.

On 3 May 2013 we confirmed our decision to change the subject of ICT to computing in order to reinvigorate the subject and provide an ambitious and inspirational curriculum which is relevant to pupils' experience in the 21st century. We are now proceeding with the parliamentary process required to bring this change into effect for the new national curriculum.

Impact of the new national curriculum – equalities

Government proposal and consultation response

The government invited views on the likely impact of the new national curriculum on equalities and on the ‘protected characteristic’ groups which cover disability, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Responses were varied, with many respondents commenting more widely than the impact on the protected groups. Some respondents suggested that a negative impact was likely, whilst others felt it was too early to tell.

In the course of developing the new national curriculum, the government has sought the views of a diverse range of stakeholders on how the proposed national curriculum framework and programmes of study might impact – positively and negatively – on pupils according to their disability, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. We have considered these views carefully, while maintaining our commitment to producing a slimmed-down national curriculum that focuses on essential knowledge in each subject area and embodies high expectations for all pupils. We have published alongside this document our assessment of the impact of the new curriculum on the protected groups,⁵ and will retain the inclusion statement set out in the national curriculum framework document which enables schools and teachers to adapt the curriculum to respond to differing levels of pupil need.

As is currently the case, there will be a small minority of pupils for whom the new curriculum and assessment arrangements will not be appropriate, because they are working below the expected standard for key stage 1. These pupils do not currently sit the national curriculum tests. Instead, teachers’ judgements are reported, for example, using performance scales (known as P scales). A number of organisations representing the interests of pupils with SEN and disabilities queried how replacing the current system of levels and level descriptions with a single, generic attainment target for each key stage would affect the existing P scales. We will explore whether P scales should be reviewed so that they align with the revised national curriculum and provide a clear route to progress to higher attainment.

⁵ www.education.gov.uk/nationalcurriculum

Views from parents

Government proposal and consultation response

The government asked respondents to comment on whether the new national curriculum would help parents to understand what their children should be learning. Many respondents felt that this would be the case, while one third of respondents felt that there would be little change between parents' ability to access this curriculum and the previous national curriculum.

The new national curriculum sets out more clearly than ever before what pupils should be learning at each stage of their school career – particularly in the core subjects of primary English, mathematics and science. This will enable parents to engage with and support their child's education more readily. The removal of the current levels and level descriptions will also encourage more open and meaningful conversations between teachers and parents on their child's attainment, progress, and areas for development, and how parents can support their child's education.

Implementation of the new national curriculum

Government proposal and consultation response

The government sought views on what would affect schools' ability to implement the new national curriculum successfully, on who was best placed to support schools and develop resources, and on a proposal to disapply aspects of the existing national curriculum to support the transition to the new one. Respondents largely raised issues around funding, training and development needs and the need for sufficient time to implement the curriculum. Respondents also identified professional teaching and subject associations, schools and teachers and government as the most important sources of support.

Phasing and disapplication

All maintained schools will be required to teach the new national curriculum for all subjects and at all key stages from September 2014, with two exceptions. The new national curriculum for year 2 and year 6 English, mathematics and science will become compulsory from September 2015, to reflect the fact that key stage 2 tests in summer 2015 will be based on the existing national curriculum. Key stage 4 English, mathematics and science will be taught to year 10 from September 2015 and year 11 from September 2016, to ensure coherence with the reformed GCSE qualifications in these subjects.

To support this transition, we confirmed on 3 May 2013 our decision to disapply the majority of the current national curriculum from September 2013 to give schools freedom and flexibility as they prepare to teach the new national curriculum. Maintained schools will still be required to teach the national curriculum subjects, but will have more flexibility over what they teach. The regulations required to bring this change were laid in June 2013 and will come into force from 1 September 2013.

Implementation support

We believe that it is for headteachers and teachers to use their expertise and professionalism to decide what is required to implement the new national curriculum successfully. We want schools and teachers to take the opportunity to develop their own school curricula to include the essential knowledge set out in the national curriculum, building upon existing good practice where appropriate to do so. There will be no new statutory document or guidance from Whitehall telling teachers how to do this. government intervention will be minimal but the new national curriculum will set higher expectations and these will be reinforced through the accountability system.

We know that headteachers' approach to staff development is one of the single most important factors in determining the quality and effectiveness of school improvement.⁶ We believe that schools are best placed to decide which resources meet their needs and to secure these accordingly. We want to move away from large-scale, centralised training programmes, which limit schools' autonomy, and towards a market-based approach in which schools can work collaboratively to provide professional development tailored to individual

⁶ DfE (2010), *The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper 2010*:
<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/toolsandinitiatives/schoolswhitepaper/b0068570/the-importance-of-teaching>

needs. We expect schools to take advantage of existing INSET days and wider opportunities to bring staff together to consider the development needs that the new curriculum may pose.

We want to focus on improving the capacity of schools to play a leading role in training and development, and to create more opportunities for peer-to-peer learning. A key element of this approach is the designation of a new cadre of teaching schools which will sit at the hub of local clusters as centres of excellence in initial teacher training, professional and leadership development. We also want to encourage and support all teachers to engage more closely with the types of professional development – including engagement with high-quality research – that have been proven to deliver the most positive impacts on the quality of teaching.

We recognise that the leadership of curriculum change and development will be a challenge for some. The Leading Curriculum Change resources developed through the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) by National Leaders of Education will inspire and guide school leaders through this process⁷ and teaching schools and others will support their use.

Sector-led expert groups have been looking at how existing resources can support the new curriculum and identifying any significant gaps. Professional teaching and subject associations will be an important source of support and have contributed to these groups, alongside teaching schools and other teacher educators. Resources and opportunities will be signposted from our website once the new national curriculum is finalised in the autumn and hosted by subject associations and other organisations.⁸

Current government-funded provision is being re-focused to support the new national curriculum. This includes support provided by the national network of Science Learning Centres,⁹ the work of the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics (NCETM)¹⁰ and the extension of match funding for phonics resources and training until October 2013.¹¹ New support includes ring-fenced funding for sport in primary schools¹² and over £2 million worth of support to bolster the supply of computing teachers.¹³ In addition, we will make a fund of £2 million available to teaching schools and national support schools, to enable them to support the delivery of the new curriculum across their alliances and networks in the coming academic year.

We believe that wherever possible the development of new resources and training should be sector-led, with central support provided only where necessary. We have been working with publishers and educational suppliers throughout the review to ensure that they are well informed about changes to the curriculum and can meet schools' needs by adapting existing

⁷ <http://www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/leadingcurriculumdevelopmentresource>

⁸ <http://www.education.gov.uk/nationalcurriculum>

⁹ <https://www.sciencelearningcentres.org.uk/> & <http://www.nationalstemcentre.org.uk/>

¹⁰ <https://www.ncetm.org.uk/> *Additional funding of £300,000 will enable NCETM to develop training for the teaching of fractions at key stage 3*

¹¹ <https://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/pedagogy/a00191791/match-funding-for-systematic-synthetic-phonics-products-and-training>

¹² <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/financialmanagement/b00222858/primary-school-sport-funding>

¹³ <http://academy.bcs.org/about-academy>

products and by identifying what additional materials will be needed in time to support schools to prepare to teach the new curriculum from September 2014. We know that schools will prioritise, budget and plan for when and how to add gradually to - or indeed replace - resources and we expect publishers and suppliers to take this into account.

With an approach that is led by schools and teachers there will of course be other sources of support and professional development, many of which were mentioned in responses to the consultation - including local authorities, academy chains, school library services, the cultural and heritage industry and organisations like the Prince's Teaching Institute. The important message is that the identification of priorities and how to address them is in the hands of those who know best.



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