

Completing the Revolution



Delivering on the promise of the 2014 National Curriculum

John Blake

Foreword by Dame Mary Archer DBE



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I am also very grateful to the teachers, school leaders, educational publishers and museum staff who helped me explore the problems discussed in this report. Given what follows may be controversial, I can probably best thank them by not naming them. In any event, the conclusions—and any errors herein—are my own responsibility.

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Executive Summary

What is wrong with our curriculum?

England's National Curriculum is rigorous, robust and well-constructed, but the curriculum studied by children in English schools is not consistently of the quality needed to ensure all children receive an excellent, well-rounded and empowering education. Government needs to take steps to ensure that the current National Curriculum, introduced in 2014—what we call throughout our report “NC2014”—is better implemented. This will be good for pupils' education and ease the workload of teachers. Government needs to draw on the many respected institutions involved with English education, who can better “mediate” between the National Curriculum and the school curriculum.

Museums, established educational publishers and learned societies such as the Royal Geographical Society can all contribute to building the coherent curriculum programmes children need. This would replace the unregulated “mishmash” faced by too many children—to be clear, we are not here blaming teachers for this, but the system itself for failing to generate the appropriate resources and training to stop this problem. Institutions capable of generating coherent, rigorous curriculum programmes can act as a trusted bridge between teachers and the Department for Education.

A “coherent curriculum programme”:

- is rooted in the knowledge and discipline of the relevant academic subjects, where explicit reference is made to the research evidence in these areas;
- provides the knowledge and skills children need to access a decent education, both academic and technical;
- is defined clearly through rigorous schemes of work, lesson plans, textbooks and lesson resources such as worksheets;
- includes assessment of both relevant prior learning and learning achieved by studying the curriculum;
- provides training is available, both in the substantive subject knowledge taught by the curriculum, and also in the effective use of the resources provided.

Government should support institutions such as multi-academy trusts, learned societies, subject associations and museums taking on this mediating role. Government should also support and encourage schools to use coherent curriculum programmes created by these mediators.

What is supposed to have happened to curriculum?

Since its inception in 1988, the National Curriculum has not achieved its aim: not all young people in our schools receive the broad and balanced suite of learning promised by the law. After the original National Curriculum in the 1990s, and again following the most recent iteration, the curriculum experienced by young people in our schools has often lacked coherence. The research and theory underpinning the current National Curriculum is strong and is evidently fit for purpose. Ensuring all children are taught a rigorous core of subjects, including literature, mathematics, history, geography and science, is a common feature of highly successful education systems around the world¹ The “powerful knowledge” derived from such a curriculum is the best preparation for young people, regardless of whether they wish to follow an academic higher education pathway or access a skills-based apprenticeship.² It is the foundation upon which a child may build a career, from automobile repair, fashion design and joinery to quantity surveying, engineering and coding. Powerful knowledge helps citizens engage positively in democracy. This is the “promise” of the National Curriculum which Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools, Amanda Spielman, has recently championed.

What has gone wrong with curriculum?

Yet the promise of NC2014 is at risk. It has been enacted by teachers with little useful practical guidance and poor training in curriculum planning, based on curriculum resources (textbooks, worksheets and the like) which do not meet the high standards found in other educational jurisdictions such as Singapore or Finland. The English system has also lacked a professional body for educators to advocate for and defend standards of training and provision in curriculum.

Oven-ready resources

One way of thinking about these coherent curriculum programmes is as “oven-ready” – they will require teachers to understand their purpose, but assuming they do, they can be deployed by teachers immediately. Especially for teachers new to the profession or new to a particular subject or topic, the easy availability of quality-assured, immediately deployable resources will enhance the quality of learning and substantially reduce workload.

The Final Foot

As well as lowering their workload, such “oven ready” resources will also help teachers focus their professional expertise on “the final foot” between them and the children they teach in the classroom. Instead of hours making different worksheets, their attention can all be on using those resources to help the children they are teaching.

1 William H. Schmidt & Richard S. Prawat (2006), “Curriculum coherence and national control of education: issue or non-issue?”, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38:6, 641-658

2 “The problem with CBT (and why constructivism makes things worse)”, Leesa Wheelahan, *Journal of Education and Work* Vol. 22, Iss. 3, 2009

Three major problems emerge:

1. **Quality:** the materials used to deliver NC2014 are simply not of sufficiently high quality to guarantee rigorous education. This is because:
 - a. Teachers frequently rely on on unregulated online resource banks, from which they can download free lesson resources. Much of the material from these resource banks lacks the coherence of fully developed schemes of work and does not meet the quality standards established by work on curriculum resources in other jurisdictions.
 - b. Easily accessible material of higher quality, which is available from some museums and other cultural institutions, and even from some of the free online resource banks, is used much less often and what is used is not used in a coherent manner.
2. **Sustainability:** Teachers appear to prefer free material designed by other teachers, despite the questions over quality. This makes the development of a market in materials difficult, since even when higher quality material is produced, schools do not purchase sufficient quantities of it on a regular enough basis to justify the sustained involvement of those groups we have identified as mediators.
3. **Workload:** The material teachers are using is of generally low quality and not designed as part of a coherent curriculum; therefore teachers are still required to do substantial amounts of planning to make the material useable. This also means that teachers need to revisit topics within subjects to ensure content is mastered, as the episodic nature driven by the materials being used does not embed pupils' learning sufficiently. This adds to the over-demanding workloads that are causing teachers to leave the profession in England.

As a result, children in England's schools are not accessing the curriculum that is their legal right, and England's schools are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain teaching staff. However, where coherent curriculum programmes have been effectively implemented—for example, in the teaching of synthetic phonics in the early years of primary school—results have improved, both in the government's own Phonics Screening Check and in international rankings of reading.³

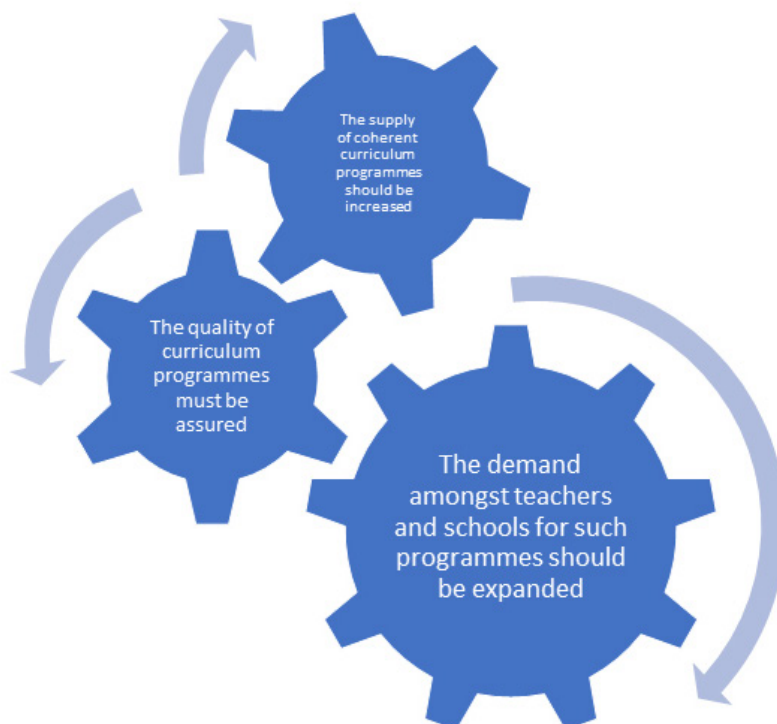
3 Joshua McGrane, Jamie Stiff, Jo-Anne Baird, Jenny Lenkeit & Therese Hopfenbeck, *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS): National Report for England*, Dec 2017, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664562/PIRLS_2016_National_Report_for_England_-BRANDED.pdf

Why should the Government not generate this material itself?

Government should encourage trusted institutions with educational expertise to help fill this gap rather than attempt to do this work itself for three major reasons:

1. The schools-led system established by the actions of all major parties in the past 20 years rightly favours school autonomy over direct instruction from central government.
2. The experiences of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies suggest that government attempts to dominate curriculum planning and resourcing face resistance from some, can rely on flawed or limited research evidence, and do not survive the government commissioning the action.
3. Confidence is likely to be higher in the quality of the materials designed by high-status institutions such as the People's History Museum, the Royal Society of Chemistry or the country's best-performing multi-academy trusts.

Government therefore needs to address itself to three distinct but inter-related issues.



1 Improving the supply

Government should seek to capitalise on the existence in England of a number of highly-successful and effective education organisations which are not currently creating coherent curriculum programmes (or not doing so at substantial scale). We recommend that:

- The present £7.7 million Curriculum Fund pledged by Justine Greening to a “curriculum fund” in January 2018 should be distributed as initial capital for reputable institutions to embark on or expand their work in creating coherent curriculum programmes.
- Bids for money from the Fund should be required to demonstrate how they expect to meet these criteria in their finished product. The criteria for coherent curriculum programmes are laid out elsewhere on p30 of this report.
- Teachers who have ideas about how to build a coherent curriculum programme should be eligible to participate in a competition to “matchmake” them with reputable publishers.

2 Expanding the demand

High-quality coherent curriculum programmes must be routinely deployed in most schools. Teachers presently favour free resources of questionable quality over the high-quality resources already exist. Government should make the following changes:

- All multi-academy trusts should have a Curriculum Plan outlining the coherent curriculum programmes their schools deploy, whether of their own design or externally designed.
- All schools judged to be “coasting” by Department for Education standards or “requires improvement” by Ofsted should be compelled to utilise externally-provided coherent curriculum programmes.
- The Teaching and Learning Innovation Fund (TLIF) and the Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIP) should be merged into a single “School Improvement Fund”.
- This fund should have a “curriculum strand”, from which primary schools and schools in Opportunity Areas are permitted to bid for funding to deploy coherent curriculum programmes.
- Ofsted should include assessment of curriculum quality in its new framework from 2019, including reporting on the coherence of curriculum plans and the usage of coherent curriculum programmes.
- Appropriate additional resources should be made available to ensure curriculum inspection by Ofsted in individual schools and across the system can be carried out systematically.
- Teacher training protocols should be adjusted so that Beginning Teachers are supported to concentrate on learning to teach effectively in the classroom, and to use coherent curriculum programmes rather than be expected to create all their own materials.
- Achievement of Qualified Teacher Status should require teachers to

demonstrate knowledge of the fundamentals of curriculum design and development. Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) should be required to create a small scale coherent curriculum programme, hence encouraging medium and longer-term planning over episodic lesson planning. Notwithstanding this, the majority of teaching by NQTs should be based on material created by others.

3 Enhancing and maintaining quality

Neither improving supply nor demand will be of value if the curriculum systems supplied and demanded do not improve the quality of curriculum available. International evidence exists which highlights the necessary features of a high-quality coherent curriculum programmes.

To ensure this quality is matched and maintained within the English school system, government should:

- Require that money from the Curriculum Fund, the proposed curriculum strand of the School Improvement Fund or any other education funding aimed for coherent curriculum programmes is only spent on projects likely to meet the standards laid out in this report.
- Maintain an online database of programmes meeting these standards and circulate this annually to all schools.
- Encourage the Education Endowment Fund to routinely investigate the efficacy of systems included in the catalogue.

Foreword

By Dame Mary Archer DBE

Britain is blessed with many, varied and extraordinary museums. Indeed, according to the author A. N. Wilson, it contains “the greatest museum in the world”—the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery in Stoke-on-Trent, home of an extraordinary collection of ceramics, fine art and the contents of the Staffordshire Hoard of Anglo-Saxon treasure.

Other institutions across the country, great and small, could contest the title of the world’s greatest. Of course, I’d nominate the Science Museum, where a visitor can move in a few short minutes from admiring Stephenson’s Rocket, which triggered the transformation of transport across the world, past a testament to humanity’s capacity to travel beyond that globe, an Apollo space capsule, on to Crick and Watson’s model of the double helix of DNA, showing what can be discovered within us as well as outside.

But our treasury of museums goes wider and deeper still: from the Victorian technological marvel that is the SS Great Britain in Bristol to the modern scientific wonders of the Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre; from Ditchling’s Museum of Arts and Crafts to York’s examples of locomotive power at the National Railway Museum; from the People’s History Museum, celebrating the clout of the populace across the ages in the heart of Manchester, to the idiosyncratic collection of Sir John Soane, nestled in Bloomsbury, and hundreds and hundreds more.

As well as housing their extraordinary collections, these museums reach out to the communities they serve to provide education and enlightenment, to all ages and especially to our young people. This mission is shared by other cultural organisations in England: our Royal Societies and other learned institutions face towards our schools and universities to help with our children’s learning. And of course, over the past twenty years, new charitable organisations have grown up directly providing schools—the multi-academy trusts that now run most of our secondary schools and a substantial proportion of our primary schools.

These, along with the educational publishers—many of them servicing international markets as well as our own—are part of the rich tapestry of institutions with an interest in education in England. Is it possible there is even more they could do to help our children learn and our teachers teach?

This excellent report argues that they can. By supporting teachers by providing resources such as textbooks and training in academic subjects, we can enrich everyone’s education. Such work, bringing together new partnerships between schools and external organisations to ensure a great

curriculum for all our children, presents challenges and opportunities to both our cultural institutions and to teachers. It will require trust and a genuine exchange of ideas and expertise, which is why it is sensible that this report urges government not do this work itself, but encourages mutually-beneficial relationships between schools and those who are keen to assist them.

A rigorous curriculum is an essential part of the education for all young people, whatever experiences in life they wish to pursue. Whether students seek an academic, a technical or a creative career, they can benefit from lessons drawn from our museum sector and other excellent education providers. Government could do a great deal of good by ensuring bridges can be built by these institutions into our schools, and it could do that well by following the recommendations in this report.

Dame Mary Archer DBE is Chair of the Science Museum Group

Introduction

School curriculum matters

Despite the existence of a strong National Curriculum built on robust evidence and theory, England's children are not receiving the quality of education they need to thrive in the modern world. Weaknesses in the implementation of the curriculum mean that we do not yet have the rounded, robust education to equip all our young people for whatever career they choose, technical or academic.

Since the victory of New Labour in 1997, there has been a revolution in our schools. This has impacted how schools are run, how they are built, and how they are held accountable. Indeed, the pace of change has been fearsome. But on curriculum, the revolution is far from finished.

The curriculum, the key content taught to our children, was intended to be a major part of recent educational reforms, but it is in danger of becoming the forgotten sibling. The importance of the curriculum has been touted alongside a number of allied policy innovations: changes to assessment processes; qualification structures; the expansion of individual school autonomy; and the creation of charitable trusts organising multiple schools across borders of local authority control. But despite its importance, curriculum reform has not been effectively implemented.

The neglect of the curriculum is surprising because we know it is so important. We have evidence that the curriculum offering of selective schools may be more important to their pupils' success in life than the very fact of selection.⁴ We also have clear evidence of how the subject choices children make at the end of their formal schooling can determine their access to the best universities.⁵

Educationists have developed powerful theories, based on both education philosophy and empirical research, of the importance of curriculum for social justice and for preparing young people to better navigate the world.⁶ From the content of the curriculum and the way it is delivered, to teachers having a firm grasp of both what their students need to know and whether they know it, curriculum policy is of fundamental importance.

Structural reform is not enough to ensure children get the curriculum experience they need and are entitled to. Such reforms are now embedded in our school system: two-thirds of secondary schools are academies, and one third of primaries, and more will convert in the years ahead. Whilst this has led to great improvements, the effect of these structural changes in driving up standards and improving the life chances of young people cannot and will not be achieved if the curriculum is not rigorous nor

4 Iannelli, Cristina. "The role of the school curriculum in social mobility", *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 34, No. 5-6, 2013, p. 907-28.

5 Duta, Adriana; An, Brian; Iannelli, Cristina, "Social origins, academic strength of school curriculum and access to selective higher education institutions : Evidence from Scotland and the USA", *Higher Education*, 17.07.2017, p. 1-16.

6 Michael Young, David Lambert, Carolyn Roberts, Martin Roberts, *Knowledge and the Future School: Curriculum and Social Justice*, 2014.

available to all children. And there are reasons to believe, in the words of the Chief Inspector of Schools, that “[t]here is a serious risk of schools not fulfilling the promise and potential of the 2014 national curriculum or of academies not using their freedoms to achieve the same.”

This report attempts to explain why that promise is at risk and offers practical solutions as to what might be done about it.

If this is done properly, standards will improve and workload for teachers will be reduced. At this report’s core is the recognition of the importance of the classroom teacher and we seek to put into their hands the most effective tools available for leading the learning of their students, whilst also rebalancing their workload to make teaching a more attractive profession.

It is both possible and necessary for government to support the construction of robust curriculum programmes which will improve the working lives of teachers and, more importantly, enhance the learning outcomes and life chances of young people.

What is the promise of the 2014 National Curriculum?

Why curriculum matters

Curriculum matters to a child's education. Whether it is narrowly defined as the roster of subjects young people are expected to study, or seen to encompass all the experiences children have through their engagement with school, curriculum describes an enormous part of the form and function of an educational institution.

A school without a curriculum would be one with very little to do with its young people all day. But is any curriculum acceptable? Are some conceptualisations of curriculum better than others? Books have been, and will no doubt continue to be, written about this topic, but the summary here is firmly informed by the evidence that the content of the school curriculum is important for young people in two inter-related but distinct ways:

1. **Personal development:** That is, for a child's growth as an individual capable of engaging and negotiating with other people and wider social forces for alterations to the world around them to best suit their own needs, values and desires—in other words, to behave as a functioning adult;
2. **Personal well-being:** That is, by providing them with the greatest opportunity to access further training and career opportunities that are appropriate and will allow them to secure the standard of living they aspire to.

Jim Callaghan summed it up well in his famous 1976 Ruskin College speech:⁷

"The goals of our education, from nursery school through to adult education, are clear enough. They are to equip children to the best of their ability for a lively, constructive, place in society, and also to fit them to do a job of work. Not one or the other but both."

What sort of curriculum might best do this?

Callaghan's speech both reflected and extended a ferocious battle already being fought within England's education system over what ought

7 J. Callaghan, "A rational debate based on the facts", 18 Oct 1976, <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/speeches/1976ruskin.html>

to be in a curriculum seeking to attain the ends he posited. In the years since, although no truce in that war has come, research has revealed clear advantages for certain types of curriculum in enabling improved life outcomes, cultural literacy and powerful knowledge.

Enhancing life chances: a knowledge-rich curriculum is beneficial for employment options for all children

The right sort of curriculum can make a real difference in improving social mobility, reducing the influence on a young person's life outcomes of the socio-economic circumstances of their parents. Research comparing Scottish and Irish university admissions discovered that the more tightly-controlled subject choices in the Irish school system meant that access to the best Irish universities was less likely to be a function of socio-economic status than in Scotland, where no formal limits on subject choice in the final years of school exist.⁸ Research on the impact of school curriculum content in England also concluded that much of the benefit in terms of future earnings, which accrues to English students who attended selective schools (either private or state-maintained), is a function of the curriculum they studied, not the selective nature of their schools.⁹

The benefits of a knowledge-rich curriculum are of value to those who pursue either technical or academic careers. The sort of curriculum offered in these more successful schools and school systems is one that many would recognise as “traditional”, being based on a knowledge of well-defined academic subjects. It is often posited that a less academic curriculum, involving more skills- or competency-based curricula, would be useful for students who either are from working-class backgrounds or who are likely to pursue vocational training, but this only seems to reinforce the connection between socio-economic status and employment outcomes.¹⁰

Cultural literacy

A knowledge-rich curriculum does not enhance social justice only by creating a solid foundation for all young people to pursue their dream job, it also does so by empowering learners to take part in the wider conversations of society.

Parents who themselves did not have access to a knowledge-rich curriculum are at a disadvantage in passing on such knowledge to their children. In turn, those children are—unless their school assists them—at a disadvantage in taking part in discussions in society as this relies on a common pool of cultural knowledge.¹¹ Policy Exchange has previously published a collection of essays examining in detail the significance of cultural literacy and the curriculum; as one of the authors comments, “If teachers don’t tell children what they need to know, then it is left up to the parents. But what if the parent doesn’t know what abbreviation means?”¹²

By contrast, children from more privileged backgrounds will almost certainly be provided with cultural literacy in their childhood, not only through what happens in school, but also at home: in the discussions held over the dinner-table, the books to be found on the shelves and in the

8 Markus Klein, Cristina Iannelli, and Emer Smyth, “School Subject Choices and Social Class Differences in Entry to Higher Education: Comparing Scotland and Ireland”, *Models of Secondary Education and Social Inequality: An International Comparison*, (2016).

9 Cristina Iannelli, “The Role of the School Curriculum in Social Mobility”, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 34 (2013).

10 Leesa Wheelahan, “How Competency-Based Training Locks the Working Class out of Powerful Knowledge: A Modified Bernsteinian Analysis”, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 28 (2007).

11 Hirsch Jr, E. D., Kett, J. F., & Trefil, J. S. (1988). *Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know*, Vintage.

12 Policy Exchange, *Knowledge and the Curriculum* (2015), <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/knowledge-and-the-curriculum.pdf>

programmes permitted on the television—the cultural activities of parents have a huge effect on the cultural activities of their children.¹³

A knowledge-rich curriculum is a prerequisite for social justice in this softer way as much as through preparing young people to pursue their own economic interests.

The nature of knowledge

Ultimately, however, the treasure trove of knowledge discovered by the human species throughout its history and available now to its children should not be conceived of in purely instrumental ways. It does not exist to make some rich, or even to ensure the stability of certain forms of state, but simply because humanity is curious and capable of investigating the unknown and summarising what is learnt. Although ensuring our young people are capable of paying their way in life and are able to partake of their democratic rights is no small thing, knowledge ought to be passed on because it permits us to understand, reflect on and, if we desire, seek to change our society and our place within it.

If we treasure knowledge in this way, a robust curriculum is also the correct structure for the content of what is taught in schools. This is because of the relationship between how society is structured and how knowledge is created. If “knowledge is power”, this is—so the argument runs—at least in part because knowledge is created by, belongs to and reflects the needs and interests of the powerful. The wealthy have the money to buy themselves the time to indulge an inclination for learning in a way the disadvantaged do not. Power dynamics determine how and by whom knowledge is created and curated.

Crucially, however, knowledge so created is not arbitrary and nor are the rules by which subsequent amendments or additions to that knowledge is curated. That, for example, the Royal Society was a gathering of rich men who could afford scientific equipment did not mean that the information about the world so derived was wrong. Rather, whether it was right or wrong, there existed a process to verify the veracity of such information and to correct that which was in error, and the rules and processes for this hold regardless of the social status of those making the correction.

It is the existence of rules and rituals for the delineation of knowledge, the validation (or invalidation) of it and the communication of it to succeeding generations of scholars which gives knowledge an existence distinct from the social structure in which it was created. The body of knowledge and the rules for its control are what we call “disciplines”, and the subjects taught in school should reflect these disciplines and permit young people to both know about their world and go a long way along the journey of engaging with these disciplines. This has been termed “powerful knowledge”, and it provides a strong argument for the pursuit of a knowledge-rich curriculum.¹⁴

13 Sullivan, A. (2001). “Cultural Capital and Educational Attainment”, *Sociology*, 35(4), 893-912.

14 Michael Young and Johan Muller, “On the Powers of Powerful Knowledge”, *Review of Education*, 1 (2013).

Assessments at different ages in England			
Age	Year	Key stage	Assessment
3 to 4	Reception	Early years	Teacher assessments (there is also an optional assessment at the start of the year) Phonics screening check National tests and teacher assessments in English, maths and science
4 to 5		Early years	
5 to 6	Year 1	KS1	
6 to 7	Year 2	KS1	
7 to 8	Year 3	KS2	National tests and teacher assessments in English and maths, and teacher assessments in science
8 to 9	Year 4	KS2	
9 to 10	Year 5	KS2	
10 to 11	Year 6	KS2	
11 to 12	Year 7	KS3	Some children take GCSEs Most children take GCSEs or other national qualification
12 to 13	Year 8	KS3	
13 to 14	Year 9	KS3	
14 to 15	Year 10	KS4	
15 to 16	Year 11	KS4	

How has the English school system dealt with curriculum?

Political and ideological battles over curriculum have long held back the implementation of an effective curriculum framework; even when one was finally introduced, in the Education Reform Act (ERA) in 1988, ongoing rows sapped resources and reduced its rigour. ERA substantially re-drew the boundaries between the local and national state in education, ending the local authority’s responsibility for governing curriculum arrangements within its area. Henceforth, a National Curriculum was to be determined on the authority of the Secretary of State.

The subjects in the National Curriculum were laid down in statute, to be taught in “key stages”, that is blocks of time within a pupil’s compulsory years of schooling (see box). English, Mathematics and Science were identified as “core” subjects, history, geography, technology, music, art, physical education and (for Key Stage 4, that is, the two years preceding the end of compulsory education, only) modern foreign languages were “foundation” subjects.

The National Curriculum required periodic assessments of the progress of children through the key stages. Key Stage 4, the end of compulsory

schooling, was covered by the recently introduced General Certificates in Secondary Education (GCSE). Key Stages 2 and 3 would be tested through the medium of Standard Attainment Tests (SATs, or frequently and tautologically, “SATs tests”). The results of these tests would be made available in league tables, thus enabling parents to exercise their newly-granted powers of school choice on the basis of assessment evidence.

These monitoring mechanisms were problematic, however. At no point would the whole curriculum be tested: the SATs at both Key Stage 2 and 3 focused on English, mathematics and science, whilst GCSEs covered only those subjects taught to the end of Key Stage 4, and only then if the school submitted a child for the test in that subject. Subsequent Labour governments established more demanding requirements for GCSE entry, but even then only English and mathematics were essential. It is possible to move through English schools having never taken a single external assessment in, for example, history, design and technology or music.

Indeed, it is arguable it would be possible to move through English schooling never having studied these subjects at all. The Office of Standards in Education (Ofsted), formed in the early 1990s, inspects schools regularly, but—until very recently—actively declined to focus on the quality of teaching in individual subjects, making blanket judgements, often on the basis only of outcomes in English and mathematics.¹⁵

Ultimately, qualifications and test arrangements were not enough to ensure a high-quality curriculum without statutory underpinning, but nor is a statutory curriculum itself sufficient to ensure children receive their entitlement.

What is NC2014?

NC2014 is an attempt to redress the failures of its predecessor National Curriculum to ensure sufficient rigour in the curriculum of all England’s schools. A strong sense of the failure of the National Curriculum—especially after a 2007 redesign moved it further from its subject-specific origins—to deliver for all England’s young people drove the education reform movement associated with the reforms of the Coalition government, which took office in 2010. The key education policy-makers of the Coalition government identified their policy programme as both a continuation of the New Labour education reform project as well as a correction of some of its choices of direction, especially in regard to the curriculum.¹⁶

England faced a problem of both equity and excellence—the outcomes of the English school system were neither of a sufficiently high quality, given the amount of money spent on them, nor did they ensure outcomes that were relatively equally distributed across the socio-economic scale of society. The attainment gap between socio-economic groups within England was stark: at the most selective universities of all, including Oxford and Cambridge, less than 1% of students had received free school meals at school.¹⁷ At the same time, English children found themselves in the midst of rising international competitiveness in education; the 2009 results for

15 J. Bald, *HMCI’s annual report, and the neglect of subject inspection in schools*, 8 Jan 2016, <http://johnbald.typepad.com/language/2016/01/hmcis-annual-report-and-the-neglect-of-subject-inspection-in-schools.html>

16 Michael Gove, “Michael Gove to the National College Annual Conference, Birmingham”, (Department for Education (DfE), 2010).

17 The Sutton Trust, *Responding to the new landscape for university access*, Dec 2010, <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/access-proposals-report-final-2.pdf>

the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) revealed that England had been overtaken in the rankings for reading, mathematics and science by other educational jurisdictions.¹⁸

To address these issues, the government pursued significant changes to the structure of English education. The monopoly on the initiation of new school building projects from government was removed. Under the free schools policy, groups of parents and teachers could seek to establish new schools, outside the control of local authorities. Existing state-maintained schools that were already outside local authority control—academy schools, created by the 1997-2010 Labour government—were permitted to expand their involvement in education, forming multi-academy trusts (MATs). Schools still under the auspices of their local authority could apply to become academies.

These policies were pursued in the name of greater “autonomy” for school leaders and teachers, which the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) had identified as a key feature of successful education systems.¹⁹ The policy instruments used by the Coalition government to expand school autonomy in England built on existing autonomy arrangements deployed by the New Labour via “City Academies”.²⁰

This created an issue with curriculum, however, since Andrew Adonis, Tony Blair’s education adviser and later Schools Minister, had designed the academies programme so that these schools were freed from the National Curriculum.²¹ This laxer curriculum policy was not expunged by the Coalition government. Instead, the government sought to deploy other

What is the National Curriculum?

All state schools in England are required by law to meet certain standards of curriculum provision. For academies and free schools, this is a “broad and balanced curriculum” that covers English, maths, sciences and RE.

Maintained schools—all state schools which are not academies or free schools—should teach **the National Curriculum** to students aged between 5 and 16. The subjects required vary depending on the ages of the children in the school, but maths, sciences, English, physical education and computing are required throughout. RE and sex and relationships education (SRE) are also required at various times, but are outside the National Curriculum.

What is NC2014?

The most recent review of the National Curriculum was initiated by the Coalition government. This made major revisions to the content of all subjects. For example, a greater focus on teaching chronologically in History and clearer requirements in grammar in English. In addition, modern languages were added to the Key Stage 2 (ages 7-11) curriculum and assessments were changed substantially. This revision was based on the evidence from some of the highest-performing educational jurisdictions in the world, such as Singapore.

18 Bradshaw, J. Ager, R. Burge, B. Wheeler, R., *Programme for International Student Assessment 2009: achievement of 15-year-olds in England*, Dec 2010, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182547/DFE-RB069.pdf

19 OECD, 2011 <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/pisainfocus/48910490.pdf>

20 House of Commons Library, 20 Jan 2015, <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN05544/SN05544.pdf>

21 A. Adonis, *Education, Education, Education: Reforming England's schools*, 2012.

policy instruments which would maintain academies' curriculum freedoms but also deliver the sort of high-quality curriculum which was to be found in other jurisdictions, without the need for direct government control.

The most significant of these policy incentives would be a new National Curriculum. What became NC2014 would replace the last iteration, which went live in 2007, and which had attracted strong criticism as a diminution of children's minimum entitlement. Notably, the 2007 National Curriculum, whilst it had not changed the subject-based statutory underpinning of the curriculum, actively encouraged schools to teach across disciplinary boundaries.²² The Expert Panel convened to advise on the new National Curriculum argued strongly against this.²³ They advocated the maintenance of a subject-based National Curriculum containing the necessary core knowledge which all young people had a right to.

The Expert Panel also drew a clear distinction between the purposes of a National Curriculum and a school curriculum. The National Curriculum is the core and foundation subjects laid down by law whilst the school curriculum comprises the whole curriculum as experienced by the pupils in each school. A (non-academy) school's curriculum ought to enact and exceed the content of the National Curriculum, and also be designed and resourced in such a way as to ensure all children understand the minimum content and are enthused by the learning.²⁴

Allied to NC2014 were changes to assessment. In the first place, the National Curriculum Levels, which had been the medium for conveying the results of the SATs, were to be abolished. The use of Levels was warping the understanding of assessment arrangements throughout schools by encouraging simplistic definitions of progress and attainment.²⁵ Further, GCSEs were to be reformed to remove innovations which were deemed to have reduced their value as tests of subject knowledge, such as permitting students to re-sit failed papers multiple times or achieving passing marks through coursework mechanisms that were open to distortion by teachers and students; the amount of content children were expected to study for GCSEs would also increase.²⁶ Moreover, the DfE indicated a change in focus on schools' results: a new measure would be published in addition to the total percentage of children in a school who achieved English, mathematics and at least three other GCSEs at C-grade or above ("5A*-C including English and Maths"). That measure would be the so-called English Baccalaureate, which would only be awarded if a student achieved passing grades in English, mathematics, a science, one of history or geography, a modern or classical language and at least one other GCSE.²⁷

NC2014 in an international perspective

In addition to the theoretical grounds for believing a knowledge-rich curriculum was a positive benefit to pupils, there also exist practical demonstrations of its benefit in other educational jurisdictions.

The results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) showed "a direct relationship between students' exposure to coherent content and their performance on achievement tests".²⁸

22 Tim Oates, "Could Do Better: Using International Comparisons to Refine the National Curriculum in England", *Curriculum Journal*, 22 (2011).

23 The Expert Panel was made up of: Professor Mary James, University of Cambridge; Tim Oates (Chair), Cambridge Assessment; Professor Andrew Pollard, University of Bristol and Institute of Education, University of London; and Professor Dylan Wiliam, Institute of Education, University of London.

24 Mary James and others, *The Framework for the National Curriculum: A Report by the Expert Panel for the National Curriculum Review* (2011).

25 M. Fordham, *Levels: where it all went wrong*, 8 Feb 2014, <https://clioetccetera.com/2014/02/08/levels-where-is-all-went-wrong/>

26 Ofqual, 13 March 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-changes-a-summary/summary-of-changes-to-gcse-from-2015>

27 Department for Education, 18 March 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate-ebacc/english-baccalaureate-ebacc>

28 Department for Education, 18 March 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-baccalaureate-ebacc/english-baccalaureate-ebacc>

Jurisdictions whose curricula had “greater focus and rigour” saw their children do better in the assessments.

For example, for the teaching of mathematics in Japan in the years covered in England by Key Stages 2 and 3, “content is extraordinarily well specified”.²⁹ Indeed, in all high-performing systems, “the fundamentals of subjects are strongly emphasised”.³⁰ Finland, which is often cited by those opposed to traditional, knowledge-rich curricula as a haven of loosely controlled, more progressive curriculum practice and all-the-more successful in international comparisons for it,³¹ does not provide an alternative answer. The country’s success in PISA,³² on which much of this praise is based, has been convincingly argued to be the product not of more recent or more progressive curriculum policies, but earlier, highly traditional ones.³³

However, caution about avoiding what Tim Oates has called a “naive descent into policy borrowing”³⁴ suggests that simply reviewing the highest-performing jurisdictions in the world and noting that, in general, they have demanding academic curricula is insufficient. Instead, there is a need to focus on the mechanisms by which their authorities determine the form and content of their curriculum, and how they go about controlling its implementation. Of crucial importance here is the idea of “curriculum coherence”.³⁵

Curriculum coherence occurs when there is consistency between the standards established in the curriculum, the curriculum materials developed to teach it and the training and practises of the teachers who are delivering the material. Centralisation of control is not an essential feature of achieving curriculum coherence, but some form of control is. A system in which there are no persons or institutions to monitor and maintain curriculum coherence is unlikely to have it.

As we noted above, in England, curriculum coherence was intended to be achieved through autonomous schools enacting a revitalised National Curriculum (NC2014) in which standards were both rigorous and clear. The control mechanisms would be external assessments, through the SATs, GCSEs and Ofsted.

Together, these measures were aimed to ensure that all children in English schools had access to a demanding, knowledge-rich, subject-based education throughout compulsory schooling. Both the curriculum and the measures intended to deliver it were supported by sound educational philosophy and successful international comparators. It was this which constituted the promise of NC2014.

However, there is currently little prospect of that promise being realised for most students in English schools.

29 William H. Schmidt & Richard S. Prawat (2006) Curriculum coherence and national control of education: issue or non-issue?, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38:6, 641-658

30 Oates, p. 15.

31 Oates, p. 15.

32 Jouni Välijärvi and others, *The Finnish Success in Pisa and Some Reasons Behind It: 2 Pisa 2003*, (Jyväskylän yliopisto, Koulutuksen tutkimuslaitos, 2007).

33 Gabriel Heller Sahlgren, ‘Real Finnish Lessons’, *The True Story of an Education Superpower*. London: Centre for Policy Studies, (2015).

34 Oates, p. 10.

35 William H. Schmidt & Richard S. Prawat (2006) Curriculum coherence and national control of education: issue or non-issue?, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38:6, 641-658

What is the Problem?

The issues to be addressed

NC2014 is extremely unlikely to substantially improve the quality of education in England. This is for three major reasons:

1. There is no systematic, validated quality assurance process of curriculum, across or within schools;
2. The workload demand attendant on teachers creating almost all of their resources themselves is intolerable. Teachers cannot focus on developing a robust curriculum, and this exacerbates the recruitment and retention problems the profession is experiencing;
3. Even where there are areas of quality and teachers are willing to take on the additional workload, there is nothing to ensure that success is sustainable over the long term.

NC2014 has not sufficiently improved the quality of curricula being utilised in schools. This is because the implementation process for NC2014 did not receive adequate consideration at the time of its creation. Instead, despite the significant debate about the content of the government's National Curriculum documentation, the same errors which accompanied the introduction of the original National Curriculum in the 1990s were also on display here. For example, teachers were largely left to enact the curriculum themselves with little training. As a result, discussions about curriculum were subsumed into debates about improving results in external examinations, with no sense of how these imperatives might conflict. There are several causes for concern about the quality of the curriculum that children in English schools are actually receiving, regardless of how well intentioned NC2014 may be.

One result of the lack of effective implementation of NC2014—and this is the second reason for concern about its effects—is that teachers' workloads in England are excessive by international standards. In educational jurisdictions as varied as Shanghai and Massachusetts, the existence of externally-generated resources for delivering the curriculum, most obviously high-quality textbooks, means that teachers' planning relates to how best to utilise quality-assured resources.³⁶ By contrast, in England, teachers appear to be bearing a far greater share of the burden of creating such resources, which is time not spent on other, more effective educational activities. In an education system in which teacher recruitment

36 T. Oates, *Why Textbooks Count*, Nov 2014, <http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/181744-why-textbooks-count-tim-oates.pdf>

and retention is already a concern, this burden is problematic.

There is also the question of how sustainable such an individualised system of curriculum creation is. Lacking either direct government control of curriculum planning and resource creation, or trusted, non-governmental institutional partners to help generate the same, individual teachers in England are trapped on a treadmill of endlessly turning out curriculum resources, with little or no quality assurance and no guarantee of coherence with the curriculum pursued in other schools, or even other departments of their own school. Even where teachers may create pockets of excellence through voluntary efforts, precisely because these are voluntary, they may easily erode.

Quality of curriculum

A recent report on curriculum by Ofsted identified problems in the practical implementation of NC2014 in a sample of schools.

Particular focus was given to:

- 1. the narrowing of the curriculum by primary school leadership teams to little or nothing more than SATs preparation in the final years of Key Stage 2.** One school, not named, is picked out where “pupils sat test papers every week in Years 5 and 6”.³⁷ Although an extreme case, the general trend is clear: “preparation time for the [Key Stage 2 Standard Attainment] tests varied between a few weeks in the lead up to the exams and a longer sustained period, typically from the end of the Easter holidays, but sometimes from Christmas.”³⁸ In other words, children were spending substantial amounts of time in primary schools not studying the actual curriculum at all, but instead engaging in repetitive test preparation.
- 2. the reduction by secondary school leadership teams of Key Stage 3, the early years of secondary school, from a three year period (when children are between 11 and 14 years old) to only two years.** The rationale used by headteachers for this change in timetabling is that children will have longer to study their chosen GCSE subjects in Key Stage 4. On the one hand this reduces children’s access to specialist subject teaching, as “a considerable number of pupils will be experiencing only two years of study before dropping, for example, history or geography or a language, possibly to never study these subjects again”.³⁹ Further, a two-year Key Stage 3 means three years of studying GCSE courses despite it being the case that “[t]he GCSE tests are designed to cover two years’ worth of content” and thus taking longer over the teaching of them is likely to “expose pupils [not] to more knowledge” but “more test preparation”.⁴⁰
- 3. restriction of subject choice for low-attaining pupils.** School leaders are submitting their lower-attaining pupils for qualifications which require little or no knowledge of the National Curriculum, in the

³⁷ Amanda Spielman, “Recent Primary and Secondary Curriculum Research”, in HMCI’s commentaries, (Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (OFSTED), 2017), (p. 3).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid. p. 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

belief that academic qualifications are not appropriate for this group. Headteachers believe that NC2014 and associated changes to school accountability measures “narrow[ed] the curriculum for lower-attaining pupils by forcing them onto a less appropriate academic track”.⁴¹ School leaders identified as the cause of this narrowing the removal from the performance measures of certain vocational qualifications. Spielman endorses the government’s EBacc target,⁴² and says she believes it is “a desirable and achievable prospect for all but a small minority of pupils”⁴³ and therefore schools ought to be devoting time and effort to “different ways of sequencing and organising subject content to take account of different starting points.”⁴⁴

In addition to these main points, Ofsted raised concerns about:

- Little debate or reflection on curriculum amongst teachers and school leaders
- No tangible reference points beyond the timetable used in curriculum planning
- Low reported levels of teachers with understanding and experience of curriculum theory
- Limited resources for the delivery of continuing professional development (CPD) related to curriculum development

There are clear reasons, therefore, to believe that NC2014 is being implemented poorly. The reliance on teachers to enact the curriculum, with little training and too little consistently high-quality external resourcing, has resulted in curriculum planning being dominated by other concerns.

This should not have been a surprise to the government. After all, the original National Curriculum in the 1990s suffered precisely these same problems. Teachers charged with implementing the original National Curriculum found it hard to break away from the ineffective curriculum models they had previously used. One study of curriculum change in English schools in the 1990s found teachers clung to using “themes” (which could be anything from “the colour red” to “running” to “hope”) to organise the curriculum, as opposed to sequencing the curriculum based on the structure of knowledge children would need to understand a particular subject.

A teacher at one school explained:⁴⁵

“We actually start from the topics because we’ve been working that way. You are supposed to start from the curriculum (the National Curriculum), I think, but we’ve been at this so long that we’re creatures of habit. . . . So we tend to say—right, we’ll choose an environment topic, we’ll choose a science based topic, we’ll choose a history topic. Throughout the year we’ll choose three different topics which we know will cover completely different aspects of the curriculum.”

41 Ibid. p. 6

42 75% of pupils will be expected to study a combination of core academic subjects by 2022.

43 Spielman, p. 6.

44 Ibid.

45 Graham Vulliamy and others, “Teacher Identity and Curriculum Change: A Comparative Case-Study Analysis of Small Schools in England and Finland”, *Comparative education*, 33 (1997), 105.

This is naïve curriculum planning. Instead of building, in a structured fashion, on prior learning rooted in a given academic subject, this mashes a smorgasbord of things together without any attention to how they relate to one another. For example: “the head suggested doing ‘science: forces’ together with the Olympic Games/Ancient Greece material because of ‘balls’”. This sort of approach results in a focus on generic debates over specific content, such as when, needing a link between Swan Lake and the Second World War, the teacher “thought of one—breaking promises with Sigfrid in Swan Lake and Hitler in Germany. Do you think you should never break promises? [Leads to discussion on keeping promises]”.⁴⁶ The school also needed to redo material frequently, because it was chosen for “relevance” which did not necessarily continue to apply—the Olympic unit was chosen because the Olympics would take place that summer and was therefore deemed not suitable for the following year.

Teacher workload

Teachers report heavy workload and the current inappropriate implementation of NC2014 is partly responsible for this. Planning lessons was identified by over a third of the respondents to the Department for Education’s Workload Challenge as a source of unnecessary work.⁴⁷ This chimes with the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) report, comparing different educational jurisdictions around the world. This found that teachers in England reported the third-highest working hours of any country, 48.2 hours per week, 19 per cent longer than the average elsewhere.⁴⁸

Excessive workload is a problem in the English school system. In a 2016 poll, 82% of teachers described their workload as “unmanageable”.⁴⁹ At least 20% of current teachers were thinking of leaving the profession in 2015⁵⁰ and workload is the most important factor amongst ex-teachers when asked to explain why they left.⁵¹

With schools in England facing issues recruiting and retaining staff, the workload created by curriculum planning is clearly an issue. The report of the Independent Teacher Workload Review Group in 2016 recommended the elimination of detailed lesson planning—where teachers would provide a pre-written, minute-by-minute account of what they expected to do in each lesson—as unnecessary. Whilst this is sensible and accords with Ofsted’s commitment to not requiring such material in the course of inspection⁵², one suggested alternative of “identify[ing] blocks of time to allow for proper collaborative planning”⁵³ is identical to the ineffective methods of curriculum planning pursued in the examples cited under the original National Curriculum in the 1990s.

The curriculum planning processes expected of teachers in England, even in the wake of the government’s own workload review, continue to be enormously time consuming. Therefore, in addition to not generating the quality of curriculum desired, the process of implementation for the National Curriculum is also adding to the pressures on teacher workload.

46 Ibid. p. 108. Square bracket in original.

47 Department for Education, *Workload Challenge: Analysis of teacher consultation responses*, Feb 2015, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/401406/RR445_-_Workload_Challenge_-_Analysis_of_teacher_consultation_responses_FINAL.pdf

48 Education Policy Institute, 2016, p.7 http://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/TeacherWorkload_EPI.pdf

49 *The Guardian*, 22 March 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/mar/22/teachers-plan-leave-five-years-survey-workload-england>

50 NFER, 2015, <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LFSA01/LFSA01.pdf>

51 Department for Education, *Analysis of school and teacher level factors relating to teacher supply*, Sept 2017, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/682023/SFR86_2017_Main_Text.pdf, p.38.

52 Ofsted, 21 Dec 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-from-september-2015/ofsted-inspections-myth-busting>

53 Department for Education, March 2016, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/511257/Eliminating-unnecessary-workload-around-planning-and-teaching-resources.pdf, p.8.

Sustainability

The systems which teachers are building to allow them to cope with the demands of curriculum planning and its associated workload are unlikely to be sustainable, even were the issues of quality and workload not present. When Policy Exchange asked teachers what sort of material they used to help them in curriculum planning and lesson resourcing, the importance of the internet became clear. Teachers reported using a wide variety of websites to find material, including:

- museums' and subject associations' dedicated provision (see Figure 1);
- exam boards' suggestions for schemes of work (see Figure 2);
- educational publishers' provision of online resources in addition to printed materials (see Figure 3);
- and—by far the most common response—online resource banks, collating teacher-produced work (see Figure 4).

Almost all of this material was freely available, and a substantial portion of it created by teachers. This is often seen as positive thing amongst teachers, and reviews of teacher social media discussions revealed a substantial number of collaborative projects between teachers in different schools, facilitated by social media and Cloud-based internet storage systems, to collate materials produced individually together in teacher-curated databases (see Figure 5).

Quality assurance is extremely difficult in this environment. Although those administering these databases may seek to weed out lower quality resources, this assumes that they have a clear standard of what constitutes a good resource—which, given the issues raised about the extent of curriculum planning expertise earlier, cannot be taken for granted—and the time and energy to conduct such quality assurance.

Although a “crowdsourced” curriculum planning and resource “ecology” may seem laudable, it actually means even where there are pockets of expert practice, their impact can be overwhelmed by poor quality resources. An effective curriculum is one in which the wider objectives of the learning sequence can be embedded within lessons—what the American educationist Doug Lemov calls “double planning”⁵⁴—but such coherence in resources is not always available. Downloading just individual lessons, or even individual activities, is precisely the kind of poor usage of time and resources criticised in the report of Independent Teacher Workload Group.⁵⁵

Teachers or institutions may offer to take on—on an unremunerated basis—the tasks of quality assurance and maintenance, but this then means that teachers who might wish to draw on those resources are dependent on a system which has no obvious ongoing mechanism for sustaining itself. If the teachers or institutions concerned lose interest, change jobs or merely have other time commitments, the online resource bank may disappear, no longer be updated, or see a decline in quality.

It is for this reason that those looking to establish improved curriculum

⁵⁴ Doug Lemov, *Teach Like a Champion*, p.143-152.

⁵⁵ Department for Education, March 2016, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/511257/Eliminating-unnecessary-workload-around-planning-and-teaching-resources.pdf, p.7.

planning and resourcing in other jurisdictions have looked to establishing effective markets in textbooks and allied materials to ensure a sustained interest in provision and quality by reputable suppliers. For example, in Hong Kong—one of the top performing jurisdictions across reading, mathematics and science in PISA 2015⁵⁶—textbooks are purchased intermittently by schools (because their quality is sufficient to ensure they do not need annual updating), workbooks are purchased every year to generate a “productive, sustainable collaborative relationship” with publishers generating the curriculum materials.⁵⁷

Conclusion

Establishing a curriculum planning system that provides quality assurances, reduces teacher workload and is durable in the long term is the urgent requirement if the promise of the 2014 National Curriculum is to be fulfilled, and all young people access a rigorous and enriching school curriculum. The government can offer meaningful solutions enabling the creation of curriculum materials which reduce the current excessive workload of teachers and support other, more valid, aspects of teacher authority. This will complement the structural changes undertaken by recent governments of all major parties.

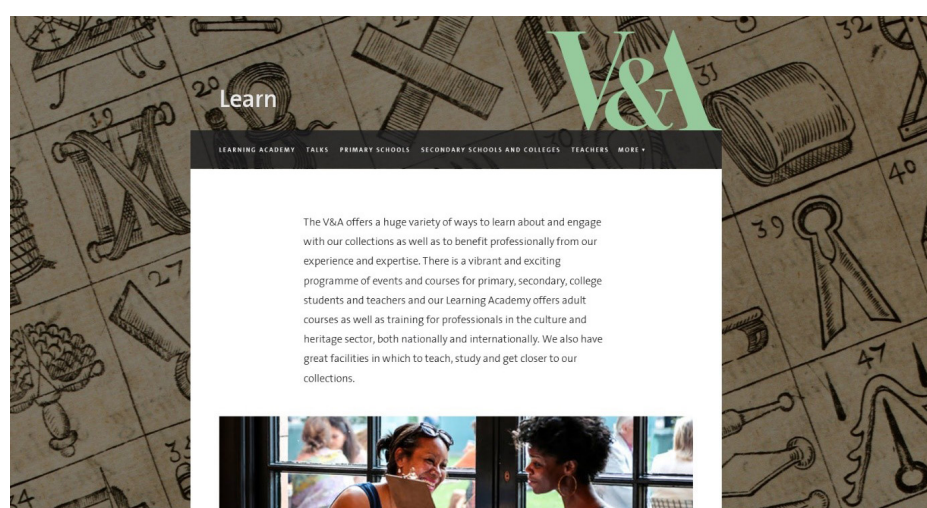


Figure 1: The Victoria & Albert's dedicated learning resources site

56 OECD, *PISA 2015: Results in Focus*, <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2015-results-in-focus.pdf>

57 Private correspondence.

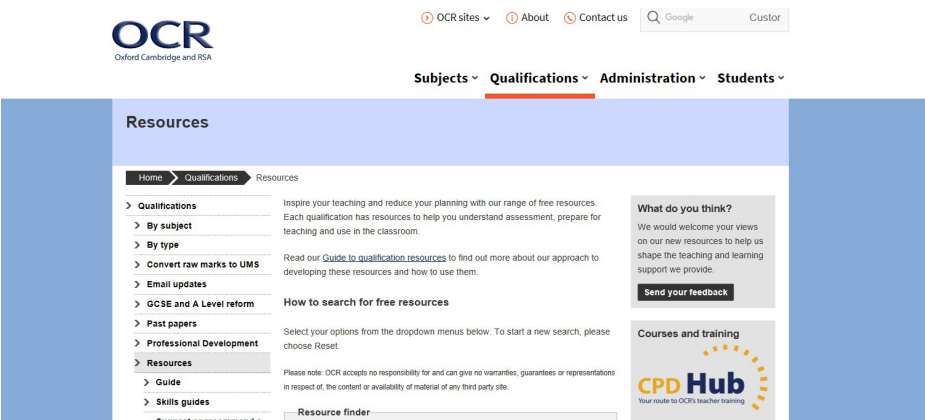


Figure 2: Homepage of OCR exam board's free resources bank

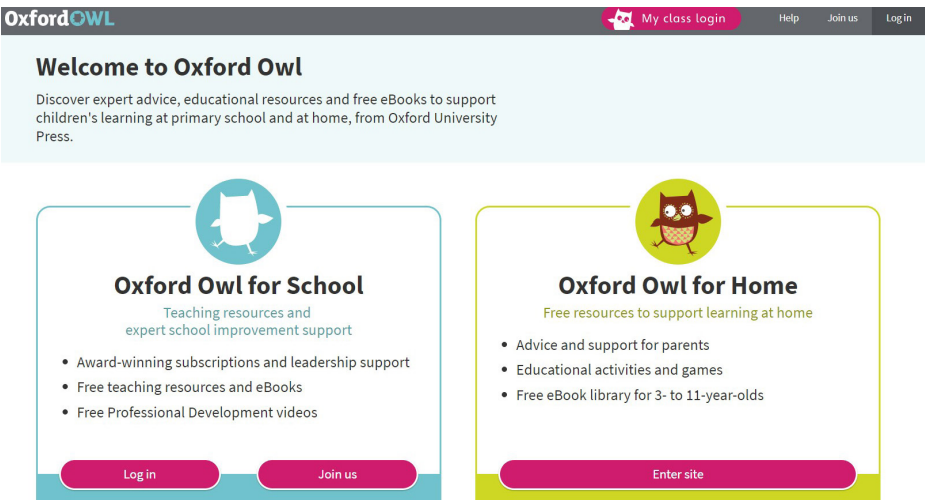


Figure 3: Oxford University Press's "Oxford Owl" support website

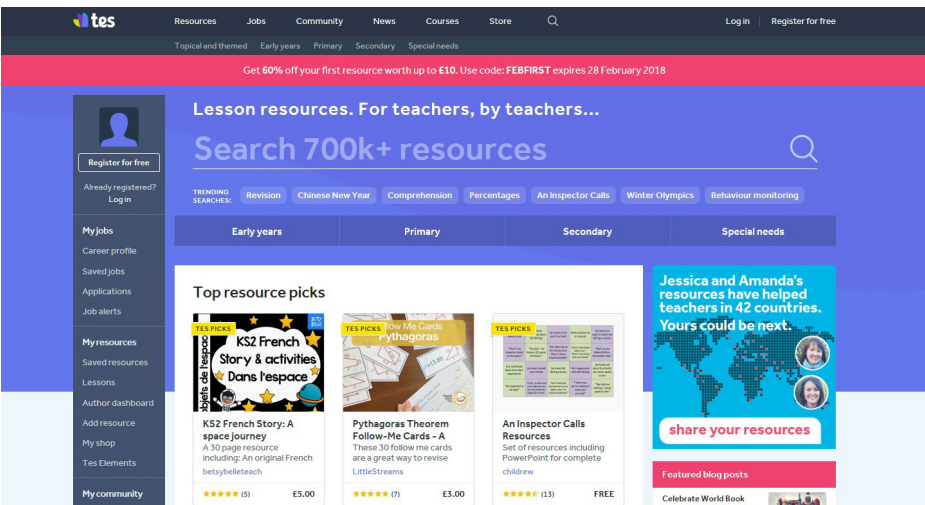


Figure 4: Search page for TES Magazine's online resource bank

What is the Problem?

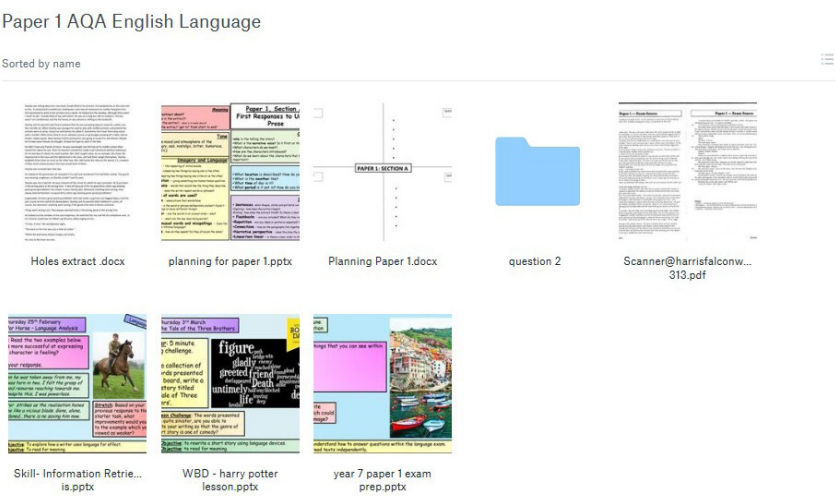


Figure 5: Contents of a folder in an open-access teacher-created resource bank via the Dropbox web servers

Ways Forward

Addressing the problem of effective implementation of the National Curriculum offers the government the opportunity to:

1. improve the quality of teaching and learning
2. reduce the workload for many teachers.

The education system needs to operate with a clear and consistent understanding of what constitutes useful and effective curriculum resources.

Coherent curriculum programmes

A coherent curriculum programme must be grounded in the content and skills of the subject it is designed to teach. It is best supported by robust, rigorous materials like textbooks and well-ordered workbooks and materials for students. A coherent curriculum programme must also provide valid assessment mechanisms and training for the teachers expected to use it. A 2011 survey found that only 10% of teachers in England used textbooks as a basis for teaching in mathematics, compared with 70% in Singapore and 95% in Finland.⁵⁸ A recent survey implies the antipathy of teachers in England to textbook usage has increased: only 10% of teachers use textbooks in more than half their lessons, and even fewer expect to be doing so by 2020.⁵⁹

This is the reverse in countries which excel in international league tables of education. Evidence from Finland and Singapore, which both achieve more highly in education than England⁶⁰, shows their teachers report lower workloads.⁶¹ This suggests that increasing the take up of textbooks in

A “coherent curriculum programme” (CCP):

1. **rooted in the knowledge and discipline** of the relevant academic subjects, where **explicit reference is made to the research evidence** in these areas;
2. provides the **knowledge and skills** children need to access **a decent education, both academic and technical**;
3. **is defined clearly** through rigorous schemes of work, lesson plans, textbooks and lesson resources such as worksheets;
4. includes **assessment of both relevant prior learning and learning achieved** by studying the curriculum;
5. provides **training**, both in the substantive subject knowledge taught by the curriculum, and also in the effective use of the resources provided.

⁵⁸ Mullis I, Martin M, Foy P & Arora A TIMSS, 2011, *International results in mathematics*, Boston College

⁵⁹ TES, 29 Sept 2017, <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/exclusive-less-one-10-teachers-set-use-textbooks-most-lessons-2020>

⁶⁰ OECD, 2015, <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisa-2015-results-in-focus.pdf>

⁶¹ EPI, 2016, http://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/TeacherWorkload_EPI.pdf

England would be effective in improving learning and reducing workload. Government has made efforts in this direction but these have clearly not reversed the anti-textbook attitudes of many teachers in England.⁶²

Something more sophisticated needs to be developed. A 2016 comparison of textbooks from around the world, including Singapore and Finland, generated a series of principles which the highest quality textbooks ought to meet.⁶³ The full criteria outlined in that report should be read closely by anyone seeking to generate high quality educational resources.

Based on these principles, we would recommend that textbooks cannot be seen in isolation from research evidence, in both substantive content and classroom teaching methods, or from the other materials and training that allow them to be effectively deployed. Conceptualising of textbooks, lesson resources, assessment and training as parts of a systematic approach will reduce the likelihood of teachers taking individual activities from these materials like they are some sort of educational “pick’n’mix”.

We would suggest steps towards improving the NC2014’s implementation should focus not on textbooks, but on “coherent curriculum programmes”, in which textbooks are likely to play a central role.

A CCP must cover an extended period of learning time, calculated as the time required for children to master the curriculum outlined. Put another way, it should not be a number of hours, or lessons, or even terms of study, after which it is arbitrarily concluded. This is essential to avoid the structure of the school timetable and annual calendar dictating the content of the curriculum. For example, if it has been agreed that a particular period in history is an essential part of the curriculum, children should study everything agreed, even if this means carrying the lessons across a half-term, or even full-term break. If the material is not important enough to justify effort to ensure continuity in this way, it is questionable as to why it was in the curriculum to begin with.

Likewise, CCPs may involve more than one subject, but this should not dilute the role of subject specific knowledge and understanding in any of the subjects involved. To do this risks a return to the low quality “thematic” thinking identified in the previous chapter as a feature of the implementation of the original National Curriculum in the 1990s.

The English school system has three objectives, which would enhance the quality of curriculum available to children as well as reduce the workload of their teachers:

1. Expanding supply: the number of coherent curriculum programmes available for use in English schools must increase;
2. Boosting demand: the uptake of CCPs by English schools must also increase;
3. Regulating standards: providing quality assurance for schools and pupils using CCPs.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Cambridge Assessment, *The Cambridge Approach to Textbooks*, 2016, <http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/cambridge-approach-to-textbooks.pdf>

Expanding supply

As we have seen, no effective quality assurance mechanisms exist to help teachers with curriculum planning and resourcing. One way of improving the implementation of NC2014 is to increase the number of CCPs from which teachers can draw.

Not government itself

First, it is helpful to establish what should not happen. The government should not attempt to supply CCPs directly itself. Government is unlikely to wish to do so, given the significance attached, by ministers of all major parties, to school autonomy from direct government control over the past thirty years. This has been manifested in so-called local management of schools (LMS) in the late 1980s, grant-maintained schools in the 1990s and especially academy schools since 2000, and the free school programme since 2010.

Were politicians minded to reverse that trend and directly intervene in curriculum planning and resource creation, the example of the Blair government's National Strategies (see box) suggests they would not meet with much success. The value-for-money of the Strategies was questionable: by 2007-08, £104 million had been spent on the Numeracy Strategy, yet the Department for Education's target for mathematical proficiency amongst young people was missed.⁶⁴ Moreover, although the Strategies were never legally compulsory, the strong pressure brought to bear on schools to implement them caused considerable resentment amongst educationists⁶⁵, which may have been a contributory factor in their disappointing impact.

Therefore, although it may be tempting for government to feel it can straightforwardly provide CCPs, this would run up against the autonomy built into the English school system, and is likely to be unsuccessful in any event. Other effective actions are available. These are more consistent with the principle of autonomy, and draw on the capacity of non-governmental institutions already involved in education.

What were the National Strategies?

The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies were keystone policies of the early New Labour government. By 2002, 80% of children were expected to reach Level 4 in the National Curriculum tests for Literacy, and by 2007, this would be 95%. 75% of 11 year olds were expected to achieve a Level 4 in mathematics by 2002.

Both strategies were supported by extensive curriculum resources including lesson plans and worksheets and teacher training. Five hundred external consultants were deployed to support schools in using the specified training materials. Both strategies were also surrounded by significant public relations machinery: a National Year of Reading for literacy and Maths Year 2000 for numeracy.

⁶⁴ W. Lightfoot, *Sorry, We Have No Money: Britain's Economic Problem*, 2010, p.103.

⁶⁵ J. Docking (ed.), *New Labour's Policies For Schools*, 2000, p.70.

Existing suppliers

There are already many current or potential providers of coherent curriculum programmes involved in English education. Some already offer highly effective examples such as Read, Write, Inc and Inspire Maths (see boxes).

These programmes meet the criteria of CCPs, and both the named examples have been subject to academic review (in Read, Write, Inc's case, through a subsidiary programme for older students, called Fresh Start⁶⁶). These studies further support our contention that it is important to conceptualise of these curriculum resources as part of a CCP: in the case of Inspire Maths, some teachers did not use the materials as they had been trained to, and the programme was less effective as a result.⁶⁷

In addition to established education publishers, there are other potential sources of CCPs. Multi-academy trusts (MATs) such as the Harris Federation, ARK and Inspiration Trust, already employ subject specialists to support teachers and schools with curriculum planning, including producing lesson resources and materials. This development of detailed curriculum policies should not merely be encouraged by government, but

Inspire Maths

Inspire Maths, produced by Oxford University Press (OUP), is a whole-school primary maths programme, aiming to support teaching for mastery and meeting the higher expectations of the National Curriculum (indeed, the material for Inspire Maths explicitly claims it exceeds the aspirations of the National Curriculum). It is the UK edition of My Pals Are Here!, a Singaporean mathematics textbook which is used in almost 100% of state schools in Singapore, built on the East Asian mastery-based approach. In addition to the textbook programme, there is essential assessment and curriculum support provided by Inspire Maths Online and PD. The programme uses a Concrete, Pictorial, Abstract (CPA) approach which emphasises teaching mathematics through multiple representations of mathematical concepts.

Read, Write Inc Phonics

Read, Write, Inc Phonics is a fully systematised programme for early years reading. Pupils taught through Read, Write, Inc are taught through synthetic phonics. Children are never asked to guess words from pictures, a form of early reading tuition that has been consistently identified as not merely ineffective but actively harmful to the acquisition of the “decoding” of text which forms the foundation of effective reading. Throughout, teachers are expected to read regularly to children from books which do contain spellings the children themselves would not be able to decode, in order to expose children to wider vocabulary. There is also an extensive programme of teacher training to support delivery of the system.

66 J. Richardson, *Fresh Start: Evaluation Report and Executive Summary*, The Education Endowment Foundation, 2015

67 J. Hall et al, *Evaluation of the Impact and Implementation of Inspire Maths in Year 1 Classrooms in England*, 28 Oct 2016, https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/bitstream/handle/10871/24265/Inspire_Maths_Evaluation_Full_Report.pdf?sequence=1

required, given how crucial MATs are to system improvement in their role as new providers for failed schools. MATs may choose to use CCPs created by others, but if they are developing their own and they meet the high standards of CCPs set out here and the MATs concerned should also be encouraged to make them available for sale.

Museums could also play an important role in expanding CCP supply. Over 400 museums are institutional members of GEM, the Group for Education in Museums.⁶⁸ A selection of these were contacted by Policy Exchange, ranging in size from the internationally famous to the very local, and all indicated that they employed dedicated educational staff. Much of the time of these staff involved working with teachers and young people who came to the institution. However, a number said they did produce material for use in classrooms. We reviewed some examples of this material. It reflected excellent substantive knowledge of the relevant academic subjects, although very little of it would qualify as a CCP, as it very rarely contained assessments, and only sometimes was training provided. However, it is clear much of this material could be systematised into a CCP, if the institutions concerned wanted to.

Some learned societies and subject associations have generated materials that meet the criteria for a CCP and should also play a role. The Royal Geographical Society, for example, provides support on its website which includes resource sets for Geography topics for the National Curriculum.⁶⁹ It also offers teacher training provision in the academic subject as well as on using the resources it provides, including certification as a Chartered Geography Teacher. The resource packs available contain full sets of materials and clear guidelines for their use, meeting the standards of a CCP.

Involving teachers

Teachers can and should continue to have a role in coherent curriculum creation, provided adequate quality assurance mechanisms are in place. It is clear some teachers want this: when Policy Exchange sought guidance from teachers about curriculum resources, one teacher indicated she would never use material created by someone else. In her experience, other people's planning had never been as good as hers—and the workload demanded notwithstanding—she would not only prefer, but insist on completing her own curriculum planning, and producing the necessary resources.

No teacher has a right to teach using material which does not effectively deliver the curriculum, whether it is of their own creation or not. However, if we assume this teacher and her like across the system are capable of producing material of sufficiently high standard, then they have the right to continue to do so. However, if they are doing so, it would be beneficial to the wider system to share the material they are producing, whilst providing quality assurance for others who wished to use the resources.

So, in addition to encouraging institutional curriculum providers to expand their output, government ought to seek to bring teachers with curriculum planning ideas together with institutions who can provide

⁶⁸ <http://www.gem.org.uk/index.php>

⁶⁹ Royal Geographical Society, <http://www.rgs.org/OurWork/Schools/Teaching+resources/Teaching+resources.htm>

quality assurance and wider scale distribution. Experienced teachers should be able to showcase their curriculum creation proficiency through a competition for curriculum programme ideas organised by the national government and judged by subject experts. The prize for this should be the opportunity to work with an established educational institution to develop promising resources into a coherent curriculum programme.

Curriculum fund

The government has already committed £7.7 million to a “curriculum fund” in fulfilment of a Conservative 2017 manifesto promise. No specific allocation for this money has yet been made. We suggest that this money be used to provide seed funding for improvements and innovations in the creation of CCPs by trusted institutions already involved in education, and the creation of a “match-making” exercise for teachers who may wish to expand the reach of their own creations.

Quality assurance will be essential to both these processes, and this is discussed further below.

Recommendations

- The present £7.7 million Curriculum Fund pledged by Justine Greening to a “curriculum fund” in January 2018 should be distributed as initial capital for reputable institutions to embark on or expand their work in creating coherent curriculum programmes.
- Bids for money from the Fund should be required to demonstrate how they expect to meet these criteria in their finished product.
- Teachers who have ideas about how to build a coherent curriculum programme should be eligible to participate in a competition to “matchmake” them with reputable publishers.

Stimulating demand

Appropriate use of regulation can ensure robust curriculum materials are used in schools. As explored in the previous chapter, international comparison suggests that without recurrent purchasing by schools of the classroom teaching materials designed to be used in conjunction with less-regularly purchased textbooks, there is little incentive for effective institutions to commit to producing such resources. Further, teachers will not necessarily purchase the best available material in the current system, without oversight in place. So expansion of supply will only have a small impact, unless the curriculum systems devised are regularly taken up by schools.

Given one of the underpinning rationales of the English school system is the autonomy of schools, government should be cautious to the extent that it seeks to instruct schools to adopt curriculum systems. However, there are occasions when that will be appropriate. There are also other policy levers in the system beyond government fiat: funding, inspection, and initial teacher education. Each of these areas should be examined with the aim of expanding the take up of CCPs.

Regulation

Even in a system as committed to autonomy as England’s, there are times when that autonomy can be lost. When a school has been judged “inadequate” by Ofsted, government has powers to intervene. The primary method of intervention is for the school to join a multi-academy trust (or to join a different trust, where the school is already an academy or free school). It is for the new MAT to make decisions about the direction of the school from that point onward, including curriculum. Given the importance of curriculum to school improvement, government should ensure that the Regional Schools Commissioners—the officers of the Department for Education charged with managing the school’s change in status—are satisfied that the new provider has a high-quality curriculum strategy, which employs CCPs that meet the standards laid out in this report.

Schools can also be identified in need of improvement in other ways, which do not automatically trigger changes in status. Ofsted may judge a school to be one which “Requires Improvement”, or a school may be classified as “coasting”, based on unsatisfactory exam results over a three-year period. In these cases, Regional Schools Commissioners should have the power to instruct such schools to adopt one or more CCPs as part of their improvement strategy. No school in any of these categories should be permitted to continue without deploying quality-assured curriculum programmes.

	Total number of schools	Percentage of schools
Classified as “coasting”	795	3.7
Judged “requires improvement” by Ofsted	1893	9
Judged “inadequate” by Ofsted	420	2

Figure 6: Total number of schools in categories eligible for direction to take up CCPs under our proposals^{70,71}. Ofsted reports 21,033 schools as at 31 August 2017

Recommendations

- All multi-academy trusts should have a Curriculum Plan outlining the coherent curriculum programmes their schools deploy, whether of their own design or externally designed.
- All schools judged to be “coasting” by Department for Education standards or “requires improvement” by Ofsted should be compelled to utilise externally-provided coherent curriculum programmes.

70 In 2017, 271 secondary schools met the DfE’s coasting definition https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/676596/SFR01_2018.pdf and 524 primary schools https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/676596/SFR01_2018.pdf, p.13.

71 Most recent Ofsted judgement totals (of August 2017) in Ofsted, 30 Nov 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/maintained-schools-and-academies-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-august-2017/maintained-schools-and-academies-inspections-and-outcomes-as-at-31-august-2017-main-findings>.

Funding

One way to stimulate the take up of CCPs would be through financial incentives. Government already provides money to schools to cover the cost of resources. In addition, there are funds of money held by the Department for Education for encouraging projects and behaviour likely to generate school and system improvement: the Teaching and Learning Innovation Fund (TLIF) and the Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIF).

Expanding the use of CCPs within schools would meet the criteria for disbursement of money from both these funds. The TLIF was originally a pot of £75 million, of which £45 million remains, to “support high-quality professional development for teachers and school leaders in the areas and schools in England that need it most”,⁷² and the SSIF consists of £140 million, of which £85 million remains, to “further build a school-led system, and aims to target resources at the schools most in need to improve school performance and pupil attainment; to help them use their resources most effectively, and to deliver more good school places”.⁷³

If the TLIF and the SSIF were combined into a single “School Improvement Fund”, and the effective implementation of CCPs was identified as a legitimate purpose for the fund, the DfE could follow a similar process to that used to encourage the take-up of provenly-effective materials for the teaching of phonics in 2011. Then, the Department for Education agreed to provide matched funding of £3000 to any primary school who purchased materials for teaching synthetic phonics from a catalogue curated by the DfE itself.⁷⁴

Adding the TLIF and SSAT funds together, the total fund would stand at £130 million. This would make meaningful change possible. It would provide an exemplification of effective practice to be used in arguing the case for further money to be spent in the same way in the 2019 Strategic Spending Review.

Funding for CCPs spent in this way should still be targeted, as the TLIF and SSIF are, at the areas of most urgent need. One approach would be to offer the opportunity to bid for matched funding from the new School Improvement Fund for the take up of quality-assured resources in areas, such as Opportunity Areas, designated by the Department for Education as especially high need.

Recommendations

- The Teaching and Learning Innovation Fund (TLIF) and the Strategic School Improvement Fund (SSIP) should be combined into a single “School Improvement Fund”.
- This fund should have a “curriculum strand”, from which primary schools and schools in Opportunity Areas are permitted to bid for funding to deploy coherent curriculum programmes.

⁷² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-and-leadership-innovation-fund>

⁷³ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-school-improvement-fund>

⁷⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/phonics-funding-thousands-of-schools-sign-up>

Inspection

Ofsted's intervention in the curriculum debate is welcome and refreshing. The authority of the inspectorate is considerable, and its access to evidence about the implementation of curriculum across the system is unrivalled. Ofsted can and should continue to be an effective lever in highlighting curriculum practises and encouraging schools to adopt the most effective resources and training available.

The inspection framework is currently being reviewed, for implementation from 2019. This review should expand Ofsted's focus on the extent to which schools are taking up validated high quality curriculum planning systems. Where schools have chosen to create their own resources, it should be clear whether these match the quality and effectiveness of external resources. In the event that schools are unable to account for their curriculum or the quality is substantially below that which is available externally, schools should expect to be supported to take up particular curriculum planning systems.

Recommendations

- Ofsted should include assessment of curriculum quality in its new framework from 2019, including reporting on the coherence of curriculum plans, including usage of coherent curriculum programmes.
- Appropriate additional resources should be made available to ensure curriculum inspection by Ofsted in individual schools and across the system can be carried out systematically.

Teacher training

Teachers in the early stage of their careers, in particular, should not be expected to take on an enormous workload as a result of curriculum planning. This is because they have the greatest level of work to do in learning other aspects of their craft as teachers, such as behaviour management, and also because they are likely to be less knowledgeable about the requirements and theory of curriculum planning. However, in our discussions with teachers, it was suggested that in many schools, it is Beginner Teachers ("BTs", those in their first year of training) and Newly Qualified Teachers ("NQTs", those in their second), who were expected to do a disproportionate amount of such planning because they have a contractual right to teach fewer lessons. This time would be better spent observing other teachers or reading up on substantive subject knowledge rather than attempting to create curriculum systems for which they are not qualified.

Fully qualified teachers should be engaging in much less curriculum planning and resource creation than at present. However, when discussing this issue with teachers, it has also been clear that most would be loath to lose entirely the expectation that teachers ought to be capable of such

planning and be able to engage in it where appropriate. It seems appropriate to improve teacher training and continuing professional development to enhance this capacity rather than eliminate it entirely, even if the general trend ought to be for teachers to do far less of it.

The government has recently announced a review of process by which teachers acquire Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), which offers an opportunity to clarify this process. We would suggest the review be clear that anyone expecting to hold QTS will know what is involved in generating a CCP, but that it would no longer be a requirement that they should have completed such planning and resource-creation themselves. In particular, the standards for Beginning Teachers should be absolutely explicit that they should be working with materials developed by others and not designing their own curricula.

Ofsted, in its inspection of initial teacher education (ITE), should ensure that BTs are not being expected to create their own materials, and are receiving appropriate training (via CCP providers) and mentoring (from within school) to ensure that they are using materials provided to them effectively.

NQTs should be expected to generate a small-scale CCP as part of their QTS assessment, but the majority of their teaching should also be based on materials created by others. Again, the QTS standards and Ofsted inspections should reflect this requirement.

The “match making” process outlined earlier in these recommendations will provide a route for teachers further in their careers to involve themselves in generating CCPs. Furthermore, CCP providers should ensure that they seek regular feedback from teachers who use their materials, including the opportunity to contribute to adjusting them.

Recommendations

- Teacher training protocols should be adjusted so that Beginning Teachers are supported to concentrate on learning to teach effectively in the classroom, and to use coherent curriculum programmes rather than be expected to create all their own materials.
- Achievement of Qualified Teacher Status should require teachers to demonstrate knowledge of the fundamentals of curriculum design and development, and that practically Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) can create a small scale coherent curriculum programme, hence encouraging medium and longer-term planning over episodic lesson planning. Notwithstanding this, the majority of teaching by NQTs should be based on material created by others.

Quality assurance

It is important to ensure the standards of CCPs supplied to schools are of reliable quality. Whenever the DfE is providing money, either through the Curriculum Fund to potential CCP projects, or supporting the use of already-developed ones via the School Improvement Fund, there needs to

be an open and transparent assessment of the quality of the CCP against the standards laid out above. A catalogue of those projects supported in this way should be maintained and made available to every school in the country every academic year. This catalogue should be used as a quality indicator—programmes from outside the catalogue, including those created in a school, could be used where schools are confident such material meets the standards laid out here.

The projects included in that catalogue need to be kept under review, and all projects receiving money for use in schools ought to be reviewed by the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) to assess their ongoing efficacy. As more projects are reviewed, the standards themselves should also be kept under periodic review by the Department, in order to ensure new research evidence is well reflected.

Recommendations

- Require that money from the Curriculum Fund, the proposed curriculum strand of the School Improvement Fund or any other education funding aimed for coherent curriculum programmes is only spent on projects likely to meet the following standards:
 - one **rooted in the knowledge and discipline** of the relevant academic subjects, where **explicit reference is made to the research evidence** in these areas;
 - that provides the **knowledge and skills** children need to access **a decent education, both academic and technical**;
 - **defined clearly** through rigorous schemes of work, lesson plans, textbooks and lesson resources such as worksheets;
 - which includes **assessment of both relevant prior learning and learning achieved** by studying the curriculum;
 - for which **training is available**, both in the substantive subject knowledge taught by the curriculum, and also in the effective use of the resources provided.
- Maintain an online database of programmes meeting these standards and circulate this annually to all schools.
- Encourage the Education Endowment Fund to routinely investigate the efficacy of systems included in the catalogue.

Conclusion

Mario Cuomo, three-term governor of New York, once opined that politicians “campaign in poetry” but “govern in prose”. A similar catchphrase ought to be coined for the process of actually changing anything whilst governing: ministers can announce a policy in poetry, but they ought to implement it in prose.

The poetry of the National Curriculum has been clear from the very beginning, right back to its birth in 1988: it is a statement of the absolute right of every child in England to a broad, balanced and rigorous education. Children who pass through schools operating under the

National Curriculum's auspices ought to be able to read, write and add up, and have an understanding of their world framed by academic subjects. They should be able to express themselves creatively and be prepared for whatever career their talents and aspirations guide them towards.

But poetry writes no lesson plans—and the government needs to help more the people who do, knowing more about how they do this and where they are looking for support. Implementation of any change to schooling ultimately depends on teachers, and in the case of curriculum change, teachers need more support than they are currently receiving.

This report recommends that in seeking to improve the implementation of the National Curriculum the government needs to encourage the supply and stimulate demand for what we have termed “coherent curriculum programmes”. Teachers need textbooks, workbooks, assessments and training that will enable them to teach the curriculum more effectively.

No textbook or worksheet will ever substitute for a positive relationship between teacher and pupil but these “oven ready resources” can underpin those relationships by reducing teacher workload on activities which can be done effectively by external bodies. That then expands the time and energy available to teachers to deploy their professional skills where they will make the most difference, in “the final foot” between them and their pupils, in the classroom.

England's National Curriculum is rigorous, robust and well-constructed, but in this report, John Blake—a former teacher and senior school leader—argues that the curriculum actually studied by children in English schools is not consistently of the quality needed to ensure all children receive an excellent, well-rounded and empowering education.

The effect is a weaker education for too many children, but it also takes a heavy toll on teachers, who are trying to implement the curriculum without the resources and support they need.

Seeking to harness the energy and expertise of the many respected institutions involved with English education, the report calls for respected museums, established educational publishers, and learned societies to “mediate” between the National Curriculum and the school curriculum and help build the coherent curriculum programmes children need. Timely and thoughtful about the real problems of curriculum in our schools, this report is essential reading for anyone who wants to see teachers' workloads made manageable whilst still improving school standards.

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