

National Curriculum Review

Evidence of the Association of School and College Leaders

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) consists of 15,000 members of the leadership teams of maintained and independent schools, academies and colleges throughout the UK. This places the association in a unique position to see this review from the viewpoint of the leaders of secondary schools and colleges and we welcome the opportunity to respond to the request for evidence.
- 2 ASCL trusts that the review will be conducted in a spirit of transparency and will offer opportunities for debate and feedback to all interested parties as the review groups develop their thinking. The school curriculum has a deep impact on the future lives of young people and it is essential that they, their parents and those responsible for educating them are involved in the debate around what they should learn and how they should be prepared for their future lives.
- 3 A national curriculum is only one part of the total range of strategies which are needed for further improvement of the system. Therefore it is important that there is joined up thinking between the various reviews under way at present, particularly between reviews of the curriculum and those involving teacher supply, quality and training. Within the area of the curriculum itself there are a number of reviews that appear to be operating separately (for example on assessment, vocational qualifications, and SEN) and we are concerned that this will lead to piecemeal and therefore ineffective reform.
- 4 ASCL believes that young people are best served by a national curriculum which is broad and balanced and which contains both a core body of knowledge and key employment and life skills. The National Curriculum should provide an opportunity for all pupils to develop an understanding of our shared culture and to be fully equipped to contribute productively to the economy and society throughout their lives. The curriculum content must be concise enough to allow teachers the time, freedom and flexibility to teach the core body of knowledge and skills in ways that will seem relevant to students, that will engage them, and that will meet their individual needs.
- 5 The 2007 revised secondary curriculum aimed to encompass these points. Its programmes of study set out clearly the core knowledge and understanding that all children should be expected to acquire. It also provides the space that teachers need to create lessons which engage their students. ASCL therefore believes that there is a strong argument for making as few changes as possible at secondary level.
- 6 We do welcome the fact that the remit is to review the statutory curriculum in its entirety, as too often in the past curriculum changes have been piecemeal and have resulted in a mismatch between key stages.
- 7 In view of the relatively recent review of the secondary curriculum and the austerity in funding expected for the next several years, school leaders are concerned at such a full review of the curriculum being undertaken now. Curriculum and qualification change requires careful planning and resourcing if learners are not to be disadvantaged. At a time of scarce resources, change should only be considered if

everyone is sure that it will result in improvements for learners and offer them enhanced progression routes for their future lives and employment.

- 8 It is unnecessary to make major changes when free schools and academies, which the present government intend to be the majority of secondary schools before the end of this parliament, will not be subject to the revised national curriculum. There will be a cost in responding to any significant changes, which only a minority of maintained schools will have to meet. This will lead to further inequality in the funds available to support students' learning.
- 9 Whenever the curriculum changes staffing requirements may be different, new resources will have to be purchased, teachers will have to be trained and then spend considerable amounts of time re-planning their programmes of study and developing new teaching materials and approaches. School leaders do not believe that there is a need for substantial change when the 2007 revised secondary curriculum already provides a manageable curriculum framework that enables them to meet the needs of all students.
- 10 It is to be hoped, therefore, that the curriculum review team will make recommendations which will enable secondary schools, if they wish, to continue to use the curriculum plans and programmes of study which they have developed since 2007 and into which school leaders and teachers have invested much time, energy and resources.

Section C: general views on the national curriculum

- 11 A SCL refutes the statement in section C of the consultation response form that the national curriculum for KS3 and 4 has come to include more subjects, prescribed more outcomes and taken more school time than originally intended. This was certainly the case during the early years of the introduction of the national curriculum but the 2007 revision dealt very constructively with these issues. When it was published, following substantial consultation with all stakeholders, there was a strong consensus around its introduction. The aims were felt to be appropriate for students entering their adult life and the world of work in the 21st century, and teachers appreciated the consistent manner in which each subject was presented under the headings of importance, key concepts, key processes, range and content and curriculum opportunities.
- 12 The revised secondary curriculum is already slimmed down and presents teachers with a very clear framework which enables them to use the very professional freedoms and autonomy about which the coalition government has frequently spoken. Schools have been able to plan their curriculum appropriately to meet the needs of their particular context, whilst ensuring that all their learners receive the entitlement that has been agreed at the national level.
- 13 During KS3, for example, some schools have chosen to retain a curriculum plan which teaches each subject discretely. Other schools have chosen to amalgamate subjects where this seemed appropriate. This has not led to a lack of rigour in the coverage of the national curriculum as schools have been careful in their planning to ensure that the whole content of the national curriculum is covered. Where schools have chosen this latter route, their rationale has usually been to ensure that all students are fully engaged in learning. Some students find the transition from KS2 to KS3 abrupt, others are fully ready for the change to separate subjects. Schools now plan their Y7 curriculum in particular to ensure that all students are able to make this transition effectively.

- 14 ASCL members have told us, in particularly strong terms, that they find the debate which appears to differentiate between a knowledge-based curriculum and a skills-based one meaningless and counter-productive. It is impossible to master any subject discipline without developing both the knowledge required and the skills. It is impossible to define these in isolation, or to teach them separately. It would be of great concern if subject knowledge were to be represented as a list of facts which must be learnt. In the 21st century students have easy access to knowledge. They need however to master the skills which will enable them to search, select, verify, analyse and prioritise the information which they find. The knowledge required to develop an understanding of the subject discipline is much deeper than the mastery of a simple lists of facts.
- 15 If the learning of a modern language, for example, was divided into knowledge and skills then knowledge would presumably simply be a list of vocabulary and grammatical points. While this knowledge is necessary for the learning of the language it is of no use at all without the development of the skills required to turn this information into sentences, to understand and interpret what others are saying and to respond.
- 16 ASCL believes that young people will need a combination of knowledge, understanding and skills if they are to be successful in their life and employment and that the UK needs people who are creative, imaginative and flexible as well as knowledgeable and well informed. Employers are constantly telling us that they need young people who have strong basic skills, particularly in English and mathematics, but also have a wider range of skills, including communication, problem solving, team working and the ability to use all forms of technology. The National Curriculum should ensure that all young people have an entitlement to all of these areas of learning.
- 17 Whilst ASCL supports the existence of a National Curriculum, as it ensures that there is a basic entitlement for all students, we do not believe that it is appropriate or sensible for governments to prescribe time allocations for specific subjects centrally. Such decisions are rightly the business of the professionals who lead and teach in our schools. Should governors, parents or other bodies have concerns about a school's curriculum there is provision within accountability systems for them to be addressed.

Section D: English and mathematics science and physical education

- 18 A SCL supports the proposal to have English, mathematics, science and physical education as compulsory subjects for all key stages up to age 16.
- 19 ASCL members are broadly happy with the 2007 requirements for English, mathematics and science.
- 20 The remit for the curriculum review states the intention to slim down the programme of study for physical education. The 2007 KS3 programme of study comprises only seven pages and is already written as a simple framework which teachers are finding useful. It is not easy to see how this could be slimmed down further and still give useful guidance. A minimum time allocation should not be prescribed by central government for physical education within schools, nor should there be lists of specific sporting activities required by the National Curriculum. Much good work has been done in recent years in encouraging all students to participate in physical education and schools must have the freedom to choose the activities they feel will best motivate and engage particular groups of students. The vast majority of secondary schools in England have an extensive programme of extracurricular activities, including sport and other physical activities. The experience of this area of the curriculum for many pupils goes well beyond what is outlined in the statutory programme of study. On the other hand, facilities for sport and outdoor activities are sadly inadequate in some areas and

for this reason also schools must be allowed to make best use of the facilities they have at their disposal.

- 21 ASCL does not believe that any of the programmes of study should be written for specific year groups. We would prefer to retain the division into key stages. Students do not develop at the same pace. Some have particular needs or long-term absences and schools need to have the flexibility to organise their teaching of the programmes of study as best suits the needs of their students. They need to be able to plan for mixed year teaching where appropriate or to place individuals in non-chronological year groups.

Section E: other subjects currently in the National Curriculum

- 22 ASCL members work mainly in secondary schools or colleges and we do not therefore intend to comment in detail on the primary school curriculum. However, we hope that pupils in primary schools will continue to have a broad curriculum where sufficient emphasis is placed on English and mathematics without pushing out other areas of study such as the humanities, science, technology, art and design, music and languages. Secondary members have found that some primary schools over-emphasise test preparation in Y6 at the expense of these other areas of the curriculum and that children can arrive at secondary school with a very limited experience of music and the arts in particular.
- 23 We believe that languages should be a statutory element of the KS2 curriculum. Much good work has already been done in the primary sector to develop an interest in language learning and, if we are to halt the decline in languages in this country, this must not be lost. ASCL hopes that the review will not recommend an emphasis on learning one specific language to a high level during the primary phase. For historic reasons this would almost certainly have to be French, with the expectation that secondary schools would continue to teach French as their main language in KS3. This will not meet the needs of the UK in the future.
ASCL, funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, has been leading an extended curricular and research project into a different way of introducing languages into the primary curriculum, the 'multi-lingual language awareness' model. Details can be found in the appendix.
- 24 Many secondary schools where language learning is still successful are diversifying their language offering; to place constraints on such developments would be a mistake. ASCL believes that a more appropriate approach to language learning in the primary sector is to follow a course which enables pupils to learn about languages, to develop an understanding of what languages are and how they are used and which encourages them to want to continue to learn a language in more depth. A language awareness course which can be taught by the class teacher in primary schools and where two or more languages are covered, including the community languages of the pupils in the school, is more likely to lead to successful language learning at KS3. This type of course also develops greater cultural awareness and prepares children for their future lives in a global society.
- 25 At KS3, the preference of ASCL members is for the subjects which are currently in the 2007 secondary curriculum to be retained. We believe that students should have a broad and balanced experience until the age of 14 and that all students are entitled to experience the humanities, the arts, design and technology, citizenship, modern languages and ICT. To differentiate between these subjects by making some compulsory and others not will inevitably influence the attitude of parents and students and create first and second tier subjects.

- 26 Many of the young people currently in education will take up careers in the creative, design or technology industries and it is essential that all are exposed to these subjects, taught by specialists, in the early years of secondary education so that talents and interests can be identified.
- 27 The 2007 programmes of study for these subjects are sufficiently slim to enable schools to be flexible in the way in which they organise their curriculum and fit them into the time available. There should be no central prescription of the years in which they should be taught, the time allocations per subject, the organisation of the curriculum or the manner in which they are taught.
- 28 ASCL has always maintained that personal social and health education is an important part of education, but that the programmes of study should not be statutory. Our members recognise the need to cover these areas and have appreciated the non-statutory guidance given within the 2007 secondary curriculum document.
- 29 At KS4, we believe that a statutory core of English, maths, science and PE, without time prescriptions, is acceptable. Beyond that, students should be able to make choices from a wide range of subjects. The current entitlement to a language course, a design technology course, a humanity and an arts course has been useful since it ensures that all students have an equal opportunity to follow such courses. We do not believe that performance tables should be used to encourage students to take specific courses. Provided that higher and further education institutions make their requirements clear then students will be able to ensure that they select courses which enable them to progress.

Section F: supporting and recognising progress

- 30 It is very difficult to enter into a discussion about the assessment of the national curriculum until more detail of the curriculum itself is known. Only after a curriculum has been designed is it sensible to decide how best to assess students' mastery and understanding of it. Too often in England assessment has led the curriculum rather than the other way round.
- 31 The levels of attainment which are currently used to assess students up to the age of 14 were devised for a curriculum which was quite different and far more detailed. Although in the case of the secondary curriculum, they were revised alongside the curriculum revision in 2007, they are still imperfect. If a new, fit for purpose, assessment system were now to be designed from scratch, it is doubtful that it would involve the current eight levels.
- 32 Particularly at the point of transfer from KS2 to KS3, the information given by a single level in each subject is not very useful. To say that a child has a level 4 in English or maths, is therefore meeting the required standard and can access the KS3 curriculum often hides many issues, which may then be overlooked. There is a great difference between a child who is working confidently towards the top of level 4 and the child who has just managed to scrape a level 4 in the tests at the end of Y6. The latter child might for example have substantial reading difficulties which are not then identified to the teachers in the secondary school and not addressed until much later.
- 33 On the other hand, to remove the current levels of attainment and replace them with a new system would introduce yet more instability into the system. Teachers are now becoming more familiar with the meaning of the levels. ASCL has already given evidence to the Bew review in which we stated that we would prefer a combination of teacher assessment and tests at the end of KS2 because this could provide more detailed information for secondary schools.

- 34 Our preference would be to wait until the outcome of the review is announced and then to undertake a review of assessment, if it is felt necessary. National curriculum assessment is already a very heavy drain on education resources at a national level which has never been subject to a cost/benefit analysis. The internal assessment techniques used now to great effect by teachers provide far greater value in enabling students to understand what they need to do to make progress.
- 35 In summary, as with curriculum revision in general, ASCL is opposed to change unless the proposed new system can be clearly demonstrated to be cost effective and to be beneficial to students.
- 36 If an assessment system has as its main aim to help students to make progress then it must give them a full picture of their achievement, in terms of skill development as well as knowledge.
- 37 As stated above our members believe that the programmes of study as currently written for KS3 and KS4 do provide sufficient flexibility to enable them to meet the needs of students with a wide range of ability. It is essential that this flexibility is retained so that schools can organise teaching and learning to meet individual needs. The development of individual pathways which has become possible within the current curriculum structure has been a big step forward in meeting such needs.
- 38 It has also been noted (not least by a recent select committee report) that a more flexible curriculum has a positive impact on behaviour.
- 39 Once the outcome of the review has been agreed and enacted we would expect to see a period of stability with no further additions, amendments or subtractions. Nor should ministers attempt further to alter or influence the KS4 curriculum by means of performance indicators. Subjects should either be compulsory or not and, beyond the former, schools should be able to offer those courses and qualifications that they believe best suit the needs of their students and that enable them to progress to the next level. Government should not attempt to influence parents to believe that some subjects are more worthwhile than others.
- 40 Provided that higher education institutions and employers make their requirements clear to young people and that young people receive sound, impartial information and advice about these requirements then there should be no need to push students into particular choices.
- 41 If government believes that there should be a statutory curriculum beyond the four core subjects proposed then this should be reflected in the national curriculum requirements. In 2007, for the first time, we had a document which set out all of the curriculum requirements for the maintained secondary sector. This is good practice and any revised curriculum document should seek to gather all regulations within it.

Section G: international comparisons

- 42 Much of the white paper *The Importance of Teaching* was predicated on an analysis of the performance of English students in comparison with those in other countries. The Prime Minister's foreword cited falling performance in science, literacy and mathematics in the 2006 PISA (which applied equally if not more to 2009 PISA). Throughout we were told that "the best systems in the world" adopt particular strategies, which were then proposed as desirable developments in England. These included approaches to the curriculum, especially the proposed English Baccalaureate

(section 4.21), and accountability (6.10), as well as many more throughout the document.

- 43 As an association, ASCL certainly supports taking a wider view of English education than that often adopted in the past. We have much to learn from other countries' and systems' experiences, as they have also from ours. Tim Oates, in the recent Cambridge Assessment report *Could do better: Using international comparisons to refine the National Curriculum in England*, wrote of the "tendency towards introspection" which has beset aspects of English educational thinking for some decades. ASCL supports the government in wanting to break away from this inward-looking approach.
- 44 However, doing so is not a simple matter. PISA surveys are useful benchmarks, and it is right that they are considered. Some aspects of the 2009 results for the UK are worrying (although it is misleading to take trends in performance back to 2000, as there are serious concerns about the reliability of that year's results for England). ASCL would support the government in considering how to incorporate insights from PISA 2009 into future education policy. However, PISA testing is a controversial matter, and there is significant evidence to suggest that the results in certain respects are not as reliable as they seem at first sight. Problems affecting the reliability of the results include the comparability of the samples from country to country, the ways in which the tests used resemble to varying degrees the style of assessment pupils are used to in their country, problems with translation, the extent to which special needs pupils are included in the samples, and so on. In the specialist literature on this kind of test doubt is cast on the reliability of PISA in a number of critical respects. Sometimes the rank ordering of countries' results, on which the White Paper sets considerable store, is not actually statistically significant. ASCL therefore advises caution in using PISA as the sole basis for far-reaching changes.
- 45 Alongside the rank ordering of countries according to PISA test performance, the 2009 study offers a summary of what features successful systems have in common. This certainly includes autonomy and accountability, which is a direction in current policy ASCL would support. It is also clear that most of the countries which appear to be overtaking the UK benefit from a greater degree of stability in their curriculum and qualifications, and ASCL would urge the review to bear this in mind. Constant change uses up scarce resources, prevents teachers from focusing on students' learning, and encourages students to take courses and qualifications that are unproved and may not lead to progression in the long term.
- 46 When developing and reforming English education it should be for us to decide as a country what we want our education to be like, having regard to international examples, but not aping them slavishly. We should assess the strength of what we do not only by international surveys but also by balanced evaluation against our own objectives. Not all countries are the same, or have the same context, history or cultural background.

Section I: transition

- 47 As this review has the opportunity to examine the whole curriculum, we hope that this will result in greater coherence between key stages. We are particularly interested in the transition from KS2 to KS3 and the way in which the new programmes of study should reflect this. ASCL would welcome that when drafted the programmes of study should be read through for coherence.
- 48 School leaders also wish to maintain the flexibility they now have to structure the curriculum to meet the needs of their particular cohort at the age of transfer. Many schools have given considerable thought to the structure of learning in Y7 and have

designed programmes which enable students to make a gradual transition from KS2 to KS3.

Section J: implementation

- 49 As already stated ASCL has serious concerns about the cost of implementing a new national curriculum. Since 2007 secondary schools have been implementing the revised national curriculum and have incurred costs resulting from changing the balance of teaching staff, purchasing new materials, training staff, developing new curriculum and subject plans and writing new materials. Since 2007 secondary schools have also had to introduce and teach new specifications for GCSE and, where they have a sixth form, for A level, and they have introduced diplomas and functional skills. Whilst we understand that a new government wishes to implement its own ideas, the same government has also asked schools to be constantly mindful of value for money and efficiency and to operate, as all other public services, within a context of reduced funding. ASCL is extremely concerned about the impact on learners if schools and teachers are to be asked to change programmes of study and approaches to learning yet again without any additional funding. As we have stated in the section on international comparisons we understand that the research shows that most countries which are more successful than the UK in the PISA tables enjoy a greater level of stability around their curriculum and qualifications.
- 50 We do not believe that it is either possible or desirable to introduce the revised curriculum in 2013/14 for all key stages or year groups. In the secondary sector, the new curriculum should be introduced for Y7 in 2013/2014 and then sequentially year by year so that this particular cohort of young people will be the first to take revised GCSE courses based on the new programmes of study when they reach Y10 in 2016. GCSEs are rightly based on the current programmes of study and it would be unfair to expect a cohort of students to be examined at GCSE on a curriculum which they had not followed in KS3.
- 51 Even then, if the new curriculum were introduced simultaneously in primary and secondary phases from 2013/14 then the greater coherence which we mentioned earlier would be delayed for some time.
- 52 ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

Martin Ward
Deputy General Secretary
Association of School and College Leaders
11 April 2011

The case for adopting ‘multi-lingual language awareness’ as the model for modern foreign languages in primary schools

A welcome for modern foreign languages in the primary phase

- 1 ASCL welcomes the introduction of modern foreign languages (MFL) to the primary phase, as:
 - Children pick up sounds and intonation more easily when they are young
 - They are less inhibited and less prejudiced against ‘foreign-ness’
 - They are naturally curious about other parts of the world
 - Children in most other European countries start to learn a foreign language (usually English) in the primary sector

The practical difficulties of implementing a one language linear sequential programme

- 2 There is a shortage of curriculum time (already squeezed by existing National Curriculum requirements and by growing pressure for improvements in literacy and numeracy).
- 3 There is a national shortage of MFL teachers which is likely to get worse rather than better now that the government has made MFL an optional subject from the end of year 9. The number of MFL graduates is declining and the majority of those who do complete a modern languages degree find employment in the commercial world.
- 4 There is a shortage of primary school teachers with a sufficient knowledge of a foreign language to make a success of four years of sequential linear language learning. There are problems in training a sufficient number of primary teachers with appropriate linguistic expertise to lay sound foundations in one language only.
- 5 Transition to secondary schools is a major problem. Drawing on as many as 20 or 30 primary schools, secondary school MFL teachers find themselves in the difficult position of receiving not only pupils of a wide range of ability but also a wide range of knowledge and foreign language experience.
- 6 If there were to be only one foreign language taught in primary schools, it would almost certainly have to be French. This would reduce diversity in the secondary sector, where many pupils are now taking German as their first foreign language and where the demand for Spanish is increasing. It also fails to respond to the 21st century need for English native speakers to be able to learn other languages quickly as required.

The multi-lingual language awareness alternative: *Discovering Language*

- 7 Over the four year KS2 phase, pupils experience a range of languages, perhaps six, drawn from different language families; for example Romance (French/Spanish), Germanic (German), Eastern European (Russian/Polish), Eastern (Japanese/Chinese) Indian (Punjabi/Urdu). It is strongly recommended that one of the languages is Latin and some schools have been finding it helpful to teach Esperanto.
- 8 The languages are presented through interactive and video-based materials with native speaker sound links.
- 9 The teaching is provided by the class teacher who may or may not have specific foreign language skills, but who will be supported in the methodology of language teaching (as distinct from having a high level of foreign language competence).

Appendix: multi-language awareness

- 10 Pupils are essentially learning about how languages work: they are practising listening, learning a restricted range of materials (basic greetings, numbers, colours, animals, families, food), deciphering scripts, and reading words and short phrases
- 11 The *Investigating Languages* teaching materials, produced by Coventry Local Authority (LA) with funding as a primary pathfinder, are strongly recommended

The advantages

- 12 Children learn better when taught by their class teacher than by specialist outsiders.
- 13 The class teacher can fit the language sessions into the week's work with greater flexibility.
- 14 The class teacher can link the language learning to other aspects of the curriculum and especially to literacy.
- 15 The pupils get a much broader picture of the place of languages in the world.
- 16 Inter-cultural understanding is enhanced by experiencing several cultures rather than just one.
- 17 Knowledge about language and language learning strategies are enhanced by experiencing diverse sounds, word patterns and scripts.
- 18 Good teaching materials are available which have been designed for use by non- or semi-specialist teachers. More materials in lesser taught languages are in the course of preparation

How the multi-lingual language awareness model has been trialled

The ASCL project funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

- 19 Seven primary schools in three LAs (Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Derbyshire) trialled teaching the basics of six different languages. At the same time, they used this exposure to different languages to raise their pupils' 'awareness of language'. The teachers, who were not MFL specialists, took a cross-curricular approach, bringing in geography, history, drama, music, art and current affairs but the principal focus was on the language. French, German, Latin, Japanese, Punjabi and Spanish were chosen to give a range of linguistic experiences. (Latin may seem an odd choice, but it proved to be popular with pupils and teachers and a very good vehicle for teaching aspects of language such as word order, verb patterns, agreements, gender, and language evolution). The linguistic concepts reflect the National Literacy Strategy and the syllabus is compatible with the Key Stage 2 framework for MFL, (particularly emphasising the inter-cultural understanding and knowledge about language components).
- 20 The University of Manchester has conducted a quantitative and qualitative evaluation to assess the short-term and long-term impact of the project. The discovering language project pupils went on to their secondary school and mixed with pupils who had come from other primary schools where they had either done one language or had done no MFL at all. The evaluation in the secondary schools took place at the end of Year 7 and again in Year 10. The purpose of the evaluation was to measure whether the discovering language approach gave pupils a more positive attitude in Years 7 and beyond and whether it made them more or less likely to continue with a foreign language in the option phase. The researcher also carried out interviews with pupils and teachers in order to get a qualitative dimension alongside the quantitative.

Appendix: multi-language awareness

The findings from the three phases of the evaluation were:

- 21 At the end of Year 6, the evaluation showed that the course was popular with teachers, pupils and parents. Headteachers reported positively on the response from pupils and from parents (after initial reservations). Teachers who had at first been hesitant became increasingly involved. They said that they had personally enjoyed learning the basics of new languages and all were positive about the teaching materials provided.
- 22 At the end of Year 7, all the pupils in the four receiving secondary schools (including those who had not followed the discovering language approach) were assessed in terms of linguistic achievement and attitude to MFL and foreigners. Using KS2 SATs, and CAT tests, the value-added factor for all pupils was calculated. Although the evaluation did not demonstrate significant measurable difference in terms of linguistic *achievement*, the findings indicated that pupils who had taken the language awareness approach showed greater interest and were more motivated to learn languages.
- 23 The final evaluation looked at the same cohort of pupils in year 10, after making their option choices. The comparison was made between three categories of pupils: those who had done one language in primary school, those who had done no primary languages and those who had done the discovering language multi-lingual model.
- 24 The main finding was that a higher proportion of those following the discovering languages course had decided to choose a foreign language in year 10, but the researchers put a caveat on that finding by pointing out that, in some of the schools, the option choice pattern prevented pupils from taking all the subjects they preferred. The discovering languages pupils had more positive attitudes to language learning and understood more clearly the value of learning languages. The secondary school teachers were very positive about the way the discovering languages project had prepared the pupils for secondary school language learning.

The extension of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation project

- 25 As the response to the original project has been so positive and as other clusters of primary schools are adopting this approach, the Foundation has agreed to extension funding to allow:
- Further dissemination of the multi-lingual language awareness approach.
 - The development of teaching materials in two or possibly three further languages (Arabic, Russian, Polish), designed specifically for non-specialist teachers.
 - Development of support materials to enable teachers to draw out the language awareness dimension.
 - Extended evaluation of the effect on pupils and schools of using this approach.

Possible patterns of implementation in a primary school

- 26 As the very essence of this model is flexibility and adaptability to the circumstances of each school, there is no single model but the following are emerging as preferred options:
- 27 In the first option the pattern is:
- Year 3 Investigating Languages 1 and FL1
 - Year 4 Investigating Languages 1 and 2, FL2
 - Year 5 Investigating Languages 2, FL 3 and FL 4
 - Year 6 FL5 and FL6
- 28 In the second option the school adopts 4 languages and for one year, the whole school takes one language, moving on to a different language the following year. In this model, used alongside the *Investing Languages* materials, every pupil experiences four languages over the primary phase. The advantage for the school is that it has a unified foreign language theme across the whole school for the year. The disadvantage is that the available basic materials are not all equally suited to Year 3 and Year 6 pupils.

Appendix: multi-language awareness

- 29 In the third option the pattern is:
- Year 3 FL1 and FL2
 - Year 4 FL3 and FL4
 - Year 5 FL5 and FL6
 - Year 6 Revisit FL1 and FL2

Concerns that people have *before they try it* (and the answers)

- 30 'It will be too difficult for a non-MFL specialist'. The evaluation of the pilot project shows that initial worries disappear very quickly and that teachers enjoy broadening their own experience of languages. The materials available do not require teachers to have specific MFL qualifications. Those who do have such qualifications will be able to apply their skills to tackling different languages.
- 31 'The pupils may ask me questions I can't answer'. True, but the classroom style encouraged by this approach is one of co-learning rather than knowledge transmission.
- 32 'The parents expect them to be learning one language, probably French.' True, because that is what many of them did when they were at school 30 years ago, but once the purpose of this model is explained to them, they accept and welcome this wider approach.
- 33 'Ofsted will be critical'. The pilot schools which had an inspection received good reports on their MFL and in some cases particularly positive comment was made on the MFL provision.
- 34 'The Framework specifies 'progression'. How can this be achieved if you keep starting again on a new language?' In two ways:
- a If you are teaching a new language for 4 to 6 months, even on the low provision of one hour per week, there will be progression within the learning of that language.
 - b Over the course of four years, the languages you teach will get progressively more difficult for the native English speaker. The skills and techniques applied to the easier languages can be applied to the more challenging ones
- 35 'How can I assess pupils' knowledge and skills?' The requirement for formal assessment in MFL is of a lighter touch than for numeracy and literacy but there is an assessment framework available (from Asset Languages) which enables teachers to assess progress at low levels and in separate skills. It is unrealistic to expect pupils to achieve the same levels in all skills and all languages. Work to provide a framework for the assessment of inter-cultural understanding and knowledge about language is part of the work of the extension to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation project.
- 36 'What about transfer to the secondary school?' The burden of trying to prepare pupils for specific languages in specific secondary schools is removed. Year 6 pupils probably go to a range of secondary schools according to parental preference. Whichever secondary school they go to, they have a foundation in several languages but, more importantly;
- a They have been trained to listen carefully.
 - b They have techniques in how to learn a range of languages.
 - c They have had an introduction to the structures of languages and how languages function.
 - d They have a clearer idea of the range of languages in the multi-lingual and multi-cultural world in which they live.
 - e They have a greater interest in language learning and developing communication skills.

Conclusion

- 37 The approach we are advocating is not only more practical and manageable than the one specified in the Rose Review's recommendations, it matches more closely what we understand the overall aim of the present national curriculum review to be; to give schools and teachers greater freedom to innovate and match the curriculum to the needs of their pupils
- 38 ASCL therefore urges that 21st century schools not be bound into a pattern of language provision that was relevant in the middle of the 20th century but which falls short of what is needed for today's and tomorrow's world.
- 39 ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

Peter Downes

Director of a language learning project funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
Association of School and College Leaders