

Curriculum and Assessment

(By 2020) ...the school curriculum is widely understood to be everything that a young person learns in school. The core curriculum is only one part of a school's curriculum. Schools determine their own curriculum, which has brought creativity, dynamism and relevance into curriculum development. The curriculum in English schools is broad and deep embracing knowledge, skills and qualities...Students gain the competencies and dispositions that prepare them to be creative, connected and collaborative as well as healthy holistic human beings who not only contribute to but also create the common good in today's knowledge-based creative, interdependent world.

Extract from ASCL's *Blueprint for a Self-Improving System*

First principles

Curriculum

- 1 The curriculum is the sum of all the experiences that a child or young person has at school or college. It is not simply a series of inputs (a framework of subjects to be taught over a defined period) – it is the expected outcomes of learning¹. Learning is shaped by much more than individual subjects and syllabuses. School and college leaders determine the wider curriculum. However, a wider set of stakeholders have a role in determining core curriculum framework of subjects.
- 2 There should be a broad, nationally defined core curriculum framework of subjects in both primary and secondary determined by an expert independent commission, which analyses the framework every five years. The commission should take account of the views of a range of stakeholders who have a legitimate interest in the core curriculum framework.
- 3 We accept that the government needs to be accountable for the outcomes of our education system, but politicians alone are not best-placed to develop the curriculum.
- 4 An independent commission is necessary because a core curriculum framework must be informed by evidence, debated and constructed by the best minds, and enable our students to reach the highest standards of attainment, comparable with the best performing jurisdictions in the world.
- 5 The principle of stability is supported by the conclusions of the expert panel for the National Curriculum² review, which noted that many high performing education systems have recently reviewed their curricula and have introduced a level of stability.


1 ASCL will develop a statement on the expected outcomes of learning, starting with what an educated 19-year old would look. The curriculum should be underpinned by a set of purposes drawn from the expected outcomes of learning.

2 The Framework for the National Curriculum: a report by the Expert Panel for the National Curriculum review, 2011, DfE p.15.

- 6 We also agree with the expert panel about the contribution of schools to wider society:
- **Economic** – Students' education should contribute to their own future economic wellbeing and that of the nation or region.
 - **Cultural** – It should introduce them to the best of their cultural heritage(s), so that they can contribute to its further development.
 - **Social** – It should enable them to participate in families, communities and the life of the nation.
 - **Personal** – It should promote their intellectual, spiritual, moral and physical development.
- 7 We therefore agree that the school curriculum should develop students' knowledge, understanding, skills and attitude to satisfy economic, cultural, social, personal and environmental goals. Specifically, the school curriculum should:
- **Satisfy future economic needs** for individuals and for the workforce as a whole, including the development of secure knowledge and skills in communication, literacy and mathematics and confidence in acquiring new knowledge and skills.
 - **Appreciate the national cultures, traditions and values** of England and the other nations within the United Kingdom whilst recognising diversity and encouraging responsible citizenship.
 - **Provide opportunities for participation** in a broad range of educational experiences and the acquisition of knowledge and appreciation in the arts, sciences and humanities, and of high quality academic and vocational qualifications at the end of compulsory schooling.
 - **Support personal development and empowerment** to ensure healthy, balanced and self-confident individuals who fulfil their educational potential.
 - **Promote understanding of sustainability** in the stewardship of resources locally, nationally and globally.³
- 8 The school curriculum should create the space for young people to grow. It should be broad and deep, embracing knowledge, skills and qualities. It should suit the school context and build character and resilience, inspire and enable young people to achieve, fulfil their potential and be successful, rounded people.
- 9 We do not support a view that prioritises knowledge over skills, dispositions and qualities, nor can any of the four be taught independently of the others. Curriculum policy needs to ensure that all of these are provided for within education. Effective teaching “engages with valued forms of knowledge” and also “equips learners for life in its broadest sense”.⁴
- 10 The curriculum should enable students to reach standards of attainment comparable with the best performing jurisdictions in the world. It should provide an opportunity for all students to develop an understanding of our shared culture and to equip themselves fully to contribute to the common good throughout their lives.

3 Adapted from the Framework for the National Curriculum: a report by the Expert Panel for the National Curriculum review, 2011, DfE p.16-17.

4 These are the first two 'principles' identified as outcomes from the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (www.tlrp.org). See James, M. and Pollard, A., (2012) *Principles for Effective Pedagogy: International responses to evidence from the UK Teaching and Learning Research Programme*. (London: Routledge), cited in the Report by the Expert Panel.

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- 11 Curriculum vision and strong pedagogical models should be at the heart of improvement and drive curriculum development, rather than accountability, and such models should be enabled and accelerated by the use of technology.

Assessment

- 12 Formative assessment should be used effectively to enable students to understand their own learning, open the door to deep learning and make progress in their learning. The ability to undertake good formative assessment practice is unlikely to be separate from secure professional subject knowledge.
- 13 Formative assessment should be inclusive, involve high expectations for all and be underpinned by a belief that all children can succeed, regardless of perceptions about innate intelligence or economic background. Achievement should be interpreted in terms of the power of effort rather than the limits of ability.
- 14 We support the ten dimensions of high expectations for all:⁵
- **Presumption of capability for improvement** – this contrasts with notions of inherited abilities that constrain self-confidence and learning.
 - **Maintenance of high expectations** – conveys both aspiration and confidence to the student, thus enhancing their potential to learn.
 - **A focused curriculum with appropriate depth** – such clarity supports high quality learning of essential knowledge, and is particularly important in primary education.
 - **Tangible learning objectives** – authentic learning rather than on the acquisition of labels associated with abstract and over-generalised levels.
 - **Constructive feedback** – practical support for self-improvement on learning tasks.
 - **Valuing of effort** – the value of concentration and practice.
 - **Resolute commitment to essential knowledge for all** – the necessary commitment by schools to ensuring that all students attain the ‘essential curriculum core’.
 - **Monitoring to record the attainment of those who are ‘ready to progress’** – the need for school systems to monitor learning but also focus attention on the threshold criterion of ready to progress.
 - **Provision of support to maintain progress** – clarifies the responsibility of each school to provide support as needed to enable students, as far as possible, to progress with their peers.
 - **Engagement of parents and carers in authentic learning** – all those in a position to support student learning should have direct access to tangible information on which to base their contribution.
- 15 In relation to students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), the principle should be, wherever possible, to enable them to continue to progress with their cohort and peers. However, as the expert panel concluded, it can be unhelpful to assess and measure progress of some students with SEND against their peers. There is a need for assessment which is more flexible and recognises and assesses individual progress. Assessment should focus on successes rather than being grounded in failure.
- 16 Assessment (formative and summative) should follow from the curriculum. Qualifications should follow from assessment.

- 17 The qualifications regulator should be independent and should set the standards for awarding organisations to meet when they design, deliver and award regulated qualifications. Qualifications should be high quality, cost-effective and assessments proportionate and manageable.
- 18 Qualification awarding should be a transparent process with clarity about the methodology by which grades are awarded and fairness to the learner is at the heart of the process.
- 19 High quality vocational qualifications should be on a par with academic qualifications. It should be recognised that there are varied routes to success and all routes are equally valid provided that they ensure progression to further study and/or employment.

Analysis of the current system

- 20 It is over 20 years since England introduced a National Curriculum. Since its inception there have been a number of attempts at reforming its content and format.
- 21 The current National Curriculum is a set of subjects and standards mandated for use in maintained primary and secondary schools. It covers those subjects are taught and the standards children and young people should reach in each subject.
- 22 However, the principle of a broad National Curriculum framework which allows all young people to succeed is eroded by a two-tier system. While maintained schools are required to follow the National Curriculum, academies are not. Academies must teach a broad and balanced curriculum including English, maths and science. They must also teach religious education.
- 23 In 2011, the report by the expert panel for the National Curriculum review firmly reinforced a clear distinction between the National Curriculum and the school curriculum. We support this distinction. The National Curriculum even in maintained schools where it is compulsory should not be (and is not) the totality of what is taught.
- 24 The removal of National Curriculum levels is both a challenge and an opportunity. We agree with the expert panel that assessment should be focused on whether students have understood key concepts rather than achieving a particular level. We do not advocate a return to a prescriptive framework for assessment. Rather, we believe that assessment practice in England needs to be developed through the articulation of evidence-informed methods and through iterative, collaborative and sustained professional learning.
- 25 Finally, a large-scale programme of curriculum, assessment and qualification reform is currently underway. This will take time to implement and embed. We need a period of relative stability to implement these reforms.

Curriculum and assessment in a self-improving system – policy proposals

For government

- 26 There should be a broad, nationally defined core curriculum framework of subjects in both primary and secondary, which adheres to the principles outlined above. This should be determined by an expert independent commission for curriculum review, which analyses the framework every five years; that is, once in the term of every Parliament. It should take account of the views of stakeholders who have a legitimate interest in the core curriculum framework.



27 The development of a national curriculum framework should be underpinned by a clearly defined statement of expected learning outcomes and a set of design principles. We propose that these are the starting point for the independent commission:

- **Start by articulating the case for any further reform** – affirming system-wide expectations for education and considering the capacities the future calls for in young people who leave our education system.
- **Exercise policy memory and system thinking** – avoid repeating mistakes of the past.
- **Make values and purposes central to the vision** – education is for the common good.
- **Ensure a balanced approach** – breadth and specialisation; skills and knowledge; choice and prescription.
- **Build a consensual and gradual approach to change** – harness the strengths of existing curriculum, assessment and qualification reform and reach out across political parties to develop a broad consensus about the direction of travel that extends beyond the life of one Parliament.⁶

28 The development of a broad National Curriculum framework would not be a return to central prescription. There is a key difference between a broad National Curriculum framework and the school curriculum. The framework should be a scaffold upon which schools would build their own curricular visions and designs.

29 A broad national framework would simply set out the general parameters of a core curriculum, designed much more than is presently the case from the learner's perspective, setting out the learning that they have a right to access to enable them to operate as effective citizens who can contribute to the common good.

30 All students should study the core subjects of English and mathematics until the age of 16, ensuring that they achieve effective levels of literacy and numeracy. They should continue to follow courses in literacy and numeracy in an upper secondary phase of education if they have not achieved such levels but a range of courses and qualifications should be available.

31 The national curriculum framework should be supported by wider labour market reform and a stimulation of the youth labour market. The role of education needs to be positioned more strategically in the debates about economic policy and wider economic growth.

32 The curriculum for initial teacher education should put assessment practice at its heart.

For the independent regulator


33 Qualification reform should be planned and implemented in response to the expected outcomes of learning, the curriculum that delivers these outcomes, the assessment practices that arise from it and wider research and evidence.

For the profession

34 School leaders should develop a bold curricular vision and pedagogical model for their school or group of schools. This should be based on the expected outcomes of learning and should be the sum of all the experiences that a child or young person has at school. School leaders will need to create a culture of curriculum design and development.

35 The profession should develop collaborative arrangements governed by an assessment ethics framework within which the regulator has proportionate and consistent controls around assessments.

6 Adapted from Ken Spours, "Ten reform propositions," Presentation given at the Institute of Education.

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- 36 School leaders should consider the use of technologies both within the curriculum and within schools. Teachers should be encouraged to develop and test models of teaching and learning, enabled and accelerated by increasingly pervasive digital tools and resources.
- 37 School leaders should build an assessment strategy around a belief that all children and young people can achieve, regardless of perceptions about innate intelligence or economic background. The development and practice of assessment is a highly specialised skill and both teachers (and those employed by awarding bodies in external assessment) should have appropriate professional learning opportunities. The Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors (CIEA) has a role to play, as an independent body, in providing professional development and support.
- 38 Schools will need to develop their own approaches to internal assessment, based on their curriculum, but guided by national standards for good practice in assessment agreed across the profession and supported by research and evidence.