

The Curriculum and Assessment Review

**Building a world-class curriculum
for all**

**Curriculum and
Assessment
Review**

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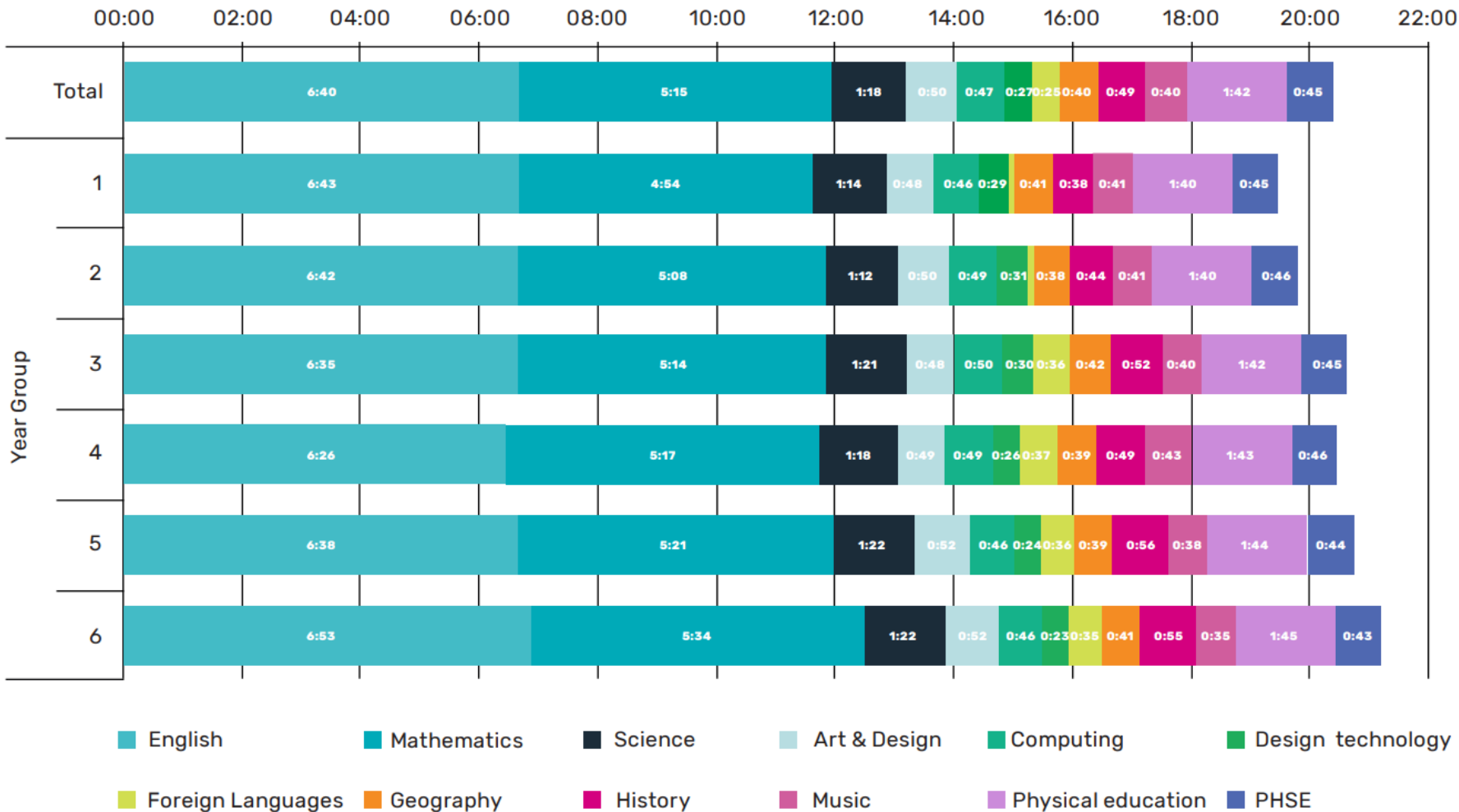
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The context

- In England, public education is the responsibility of the national government.
- Education provision (mandated age 5 to 18) is divided into Key Stages:
 - Early Years Foundation Stage (age 3-5; nursery to Reception)
 - Key Stage 1 (age 5-7; Years 1 and 2)
 - Key Stage 2 (age 7-11; Years 3-6)
 - Key Stage 3 (age 11-14; Years 7-9)
 - Key Stage 4 (age 14-16; Years 10-11)
 - Post-16 'Key stage 5' (age 16-18/19)
- The National Curriculum was introduced in England in 1988
- Curriculum subjects categorised as Core, Foundation, Entitlement and Basic. Strong continuity from KS1 to KS4
- The national curriculum 'is just one element in the education of every child'. The national curriculum sets out the Programmes of Study but it does not specify the amount of time that schools should teach each subject.

Amount of time primary teachers spent on different foundation subjects



Around 60% of teaching time in primary (in foundation subjects) in the national curriculum were spent on English and mathematics

Background

- In July 2024, the government invited Professor Becky Francis CBE to lead an independent review of the current national curriculum and statutory assessment system in England.
- The Review looked across Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4 and 16-19 education, at the challenges to attainment for young people, and the barriers which hold them back from the opportunities and life chances they deserve – in particular, those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, or who have special educational needs or disabilities.
- The Review was informed by research evidence, data and a wealth of perspectives from experts, stakeholders and the public.
- The final report from the Review, *Building a World-Class Curriculum for All*, published on November 5th 2025, set out the conclusions and recommendations for Government.
- Alongside the Review's final report, the Government published its response which set out the next steps and plans for implementation (now moving forward).

The Review Expert Panel



Professor Becky Francis CBE: Chair

Previously Chief Executive Officer of the Education Endowment Foundation



Lisa O'Loughlin

Principal and CEO of the Nelson and Colne College Group



Dr Vanessa Ogden CBE

CEO of the Mulberry Schools Trust



Funmilola Stewart

Trust Leader for Anti-Racism and Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion across Dixons MAT



Gary Aubin

Specialist Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) consultant



Cassie Buchanan OBE

CEO of the Charter Schools Education Trust in South-East London



Sir Ian Bauckham CBE: Observer

Interim Chief Regulator at Ofqual, Chair of Oak National Academy



Professor Zongyi Deng

Professor of Curriculum and Pedagogy at IOE - Faculty of Education and Society, University College London.



Nic Beech

Vice-Chancellor of the University of Salford



Professor Jo-Anne Baird

Director of the Oxford University Centre for Educational Assessment



John Laramy CBE

Principal and Chief Executive of Exeter College



Jon Hutchinson

Director of Curriculum and Teacher Development at the Reach Foundation

Research and data collected

The review involved gathering a wide range of evidence including:

- Polling of over 2,000 young people who had just completed their KS4 and 16 to 19 exams, and their parents; supplemented by polling undertaken by PublicFirst, Teacher Tapp and by Parentkind, which surveyed over 5,000 parents across the UK.
- Over 7,000 responses to a Call for Evidence, which ran in late 2024, with respondents including teachers, tutors, lecturers, parents, carers, leaders, researchers, experts, students, members of the public, local authorities and employers.
- Public consultation events across the country, complemented by focus groups and roundtables with education professionals, young people and other stakeholders.
- Research and statistical evidence, including analysis of learner data from the National Pupil Database and Longitudinal Education Outcomes data, as well as a wide range of education research and published statistical evidence.

Principles underpinning the review

- **Evidence and Data Informed:** decisions based on solid evidence, avoiding myths and unproven practices.
- **Evolution, Not Revolution:** building on existing strengths and successes without unnecessary changes.
- **Aware of Trade-offs:** considering practical implementation and avoiding extra workload for education staff.
- **Focused on Key Issues:** addressing significant curriculum and assessment issues without destabilising the system.
- **High-Quality Curriculum for all:** committing to a comprehensive, rich curriculum for all students, irrespective of background.
- **Removing Barriers:** ensuring access to quality education and pathways for all students.
- **Consultative Approach:** engaging with education professionals, experts, parents, students, and stakeholders.

Key findings and recommendations

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What's working well and should be maintained?

Many aspects of the current system are working well:

- The current knowledge-rich national curriculum has had a positive impact on attainment.
- The present architecture of key stages is generally working well and we recommend retaining it.
- Our national assessments and qualifications are, broadly, working well.

But other areas are in need of change.

Towards a world-class curriculum and assessment system

Our recommendations fall under 5 key themes:

- High standards must mean high standards for all
- Curriculum shape and individual subjects
- Knowledge and skills for the future
- Revitalising post-16
- Assessment and accountability

High standards must mean high standards for all

A world-leading education system must deliver excellence for all young people, irrespective of background. Our curriculum and assessment system is working well in many respects, but it is not delivering high standards for all.

The Review recommendations aim to remove barriers in all subject areas and assessments. For example:

- Measures to ensure all have the requisite KS3 competencies for success in English and Maths and GCSE
- An entitlement to Triple Science at GCSE
- Asking Government to optimise its investment to ensure all have the opportunity to learn to read music and play an instrument
- Provision of resources to exemplify best practice in curriculum inclusion and adaptation for children with additional needs.

Curriculum shape and subject content

We make recommendations for improvements and updates in every National Curriculum subject area having applied a set of curriculum principles which we recommend are applied to the re-writing of Programmes of Study.

- Our principles set out the features a refreshed world class curriculum must have. For example the necessity of clear sequencing of content, clear and specific articulation of content – all seeking to enhance deeper understanding and mastery.
- All young people will be able to see themselves in the curriculum, whilst broadening their horizons – reflecting diverse contributions while continuing to draw on classic and traditional perspectives that have all shaped British Society.
- Teachers have enough flexibility to challenge high attainers and make sure those who are struggling can master core concepts.
- The national curriculum must be an aspirational entitlement for all, but must not exceed its intended limits: space must be provided for the broader school curriculum.

Knowledge and skills for the future

Our curriculum must equip young people for a world that is changing quickly, and we have heard the calls for more attention to certain areas of applied knowledge and skills. Our recommendations aim to:

- Strengthen **financial education** in Citizenship, and with exemplification in Maths.
- Improve **digital literacy** through Computing and RSHE, including responsible technology use and awareness of online harms and safety.
- Strengthen the role of **media literacy** to support protection against misinformation.
- Bolster the presence **of climate education and sustainability** in Science and Geography curricula; emphasise sustainability in the Design and Technology curriculum.
- Support **oracy**, including introduction of an oracy framework to complement the existing frameworks for Reading and Writing

The Review also recognises the importance of **Citizenship**, recommending it should be mandatory at primary, and reviewed to improve its efficacy, clarity and progression.

16-19 education

The Review has made recommendations to provide a clearer set of pathways for young people during 16-19 education.

- Introduce a third pathway at level 3, **V Levels**, to introduce a high quality, coherent and well-recognised vocational offer for those wanting a broader, applied alternative to that provided by three A Levels or a T Level.
- Introduce two pathways at level 2 - one for learners looking to progress to a level 2 occupation and another to support learners to progress to level 3.
- Continue improvements to T Levels, and (where necessary) update A Level content in line with GCSE subject content changes.
- Improve success rates for English and Maths at post-16 for those that have not secured a GCSE Grade 4 or above, by introducing a new level 1 stepped qualification to support those students with low grades to make progress towards achieving level 2 in these GCSEs during 16-19 study.

Assessment and accountability

Whilst our national assessments, qualifications and accountability are, broadly, working well, we have identified a number of areas for improvement. We recommend:

- Removal of the EBacc accountability measures, whilst retaining Progress 8 without change (re-naming the EBacc bucket in Progress 8 the 'Academic Breadth' bucket).
- Reducing GCSE exam volume (the time students spend sitting exams) by at least 10%.
- At Key Stage 2, replace the current grammar, punctuation and spelling (GPS) test with an amended test, to better assess application of grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- Introduce diagnostic checks in English and maths, to be taken during Year 8, to enable teachers to identify and address weaknesses before students progress to Key Stage 4.

Further Reflections

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Learning from the Review

- The importance and benefit of robust evidence

“The range of opinion in this area has been striking. It is inevitable, given the strength of feeling and the wide range of views, that much of the evidence and feedback is conflicting or contradictory. However, we have been surprised that every suggestion has generated substantial drawbacks and risks, and that every proposal which enjoys any significant support from some respondents can prompt a negative reaction from others.”

Bew Report on KS2 accountability (2011)

Learning from the Review

- The importance and benefit of robust evidence
- Much is going well and has shown progress
- Our sector benefits from exceptionally deep and extensive expertise on curriculum
- The many dilemmas – e.g. between national and local, mandate v choice and autonomy, etc.
- Trade offs result in a frequent need to rest on the 'least worst' option. There is no perfect – and many risks of unintended consequences.
- The curriculum can't do everything – but we can make improvements
- Implementation: Management of expert groups and burgeoning content
- The importance of horizontal and vertical development

Curriculum Principles

- **An entitlement for all young people:** The refreshed national curriculum must be an aspirational, engaging and demanding offer that reflects the high expectations and excellence our young people deserve, irrespective of background.
- **Knowledge-rich:** The refreshed national curriculum should retain a knowledge-rich approach, ensuring skills are developed in conjunction with knowledge in ways that are appropriate for each subject discipline.
- **Curriculum depth, and mastery of core concepts:** The national curriculum should be constructed so that it supports children and young people to master core concepts, ensuring sufficient space for them to build their knowledge and deepen their understanding.
- **Curriculum coherence:** Curriculum coherence should be an organising principle for curriculum drafters [...]. Where appropriate, vertical core concepts on which subjects have been constructed should be clearly presented, and horizontal coherence should be ensured.

Curriculum Principles (continued)

- **Specificity:** Foundation subject content should specify the essential substantive knowledge and skills which should be taught to enable children and young people to meet expectations at the end of each key stage.
- **Professional autonomy:** The refreshed national curriculum should ensure the professional autonomy of teachers is maintained, making sure that greater specificity does not substantially restrict teachers' flexibility to choose lesson content and how to teach it.
- **A curriculum for all:** The national curriculum is for all our children and young people. As such, it should reflect our diverse society and the contributions of people of all backgrounds to our knowledge and culture
- And: **The national curriculum should be a tool for teachers.**
- We recommend that the Government Develops the national curriculum as a digital product that can support teachers to navigate content easily and to see and make connections across key stages and disciplines.

Thank you

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