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Committee

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The Children, Schools and Families Committee

The Children, Schools and Families Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Children, Schools and Families and its associated public bodies.

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Summary

It is over twenty years since England introduced a national curriculum. In its earliest version the National Curriculum was overloaded and since its inception there have been a number of attempts at reforming its content and format. In this inquiry we took evidence from a wide variety of sources to pose the questions: do we now have the National Curriculum that we need and, if not, what should be done?

The current National Curriculum covers learners from age 5 to 16, but there have been important developments at both ends, with the specification of an early years curriculum through the Early Years Foundation Stage, and the introduction of new arrangements for learners aged 14 to 19, including a new-style qualification, the Diploma.

Scaling down the National Curriculum

We take the view that the main purpose of a national curriculum is to set out clearly and simply a minimum entitlement for every child. In its current form the National Curriculum essentially accounts for all the available teaching time. We would like to see this changed and a cap placed on the proportion of the curriculum that is prescribed centrally.

We believe that such a slimmed-down National Curriculum should be 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. Parents should be provided with a copy of the National Curriculum so that they can take on a greater role in overseeing the curriculum that their child experiences.

We are not convinced by the proposed Programmes of Study for the primary curriculum put forward in the interim report of the Rose Review, which seem unnecessarily complex. We take a similar view on the new secondary curriculum. We are disappointed that the recent Cambridge Primary Review report on the primary curriculum, although welcome in its extensive analysis of the problems, has not enough to say about what might be done in practice to address them.

Children's development and learning in the early years are crucial for laying the foundations of formal education. We welcome the entitlement that the Early Years Foundation Stage offers, but we are concerned at some of the Early Learning Goals that it specifies. We have heard much evidence to suggest that the specifications relating to reading, writing and punctuation are not appropriate for all children and should be reassessed. We are of the view that the emphasis at this stage should be on developing speaking, listening and social skills. We do not support the recommendation contained in the interim report of the Rose Review of the primary curriculum that children should move to reception class at age 4. Due to their low practitioner-to-child ratios these settings cannot cater for the needs of very young children.

Trusting schools

We are concerned by the varying level of freedom that different categories of schools enjoy in relation to the National Curriculum. While Academies are obliged to offer a broad and balanced curriculum, they are only required to follow the National Curriculum for the subjects of English, mathematics, science and ICT. If these freedoms are thought essential for Academies we believe that they should be extended to all schools. There are similar discrepancies with regard to schools' ability to extend the school day in order to best meet the learning needs of their pupils. We want all schools to have the freedom to make such changes without needing to apply to the Department.

Of course, the interpretation of the National Curriculum by teachers is heavily influenced by testing and school inspection. If all schools are to enjoy greater curriculum flexibility the constraining effects of current accountability arrangements must be addressed. We are particularly concerned at the pressures placed on schools through various means, including inspection, to follow the non-statutory National Strategies guidance.

Empowering teachers

We heard how the level of central prescription and direction through the National Curriculum and National Strategies has de-skilled teachers. At times schooling has appeared more of a franchise operation, dependent on a recipe handed-down by Government rather than the exercise of professional expertise by teachers. The education system needs confident and well-qualified teachers capable of shaping the best possible education for their pupils. This has implications for the content of teacher training, but also for the role of the Department and its agencies. We want to see the centre to take on a different role to the one it currently has—with much greater emphasis on intelligence gathering and research and development, and less on monitoring and compliance.

Curriculum coherence

Alongside the extent of central control over the curriculum and its delivery, our other main concern to emerge from this inquiry was the poor level of continuity and coherence in the National Curriculum—and across the National Curriculum, the Early Years Foundation Stage and 14–19 arrangements. We regret the piecemeal fashion by which these frameworks for learners aged 0 to 19 have been arrived at and subsequently reformed, with the Department instituting reviews of the curriculum for each phase of education separately and in no particular order. In consequence there are the disjunctions in pupils' learning that have been highlighted by Ofsted among others.

We recommend that curriculum frameworks for learners aged 0 to 19 should be reviewed as a whole to achieve continuity and coherence. We see this as being the responsibility of a completely independent curriculum authority. We are concerned that the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and its proposed successor, the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, lack that essential autonomy. We recommend that an independent curriculum authority be established to keep the National Curriculum refreshed.

We suggest that the Early Years Foundation Stage is brought within the National

Curriculum and run through the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency rather than the Department, and that an overarching set of curriculum aims is introduced that covers learners 0 to 19. There should be a related statement setting out the fundamental knowledge and skills that young people should acquire by the end of compulsory education.

Preface

1. As a map of what young people should be taught the National Curriculum is central to education provision. This Report is the result of one of three inquiries undertaken by this Committee into the fundamentals of our education system, each prompted by the twentieth anniversary of the 1988 Education Reform Act. We have already published a Report on testing and assessment,¹ and in December 2008 we announced the Terms of Reference for an inquiry into school inspection and performance reporting.² While not part of the 1988 Act, school inspection represents an extension of its emphasis on school accountability and the provision of information to support parental choice.

2. We announced our call for evidence on the National Curriculum in February 2008 and began taking oral evidence in June 2008. We held a related evidence session on the Early Years Foundation Stage in May 2008.

3. During the inquiry we took evidence from Ministers, government agencies, trades unions, subject associations, employer representatives, research organisations and prominent academics. A list of those who gave oral evidence appears at the end of this Report. In addition we received nearly 50 written memoranda, which have helped us with the inquiry.

4. We would like to extend our thanks to our Specialist Advisers, Professor Alan Smithers, Director of the Centre for Education and Employment Research, University of Buckingham, and Professor Geoff Whitty, Director of the Institute of Education, University of London and, in relation to the Early Years Foundation Stage session, our Specialist Advisers Dame Gillian Pugh, Visiting Professor at the Institute of Education, University of London and Professor Kathy Sylva, Department of Educational Studies, University of Oxford.³

5. We set out below a list of acronyms used in this Report.

DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
ELG	Early Learning Goal
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
NDPB	Non-Departmental Public Body
Ofqual	Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator

1 House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee, Third Report of Session 2007–08, *Testing and Assessment*, HC169–I.

2 The Terms of Reference can be found at www.parliament.uk.

3 Dame Gillian Pugh is Chair of the Cambridge Primary Review Advisory Group and adviser to various sections of the Department for Children, Schools and Families. Professor Kathy Sylva was a contributor to the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project, which ran from 1997–2003 and the Effective Pre-School and Primary Education 3–11 (EPPE 3–11) project, which ran from 2003–2008, and is a contributor to the Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE 3–14) project, which runs from 2007–2011.

Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PFLM	Primary Framework for Literacy and Mathematics
PNS	Primary National Strategy
PSHE	Personal, Social and Health Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QCDA	Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
SEAL	Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SNS	Secondary National Strategy

1 The evolution of the National Curriculum: from Butler to Balls

What is a national curriculum?

6. A national curriculum sets out the body of knowledge, skills and understanding that a society wishes to pass on to its children and young people. Most countries have some form of national curriculum. In countries where the curriculum is set at regional level these frameworks are often informed by shared guidelines. Countries typically structure their national curriculum around aims and values, subject content and skills, but do so in varying levels of detail. In comparison to many countries' frameworks, England's National Curriculum remains relatively prescriptive. Unlike in some other countries, England's National Curriculum only applies to maintained schools and not to independent schools, nor to children who are educated at home. National or state education Ministries typically have oversight of their respective national curriculum. In England the Department is responsible for the strategic management of the National Curriculum. Development and support of the National Curriculum largely rests with the Non-Departmental Public Body, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

7. In order to provide some further perspective for the reader on England's National Curriculum, we provide a more detailed comparison of a selection of national curriculum frameworks at Annex 1. Below, we set out some of the key milestones in the development of the National Curriculum. We then outline the format and content of the current National Curriculum as well as the guidance that is in place to support its delivery.

Government interest in the school curriculum 1944–1985

8. Looked at over the duration of publicly provided education in England there has been a marked level of consistency in thinking about the school curriculum. This is demonstrated in the continued use of an essentially subject-based structure for the curriculum and the fact that the subjects it comprises have changed little since the late 1800s.⁴ In more recent decades there has also been a significant level of consensus across the political parties as regards the need for a national curriculum, what its purposes might be and how it should be structured and supported.

9. The 1944 Education Act, introduced under the Conservative President of the Board of Education, R. A. Butler, put in place publicly provided primary and secondary education for all. In doing so, it set out a broad aim for education provision: "[...] it shall be the duty of the local education authority for every area, so far as their powers extend, to contribute towards the spiritual, moral, mental and physical development of the community [...]". However, the only specific requirement that it set out in relation to the school curriculum was that all schools should teach religious education. This meant that, aside from curriculum schemes run by some local education authorities, the curriculum for pupils aged 5 to 14 continued to be largely determined by their teachers, often on the basis of

4 White, J., *The Aims of School Education*, 2006. For further detail on the evolution of the National Curriculum see Barber, M. *The National Curriculum: a study in policy*, 1996.

commercially available textbooks. The curriculum for older pupils tended to be based on the public examination syllabuses chosen by their teachers. The strength of the teaching profession and its representative bodies at this time inhibited attempts to introduce greater central direction of the curriculum.

10. In the early 1960s, in part due to concerns about falling standards, the Conservative Minister of Education, David Eccles, oversaw the establishment of a curriculum study group within the Department of Education and Science. In 1964 his successor, Sir Edward Boyle, replaced the group with the Schools' Council. To counter accusations that local autonomy over the curriculum had been undermined by the study group, the Council was based on a partnership between central and local Government and teachers. It advanced a wide range of national projects that typically sought to develop new ways of teaching and assessing a subject and to spread good practice.

11. In the context of the economic downturn of the mid-1970s, James Callaghan's 1976 Ruskin College speech reflected growing public concerns that the UK was not being well-served by its schools. The speech mooted the idea of a national 'core curriculum'. Shortly afterwards, under Shirley Williams as Labour Secretary of State, the Department of Education and Science and Her Majesty's Inspectors published a series of papers on curriculum issues, many of which criticised both primary and secondary schools for the lack of balance in their curriculum and for their failure to develop sufficiently planned curricula that took account of the changing needs of industry and society. Circular 14/77, which asked local education authorities about the curriculum in their areas, found substantial variation in curriculum policy across the country.

12. An indication of the Department of Education and Science's determination to take greater control of curriculum matters, in 1979 the Conservative Secretary of State, Mark Carlisle, oversaw the abolition of the Schools' Council and its replacement with the School Curriculum and Development Committee and the Secondary Examinations Council, the members of which were appointed by the Secretary of State.

13. In 1985, under Sir Keith Joseph as Secretary of State, the *Better Schools* White Paper recommended moving towards a nationally-agreed curriculum. A further related agency, the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, was established in 1986.

Establishment of the National Curriculum

14. In 1987 the Department of Education and Science, now under Kenneth Baker, issued a consultation document that set out the rationale for a national curriculum. This document essentially identified four broad purposes: introducing an entitlement for pupils to a broad and balanced curriculum; setting standards for pupil attainment and to support school accountability; improving continuity and coherence within the curriculum, and aiding public understanding of the work of schools.

15. Following the consultation, Parliament passed the 1988 Education Reform Act, which established the framework for the National Curriculum. The key principles in developing the National Curriculum were that:

- it would be underpinned by two aims—and echoing the 1944 statement—to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils,

and to prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life;

- it would be structured around ‘Key Stages’ and be subject-based, covering the ‘core’ subjects of English, mathematics and science, and the ‘foundation’ subjects of art, geography, history, music, physical education and technology, with all subjects studied from age 5 up to age 16, modern foreign languages from age 11, and
- the syllabus for each subject at each Key Stage would be set out in a ‘Programme of Study’, which would also include a scale of attainment targets to guide teacher assessment.

Schools would also be required to teach religious education and areas such as personal, social and health education, though these subjects sat outside the National Curriculum. A number of non-statutory ‘cross-curricular’ themes and generic—or life—skills were added to this basic framework in the course of implementing the National Curriculum.

16. Development of the National Curriculum was overseen by two new advisory bodies, the National Curriculum Council and the School Examination and Assessment Council. Formulation of the original Programmes of Study was handed to subject-based working groups, comprising experts from a wide variety of educational backgrounds and which drew on evidence and expertise from throughout the education system. Due in part to the different subject communities wanting to promote their subject within the National Curriculum, the documentation to emerge from this process was substantial and set out in considerable detail the subject content that schools should be required to cover.

17. The drawing up of testing arrangements for the National Curriculum was taken forward by the Task Group on Assessment and Testing (TGAT). The TGAT report emphasised the formative aspects of assessment and the use of a range of assessment approaches that could be delivered and marked by teachers. However, the Department of Education and Science regarded the TGAT recommendations as overly complex and simpler arrangements were ultimately put in place—teacher assessment accompanied by summative assessment through nationally-administered standardised tests, known as ‘Key Stage tests’. More controversially, and again counter to the TGAT report, test results were to be published in performance tables.

18. The National Curriculum was introduced into primary schools in 1989, and implementation across the primary and secondary phases continued into the mid-1990s. The first run of Key Stage testing was completed in 1991. In 1993 responsibility for school inspections was transferred from Her Majesty’s Inspectors and local authority inspection teams to independent inspection teams, the work of which would be co-ordinated by a new Non-Ministerial Department of State, the then Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted).

Key milestones in the reform of the National Curriculum

19. The National Curriculum has subsequently been reviewed and reformed on several occasions. The first review, in 1993, was a response to teachers’ complaints that the National Curriculum and its testing arrangements were simply too unwieldy and, indeed, to proposed teacher boycotts of the Key Stage tests. Under John Patten as Secretary of State, the Department of Education invited Sir Ron Dearing to conduct the review, and a

revised version of the National Curriculum was introduced in 1995. The key changes included a reduction in the amount of prescribed content, the restriction of Key Stage testing to the core subjects and the replacement of a 10-level assessment scale for each subject with 8-level descriptors. In 1993 the National Curriculum Council and the School Examination and Assessment Council were merged to form the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority.

20. In 1996 concerns about the poor level of pupil performance in Key Stage tests prompted the then Secretary of State, Gillian Shephard, to oversee the addition to the National Curriculum of two parallel support projects. These were intended to improve the teaching of literacy and numeracy in primary schools. At this stage only 18 local authorities made use of the projects. Following the change of Government in 1997 the projects continued in a modified form under the title of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. The Strategies were subsequently expanded into the secondary phase, across more subjects and to cover whole school issues, such as behaviour and attendance.

21. The National Curriculum itself next underwent substantial revision in 1999. This work was overseen by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), which was formed in 1997, by the Conservative Government, through a merger of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications. As well as further reducing the amount of prescribed content, in response to a growing number of requests from teachers for a fuller explanation of what the National Curriculum stood for, the 1999 reforms introduced an overt statement of aims and purposes. These were not significantly different to those already in place, just expanded upon in greater detail within *the National Curriculum Handbook* for teachers. The statement of purposes remains in place today:

- to establish an entitlement. The National Curriculum secures for all pupils, irrespective of social background, culture, race, gender, differences in ability and disabilities, an entitlement to a number of areas of learning and to develop knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes necessary for their self-fulfilment and development as active and responsible citizens.
- to establish standards. The National Curriculum makes expectations for learning and attainment explicit to pupils, parents, teachers, governors, employers and the public and establishes national standards for the performance of all pupils in the subjects it includes.
- to promote continuity and coherence. The National Curriculum contributes to a coherent national framework that promotes curriculum continuity and is sufficiently flexible to ensure progression in pupils' learning. It facilitates the transition of pupils between schools and phases of education and provides a foundation for lifelong learning.
- to promote public understanding. The National Curriculum increases public understanding of, and confidence in, the work of schools and in the learning and achievements resulting from compulsory education. It provides a common basis

for discussion of education issues among lay and professional groups, including pupils, parents, teachers, governors and employers.⁵

22. Meanwhile, the Labour Government extended national prescription of the curriculum to early years provision. A loose national curriculum framework for early years provision was first introduced in 2000 (*Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage*). This guidance became statutory from 2002. In the same year guidance for younger children was introduced (*Birth to Three Matters*). From September 2008 both documents were replaced by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) as the new statutory framework for children from birth to age 5. The EYFS sits outside the National Curriculum and is run through the Department rather than the QCA.

23. In 2005, the Department asked the QCA to review the secondary curriculum at Key Stage 3. This was with the principal aim of further reducing the amount of prescribed content in order to give teachers more time and space to support personalised learning—broadly understood as the tailoring of what is taught and how it is taught to the needs of the individual pupil. Key Stage 4 was later included in the remit of the review. The new secondary curriculum places greater emphasis on pupils' understanding of the concepts, ideas and processes of subjects, on cross-curricular themes and on pupils' development of life skills. It became statutory from September 2008.

24. In 2007 the *Children's Plan* announced a 'root and branch' review of the primary curriculum, with changes to be implemented from September 2011.⁶ The Review, led by Sir Jim Rose, commenced in 2008. In line with the reform of the secondary curriculum, the Review has been tasked with, among other things, reducing prescription and addressing to a greater degree than before the development of pupils' life skills. The Review team published its interim report in December 2008. It is due to publish its final report and recommendations in Spring 2009.

25. The Department's ongoing reforms to 14–19 provision will have a bearing on the National Curriculum. In particular, the Diploma represents an attempt to reform the curriculum and qualifications in tandem.

26. In addition, the remit of the agency with principal responsibility for the National Curriculum is to be reconfigured once again. Changes to the role and remit of the QCA will be taken forward in 2009 through the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill.

5 See <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk>

6 DCSF, *The Children's Plan: building brighter futures*, Cm 7280, December 2007, paragraph 3.83.

The current National Curriculum

Primary curriculum

Format and content

27. At both Key Stage 1 (Year groups 1–2, pupils aged 5–7) and Key Stage 2 (Year groups 3–6, pupils aged 7–11), the primary curriculum continues to be structured around the subjects as specified in 1988:

- the ‘core subjects’ of English, mathematics and science, and
- the ‘foundation subjects’ of art and design, design and technology, geography, history, ICT, music and physical education.

28. Primary schools must also teach religious education, the syllabus for which is determined at local authority level.⁷ They are encouraged, but not required, to cover appropriate personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship topics.

29. The primary curriculum includes two non-statutory skills frameworks:

- Key Skills, covering communication, application of number, information technology, working with others, improving own learning and performance and problem-solving skills, and
- Thinking Skills, covering information-processing, reasoning, enquiry, creative thinking and evaluation skills.

30. In addition, it includes five non-statutory cross-curricular elements:

- Creativity;
- ICT;
- Education for sustainable development;
- Literacy across the curriculum, and
- Numeracy across the curriculum.

31. At the end of Key Stage 1 pupils sit tests in reading, writing and mathematics, which are marked by the teacher. At the end of Key Stage 2 pupils sit tests in English, mathematics and science, which are marked by an external marker.

Documentation

32. The detail of the primary curriculum is set out in the following documentation:

⁷ Religious Education is taught in accordance with a locally-agreed syllabus, which is drawn up by local authorities in consultation with their Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACREs). In Foundation/Voluntary-Controlled schools with a religious character the syllabus is the responsibility of the foundation governors. In 2006 the QCA developed a national non-statutory framework for religious education.

- a statutory Programme of Study—syllabus—for each subject at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2;⁸
- a non-statutory Scheme of Work—lesson plans—for each subject at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2;⁹
- non-statutory guidance on timetabling the primary curriculum,¹⁰ and
- the ‘Big Picture of the Curriculum’ framework, which links the curriculum to other aspects of school life.¹¹

Supporting frameworks

33. The main source of centrally-provided support for delivery of the primary curriculum is the Primary National Strategy (PNS).¹² This includes:

- the Primary Framework for Literacy and Mathematics (PFLM), which offers detailed guidance on planning and delivering these aspects of the primary curriculum
- guidance promoting particular approaches to the delivery of the primary curriculum, most notably the *Letters and Sounds* publication, which has promoted the use of synthetic phonics as *the* method of teaching early reading;
- guidance for other subjects, including the arts, ICT, modern foreign languages, music and physical education, and
- guidance on related whole-school issues, including guidance on the ‘Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning’ (SEAL) and how to develop related skills among pupils.

A fuller outline of this documentation is provided at Annex 2.

Secondary curriculum

34. The new secondary curriculum is distinctive in being underpinned by a set of statutory aims. The aims state that the secondary curriculum should enable young people to become:

- successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve;
- confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives, and
- responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

8 Programmes of Study for the primary curriculum can be viewed at <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk>

9 Schemes of Work for the primary curriculum can be viewed at www.standards.dfes.gov.uk

10 QCA, *Designing and Timetabling the Primary Curriculum: a practical guide for key stages 1 and 2*, 2002.

11 QCA, *A Big Picture of the Curriculum*, 2008. See Ev 13

12 See www.nationalstrategies.org.uk

For each heading there are around 10 statements, including, for example, statements on learning how to learn, having secure values and beliefs and sustaining and improving the environment. The full list of aims is provided at Appendix 1.

35. The subjects included in the secondary curriculum remain broadly the same as those in the primary curriculum. At Key Stage 3 (Year groups 7–9, pupils aged 11–14) pupils also study citizenship and modern foreign languages. At Key Stage 4 (Year groups 10–11, pupils aged 14–16) pupils study English, mathematics, science, citizenship, ICT and physical education. Alongside this they must be able to take at least one subject from each of the four entitlement areas of arts subjects, design and technology, humanities and modern foreign languages. In addition, at Key Stages 3 and 4 schools must teach religious education, sex and relationship education, drugs education and careers education. At Key Stage 4 they must also provide work-related learning.

36. Key Stage 3 tests in English, mathematics and science were discontinued in 2008, though teacher assessment remains in place for these pupils. At Key Stage 4 pupils sit GCSE or equivalent examinations.

37. The new secondary curriculum includes two skills frameworks:

- the ‘functional skills’ of English, mathematics and ICT, which are concerned with the application of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, and
- ‘personal, learning and thinking skills’ (PLTS), which cover team working, independent enquiry, self-management, reflective learning, effective participation and creative thinking skills.

Both build on the non-statutory ‘key skills’ framework included in the previous version of the secondary curriculum.

38. Finally, the new secondary curriculum incorporates seven non-statutory ‘cross-curriculum dimensions’:

- Identity and cultural diversity;
- Healthy lifestyles;
- Community participation;
- Enterprise;
- Global dimension and sustainable development;
- Technology and the media, and
- Creativity and critical thinking.

Again, the inclusion of non-statutory cross-curriculum themes within the secondary curriculum is not new, but there is now greater emphasis on their use.

Documentation

39. The documentation for the secondary curriculum is largely as for the primary curriculum, albeit with less prescriptive Programmes of Study.¹³ Schemes of Work have not been produced for the new secondary curriculum, instead case studies for the different subjects are provided to illustrate how different schools have interpreted the curriculum. Schemes of Work for the previous secondary curriculum are still available for teachers.¹⁴

Related frameworks and guidance

40. The Secondary National Strategy (SNS) comprises three main categories of support to schools:

- detailed frameworks for each of English, mathematics, science and ICT;
- generic pedagogic guidance for the foundation subjects, and
- guidance on related whole-school issues, including behaviour and attendance and SEAL.

A fuller outline of this documentation is provided at Annex 2.

Frameworks for the 0–5 and 14–19 age ranges

Early Years Foundation Stage

41. All early years providers in the maintained, voluntary and private sectors are required to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). It encompasses child safety and welfare requirements and learning and development requirements. The latter emphasise ‘play-based learning’ but also specify what children should learn by setting out 69 statutory ‘Early Learning Goals’. These appear under six headings:

- Personal, social and emotional development;
- Communication, language and literacy;
- Problem-solving, reasoning and numeracy;
- Knowledge and understanding of the world;
- Physical development, and
- Creative development.

The Department has published detailed guidance for practitioners on how they might address the Goals within their provision. Children’s development against the Goals is assessed through teacher observation and recorded in the EYFS Profile. The Profile offers a

13 Programmes of Study for the secondary curriculum can be viewed at <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk>

14 Schemes of Work for the Key Stage 3 curriculum can be viewed at www.standards.dfes.gov.uk

9-point scale on which to assess a child. There are 13 areas to be assessed, which relate to the Goals.¹⁵

14–19 provision

42. The Department is currently part way through a programme of reform to education and training provision for learners aged 14 to 19. This includes the raising of the participation age to 18 by 2015. The qualifications options open to young people from age 14 include GCSEs, a Diploma, vocational qualifications and a Young Apprenticeship. The qualifications options open to young people from age 16 include A-levels, a Diploma, vocational qualifications and an Advanced Apprenticeship. The Foundation Learning Tier (FLT) is a part of the wider 14–19 reform programme. It offers credit-based qualifications designed to improve the skills of learners aged 14 and over who are working at a lower level than the other routes listed here. The main questions that these reforms raise is where the National Curriculum should end—for young people aged 14, 16 or 19—and how entitlement and differentiation should be balanced for these learners?

15 For the full list of Goals, the EYFS Profile and related guidance see www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/eyfs. DCSF, *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage: setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five*, 2008; DCSF, *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage*, 2008; QCA, *Early years foundation stage Profile handbook*, 2008.

2 Standpoints on the National Curriculum

43. **The evidence that we received revealed a consensus that the nature and particularly the management of the National Curriculum is in urgent need of significant reform.**

44. As the previous section illustrated, despite repeated reforms intended to reduce the level of prescription contained in the National Curriculum it remains substantial. While the new secondary Programmes of Study may be much shorter in length than their predecessors, the secondary curriculum is arguably as complex as it ever was, if not more so, because greater emphasis is put on its other components—the lengthy set of statutory aims and the non-statutory life skills and cross-curriculum themes. The ongoing reform of the primary curriculum must find room for, among other things, additional time for literacy and numeracy, modern foreign languages as a new statutory subject at Key Stage 2 and a set of life skills that all pupils should cover. The Department and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) no longer just concern themselves with setting and supporting the Programmes of Study; through the ‘Big Picture’ they have also taken an interest in how schools link the National Curriculum that is delivered in lessons to all other aspects of school life. Mick Waters, Director of Curriculum at the QCA explained:

We have tried to develop a conversation that encourages schools to think about how the Curriculum is the entire planned learning experience for children, bringing together lessons, subjects, events that children take part in, routines, out-of-school life, and the work that children do beyond and outside school.¹⁶

45. To the National Curriculum the Department has felt the need to add a raft of additional centrally-produced frameworks and guidance. Despite the Department’s claims that steps have been taken to streamline the National Strategies guidance,¹⁷ the amount of that guidance remains considerable—all of it, according to the Department, crucial to empowering teachers and raising standards.¹⁸

46. Other witnesses were dismayed at the degree of control over the curriculum and its delivery that the Department has pursued, particularly over the last decade. As one submission remarked:

Initially there was a promise to provide guidelines only on *what* children were entitled to be taught, and there was to be no question of eroding the teacher’s responsibility for the *how* or the *particularity* of teaching. There can still be no quarrel with that. However, that promise was quickly broken and we now have a totally prescriptive, centrally worked out set of curriculum packages designed for “delivery” by teachers [...].¹⁹

Another witness commented:

16 Q 6

17 Q 567

18 e.g. Q 615

19 Ev 250, paragraph 2 [Malcolm Ross]

I think we are living in a dangerous dream world if we accept the official view that the National Curriculum is a light regulatory framework within which teachers can develop their skills. That is not what we are hearing from teachers. Teachers are very oppressed. [...] I am afraid I do not accept the view that it is only the poor teachers who say, “Oh, we can’t do this because of the National Curriculum.” It is a genuine excuse: they feel they are so rigidly controlled that they cannot do what they trained to do as teachers.²⁰

47. We received related calls for a much greater emphasis on local determination of the curriculum and responsiveness to parents and pupils:

Missing [...] is the sense of a pull from the consumer or beneficiary. Teachers are well aware of the collective view of the parents but they have not been encouraged or enabled to use that as their driving force. The role of teachers in meeting the needs of parents has effectively been reversed to one of meeting the requirements of the State.²¹

[...] under the aegis of the National Curriculum, there can be no way in for the notion of education as cultural conversation led by a cultured profession free to express itself in essentially local, small scale environments. In short, politicians have to be persuaded to [...] return [the curriculum] to the care of a revitalized and independent profession working in partnership with a resurrected, well-funded network of local authorities. [...] Along with these reforms there must be a fresh remit for the [Qualifications and Curriculum Authority] reflecting the needs of children, families and schools—rather than the latest whims of its political masters.²²

48. As we now go on to discuss, even very strong supporters of the principle of a national curriculum were clear that the current National Curriculum and its management are damaging both to pupils’ learning and to teacher professionalism.

20 Q 91 [Robert Whelan, Civitas]

21 Ev 256, paragraph 9 [Jolly Learning Ltd]

22 Ev 250, paragraph 6 [Malcolm Ross]

3 Scaling down the National Curriculum

Limiting the reach of the National Curriculum

49. There is strong support for retaining some form of national framework for the curriculum, principally for the purpose of signalling pupils' shared entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum.²³

50. Several written submissions to our inquiry pointed to the very varied nature of the curriculum across schools prior to the introduction of the National Curriculum. This variety resulted in the least advantaged and least able pupils covering a very narrow curriculum,²⁴ in significant social class and gender bias with regard to what pupils studied²⁵ and in poor levels of progression in pupils' learning.²⁶ The National Curriculum has been particularly advantageous for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). As Treehouse, a national charity concerned with autism education, commented: [the National Curriculum] helped to push forward thinking about the education of children with [SEN] well beyond an historic approach of merely keeping these children safe in schools [...].²⁷

51. However, these submissions, like the majority of others, took the view that the National Curriculum should be much more flexible than it currently is and, ideally, significantly slimmed-down.

52. Of course, one individual's idea of what would constitute an appropriate basic entitlement might not be the same as another's and we note that no submission made a concerted attempt at illustrating what such a curriculum might look like. Nevertheless, as a starting-point, the root causes of the current tendency towards over-prescription through the National Curriculum are much more easily identified and addressed.

53. The assumption that has underpinned the National Curriculum to date is that it should account for essentially all of the teaching time available to schools. **We would like to see the National Curriculum underpinned by the principle that it should seek to prescribe as little as possible and by the principle of subsidiarity, with decisions made at the lowest appropriate level.**

54. Another problem is that any national curriculum is a potential 'bloating mechanism'. In England the level of political interference in the National Curriculum has been striking. Robert Whelan, Deputy Director at Civitas, commented:

23 See, for example, Ev 41, paragraph 3; Ev 50, paragraph 6; Ev 63, paragraph 2; Ev 157, paragraph 1; Ev 257, paragraph 1; Ev 266, paragraph 1; Ev 272, paragraph 2.1.1; Ev 285, paragraph 1; Ev 287, paragraph 1.1

24 Ev 287, paragraph 1.1. See also Ev 273, paragraph 2.1.2

25 Ev 273, paragraph 2.1.2a; Q 122

26 Qq 309–310

27 Ev 291. See also Ev 273, paragraph 2.1.4; Ev 292, paragraphs 3–5; Ev 293, paragraph 1.4; Ev 314, paragraph 3.1

[the National Curriculum] is very appealing if you like to control what happens in school, because you can always make a new announcement every week that this and that is going to be added [...]. All sorts of things are being piled on to schools [...].²⁸

As Professor Hargreaves similarly remarked:

The mistake we have made in recent years is that there has been a tendency for Ministers, when something comes up, to think that we can impose new regulation through the National Curriculum. [...] This constant changing of the curriculum [...] is politicisation in the negative sense, as opposed to the positive sense that politicians should have a say on what goes on in our schools.²⁹

55. Indeed, only last October, just a month after the new secondary curriculum came into force, the Department announced its intention to add a further statutory subject area to the National Curriculum—personal, social and health education.³⁰ This is in addition to its recent decisions to make cookery a compulsory part of the National Curriculum,³¹ and to add modern foreign languages to the primary curriculum.³²

56. In order to keep the amount of prescription through the National Curriculum to an absolute minimum we recommend that a cap is placed on the proportion of teaching time that it accounts for. Our view is that it should be less than half of teaching time.

57. Wherever the parameters of the basic entitlement should lie, that entitlement should be drawn up from the perspective of the learner—setting out the learning experiences that children and young people should have a right to access in order that they can be enabled to operate as effective citizens. We return to the issue of the learner’s perspective in our discussion of the review and reform of the National Curriculum in a later Section of this Report.

58. In the context of such a National Curriculum, presented clearly and concisely, we would envisage parents having a more pronounced role in overseeing the curriculum that their child has access to. **Parents should be provided with a copy of the National Curriculum for their child’s Key Stage so that they might be better informed of the curriculum that their child should experience.**

Recent and ongoing reform of the primary and secondary curriculum

59. The timescale of and a number of specifications for the Rose Review of the primary curriculum were set out by the Secretary of State.³³ Here we note the disquiet at the strong steer given by the Secretary of State to the Rose Review.³⁴ By contrast, the Cambridge

28 Q 91

29 Q 531

30 “All pupils to get healthy lifestyle lessons”, DCSF press release 2008/0235, 23 October 2008.

31 “Compulsory cooking lessons for all young people”, DCSF press release 2008/0015, 22 January 2008.

32 “Johnson backs Dearing’s blueprint for a renaissance in language learning”, DCSF press release 2007/0041, 12 March 2007.

33 The Secretary of State’s terms of reference for the Rose Review can be viewed at www.dcsf.gov.uk

34 Q 520; Ev 255, paragraph 6.2; Ev 45, paragraph 34; Ev 53, paragraph 26; Ev 72, paragraphs 101–104

Primary Review is a much more wide-ranging review³⁵ and is seen as truly independent (see Appendix 2 for a more detailed comparison of the two reviews). Consequently, it has the potential to offer a much more comprehensive assessment of the shortcomings of current primary education and of how the curriculum might be changed in order to address them. However, we do not believe that this potential has yet been realised. **The very welcome Cambridge Primary Review report on the primary curriculum contains extensive analysis of the problems but has not enough to say about what might be done in practice to address them. The Rose Review and the Cambridge Review both recognise that the primary curriculum is overly full, but neither offers a practical basis that appeals to us for reducing the load. As we have indicated, we would see greater merit in stipulating a basic entitlement for literacy and numeracy and offering general guidelines on breadth and balance to be interpreted by schools and teachers themselves.**

60. The style of the Programmes of Study for the new secondary curriculum has been subject to similar criticism.³⁶ As Mathematics in Education and Industry, a UK charity concerned with improving mathematics education, noted:

Encouraging schools to make links between different subjects and to adapt the National Curriculum to produce something tailored to their students is excellent in principle. However, the repackaging of the current curriculum into the new Programmes of Study does not necessarily make it easier to achieve this. Moreover, the revised structure of the Programmes of Study for mathematics does not seem to provide a good fit to the nature of mathematics as a subject and obscures what needs to be taught; this will be particularly problematic for less experienced teachers.³⁷

61. In our view, the Programmes of Study for the new secondary curriculum are overly complex and lack clear and concise statements on what should be taught. We believe that there is much to be learned from other countries in this regard.

The Early Years—getting the entitlement right

62. High profile research using data from the national Birth Cohort Study has shown how the impact of a child's socio-economic background on their early development is evident before they start school—and that the gap between the development of children from higher and lower socio-economic backgrounds widens thereafter throughout the primary school years.³⁸ The much cited Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project has shown the positive contribution that good quality early years care can make to children's development and learning.³⁹ Taken together, these studies suggest that the extension of a shared curriculum entitlement to cover children from birth to age 5 is potentially tremendously important in terms of laying strong foundations for all children. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) offers that shared entitlement, but there is

35 The Cambridge Primary Review takes in ten themes: Purposes and Values; Learning and Teaching; Curriculum and Assessment; Quality and Standards; Diversity and Inclusion; Settings and Professionals; Parenting, Caring and Educating; Children's Lives Beyond the School; Structures and Phases, and Funding and Governance.

36 Q 478

37 Ev 263, paragraph 21. See also Ev 274, paragraph 3.1.2c

38 Feinstein, L. *Birth Cohort Study*, 1999; Feinstein, L., *Economica*, 2003.

39 For full information on this and related projects see www.ioe.ac.uk

considerable debate about whether all of its prescriptions are appropriate—and some suggestion that a number of them might even be harmful to young children’s development. On this we heard the view that children must be supported, encouraged and provided with appropriate learning opportunities, but not rushed in their development. There are more general concerns that the EYFS is too prescriptive and too detailed.

63. The Early Learning Goals that come under the heading of ‘communication, language and literacy’ have faced the strongest criticism. There is opposition to the Goals relating to reading, more so to those relating to writing and punctuation:

Over the years, a lot of evidence from the Foundation Stage profile suggests that although such goals are achievable for some children [...] they do not seem to be consistently achievable for all children at the end of the year in which they become five. [...] Certainly, the British Association for Early Childhood Education feels that they are more appropriate for Year 1. Therefore, we would wish to see those goals apply to slightly older children, so that the goals are genuinely something that children at the end of their fifth year would be able to achieve, rather than having unrealistic expectations for [younger] children.⁴⁰

The evidence that we received called for five Goals to be removed from the EYFS—that, by around the age of 5, children should:

- read a range of familiar and common words and simple sentences independently;
- use their phonic knowledge to write simple regular words and make phonetically plausible attempts at more complex words;
- attempt writing for different purposes, using features of different forms such as lists, stories and instructions;
- write their own names and other things such as labels and captions, and begin to form simple sentences, sometimes using punctuation, and
- use a pencil and hold it effectively to form recognisable letters, most of which are correctly formed.⁴¹

64. In responding to these concerns the Minister of State for Schools and Learners, the Rt Hon Jim Knight MP, expressed his impatience for the EYFS to be implemented so that it could begin to support the work of early years practitioners. Nevertheless, the Department has asked Sir Jim Rose to re-assess two of these Goals as part of his review of the primary curriculum—that, by around the age of 5, children should “use their phonic knowledge to write simple regular words and make phonetically plausible attempts at more complex words” and “write their own names and other things such as labels and captions, and begin to form simple sentences, sometimes using punctuation”.

65. We welcome the Department’s decision to review two of the communication, language and literacy Early Learning Goals within the Early Years Foundation Stage.

40 Evidence on the EYFS, HC 600-i, Session 2007–08, Q 2

41 Evidence on the EYFS, HC 600-i, Session 2007–08, Qq 34–38

Nevertheless, we draw the Department's attention to the near universal support for the reconsideration of the Early Learning Goals directly concerned with reading, writing and punctuation.

66. We recommend that the Early Learning Goals directly concerned with reading, writing and punctuation be removed from the Early Years Foundation Stage pending the review of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2010.

67. We recommend that, through its review of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2010, the Department takes the opportunity to evaluate whether the statutory framework as set out in *Setting the Standards for Learning and Development and Care for Children from Birth to Five* is too prescriptive and too detailed.

68. We have strong reservations regarding the interim recommendation from the Rose Review that entry into reception class in the September immediately following a child's fourth birthday should become the norm.⁴² As a predecessor Committee of ours pointed out, when a child starts reception class is less of an issue than *what* they learn.⁴³ Given our concerns that literacy is being covered with children at too young an age, we fear that, as currently constituted, reception classes cannot deliver this recommendation in a way that is appropriate for younger children. We note that, unlike nursery settings, a reception class needs only to be staffed by one teacher for 30 pupils, and that the number of additional adults in a reception classroom, such as teaching assistants, varies. We learnt of one example where one teaching assistant was shared between three reception classes.⁴⁴

69. We recommend that the Rose Review does not pursue its interim recommendation that entry into reception class in the September immediately following a child's fourth birthday should become the norm.

42 The Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum, interim report, December 2008, recommendation 10(i), p 51.

43 House of Commons Education and Employment Committee, First Report of Session 2000–01, *Early Years*, HC 33–I, paragraph 57.

44 Evidence on the EYFS, HC 600-i, Session 2007–08, Q 53 [Anne Nelson]

4 Trusting schools

Extending Academies' freedoms

70. Some categories of schools already have considerable freedom in relation to the National Curriculum. This was the case with the small number of City Technology Colleges (CTCs) introduced following the 1988 Education Reform Act. The same was true for the first waves of Academies, which represented a similar category of schools to CTCs, so much so that most CTCs have now converted into Academies. The first Academies were not required to teach to the National Curriculum but were required to teach the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and ICT and otherwise offer a 'broad and balanced' curriculum. Since 2007, all newly-signed Academy funding agreements have required Academies to follow the National Curriculum for the core subjects. There are currently 133 Academies, which represent 4% of secondary schools in England;⁴⁵ the Department is committed to establishing 400 Academies, though it does not give a date by which this should be achieved.⁴⁶ Curriculum freedoms will be considered on a case-by-case basis for a further category of schools—National Challenge schools—which in January 2009 numbered 440, around 13% of secondary schools.⁴⁷

71. The Department's argument for Academies' curriculum freedoms is that these schools have a particularly disadvantaged pupil intake and therefore may need to spend more time on literacy and numeracy or find new ways to engage pupils in their learning.⁴⁸ The Department expects that as Academies drive up performance they will offer the full National Curriculum to the large majority of their pupils. In the meantime, however, it deems Academies' curriculum freedoms to be essential if these schools are to raise standards.⁴⁹ Furthermore, in his evidence to us the Minister was not concerned that Academy pupils' access to a broad and balanced curriculum, or coverage of particular key topics, was in any way under threat from the curriculum freedoms that these schools enjoy:

I guess we would have confidence in the fact that [Academy pupils] had a good grounding and competence in the core subjects. Those are the core subjects because it is only with confidence in them that pupils will prosper across the curriculum. On the basis of that foundation, when pupils move schools, they can do so with some confidence.

Some catching up might be required [in relation to particular topics], but again, one of the joys of the new Key Stage 3 secondary curriculum is that the flexibility is there for one-to-one catch-up or for groups to be able to catch up and stretch according to the needs of individuals.⁵⁰

45 DCSF, *Education and Training Statistics for the United Kingdom: 2008*. Table 1.1: Number of schools, by type of school—time series; 2007/08 figures. For up-to-date figures on Academies see www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk.

46 www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk

47 "Number of National Challenge schools down", DCSF press release 2009/0007, 14 January 2009.

48 See www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk

49 See www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk

50 Qq 224–225

72. Should other schools wish to disapply a Programme of Study, whether for the whole school or particular groups of pupils, they must apply to do so through the Department. If a school is successful in its application it will be able to take forward its proposed innovation only for a specified time period, after which a further application must be submitted.⁵¹

73. Given that the Department sees Academies' curriculum freedoms as a key factor in their ability to raise standards, and that the Minister is so confident that Academies' curriculum freedoms have not damaged these pupils' access to a rounded curriculum, it is not clear why the Department restricts these freedoms to Academies. **We recommend that the freedoms that Academies enjoy in relation to the National Curriculum be immediately extended to all maintained schools.**

74. Some categories of schools, including Academies, have other freedoms that are relevant to their ability to shape their curriculum offer to best meet the needs of their pupils, most notably their ability to extend the school day. Should Foundation schools, Voluntary-Aided schools or Academies wish to change the length of the school day the only requirement is one of acting reasonably (e.g. consulting with parents, pupils and staff). By contrast, Community and Voluntary-Controlled schools—which together comprise 75% of all maintained schools⁵²—face particular restrictions, as set out below:

- i. The governing body of a Community or Voluntary-Controlled school must consult with various audiences as set out in the regulations.⁵³ This includes the local authority, the head teacher, parents and all persons employed in any teaching or non-teaching post at the school.
- ii. If the governing body wants to change the morning start time or afternoon end time, change can only come in at the start of the school year and when the local authority and parents have had a minimum of three months notice of the change.
- iii. If change is to other times (e.g. lunch-break), change can only come in at the start of the school term and where the local authority and parents have had a minimum of six weeks notice of the change.
- iv. If seeking an exception to any of the requirements set out under (ii) and (iii), the governing body can apply to the Department for 'Power to Innovate'.⁵⁴

Even where a Community or Voluntary-Controlled school becomes a National Challenge school (i.e. they dip below the threshold of 30% pupils achieving five GCSEs A*–C, including English and mathematics), these requirements still stand. Community and

51 DfES, *Disapplication of the National Curriculum (Revised)*, guidance (July 2006)

52 DCSF, *Schools and Pupils in England: January 2007 (Final)*, 2007. SFR 30/2007. Table 8a: Maintained primary and secondary schools: number of schools by their status and religious character.

53 Statutory Instrument 1999 No. 2733, *The Changing of School Session Times (England) Regulations 1999*.

54 Through the Power to Innovate the Secretary of State for the DCSF is able, temporarily, to suspend or modify education legislation that may be holding back innovative approaches to raising standards. The Power to Innovate guidance and application form can be viewed at www.teachernet.gov.uk

Voluntary-Controlled schools currently represent 72% of the 440 National Challenge schools.⁵⁵

75. We note that the roll-out of extended schools will offer all maintained schools more time in the school day in which to deliver the curriculum. In the meantime, no reason has been brought to our attention for the discrepancy between different categories of schools in terms of the processes that they must follow if they wish to extend the school day. We believe that the greater freedom that Foundation and Voluntary-Aided schools and Academies enjoy in relation to changing the length of the school day should be immediately granted to all maintained schools. This would offer all maintained schools maximum scope to shape their delivery of the National Curriculum around the needs of their pupils.

Promoting local ownership of the National Curriculum

76. We recognise that simply handing greater freedoms to schools in the context of current accountability arrangements would not necessarily result in significant change to the way in which schools and teachers work with the National Curriculum and related guidance and the way in which children and young people experience the National Curriculum.

77. The response of schools to date to the opportunity to have the National Curriculum disappplied illustrates the nervousness of some in relation to curriculum innovation. As the Minister himself commented:

[...] it is interesting that the applications that [the Department has] had in respect of variation from the National Curriculum for curriculum innovation have not been refused because we do not want people to do the innovation, but because they could already have done the things that they wanted to do within the National Curriculum.⁵⁶

78. In line with the findings of our recent testing and assessment inquiry, a range of evidence submitted to our National Curriculum inquiry commented on the way in which the curriculum as delivered to pupils tends to follow testing rather than, as claimed by the Department, testing following the curriculum.⁵⁷ It is widely believed that the Department's proposed future approach to testing, Single Level Tests, could actually exacerbate some of the problems encountered with Key Stage testing in this regard.⁵⁸

79. Further to our *Testing and Assessment* Report we again draw the Department's attention to concerns that a system of Single Level Tests linked to targets, and potentially to funding, could further narrow the curriculum as experienced by all or some pupils.

55 Data supplied by DCSF.

56 Q 220

57 Ev 111, paragraph 72

58 Ev 161, paragraph 26. See also Ev 45, paragraph 33; Ev 67, paragraphs 45–46; Ev 71, paragraph 96; Ev 161, paragraph 24; Ev 282, paragraph 4(iii); Ev 290, paragraph 9.2

80. The perception among schools is that the outcomes of Ofsted inspections are largely determined by a school's test scores and Contextual Value Added scores and that inspectors pay little attention to broader *Every Child Matters* outcomes.⁵⁹ This reinforces the potential for current testing arrangements to impact negatively on teaching and learning.⁶⁰

81. Yet, it seems that inspection also impacts directly on *how* the curriculum is delivered in schools by encouraging adherence to the National Strategies as *the* means of raising Key Stage test performance. The National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) commented:

Despite its claims to the contrary, the current inspection system focuses almost exclusively on the nature and operation of school processes rather than outcomes.⁶¹

Although the [National] Strategy frameworks are not statutory [...] Ofsted continues to emphasise their importance in the development of effective approaches to curriculum planning and delivery at school level.⁶²

82. In such a context it seems to us that a local authority or a school would have to be very confident to decide not to 'play it safe' by following centrally-produced guidance:

The underlying policy is one of Ministers being relentless in driving up standards and in developing the policies to do so. [...] Time and again one hears of teachers who suspend their judgement and instead follow what the various curricula tell them to do because then they 'can't be blamed'.⁶³

And, indeed, there was evidence to suggest that some local authority officers and school improvement partners—through which the National Strategies are increasingly brokered—are placing pressure on schools to use National Strategies guidance.⁶⁴

83. There are also instances where the Department's emphasis on the non-statutory status of National Strategies guidance appears particularly disingenuous, most notably in the case of *Letters and Sounds*. This was an 'opt-out' rather than 'opt-in' set of guidance, and in his evidence to us the Minister was clear that the Department wishes to see more "consistent use" made of it.⁶⁵

84. Part of the problem with the National Strategies guidance in this respect is that it has often promoted a particular approach as the 'one best way', whether, for example, objective-led lessons, the three-part lesson or synthetic phonics.⁶⁶ This is all the more problematic given the suggestion that the National Strategies have typically been supported

59 e.g. Q 476

60 e.g. Q 272

61 Ev 56

62 Ev 61, paragraph 40. See also Ev 271, paragraph 4; Q 273

63 Ev 256, paragraphs 6–7 [Jolly Learning Ltd]

64 Ev 256, paragraph 7; Ev 285, paragraph 4. See also Ev 52, paragraphs 13, 16

65 Qq 217, 596

66 Ev 135–136

by post-hoc justification based on selective use of the available evidence.⁶⁷ To take the example of literacy, it appears that the promotion of ‘one best way’ has resulted in some teachers being prevented from using their preferred approach due to pressure to follow centrally-produced guidance. As one teacher commented to us:

In 2004, I was not allowed by my local authority to teach children consistently according to the principles of synthetic phonics. I was told I must use the National Literacy Strategy ‘searchlights’ [approach]. [...] I was also told that I must use the government programmes, *Progression in Phonics* and *Playing with Sounds*. These programmes have now been withdrawn by Government and replaced by the synthetic phonics programme *Letters and Sounds*. In other words, government initiatives were used as justification for preventing me from teaching in a way that was later promoted through new government initiatives.⁶⁸

While there is considerable support for the *Letters and Sounds* guidance, our own extensive inquiry into the teaching of early reading concluded that a range of approaches can work effectively, so long as teachers are trained to use them and they are applied systematically.⁶⁹

85. The idea that there is one best way to teach is not supported by the research evidence and so should not be the basis for the delivery of the National Curriculum.

86. The Department must not place pressure on schools to follow certain sets of non-statutory guidance, such as it has done in the case of *Letters and Sounds*. We recommend that the Department send a much stronger message to Ofsted, local authorities, school improvement partners and schools as to the non-statutory nature of National Strategies guidance.

⁶⁷ Ev 135–136; Qq 273, 296

⁶⁸ Ev 285, paragraph 4. See also Q 36

⁶⁹ House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, Eighth Report of Session 2004–05, *Teaching Children to Read*, HC 121. See also Ev 135–136; Ev 271, paragraphs 5–6; Ev 286, paragraph 7

5 Empowering teachers

Central control and teacher professionalism

87. As well as undermining local ownership of the curriculum and pedagogy the National Curriculum and National Strategies are also perceived to have contributed to the de-skilling of teachers. When questioned on teacher skills in relation to the curriculum the Minister presented the National Strategies guidance as a tool for teachers who were unsure of what to do, in this instance, with the space created by the discontinuation of Key Stage 3 tests:

Having moved on from the Key Stage 3 test in English and maths, some people have said, “What shall we do instead?” which is why we have [the National Strategies] offering those people helpful advice to empower them to do better.⁷⁰

88. In suggesting that the National Strategies guidance gave teachers confidence,⁷¹ the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools and Learners, Sarah McCarthy-Fry MP, did not acknowledge the problem that, while this might be so in the short-term, in the longer-term it could contribute to the de-skilling of the teaching profession. Nor did the Ministers recognise that reliance on immediate ‘pedagogical fixes’ undermines teachers’ engagement with more fundamental issues of curriculum design and the purposes of education.⁷² As the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) observes:

There has been a danger that the guidance documents and resources for the National Strategies have been seen as *the* way to deliver the curriculum and, where teachers have lacked confidence or experience, there has been a tendency to view these as “teaching by numbers”, leading to a generation of teachers who are curriculum deliverers rather than curriculum developers. This leads to a detachment from the process and a move towards “de-professionalisation”.⁷³

89. We urge the Department to cease presenting the National Strategies guidance as a prop for the teaching profession and to adopt a more positive understanding of how schools and teachers might be empowered in relation to the National Curriculum.

Supporting teachers as researchers and reflective practitioners

90. A range of evidence to our inquiry called on the Department to fund further research on the curriculum and pedagogy and to disseminate the findings of that research to teachers in the spirit of informing local professional decision-making. Such an approach would mean that the recent Independent Review of the Teaching of Early Reading report (the supporting document for *Letters and Sounds*), for example, would be principally to

70 Q 615. See also Q 579

71 Q 591

72 Ev 257, paragraph 3; Ev 258, paragraph 7; Ev 289, paragraph 7.1

73 Ev 52, paragraph 15

inform teachers, with a summary sent to each of them, rather than to inform the Department.⁷⁴

91. We recommend that the Department diverts resources away from the production of guidance to the funding and dissemination of research findings to teachers in the spirit of informing local professional decision-making.

92. At the same time, teachers need to be given a stronger sense that their own innovations in pedagogy can be valued. There is considerable support for the introduction of some form of ‘pedagogic bank’ developed by teachers for teachers.⁷⁵ The QCA is already developing a similar resource for schools in relation to the Diploma:

[...] with the Learning and Skills Improvement Service [...] we are currently building a site where we can gather, collect, push back and begin to look at evidence about the kind of practice that is emerging. [...] there are 4,000 practitioners engaged on that site although it is not yet live. We are in the process of building that kind of infrastructure. That does not deal directly with the curriculum, but there are possibilities for it to do so at some point in the future [...].⁷⁶

The National Strategies team is also developing a ‘what works’ website:

The 1998 [National] Strategy did a job that needed doing at the time. [...] a lot of people were teaching lots of subjects in the National Curriculum fairly superficially and not getting the progress. We are now able to [...] engage teachers more in working with and developing the pedagogy in their classrooms. [...]⁷⁷

We have a fairly new website called “What works well”, where teachers are taking risks and sharing what they are doing and the difference that that is making for their children.⁷⁸

These developments are to be welcomed in encouraging local interpretations of centrally-produced frameworks and guidance, so long as these agencies restrict their role to one of moderator rather than controller.⁷⁹

93. We recommend that the Department and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority develop facilities to disseminate research about teaching and support teachers in sharing effective practice.

74 Ev 257, paragraph 15

75 Ev 73, paragraph 116

76 Q 487

77 Q 279

78 Q 278 [Peter Dudley]

79 Qq 487–488

Supporting local ownership of the National Curriculum

Teacher training and the curriculum

94. The process of improving teacher skills will mean ensuring that curriculum-related matters are covered sufficiently in Initial Teacher Training (ITT) provision. Such provision could be expected to support immediate improvement in teacher confidence. It could also have longer-term benefits in building the national stock of knowledge about curriculum design:

We need to have in this country a reservoir of expertise on thinking about the curriculum and unless we restore to teachers in general the capacity to think through those issues, we are heading for trouble as an educating nation.⁸⁰

95. ITT provision is shaped by the standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), which it must enable trainee teachers to meet. The most recent version of the QTS standards was introduced in 2007. There are 33 standards, of which the following relate most directly to curriculum matters:

14) Have a secure knowledge and understanding of their subjects/curriculum areas and related pedagogy to enable them to teach effectively across the age and ability range for which they are trained.

15) Know and understand the relevant statutory and non-statutory curricula and frameworks, including those provided through the National Strategies, for their subjects/curriculum areas, and other relevant initiatives applicable to the age and ability range for which they are trained.

22) Plan for progression across the age and ability range for which they are trained, designing effective learning sequences within lessons and across series of lessons and demonstrating secure subject/curriculum knowledge.⁸¹

96. While teacher training does not end with ITT, Standard 15, with its emphasis on trainee teachers' knowing the requirements of National Strategies guidance, appears particularly inadequate for the purpose of developing trainee teachers' understanding of curriculum design and their confidence to take ownership of central curriculum frameworks and guidance, let alone design their own curriculum independently.

97. We recommend that both the theory and practice of curriculum design is given a much higher profile within the standards for Qualified Teacher Status.

98. In this respect we recognise that the implications of reducing the size of the National Curriculum have the potential to result in a bloated curriculum for ITT. We will look more closely at the appropriateness of the current QTS standards as a whole as part of our forthcoming inquiry into teacher training.

⁸⁰ Q 124 [Martin Johnson]

⁸¹ The QTS standards can be viewed at www.tda.gov.uk

Re-orienting the role of the centre in relation to the curriculum

99. Teachers will also need support in developing and refining their practice and in identifying effective practice conducted in other schools. As the Geographical Association commented:

Currently, schools are experimenting with curriculum innovation—both within and outside the National Curriculum—with almost no framework for either evaluation or the transfer of successful and effective practices.⁸²

100. The support of locally-developed practice will require the Department and its relevant agencies to take on a very different role—one of intelligence gathering and research and development as well as monitoring compliance. Professor David Hargreaves observed:

The centre, since the Education Reform Act 1988, has prescribed very substantially what schools should do and then has monitored whether there is compliance, through either Ofsted or tests. When we move to a period of less prescription from the centre and more innovation from the front line, which I think is the step we are now at, it means the centre has to do more than simply monitor; it has to look for intelligence. We need an intelligence system that says, “Where is the most interesting innovation occurring, and how can the centre assist to apply rigour and identify it as good? [...]”⁸³

Efforts to gather and disseminate intelligence on effective practice in delivering the National Curriculum will also need to assist Ofsted in its ability to assess more innovative approaches to curriculum delivery, such as project-based learning.⁸⁴

101. We expect the Department to set out how its role and that of its relevant agencies will change in relation to the National Curriculum over the next five to ten years in order to support the move to a much less prescriptive curriculum and less centrally-directed approach to its delivery.

82 Ev 258, paragraph 6

83 Q 483

84 Q 482 [Professor Hargreaves]

6 Curriculum coherence

102. Alongside the extent of central control over the curriculum, our other main concern to emerge from our inquiry was the poor level of continuity and coherence in the current National Curriculum—and across the National Curriculum, Early Years Foundation Stage and 14–19 arrangements. In this section of our Report we put forward recommendations on how this might be addressed, whether through the way in which the reform of the National Curriculum and adjoining frameworks is managed or through the introduction of stronger overarching structures.

Transforming curriculum reform

Shaping the National Curriculum through the learner's perspective

103. Both the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) and the National Union of Teachers (NUT) questioned the coherence of the National Curriculum and attributed its lack of coherence to the way in which it has been reviewed and reformed. As the NASUWT remarked:

The development of the National Curriculum has been marked by an approach that focuses on reform of specific Key Stages without adequate reference to the implications for teaching and learning in preceding or subsequent Key Stages. The recent separate revisions to the [Early Years] Foundation Stage, the Programmes of Study at Key Stages 3 and 4 and the Rose Review of the primary curriculum serve to exemplify the piecemeal approach to curriculum reform seen to date.⁸⁵

In view of such an approach to curriculum review and reform it is not surprising that Ofsted continues to comment on the failure to improve pupils' transition from one Key Stage to the next, especially from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3.⁸⁶

104. We suggest that this practice stems from a failure to address the National Curriculum from the learner's perspective. A prominent strand of recent education policy has been encouraging schools to listen to the views of their pupils on all aspects of school life, particularly on teaching and learning matters.⁸⁷ **Despite the Department's emphasis on pupil voice in schools, nowhere in the evidence submitted to us did we get a sense that the Department particularly concerns itself with how the National Curriculum is experienced by children and young people. If it had, we suggest, it would have tackled the disjunction that children and young people face in their learning as they move from one phase of education to the next. While this matter forms a key strand of the ongoing Rose Review of the primary curriculum, we are not convinced that the Rose Review alone will be able to tackle this enduring problem with the National Curriculum.**

105. We recommend that the Department's highest priority be to review the Early Years Foundation Stage, the National Curriculum and 14–19 arrangements as a whole

⁸⁵ Ev 63, paragraph 61

⁸⁶ Q 304. See also Ev 8, paragraph 3.5; Ev 68, paragraph 60; Qq 286, 337

⁸⁷ e.g. DCSF, *Working Together: listening to the voices of children and young people*, 2008

in order to establish a coherent national framework that offers children and young people a seamless journey through their education from 0 to 19.

106. As we indicated earlier in our Report, the National Curriculum has been subject to a considerable number of ad hoc changes and additions. These have often stemmed from Ministerial priorities. While we support democratic control of the school curriculum, this should not facilitate such political interference, not least because, going on experience to date, such interference is more likely than not to further erode continuity and coherence in the curriculum. **In order to reduce the number of ad hoc changes made to the National Curriculum we recommend that the Department put in place a cycle, of around five years, for curriculum review and reform and avoid initiating additional change outside that cycle. Reviews should scrutinise the Early Years Foundation Stage, National Curriculum and 14–19 arrangements as a continuum, not as discrete ‘chunks’.**

Strengthening the authority of the QCDA

107. **If the National Curriculum is to be managed more proactively and strategically it is essential that the agency with main responsibility for the development of the National Curriculum is truly independent from the Department and carries authority.** Given the degree of consensus across the political parties on the need for a national curriculum, the purposes it should serve and what it might look like, we see no reason not to take this step.

108. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) began operations in 1997 with a regulatory and non-regulatory role in relation to the National Curriculum and qualifications.⁸⁸ In 2007 the Department announced the creation of a separate regulatory body with responsibility for regulating qualifications and tests—the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual). Once the relevant legislation is passed, Ofqual will be independent of Ministers and will report to Parliament.⁸⁹ In this context the QCA will become a development agency for the curriculum, assessment and qualifications. In its new form as the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) the QCA’s objective will be to “promote quality and coherence in education and training in England”.⁹⁰ Its main role will be to provide advice to the Department and to conduct or commission related research. It is to remain a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) accountable to Ministers.⁹¹

109. Concerns were raised in the evidence submitted to us about the potential weakening of the QCA’s independence and authority once it becomes the QCDA.⁹² The majority of comments on the future role of the QCA saw the possibility that the Department might take on an even stronger role in setting the direction for curriculum policy and, in doing

88 Until it was disbanded in 2008, the National Assessment Agency, a subsidiary body of the QCA, had responsibility for the production and delivery of Key Stage tests.

89 DCSF/DIUS, *Confidence in Standards: regulating and developing qualifications and assessment* Cm 7281, December 2007, paragraph 3.

90 Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill [Bill 55 (2008–09)], clause 167

91 Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill, clauses 172 and 166

92 e.g. Ev 54, paragraph 34; Ev 284, paragraph 8

so, increase the likelihood that reforms will follow political rather than educational imperatives. Professor Hargreaves, a former Chief Executive of the QCA, commented:

[...] when the QCA was set up, the Secretary of State could demand advice from it on any matter that he determined. However, within the Act was a power for the QCA to give advice to the Secretary of State, whether or not he wanted it. From time to time, while there, I drew on that empowerment and gave advice, although it was not always welcome. I hope that, under the new arrangements, the QCA will be given the responsibility and power to give advice whether called for or not. That is very helpful to the QCA and gives it a degree independence [...].⁹³

The draft Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Bill indicates that the QCDA will have the kind of remit that Professor Hargreaves describes, but we would like its power extending beyond this. **We recommend that, as with the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator, the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency is made independent of Ministers and instead required to report to Parliament through the Select Committee.**

110. Some public appointments, including that of the Chair of the QCDA, are subject to pre-appointment hearings with the relevant Select Committee.⁹⁴ **The involvement of this Committee, albeit in an advisory role, in holding pre-appointment hearings with the nominee for the post of Chair of the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency will play an important part in maintaining the independence of the Agency from the Government.**

Establishing an overarching structure for learning 0–19

111. One recommendation of the Rose Review interim report is that the primary curriculum should follow the new secondary curriculum in terms of being underpinned by a statutory set of aims.⁹⁵ Furthermore, it suggests that the statement of aims for the secondary curriculum “holds good for the primary phase, and indeed for the [Early Years Foundation Stage]”, and requests comments about the statement’s suitability in this regard.⁹⁶ We believe that, as well as considering the appropriateness of the secondary curriculum statement of aims for the primary curriculum and the Early Years Foundation Stage, the Rose Review should consider the potential to apply the statement to 14–19 provision also. This is particularly apt in the context of the decision to extend the participation age to 18. Professor Ann Hodgson, Institute of Education, University of London, argued that there should be some form of aims-based curriculum entitlement for these learners:

In my view, we ought to have some form of curriculum aims and purposes right up to the age of 19, not just to age 16. That is not to say that everyone should be studying exactly the same thing, but we as a country should have an idea of what we wish an

93 Q 520

94 Ev 322

95 Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum, interim report, December 2008, p23.

96 Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum, interim report, December 2008, paragraph 1.34.

educated 19-year-old to have experienced throughout their time in education. [...] we have a duty to think about what kind of knowledge, skills, experience and aptitudes or capacities we want to develop in young people [...]⁹⁷

112. We strongly recommend that an overarching statement of aims for the National Curriculum—encompassing the Early Years Foundation Stage, National Curriculum and 14–19 learners—be introduced, properly embedded in the content of the National Curriculum, in order to provide it with a stronger sense of purpose, continuity and coherence.

113. In addition, we recommend that a statement of provision for learners from 0 to 19 is introduced, setting out the fundamental knowledge and skills that young people should have acquired at the end of compulsory education.

114. We recommend that the Early Years Foundation Stage is brought within the National Curriculum—and run through the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority rather than, as at present, the Department.

115. Bringing 14–19 provision under a shared set of aims for the National Curriculum would have been easier under the Tomlinson proposals for the Diploma. Our predecessor Committee, the Education and Skills Committee, voiced its opinion on the Tomlinson proposals in its 2007 Report *14–19 Diplomas*. We share the preference, outlined then, for an overarching diploma that replaced all other qualifications for learners aged 14 to 19.

116. We suggest that the review and reform of the Early Years Foundation Stage, National Curriculum and 14–19 provision as a continuum and the bringing together of these frameworks underneath an overarching statement of aims represent necessary first steps to improving the continuity and coherence of the learning opportunities presented to children and young people. These changes must be accompanied by improved communication and co-ordination between teachers and practitioners across the different phases of education.

Conclusions and recommendations

Standpoints on the National Curriculum

1. The evidence that we received revealed a consensus that the nature and particularly the management of the National Curriculum is in urgent need of significant reform. (Paragraph 43)

Scaling down the National Curriculum

Limiting the reach of the National Curriculum

2. We would like to see the National Curriculum underpinned by the principle that it should seek to prescribe as little as possible and by the principle of subsidiarity, with decisions made at the lowest appropriate level. (Paragraph 53)
3. In order to keep the amount of prescription through the National Curriculum to an absolute minimum we recommend that a cap is placed on the proportion of teaching time that it accounts for. Our view is that it should be less than half of teaching time. (Paragraph 56)
4. Parents should be provided with a copy of the National Curriculum for their child's Key Stage so that they might be better informed of the curriculum that their child should experience. (Paragraph 58)

Recent and ongoing reform of the primary and secondary curriculum

5. The very welcome Cambridge Primary Review report on the primary curriculum contains extensive analysis of the problems but has not enough to say about what might be done in practice to address them. The Rose Review and the Cambridge Review both recognise that the primary curriculum is overly full, but neither offers a practical basis that appeals to us for reducing the load. As we have indicated, we would see greater merit in stipulating a basic entitlement for literacy and numeracy and offering general guidelines on breadth and balance to be interpreted by schools and teachers themselves. (Paragraph 59)
6. In our view, the Programmes of Study for the new secondary curriculum are overly complex and lack clear and concise statements on what should be taught. We believe that there is much to be learned from other countries in this regard. (Paragraph 61)

The Early Years—getting the entitlement right

7. We welcome the Department's decision to review two of the communication, language and literacy Early Learning Goals within the Early Years Foundation Stage. Nevertheless, we draw the Department's attention to the near universal support for the reconsideration of the Early Learning Goals directly concerned with reading, writing and punctuation. (Paragraph 65)

8. We recommend that the Early Learning Goals directly concerned with reading, writing and punctuation be removed from the Early Years Foundation Stage pending the review of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2010. (Paragraph 66)
9. We recommend that, through its review of the Early Years Foundation Stage in 2010, the Department takes the opportunity to evaluate whether the statutory framework as set out in *Setting the Standards for Learning and Development and Care for Children from Birth to Five* is too prescriptive and too detailed. (Paragraph 67)
10. We recommend that the Rose Review does not pursue its interim recommendation that entry into reception class in the September immediately following a child's fourth birthday should become the norm. (Paragraph 69)

Trusting schools

Extending Academies' freedoms

11. We recommend that the freedoms that Academies enjoy in relation to the National Curriculum be immediately extended to all maintained schools. (Paragraph 73)
12. We note that the roll-out of extended schools will offer all maintained schools more time in the school day in which to deliver the curriculum. In the meantime, no reason has been brought to our attention for the discrepancy between different categories of schools in terms of the processes that they must follow if they wish to extend the school day. We believe that the greater freedom that Foundation and Voluntary-Aided schools and Academies enjoy in relation to changing the length of the school day should be immediately granted to all maintained schools. This would offer all maintained schools maximum scope to shape their delivery of the National Curriculum around the needs of their pupils. (Paragraph 75)

Promoting local ownership of the National Curriculum

13. Further to our *Testing and Assessment* Report we again draw the Department's attention to concerns that a system of Single Level Tests linked to targets, and potentially to funding, could further narrow the curriculum as experienced by all or some pupils. (Paragraph 79)
14. The idea that there is one best way to teach is not supported by the research evidence and so should not be the basis for the delivery of the National Curriculum. (Paragraph 85)
15. The Department must not place pressure on schools to follow certain sets of non-statutory guidance, such as it has done in the case of *Letters and Sounds*. We recommend that the Department send a much stronger message to Ofsted, local authorities, school improvement partners and schools as to the non-statutory nature of National Strategies guidance. (Paragraph 86)

Empowering teachers

Central control and teacher professionalism

16. We urge the Department to cease presenting the National Strategies guidance as a prop for the teaching profession and to adopt a more positive understanding of how schools and teachers might be empowered in relation to the National Curriculum. (Paragraph 89)

Supporting teachers as researchers and reflective practitioners

17. We recommend that the Department diverts resources away from the production of guidance to the funding and dissemination of research findings to teachers in the spirit of informing local professional decision-making. (Paragraph 91)
18. We recommend that the Department and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority develop facilities to disseminate research about teaching and support teachers in sharing effective practice. (Paragraph 93)

Supporting local ownership of the National Curriculum

19. We recommend that both the theory and practice of curriculum design is given a much higher profile within the standards for Qualified Teacher Status. (Paragraph 97)
20. We expect the Department to set out how its role and that of its relevant agencies will change in relation to the National Curriculum over the next five to ten years in order to support the move to a much less prescriptive curriculum and less centrally-directed approach to its delivery. (Paragraph 101)

Curriculum coherence

21. Alongside the extent of central control over the curriculum, our other main concern to emerge from our inquiry was the poor level of continuity and coherence in the current National Curriculum—and across the National Curriculum, Early Years Foundation Stage and 14–19 arrangements. (Paragraph 102)

Transforming curriculum reform

22. Despite the Department's emphasis on pupil voice in schools, nowhere in the evidence submitted to us did we get a sense that the Department particularly concerns itself with how the National Curriculum is experienced by children and young people. If it had, we suggest, it would have tackled the disjunction that children and young people face in their learning as they move from one phase of education to the next. While this matter forms a key strand of the ongoing Rose Review of the primary curriculum, we are not convinced that the Rose Review alone will be able to tackle this enduring problem with the National Curriculum. (Paragraph 104)

23. We recommend that the Department's highest priority be to review the Early Years Foundation Stage, the National Curriculum and 14–19 arrangements as a whole in order to establish a coherent national framework that offers children and young people a seamless journey through their education from 0 to 19. (Paragraph 105)
24. In order to reduce the number of ad hoc changes made to the National Curriculum we recommend that the Department put in place a cycle, of around five years, for curriculum review and reform and avoid initiating additional change outside that cycle. Reviews should scrutinise the Early Years Foundation Stage, National Curriculum and 14–19 arrangements as a continuum, not as discrete 'chunks'. (Paragraph 106)
25. If the National Curriculum is to be managed more proactively and strategically it is essential that the agency with main responsibility for the development of the National Curriculum is truly independent from the Department and carries authority. (Paragraph 107)
26. We recommend that, as with the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator, the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency is made independent of Ministers and instead required to report to Parliament through the Select Committee. (Paragraph 109)
27. The involvement of this Committee, albeit in an advisory role, in holding pre-appointment hearings with the nominee for the post of Chair of the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency will play an important part in maintaining the independence of the Agency from the Government. (Paragraph 110)

Establishing an overarching structure for learning 0–19

28. We strongly recommend that an overarching statement of aims for the National Curriculum—encompassing the Early Years Foundation Stage, National Curriculum and 14–19 learners—be introduced, properly embedded in the content of the National Curriculum, in order to provide it with a stronger sense of purpose, continuity and coherence. (Paragraph 112)
29. In addition, we recommend that a statement of provision for learners from 0 to 19 is introduced, setting out the fundamental knowledge and skills that young people should have acquired at the end of compulsory education. (Paragraph 113)
30. We recommend that the Early Years Foundation Stage is brought within the National Curriculum—and run through the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority rather than, as at present, the Department. (Paragraph 114)
31. Bringing 14–19 provision under a shared set of aims for the National Curriculum would have been easier under the Tomlinson proposals for the Diploma. Our predecessor Committee, the Education and Skills Committee, voiced its opinion on the Tomlinson proposals in its 2007 Report *14–19 Diplomas*. We share the preference, outlined then, for an overarching diploma that replaced all other qualifications for learners aged 14 to 19. (Paragraph 115)

32. We suggest that the review and reform of the Early Years Foundation Stage, National Curriculum and 14–19 provision as a continuum and the bringing together of these frameworks underneath an overarching statement of aims represent necessary first steps to improving the continuity and coherence of the learning opportunities presented to children and young people. These changes must be accompanied by improved communication and co-ordination between teachers and practitioners across the different phases of education. (Paragraph 116)

Annex 1—International comparison of curriculum frameworks

Comparison of the school curriculum across five countries: based on information from www.inca.org.uk

[illegible]

	England	Canada—Ontario	France	Singapore	Sweden
Range— upper secondary	The coverage of pupils' learning is determined by the qualification route chosen. Through A-levels and the Diploma pupils are able to study a relatively narrow range of academic subjects or focus on a particular vocational area.	The high school programme is based on a credit system, where pupils must earn a total of 30 credits, 18 of which are compulsory and 12 are optional—spread across a wide range of subjects.	At age 14/15 pupils focus on either the language or the technology branch of the curriculum. Between 15 to 18 pupils must study French, mathematics and at least one foreign language. The Baccalaureate route taken by the pupil determines the remainder of their learning, though these qualifications take in a wide range of subjects.	Pupils aged 16 to 18 must study a general paper, mother tongue, 3–4 GCE A-level subjects and 1–2 GCE AO-level subjects. They also undertake interdisciplinary project work. They also study the non-examination subjects of civics and moral education and physical education.	All pupils 16+ study a common foundation of eight subjects. In addition they select from one of 17 nationally-determined programmes, 2 of which are academically-oriented (Natural Science, Social Science) and 15 of which are vocationally-oriented (e.g. The Arts; Business and Administration; Electrical Engineering; Health and Nursing), or an Apprenticeship.
Syllabus	Schools must follow the Programme of Study for each subject. These set out subject content and attainment targets. Despite continued efforts to reduce the level of prescription contained in the Programmes of Study they remain relatively detailed. Optional, more detailed plans—Schemes of Work—and case studies are also available as a resource for teachers.	A Curriculum Guideline for each subject states the required learning. There are also non-statutory Course Profiles, which are specific to a subject, Grade/Year and type of course. These include more detailed learning outcomes. Subject exemplars show teachers key features to look for when grading pupils work.	National Programmes for each subject set out programme content and the outcomes that pupils are expected to achieve at the end of each year and phase of their education.	Syllabuses for each subject contain: general and subject-specific aims and objectives; learning outcomes; knowledge, skills and values; suggested teaching strategies, and suggested assessment methods.	Relatively short subject syllabuses set a minimum teaching entitlement. They define the subject's general orientation and nature and the goals and targets to be achieved by a given Year. Municipalities are responsible for the implementation of the curriculum. Each municipality must state how it intends to achieve the national goals for schools. Each school produces a related plan.

	England	Canada—Ontario	France	Singapore	Sweden
Time allocations	Guidance only	Guidance only	Ministry sets out recommended annual and/or weekly number of teaching hours for each subject.	Ministry sets out recommended weekly number of teaching hours for each subject.	Ministry sets minimum teaching time for each subject.
Textbooks	Textbooks are selected for classroom use by schools. There are a small number of set texts at secondary level.	The Ministry produces an approved textbook list.	The Ministry produces an approved textbook list.	The Ministry produces an approved textbook list.	Textbooks are selected for classroom use by schools.
Coverage	Independent schools and home educators are not required to follow the National Curriculum.	Independent schools are not required to follow the curriculum, but home educators are encouraged to do so.	Independent schools and home educators are required to follow guidelines on minimum entitlements.	Independent schools and home educators are not required to follow the National Curriculum.	Independent schools are required to broadly follow the curriculum. Home schooling is linked to the local school and must abide by the same statutory regulations as 'regular' schools.

Developments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

Since 2007 England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have each made reforms to their respective national curriculum. The reforms are similar—slimming down the prescribed syllabus and placing greater emphasis on addressing curriculum aims, cross-curriculum learning and pupils’ development of learning and life skills. While England has only removed Key Stage 3 testing, elsewhere there has been a more concerted shift to teacher assessment. The reforms have been most radical in Northern Ireland.

	Curriculum format	Testing
Wales	The national curriculum remains subject-based. Syllabuses have been revised to identify the skills for each subject and the range of contexts, opportunities and activities through which these skills should be developed and applied. Cross-curriculum learning is encouraged. There are also revisions to the Foundation Phase (early years), skills development frameworks, personal and social education, careers education and religious education.	Wales abolished Key Stage testing in 2004. Pupils now sit a skills test in numeracy, literacy and problem-solving at the age of 10, which is backed-up by teacher assessments.
Scotland	The new curriculum focuses teaching on helping pupils to become: successful learners; confident individuals; responsible citizens; effective contributors. Subjects remain in place, but are presented as curriculum areas—including Expressive Arts, Health and Wellbeing, Languages, Mathematics, Religious and Moral Education, Sciences, Social Studies and Technologies. Cross-curriculum learning is encouraged. Courses focused on generic employability skills are also available.	An ‘Assessment is for Learning’ (AifL) development programme has been running since 2002. As part of this programme the previous system of National Tests (for pupils aged between 5 and 15) has been replaced by new online National Assessments intended to help teachers track pupils’ progress.

	Curriculum format	Testing
Northern Ireland	The curriculum is now set out as 'Areas of Learning' (e.g. Language and Literacy, Mathematics and Numeracy, The Arts, The Environment and Society). Subjects are set out as 'strands' within these broader Areas of Learning. The curriculum as delivered must help pupils develop as: individuals; contributors to society; contributors to the economy and the environment. Cross-curriculum learning is particularly encouraged. There is an explicit emphasis on the development of learning and life skills and capabilities across the curriculum. For the primary curriculum, with the exception of English and Mathematics, the content outlined within each Area of Learning has been very significantly reduced to a minimum requirement. For the secondary curriculum the content requirements for each strand have been reduced more dramatically—to a single page.	Formal end of Key Stage assessment has been replaced by statutory annual teacher assessment of the cross-curricular skills of communication, using mathematics and using ICT.

Information taken from www.inca.org.uk

Annex 2—National Curriculum and related documentation

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority website (www.qca.org.uk) contains a large amount of information and guidance to help teachers and others working in schools. The following documents, in particular, are aimed at supporting teachers and others in delivering the curriculum:

- *National Curriculum Handbook* (one for primary and one for secondary) (non-statutory). This includes general information regarding the purpose of the National Curriculum and details on the non-statutory aspects of the curriculum (e.g. skills frameworks). It also includes the Programmes of Study.
- Programmes of Study (for each subject at each Key Stage) (statutory). These describe the subject knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils are expected to develop and specify the range of activities, contexts and purposes that they should experience. They too map out a scale of attainment within the subject.
- Schemes of Work (for each subject at each Key Stage) (non-statutory). These are work plans that help teachers to translate the National Curriculum into teaching and learning activities.
- *The place of Every Child Matters in the Curriculum* booklet (non-statutory guidance).
- Guidance on timetabling the curriculum (non-statutory). This includes suggestions on how much time should be spent teaching each subject.
- *Homework: guidelines for primary and secondary schools* (non-statutory).
- Guidance on disapplication of the National Curriculum (non-statutory).
- ‘*A Big Picture of the Curriculum*’ framework (non-statutory).

The key National Strategies resources that support the National Curriculum are listed below. The full list of National Strategies resources can be viewed at <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk>

Primary Framework for Literacy and Mathematics

Teachers can pick out guidance by subject, Year group and unit. An example is provided below:

Year 1 Narrative - Unit 1

Stories with familiar settings

(4 weeks or 2 x 2 weeks)

This is the first of a block of four narrative units in Year 1. It builds on children's experience and knowledge from the Early Years Foundation Stage and introduces new areas of learning that will be developed during the year. The unit can be linked to many other curriculum areas such as history or personal, social and health education. It can be taught in two sequences each lasting two weeks, as illustrated below, or as a single 4-week unit. The teaching sequence is repeated but the texts read and the writing outcomes are different.

Sequence 1 phase 1

Read a selection of stories with incidents and settings familiar to the children. Identify characters, settings and main events.

Sequence 1 phase 2

Re-enact stories using puppets, story boxes, etc. Order events in the correct sequence.

Sequence 1 phase 3

Use role-play to explore imaginative ideas based on a theme from reading and devise a class story. Take photographs to use as a story plan. Demonstrate how to write the story. Children write their own versions of the story.

Sequence 2 phases 1 and 2

As above, using different stories.

Sequence 2 phase 3

Tell a story based on your own experience. Demonstrate how to compose a short written version. Pairs recount their own experiences and draw a sequence of pictures. Children write a story based on their own experiences.

Overview

Read several stories during the unit which are based around incidents and settings that are familiar to the children. Identify where the story takes place, who is involved and what happens. Introduce the words 'character', 'setting', 'events'. Demonstrate how to apply word reading skills and strategies and involve children in using these strategies themselves.

Children identify the main events in a story and re-enact using, for example, props, pictures or puppets.

Identify and discuss a familiar experience in a story, for example getting lost. Children make links with their own experiences.

Explore imaginative ideas arising from this using role-play, for example 'The day Class 1 got lost'.

Make a simple story plan, for example using a sequence of photos from the drama activity.

Demonstrate how to write sentences to tell the story. Reinforce the application of spelling strategies and correct sentence punctuation. Make a class book.

Children recount their own real or imagined experiences orally. They record their plan by drawing a sequence of pictures, then writing sentence(s) to retell the story in writing. The sequence could be repeated twice using different books as a starting point.

Taken from the Primary National Strategy Primary Framework for literacy

The Primary National Strategies website also includes a compendium of all resources available across the site—teaching and learning resources, professional development and support materials and background and guidance documents.

Secondary Frameworks for the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and ICT

Each of the Frameworks are structured around learning objectives, linked to the Programmes of Study, which set out in reasonable detail the knowledge, skills and understanding which pupils need to acquire across Key Stages 3 and 4. Teachers can use the learning objectives to plan sequences of lessons that cluster objectives together and that cater for different groups of pupils.

The Frameworks offer guidance on ‘key lines’ of progression and pupil tracking.

There are examples of short-, medium- and long-term curriculum planning for teachers to follow. The short-term plans exemplify quality teaching, effective structured lessons and lesson sequences and appropriate use of intervention materials. Medium-term plans show planning for progression in key aspects of the subject, and how to plan for rich curriculum opportunities and links with other subjects. Long-term plans show how to cover the whole Key Stage.

There are also links to a subject, curricular and pedagogic knowledge bank, covering key concepts and processes in teaching and learning the subject, key teaching and learning approaches, guidance on inclusive teaching (including SEN and Gifted and Talented pupils), use of ICT to enhance learning in the subject and links with the National Strategies Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme materials and resources.⁹⁸

Materials to help schools exploit the opportunities that the new secondary curriculum offers (covering English, mathematics, science and ICT).

Materials to support teaching in the foundation subjects.

All National Strategies guidance and recommendations are non-statutory.

98 Taken from <http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk>

Appendix 1—Statement of aims for the secondary curriculum

Extract from *The National Curriculum: statutory requirements for Key Stages 3 and 4* (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2007).

The curriculum should enable all young people to become:

Successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve.

Successful learners who:

- have the essential learning skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT;
- are creative, resourceful and able to identify and solve problems;
- have enquiring minds and think for themselves to process information, reason, question and evaluate;
- communicate well in a range of ways;
- understand how they learn and learn from their mistakes;
- are able to learn independently and with others;
- know about big ideas and events that shape our world, and
- enjoy learning and are motivated to achieve the best they can now and in the future.

Confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives.

Confident individuals who:

- have a sense of self-worth and personal identity;
- relate well to others and form good relationships;
- are self-aware and deal well with their emotions;
- have secure values and beliefs, and have principles to distinguish right from wrong;
- become increasingly independent, are able to take the initiative and organise themselves;
- make healthy lifestyle choices;
- are physically competent and confident;
- take managed risks and stay safe;
- recognise their talents and have ambitions;

- are willing to try new things and make the most of opportunities, and
- are open to the excitement and inspiration offered by the natural world and human achievements.

Responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

Responsible citizens who:

- are well prepared for life and work;
- are enterprising;
- are able to work cooperatively with others;
- respect others and act with integrity;
- understand their own and others' cultures and traditions, within the context of British heritage, and have a strong sense of their own place in the world;
- appreciate the benefits of diversity;
- challenge injustice, are committed to human rights and strive to live peaceably with others;
- sustain and improve the environment, locally and globally;
- take account of the needs of present and future generations in the choices they make, and
- can change things for the better.

Appendix 2—Comparison of the Rose and Cambridge Reviews

Comparison of the remit and recommendations of the Rose and the Cambridge Reviews of the primary curriculum
Taken from Cambridge Primary Review (2009), draft of part of the Review’s final report, submitted to the Committee prior to publication.

DCSF ROSE REVIEW		CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW
NATURE OF THE TWO REVIEWS		
STATUS	Commissioned by government. Based at DCSF. Team membership and management not specified, apart from review leadership and QCA involvement.	Independent. Based in a university. Cambridge team together with 70 research consultants, guided by advisory committee, steered by management group. All named: details at www.primaryreview.org.uk .
REMIT	Restricted. Treats current policy as mostly incontestable. Exclusive focus on curriculum. Assessment/testing specifically excluded.	Open. Treats no policy as beyond question. Curriculum placed in broader context. Assessment/testing included.
EVIDENCE	569 mostly closed-response questionnaire returns; 2-month response deadline 'Unsolicited contributions'. Commissioned evidence reviews from QCA and NFER. School visits.	818 open-response submissions: 6-month response deadline (latecomers accepted). Average submission length: 30 pages. 28 commissioned research surveys from 70 academics in 21 universities and NFER, covering nearly 3,000 published sources. 87 school-based regional 'community soundings'.

	DCSF ROSE REVIEW	CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW
	Stakeholder meetings. Official data Comments invited on interim report Consultation with opposition parties: not known	148+ stakeholder meetings, including conferences and 9 'national soundings' with major organisations, teachers and other professionals. In all, with the community soundings, over 235 meetings to date. Official data. Comments invited on interim reports. Meetings with Conservative and Liberal Democrat education shadows/groups. 3 sessions to date with House of Commons Children, Schools and Families Committee.
REPORTS	1 Interim report, December 2008. Final report scheduled March 2009.	29 interim reports, October 2007–May 2008. 37 briefings, October 2007–May 2008. 2-volume curriculum report January 2009. Final report scheduled spring 2009.
REPORT PROVENANCE	Review leader named, but actual report authorship unclear. Very few evidential sources cited, almost entirely official or otherwise within the loop of current policy.	Review leader/report editors named. All evidential sources cited, mix of official and independent.
<i>TREATMENT OF CURRICULUM</i>		
PROBLEMS	View of what is problematic dictated largely by the review's remit. Witness concerns mainly restricted to what is covered by the consultation questionnaire. Considers problems of perceived curriculum overload, unmanageability, progression/continuity from the EYFS, and transition to Key Stage 3.	View of what is problematic dictated largely by the review's evidence. Witnesses determine their own concerns: exceptionally wide-ranging. Considers all problems identified by Rose, plus: children's loss of entitlement to curriculum breadth and balance; curriculum impact of KS2 tests and the national strategies; marginalisation of the arts and

	DCSF ROSE REVIEW	CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW
	Also school starting age. Central concerns appear to be to reduce the number of subjects and simplify the programmes of study. An exercise in rearrangement rather than reform?	humanities; the opposition of 'breadth and 'standards'; underlying problems in the way curriculum is conceived and discussed, especially in relation to subjects, knowledge and skills; character of specific subjects, notably English; centralisation, micro-management, and the balance of national, local and school in decision-making. Also, and fundamentally, asks what primary education is for and what its priorities should be.
AIMS & VALUES	Takes as 'platform' the 2007 Children's Plan and endorses as applicable to primary education the existing QCA aims for the secondary Aims and curriculum devised separately; not necessarily consistent.	Starts from first principles: 12 aims for primary education to shape curriculum, pedagogy and school life, plus 18 procedural principles to guide the work of government, national bodies, local authorities and schools. Aims and principles grounded in the Review's evidence and independent analysis. Finds the QCA aims inadequate. Aims devised first and then reflected in proposals for curriculum, pedagogy and the wider life of the school.
PRIORITIES	Literacy and numeracy given highest priority. Current 3-subject core (English, maths, science) replaced by four 'skills for learning and life' (literacy, numeracy, ICT, personal development).	Language, oracy and literacy given highest priority. Current core replaced by mandatory commitment to high-quality teaching in all specified domains, regardless of how much time each is allocated.
FRAMEWORK	Curriculum conceived as concentric circles of (i) 3 DCSF/QCA secondary aims (ii) 4 'skills for learning and life' (iii) 6 'areas of learning'.	Curriculum conceived as a matrix of (i) 12 new aims for primary education (ii) 8 domains of knowledge, skill, enquiry and disposition, all of which are essential (iii) national and local/community components (below).
CONTENT	The six areas of learning essentially re-organise existing NC subjects under a smaller number of headings; little re-conceptualisation or revaluation apparent.	The domains derive (a) from the 12 aims, (b) from a list, grounded in the Review's evidence, of 15 kinds of knowledge, skill, enquiry and disposition which are essential to a properly-conceived primary education. They also build on the EYFS and lead readily to the KS3 curriculum.

	DCSF ROSE REVIEW	CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW
	No clear perspective on community, culture, society and the world apparent. Aims detached from curriculum.	The 8 domains incorporate familiar disciplines but also entail radical re-conceptualisation of, especially: language, oracy and literacy; citizenship and moral education; children's health, emotional development and wellbeing. The domains require much-enhanced public, political and professional understanding of the importance of science, the arts and humanities, and a challenge to the perception of the latter two as 'soft', undemanding or marginal. Global, national and local dimensions of curriculum identified. Strong community orientation in response to widespread concern. Culture and cultural engagement are major elements. In this reconceptualisation the 12 aims are crucial, for they set the educational priorities for the primary phase as a whole.
KNOWLEDGE	Status ambivalent; each 'area of learning' focuses more on 'understanding' than on knowing. Tendency to reductionism in treatment of knowledge and skill.	Status unequivocal: knowledge, broadly conceived, is central, alongside a more discriminating concept of skill.
NATIONAL STRATEGIES	Disquiet about NLS/literacy component of PNS acknowledged, but main concern seen as primary/secondary strategy continuity. National strategies to continue, with some rationalisation.	Problems with NLS/NNS/literacy and numeracy components of PNS, especially literacy, strongly conveyed by witnesses. Strategies' distortion of the language curriculum a major concern. Literacy and numeracy components of PNS to be wound up in present form. Literacy and numeracy to be re-integrated with English and mathematics and re-framed in programmes for the new domains.
NATIONAL AND LOCAL	Content to be described centrally but in ways 'that allow for local interpretation'.	Curriculum combines statutory national and local components. Proposed allocations of yearly teaching time: National Curriculum 70%, Community Curriculum 30%. NC to be determined nationally, CC to be determined locally, by new bodies set up by LAs. Statutory national framework for the 8 domains, but national and local programmes of study non-statutory.

	DCSF ROSE REVIEW	CAMBRIDGE PRIMARY REVIEW
STRUCTURES	Advocates building on EYFS, but also lowering school starting age which some see as threat to EYFS. Possibility of restructuring KS1/ as three 2-yearly phases hinted at.	EYFS to be respected and built on. Proposals for starting age and clarifying EY/primary phasing will be in the final report. See above.
CONSULTATION AND DEVELOPMENT	Comments invited on the interim report, but the essentials of the proposed curriculum framework appear to be exempted since QCA is invited to have draft programmes of study for the six areas of learning ready by two months before the end of the consultation period. No significant change to current curriculum and policy infrastructure envisaged.	Open discussion invited on all issues. The report is presented as both the outcome of a two-year programme of evidence-gathering and consultation and a stimulus to further debate. Success of the proposals seen as dependent on (a) reform of national bodies, requirements and procedures, (b) loosening of central control, (c) rigorous professional capacity-building in local authorities, teacher training and schools, (d) deeper understanding of curriculum issues and resistance to the current knowledge/skills reductionism.

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 11 March 2009

Members present:

Mr Barry Sheerman, in the Chair

Annette Brooke
Mr Douglas Carswell
Mr John Heppell
Paul Holmes
Fiona Mactaggart

Mr Andy Slaughter
Mr Graham Stuart
Mr Edward Timpson
Derek Twigg

Draft Report (*National Curriculum*), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Draft Report (*National Curriculum*), proposed by Mr Graham Stuart, brought up and read, as follows:

Introduction

1. The National Curriculum, which is followed by all maintained schools in England and, to a certain extent, by Academies, is rooted in the Education Reform Act 1988. The key principles in developing the National Curriculum were that:

- it would be underpinned by two aims—to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils, and to prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life;
- it would be structured around ‘Key Stages’ and be subject-based, covering the ‘core’ subjects of English, mathematics and science, and the ‘foundation’ subjects of art, geography, history, music, physical education and technology, with all subjects studied up to age 16, modern foreign languages from age 11, and
- the syllabus for each subject at each Key Stage would be set out in a ‘Programme of Study’, which would also include a scale of attainment targets to guide teacher assessment.

Schools would also be required to teach religious education and areas such as personal, social and health education, though these subjects sat outside the National Curriculum. A number of non-statutory ‘cross-curricular’ themes and generic—or life—skills were added to this basic framework in the course of implementing the National Curriculum.

2. Since its introduction, the National Curriculum has been subject to frequent review and reform. Most recently, a new secondary curriculum, placing greater emphasis on pupils’ understanding of the concepts, ideas and processes of subjects, on cross-curricular themes and on pupils’ development of life skills, became statutory for Year 7 pupils from September 2008. The Government has also commissioned a ‘root and branch’ review of the primary curriculum, led by Sir Jim Rose, *albeit excluding testing and assessment*. The Review team published its interim report in December 2008; and it is due to publish its final report and recommendations in Spring 2009.

3. National prescription in relation to the curriculum has also gradually extended to early years provision, culminating in the introduction in September 2008 of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) as the new statutory framework for children from birth to age 5. Although early years guidance has always sat

outside the National Curriculum, the stated purposes of the National Curriculum and the EYFS broadly overlap.⁹⁹

4. The Terms of Reference for our inquiry requested views on whether there should be a national curriculum. A lot of the evidence that we received, while it did not call for the complete removal of a national framework for the curriculum, did suggest that the level of prescription under the National Curriculum has become excessive.¹⁰⁰

5. Our overall impression of the National Curriculum is that it has far outgrown the initial concept and has become overly prescriptive. It has been interfered with and micro-managed by central government which has reduced the scope for teachers to innovate and take control of learning. The Department needs to accept that it must move away from a culture of imposition to a culture of trust and support, otherwise the National Curriculum, for all its virtues, will continue to be perceived by many to be an instrument of central control rather than a facilitator of excellent learning.

6. We highlight below some of the chief faults of the National Curriculum in its present form; and we conclude by sketching out the characteristics of a national curriculum that, we believe, can help revitalise curriculum development within schools and which is protected from continuous change and overload.

Failure of the status quo

7. **We regret that the National Curriculum and related accountability arrangements have inhibited some schools from taking forward curriculum and pedagogical innovation.** Schools can apply to the Secretary of State to have the National Curriculum disapplied for a period “to enable curriculum development or experimentation”.¹⁰¹ Schools also have flexibility in how they develop their curriculum from the statutory requirements without any need for disapplication. They may decide on, for example, the time allocation for each curriculum area and whether to teach subjects discretely or across different structures. Such flexibilities have enabled quite different interpretations of the National Curriculum.¹⁰² Nevertheless, there are clearly schools that feel less able to take ownership of the National Curriculum. As the National Union of Teachers (NUT) commented:

Some primary schools turn [the National Curriculum] inside out, cherry-pick from it and use it as a creative and flexible framework. Other schools use it for what we call post-hoc curriculum mapping: they do the teaching, then go back to the curriculum and tick off the attainment targets for the bit that they have covered. That approach is entirely deadening and not the purpose of a curriculum.¹⁰³

8. **We are concerned at the growth of centrally-produced curriculum-related guidance, and we believe that the National Strategies should be discontinued.** In addition to the statutory Programmes of Study for the National Curriculum, schools are encouraged to have regard to a range of centrally-produced curriculum-related frameworks and guidance, including the National Curriculum Schemes of Work and overarching frameworks, most notably the Every Child Matters outcomes.¹⁰⁴ In addition there is Key Stage guidance and subject guidance, much of which is published through the National Strategies. The sheer volume and complexity of this documentation, particularly the National Strategies guidance, was repeatedly noted across the evidence that we received. As Jolly Learning Ltd noted:

99 DCSF, *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage: setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five*, May 2008, p7. Related EYFS guidance can be found at www.dcsf.gov.uk

100 E.g. Ev 250, paragraph 2 [Malcolm Ross]

101 DfES, *Disapplication of the National Curriculum (Revised)* guidance, July 2006, section 2.1.

102 Qq 32 and 47

103 Q 113

104 Be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, achieve economic well-being.

A characteristic of government curriculum advice is not just its launch, but its huge and inexorable growth. Whereas the National Curriculum of 1995 had 62 pages (for literacy and numeracy) the requirement today includes Letters and Sounds (236 pages), the Primary Framework (135 pages) and the Early Years Foundation Stage (168 pages) an over 8-fold increase.¹⁰⁵

In response, the National Strategies team and the Department emphasised that the National Strategies guidance is non-statutory.¹⁰⁶ However, this ignores the widespread perception among teachers that National Strategies guidance is mandatory, and that they could be penalised by their local authority or school improvement partner, or through Ofsted inspection, for not following that guidance.¹⁰⁷

This perception by teachers of the mandatory nature of the National Strategies is hardly surprising when Initial Teacher Training (ITT) guidance says that training must be given on the use of the National Strategies and Ofsted has specifically investigated how well ITT succeeds in preparing teachers to implement the strategies in schools.

9. We suggest that the extent of top-down prescription and direction has reduced teacher morale and commitment and de-skilled the profession. The National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) commented:

There has been a danger that the guidance documents and resources for the National Strategies have been seen as THE way to deliver the curriculum and, where teachers have lacked confidence or experience, there has been a tendency to view these as “teaching by numbers”, leading to a generation of teachers who are curriculum deliverers rather than curriculum developers. This leads to a detachment from the process and a move towards “de-professionalisation”.¹⁰⁸

This is problematic in terms of reducing teachers’ confidence and skills in the classroom.¹⁰⁹ Over the longer term it could result in a dearth of curriculum design skills within the teaching profession.¹¹⁰

10. We suggest that having a national curriculum will inevitably result in continued pressure from interest groups to ensure that their field is covered by the national curriculum. As the Minister of State for Schools and Learners, the Rt Hon Jim Knight MP, himself noted:

There is pressure on us from a number of people who tell me about this and that, and what should be compulsory because it is their thing and they want it made compulsory. The system becomes weightier and weightier as you accede to those requests, and eventually, in the case of the secondary curriculum, you must slim it down, because it becomes unmanageable for schools.¹¹¹

We believe that the bloated nature of the current National Curriculum also stems from excessive ad hoc changes, which have often stemmed from the particular priorities of successive Ministers.¹¹² As Professor Hargreaves commented:

The mistake we have made in recent years is that there has been a tendency for Ministers, when something comes up, to think that we can impose new regulation through the national curriculum. [...] [the] commitment to a regular review has disappeared and Ministers can now chip in and change

105 Ev 256, paragraph 4

106 Q 567

107 Ev 256, paragraphs 6–7; Ev 285, paragraph 4. See also Ev 52, paragraphs 13, 16

108 Ev 52, paragraph 15

109 Ev 52, paragraph 15. See also Ev 257, paragraph 3; Ev 258, paragraph 7; Ev 289, paragraph 7.1

110 Q 124 [Martin Johnson]. See also Ev 47, paragraph 44

111 Q 201

112 Q 531

it if it is something to do with obesity, or something or other. [...] That is very confusing to schools. It is very difficult for them to implement.

11. Children's development and learning in the very early years are of crucial importance in terms of laying strong foundations for their schooling and beyond. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), however, is too prescriptive, bureaucratic and damaging to innovation and diversity in provision. EYFS needs, at the very least, to be drastically rethought and consideration should be given to its abolition. Instead of fixed "Early Learning Goals" the Department should facilitate enhanced research to inform practitioners and help them develop and share early years curriculum expertise.¹¹³

12. We are concerned that, despite having a national curriculum, many pupils are still not able to access a curriculum that equips them with the learning opportunities available to others.

13. We welcome attempts to enhance vocational and work placed learning. However, we have concerns about the design and implementation of the new Diploma, in particular the proposed inclusion of academic diplomas in science, humanities and language. We consider that all development and future provision of these academic diplomas should be discontinued.

Trusting teachers

14. We believe that there should be a national curriculum in place, but that it should look and be managed very differently, from the existing National Curriculum.

15. The National Curriculum should set out broad goals to be reached by the age of 16, should set out a framework of the core subjects and include no further instruction as to what aspects of those subjects should be taught or how the subjects should be taught. Teachers should be able to select from commercially available schemes, text-books and examination syllabuses to augment their own and their school's curriculum development. Additional support, training and re-training will be required to equip teachers with the curriculum design skills which have been lost due to the over prescription of recent years.

16. Independent schools, free schools and Academies should not be required to follow the National Curriculum. Other schools must be able to opt out if their governing bodies vote to do so and are supported by a majority of parents who vote in a ballot. The relative ease with which schools could exempt themselves from the national curriculum would serve as a valve on the national curriculum to prevent it from becoming overloaded through political interference. We also believe that a slimmed-down and essentially optional national curriculum would enhance the professional standing of teachers, improve the localisation and relevance of lessons to pupils and make teaching more enjoyable and more effective.

17. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (or its proposed successor) should be abolished or much reduced in size and consideration given to the establishment of an independent 'National Curriculum Board' with representatives appointed by universities and employers.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.—(*The Chairman*).

Amendment proposed, to leave out "Chairman's draft Report" and insert "draft Report proposed by Mr Graham Stuart".—(*Mr Graham Stuart*).

Question put, That the Amendment be made.

¹¹³ Evidence on the EYFS, HC 600-i, Session 2007–08, Ev 1–4, Ev 16–17; Evidence on the EYFS, HC 600-i, Session 2007–08, Qq 44–45, 54 [Sylvie Sklan], 59, 61

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 3

Mr Douglas Carswell
Mr Graham Stuart
Mr Edward Timpson

Noes, 5

Annette Brooke
Mr John Heppell
Paul Holmes
Fiona Mactaggart
Derek Twigg

Main Question put and agreed to.

Ordered, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 9 read and agreed to.

Paragraphs 10 and 11 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 12 to 20 read and agreed to.

Paragraphs 21 and 22 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 23 to 55 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 56 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 57 read and agreed to.

Paragraphs 58 and 59 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 60 and 61 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 62 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 63 and 64 read and agreed to.

Paragraphs 65 and 66 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 67 to 92 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 93 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 94 to 100 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 101 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 102 to 110 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 111 read and postponed.

Paragraph 112 agreed to.

Postponed paragraph 111 again read.

Paragraph amended and agreed to.

Paragraph 113 read, amended and agreed to.

Paragraphs 114 to 116 read and agreed to.

Summary amended and agreed to.

Annexes agreed to.

Two Papers were appended to the Report as Appendices 1 and 2.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman make the Report to the House.

Several Memoranda were ordered to be reported to the House for printing with the Report, together with certain Memoranda reported and ordered to be published on 21 May 2008 in the previous Session of Parliament.

Several Memoranda were ordered to be reported to the House for placing in the Library and Parliamentary Archives.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Monday 16 March at 3.30 pm]

Witnesses

Wednesday 4 June 2008

Page

Lesley James, Head of Education, Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts; **Mick Waters**, Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; **Robert Whelan**, Deputy Director, Civitas: Institute for the Study of Civil Society; and **Dr Ben Williamson**, Senior Researcher, Futurelab

Ev 17

Wednesday 11 June 2008

John Bangs, Assistant Secretary, National Union of Teachers (NUT); **Mick Brookes**, General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT); **Martin Johnson**, Deputy General Secretary, Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL); and **Darren Northcott**, National Official for Education, National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)

Ev 75

Carmel Gallagher, Manager for Curriculum Development, Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment; **David Robb**, Chairman, Undergraduate Admissions Committee, Imperial College London; and **Colin Wilman**, Chair, Education and Skills Policy Unit, Federation of Small Businesses

Ev 87

Monday 7 July 2008

Rt Hon Jim Knight MP, Minister for Schools and Learners; and **Helen Williams**, Director, Curriculum and Pupil Well-being, Department for Children, Schools and Families

Ev 120

Monday 20 October 2008

Professor Bill Boyle, University of Manchester; **Peter Dudley**, Primary National Strategy; **Roger Shippam**, Deputy Director, Education Directorate, Ofsted; **Professor Rosemary Webb**, University of Manchester; and **Dr Dominic Wyse**, University of Cambridge

Ev 137

Sir Jim Rose, Education Consultant; and **Colin Seal**, Head of the Rose Review secretariat

Ev 148

Monday 3 November 2008

Professor Derek Bell, Chief Executive, Association for Science Education; **Clive Bush**, Director, Secondary National Strategy; **Dr Rita Gardner**, Director, Royal Geographical Society; and **Professor Gordon Stobart**, Institute of Education, University of London

Ev 170

Monday 10 November 2008

Susan Anderson, Director, Public Services, Confederation of British Industry; **Benedict Arora**, Programme Director, National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts; **Mary Curnock Cook OBE**, Director, Qualifications and Skills, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; and **Professor Ann Hodgson**, Institute of Education, University of London Ev 188

Monday 17 November 2008

Mick Waters, Director of Curriculum, and **Teresa Bergin**, Director, Diploma Programme, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; **Professor David Hargreaves**, Associate Director for Development and Research, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust; and **Tim Oates**, Director of Assessment Research and Development, Cambridge Assessment Ev 207

Monday 24 November 2008

Rt Hon Jim Knight MP, Minister for Schools and Learners, **Sarah McCarthy-Fry MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Children, Schools and Families; and **Ian Harrison**, Managing Director, Capita Strategic Children's Services and the National Strategies Ev 228

List of written evidence

1	Futurelab	Ev 1
2	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)	Ev 3
3	Mick Waters, Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)	Ev 14: Ev 38
4	The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)	Ev 40
5	Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)	Ev 48
6	National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)	Ev 50
7	National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)	Ev 55
8	National Union of Teachers (NUT)	Ev 63
9	John Bangs, Assistant Secretary, National Union of Teachers (NUT)	Ev 73
10	Imperial College London	Ev 97
11	Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)	Ev 99
12	Rt Hon Ed Balls MP, Secretary of State, Department for Children, Schools and Families	Ev 119
13	Dr Dominic Wyse, University of Cambridge	Ev 135
14	Association for Science Education (ASE)	Ev 156
15	SCORE (Science Community Representing Education)	Ev 162
16	Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers)	Ev 166
17	National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA)	Ev 185
18	Professor Stephen Gorard	Ev 246
19	Tim Peskett	Ev 248
20	Malcolm Ross	Ev 249

21	Sara Wernham	Ev 251
22	Professor Robin Alexander, The Primary Review	Ev 253
23	Jolly Learning Ltd	Ev 256
24	Geographical Association	Ev 257
25	The Association of Professionals in Education and Children's Trusts (Aspect)	Ev 258
26	Mathematics in Education and Industry (MEI)	Ev 261
27	British Chambers of Commerce (BCC)	Ev 265
28	The Edge Foundation	Ev 265
29	Sue Lloyd, Co-author, Jolly Phonics	Ev 271
30	Ofsted	Ev 272
31	New Vision Group's sub-group on the Aims of the Curriculum	Ev 278
32	DEA	Ev 283
33	Elizabeth Nonweiler	Ev 284
34	Professor Dylan Wiliam, Deputy Director, Institute of Education, University of London	Ev 287
35	TreeHouse	Ev 291
36	Special Educational Consortium (SEC)	Ev 293
37	General Teaching Council for England (GTCE)	Ev 295
38	Independent Schools Council (ISC)	Ev 298
39	Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)	Ev 313
40	Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC)	Ev 316
41	Early Childhood Forum	Ev 319
42	Rt Hon Jim Knight MP, Minister of State for Schools and Learners, Department for Children, Schools and Families	Ev 322

List of unprinted evidence

The following memoranda have been reported to the House, but to save printing costs they have not been printed and copies have been placed in the House of Commons Library, where they may be inspected by Members. Other copies are in the Parliamentary Archives, and are available to the public for inspection. Requests for inspection should be addressed to The Parliamentary Archives, Houses of Parliament, London SW1A 0PW (tel. 020 7219 3074). Opening hours are from 9.30 am to 5.00 pm on Mondays to Fridays.

Norman Thomas

Family Planning Association (fpa)

Terrence Higgins Trust

Association for the Study of Primary Education (ASPE)

Naace

Oxfam Education and Youth

The Holocaust Educational Trust (HET)

Association for Physical Education (afPE)

UNICEF UK

Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE)

British Humanist Association (BHA)

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2008–09

First Report	Public Expenditure	HC 46
Second Report	The Work of the Committee in 2007–08	HC 47
Third Report	Looked-after Children	HC 111-I and II
Fourth Report	National Curriculum	HC 344-I and II

Session 2007–08

First Special Report	Creative Partnerships and the Curriculum: Government Response to the Eleventh Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07	HC 266
Second Special Report	Special Educational Needs: Assessment and Funding: Government Response to the Tenth Report from the Education and Skills Committee, Session 2006–07	HC 298
First Report	Children and Young Persons Bill [Lords]	HC 359 (HC 711)
Second Report	The Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Children's Plan	HC 213 (HC 888)
Third Report	Testing and Assessment	HC 169-I and II (HC 1003)
Fourth Report	The Draft Apprenticeships Bill	HC 1082 (HC 259 of Session 2008–09)