



30 September 2009

The Rt Hon Ed Balls MP
Secretary of State
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Dear Secretary of State,

**Report on the consultation on Level Descriptions
Carried out under Section 96 of the Education Act 2002**

I am pleased to send you a report of the consultation we have recently conducted on the revised level descriptions for national curriculum subjects. In 2007 we consulted on levels 4–8 (and exceptional performance) at the time of the consultation on the proposals for the revised secondary curriculum. Those proposals were welcomed by respondents to the consultation. At that time it was anticipated that there would be a review of the primary curriculum, which was announced in the Children's Plan in December 2007. It was then agreed to consider the lower levels of the subject level descriptions when the results of the Primary Curriculum Review were known.

Along with our report, I also enclose the attainment targets and level descriptions for all the national curriculum subjects, which have been amended in the light of comments received in responses to questionnaires and in discussions held as part of the consultation. No changes were made to the versions of the level descriptions used in the consultation for five subjects: art and design, design and technology, history, physical education and religious education. Some changes were made to the consultation versions for seven subjects: English, citizenship, geography, ICT, mathematics, music and science. The sole subject where respondents to the consultation were not content was Modern foreign languages, where the proposals were more radical than previously, so for this subject we have reverted to the 2007 post-consultation agreed version of the attainment targets and levels.

Maintaining standards

We have paid particular attention to maintaining the standards in English, mathematics and science, whilst modernising some aspects of the level descriptions. We have broadened the range of skills to be assessed in ICT at the lower levels in line with the primary curriculum and where we consider that pupils are, in many cases, adept in using ICT. These changes maintain standards and are compatible with the revised secondary curriculum and the relevant parts of the primary curriculum proposals.



Using subject level descriptions in primary schools

Those who responded to the consultation tended to be uncertain about how the subject level descriptions might be used in primary schools given that the curriculum now proposes Areas of Learning in place of subjects. It will be important to clarify how primary schools might use the attainment targets where they choose to do so. This is particularly important when Modern foreign languages are being made statutory for the first time in the primary curriculum and schools may want to look at how far their pupils are progressing in this new subject.

Teachers in primary schools will continue to use the subject level descriptions for English and mathematics in relation to tests and teacher assessment. We propose that in primary schools the level descriptions for the other subjects can be used for reference if, for example, pupils are engaged in a subject-specific study and the teacher wants to see if their attainment is satisfactory. In addition, if schools choose to make comparisons across the primary-secondary transition in something other than English and mathematics, the level descriptions could be used as a basis for discussion. However, there should be no requirement to use the level descriptions for other subjects, and this should be made clear in guidance offered to primary schools. We recommend that further consideration is given to the most appropriate timing for publicising the new level descriptions to primary teachers.

Secondary school teachers

Given that a small but significant minority of pupils at key stage 3, including many who have special educational needs, will be achieving at levels below level 4, it is important to provide subject-specialist secondary teachers with a full set of revised level descriptions to use when making end of key stage 3 judgments of pupils' performance. This will enable teachers to recognise the achievements of learners as they move on from key stage 3.

With the abolition of key stage 3 national curriculum tests it will be only teacher assessment levels for all subjects that are reported to parents of 14 year old pupils. In the summer of 2010 we will be publishing materials for all statutory national curriculum subjects, which will exemplify the standards expected in relation to these new level descriptions in order to support teachers' judgements in 2011. This is the ideal opportunity to disseminate the new level descriptions to secondary teachers. Teachers of citizenship will be making judgements for the first time in 2011 and we propose that some additional guidance should be developed to support them in making manageable and accurate assessments.

Two further matters arising from this consultation

Intercultural Understanding

It is agreed that Intercultural Understanding is a vital part of the teaching of Modern foreign languages, and indeed it is integral to several other subjects including English, art, music, history and geography. The consultation revealed that languages teachers in primary and secondary schools are uncertain about both how to teach this key concept and how it should

be assessed. We propose that we should address this through guidance and exemplification of teaching and pupil attainment in Intercultural Understanding for both primary and secondary schools.

Applied aspects of mathematics and science

In mathematics and science, the consultations on the level descriptions and the primary curriculum have revealed a desire for a much stronger emphasis on the practical, applied aspects of these subjects. This has been addressed in the primary and secondary programmes of learning but there is limited change in the attainment targets and level descriptions. It is important that assessment supports the curriculum and recognises the application of knowledge and problem-solving that are integral to science and mathematics. We propose that relevant parts of the Areas of Learning and the attainment targets should be explored further in order to provide guidance on how to teach these aspects effectively and how pupils' work can be related to the standards in the level descriptions.

There is one final point. The Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) materials in English, mathematics and science are now being used in schools to support reliable and consistent teacher judgements. Where implemented well, APP has also been shown to improve curriculum provision, since teachers are clearer about the next steps for their pupils. The statutory requirements for end-of-key-stage teacher assessment pre-date the development of the APP materials and, while it would clearly not be practical to make immediate changes to the legislation, DCSF and QCDA need to send clear messages to schools about taking every opportunity to ensure teachers' judgements are consistent.

We look forward to working with your officials on the Primary Support Programme and to discussion of further remits as proposed in this letter.

Yours sincerely,
