Disapplication of the National Curriculum Programmes of Study, Attainment Targets and statutory assessment arrangements for ICT from September 2012

Overview

Introduction

This report summarises the responses to the consultation on the Government's proposal to disapply the duty on maintained schools to teach the existing information and communication technology (ICT) Programmes of Study, and the associated Attainment Targets and statutory assessment arrangements, from September 2012. The consultation was open from 18 January 2012 to 11 April 2012 and this report is based on the 333 responses received.

Background

On 18 January 2012 the Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Education, announced the Government's intention to remove the duty on schools to teach the existing National Curriculum Programmes of Study for ICT for all key stages from September 2012, and to disapply the associated Attainment Targets and the statutory assessment arrangements at Key Stage 3 from the same date. This proposal stemmed from concerns that had been expressed by stakeholders during the course of the National Curriculum review that the existing Programmes of Study were not fit for purpose, and from Ofsted reports on the quality of ICT provision in schools. Under this proposal, schools would still be required to teach ICT as part of the National Curriculum but teachers would have the freedom and flexibility to design an ICT curriculum that was best for their pupils.

Headline findings

Overall, there was a broad consensus amongst respondents that the existing Programmes of Study and Attainment Targets for ICT were no longer fit for purpose, and many teachers responding to the consultation welcomed the opportunity to develop and deliver more ambitious ICT provision, including computer science. Over half of respondents were in favour of disapplying the Programmes of Study and around half were in favour of disapplying the Attainment Targets and statutory assessment arrangements. Around a third of respondents were opposed to the proposals, and many of these suggested that the Programmes of Study and Attainment Targets should be revised rather than disapplied.

Respondents also highlighted a number of points that would need further consideration to achieve the desired outcomes:

- Some schools had misinterpreted the announcement on disapplication as signalling a downgrading of ICT and the Government therefore needed to send a strong and clear message to schools about the continuing importance of ICT education.

- Most respondents agreed that ICT in schools could be more challenging but highlighted the high numbers of non-specialist ICT teachers in secondary schools. They wanted more and better teacher training to support delivery of a more demanding ICT curriculum, and greater focus in schools on continuing professional development for existing teachers.

- Some respondents argued that there should be a reaffirmation of the importance of digital literacy alongside an increased focus on computer science.

Next Steps

Having carefully considered the responses to this consultation, the Government has decided to proceed with disapplication of the ICT Programmes of Study at all key stages from September 2012, and of the associated Attainment Targets and Key Stage 3 statutory assessment arrangements from the same date. In a system where more and more schools are embracing greater autonomy, we believe that those schools wishing to deliver more demanding ICT provision should have the freedom to do so now.

The Government has made clear that it considers ICT to be an important subject that should be taught to all pupils. As a clear statement of the importance that it attaches to ICT education, the Government has decided that ICT will continue to be a National Curriculum subject, with new statutory Programmes of Study at all four key stages, from September 2014. The Department for Education will look to work with experts from industry, IT organisations and the teaching profession to develop the new Programmes of Study as a national standard for all schools, whilst providing sufficient flexibility and scope to meet the changing demands of the subject.

In our response to the report of the Expert Panel for the National Curriculum review (published on 11 June), we announced that we would be abolishing the existing system of level descriptors and would ensure that Attainment Targets were more closely linked in future to the content of what pupils should be taught. This principle will apply to the new Attainment Targets for ICT, as for other subjects. Our position on statutory assessment of ICT at Key Stage 3 will need to be considered as part of wider thinking on the implications for statutory assessment of the National Curriculum review, including the abolition of levels.

We will also consider the points made about workforce capacity as part of planning for implementation of the new National Curriculum. Between 2012 and 2014 schools will not be required to change their ICT curriculum, but disapplication of the existing statutory requirements will free them up to do so if they wish.

Overview of responses

The organisational breakdown of respondents was as follows:

Secondary School	123
Primary School	55
Other[1]	29
Employer/Business Sector	21
Higher Education	19
Local Authority	19
Consultants/Advisers	14
Teacher	13
Academy	11
Parent	10
Organisation Representing School Teachers	6
Further Education	6
Subject Association	5
Special School	2

Throughout this report, percentages are expressed as a proportion of those answering each question, not as a proportion of all respondents.

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[1] Those which fell into the 'other' category included, ICT specialists, IT professionals, ICT Charities, Academy sponsors, School Governors, ICT service suppliers and those respondents who did not specify a type.

Summary

Q1a) **Do you agree with the Government's proposal that the statutory Programmes of Study for ICT should be disapplied in maintained schools in England from September 2012? Please explain the reasons for your answers.**

Yes 191 (58%)   **No 102 (31%)**   **Not sure 35 (11%)**

There were 328 responses to this question.

Over half of the respondents agreed with the Government's proposal that the National Curriculum Programmes of Study for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) should be disapplied. Respondents felt that disapplication would give schools the freedom to develop a more ambitious curriculum but would still allow others to continue to follow the disapplied Programmes of Study if they wished. Many respondents believed that the existing Programmes of Study were flawed, some citing the omission of programming and other aspects of computer science from the Key Stage 4 Programme of Study as an example. Even the respondents who answered no or not sure were largely in favour of reviewing and replacing the existing Programmes of Study, particularly at Key Stages 3 and 4. 120 respondents (37%) said that the Programmes of Study were not fit for purpose. They said that they were outdated, too basic and had relatively little common ground with what actually happens in the world of ICT. Any new Programmes of Study should give teachers freedom to teach the knowledge and skills their pupils will need for further study and employment.

70 respondents (21%) recommended a review of the Programmes of Study rather than disapplication. They thought that while the Programmes of Study needed updating, they contained essential knowledge and skills that should not be lost.

59 respondents (18%) thought that there was a risk that if the Programmes of Study were disapplied, the status of ICT in schools could be affected. Several respondents reported that the announcement had been misunderstood by some schools. Even respondents supporting the proposal said that there should be a clear vision for the future of ICT and computer science to accompany the disapplication of the Programmes of Study, as without this some schools would reduce their commitment to teaching ICT. Some respondents suggested that the government could consider issuing a statement on making computer science part of the English Baccalaureate performance measure.

39 respondents (12%) raised concerns about the high number of non-specialist ICT teachers. A small number of respondents argued that the issues with the Programmes of Study were due to schools not teaching it properly or interpreting it at a low level, particularly at Key Stage 3, as well as how ICT is assessed at Key Stage 4.

Only 6 respondents (2%) thought that ICT should be embedded across the curriculum as opposed to retaining it as a discrete subject.

Q1b) **Do you agree with the Government's proposal that the statutory Attainment Targets for ICT should be disapplied in maintained schools in England from September 2012? Please explain the reasons for your answers.**

Yes 161 (50%)   **No 108 (34%)**   **Not sure 50 (16%)**

There were 319 responses to this question.

Half the respondents agreed with the proposal to disapply the statutory Attainment Targets, with several respondents acknowledging that they would have to be disapplied if the Programmes of Study were disapplied. Many stated that the current Attainment Targets are confusing and open to interpretation, making it difficult to reach a consensus as to what they meant and how they applied to different aspects of the subject. Whether respondents answered yes, no or not sure, many felt that the Attainment Targets needed updating. The main concerns about disapplication of the Attainment Targets were the lack of consistency for schools and uncertainty surrounding the implications for school inspection if expected standards were unclear. Some respondents also questioned whether schools that were currently failing to teach ICT in a challenging and inspiring way would fare any better if the Attainment Targets were to be disapplied.

78 respondents (24%) were in favour of keeping Attainment Targets as they thought schools needed a consistent way of measuring progress. They felt that even those schools that were more innovative would need an agreed definition of minimum expectations.

57 respondents (18%) expressed their support for the proposal to disapply the Attainment Targets on the basis that they were too vague and were insufficiently demanding for the majority of pupils. Several respondents argued that the current Attainment Targets were an unsuitable way to assess ICT due to the complexities of the subject.

33 respondents (10%) said that some schools would need additional advice and support if Attainment Targets were disapplied. A few respondents felt that schools need statutory guidance on how to assess ICT.

Q1c)   Do you agree that the statutory assessment arrangements for ICT at Key Stage 3 should be disapplied in maintained schools in England from September 2012? Please explain the reasons for your answers.

Yes 134 (47%)   No 91 (31%)   Not sure 63 (22%)

There were 288 responses to this question.

Just under half of respondents agreed with the proposal to disapply the statutory assessment arrangements for ICT at Key Stage 3, with many reiterating the same points made under the previous questions. Respondents felt that the current assessment arrangements were inconsistently applied across schools and teachers found them confusing. However, a number of respondents who believed that the statutory assessment arrangements should not be disapplied stated that alternative assessment arrangements would need to be in place from September 2012 if this proposal did go ahead.

56 respondents (19%) felt that that disapplication could result in a lack of reliable or comparable data. They stated that as ICT would still have to be taught, schools would need a national benchmark against which they could measure pupil progress and against which parents could measure the progress of their children and the performance of their school.

42 respondents (15%) argued that statutory assessment arrangements must be in place. They wanted confirmation on what the revised arrangements would be before they would support disapplication. They stated how important it was not to remove arrangements until they were replaced with clear guidance on their replacement.

38 respondents (13%) mistakenly thought that disapplication meant that ICT was being removed from the National Curriculum. They said schools would drop ICT in favour of statutory subjects.

Q2a) **What would be the likely impact in schools of disapplying the existing Programmes of Study and Attainment Targets?**

There were 278 responses to this question.

131 respondents (47%) expressed concern that disapplying Programmes of Study and Attainment Targets would result in some schools reducing their commitment to teaching ICT or withdrawing from the subject altogether. Many respondents thought that behaviour would largely be driven by school inspection during the disapplication period.

87 respondents (31%) thought that disapplication would give teachers more freedom to innovate. Many of these respondents who identified themselves as teachers said that they had already extended their ICT provision beyond the Programmes of Study and disapplication would allow them to take that further.

84 respondents (30%) expressed concern about the quality of ICT teaching. They were concerned that the many ICT teachers in secondary schools were non-specialists. Many commented that computer science should only be taught by a teacher competent in the subject, similar to the teaching of mathematics or science, and that the Department would need to ensure that sufficient numbers of newly qualified computer science teachers were coming through the system if more schools were to offer rigorous computer science education.

32 respondents (12%) believed that Key Stage 4 courses would be more challenging and rigorous as a result of disapplying the Programmes of Study and Attainment Targets. Many of this group expressed frustration with the quality and standards of many existing ICT qualifications, including GCSEs. They believed that many pupils were able to deal with a higher level of challenge which would provide pupils with more opportunities in employment.

Q2b) **How might this vary between different types of school or differentially affect different groups of pupils?**

There were 232 responses to this question.

Most respondents said that the impact would depend on the quality of the teaching staff, resulting in variations in the quality of ICT provision. On primary schools some argued that disapplication would be difficult for primary schools. Other argued that unlike secondary schools, the case for change had not been made for primary schools and that their ICT provision was largely of a good standard.

83 respondents (36%) believed that disapplication could have a negative effect in schools where ICT was currently poorly managed or seen as low priority. Some said that these schools were more likely to be situated in disadvantaged areas and that the impact was potentially greater on pupils from low income families as they were less likely to have opportunities to learn to use ICT at home. Several respondents stated that some schools are already reducing their ICT provision and numbers of teachers as a result of the announcement.

70 respondents (30%) said that schools with specialist ICT teachers and strong school leadership would use disapplication to develop and teach a broader ICT curriculum that included programming and other specialist skills. A few respondents suggested that many of these schools were already doing this, but could now be more open about it.

66 respondents (28%) thought that the different levels of ICT provision in schools would impact on pupils' ICT experience. Some respondents identified a risk that in some cases a school's ICT curriculum would be based on the skills level of the teacher rather than the ability and interests of the pupils.

35 respondents (15%) thought that an increased focus on computer science would disadvantage lower ability pupils due to the increased level of demand. However, several respondents felt that computer science could be taught to every pupil if tailored appropriately.

Q3a) **Do you agree that schools should be encouraged to deliver a more challenging, rigorous, discipline-related curriculum in ICT, especially by focusing on the foundational principles and practices of computer science? Please explain the reasons for your answer.**

Yes 216 (66%)   No 42 (13%)   Not sure 70 (21%)

There were 328 responses to this question.

The majority of respondents agreed that schools should be encouraged to deliver a more challenging, rigorous and discipline-related curriculum with an increased focus on computer science, but <u>not</u> to the exclusion of the other aspects of ICT. While several respondents commented on the importance of understanding the fundamentals of computers and not just some of the end products, others felt that digital literacy was just as important and should not be lost. The respondents who answered no or not sure said that computer science was a specialist subject and while it may be a suitable GCSE option for some pupils, it should not be compulsory for all.

88 respondents (27%) said that computer science was important and was necessary to keep up with fast changing technology. They stated that pupils would gain many vital transferable skills from studying computer science.

79 respondents (27%) raised concerns about a possible over-emphasis on computer science. They believed that digital literacy skills were still needed in most jobs and should be taught to all pupils.

54 respondents (16%) suggested that computer science was not for everyone and that it would be too challenging for some. They thought that computer science was more akin to subjects like economics and should be offered at options stage (ie just at Key Stage 4).

39 respondents (12%) thought that ICT and computer science should be taught as separate subjects.

39 respondents (12%) were concerned about the loss of basic office skills, while a further 15 (5%) respondents highlighted the risks if schools stopped teaching e-safety.

Q3b) **How can schools be best supported to engage with the ICT industry and subject associations in curriculum development, in order to develop innovative and creative approaches to ICT teaching, including the teaching of computer science?**

There were 270 responses to this question.

Most respondents thought that the IT profession could help to improve the provision of ICT in schools.

126 respondents (47%) felt that industry and subject associations could do more to support schools by developing training and support materials and providing free or low cost equipment and software to help teachers keep up with the latest developments.

74 respondents (27%) felt that collaboration amongst teachers would best deliver an innovative and flexible curriculum, with more experienced teachers supporting less confident teachers. Many believed that there is already a plethora of good practice in schools. Capturing and

disseminating good practice as a means of narrowing gaps, for example through input into an open source curriculum or online forums, is essential. However they also said that sufficient funding was needed to facilitate this.

54 respondents (20%) said that a new Programme of Study should be developed by subject experts with a lot of input from teachers and overseen by industry, to ensure that the final product was fit for purpose.

36 respondents (13%) recommended that teachers be asked to input into a new Programme of Study. Respondents thought that ICT teachers were the best people to be asked to contribute. They said industry did not have the pedagogical knowledge to be able to produce such work and that teachers could share best practice to create a flexible, suitable ICT curriculum.

Q4) **Do you have any other comments you would like to make about the proposals in this consultation document?**

There were 225 responses to this question.

64 respondents (28%) emphasised the importance of training for existing teachers. These respondents also wanted long term investment in teacher training to support the delivery of a curriculum with more demanding computer science aspects.

41 respondents (18%) said that they welcomed the proposal to allow them greater freedom and flexibility over the delivery of ICT. Teachers commented that they looked forward to delivering innovative and creative curricula. They felt that these changes were imperative to engage with pupils and to help create a well-educated workforce appropriate for the future economy.

36 respondents (16%) wanted to be involved in future development work. Many provided links to a variety of sites for guidance and examples of how teacher involvement in developing ICT curricula had been instigated and productive.

36 respondents (16%) commented on budget and funding implications. They felt that many schools would not implement changes without additional financial support from the Government.

35 respondents (16%) requested additional guidance that included examples of what they should teach.

23 respondents (10%) thought that changes to ICT should be introduced alongside the rest of the National Curriculum reforms in September 2014. Others felt that the new computing qualifications being offered by some awarding bodies needed longer to 'bed-in'. While welcomed, they thought it was too early to judge their effectiveness as the first cohort of students doing these courses complete them this summer. Thus it may be premature to disapply the ICT Programme of Study from this September.