



House of Commons

Children, Schools and Families
Committee

**National Curriculum:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Fourth Report of
Session 2008–09**

**Third Special Report of
Session 2008–09**

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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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Third Special Report

On 2 April 2009 we published our Fourth Report of this Session, *National Curriculum*.¹ The Government's response was received on 4 June 2009 and is published as Appendix 1 to this Report. We plan to meet witnesses and other interested parties to hear their views on our Report and on the Government's response.

Appendix 1

CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT ON THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM: THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

The Select Committee's recommendations are in bold text.

The Government's response is in plain text.

Some of the recommendations and responses have been grouped.

- 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.**
- 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.**
- 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.**

Recent curriculum reviews have found overwhelming support for the continuation of a National Curriculum and the benefits it brings. Even those who consider the curriculum to be overly prescriptive and overloaded tend not to argue against the principle of a National Curriculum. The recent review of the secondary curriculum and Jim Rose's independent review of the primary curriculum confirm that the vast majority of stakeholders feel there is a great deal that is good in the National Curriculum. It is one of the reasons why curriculum reviews have struggled to find content in the programmes of study that could easily be dispensed with. Sir Jim Rose makes the point in his final report that "Universal agreement on curricular content is impossible to achieve, even among experts from the same subject community."

Therefore agreeing to the principle that the National Curriculum should seek to prescribe as little as possible is far easier than agreeing the detail of what it should contain. As the Committee point out "no submission made a concerted attempt at illustrating what such a curriculum might look like."

The recent reviews of both the secondary and primary curriculum were given remits to reduce the level of prescription and reduce content, where appropriate, in order to provide

¹ Fourth Report from the Children, Schools and Families Committee, Session 2008–09, National Curriculum, HC344-I.

increased flexibility for schools to design their curriculum around a smaller statutory core which enabled them to better meet the needs of all their pupils. In particular, the review of the primary curriculum worked with a wide range of stakeholders, including primary headteachers, teachers, subject specialists and learned societies to reduce content where it was not considered essential or developmentally appropriate for 5–11 year olds. We believe that Jim Rose's proposals will lead to a primary curriculum that is less prescriptive and allows schools to exercise greater professional judgement over curriculum content. It will also provide more opportunities to adapt the curriculum to local circumstances and children's individual needs and interests.

Findings of a research commissioned by the QCA on the new secondary programmes of study and level descriptions showed that around one in seven respondents agreed that the revised programmes of study for key stages 3 and 4 give more flexibility to schools in the way they manage their curriculum.²

The Government does not prescribe how much time schools should spend teaching the National Curriculum. There is no requirement, for example, for any subject to be taught each week, each term, or each year during a Key Stage. It is up to schools, headteachers and teachers, who are the professionals, to decide how the curriculum is organised and which aspects of the curriculum to cover in depth, and how long to spend on the different aspects. Many schools and teachers use their current flexibilities effectively to design their whole curriculum around the statutory core while adapting and shaping it to meet the needs of all their pupils and to promote engagement with the wider community.

We are clear that the management of the curriculum is the responsibility of schools as it is only at this level that the needs of all pupils can be identified and met, through whole curriculum planning that enables personalised learning to become a reality. Guidance and support offered to schools in support of the curriculum—by the Department and its partners—are consistent in this approach. For example, the programme that supports implementation of the new secondary curriculum has direct support, on-line resources and tools for Heads, curriculum planners, local authorities and subject heads. All emphasise the need for whole school engagement in curriculum planning and for this planning to be within and across subjects. Only in this way can the flexibilities introduced through slimming down of the curriculum be translated into learning that meets pupils' needs.

We do not share the view that placing a cap on the proportion of time spent teaching the National Curriculum—whether half or another proportion—would help schools provide personalised learning for children and young people. Such a cap is more likely to restrict schools' freedom to plan their curriculum and decide how best to organise learning, taking account of local circumstances, resources, interests, aptitudes and background of pupils.

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.

We support the broad thrust of this recommendation. We already encourage schools to give parents, or help them access, as much information as would be helpful to them in supporting their children's learning. As outlined in the Children's Plan: Progress Report in

December 2008, we will go further to highlight effective practice to schools and provide materials that they can use to help parents. This will include schools giving parents links to nationally available materials alongside information about their own child in their online communication with them. This includes, of course, the National Curriculum Programmes of Study and other information available from QCA at <http://curriculum.qca.org.uk>.

To keep parents informed, we have recently published a guide for parents and carers about the proposed changes to the primary curriculum from 2011. This meets the level of information sought by the majority of parents, with full detail available online from QCA for those who want it. At secondary level, schools typically outline their curriculum structure in their prospectus. Parents of secondary age pupils mostly want to know about the detail of the curriculum in relation to Key Stage 4 choices. During Year 9, all schools produce booklets or provide information in other ways about 14–19 routes and curriculum content, including GCSEs, Diplomas and other learning pathways. Parents will also be able to access their local online 14–19 Prospectus, which is a directory of all learning opportunities available to young people in their area. 14–19 Prospectuses also provide information about each of the learning pathways, and are available via DirectGov (www.direct.gov.uk/14-19prospectus).

On 28 April, we published an Action Plan setting out our ambition for the development of local 14–19 Prospectus and the support we will offer local areas to make this ambition a reality. The Action Plan is available at: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/14-19/index.cfm?go=site.home&sid=57&pid=497&lid=586&ctype=Text&pptype=Single>

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.

The final report of the Rose Review, published on 30 April, sets out the detail of what the primary curriculum should contain and a number of recommendations to reduce the load and make it more manageable for schools. It is based on extensive consultation with the teaching profession, subject specialists, parents and pupils. The draft programmes of learning set out by the review offer a less prescriptive primary curriculum. They give schools much more flexibility to plan a curriculum that allows schools greater discretion to select content according to their local circumstances and resources. For example, by exploiting their local environment and making links between their locality and other places in the UK and beyond. There is a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, but within a broad and balanced curriculum, rather than at the expense of it. The consultation, which ends on 24 July, will allow interested parties to consider whether the draft programmes of learning have struck the right balance between prescription of essential content and manageability for the primary teacher and school.

Many respondents to the Rose Review said that before the National Curriculum was introduced, far too much of the primary curriculum suffered from low expectations, lacked

challenge and was considerably more uneven in breadth, balance and quality, than has been the case since its introduction. Jim Rose points out in his final report that no respondents to his review suggested “...that schools should only be required to follow the curriculum for English, mathematics, science and ICT.’

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.

We do not accept that the Programmes of Study for the new secondary curriculum are overly complex and lack clarity. This is simply not the case. The Programmes of Study now have short simple statements setting out the key concepts and processes; and schemes of work have been replaced by case studies to give teachers illustrative examples of good practice. Much of the prescription around the previous subject content has been stripped out, allowing schools more autonomy to organise their curriculum. This was in response to what teachers told both us and the QCA during consultation. The Department consulted on the final drafts of the Programmes of Study and no one suggested that they were too complex or required further reduction. The new secondary curriculum has been widely welcomed by the teaching profession.

The QCA made comparisons with a number of other countries during its review using the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment frameworks Internet Archive (INCA), which it funds. Like the UK, many countries included in the INCA review have chosen a National Curriculum which minimises the amount of prescription and maximises flexibility for teachers. These include, for example, Finland, which frequently performs best in international comparisons of educational performance.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

We recognise that parts of the sector have expressed concern about the communication, language and literacy goals, particularly those focusing on children's early writing, and we responded to this concern by asking Sir Jim Rose to look at two of the early writing goals as part of his primary curriculum review.

Sir Jim's assessment was that the goals should be retained within the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), and we have accepted this recommendation. Sir Jim had a number of discussions with early years experts and listened carefully to their views and concerns about these two early learning goals. However, he received no hard evidence which suggested that these goals should be removed from the EYFS. He has taken on board concerns that some members of the workforce may take an over-formal approach in supporting children to reach these goals, hence his emphasis on the play-based nature of the EYFS, and his recommendation that additional guidance should be offered to practitioners and teachers on supporting children's emerging writing skills, which we have also accepted.

Sir Jim's view, with which we agree, is that to remove these goals purely because fewer children currently reach them would be to put an unnecessary ceiling on children's potential achievements. Setting our aspirations high for children's capabilities is nothing new. One of the early writing goals is currently achieved by around a third of children and the other by just under one half of all children. This is not dissimilar to the numbers of children reaching the expected levels at Key Stage 2, when KS2 assessment was first introduced in 1995 (when 45% of children reached the expected level in Maths, and 49% of children in English). 2008 data was 79% and 81% of children respectively—a huge increase and testament to children's abilities and the skill of those teaching them.

It is important to stress that the early learning goals are not statutory targets and that practitioners have flexibility in judging the right time to support children towards the goals. The EYFS is clear that every child develops at a different rate and that they should be supported by practitioners to progress towards the early learning goals at the pace which is right for them. Equally we make no apology for setting our aspirations high—plenty of children are already reaching the communication, language and literacy goals in question.

2010 Review of the EYFS

The review of the EYFS will begin in September 2010. No decisions have yet been made on the scope of this review, but we agree that this will provide an opportunity to look at the level of detail set out in the statutory framework. It is important to note that the EYFS statutory framework does not prescribe day to day practice in early years settings (although detailed guidance is available for practitioners); rather, clear statements are included in the framework that practitioners should use their professional judgement to understand the needs of individual children, and the pace of development which is right for those children. We are confident that the EYFS offers sufficient flexibility to respond to the needs of individual children—indeed this is one of the fundamental principles upon which the EYFS is built.

Before the review of the EYFS takes place, it is crucial that there is time for the current arrangements to bed in, so that the review can be informed by evidence of the EYFS in practice. It is important to remember what a major step forward the EYFS represents—it

drew together three existing frameworks into one statutory framework for care, learning and development for children from birth to age 5. This is the first time that there has been a single set of standards from which all children, regardless of their background, can benefit. A survey of teachers conducted by the Times Educational Supplement in July 2008 showed that 88% of respondents supported the EYFS.

Bringing the EYFS within the National Curriculum

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) supports the integration of care and education for children from birth to five. It therefore brings together the previous Birth to Three Matters and Foundation Stage frameworks with elements of the National Standards for Day Care and Childminding which combines specific learning and development and welfare requirements. These welfare requirements cover for example child protection, health and safety, organisation and procedures for ensuring that all children are included and well looked after. We believe that these requirements (and therefore the EYFS) should remain the responsibility of the Government, which is why the EYFS remains separate from the National Curriculum.

However we have given QCA a statutory remit to keep the curriculum under review including the EYFS. As part of this role QCA will support the effective transition by local authorities from Foundation Stage Profile to the EYFS Profile and continue to improve and maintain the robustness of moderation and look at the impact of the EYFS on children. Like the National Curriculum, the EYFS ensures a fundamental entitlement to learning, development and care for all children in early years provision. We are committed to ensuring that children's journeys through the different phases of education are as seamless as possible, and believe that Sir Jim Rose's proposals provide an excellent opportunity to ensure that primary education builds on the EYFS. Sir Jim's proposed six areas of learning dovetail well with the six areas of learning and development set out in the EYFS and this provides an excellent opportunity for us to strengthen further the links between the EYFS and KS1.

Summer-born children

Sir Jim has taken account of the compelling evidence that attending a good quality early years setting rather than none has long term benefits for a range of educational outcomes through to at least Year 6. Allowing summer born children to start school, or another early years setting, immediately after their fourth birthday will ensure they receive the same amount of early years experience as their peers. Young disabled children and children with SEN in particular will benefit from starting school as soon as possible so that the right interventions are put in place to ensure that these children also make progress alongside their fellow pupils.

The majority of local authority areas already operate a single point of entry to reception class in September. Therefore, as Jim Rose makes clear in his report, the debate is less about whether children should be starting reception or other early years provision at that time, than how to secure high-quality provision that is best suited to their development. We acknowledge that some parents have a strong preference for their child's early years experience to take place outside a school setting. We therefore intend to make funding available across the maintained, private and voluntary sectors to enable all children to

receive full time provision in education and childcare from the September after their fourth birthday. Alongside making that provision available, we will ensure that parents have clear information about the benefits of beginning reception in September and we will work to help schools and early years settings to smooth the transition for any children who move into reception after September.

11. We recommend that the freedoms that Academies enjoy in relation to the National Curriculum be immediately extended to all maintained schools.

We believe this recommendation is based on a misconception that many schools would want the same opportunities as Academies to reduce their curriculum requirement, and that this would be in the best interests of children and young people. The evidence does not support this view. As set out in response to earlier recommendations, recent reviews of both the primary and secondary curriculum have found strong support for a statutory entitlement to a broad and balanced set of skills, knowledge and understanding. These reviews have introduced much greater flexibility so that schools can provide personalised learning for all their pupils.

Since 1996 Headteachers of all maintained schools, including national challenge schools, have had the freedom to disapply pupils from some or all of the National Curriculum requirements in order to meet individual pupil needs. We have published guidance on this subject to ensure that schools have the necessary information about the flexibilities available to them and how to use them where appropriate. We understand that many schools use this freedom where it is in the best interests of pupils, although we do not require them to tell us when they do this. Where schools wish to make more significant changes to the National Curriculum, they must apply to the Secretary of State. The Department receives fewer than 10 such applications on average each year, and in the vast majority of cases, schools already have the freedom to introduce the changes they propose within the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum and did not need to make an application at all. Nonetheless, to assist maintained schools further, particularly National Challenge schools which face similar challenges to Academies, we will be considering whether the current process of determining disapplications can be simplified.

There is no question that Academies have a particular role to play by being established mainly in areas of disadvantage, where schools are facing multiple barriers to success and a number of pupils are particularly low achieving. Limiting the statutory curriculum requirement to the core subjects allows Academies to focus on the basics and to tailor the content of the wider curriculum to the needs of its pupils. That said, principals of successful Academies have told us that they mostly follow the National Curriculum, especially since it has become more flexible.

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.

We accept the principle of greater flexibility for community and voluntary-controlled schools with respect to the school day and will consider and consult on some changes to regulations to allow governing bodies of these schools more flexibility. We must however acknowledge that the local authority, as employer, has a different role with community and voluntary-controlled schools from that which it has with other categories of schools, and that may steer us away from removing *all* regulations governing these issues.

We will consult on possible changes to regulations and guidance to accompany such revisions.

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.

Single level tests are currently being trialed in the Making Good Progress pilot, which is subject to rigorous, independent evaluation. There has been no evidence of single level tests narrowing the curriculum in the pilot to date. Nonetheless, we will continue to monitor the pilot closely and will look carefully for impact on the curriculum and for signs of teaching to the test.

The Expert Group on assessment, established in October 2008 following the decision to discontinue national curriculum tests at Key Stage 3, was asked to advise on early evidence from the first year of the pilot, including any concerns raised about the impact of single level tests on the curriculum. The Group has recommended that we should continue to pilot single level tests in English and mathematics at Key Stage 2, including trialling their use in an accountability context.

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.

We agree. There is a perception that the National Strategies offer is 'one size fits all', but this is not the case. It offers guidance on tried and tested 'good practice' approaches to teaching, based on a wide range of research evidence including systematic evaluation of the implementation of its support programmes. The introduction of 'whatworkswell' through its web offer is an example of drawing together and sharing good practice developed by teachers in schools.

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.

The National Strategies do not prescribe what should be taught. It provides tools, materials, support and challenge to local authorities and schools. The primary and secondary

Frameworks ensures the National Curriculum is covered, but that the emphasis is on pupils' learning and attainment in the curriculum, rather than ticking coverage boxes.

The use of Letters and Sounds is not compulsory —schools and early years settings are free to choose whichever phonics programme best suits their needs. All we ask schools and settings to consider is that the programme they use adheres to Rose's core criteria set out in his independent report on early reading.

The Standards website clearly states: "We are not promoting 'Letters and Sounds' as the preferred phonics programme, merely one of many high quality phonics teaching programmes which meet the core criteria"

The Ofsted report "Responding to the Rose Review: schools' approaches to the systematic teaching of phonics" published on the 9th May 2008, found 12 out of 19 schools they did in depth work with were using Letters and Sounds, others commercial alternatives. For all the schools, teaching a systematic phonics programme had resulted in an improvement in both pupil enjoyment and staff confidence and helped to raise expectations.

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.

National Strategies' materials and training always stress the importance of teachers exercising their professional judgement and not accepting what is recommended uncritically. Drawing together the National Strategies subject and pedagogic guidance into a single web offer, is an example of how teachers have been empowered to utilise this vast wealth of good practice and training when needed. This is already reaping dividends from teachers' perspective, with over 2 million visitors since its launch in November 2008, exploring these resources and using them to support their specific professional development needs. There is no prescription in their use; teachers and practitioners are accessing them because they value the quality of the materials and guidance offered. Such investments in improving the quality of teaching and learning are well regarded by teachers and practitioners.

The National Strategies' guidance and support materials are available for all schools to use as best fits their needs, including academies who are increasingly seeking bespoke support from the National Strategies to empower their teachers.

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.

The Department continues to invest in research, and to disseminate good practice drawing on a range of research evidence. The National Strategies applies this evidence based principle in designing its teaching and learning support. Its motivation is to enable teachers, not to spoon feed them.

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.

We have reservations about the idea that systemic change can be brought about simply by means of issuing research reports to teachers and expecting them to adapt their practice. There is recent research evidence commissioned by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) (Bubb and Earley, Institute of Education) that indicates that such an approach will have very little impact. We think it is more effective to give teachers and teacher educators access to recent research evidence and to support them through an infrastructure for Continuing Professional Development. This approach (CPD) incentivises teachers to participate through performance management and supports schools to work in clusters, enabling teachers to share effective practice.

The TDA's Teacher Training Resource Bank (www.Ttrb.ac.uk) already contains a bank of research evidence which is publicly available. All materials are quality assured through a rigorous process of academic scrutiny and monitoring undertaken by a team of expert teacher educators. The TDA are also promoting and disseminating good practice and developing guidance to help schools make the best use of resources and to assess impact and value for money.

The new Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) will support and encourage teachers to apply and further develop their skills of enquiry and research, as well as help them to identify and critically analyse the use of evidence to further improve their professional practice. It will enable teachers to develop an open and questioning mindset which will impact on their teaching and learning and help to improve the outcomes of children and young people.

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.

The Qualified Teacher Status standards are dynamic—they reflect the changing needs of schools and the changing approach to the curriculum as it evolves. That means that the approach to the curriculum in the standards will reflect changing practice.

It is the Department's view, supported by the Training and Development Agency for Schools, that the current standards are already sufficiently flexible to enable providers to give the additional time to both the 'theory and practice' of curriculum design. With the introduction of the revised primary curriculum in 2011 and the revisions to the secondary curriculum being implemented now, ITT providers are already adapting their programmes to develop these skills in new teachers.

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.

The Department will continue to act in the best interests of society, and particularly of children and young people who are growing up in an uncertain world. The National Curriculum will remain the responsibility of the Department and a means of ensuring young people have the skills and knowledge they need as they grow up. So, we expect the Department to continue to set the strategic direction for the curriculum, and the parameters within which it can develop, and for its agencies to provide expert advice to Ministers.

As now, we will continue to work with our agencies and stakeholders, particularly QCA which has a responsibility to monitor the curriculum, and, where changes are needed, we will make these decisions through the statutory consultation process.

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.

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.

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.

We do not accept that there is poor coherence and continuity from 0 to 19, but we do accept that there are issues around transition between Key Stages and between children moving between schools and other settings at key transition points. All of our reform programme has been developed with a wide range of stakeholders, including a large number of people who are experts in their fields and we believe the Committee does them and the Department a disservice by suggesting that attention has not been paid either to the needs of young people or to continuity and coherence.

The Children’s Plan sets out very clearly our vision for making this the best place for young people to grow up in, and provides the context, rationale and plans for making this a reality. The learning and development frameworks 0–19, including the National Curriculum, are designed to make an important and coherent contribution to this vision.

The Committee should be aware of the work done by QCA through the longitudinal study of young people and their experiences of the curriculum. The latest report from an 8 year project conducted by NFER on behalf of QCA, compiled by Pippa Lord and Megan Jones, found that young people want a curriculum that is relevant, enjoyable, varied and broad. Other findings were:

- Young people want to see the relevance of what they are learning to the rest of their lives, eg learning about a job, developing personal skills or having a subject explained in terms of its contemporary context.
- Young people’s enthusiasm for the curriculum wanes from the end of Key Stage 2 when they perceive many subjects to be easier and less interesting and are bored by the repetition that occurs between Key Stages 2 and 3.

- Enjoyment increases slightly in Key Stage 4 when they are studying their own choices but overall, enjoyment decreases throughout Key Stages 3 and 4. They want variety in how they learn and how they are assessed. They favour active, practical teaching approaches.
- They recommend continuous assessment, although they like clear grades and marks so they are able to judge progress for themselves.
- Young people want a curriculum that offers them choice across a wide range of subjects and courses. They believe that everyone should be entitled to vocational learning, basic skills and careers education.

This and other evidence sources, including INCA (mentioned earlier), and curriculum monitoring provides QCA with a credible evidence base which it uses to inform its advice to Ministers.

Account should also be taken of how the curriculum is experienced by each young person, and how personalisation gives them a real voice in their own learning and development. Responsibility for outcomes is shared between staff, parents/carers and pupils. This means everyone has a good understanding of where pupils are in their learning, where they need to get to and how; pupils are encouraged to take greater responsibility for their learning through participation in key decision-making; schools consult and engage both pupils and parents on a wide range of issues; and parents are fully engaged in supporting their child's learning and development. We believe this is a much surer way of securing learning matched to the needs of each pupil, rather than, as the committee seems to be suggesting, some sort of one size fits all solution for progression and development.

That said, we do recognise that transitions are difficult to manage and can be disruptive for some children and young people. We agree that this has been a longstanding issue, which is why we asked Sir Jim Rose to consider how the primary curriculum could change to support better transition from the EYFS and from primary to secondary school. The six areas of learning proposed for the primary curriculum are an excellent opportunity for us to ensure that even stronger links are made between the EYFS and the primary curriculum, supporting children's transition into KS1. More opportunities for exploratory play and child-initiated activities in Key Stage 1 (while ensuring appropriate attention continues to be paid to developing speaking and listening, early reading, writing and number work) will enable a smoother transition from early years and allow younger children more time to adapt and become ready for formal learning. Setting out curricular content of the programmes of learning in three phases—early, middle and later—will help primary school teachers to see how the curriculum should broaden and deepen as children's capabilities develop between the ages of 5–11.

We have accepted Sir Jim Rose's recommendation that 'with their local authorities, primary and secondary schools, should agree a joint policy for bridging children's transition from key stage two to key stage three. Five inter-dependent transition bridges are suggested for this purpose: administrative; social and personal; curriculum; pedagogy, and autonomy and managing learning. This should involve extended studies across Y6 and Y7, and draw upon the support of personal tutors.'

We have also accepted the recommendations of the Expert Group on Assessment that:

- Schools should use ‘primary graduation certificates’ to recognise each child’s achievements in a range of subjects and highlighting their strengths before they progress to secondary school.
- DCSF should commission the development of a ‘transition unit’ of work, which all pupils would begin in primary school and complete at their secondary school, in order to help create a smooth and consistent transition.
- All year 6 pupils should spend a short period of time at the end of the summer term in the secondary school which they will attend in the autumn.

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’.

We have accepted the recommendation in the Rose Review that ‘the EYFS and the statutory curriculum for primary and secondary schools are reviewed at agreed intervals’.

Reviews of the primary and secondary curriculum could be sequential and not necessarily concurrent. The principle is, however, that any planned review process starts with Early Years and flows upwards through the age range as cohorts of pupils progress. This ties in well with the planned review of the EYFS, due to start in September 2010.

This does not rule out introducing changes generally recognised as being essential outside the agreed cycle such as making Personal, Social, Health and Economic education a statutory subject in the secondary National Curriculum, on which we are currently consulting.

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.

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.

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.

We unequivocally reject the recommendation that, as with the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) is made independent of Ministers and instead required to report to Parliament through the Select Committee. Ministers are and must continue to be accountable to Parliament for the curriculum. It is important that there remains clear democratic accountability. Ultimately, it must be for Ministers—not for an unelected body—to make and be answerable for decisions about the curriculum that are key to the

education that our children receive. We do not think it is appropriate to have, as the report proposes, an unelected body being responsible for these key decisions.

In making and being answerable for decisions on the curriculum, Ministers will continue to need an expert body that can offer robust advice on the monitoring and development of the curriculum. Ministers will therefore be advised by QCDA (as they are now by QCA) on the curriculum. Responsibility for curriculum development will remain exactly as it is now. There will be no substantive change to how the curriculum is developed and monitored.

It is right that Ofqual is independent of Ministers because it is a regulator: it does not make policy decisions; it regulates within a statutory framework and, where appropriate, operates within a policy framework set by Ministers.

The report quotes Professor Hargreaves' advice that the QCA should retain the responsibility and power to give advice, regardless of whether the Government call for this advice. As the report acknowledges, this will remain the case. QCDA will retain the power that QCA has to advise Ministers on curriculum issues, whether this advice is requested or not.

The introduction of pre-appointment hearings has not changed the fundamentals of the public appointment process by Ministers. There will continue to be a formal selection process for the Chair of QCDA, which will be open and transparent and underpinned by the overriding principle of appointment on merit.

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.

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.

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.

We believe that all young people should enjoy education and training that gives them the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in adulthood and employment. We agree that there should be clear aims for children and young people's learning from 0–19. We also agree that all young people should leave compulsory education with a set of essential knowledge and skills.

We have already taken steps to formulate this. For example, *the Children's Plan One Year On* sets out what provision should look like for 0–19. And *Delivering 14–19 Reform: Next Steps* sets out a broad entitlement to learning and support for all young people. It sets out the knowledge and skills that young people should acquire on all learning routes, such as functional skills in English, Maths and ICT and the ability to work independently and think creatively. And going forward, our work on the 21st century schools White Paper will set out how we will deliver these aims and vital knowledge and skills for all aged 0–19.

We have accepted and are consulting on Sir Jim Rose's recommendation that 'The aims for a revised primary curriculum derived from the 2006 Education Act, the Children's Plan and 'Every Child Matters' should be underpinned by a unified statement of values which is fit for all stages of statutory education. Therefore the aims and values established as part of the recent secondary curriculum review will be extended to the primary curriculum'.

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.

In developing our 14–19 Reform programme, we have built on the major blocks of Mike Tomlinson's proposals. As Mike Tomlinson himself has said 'we are doing 90% of Tomlinson'. Creating a new mix of theoretical and applied learning, embedding functional skills and personal, learning and thinking skills across the curriculum, introducing greater stretch into A levels—all of these were Tomlinson's recommendations which we have acted on.

Our consultation paper, "*Promoting achievement, valuing success: A strategy for 14–19 qualifications*", published in March 2008, set out our intention to move towards a more streamlined and more understandable qualifications offer for young people aged 14–19 in England. The consultation document set out a clear vision for 2013, by when we want to have a streamlined system based on four nationally-available qualification suites or frameworks:

- GCSE and A-Level;
- Diplomas;
- Apprenticeships; and
- the Foundation Learning Tier Progression Pathways.

Young people will be able to choose from any one of these four routes to suit their individual learning needs and style, and there will be flexibility for learners to move between routes as their interests and aspirations develop. The development of the Diploma is a central plank of this vision. The 17 Diploma lines of learning have been developed in close consultation with employers, higher education and providers. The Diploma builds on and complements the secondary curriculum and reflects what employers and other stakeholders have told us about the future skills needs of young people.