



Department  
for Education

# **Draft programmes of study for English and mathematics for key stage 4: consultation**

**Government consultation response**

**May 2014**

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## Introduction

On 2 December 2013 the Department for Education published a consultation on proposed programmes of study for English and mathematics for key stage 4. In line with changes to the subject content for new GCSEs, the consultation set out the government's proposals for new, more stretching programmes of study, with expectations that match those in the highest performing jurisdictions.

The consultation closed on 3 February 2014 and attracted 61 responses. The Secretary of State has considered the responses received and has published new programmes of study that will be taught from September 2015, subject to the Order governing the national curriculum being made. We received responses from the following:

Secondary school	16
Teacher	16
Other	14
Subject association	6
Local authority	3
Organisation representing teachers	2
Parent	2
Higher education	1
Special school	1
Total	61

# Summary of responses received and the government's response

## English

There were 36 responses on the content of the programme of study and 22 responses on whether the programme of study provides appropriate progression from key stage 3.

8 of the 22 respondents felt that the draft programme of study provides appropriate progression from key stage 3 (with the same proportion who disagreed). Key issues were:

- the removal of speaking and listening from the English Language GCSE (13 of the 36 respondents)
- lack of suggested texts/authors and literature representing different cultures (10 of the 36 respondents)
- not including poetry before 1789 (9 of the 36 respondents)
- omission of multi-media texts (8 of the 36 respondents)

Comments made highlighted the views that speaking and listening was being downgraded and should remain part of the GCSE, and that the absence of spoken language skills from GCSE grades would impact on the focus given to these important skills by teachers; and that 'English literary heritage' should be placed in a broader context, and that the programme of study should take more account of world literature and the diversity of cultures in England and the UK.

The value of studying romantic poetry was recognised but some respondents felt not to include poetry before the Romantic period was arbitrary and overly prescriptive. Those respondents expressing concern over the omission of multi-media texts thought that pupils would not learn to be critical about a significant amount of the text they read and see every day.

## Response

The English language has a pre-eminent place in education and society. A high-quality education in English will enable pupils to read, write, speak fluently and communicate confidently with others. We know that employers in particular value oral literacy and spoken English will continue to be part of the English Language GCSE, but will be reported separately. Spoken Language features throughout the English programmes of study at all key stages. The programme of study for key stage 4 follows the approach for key stages 1 to 3 in not specifying which texts (or cultures) students should study, nor

suggesting particular authors since we believe English teachers will know best what will constitute an appropriate choice of high-quality, challenging classic literature for their students. It also follows the approach established in key stages 1 to 3 in not specifying the format in which texts should be read. We believe that some forms of multi-media texts do not provide sufficiently rich, substantial writing to promote the development of a deep understanding and appreciation of the English language. Schools and teachers will, however, be free to use high-quality, challenging texts, for example reviews and journalism. Poetry since 1789 is specified to ensure that pupils have access to the Romantic poets, but there will be nothing to prevent teachers from introducing students to poetry from earlier periods.

## Mathematics

There were 42 responses on the content of the programme of study, and 36 responses on whether the programme of study provides appropriate progression from key stage 3.

11 of the 36 respondents felt that the draft programme of study provides for appropriate progression from key stage 3 (compared to 15 who disagreed). 8 of the 42 respondents thought the level of challenge and extra content was appropriate. Where respondents raised concerns, the most common specific points made were that the content:

- was too challenging, particularly for less able students (18 of the 42 respondents);
- was too large, which would place excessive demands on schools and teachers (10 of the 42 respondents); and
- was not consistent with key stages 1 to 3 (8 of the 42 responses).

Comments made highlighted the views that the mathematical content that should be taught to all pupils was very challenging and could adversely affect less able students; and that some of the content was taught at A level and that there was no value in including it at key stage 4.

## Response

The mathematics programme of study follows very closely the subject content for the new GCSE which was published on 1 November 2013. Every pupil should be confident and competent in the basics of mathematics and for that reason the GCSE subject content incorporates essential content from key stage 3 such as arithmetic and ratio. This content has of course been omitted from the key stage 4 programme of study which is focused on the mathematics needed for further study across a range of scientific and technical areas. This may give the impression that the level of challenge at key stage 4 has been significantly increased but both key stages should be seen as together providing an integrated programme which is suitable for a wide range of ability. This is

supported by the inclusion of more challenging content in bold which is designed to stretch the most able.

The new programme of study at key stage 4 is wider and deeper than the current programme and this is intentional. International comparisons of performance in mathematics show that England's pupils have been falling behind that of our competitors. We spend far less time teaching mathematics than other countries – TIMSS 2011 shows that we were 39th out of 42 participating countries in terms of the amount of time spent teaching mathematics at the end of key stage 3. We anticipate that schools will review the amount of time that they currently spend teaching this vital subject to ensure they are able to cover the content thoroughly. An extra lesson each week would put England closer to jurisdictions such as Hong Kong and Singapore which both teach an average of 138 hours a year of mathematics at secondary level.

## Equalities

Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Secretary of State, when exercising functions, to have due regard to the need:

- to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The relevant protected characteristics applicable to schools are disability, gender, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation and gender reassignment.

The consultation asked for views on potential equality implications of the proposed programmes of study for English and mathematics. There were 32 responses to this question. 69% of responses considered that the proposals would have a negative impact upon particular groups, compared to 25% who were not sure, and to 6% who thought there would be a positive impact.

The majority of responses to this question raised concern about the impact that the proposed programmes of study changes would have on low attainers and those with special needs. They were of the opinion that the changes were overly complex and would adversely affect pupils in these groups. The main issues mentioned were:

- 12 Too much content for less able pupils

- 10 Disadvantages pupils with dyslexia/dyscalculia
- 9 A focus on memorisation would adversely affect SEN and lower ability pupils
- 7 Disadvantages pupils with English as an additional language
- 4 End of year exams will reduce the chances for pupils with SEN to achieve their full potential.

## **Response**

We will publish a full equalities impact assessment after the programmes of study have been finalised – expected to be in June. This will consider the impact of the changes for protected groups. A further equality impact assessment will be completed for key stage 4 science when the programme of study has been developed for this subject.

## **Conclusion**

We are grateful to all those who responded to the consultation. We believe that the revised programmes of study for English and mathematics for key stage 4 we have published will provide young people with the high quality teaching and learning they deserve.



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