



Department
for Education

Reform of the national curriculum in England: New programmes of study for English and mathematics at key stage 4

Equality analysis

July 2014

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Introduction

This document assesses the impact of new national curriculum programmes of study for English and mathematics for pupils at key stage 4. It considers whether and how the proposed changes to the programmes of study may impact – positively or negatively – in relation to those in ‘relevant protected characteristics’ groups. 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 are disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Although the national curriculum is not specifically covered by the Equality Act 2010, the Government is required to give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations when carrying out its activities. In addition, one of the objectives of the review of the national curriculum – launched in January 2011 - has been to ensure that opportunities are more equal for every child, including pupils with special educational needs. We have sought views through a statutory consultation on the proposals for the new programmes of study for key stage 4 English and mathematics between December 2013 and February 2014.

A paper setting out an assessment of the potential impact on equalities covering all national curriculum programmes of study except those for English, mathematics and science at key stage 4 was published in July 2013 - available from [GOV.UK](#).

This analysis should be read in conjunction with the equality analysis undertaken for the subject content of new GCSEs in English and mathematics. The national curriculum programmes of study for these subjects have been developed in tandem, and are consistent, with the GCSE content for these subjects because schools pay attention to both the GCSE subject content and the programmes of study in preparing pupils for the end of key stage 4 examinations. The equality analysis for the new GCSEs was published in November 2013 - available via this link: www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-and-mathematics-gcse-content-equality-analysis

Policy context

In January 2011, the government launched a review of the national curriculum with the following aims:

- to ensure that the new national curriculum embodies rigour and high standards and creates coherence in what is taught in schools
- to ensure that all pupils are taught the essential knowledge in the key subject disciplines
- beyond that core, to allow teachers greater freedom to use their professionalism and expertise to help all pupils realise their potential

The review has been informed by evidence on curricula in high-performing educational jurisdictions internationally.

On 11 June 2012 we announced decisions on the proposed primary national curriculum. On 7 February 2013 we announced proposals about the new secondary national curriculum and launched a formal consultation on draft programmes of study for all national curriculum subjects, except for English, mathematics and science at key stage 4. The consultation ended on 16 April 2013.

On 8 July 2013 we published updated programmes of study for all national curriculum subjects at all four key stages except for English, mathematics and science at key stage 4, and we published the final programmes of study on 11 September 2013. New programmes of study for English, mathematics and science at key stage 4 have been developed in tandem with the new GCSEs for these subjects, and they will be phased in from September 2015. The programme of study for science at key stage 4 is planned to be introduced from September 2016 to ensure coherence with the reformed GCSE qualifications.

The evidence base

Our analysis of the potential impact of the proposed programmes of study for English and mathematics for key stage 4 pupils has been informed by responses to the consultation on the programmes of study which ran from 2 December 2013 to 3 February 2014 attracting a total of 61 responses.

The following summary of evidence draws on responses to the public consultation on the new programmes of study, and also refers to views expressed by stakeholders in their response to the consultation on the GCSE subject content.

Consultation responses and possible impact

The statutory consultation on the proposed programmes of study for key stage 4 English and mathematics asked respondents what impact – positive or negative – the proposals would have on pupils from groups with relevant protected characteristics. Out of 61 responses to the consultation, there were 32 responses in relation to possible impact on pupils with disability. The majority of those 32 respondents were from teachers and secondary schools. Without always making a clear distinction as to which of the two subjects they were referring, 12 respondents stated that the programmes of study had too much content and that would have a negative impact on less able students. 10 respondents said that pupils with dyslexia and those of lower ability would be at a disadvantage. Nine respondents felt that the focus on memorisation in mathematics will have a negative impact on students with SEN and those of lower ability. Seven respondents said that the new programmes of study will have a negative impact on students for whom English is an additional language (EAL). Others expressed their disagreement with the policy for students to be required to take one examination at the end of key stage 4, and a small number of respondents said that they would like pupils to be assessed partly through coursework.

There were 13 responses on the possible impact on pupils with protected characteristics of gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sex and sexual orientation. However, there were no common issues raised by these respondents and we have not identified any potential for a negative impact on students with these protected characteristics in the development of the GCSE content for English and mathematics.

Subject content

English

The programme of study for key stage 4 English seeks to provide continuity from key stage 3 and provides some additional challenge. It is consistent with the GCSE English language and English literature criteria. Our aim is to enable all pupils to study a wide range of high-quality literature, not just those who take the English literature GCSE. The key characteristics of the programme of study:

- slimmer and less prescriptive
- focus on the requirement to study English literature thereby ensuring all pupils get a good grounding in English literature through the study of:
 - At least one play by Shakespeare
 - Works from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries
 - Poetry since 1789, including representative Romantic poetry
- focus on whole texts
- focus on grammar and vocabulary (to ensure continuity from key stage 3 and in an acknowledgement of the needs of employers)
- focus on Standard English

Under the 'Spoken Language' section young people should be taught to work effectively in groups, lead and manage discussions and meet goals and deadlines. These are skills that we know employers value highly.

In responding generally about the proposed programme of study, some respondents mentioned the possible impact on students who have dyslexia. They felt that these students will not be able to fully access the programme of study, particularly as reading fluency and accuracy, and acquisition of spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG) rules may all be markedly impaired by the neurological condition per se. They suggested that the programme of study should set out alternative ways in which dyslexic students can access text (e.g. by using audiobooks, readers, Load to Learn). We have considered these points when assessing the possible impact of the new GCSE subject content. We believe that written and spoken language development is of paramount importance for all pupils. It is reasonable to assess a student's proficiency in SPaG and for this to be a significant proportion of the assessment, particularly given the importance of these skills for future progression and employment. Although this could impact on some students with SEN and/or dyslexia and/or English as an Additional Language, for some students with these characteristics, arrangements such as additional time in the examination may be sufficient to access these marks.

The policy on SPaG marks is a key part of our commitment to ensuring that young people are properly prepared for adult life and future employment. This policy gives a real incentive to teachers to provide effective support to all students to improve their written communication skills. We are committed to supporting schools with training and resources to help them identify barriers to learning, and to offer appropriate support. We believe that any impact to students with protected characteristics could be mitigated by access arrangements in some situations and will provide an incentive to schools to develop better teaching approaches for those who need it. We concluded that the reform is justified given the importance of these skills to all students' prospects of further study and employment.

Mathematics

Key characteristics of the programme of study:

- focus on application of mathematical knowledge and skills to solve problems
- content specified in far more detail and closely aligned to GCSE content
- more challenging content for higher achieving students identified
- better preparation for post 16 mathematics, providing foundations for advanced topics like calculus
- focus on consolidation and building on key stage 3, emphasising that mathematics is an interconnected subject
- pupils will be taught essential problem solving skills including multi step problems, and how to apply these skills to contexts such as personal finance
- more able pupils will learn the concepts of instantaneous and average rates of change – essential precursors to the study of calculus

The mathematics programme of study follows very closely the subject content for the new GCSE which was published on 1 November 2013. For higher attaining pupils, the mathematics programme of study also includes the more challenging additional GCSE content. The programme of study is clear that this additional content is not obligatory for all pupils – teachers will need to decide which pupils are taught the additional content.

We believe that 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 ratios. This content has therefore 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.

Teaching the new programmes of study

The new programmes of study set out the matters, skills and processes to be taught by the end of each key stage, with a change in emphasis towards essential knowledge in each subject area. One of the key objectives of the review is to ensure that all pupils – irrespective of their background or circumstances – have the opportunity to acquire the essential knowledge and skills they need to succeed in life. It is our belief that the new national curriculum programmes of study democratise knowledge by ensuring that as many children as possible can access a rich intellectual and cultural inheritance.

Evidence is clear that setting higher expectations for all pupils, regardless of background or circumstances, is a key driver in improving standards.¹ International evidence is also clear that the best-performing education systems set the highest standards in core subjects² and embrace diversity in pupils' capacities, interests and social background.³ Furthermore, evidence shows that raising the level of challenge and rigour in the curriculum does not automatically mean wider gaps in pupil attainment: there are examples of high-performing educational jurisdictions (including Finland, Canada and Japan) that set high expectations and reduce the spread of attainment amongst pupils,⁴ with significant proportions of disadvantaged pupils exceeding internationally comparable benchmarks.⁵

The national curriculum makes it clear that teachers should set high expectations for all pupils, including disabled pupils and pupils with EAL, and reaffirms the need for schools to take account of their duties under equalities legislation that covers disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and religion or belief. We understand that some pupils will access the national curriculum in ways that are different to others, and will progress at different rates. This, however, is a matter of pedagogy and good teachers will always adapt their teaching approach to meet the needs of their pupils. In practice this means ensuring that the national curriculum is taught in ways that enable all pupils to have an equal opportunity to succeed.

¹ P. Sammons, J. Hillman & P. Mortimore (1995), *Key characteristics of effective schools* (London, Institute of Education/OFSTED); Ofsted. (2009), *Twelve outstanding secondary schools: Excelling against the odds*.

² Department for Education (2011), [Review of the national curriculum in England: what can we learn from the English, mathematics and science curricula of high-performing jurisdictions?](#)

³ OECD (2010), [PISA 2009 Results: What makes a school successful? – resources, policies and practices](#) (Volume IV);

⁴ Analysis of 2009 PISA data indicates that in a number of countries (including Finland, Canada, Japan, Korea and Norway), students perform higher and are less affected by their home background than the OECD average. Equitable education systems are fair and inclusive and support their students to reach their learning potential without either formally or informally pre-setting barriers or lowering expectations. OECD (2012), *Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools*, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264130852-en>

⁵ OECD (2011), *Against the Odds: Disadvantaged Students Who Succeed in School*, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264090873-en>

The statement of subject aims for mathematics in particular sets out in the National Curriculum Framework Document the expectation that schools will decide on the pace at which individual pupils progress through each programme of study based on the security of their understanding and readiness to proceed to the next stage. We believe that this should benefit some pupils with special educational needs who may not be sufficiently fluent with earlier material.

Conclusion

The majority of respondents to the consultation were unsure as to whether the programmes of study would have potential for adverse impact on pupils with protected characteristics except those with a disability.

One of the key aims of the national curriculum review has been to raise expectations of what all pupils should know and be able to do by the time they leave school. We believe that the more challenging programmes of study and GCSE subject content, coupled with more rigorous assessment characteristics, will give more confidence to students and employers, and access to further and higher education institutions.

We are confident that the new national curriculum sets appropriately high expectations for all pupils, and that the content of the programmes of study will give all pupils, regardless of background and circumstances, the essential knowledge and skills that they need to succeed in education and life. We believe there is flexibility to deliver a personalised curriculum to meet the individual needs of pupils including those with protected characteristics. In keeping with the objectives of the review, we believe that teachers are best placed to decide how to teach the programmes of study. Teachers should be able to use their professional judgement to address the needs of all children and have flexibility on the time and other resource allocation needed to teach them effectively.

The national curriculum inclusion statement reaffirms schools' duties under equalities legislation. It sets out that teachers must determine the support and teaching interventions their pupils need to participate fully in all parts of the school curriculum including the national curriculum. The statement also gives teachers and teaching staff the freedom to teach the national curriculum in line with pupils' specific and individual needs and to make reasonable adjustments where appropriate.

In keeping with our commitment to system-led educational reform, we expect schools to work in partnership, locally and nationally, to implement the new national curriculum and develop effective ways of meeting the particular needs of all of their pupils – including those with protected characteristics. We also anticipate, and will work to encourage, those organisations that represent those with relevant protected characteristics to help schools fulfil their equalities duties in delivering the new national curriculum and ensure that all pupils are able to achieve.

The key stage 4 curriculum for English and mathematics, in tandem with the GCSEs in these subjects, are a cornerstone of our education system. Improving standards of these subjects is ultimately beneficial to all students, providing the best possible opportunities for progression into further and higher education and employment.



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