



## National Curriculum review

Standard Note SN 06798  
Last updated: 1 May 2014  
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The National Curriculum was first introduced in 1988. Since then, it has been subject to a number of major reviews and revisions. Shortly after coming to office in May 2010, the current Government announced it intended to review the entire National Curriculum. The review was formally announced on 20 January 2011; at the time of writing, aspects of the review were still ongoing.

There has been widespread support for the review's aims and some support for changes that have been made to the 'content' of individual national curriculum subjects. The Government argues that the proposals have been developed giving 'due regard' to the views of subject experts and teachers and to the findings of international best - practice comparisons.

However, many commentators have raised concerns about both the review process, and its outcomes. They have queried the level of involvement of specialists in determining the subject content, the degree of prescription in terms of what should be taught, and to what extent the new curriculum is likely to meet the Government's stated aims.

The new National Curriculum will – in most subjects and in respect of most age groups - be introduced from September 2014. As is the case currently, there will be no requirement for academies, free schools or independent schools to follow it, although they may do so if they wish.

This note does not cover the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage followed in early years settings and in the reception year of primary school.

It applies to England only.

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# 1 Overview: the school curriculum in England

## 1.1 Maintained schools

There is often considerable confusion about what constitutes the school curriculum in England, what is compulsory at what stages, and in what settings. To summarise, all maintained schools<sup>1</sup> in England must offer, as a minimum, the statutory curriculum as defined in Section 80 of the *Education Act 2002* plus certain other compulsory subjects. The statutory curriculum currently includes:

- The National Curriculum (NC), in respect of pupils aged 5 to 16
- At secondary level, a programme of sex and relationships education (SRE) for all registered pupils, providing the parents have not withdrawn their child from such provision.
- Religious education (RE) for all registered pupils – what is taught will depend on the type of school and (usually) the content of the locally agreed syllabus.<sup>2</sup>

Section 78 of the 2002 Act requires the curriculum at maintained schools (and maintained nursery schools) to be “balanced and broadly based” and to:

- promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society; and
- prepare pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

Additionally, under Section 42a of the *Education Act 1997*, as amended, and related regulations,<sup>3</sup> schools are under a duty to offer impartial careers advice to pupils in school years eight to thirteen.

The NC is arranged into four Key Stages:

- Key Stage 1 (KS 1) typically covers years 1-2 (ages 5-7)
- KS2 years 3-6 (ages 7-11)
- KS3 years 7-9 (ages 11-14)
- and KS 4 years 10-11 (ages 14-16)

The subjects included in the English NC at each Key Stage are laid out in Section 84 and 85 of the *Education Act 2002*, as amended. Further subject specification is provided in statutory

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<sup>1</sup> Schools maintained by the local authority – as opposed to independent, academy or free schools

<sup>2</sup> In voluntary aided schools with a religious character, the governors determine RE policy. For VA and voluntary controlled schools, parents may request their child is taught RE according to the tenets of the school’s designated faith.

<sup>3</sup> *The Careers Guidance in Schools Regulations 2013*, SI 2013/ 709

programmes of study, which outline what should be covered at each key stage. Although maintained schools must teach the NC and deliver other elements of the statutory curriculum, generally speaking they are free to organise teaching, and the school day, in the way they see fit.

Maintained mainstream schools in England may apply to have the NC disapplied either in its entirety or in respect of particular pupils. Disapplications are usually only sought in particular circumstances – for example, in the case of individual children with statements of special educational needs (SEN), or in respect of a particular cohort to enable curriculum development or experimentation.

There is no general right for parents to withdraw children from particular parts of the NC; different arrangements apply in respect of RE and SRE.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 Non-maintained schools

Academies, free schools, studio schools and university technical colleges are not required to teach the NC although they may do so, if they wish. They are required to offer a 'broad and balanced curriculum' that covers English, maths, sciences, RE and SRE (for pupils aged 11-18) and to meet any other curriculum conditions specified in the academy trust's funding agreement with the Secretary of State.<sup>5</sup>

Independent schools do not have to teach the NC. Like academies, they must offer a 'broad and balanced' curriculum and meet the curricular requirements laid out in the *Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010*, as amended.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.3 NC - structure and subjects

Since its introduction in 1988, the NC has retained broadly the same structure – being comprised of a small number of 'core' subjects – English, maths and science - plus additional 'foundation' subjects. The recent NC review has made only two major changes to the current structure of the NC – namely, languages will become part of KS2, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) will be replaced with Computing.

Details about the NC until September 2014 can be found on the [relevant section](#) of the National Archives website,<sup>7</sup> and see section 1.4 of this note for information on transitional arrangements for the 2013-14 and 2014-15 academic years.

The table on the following page, adapted from the Department for Education's (DfE) National Curriculum *Framework document* gives an overview of the subjects to be included in the NC at primary and secondary level from September 2014, following the NC review.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> There is a statutory right for parents (and pupils themselves, if aged over 16) to withdraw their children from any Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) delivered outside NC science. Parents can also withdraw their children from RE and from the daily collective act of worship.

<sup>5</sup> 'Alternative provision' academies are not required to teach science - see section 3.1 of the DfE's [Governor's Handbook](#) (January 2014 edition). All internet articles and documents retrieved 1 May 2014 unless otherwise stated.

<sup>6</sup> *The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010*, SI 2010/1997. Academies are required to comply with parts of these Regulations, but not the curricular provisions.

<sup>7</sup> *Primary National Curriculum until 2014*, National Archives website, undated. See also *Secondary National Curriculum until 2014*, National Archives website, undated.

<sup>8</sup> DfE, *The national curriculum in England. Framework document*, September 2013, Pp. 7

Table 1: NC subjects from September 2014

	Primary – Key Stages 1 and 2	Secondary - Key Stage 3	Secondary - Key Stage 4
Age	5-7; 7-11	11-14	14-16
Maths	✓	✓	✓
English	✓	✓	✓
Science	✓	✓	✓
History	✓	✓	✗
Geography	✓	✓	✗
Art and Design	✓	✓	✗
Physical Education (PE)	✓	✓	✓
Music	✓	✓	✗
Languages <sup>9</sup>	✓(KS2 only)	✓	✗
Computing	✓	✓	✓
Design and Technology	✓	✓	✗
Citizenship Education	✗	✓	✓

The arts, modern foreign languages, the humanities and design and technology are not currently NC subjects at KS4, when most students select from a range of nationally-recognised qualification courses (including GCSEs). However, all pupils at maintained schools are currently entitled to study one subject in each of the four areas during KS4, if they wish to do so.

To reiterate, several subjects outside the NC are nevertheless compulsory for maintained schools. For example, and as mentioned above, SRE is compulsory during the secondary phase of education, and RE must be provided to all registered pupils at all stages. Schools are also expected to provide Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE).

For each NC subject, there is an associated statutory *programme of study* outlining the minimum subject content and skills that should be taught. The new *programmes of study* to be introduced from September 2014 can be found in the national curriculum *Framework document*,<sup>10</sup> which in turn will be given force by *the Education (National Curriculum) (Attainment Targets and Programmes of Study) (England) Order 2013*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> At KS2, the NC subject title will be 'foreign language'; at KS3 it will be 'modern foreign language'.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> SI 2013/2232. The Order was laid on 11 September 2013 and comes into force on 1 September 2014

Currently, detailed attainment target 'level descriptors' exist for each NC subject at each Key Stage. These targets and descriptors are also being reformed as part of the review of the NC. At the end of KS1, pupils undertake teacher-administer tasks and tests for English, maths and science; they also undertake a 'phonics' (reading skills) screening test in year 1 – these tests were introduced in 2012. Teachers also undertake their own assessments to gauge attainment and progress. Pupils sit externally - marked tests at the end of KS2 (age rising 11) in English, maths and science. There are optional National Curriculum tests available for use at KS3. The National Curriculum tests are often referred to colloquially as 'SATs'. KS2 results are included in the DfE's [school performance tables](#).

#### **1.4 Transitional arrangements for the academic years 2013-14 and 2014-15**

Following the NC review (Section 3 of this note), the programmes of study and attainment targets for most NC subjects and for most year groups have been disappplied nationally from September 2013.<sup>12</sup> The 'old' programmes of study and attainment targets will remain in force, however, for English, maths and science in respect of certain cohorts until September 2015.

The rationale behind the disapplication was to allow schools to prepare for the introduction of the revised NC from September 2014 onward. The Government consulted on the disapplication arrangements as part of the wider consultation on the changes to the NC. The DfE's summary of responses to the consultation, published in June 2013, indicated that 25 per cent of respondents were in favour of the disapplication of the programmes of study, 40 per cent were against, and 35 per cent remained unsure.<sup>13</sup>

## **2 History of the National Curriculum**

The National Curriculum was introduced by the Thatcher Government following the passage of the [Education Reform Act 1988](#). A comprehensive account of the early history of the NC can be found in the 2009 report of the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee, [National Curriculum](#).<sup>14</sup> Below is a brief timeline of events adapted from the report:

**1987** – the Department of Education and Science, led by Kenneth Baker MP, issued a consultation document setting out the rationale for a National Curriculum. This identified four broad underlying principles and intentions: establishing an entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum; improving school accountability; improving curricular coherence; and aiding "public understanding" of schools.

**1989** – NC introduced to primary schools, with implementation continuing into the mid-1990s.

**1993** – Review of the NC by Sir Ron Dearing in response to teachers' observations that the curriculum was 'unwieldly'. A revised NC was introduced in 1995 with less prescribed content and changes to testing arrangements.

**1996** – Introduction of two pilot support projects in numeracy and literacy. These were carried forward – as the National Literacy and National Numeracy Strategies by the incoming Labour Government.

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<sup>12</sup> The programmes of study for ICT were disappplied earlier, with effect from September 2012, following a ministerial announcement.

<sup>13</sup> DfE, [Reform of the national curriculum in England. Report of the consultation conducted February – April 2013](#), June 2013, Pp 14

<sup>14</sup> Children, Schools and Families Select Committee, [National Curriculum, Fourth Report of Session 2008-09](#), 2 April 2009, Vol 1., HCC 344-1

**1999** – major review of the NC overseen by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) resulting in the further slimming down of prescribed content, and the introduction of an overt statement of aims and purposes

**2005** – review of the secondary NC, again with the aim of slimming down prescribed content; resulted in more emphasis on cross-curricular themes, skills and personalised learning.

**2007** – ‘Root and branch’ review of the primary NC announced by the Government, subsequently undertaken by Sir Jim Rose from 2008 and with findings published in April 2009.

### **3 The National Curriculum review 2011 - present**

#### **3.1 Policy background**

In November 2010 the Government published its wide-ranging schools’ White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*.<sup>15</sup> Chapter Four contained proposals on the curriculum, qualifications and school accountability. It stated the Government’s intention to review and reform the whole NC – with key aims being to slim down content and reduce the bureaucratic burden on schools so that the NC would serve as a “benchmark and not a straitjacket”:

4.1 ... At over 200 pages, the guidance on the National Curriculum is weighing teachers down and squeezing out room for innovation, creativity, deep learning and intellectual exploration. The National Curriculum should set out only the essential knowledge and understanding that all children should acquire and leave teachers to decide how to teach this most effectively.

4.2 The National Curriculum was never meant to be the whole school curriculum – the totality of what goes on in any school. It was explicitly meant to be limited in scope yet in practice has come to dominate. We propose to take a new approach to the curriculum, which affirms the importance of teaching and creates scope for teachers to inspire. We want the National Curriculum to be a benchmark not a straitjacket, a body of knowledge against which achievement can be measured.<sup>16</sup>

The review has taken place in the context of other complex ongoing reforms to public examinations, school organisation, testing and accountability systems. These are not covered in detail in this note, but key developments include:

- A review of KS2 assessment arrangements and the role of SATs undertaken by Lord Bew at the request of the Government. His final report was published in June 2011 and concluded that both summative teacher assessment and external forms of assessment had important roles to play.<sup>17</sup> The review team did not believe “that statutory assessment needs to rely only on one or other of these forms”.<sup>18</sup> It did not recommend scrapping KS2 tests, but did advocate that “at least as much weighting” should be given to progress as was given to attainment in assessments of the quality

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<sup>15</sup> *The Importance of Teaching. The Schools White Paper 2010*, November 2010, Cm 7980

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 40

<sup>17</sup> Lord Bew, *Independent Review of Key Stage 2 testing, assessment and accountability Final Report*, June 2011.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, Pp. 10



of education a school is providing.<sup>19</sup> His recommendations were accepted by the Government in full, who subsequently announced the following changes:

- replacing the current writing test with teacher assessment of writing composition from 2013 to ensure that pupils can be more creative and will overcome the dangers of teaching to the test. This teacher assessment will make up the larger part of the overall writing judgement.
  - introducing a test of some of the essential skills needed to become fluent, confident writers - spelling, grammar, punctuation and vocabulary. This will be trialled in 2012 so that it can be introduced in 2013.
  - publishing more data in the 2011 performance tables onwards, including new three-year rolling averages from 2012, to give a rounded picture of a school's performance
  - placing a greater emphasis on progress made by pupils
  - giving secondary schools teacher assessment judgements before test results, from 2012. This will mean there is more weight attached to them and allow longer for them to inform year 7 teaching and learning
  - primary schools providing more information on pupils' performance to secondary schools so year 7 teachers know right from the outset children's attainment and the areas where extra work is needed. This will start in summer 2013
  - trialling in 2012 of an extension to the testing period, so that pupils who are absent (eg due to illness) on the day of a test will have a week in which to sit it, rather than two days.<sup>20</sup>
- Changes to the 'floor standards' that primary schools are expected to meet. Floor standards describe minimum standards of attainment in English and maths. The percentage of children required to reach 'level 4' in these subjects at the end of KS2 in 2014 is 65 per cent. Schools must also demonstrate that the percentage of pupils making expected progress between KS1 and KS2 is at or above the national median.<sup>21</sup> In a [statement of 27 March 2014](#) the Schools' Minister, David Laws, said that progress measures would now be the "most important way" the Government held schools to account. From September 2016, new floor standards would be introduced.<sup>22</sup>
  - The introduction of a new reception baseline assessment from September 2016 onward.
  - Changes to the inspection framework for schools. A new framework, to be used by Ofsted during routine inspections, came into force in September 2012; it was last

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<sup>19</sup> Lord Bew, *Independent Review of Key Stage 2 testing, assessment and accountability Final Report*, June 2011, Pp 11.

<sup>20</sup> *Government response to Lord Bew key stage 2 review published*, 18 July 2011

<sup>21</sup> Standards and Testing Agency, *National curriculum assessments. Assessment and reporting arrangements. Key stage 2*, September 2013.

<sup>22</sup> *Primary and 16-to-19 Assessment and Accountability*, Written Ministerial Statement, 27 Mar 2014, c 36WS



updated in April 2014.<sup>23</sup> This has been accompanied by significant changes to the process of intervention when schools are underperforming.

- Major changes to the system of public examinations at KS4 and beyond. In September 2012, the Secretary of State **announced** that the Government intended to abolish GCSEs and replace them with new English Baccalaureate Certificates (EBCs).<sup>24</sup> On 7<sup>th</sup> February 2013 the Government confirmed it did not intend to proceed with this, but would instead reform existing GCSEs. The reformed qualifications would be linear in structure, and assessment would normally be undertaken at the end of the course.<sup>25</sup> There would also be a new secondary school accountability system. A timeline of reforms to GCSEs can be found on the exam regulator Ofqual's **website**.
- The roll-out of the academies and free schools programme. The Government has encouraged high-performing primary and secondary schools to voluntarily convert to 'academy' status; other schools can convert with the help of a sponsor or as part of an 'academy chain'. Schools which are deemed to be underperforming and 'eligible for intervention' can be required to convert to academy status.<sup>26</sup> Neither academies nor free schools are required to teach the National Curriculum.

### 3.2 NC Review Stages

The DfE formally announced its review of the NC on 20 January 2011 – a **press notice** outlined the review's scope and a timetable for action and stated that a clear motivation behind curriculum reform was to address England's apparent 'slide' down international education league tables.<sup>27</sup>

The original timelines were as follows:

- A 'first phase', which would consider the core subjects of English, maths and science, plus PE. These subjects would continue to have statutory programmes of study – albeit slimmed-down - and the aim would be for the new revised curricula in these subjects to be introduced from September 2013. The first phase would also consider whether other current NC subjects should remain compulsory, and if so, whether there should be statutory programmes of study for them.
- A 'second phase' starting in early 2012 to further consider other subjects and to produce draft statutory and non-statutory programmes of study with a view to these being taught in maintained schools in September 2014.

At the outset, the Government set up an advisory committee to steer the review, chaired by the DfE and including several head teachers in its membership. An expert panel was established alongside this to provide advice on evidence, chaired by Tim Oates, then Director of Assessment Research and Development for *Cambridge Assessment*. Other members of the expert panel were: Prof. Mary James, University of Cambridge and then President of the British Educational Research Association (BERA); Prof. Andrew Pollard,

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<sup>23</sup> The current versions of the framework is available from Ofsted's website: Ofsted, *Framework for school inspection*, April 2014.

<sup>24</sup> HC Deb 17 September 2013 c653-655. It is important to distinguish between EBCs and the EBACC; the latter is a current school performance measure, not a qualification in its own right.

<sup>25</sup> *Curriculum and exam reform*, Oral Statement by Michael Gove, HC Deb 7 Feb 2013 c 441

<sup>26</sup> 'Eligible for intervention' as defined in s 59 of the *Education and Inspections Act 2006*.

<sup>27</sup> DfE press release, *National curriculum review launched*, 20 January 2011.

Institute of Education; and Prof. Dylan William, Institute of Education. The DfE also launched a 'call for evidence'.<sup>28</sup>

On 19 December 2011, the DfE published several documents setting out the evidence gathered to date by the review. These included:

- The final **report** of the review's expert panel - setting out recommendations in relation to the framework for the new National Curriculum, which they urged should be debated further before decisions were made;<sup>29</sup>
- a **summary** of the evidence gathered about curricula for English, mathematics and science in 'high-performing jurisdictions'.
- a **research report** looking at subject breadth in the curricula used in other education jurisdictions;<sup>30</sup> and
- a **summary report** of the responses to the review's call for evidence.<sup>31</sup>

The Government also decided to change the timetable for the review. It announced that instead of new curricula for English, mathematics, science and PE being introduced from 2013, and the remainder in 2014, the new curriculum for all subjects would instead to be introduced in 2014.<sup>32</sup>

### 3.3 Expert panel initial report – December 2011

The expert panel's report, *The Framework for the National Curriculum*, was wide-ranging and made a number of recommendations, including:

- A new focus on five identified aims – see page 16 of the expert panel's **report**.
- Support for the Government's intention to set out a "core of essential knowledge to allow more scope for curricular provision determined at school or community level."<sup>33</sup>
- Reclassification of some subjects and areas of learning. In particular, citizenship education and design and technology should be removed from the NC and re-sited in the basic (statutory) curriculum but only at KS3 and KS4. ICT should also become part of the basic curriculum but that more thought be given to proposals to increase the amount of teaching of Computer Science in the secondary phase.
- Introduction of languages at 'upper KS2'
- Redesign of purpose and form of programmes of study, and scrapping of current attainment target system. Core subjects of English, maths and science should have detailed programmes of study and attainment targets; other foundation subjects

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<sup>28</sup> See: DfE press release, *National curriculum review launched*, 20 January 2011

<sup>29</sup> DfE, *The Framework for the National Curriculum. A report by the Expert Panel for the National Curriculum review*, December 2011

<sup>30</sup> DfE, *Review of the National Curriculum in England Report on subject breadth in international jurisdictions*, Research Report DFE-RR178a, December 2011

<sup>31</sup> DfE, *Review of the National Curriculum in England. Summary report of the call for evidence*, December 2011.

<sup>32</sup> *Schools: National Curriculum Review*, written ministerial statement by Michael Gove, HC Deb 19 December 2011, WS180

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp. 7

should have refined and condensed programmes of study, with minimal or no attached attainment targets.

- Greater breadth during the 14-16 phase of secondary education (KS4). Geography, history and modern foreign languages should be included as NC foundations subjects at KS4, with design and technology and ‘the arts’ being brought within the basic curriculum at this stage also.
- Changes to the Key Stages - in particular, splitting KS2 into two new stages, both of two years length, reducing KS3 by one year, and increasing KS4 by one year.
- An increased emphasis on oral language skills.

On the 11th June 2012, the Secretary of State wrote to the Chair of the Panel, Tim Oates, outlining his response to the recommendations. The [letter](#), available on the DfE website, congratulated the panel on the “superb work” it had done but stopped short of promising that all of its recommendations would be implemented.<sup>34</sup>

On the same date, the Government published draft programmes of study for the core subjects of English, maths and science at KS1 and KS2.<sup>35</sup> The drafts were described as a ‘starting point’ for discussion with key stakeholders. An accompanying [press release](#) outlined the thinking behind the draft documents, and summarised the major changes, which included:

- The introduction of ‘more demanding’ programmes of study in English, maths and sciences to better align England with other high-performing jurisdictions.
- ‘Raised standards’ in basics, including reading, grammar, fractions and scientific concepts. There would, for example, be a list of spellings to be learned by the end of primary, and in science a greater focus on the acquisition of appropriate knowledge with new content on the solar system, speed and evolution.<sup>36</sup>

The Government also suggested that the programmes of study for other foundation subjects such as history and music would contain far less detail than those for English, maths and science, meaning that schools would be freer to teach what they saw fit.

### 3.4 Reaction to the June 2012 proposals

The draft programmes of study attracted a very mixed response. An [article](#) in the Guardian reported that Prof Andrew Pollard (a member of the expert panel) had described the proposals as “fatally flawed” in showing insufficient consideration of the needs of learners, and described the programmes of study as “overly prescriptive”.<sup>37</sup> In response, the DfE said that the proposals would not act as a ‘rigid straitjacket’ for teachers, and that flexibility would remain for schools in how they covered the content.<sup>38</sup>

At this stage, it became apparent that there had been tensions for some time between the Government and some members of the expert panel; a series of letters between Prof Mary

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<sup>34</sup> [Letter from Secretary of State for Education to Tim Oates, Chair of the Expert Panel](#), 11 June 2012.

<sup>35</sup> The drafts are no longer available online.

<sup>36</sup> DfE press release, [New primary curriculum to bring higher standards in English, maths and science](#), 11 June 2012.

<sup>37</sup> [“Michael Gove’s curriculum attached by expert who advised him”](#), *The Guardian (online)*, 12 June 2012.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

James, Prof Andrew Pollard and the Secretary of State, outlining the issues, has been published on the BERA website. The BERA [website](#) states that the expert panel “as a whole” were “not involved in the development of the specific draft programmes of study and was not asked to endorse them”.<sup>39</sup>

Professor Robin Alexander of Cambridge University and Director of the Cambridge Primary Review, published a [critique](#) of a letter written by Michael Gove to accompany the publication of the programmes of study. In the letter, Prof Alexander said the Government had cited “selectively and tendentiously” from the international evidence in support of its case for reform, and had ignoring important contextual and cultural factors.<sup>40</sup>

A [press release](#) from the National Union of Teachers (NUT) said that much of what was proposed was already covered in primary schools but that there was a risk of creating “a task orientated curriculum” which would “simply stultify the learning process and, due to its inherent inflexibility, make it impossible for many children to achieve in the time and space they need”.<sup>41</sup>

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) gave more mixed responses. ASCL welcomed the emphasis on English, maths and languages at primary level but criticised the Government for not ‘seizing the opportunity’ to slim down the curriculum and for failing to make clear at this stage what the proposals in respect of the secondary curriculum were likely to be.<sup>42</sup> NAHT welcomed what it saw as a ‘leaner’ science curriculum, positive aspects of the English curriculum, assurances of no further statutory testing (SATs) and a concentration on *what* should be taught, as opposed to *how*. The union, however, thought that schools would need ‘time and support’ to deliver the curriculum’s ‘more demanding’ programmes and judged that much of the content was in fact not new.<sup>43</sup>

Other commentators welcomed the changes wholeheartedly. An [article](#) in *The Times* of 13 June 2012 argued that Gove had been ‘unfairly derided’ for the new primary school curriculum, which in fact should be praised for its level of ambition.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, an article for the *Financial Times*, commentator Stephen Robinson hailed the reforms for putting “proper content ...back into the curriculum”.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.5 February 2013 - first formal consultations

On 7 February 2013, the DfE published further draft programmes of study, this time for formal consultation, in a draft National Curriculum Framework Document. The documents can be viewed on the DfE [website](#). For the first time, draft programmes of study for foundation subjects such as history, geography and music were released, as were the long-awaited secondary programmes, with the exception of maths, science and English at KS4.

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<sup>39</sup> BERA website article, [Background to Michael Gove’s response to the Report of the Expert Panel for the National Curriculum Review in England](#), undated.

<sup>40</sup> Robin Alexander/ Cambridge Primary Review, [Neither national nor a curriculum? Response to the Secretary of State’s National Curriculum proposals for England](#), June 2012.

<sup>41</sup> NUT, [Primary curriculum – press release](#), 11 June 2012

<sup>42</sup> See ASCL press release, [Primary curriculum only half the picture](#), 11 June 2012

<sup>43</sup> NAHT website article, [Curriculum proposals must now be tested by the professionals, says NAHT](#), 11 June 2012.

<sup>44</sup> [“Be ambitious: spell ‘conscience’, learn Keats”](#), *The Times* (online – subscription required), 13 June 2012.

<sup>45</sup> [“Gove’s back-to-basics drive is just what education needs”](#), *Financial Times* (online – subscription required), 16 June 2012.

A [consultation](#) on the programmes of study ran from 7 February to 16 April 2013, and generated a very large number of responses.<sup>46</sup> It also asked for views on a number of other issues including implementation of the changes, assessment arrangements, and the planned disapplication of certain curriculum requirements during the transition year 2013 -14. Draft programmes of study for the core subjects of English, maths and science at KS4 were published on 19 February 2013 but these were not included in the formal consultation.

Again, the proposals proved highly controversial and generated strong feeling among commentators – particularly with respect to the proposed subject content. On 20 March 2013, *The Independent* published a highly critical [letter](#) signed by a large number of academics about the curriculum proposals.<sup>47</sup> The letter’s authors criticised what they saw as the new curriculum’s “endless lists of spellings, facts and rules” and “mountain[s] of data” which would not develop young children’s understanding and expected “too much too young”. Michael Gove responded to his critics in a strongly worded [article](#) for the Daily Mail on 23 March 2013.<sup>48</sup>

During the consultation process, the curricula for some subjects – including history, design and technology, and science – generated particularly intense debate. The *Historical Association*, in its [consultation response](#) raised a number of concerns, describing the content as “dry and uninspiring”, “anglo-centric” and with a “distinct lack of world history”. It also judged that the “strictly chronological approach [was] unworkable”.<sup>49</sup>

A coalition of bodies involved in science teaching and research, *Score*, also submitted a [response](#).<sup>50</sup> *Score* welcomed the aims of the curriculum review and the focus on ‘working scientifically’ throughout the curriculum, but raised concerns about the amount of input subject specialists had had, and the potential for the addition of extra content to lead to a “superficial” understanding of the subject.

The DfE’s [report](#) on the consultation gives a summary of responses received in relation to each subject. The report notes that respondents did broadly support aspects of the changes, for example: the inclusion of personal financial literacy in the draft citizenship curriculum; the inclusion of computer science with programming content and a focus on e-safety; the focus on developing a love of reading in the draft primary and KS3 English programmes; the draft music programmes; the slimmed-down nature of the PE curriculum; the aims and the “greater focus on rigour and depth” in the draft programmes for maths (although there were also concerns about the content being too challenging for lower-achieving pupils).<sup>51</sup>

### **3.6 July 2013 – second formal consultation**

On 10 July 2013, the DfE published the [summary report](#) of responses received to the consultation. In response to the consultation outcome, the Government confirmed it had

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<sup>46</sup> DfE consultation document, *Reform of the National Curriculum in England*, 7 Feb 2013

<sup>47</sup> Letter from Prof. Michael Bassey and 99 others, “Gove will bury pupils in facts and rules”, *The Independent* (online), 20 March 2013

<sup>48</sup> Article by Michael Gove, “I refuse to surrender to the Marxist teachers hell-bent on destroying our schools: Education Secretary berates ‘the new enemies of promise’ for opposing his plans.”, *Daily Mail (Online)*, 23 March 2013.

<sup>49</sup> [Response](#) of the Historical Association to the DfE (February 2013) consultation on the National Curriculum review, 16 April 2013.

<sup>50</sup> [Response](#) by Score to the DfE (February 2013) consultation on the National Curriculum review, 16 April 2013. Score partners include: the Association for Science Education; the Institute of Physics; Royal Society; Royal Society of Chemistry; and the Society of Biology.

<sup>51</sup> DfE, *Reform of the national curriculum in England/ Report of the consultation conducted February – April 2013*, July 2013, Pps 6-9.



made further changes to the programmes of study, and was launching another short consultation which would end in August 2013. Changes made from the February 2013 drafts included:

- More emphasis in primary English on spoken language skills and further content on vocabulary development.
- Revisions to design and technology programmes in response to concerns that it lacked aspiration and was insufficiently flexible. The changes, said the Government, had been made in consultation with design and engineering associations, and industrial representatives.
- Removed a previous limitation on the languages that could be offered at KS2 – schools would now have free choice.
- Added explicit references to Geography KS3 curriculum.
- Revised the history programmes in response to concerns that earlier drafts were too prescriptive, slimmed down the overall content and included additional content on world history while retaining a core focus on “teaching the history of Britain and its relationship with the world in a clear chronological framework.”<sup>52</sup>

On 17<sup>th</sup> July 2013 the Government also published final [proposals](#) for primary assessment and accountability arrangements under the new curriculum, for consultation.<sup>53</sup> Earlier plans to scrap the current NC attainment target level descriptors, and not replace them, were confirmed. The document explains the rationale behind this move:

Our new national curriculum is designed to give schools genuine opportunities to take ownership of the curriculum. The new programmes of study set out what pupils should be taught by the end of each key stage. Teachers will be able to develop a school curriculum that delivers the core content in a way that is challenging and relevant for their pupils. Imposing a single system for ongoing assessment, in the way that national curriculum levels are built into the current curriculum and prescribe a detailed sequence for what pupils should be taught, is incompatible with this curriculum freedom. How schools teach their curriculum and track the progress pupils make against it will be for them to decide.<sup>54</sup>

The document restated the Government’s intention to continue with NC tests at the end of KS1 and 2 (SATs), although they would be modified to reflect the content of the new curriculum. The first tests based on the new NC would take place in the summer of 2016. The DfE says these tests will be “more demanding, with a higher and more ambitious expected standard.”<sup>55</sup>

The document also proposed significant changes to the way that the outcomes of the tests are reported. In particular, NC test results would be reported against a ‘scaled score’; the national cohort would be divided into ‘deciles’ (10 ‘bands’) and parents would be told which band their child fell into. The consultation on the assessment and accountability arrangements ran from 7 June 2013 to 11 October 2013.

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<sup>52</sup> See DfE, *Reform of the national curriculum in England. Government response to the consultation conducted February – April 2013*, July 2013, Pp. 6

<sup>53</sup> DfE, *Primary assessment and accountability under the new national curriculum*, 17 July 2013.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp 5.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, Pp 7.

### 3.7 Final curriculum documents published

On 11 September 2013, the Government published [summary findings](#) of the consultation on the revised programmes of study and attainment targets.<sup>56</sup> Alongside this, it released the [finalised NC documents and programmes of study](#) for introduction from September 2014 – English, maths and science at KS4 were not included. Details were given in a [written statement](#) on 12 September 2013.<sup>57</sup> The DfE has also published brief [guidance](#), last updated in March 2014, for schools on the National Curriculum and assessment arrangements for September 2014 and beyond.<sup>58</sup>

Final drafts of the KS4 maths and English programmes were [published](#) on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2013 and are the subject of a separate public consultation which closed in February 2014. Their publication followed the release, on 1 November 2013 of new subject content specifications for English language, English literature and mathematics GCSEs.<sup>59</sup> The final KS4 maths and English programmes are expected to be published by the end of July 2014 for first teaching in September 2015. The Science KS4 programme is expected to be published by the end of 2014 with first teaching from September 2016.<sup>60</sup>

On 26 September 2013, the DfE Standards and Testing Agency also published statutory guidance on the assessment and reporting arrangements for [KS1](#) and [KS2](#) for September 2014. The Government also [consulted](#) on introducing a ‘baseline check’ for reception-aged children, so that progress between entry and the end of KS2 can be tracked more accurately, and confirmed in March 2014 that it would introduce this. Schools that opt out of the baseline check will be judged against a new 85 per cent attainment target at the end of KS2 alone.<sup>61, 62</sup>

### 3.8 Training for teachers on the new curriculum

A PQ of 7 April 2014 gives details on support for training on the new curriculum:

Asked by Lord Quirk

To ask Her Majesty’s Government, further to the remark by Lord Nash on 9 July 2013 (HL Deb, col 225), that they “are focusing heavily on ensuring that teachers have the resources to deliver the new curriculum,” how they have (1) identified, and (2) supplied, the resources needed by teachers of (a) maths, and (b) English.[HL6359]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools (Lord Nash) (Con): The new national curriculum sets out very clearly what should be taught to pupils. However, it deliberately gives teachers the flexibility to decide how to teach it. We expect schools to identify the support that they need to prepare for the new curriculum, recognising that different schools will face different challenges.

The Department for Education has provided funding to teaching schools to work with their alliances and beyond, and we have been signposting schools to the range of free

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<sup>56</sup> DfE, *Reforming the national curriculum in England. Summary report of the July to August 2013 consultation on the new programmes of study and attainment targets from September 2014*, 11 September 2013.

<sup>57</sup> *Education Reform (Schools)*, Written Ministerial Statement, HC Deb 12 Sep 2013: c54WS

<sup>58</sup> DfE *National Curriculum and assessment from September 2014: information for schools*, updated 21 March 2014.

<sup>59</sup> See: *Reformed GCSEs in English and mathematics*, Written Ministerial Statement by Michael Gove, 1 November 2013, HC Deb 1 Nov 2013, c62-63WS

<sup>60</sup> See: DfE *National curriculum and assessment from September 2014: information for schools*, March 2014.

<sup>61</sup> DfE, *Primary assessment and accountability under the new National Curriculum*, July 2013. The consultation closed on 11 October 2013.

<sup>62</sup> See *Primary and 16-to-19 Assessment and Accountability*, Written Ministerial Statement by David Laws, 27 Mar 2014, c 36WS



support that is available in English and mathematics including the resources developed by the

National Literacy Trust and the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics. The sector-led expert subject groups have been providing audit tools and guidance, and publishers are bringing a variety of new materials to market.

The Government is funding a national network of around 30 Maths Hubs to drive up the quality of mathematics teachers. Each hub will be led by an outstanding school and will provide support to all schools in the area, across all areas of mathematics education. Systematic phonics has been emphasised in the teaching of early reading in the new national curriculum because evidence shows that it is the most effective way of teaching all children to begin to read. We have provided match-funding of £23 million to primary schools to purchase high quality phonics resources.<sup>63</sup>

A [PQ of 29 October 2013](#) gives further details:

**Nic Dakin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education pursuant to the answer of 2 September 2013, *Official Report*, column 69W, on the curriculum, whether any new sources of funding will be provided to assist schools in providing training for teachers; and if he will make a statement. [172786]

**Elizabeth Truss:** The Department for Education recognises that the high expectations set by the new national curriculum will present challenges for some schools. To assist them, existing opportunities funded by Government in core subjects are being adapted to reflect the requirements of the new curriculum. For example, the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics (NCETM) has a range of support for schools. The match funding scheme of £3,000 for phonics materials and training has been extended until October 2013. We have made £2 million available to recruit 400 master teachers in computer science over the next two years. We also announced a further £2 million to support teaching schools to take forward the delivery of the new curriculum in their alliances, and in March we announced £150 million per year of ring-fenced funding for primary school sport.

Beyond this, we will not be rolling out a national support programme for all schools, as the Government believe that schools are best placed to decide which professional development meets their needs.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> [HL Deb 7 April 2014 c WA251](#)

<sup>64</sup> [HC Deb 29 Oct 2013 c 433W](#)