Curriculum and Assessment Review

Analysis of Call for Evidence responses

Prepared for the Curriculum and Assessment Review by Alma Economics

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Executive summary

Background

The Curriculum and Assessment Review (the Review) was set up by the Department for Education (DfE) to review the national curriculum and statutory assessment system in England, including qualification pathways. The Review sought to identify the most significant and pressing issues facing the curriculum and assessment, considering children and young people's education and experiences from the age of 5 to 19. The Review launched the public Call for Evidence to capture the perspectives of expert stakeholders and the wider public. It was open from 25 September to
22 November 2024.

The goal of the Call for Evidence was to further the Review's understanding of the strengths of the current system, as well as to identify areas that most need to change. Alma Economics, an independent research consultancy, was commissioned to analyse the responses to this Call for Evidence.

Profile of respondents

The Call for Evidence was open to the public and received 7,021 responses, including through an online platform hosted by Citizen Space and directly via email. Duplicated responses were then removed by the research team.

As part of the Call for Evidence, respondents could select whether they were answering as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. Overall, 5,327 individuals (76%) and 1,694 organisations (24%) responded to the Call for Evidence. The research team also identified 53 respondents who classified themselves as both individuals and organisations.

The most common individual respondent type was teacher, tutor or lecturer (35%), followed by those who selected multiple categories (25%), and parents or carers (15%).[1] Those that selected "other" (5%) included i) retired school staff (e.g. teachers, headteachers), ii) active headteachers, iii) school governors and iv) special educational needs and disabilities co-ordinators (SENDCOs). The most common organisational respondent type was charity, social enterprise organisation

[1] In this report, for readability, respondent types have been abbreviated when referenced in the thematic analysis. These include "teacher, tutor or lecturer" to "teacher", "parent or carer" to "parent", "researcher, academic or education export" to "academic" and "student, pupil or learner" to "student".

or not-for-profit (28%), with the next being “other” (18%). Examples of this group included i) museums, ii) governing bodies and iii) arm’s length bodies.

The Call for Evidence: questions

The Call for Evidence included 54 questions (9 demographic and 45 requesting respondents’ views) across eight sections. The sections and related areas of inquiry are summarised below:

1. About you: demographic information on respondents.
2. General views on the curriculum, assessment, and qualifications pathways: looking into general strengths and improvement areas across the board.
3. Social justice and inclusion: exploring barriers and enablers faced by students with diverse characteristics.
4. Ensuring an excellent foundation in Maths and English: emphasising Maths and English curriculum and assessment across Key Stages 1 to 4.
5. Curriculum and qualification content: looking into the nature and volume of qualification content, and views on their adequacy in preparing students for work and life.
6. A broad and balanced curriculum: inviting views on the breadth and depth of curricula (including primary and secondary), and qualification pathways.
7. Assessment and accountability: inviting views on assessment and qualification content and related areas of improvement, across key stages and subjects.
8. Qualification pathways 16-19: exploring the adequacy and effectiveness of qualification pathways, and inviting suggestions for improvement.
9. Other issues: exploring the role of technology, suggestions for wraparound support, and other views respondents may have.

A summary of responses to questions in each section is set out in this report.

Approach to reporting and limitations

The analysis of responses to the Call for Evidence was done by way of thematic analysis, where responses for every question were coded with certain themes. The core themes were then ordered by prevalence in each case. The reporting, therefore, reflects the prevalence and/or frequency with which these themes were repeated by respondents answering the specific question.

There are several important issues to note:

- The responses submitted to a public Call for Evidence are not representative of the overall population or any specific group, and responses from some areas or groups may be under- or over-represented. It is also worth noting that respondents with stronger views on the subject are typically most likely to respond to a public Call for Evidence.
- Information was not fact-checked; all views should be treated as subjective experiences. It was sometimes unclear whether those identifying as organisations were responding in an official capacity. In particular, the research team aimed to summarise rather than interpret or make any claims as to the factual accuracy of views presented by respondents.
- Many respondents did not answer parts, or sometimes all, of the questions set out, which meant analysis of these responses was limited.
- Respondents could answer some or all of the questions. This meant that there could be different respondents answering different questions, so while the answers across questions can sometimes appear contradictory, it means simply that different respondents are sharing differing views.
- When ordering themes by prevalence in the report, the relative magnitude of responses for each theme has been reported by descriptors such as “few”, “some” and “many”. There is no precise quantification of these terms. However, indicatively, “a few” (and phrases such as “one suggestion”, “for example”) is likely to mean less than 5% of respondents answering the specific question mentioned the theme; “some” is likely to mean 5% to 30-40%, and “many” may mean more than 30-40% of respondents mentioned the theme. These thresholds are high-level and vary by question.
- Across all questions, the most prevalent themes were typically shared across all respondent subgroups (see respondent profile above) answering the question. However, in cases where there was a distinct respondent subgroup more likely to have a view in comparison to others, and/or where the most prevalent theme had varying nuances among respondent subgroups, this has been specifically clarified in the reporting.
- Where attribution to respondent types was specified (i.e. “the most common theme, particularly for teachers…”), this refers to the fact that teachers were more likely to mention this theme compared to other respondent subgroups. It does not mean this was the most common theme mentioned by teachers in their responses.

Section 1: General views on the curriculum, assessment and qualifications pathways

This first substantive section asked two broad questions about respondents' perceptions of what was working well, and what should be targeted for change, across the full curriculum, qualifications pathways and assessment system across Key Stages 1 to 4 and 16-19 education.

Across this section, three themes were expressed most consistently by respondents:

- While access to a diversity of subjects is a strength, the curriculum needs to improve the balance between this breadth and the depth in which it is possible for topics to be taught or learnt.
- Assessment is needed, but the current system provides limited options and places too much pressure on students and teachers.
- Children and young people should have access to wide-ranging and flexible qualification pathways.

10. What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system, and c) qualification pathways are working well to support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

As well as responses commenting in detail on the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, a significant minority of responses simply suggested that the overall system was working well, or that it was not working well, rather than raising more specific points. There was a broad balance between positive and negative sentiments.

Curriculum

The most frequent theme across all respondent types was positivity around the breadth of the curriculum. Respondents noted that the diversity of subjects taught supported well-rounded development and helped provide a range of opportunities for students to succeed. Some also praised what they felt to be a clear framework for progression provided by the curriculum, which could be easily understood by students, parents, teachers and employers, and allowed students in different schools to have similar educational opportunities.

Among respondents who mentioned specific subjects as working well, the most commonly discussed was English/literacy**.** Many respondents directed specific praise to the role of phonics in teaching literacy, and the phonics screening check was

generally seen as working very well. There was widespread support for the emphasis on English as a foundational skill as well as positivity around the continued emphasis on English as a mandatory subject at secondary school.

Maths was also frequently suggested to be working well and rightly given significant emphasis at both primary and secondary school levels. At primary level, respondents specifically referenced the multiplication tables check as working well, and that the mastery approach to Maths had helped pupils understand core concepts. Other examples mentioned by respondents included Maths hubs and the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics (NCETM) as helpful resources for Maths education.

Finally, in addition to English and Maths, a smaller number of respondents also mentioned Science, History, and Design and Technology (D&T) as specific subjects that were working well, among others.

Assessment and accountability

Most respondents who expressed positive feedback for assessment felt that the current system of formal assessment provided a clear and consistent benchmark of students' starting points and progress over time. Respondents also mentioned the importance of having assessment results that were widely recognised by employers and higher education institutions. Some respondents referenced the Progress 8 measure, feeling this was a fair measure to compare schools. These respondents thought Progress 8 helped promote both breadth in subjects studied and equity across students, by helping schools focus on improving the performance of all students in their overall strategy.

Qualification pathways

For respondents who discussed qualification pathways, a common view was that vocational and applied qualification pathways, i.e. BTECs, apprenticeships, and T Levels, were working well.

A significant number of respondents noted that it was important to offer different pathways that could support students with varying educational backgrounds and aspirations. Some respondents praised the introduction of Gatsby Benchmarks to ensure that students had access to effective career Information, Advice and Guidance. These respondents felt that the benchmarks allowed students to make connections between what they were taught in the classroom and future career pathways, allowing them to make more informed decisions about potential next steps in their education or career.

11. What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways should be targeted for improvements to better support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

Respondents raised a broad range of specific issues related to the curriculum, the assessment system and qualification pathways. In general, respondents did not address each part of the question but answered by listing specific issues.

Curriculum

Respondents, particularly primary schools, senior leaders, and teachers, frequently expressed concern that the curriculum required too much content to be taught**.** The most common stages flagged as having too much content were Key Stages 1, 2 and 4. Some specifically discussed challenges in covering the required maths content to prepare pupils for the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2. These respondents felt that the primary Maths curriculum did not provide enough time to reinforce basic concepts that were required for future mathematics education.

Another widely raised concern was a belief that the EBacc, as well as other accountability measures such as Progress 8, limited students' access to and time for vocational qualifications, creative subjects or content that better reflected the skills and knowledge required for modern society. Some respondents felt there was not a transparent rationale around which subjects were included in the EBacc. A perceived need for cross-curriculum learning was also frequently cited. These respondents felt that making connections between subjects, particularly for Maths and writing, would increase student engagement and reinforce learning by mirroring real-world applications.

Other respondents mentioned a wide range of subjects and skills that they felt were not sufficiently covered in the curriculum, including financial literacy, digital literacy, critical thinking and oracy. A more in-depth analysis of subject-specific themes raised by respondents has been included in Sections 4 and 5.

Assessment and accountability

Many respondents expressed concern about a perceived overemphasis on testing. Examples included the perceived unreliability of data from the national tests in predicting student performance in Year 7. Respondents also described possible negative impacts of ranking student assessment performance on a distribution curve. Others suggested that assessments were not an effective way to support lower-attaining students. Some respondents felt that the focus of the English

Baccalaureate (EBacc) was too narrow. Others felt that changing grade boundaries and thresholds from year to year unfairly hurt student progression, and many of these respondents called for an outcomes-based approach to qualifications based on meeting competencies.

Qualification pathways

For respondents who discussed improvements to qualification pathways, the most common theme was the importance of more flexible vocational and applied qualifications. Respondents felt that students were potentially being forced to specialise or choose a specific career pathway too soon (particularly for T Levels) and that changes needed to be made to ensure students had access to a diverse range of pathways aligned to their interests and strengths. For example, some respondents thought that lack of flexibility in qualifications made it difficult for students to prepare effectively and to meet needs of local employers.

A further concern raised by numerous respondents was the perception that non-academic pathways were insufficiently valued, in part due to the focus of Progress 8 and EBacc on more academic subjects. For example, respondents pointed out that GCSEs were valued more highly than Tech Awards as part of school performance tables, or that employers were not sure how to compare the equivalence of T Levels and A Levels. Some respondents also noted challenges around frequent changes to vocational and technical qualifications, which they felt led to a fragmented system that students and employers did not know how to navigate.

Some respondents also argued that increasing the minimum percentage of external assessment for Tech Awards (to 40%) had weakened the ability of vocational qualification pathways to support a diverse range of students. Similarly, a few respondents felt that the assessment burden on T Levels was too high, posing challenges for both students and providers, and thought that as a result fewer students would be able to successfully complete these qualifications.

Section 2: Social justice and inclusion

This section invited views across four questions on barriers to access, attainment and progression faced by students with diverse characteristics. The target student groups included students facing socio-economic disadvantage, students with other marginalised characteristics (including race, ethnicity, disability, gender), and students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Views were also invited on potential enablers in place for such students. Across this section, the thematic analysis revealed the following common barriers perceived by respondents:

- the non-inclusive nature of curriculum and assessment
- the inflexibility of the curriculum; and
- the inflexibility of assessment formats.

The thematic analysis for questions across this section also showed that some barriers that were most frequently noted were outside the scope of the Review. Examples of these barriers include public funding, experiences of discrimination in classrooms, and limited access to resources for learners to access supplementary learning material. These wider barriers have been reported in the specific cases where they were overwhelmingly highlighted by respondents. While these wider barriers are beyond the scope of the questions asked, in that they may not specifically relate to curriculum, assessment, and qualification systems, they highlight factors that respondents felt compound other existing barriers they face in these areas.

It is worth noting that the most commonly identified barriers were not always separately structured by type of barrier, and cut across curriculum, assessment systems, and qualification pathways. These have been reported according to the prevalence and frequency with which they were mentioned by respondents, and then structured under type of barrier, where possible.

12. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation (class ceilings) for learners experiencing socio-economic disadvantage?

Barriers in the curriculum

Respondents commonly felt that the inflexibility of the curriculum acted as a barrier. In the specific context of this question, the curriculum was felt to be inflexible to the

extent of being highly focused on academic subjects and homework. Many respondents noted that the high academic focus means that the curriculum did not hone other natural or practical skillsets gained from students' lived experiences. This view was more common among individual respondents, including teachers, parents, senior leaders and local authority officers.

Barriers in the assessment system

Another common view was that the assessment system was not fit for purpose for students who were socio-economically disadvantaged. The assessment system was seen to focus on testing some skills, which respondents believed could isolate some students who were not able to afford the resources or support required to successfully develop these skills. For example, learners facing socio-economic disadvantage were perceived to have limited exposure to vocabulary and spoken language, which could affect their ability to pass these exams and perpetuate the cycle of exclusion.

A notable point put forward by organisational respondents was that socio-economic disadvantage could overlap with other inequalities such as disability. For example, students with disabilities could often require access to assistive equipment and other resources that might be unaffordable for socio-economically disadvantaged families.

Other wider barriers (beyond the scope of the Review)

Respondents across subgroups most commonly mentioned limited public funding as a barrier for schools in less affluent areas and/or those that had a higher number of learners facing socio-economic disadvantage. Relatedly, another commonly cited barrier was the inability of learners to afford resources and supplementary learning material required to effectively engage in the curriculum. This was a common view held across respondent types. It was more frequently noted by teachers, senior leaders, parents and organisations.

13. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation which may disproportionately impact pupils based on other characteristics (e.g. disability, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion or belief, etc.)

Barriers in the curriculum

Most respondents across all respondent types answering this question perceived the curriculum as having barriers related to inclusivity. Explaining this, one commonly mentioned challenge was a low representation of individuals from diverse backgrounds in course material. Course material was also widely noted as being Anglocentric, particularly in English, History and Art, without authentic and/or inclusive representation of global cultures and geographies. The lack of representation was believed to lead pupils and learners from diverse racial and/or ethnic backgrounds to engage with the curriculum and contents in a limited way. Some respondents suggested that the curriculum should offer greater opportunities for discussions on race, colonialism and migration to increase students' awareness about global power dynamics and the roots of current inequalities. The current requirement for schools to be politically impartial was noted to complicate teaching, as its scope was seen as unclear, meaning some issues may be unfairly deemed 'political', such as anti-racist movements, and therefore excluded.

Barriers in the form of non-inclusive curricula were also noted for students with diverse sexual orientations. Respondents particularly highlighted challenges with subjects such as sex education, which were felt not to be representative of LGBTQ+ groups.

Respondents noted the impact of not having English as a first language – particularly for pupils belonging to immigrant households and/or ethnic or racial minority backgrounds. The curriculum's focus on English was perceived to add to this disadvantage, as respondents noted that these students could find it difficult to engage effectively with course material and/or curriculum content that focused on English. These barriers were thought to apply to other subjects as well. Relatedly, a few respondents suggested that the diversity of languages in the classroom should be more celebrated, with greater study of how languages work and the value of linguistic diversity. Similarly, limited additional support for such pupils or learners to access support for English as an additional language (EAL) was believed to further disadvantage such learners. A smaller proportion of respondents also highlighted the need for support relating to oracy.

Barriers in the assessment system

Respondents commonly believed that exam formats were inflexible and did not accommodate the needs and interests of learners from diverse backgrounds. The concentrated focus on English in testing formats was perceived to disadvantage those learners who might not have access to foundational English and/or a wide vocabulary. Similarly, testing methods and structures were reported as being highly disadvantageous for students with disabilities (including physical and/or learning disabilities). The perceived emphasis on recall rather than creativity and criticality was considered to particularly disadvantage some learners.

Other wider barriers

Respondents frequently highlighted experiences of exclusion in classrooms. Respondents most likely to raise these observations were parents and charities. For instance, various respondents observed that pupils of colour were disproportionately likely to be excluded from school.

Another barrier frequently cited by respondents was the limited support for students with disabilities and additional needs. One common example mentioned by respondents was the lack of specialist staff available for students with disabilities and/or additional needs. Responses from organisations, in particular, suggested that data should be used to identify pupils in need of early intervention, which may not necessarily align with protected characteristics. For example, groups associated with poorer early literacy outcomes included boys and those who were young in their year group.

14. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers in continuing to improve attainment, progress, access or participation for learners with SEND?

Respondents identified a wide range of barriers for learners with SEND. Many felt strongly that the current system was failing learners with SEND, arguing that a “one-size-fits-all” approach disadvantaged those who could not thrive within that system.

Barriers in the curriculum

Noting the inflexibility of the curriculum as a key barrier, most respondents across all respondent types stated that learners were expected to learn too much, too quickly, and learners with SEND might fall behind (particularly at key stage transitions) and be unable to catch up. Some felt that the curriculum was overly academic, which did

not suit learners with SEND. Additionally, respondents felt that the emphasis on English and Maths, including the requirements to attain certain grades to progress, could have a disproportionately negative effect on learners with SEND who might be struggling with these subjects (particularly those with dyslexia, dyscalculia and other learning disabilities). Respondents suggested that vocational, creative and practical subjects could often be more suitable for learners with SEND. While this view was commonly held across all respondent types, it was cited by a higher proportion of organisational respondents.

Barriers in assessments

Among respondents discussing assessments, particularly higher education (HE) and further education (FE) institutions, the most common view was that exam-based assessments were not suitable for pupils with SEND. These respondents cited various reasons, including the mode of learning required (e.g. learning by heart), having to sit still for hours to take the exam and the pressure to perform on a specific day and time.

While it was outside the scope of the Review, some respondents expressed concern that the education, health and care plan (EHCP) assessment system did not seem to be working. These respondents noted that students were generally unable to access support without a formal diagnosis and plan which can take a long time to secure.

Other wider barriers

Other barriers cited were outside the scope of the Review. For example, a commonly cited barrier was the lack of funding for specialist support in mainstream schools, along with limited training for school staff and availability of specialist support staff. This was a common viewpoint among those working in the wider education sector workforce, teachers and senior leaders.

Some respondents believed that the classroom environment in many mainstream schools, particularly at secondary level, was unsuitable and challenging for some students with SEND. These respondents noted concerns about class sizes in mainstream schools, resulting in teachers and SENDCOs not always being able to give adequate support to pupils with SEND alongside teaching the rest of the class. A small proportion of respondents highlighted the need for physical accessibility in ageing school buildings, and others noted the need for considerations for sensory sensitivities.

15. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any enablers that support attainment, progress, access or participation for the groups listed above?[2]

While respondents discussed a small number of enablers to support the attainment, progress, access or participation of the relevant groups, they most frequently highlighted a lack of enablers. This view was held equally by both individual and organisational respondents. The most commonly cited enablers cut across factors relating to the curriculum, assessment and qualifications and have been reported below, according to the prevalence with which they were cited.

Among the enablers discussed by respondents, the most common related to school staff. While this is outside the scope of the Review, many respondents, particularly individual respondents, mentioned supportive and dedicated school staff, and valuing trusting relationships with learners, as enablers. Relatedly, respondents also mentioned that the availability of specialist staff, such as well-trained SENDCOs, teaching assistants and family support workers, could be a strong enabler where in place.

Several respondents, particularly organisations, identified the access to vocational, practical and creative subjects as an enabler, highlighting that these subjects were often more appropriate for learners with SEND. Relatedly, the availability of different qualification pathways, including T Levels and GCSEs, was identified as an enabler, allowing learners with SEND to choose educational journeys that are right for them.

Some respondents highlighted that greater focus on coursework rather than exams could be an enabler for learners with SEND. The Applied General Qualifications (AGQ) assessment model and its modular approach were a specific example mentioned as beneficial for many learners with SEND and others.

Respondents also identified some aspects of the curriculum that could act as enablers. These included personal development, social-emotional learning and life skills. Some respondents also cited evidence that non-qualification activities (e.g. work experience, extra-curricular activities) could be beneficial for engagement and attainment. Other respondents highlighted that the English curriculum in primary schools, particularly in phonics, oracy and reading, had been successful in building these skills amongst a diverse range of pupils. In identifying subjects as enablers, some respondents, particularly students, highlighted the importance of teaching

[2] Responses to this question most commonly mentioned SEND learners, suggesting that respondents may have interpreted this question as being specifically about enablers for SEND learners, due to its placement immediately after the question on SEND barriers.

and activities relating to diversity, equality and inclusion, such as days celebrating global cultures.

Examples of targeted funding streams mentioned by respondents included the pupil premium and other targeted funding streams (such as the 16-19 bursary fund). Respondents noted that these could serve as invaluable support for disadvantaged learners. However, other respondents questioned whether funding was being used appropriately within schools. While this suggestion was broadly made across all respondent groups, it was more frequently voiced by individual respondents, such as teachers and senior leaders.

Respondents also mentioned tailored support and interventions (such as the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, mentoring programmes, technological support and other evidence-based programmes) as enablers, particularly those focused on early intervention. Relatedly, flexible and personalised learning approaches and accommodations in exams, such as additional time and availability of laptops, were felt to be effective in encouraging pupils with SEND to engage and achieve their potential.

A small number of respondents highlighted collaboration with other schools and agencies, such as local authorities and independent organisations, as an enabler. Respondents noted that this collaboration could enable shared learning to support socio-economically disadvantaged pupils, as well as drawing on expert knowledge in specific subject areas.

Section 3: Ensuring an excellent foundation in Maths and English

This section invited responses, through six questions, on the extent to which the current curriculum and assessment system provides a strong basis in English and Maths, noting the centrality of these subjects to education, work and life. At primary level (Key Stages 1 and 2), questions related to the provision of a strong foundation in both subjects, while at secondary level (Key Stages 3 and 4) questions referred to embedding knowledge and skills for life and further study. Respondents were asked how qualifications at pre-16 and 16-19 support pupils to gain and demonstrate skills, and how qualifications support those who do not achieve level 2. Finally, respondents were asked about barriers for learners in need of additional support. Suggestions were also invited on how to address barriers.

Across this section, four themes were expressed most consistently by respondents:

- While breadth, high standards and standardisation could contribute to good foundations, at times excessive breadth and complexity were felt to make embedding foundational knowledge more difficult.
- Negative experiences with the curriculum and assessments could potentially limit pupils' capacity to learn.
- Assessments were believed to not always test or encourage meaningful learning.
- Flexible curricula and alternative qualification pathways could help pupils develop diverse skillsets.

16. To what extent does the content of the national curriculum at primary level (Key Stages 1 and 2) enable pupils to gain an excellent foundation in a) English and b) maths? Are there ways in which the content could change to better support this aim? Please note, we invite views specifically on transitions between key stages in section 9.

A considerable minority expressed a general view that the curriculum for English and Maths is working well. Where specifics were provided, some commented that the English curriculum provided a good foundation in the basics, while others noted that the high standards instilled by the broad and complex curriculum had led to improved attainment.

There were divided opinions around phonics. Some respondents felt that this approach was working well and highlighted it as a key success. However, others felt that there was too much emphasis on phonics and did not believe that phonics worked for every pupil. Sometimes, both positive and negative sentiments were expressed in the same response. As a suggestion for improvement, one example mentioned by respondents was incorporating phonological awareness alongside phonics to ensure holistic capabilities.

While some respondents identified positives in these subjects, including successes with phonics and a general belief that a good foundation was being provided, a greater number of responses referred to issues and possible changes to support this aim.

The most commonly cited issue across both the English and Maths curricula was a perception that one or both was too broad and/or too difficult. Respondents felt there was too much content being covered, which limited time to consolidate knowledge and ensure pupils truly understood what they were learning before moving on. This was noted to lead to increased inequality, as pupils who were struggling at early stages did not have opportunities to catch up before moving to higher key stages. It was suggested that the curriculum be more aligned with pupils' developmental stages and more focused on embedding understanding. Relatedly, many felt that the curriculum should be more adaptable according to individual needs, abilities and interests, rather than all pupils following the same prescribed path, even when it did not suit them. In particular, it was felt that the primary curriculum could negatively affect pupils with SEND and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds who might struggle to engage with the curriculum's pace and complexity.

To address this, one example raised by respondents was moving to a system with more optional content, with the caveat that caution should be taken not to reduce the richness of knowledge available for pupils from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Some noted that perceived oversaturation of the curriculum might be more related to assessment and accountability structures (e.g. that schools feel obliged to cover everything to ensure high test scores, even if not technically required).

Many respondents thought that the English and Maths curricula did not create a love of learning, which was seen to be crucial to facilitating ongoing engagement in education. The level of difficulty and academic focus were seen to take away from play-based and creative learning that might lead pupils to enjoy school and be passionate about English and Maths, instead resulting in anxiety and feelings of 'failure' from a young age. Many felt that both subjects, but particularly English, should allow for more creativity**,** with some suggestions made around practical,

hands-on learning and learning opportunities outside the classroom. Some respondents cited evidence that reading for pleasure could have considerable educational benefits, suggesting that a slimmed-down English curriculum could help to increase engagement with reading among pupils. A more play-based and experiential approach to learning, especially at Key Stage 1, was considered by some respondents to align with international evidence on child development.

For both English and Maths, many respondents felt the curriculum should place more emphasis on practical abilities and everyday skills. For English, many thought the Key Stage 2 grammar, punctuation and spelling (GPS) curriculum placed too much emphasis on learning technical grammatical terms rather than focusing on oracy and confidence in reading. For Maths, respondents felt that it could be beneficial for content to focus on day-to-day applications rather than more obscure concepts.

Although transitions between key stages were not a focus of this question, a significant number of respondents raised a concern that the curriculum is not aligned between key stages, particularly between Key Stages 2 and 3. Respondents felt there was repetition at Key Stage 3, potentially leading students to become bored and disengage. In other cases, learning at Key Stages 1 and 2 was felt not to be linked to later requirements, for example, some noted that the technical grammatical terms learned in GPS were not revisited in later key stages. Some respondents also shared concerns that an increasing number of learners had been progressing between key stages without adequate foundations, such as the ability to read and write coherently, which these respondents linked to issues of growing inequality.

It was also felt by some that the success of the curriculum depended to a large extent on teaching, which was not seen as consistent across schools. Although out of scope of the Review, some respondents suggested the need for better-resourced schools, a greater number of teachers, and additional training for teachers.

17. To what extent do the English and Maths primary assessments support pupils to gain an excellent foundation in these key subjects? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support this aim?

Only a small proportion of responses to this question reflected a belief that the English and Maths primary assessments supported pupils to gain an excellent foundation in these subjects. The most widely expressed view was that the current system of primary assessments did not test meaningful learning. Many respondents believed that these tests assessed a narrow subset of knowledge, based on performance on a specific day, that was often not reflective of a pupil’s wider ability.

Many respondents commented on perceived issues with the Key Stage 2 national tests, with three main concerns cited: the undue stress placed on pupils, the narrowing of the curriculum to focus solely on content covered by the tests, and perceived ineffectiveness in preparing pupils for secondary school. Relatedly, some respondents thought that primary assessments did not align with what was required for Key Stage 3, suggesting secondary schools were often not interested in national test scores and that many of the concepts tested were no longer priorities at Key Stage 3.

A point which was often raised strongly was the negative emotional impact that the assessment system could have on children. This was discussed both in terms of stress and anxiety leading up to exams, and the negative impacts on self-esteem resulting from poor exam performance. Some felt that primary school pupils were too young to be assessed through formal tests, and that primary school instead should focus more on enjoyment of learning while avoiding pressurised situations. Many highlighted that “one-size-fits-all” testing could be negative for many pupils, particularly those with SEND or those who struggled to learn things by heart. Many respondents also suggested that assessments were too high-stakes, and that even if they did provide a useful baseline, too much pressure was placed on these one-off tests to determine perceptions of individuals and schools.

As in the previous question, there were differing opinions on the value of and emphasis on phonics screening, with contradictory views sometimes expressed within the same response. Many thought that the phonics screening check (PSC) was a useful part of measuring a pupil’s progress, but a greater number of responses suggested that the PSC did not work for everyone and could result in skewed measurement of their progress. There were also different views about the utility of the multiplication tables check (MTC**)**. Some felt this was a well-functioning progress check for an important skill, while a greater number of respondents felt it unfairly disadvantaged those who did not have this skill and that the pass mark (100%) was unreasonable. Some respondents who disagreed with the utility of the MTC also thought that the skills tested might not be needed in later life due to the ease of access to calculators and phones.

A further concern raised by respondents was potential issues with the school performance tables, as they were thought to incentivise schools to prioritise assessment scores above a more holistic approach to learning. It was perceived by some to be unfair that pupils were required to undertake stressful tests that were ultimately not about their learning but about the school’s scores. Respondents further highlighted that lower assessment scores from pupils with SEND or without English as a first language may affect a school’s scores, which was perceived to be unfair to both the school and the pupils. Closely linked to this was the point that the current

system could create stress for teachers and schools due to the pressure to attain high marks to protect or improve the school's scores.

In terms of proposed improvements, the most common suggestion was that regular, informal and/or teacher-led assessments might be more appropriate. It was suggested that these could take a more holistic approach rather than focusing on a single performance and could account for individual progress and external factors. Recommendations for improvements within the current system of assessments included a shift to cover more practical skills and real-world contexts within assessments, and a greater emphasis on creativity and critical thinking.

In terms of positives, some noted that standardised assessments enabled accountability and effective targeting of support and were therefore important to maintain in some form. A minority of respondents believed that assessments were broadly working well. As well as the MTC and PSC as noted above, in a small number of cases, the national tests were felt to be effective measures.

18. To what extent does the content of the a) English and b) Maths national curriculum at secondary level (Key Stages 3 and 4) equip pupils with the knowledge and skills they need for life and further study? Are there ways in which the content could change to better support this aim?

The most common view expressed in responses to this question was the need for the curriculum to include more real-life, and practical knowledge and skills to better equip students for their future studies and lives. Respondents offered a range of suggestions, including financial literacy, budgeting, mortgages, and digital skills for Maths, as well as oral communication, including debate and discussion for English.

Many respondents expressed a general view that the curriculum was not working well and some offered suggestions for improvement. General comments about both Maths and English highlighted concerns that the content was overly challenging, dense, and perceived as irrelevant to students' future needs and interests. Additionally, some respondents noted that the required Maths and English knowledge and skills were often not fully developed by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, resulting in students advancing with persistent learning gaps. There was a particular focus on English, which respondents frequently described as outdated and restrictive. Respondents suggested that many students had become disengaged from English, and texts were often perceived as unreflective of their interests, outdated and limited in scope. A common example referenced was Shakespeare's texts, with some respondents expressing concerns about their relevance and

practical value for contemporary students. Frequently mentioned suggestions for the improvement of the English content were:

- Focus on oracy and communication (including through an expanded focus on Drama).
- More representative, broader range of texts, including texts and authors that presented a diversity of perspectives.
- Increasing curriculum breadth to reflect students' interests and make content relevant to their lives.
- Increasing coverage of modern literature (especially from the 21st century).

Alongside greater emphasis on oracy, some respondents recommended joined-up pedagogy across different elements of English (e.g. reading, writing, oracy). Other respondents suggested that the emphasis on grammar in Key Stage 2 compared with the relative freedom to experiment at Key Stage 3 was "back to front" and should be reversed to ensure meaningful fluency. Developing teachers' own creativity and writing identity were also noted as important for this to be instilled in students.

Maths was not discussed as frequently as English. However, issues raised included perceptions that the curriculum could be too abstract, specialised and/or difficult**.** This included concerns that the Maths curriculum was not adequately connected to real-life applications, with a focus on theory and complex concepts leading some students to disengage. As suggestions for improvement, respondents mentioned giving more focus on numeracy, embedding technology and digital skills in the curriculum, and enhancing creative learning, encouraging students to learn thinking out of the box. Finally, some respondents highlighted research indicating that a large proportion of teaching staff believed there was too much content in the curriculum, and there were suggestions that a greater focus on mathematical literacy (defined in line with PISA) would be beneficial.

Another common theme concerned the need for accessible and inclusive content**.** A frequently expressed view under this theme was that the A-level system was working well for the "typical" learner, but did not effectively support those with diverse needs, such as neurodivergence, providing fewer opportunities for these students to thrive. These respondents felt that a broad, inclusive curriculum could better relate to students' interests and meet their needs. Suggestions to improve this included increasing the curriculum's flexibility and including more diverse or multicultural content (particularly texts in English).

Respondents offered examples of schools and regions that had independently developed diverse and anti-racist curricula, including the "Reflecting Britain" initiative in some London schools. These respondents mentioned that these can result in

higher levels of classroom engagement, improved academic attainment for ethnic minority pupils, and a reduction in racial incidents in the school.

A smaller proportion of respondents thought that the content was effective in equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary for life and further study. These respondents broadly indicated that the curriculum had provided a strong foundation for the future, supported students' progress, and prepared them for both further education and future life challenges (without supporting detail).

19. To what extent do the current maths and English qualifications at a) pre-16 and b) 16-19 support pupils and learners to gain, and adequately demonstrate that they have achieved, the skills and knowledge they need? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support these outcomes?

Most of those who responded to this question thought that current qualifications did not support students and learners sufficiently. Out of these respondents, some thought that qualifications were not linked to the skills and knowledge needed in future education and employment and were too focused on memorisation and exam-centric learning. Some suggestions related to a perceived need to connect qualifications better with real-life applications and employer needs. Examples given by respondents included functional maths, communication and writing skills, and expanded use of technology.

For English, suggestions included greater emphasis on speaking and listening, studying different forms of language including social media, and introduction to a range of different writing styles that were thought to be more relevant in the modern world. It was particularly highlighted that this practical approach could be beneficial for those who had struggled with more academic subjects, including those who did not attain the required grade at GCSE English (many respondents felt that the requirement to continue studying English if not attaining level 2 had significant negative impacts on students). Respondents noted that the spoken presentation required for GCSE English did not count towards a student's grade; it was recommended by some that this element be adapted to cover various skills (beyond formal presentation) and be formally assessed.

Many respondents felt there was a need to introduce flexible and accessible assessment methods to reflect students' interests. Many also suggested that current qualifications could be disadvantageous for students with SEND and could prevent them from reaching their full potential.

A frequent suggestion for flexible qualifications 16-19 was to keep more advanced English and Maths courses for those who wanted to pursue relevant higher education while also offering alternatives for those who wanted to follow another direction. Other suggestions included open-book assessments, modular assessments and reduction in exams. Testing students when ready, or using "micro-credentials", was proposed to help those who struggled with high-stakes end-of-year exams to display their progress and proficiency. For Maths specifically, one point of evidence discussed by respondents was that a majority of OECD countries offered flexible curricula that could be tailored to individuals' needs and interests, for example, breaking the curriculum down into elements such as numeracy, mathematical methods and specialist areas, or simply into a 'core' and 'enhanced' offer.

20. How can we better support learners who do not achieve level 2 in English and maths by 16 to learn what they need to thrive as citizens in work and life? Do we have the right qualifications at level 2 for these 16-19 learners (including the maths and English study requirement)?

Around half of responses to this question mentioned the importance of connecting the English and Maths curriculum and assessment to real-life applications and functional needs to support learners below level 2 to prepare for the future and thrive as citizens in both work and life. Many advocated for ensuring foundational literacy and numeracy skills, focusing on functional skills, and expanding vocational content. Suggestions included replacing or supplementing traditional exams with functional qualifications, fostering communication skills, contextualising Maths in practical scenarios, embedding technology into learning, increasing the visibility of apprenticeships, and introducing climate literacy. In Maths, specific recommendations included a greater focus on finance, planning and other practical activities, rather than concepts perceived to be more complex or abstract.

However, a few respondents believed that functional skills alone would not be sufficient to address the diverse needs of students. These respondents argued that the importance of academic learning should not be underestimated, and that learners not achieving level 2 in English and Maths should not be excluded from this area of learning.

Another common theme was the need to adapt the curriculum to enhance flexibility and offer more opportunities for work and life readiness. These respondents stressed the importance of ensuring relevance for a variety of future careers, grounding the curriculum in contemporary contexts. Additionally, respondents emphasised fostering personal growth and promoting social action through the

curriculum. Some advocated offering alternative pathways, including technical routes, not only to provide diverse options but also to improve assessment methods by replacing traditional exams with more varied approaches to demonstrate knowledge.

Some respondents argued that the requirement to continue with English and Maths if level 2 was not achieved was demotivating and disproportionately affected students who were already disadvantaged and whose schools may not have appropriate resources to support them. Recommendations included a lower-level or more functional assessment, alternative curricula (such as Pearson functional English), small-group learning, and offering more options to students to allow them to attain the required skills without stressful resits.

Accessibility and inclusion were also themes raised by numerous respondents. Respondents highlighted concerns about the condition of funding and its potential to affect students and their access to the curriculum negatively. Special attention was given to learners with diverse learning needs (e.g. EAL, SEND, disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds) and those who struggled with traditional academic qualifications, as some respondents believed that the current qualifications not only failed to support them in reaching their potential but often created additional challenges. Respondents stressed the importance of providing sufficient access to a broader curriculum and suggested implementing streamlined processes tailored to the diverse needs of learners.

Finally, some respondents broadly indicated that the right qualifications were not in place at level 2 but did not provide suggestions for improvement. Their responses were generally linked to themes discussed in question 19: the need for a more diverse and inclusive curriculum and revision of assessment methods, particularly for GCSE resits. Some of the most frequent suggestions of respondents to support students who reach below level 2 to thrive as citizens in work and life include:

- Focusing on ensuring strong foundations in Maths and English.
- Prioritising early detection of support needs.
- Empowering teachers to provide more effective and targeted support and secure sufficient funding.

21. Are there any particular challenges with regard to the English and maths a) curricula and b) assessment for learners in need of additional support (e.g. learners with SEND, socio-economic disadvantage, English as an additional language (EAL))? Are there any changes you would suggest to overcome these challenges?

Respondents broadly agreed with the idea that learners in need of additional support faced challenges, with a few proposing specific areas and possible changes. Many respondents focused on learners with SEND, expressing concern that the current curriculum and assessment system did not allow them to thrive in the educational system. For EAL learners, respondents expressed concerns about whether it was equitable for these students to be expected to follow the same curriculum as their peers who had English as their first language. Challenges for students from socio-economically deprived backgrounds included a curriculum that was not seen to be representative of these students' experiences. In relation to English, some respondents felt that the high volume of material, some of which was felt to be outdated, was a barrier to these learners. On Maths, some felt that complex terminology posed a challenge for understanding key concepts and assessments, especially for EAL learners and/or those with SEND.

Many respondents also called for a more flexible, adaptive educational system**.** These respondents emphasised a belief that the diverse needs of learners could be better met by alternative pathways. According to some respondents, the curriculum could be more relevant and reflective of the diverse backgrounds of students while also including real-life applications (especially practical Maths), vocational skills and pathways. Relatedly, many suggested there was a need to introduce a more accessible curriculum and, especially, a more accessible assessment system. Suggestions included the option for online, remote assessment, use of assistive technologies, formative and flexible assessment without short time limits, and the recruitment of more teaching assistants. Although out of scope for the Review, many respondents contextualised the issues they expressed by reflecting that the current educational system faced a serious lack of resources, including staff shortages and the need for greater teacher training.

Section 4: Curriculum and qualification content

Section 5 contained six questions relating to the nature and volume of curriculum and qualification content. Questions invited respondents to identify specific subjects that they feel have too much, too little, out-of-date or inflexible content, as well as provide possible changes to increase diversity, representation and respect for others. Respondents were also asked how curriculum content at primary, secondary and 16-19 levels supports pupils in future education, work and wider life.

Across this section, two themes were expressed most consistently by respondents:

- English and Maths curricula were seen as the two most common subjects with too much content, and re-balancing of these subjects was proposed.
- Curriculum content should better reflect Britain's diversity and incorporate practical knowledge and skills needed in today's world.

22. Are there particular curriculum or qualifications subjects where: a. there is too much content; not enough content, or content is missing; b. the content is out-of-date; c. the content is unhelpfully sequenced (for example to support good curriculum design or pedagogy); d. there is a need for greater flexibility (for example to provide the space for teachers to develop and adapt content)? Please provide detail on specific key stages where appropriate.

A small number of respondents either called for the curriculum across all subjects to be revised, or did not think any changes were needed at all. These responses have not been included in the discussion below, which focuses on subject-specific changes mentioned by respondents.

In relation to the first part of sub-question a., i.e. subjects where there was too much content, discussion varied, depending on qualification and year group. The most common response was Maths (particularly for Key Stages 1 and 2), followed by Science, English (particularly on grammar in Key Stage 2) and Modern Foreign Languages (MFL). Specific recommendations included prioritising English, Maths and Science for reductions in curriculum volume for Key Stage 3; History, Geography, English, Maths, Science, and D&T at Key Stage 4; and MFL, History, Geography and Maths at 16-19. In prioritising content for removal, respondents suggested assessing areas based on their importance and applicability to i) later curriculum or examination requirements, ii) mastering subject foundations and iii) real-world or professional settings.

In relation to the second part of sub-question a., i.e. subjects where there was not enough content or content was missing, the most frequent theme was the need to focus more on “life skills” and practical knowledge to best prepare young people for their next steps. For example, respondents highlighted the need to include education on political systems and current affairs, financial skills, as well as developing their digital skills within a safe environment. Several respondents also supported developing key transferable skills, such as communication, oracy, leadership and teamwork, which these respondents felt were transferable across multiple contexts and essential for navigating society.

Other respondents believed there was a need to prioritise creative subjects such as Drama, Art and Music. Several respondents highlighted the importance of including these subjects in the curriculum for both Key Stages 1 and 2 to encourage creativity from a young age. Some other respondents felt that the Science curriculum should be expanded to focus on more practical elements, such as engineering and technology.

Other specific recommendations included greater inclusion of oracy in the English curriculum; climate literacy; digital literacy; more diverse content particularly in History and English; and global citizenship particularly in MFL. It was also noted by some that, at times, content was not necessarily missing but instead lacked specificity, leading to gaps in what was taught at a school and classroom level. Greater clarity in language used within the curriculum, such as the inclusion of non-exhaustive example lists, was recommended.

In relation to sub-question b., i.e. outdated content, the most frequent theme was a perceived need to update and modernise subjects such as, but not limited to, humanities, D&T and computer science. For example, respondents believed that computing and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) subjects were unfit for purpose due to the changing nature of technology. Specifically related to D&T, respondents thought that the curriculum should place greater focus on sustainability, artificial intelligence (AI) and digital design. Another common point was the need to modernise the History curriculum to incorporate more recent events and wider perspectives. For example, respondents highlighted key topics missing from the curriculum, while others argued for including a critical lens on content about the British Empire and slavery. Some respondents felt there was a need to integrate climate change and sustainability within Geography as well as other subjects. There were some comments that subjects such as Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) and Physical Education (PE) should be updated to focus on the health and wellbeing of students.

Another key theme raised when discussing outdated content, particularly by students, was English Literature and Language courses at GCSE and A level.

This was specifically in reference to the lack of contemporary texts studied, including a notable lack of authors which reflect the diverse make-up of the UK.

In relation to sub-question c., fewer respondents referenced the sequencing of subjects**;** however, those who did noted that Art, D&T, History, Maths and Science could be better sequenced (for example, respondents discussing History thought that thematic sequencing could be more helpful for learning compared to chronological sequencing). Some responses also noted that the learning journey for pupils with SEND was not always linear which could cause challenges for sequencing.

In relation to sub-question d., many respondents expressed a general need for more flexibility across the curriculum, particularly around a greater allowance for professional judgement by teachers in terms of sequencing according to learners' needs and context rather than a prescribed order. Most of these respondents spoke generally, with some noting specific subjects such as English particularly needing further flexibility. Respondents noted flexibility as particularly important for tailoring teaching to students' needs, specifically ensuring teaching was accessible for pupils with SEND or who had experienced other barriers to mainstream education, including socio-economic disadvantage. Some suggested adaptations for these groups included spending additional time embedding learning in key topics, including more locally relevant content, and allowing learners to spend more time on topics they were personally interested in.

23. Are there particular changes that could be made to ensure the curriculum (including qualification content) is more diverse and representative of society?

The most widely expressed view was an overarching desire to modernise and update the curriculum. Respondents felt that the History curriculum, in particular, did not contain enough content that was relevant to today's issues and that it was too UK-centric. One example suggested by respondents was embedding the history of Black British individuals across the curriculum rather than just during Black History Month, as well as covering topics such as the Windrush Generation.

Some respondents felt that more flexibility in the curriculum could better allow schools to respond to the needs and context of their local community. For example, respondents supported developing a diverse and inclusive curriculum which best represented the students they taught, including students from lower socio-economic backgrounds as well as pupils with SEND. To be able to do this, it was highlighted that teachers needed more autonomy to adapt content which best suits their specific students. Some felt that teachers should have the flexibility to integrate local

histories into lessons, providing an opportunity to reflect the voices of the local community.

Subjects such as Geography were highlighted as needing a more global focus, including prioritising pressing challenges such as climate change and its impact on migration and human geography. Similarly, some respondents felt that the Religious Education (RE) curriculum should take a broader approach that could better reflect the multicultural make-up of the UK, covering a wider range of religions, as well as ensuring non-religious views are represented.

Many respondents called for greater diversity in the authors, composers and scientists included in the curriculum, as well as the materials and texts chosen. This was particularly highlighted within English Literature, with many feeling that there was a need for further diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, gender, class, disability and LGBTQ+ representation. It was also highlighted that Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects, D&T and ICT could be made more inclusive by highlighting the stories of scientists, mathematicians, engineers, and innovators from under-represented backgrounds to encourage more diverse uptake of these subjects and related careers.

Another common theme was a desire to adjust priorities within the curriculum to encourage more diversity and representation. Among these, many argued for a need to focus on integral skills (e.g. communication, teamwork) which were believed to be more transferable, as well as teaching students about social, emotional and mental wellbeing.

Many respondents felt there was a need to focus more on current affairs, politics, languages and culture to support diversity**.** Among these responses, some felt that MFL should be made a core part of the curriculum as languages could support intercultural awareness and connection. For example, there was a suggestion of further diversifying the curriculum to include more opportunity to study non-European languages such as Mandarin, Arabic and Urdu, as well as British Sign Language, to reflect the linguistic diversity of the UK. Some respondents also believed that focusing on current affairs and politics could help educate pupils about differing perspectives as well as contemporary challenges, such as Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.

A final priority mentioned by respondents was to focus more on the arts and creative subjects to support greater representation of cultures and experiences. Respondents sometimes mentioned the EBacc as a perceived barrier to achieving this aim and called for its restructuring or removal.

Some respondents called for more fundamental changes to the curriculum and education system, although many of these suggestions were out of scope of the Review.

Finally, some highlighted a need to include a diverse range of young people, parents and communities in future reviews. These respondents felt that following the present Call for Evidence, communities should be regularly invited to feed into any decisions to ensure the curriculum could adapt to the changing needs of communities.

24. To what extent does the current curriculum (including qualification content) support students to positively engage with, be knowledgeable about and respect others? Are there elements that could be improved?

Many respondents only answered the second part of the question (suggestions for improvement) without commenting on the current curriculum. Among respondents who suggested improvements, the most common theme was the need to prioritise and expand courses such as PSHE, RE and Citizenship. Respondents highlighted that these subjects were crucial for promoting values such as mutual respect and understanding. For example, RE was thought by some to enhance students' learning of various religions, as well as learning to respect others' personal views and beliefs. Although there was a range of views expressed about how well these subjects were currently being implemented, it was highlighted that there was often not enough space in the curriculum to do these subjects justice, particularly in the secondary curriculum.

A few respondents suggested there should be high-level changes within the curriculum to foster respect, including the need to embed principles of respect within each subject's curriculum**,** as well as the overall curriculum. For example, some respondents thought that subjects such as PSHE emphasised respect, but respect was not necessarily prioritised in other subjects. Additionally, several respondents felt there were inconsistencies in application across schools, with the need for more high-level input and support to ensure wider consistency. Other comments called for incorporating principles of respect in the resources and materials within the curriculum as well as providing more training to staff.

Some respondents felt that more practical and creative subjects could help champion respect**.** For example, subjects such as Art, Music and PE were highlighted as useful vehicles for teaching about diversity, different cultures and respect, as well as fostering key skills. Relatedly, some respondents noted the role of volunteering, activism and cultural visits to help foster respect. Respondents highlighted how such activities could help develop key interpersonal skills as well as

principles related to civic duty and respect. Some respondents also felt there was a need to better foster key skills such as debating, critical thinking and conflict resolution, and others emphasised the need to teach students key skills related to self-care, wellbeing and interpersonal skills. These skills were seen by respondents as fundamental for ensuring respect in schools and also within the wider community.

25. In which ways does the current primary curriculum support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for life and further study and what could we change to better support this?

Generally, respondents felt that the current primary curriculum could do more to support pupils with the skills and knowledge needed for life and further study. However, more respondents answered the second part of the question in detail (on suggested improvements) rather than the first part (discussing the current primary curriculum).

The most common view expressed by respondents was that there was a need for more focus on play, creative expression and social skills at primary level to support the development of a range of interpersonal skills as well as prioritising pupil wellbeing. Many suggested the need to prioritise life skills within the curriculum. Some respondents emphasised that the curriculum should be a vehicle to support pupils to be healthy, safe and happy. Specific suggestions included focusing on more practical skills such as swimming, cooking, budgeting and online safety.

Many respondents felt that there was not enough time for teachers to focus on these integral skills due to the level of content already within the curriculum, specifically Maths and English. It was suggested that a more holistic approach within the curriculum, such as a focus on project-based learning, could allow for greater focus on skills development. Some responses supported statutory requirements to better incorporate life skills within the primary curriculum, noting the approach across primary schools was currently inconsistent. A small proportion of respondents, however, argued that core subjects should continue to be prioritised.

Another suggestion was greater focus on PSHE and Citizenship within the primary curriculum. Several respondents thought that these two subjects were important for personal development, specifically related to anti-bullying education and information on current world issues, such as climate change. Other key areas of focus included the need to support early engagement in careers advice and planning, and transition into secondary school. Several respondents highlighted that early introduction to employment options could help break down job-specific stereotypes.

26. In which ways do the current secondary curriculum and qualification pathways support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?

As with question 25, more respondents answered the second part of the question in detail (on suggested improvements) rather than the first part (discussing the current secondary curriculum). Most respondents who discussed the current secondary curriculum disagreed that it supported pupils with the skills and knowledge needed for future study, life and work without going into detail to explain their response. Some of these respondents felt the curriculum only worked for students continuing to A Levels and higher education. Respondents who did list specific avenues of support mentioned the wide range of subjects available to study and the opportunity to gain practical skills through BTECs or T Levels.

Many respondents felt there was a strong need to emphasise vocational and alternative pathways and assessments. Respondents felt this would better support students to find a pathway which was best suited for them, as well as offering more freedom and choice. Many argued for incorporating skills-based approaches**,** suggesting there was too much emphasis on memorising content to pass an exam rather than teaching transferable skills. Several respondents noted the positive impacts of using Skills Builder, while others suggested the need to reduce the level of content within subjects to make space for skills development, further train teachers, make classes smaller and have fewer national exams.

As with the primary curriculum, one of the most common suggestions, particularly among students, was to prioritise important life skills within the curriculum**,** including more focus on practical skills and knowledge. Examples included the need to focus on subjects such as financial literacy, cooking and digital skills, including online safety. Several respondents also noted the important role of MFL to support students in an increasingly globalised world. Finally, some respondents also suggested that fostering skills such as teamwork, leadership and critical thinking skills could prepare young people for leaving secondary education.

While this is not in the scope of the Review, a further suggestion for improvement was to create greater access to careers opportunities and work experience in the secondary curriculum. Respondents called for greater connections with key industries to ensure education was appropriately preparing young people for the workforce, as well as providing further opportunities within work settings. Some respondents also suggested that providing more comprehensive careers advice within schools could help support young people in choosing an appropriate career path.

Some respondents also mentioned the role of specific subjects in preparing students for future study, life and work. These included Art, Music and PE, which respondents believed would foster creativity and support students' wellbeing and personal development. Similarly, some suggested a need to prioritise PSHE and Citizenship within the secondary curriculum, as well as ensuring it was up to date to respond to key societal issues such as climate change.

27. In which ways do the current qualification pathways and content at 16-19 support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?

As with the previous two questions, most respondents answered the second part of the question in detail (on suggested improvements), with very few respondents answering the first part (discussing the current qualification pathways and content). Respondents who did list specific avenues of support mentioned the wide range and flexibility of qualifications offered (allowing students the option of specialising in a particular sector or studying a broader curriculum), the subject-specific knowledge covered and the different methods of assessment (testing both practical and academic skills) which prepared students for real-world tasks.

The most commonly suggested area for improvement was a greater variety of available pathways for 16-19 students, as well as further transition support for young people. Respondents highlighted the benefits of more vocational pathways (including apprenticeships) as well as the need to develop more hybrid options which merged academic and vocational elements to better prepare young people for suitable careers. Some respondents expressed concern that the frequency of reforms to vocational and technical pathways could lead to uncertainty among practitioners. Other respondents argued that content overlap between AGQs and T Levels should not imply that funding for the AGQ should be removed, as the different purposes behind each qualification meant that they would engage different sets of learners with different outcomes.

Several respondents suggested a need to move away from end-point exams (which they felt led to under-assessment of skills) to more continuing practical assessments. However, some of these respondents also acknowledged the challenge of doing coursework and project-based work within the context of the growing use of generative AI.

Another commonly suggested area for improvement was better preparing young people for future study and work through providing comprehensive career advice and work experience opportunities. Respondents felt that the system needed to better

align and collaborate with industry to ensure young people were sufficiently trained and prepared for employment. Other respondents noted the risk that occupational standards could quickly go out of date and should be regularly reviewed. It was highlighted that work placements could provide effective opportunities for young people to develop their skills and test out different opportunities. Some respondents also suggested that feeling pressured to choose a career pathway too early could place undue stress on young people.

As with the previous questions, many suggested improvements in the development of practical skills and knowledge, such as financial literacy, to better prepare students for navigating life. Several respondents highlighted this could be supported by making PSHE and Citizenship compulsory in 16-19 provision. Many of these respondents proposed a need to focus on fostering transferable and integral skills, such as critical thinking and interpersonal skills, to support young people for future study, life and work. Respondents felt this should be embedded across each pathway to ensure students could develop greater independence to prepare them for the future.

A smaller number of respondents discussed wider statutory changes required within the current system. These respondents referenced key challenges related to the defunding of vocational qualifications, as well as the lack of availability of certain subjects and pathways across all parts of England. Others also felt there were not enough guided learning hours to cover the technical content in certain courses or that there was too much content.

Section 5: A broad and balanced curriculum

This section contained five questions exploring the breadth and depth of the curriculum in terms of the range of content, range of subjects available, and range of pathways available. Questions invited reflections on breadth and depth in relation to the primary curriculum, secondary curriculum and qualifications pathways, and qualification pathways at 16-19. Respondents were also asked about access to creative subjects at all levels, and to consider explanations for curriculum trends over time. Two questions in the Call for Evidence asked specifically about Key Stage 4 Technical Awards.

Across this section, three themes were expressed most consistently by respondents:

- Qualification systems could lead pupils to choose narrow specialisms too early.
- A greater role for creativity within the curriculum was supported.
- Vocational pathways should be more embedded, flexible and valued.

28. To what extent does the current primary curriculum support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?

The most frequent theme discussed was the emphasis on the breadth of the curriculum: almost all responses to this question acknowledged that the curriculum was broad, but respondents were split on whether the breadth of specific subjects was excessive. Many respondents felt that the curriculum did not go deeply enough in certain topics and the volume of content does not align with the time allocated to teach it. This view was particularly common amongst senior leaders, and around half of teachers, tutors or lecturers also cited excessive breadth.

Notably, respondents commonly felt that the breadth of subjects available was a strength, and that the most viable solution to the issue of the curriculum having too much content was to reduce the volume of content within each subject, particularly English and Maths. To address potential concerns around not having sufficient time to cover all content in the curriculum, one suggestion by respondents was that the curriculum be revised based on a realistic assessment of the number of teaching hours available to teach a given subject across the academic year.

Many respondents suggested that the curriculum had too much focus on academic subjects, particularly English and Maths, at the expense of other, more creative subjects that respondents believed could assist pupils in growing up to be more well-rounded citizens. Respondents frequently proposed giving larger weight in the

primary curriculum to subjects such as the arts, design, dance and drama. It should be noted that some respondents felt that the emphasis on Maths and English was in fact appropriate at this stage to ensure strong foundations in literacy and numeracy.

Another commonly raised concern was the impact of performance measures in narrowing the curriculum, particularly the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2. Some respondents felt that schools placed too much emphasis on preparing pupils for standardised assessments at the expense of embedding learning, embracing creativity or developing wider life skills. Many respondents suggested the need to embed the primary curriculum with subjects that stimulate critical thinking and real-life applied skills. These could include play-based learning, cooking, digital literacy and skills, philosophy, and promoting interconnectedness between subjects, as well as a more integrated and critical way of thinking. Differing emphasis on the national tests across schools was also noted to lead to disparities in the volume of non-English and Maths content taught at Key Stage 2. Students, pupils and learners, as well as academics, were the respondent groups most likely to perceive that practical, critical thinking and life skills were neglected at primary level.

29. To what extent do the current secondary curriculum and qualifications pathways support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?

Many respondents discussed the role of the EBacc in their responses, whether referring to the EBacc itself, or the effects of its introduction. Out of the respondents who mentioned the EBacc, a high proportion perceived that it had led to a crowding-out effect. These respondents felt that the EBacc limited the choices available to learners and took too narrow an academic focus, squeezing out technical and creative subjects. This was also perceived to lead to an excessive focus on exams at the expense of deep understanding and skills. Relatedly, a similar proportion of responses cited the need for more creative subjects. Some respondents raised concerns that EBacc subjects, particularly STEM fields, are prioritised at the expense of other disciplines, and felt that this imbalance restricts students' ability to pursue varied interests and leads to unequal opportunities. Some expressed concern about the diminishing role of creative subjects such as dance, theatre and arts in the curriculum, with some noting a decline in GCSE creative arts enrolments. Suggestions included revising the EBacc framework to include creative attainment, elevating the status of non-core subjects, such as the arts and vocational studies, and ensuring greater flexibility in subject combinations to better cater for students' aspirations.

Another commonly cited concern was the need to better equip students with practical skills for their futures at this stage of their academic life. Students, pupils and learners, as well as local authority officers, were most likely to cite a need for the curriculum to better prepare learners for life beyond school. Many felt that the curriculum currently had shortcomings in areas such as digital literacy, financial management and mental health education. Respondents called for greater integration of life skills into the curriculum, with suggestions including online portfolios, structured work/life skills programmes, increasing the budget for more practical subjects, and dedicated guidance on career pathways. There was also strong support for flexible qualification pathways to accommodate diverse learning preferences. However, some respondents noted that caution should be taken when considering more skills-based curricula, as the overall quality of learning and access to wide-ranging knowledge should not be compromised.

Finally, a number of respondents argued for the need to expand vocational options to better serve students who thrive in practical, hands-on learning environments. Many of these respondents called for increased investment in vocational training and collaboration with industries to provide robust pathways for non-academic learners. Offering more vocational and technical options pre-16 was proposed, with reference to Wales's Skills Suite offer for 14-16-year-olds.

30. To what extent do the current qualification pathways at 16-19 support learners to study a broad curriculum which gives them the right knowledge and skills to progress? Should anything change to better support this?

Most respondents did not specifically respond to the question about the current qualification pathways, and only suggested areas for improvement (or noted that they were not qualified to respond or referenced responses to previous questions). The most common theme across all respondent types was that the current 16-19 qualification pathways forced students to specialise too early**,** limiting their opportunities for exploration and growth. Some respondents noted that students typically studied fewer subjects than those in comparable countries. Among those who made suggestions for improvements, there was widespread support for broadening the options available for both A Levels and T Levels, allowing students more time to pursue a diverse range of interests before committing to a specific pathway. It was suggested that this would help create a more well-rounded education. Some respondents also expressed concern that the range of pathways offered differed based on geography and school size. For example, respondents pointed out that larger schools or schools with closer relationships with a broad range of local employers could typically offer more diverse pathways.

The Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) was mentioned by some respondents as providing an opportunity to develop independent learning and research skills, but it was felt that not all students had access to this pathway as it was not central to A level grades or university admission, something that some respondents felt should be changed. Similarly, some argued that greater incentives could be created for taking Core Maths. “Re-coupling” the AS qualification and A Levels was also recommended by some respondents to increase breadth and opportunities for flexibility.

Regarding T Levels, respondents provided a range of feedback. Beyond some high-level positive feedback and comparison with A Levels (in discussing academic versus vocational pathways), some respondents believed that the specialised nature of the T Levels was too limiting, due to the long duration of commitment (two years) and concerns that not all schools had the resources to offer students a wide range of courses. In addition, the removal of funding for AGQ was seen by some as a negative development, as this reduced choice for some groups of learners for whom T Levels were not an appropriate replacement.

Many respondents believed that the traditional academic pathways tended to be prioritised over vocational education, which they felt did not always serve all students effectively in terms of their future outlook and perspectives. These respondents highlighted the importance of recognising vocational qualifications equally, as both academic and vocational pathways were crucial in preparing students for future careers. The need to create a more flexible approach that valued different strengths was suggested to help more students succeed.

Some respondents also suggested a blend of subject choices could potentially contribute to a more rounded education. One example mentioned by respondents was that after the de-coupling of AS qualifications from A Levels, students taking STEM A Levels were likely to choose other supporting subjects within STEM as part of their three A Levels instead of non-STEM subjects. In addition, some respondents suggested that a programme similar to the International Baccalaureate should be introduced to ensure students could still cover a wide range of subjects before continuing on to A Level or T Level specialisation.

Respondents emphasised the need for students to be better equipped with practical knowledge, such as financial literacy, mental health awareness and civic responsibilities**.** It was suggested that integrating these skills into the curriculum could ensure students were well prepared for adulthood, both in their personal lives and professional careers. Many felt that enhancing life skills education could foster more responsible and capable citizens. Relatedly, some respondents also thought that the current qualification pathways did not adequately prepare students for the modern world, where skills such as adaptability, problem solving and digital literacy

were felt to be increasingly important for work. There was support for incorporating these skills into the curriculum, ensuring that students were equipped to navigate evolving professional environments and embrace lifelong learning. Respondents suggested that fostering adaptability would help students remain competitive and resilient in their future careers.

Many respondents also expressed a desire for greater flexibility in mixing academic and vocational programmes**,** allowing students to tailor their education to their strengths and interests. Many felt that the current system was too rigid, making it difficult for students to combine different types of qualifications. By enabling a more blended approach, it was suggested that students could benefit from a more personalised education that could better prepare them for both higher education and the workforce. Flexibility in combining programmes was seen as a way to ensure that every student had the opportunity to succeed on their own terms.

31. To what extent do the current curriculum (at primary and secondary) and qualifications pathways (at secondary and 16-19) ensure that pupils and learners are able to develop creative skills and have access to creative subjects?

A high proportion of respondents disagreed that the current curriculum and qualification pathways ensured pupils and learners could develop creative skills and had access to creative subjects. Many of these respondents believed that creative skills and subjects had been treated as secondary compared to core academic priorities (including English and Maths). This was believed to be due to the perceived lack of their importance, lack of available resources or staffing and the focus on exams (for pre-16). While this is out of scope of the Review, respondents mentioned resource constraints such as budget cuts and staffing shortages as key barriers to maintaining robust creative programmes in schools. Many respondents believed that the lack of access to creative subjects limited opportunities for self-expression and critical thinking, with potential broader implications for personal and professional growth.

A common suggestion was that creative subjects should be better integrated into the wider academic curriculum to enhance students' engagement and learning outcomes. These respondents suggested a range of interdisciplinary approaches combining creative and analytical skills, such as project-based learning that incorporates both STEM and the arts, as they believed this would make the curriculum more dynamic and relevant to real-world challenges. This view was particularly common among students, pupils and learners, and academics.

32. Do you have any explanations for the trends outlined in the analysis and/or suggestions to address any that might be of concern?

Many respondents thought that trends reflected Government policy rather than changes in students' interests. Respondents suggested that some subjects had increased in uptake (or maintained their uptake at a high level) due to the focus on them from Government frameworks and accountability measures, including Progress 8 and the EBacc supporting subjects such as History and Geography. Consequently, subjects that respondents believed had not received sufficient focus in accountability measures had experienced a decrease in uptake due to loss of resources, teaching time or both.

The most commonly discussed trend was growth in STEM subjects. Many respondents suggested that growth in these reflected policy efforts to prepare students for careers in high-demand sectors such as technology and engineering. Some, however, thought this had come at the expense of arts subjects. Concerns were also raised about the practical aspects of STEM education, which some respondents felt lacked real-world applications, and others cautioned against over-prioritising STEM at the expense of non-STEM subjects.

Relatedly to the growth in STEM subjects, other trends commonly mentioned by respondents were the decline in D&T and arts subjects such as Drama, Dance and Music. Both trends were frequently attributed to reasons outside the scope of the Review, that is, insufficient funding/resources and shortage of specialist teachers, as well as the lack of their inclusion in Government accountability measures. For the arts specifically, some respondents felt that arts education had been undervalued and perceived as low status. Suggestions for improvement across D&T and arts subjects included investing in resources, increasing teacher training (or employing more experienced teachers), better integration with other subjects, adding these subjects (specifically the arts) to the EBacc, and leveraging external sectors to inspire and train teachers.

A decline in uptake of English was attributed by some respondents to an increased focus on STEM subjects and a decreased focus on AS qualifications. These respondents thought that English had been marginalised in favour of subjects that are felt to be more critical for performance metrics. In addition, some respondents believed that the English curriculum had failed to engage students meaningfully, leading to decreased interest and uptake at 16-19. Suggestions for improvement included revisiting the structure of English courses to align them with modern societal needs and fostering creative and critical thinking skills.

33. To what extent and how do pupils benefit from being able to take vocational or applied qualifications in secondary schools alongside more academically focused GCSEs?

Most responses to this question agreed that pupils benefited from being able to take vocational qualifications alongside their GCSEs. The most common benefit discussed by respondents was the ability to support different types of learners who might not engage well with exam-based qualifications, including neurodivergent and SEND students. Respondents from the wider school, college or university workforce were particularly likely to express this view.

Another benefit commonly discussed by respondents, particularly organisations, was the development of practical, career and life skills, which were seen to increase opportunities for employment and higher education due to the emphasis on applying knowledge and developing practical skills. Responses mentioned approaches such as University Technical Colleges (UTCs), which partner with employers and third-level education providers, as examples of good practice that targeted students' skill development in line with what is required for their career. This further enabled informed decision-making about careers and education 16-19.

A further benefit discussed was increased engagement with education, including motivation and attendance. By allowing students to learn subjects they enjoy, respondents believed vocational or applied qualifications could foster a sense of accomplishment and success. This, in turn, could enhance students' self-esteem. Some respondents noted that pupils who had previously struggled and had disengaged with education could often thrive in vocational and applied settings.

Finally, many respondents suggested improvements to improve existing vocational and applied qualifications**,** although this was not the focus of the question. These suggested improvements closely aligned with those mentioned in Question 27, including offering a broad range of vocational qualifications, ensuring that academic and vocational qualifications were held in equal esteem, integrating vocational education pre-16 and ensuring schools had sufficient resources to offer qualifications.

34. To what extent does the current pre-16 vocational offer equip pupils with the necessary knowledge and skills and prepare them for further study options, including 16-19 technical pathways and/or A Levels? Could the pre-16 vocational offer be improved?

Most suggested improvements aligned closely with previous high-level suggestions discussed in detail in Question 27. These included expanding the scope of vocational offerings, ensuring vocational pathways were equally valued as academic pathways, and providing greater flexibility in designing vocational pathways. A small number of respondents stated they felt that the current vocational offer was appropriate. These respondents noted that the offer provided a good balance of practical skills and foundational knowledge and could act as a stepping stone to further study options. The majority of these respondents, while expressing support for the current offer, also thought the offer could go further in supporting students.

Many respondents called for greater integration of vocational education with employers. These respondents thought students could benefit from additional opportunities to engage with employers and organisations providing 16-19 vocational education, as this lived experience could help them make more knowledgeable decisions about which future employment pathways to pursue.

Some respondents expressed a concern that pursuing pre-16 vocational education could limit opportunities for future study, which could especially affect disadvantaged students. This stemmed from a perceived lack of rigour in pre-16 vocational pathways. To address this concern, respondents thought that pre-16 pathways should follow a more holistic, integrated approach, integrating practical, hands-on learning with academic content, allowing students to develop a more diverse skill set. Other respondents suggested better joining up of pre-16 and 16-19 vocational pathways to ensure the skills and knowledge required for future vocational education were introduced and developed at the pre-16 stage.

A small number of respondents thought that current accountability measures could limit opportunities for students to pursue vocational qualifications, making it more difficult for them to explore different subjects and potential areas of interest. Finally, a small number of respondents thought that changes to assessments, particularly the introduction of timed written assessments, meant that pre-16 vocational pathways now catered for a narrower range of students. Respondents thought this worked against the original intention of vocational pathways to appeal to students with a diverse range of abilities and needs.

Section 6: Assessment and accountability

This section contained twelve questions, inviting views on assessment and qualification content, and ways in which students' outcomes can be better supported across key stages and subjects. Responses were also sought on the content, volume and effectiveness of GCSE assessments. Suggestions were invited on changes to assessment requirements to support knowledge and skills development and students' wellbeing.

Across this section, three themes were expressed most consistently by respondents:

- The content of exams should include more flexibility and inclusivity.
- The volume of exams should be reduced.
- Assessment outcomes should have a reduced emphasis in accountability systems.

It is also worth noting that the thematic analysis in this section revealed cross-cutting themes across questions aimed at assessments and those aimed at the wider accountability system. Where possible, this distinction has been highlighted.

35. Is the volume of statutory assessment at Key Stages 1 and 2 right for the purposes set out above?

A majority of respondents across respondent types felt that the volume of statutory assessments at Key Stages 1 and 2 was too high**.** The discussion below covers themes for each set of respondents (agreement and disagreement with the volume of assessment) separately. Responses discussing suggestions to improve the current approach are covered in question 36.

Of the respondents who felt that the volume of statutory assessments was too high, the most common sentiment, particularly among parents, was that it can lead to negative mental health impacts and that it did not always accurately reflect pupils' knowledge and learning.

The second most common theme was that the current volume of tests could be detrimental to learning because it encouraged a "teach-to-the-test" mentality**.** Respondents often felt that the current assessment system had been designed for school accountability rather than to support pupils**.** Additionally, respondents thought that the curriculum had prioritised test performance over broader educational goals.

Respondents, particularly teachers, commonly linked this theme with the pressure placed on teachers due to too many exams and not enough teaching time, often leading to narrowing of the curriculum in practice.

A minority of respondents felt that the volume of statutory assessments was appropriate, although they also provided varying suggestions on how these could be improved. A few respondents suggested specific modifications to enhance the process, while others stated that although the quantity of assessments was acceptable, the format of assessments was thought to be ineffective.

36. Are there any changes that could be made to improve efficacy without having a negative impact on pupils' learning or the wider education system?

The most common suggestion put forward by respondents was to move away from statutory Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 tests and adopt alternative methods for assessing pupils. In this regard, individual respondents, such as parents, teachers, academics and local authority officers, most frequently advocated teacher-led assessment.

Another suggestion put forward by respondents was to modify the assessment process to better capture pupils' knowledge and abilities**.** One alternative method frequently discussed by respondents was a formative approach centred on learning rather than assessment. Respondents emphasised the importance of identifying learning gaps and strengths in real time. Many suggested basing the assessment of progress on coursework, recordings and other ongoing measures rather than relying solely on exams. A key recommendation was to replace high-stakes summative assessments with formative assessments at school level.

Although less commonly cited, respondents across respondent types supported reducing the overall volume of assessment to lessen the burden on pupils**.** For example, several respondents felt that one test for Maths and one for reading would be sufficient to assess pupils' skills effectively. A few respondents also suggested spreading assessments more evenly throughout the academic year rather than concentrating them into a short, intense period, such as a four-day window. Relatedly, these respondents called for broader metrics to evaluate pupils' development and progress. These could include focusing on targets rather than success, incorporating oral assessments, using online tests and developing personalised learning pathways.

37. Are there other changes to the statutory assessment system at Key Stages 1 and 2 that could be made to improve pupils' experience of assessment, without having a negative impact on either pupils' learning or the wider education system?

The thematic analysis for question 37 almost completely aligned with themes identified in question 36, indicating that respondents may not have fully understood the difference between the two questions and often gave near-identical responses. Respondents across respondent types generally reiterated their belief that the volume of assessment was too high, particularly in Key Stage 2, and that teachers should be trusted to assess their pupils.

38. What can we do to ensure the assessment system at Key Stages 1 and 2 works well for all learners, including learners in need of additional support in their education (for example SEND, disadvantage, EAL)?

The thematic analysis in this question revealed a clear distinction among respondent types for the two most frequent suggestions.

The most common suggestion was to adopt a more flexible and tailored approach to assessments. This view was particularly common among organisational respondents, such as charities, multi-academy trusts and local authorities. These respondents highlighted the need to move away from a "one-size-fits-all" model and emphasised the value of recognising diverse learning needs, especially for learners with special needs. Some of these respondents suggested progress-focused assessments as a replacement that placed greater value on individual pupils' growth rather than comparative outcomes.

The next most common suggestion, made most frequently by individual respondents such as parents, teachers and senior leaders, was to eliminate statutory testing for pupils requiring additional support**.** Many of these respondents argued that these assessments were not an appropriate method for evaluating progress as they were not accessible for all and tended to affect wellbeing negatively by increasing stress and anxiety.

Although less frequent, specific suggestions were also made to help support SEND pupils with assessments. These included using simplified language, large-print materials, assistive technology, offering oral assessments, allowing extra time, breaks during tests, or tailored assessment frameworks with reasonable adjustments. Early screening for learning needs was also suggested, in view of

some respondents' concern that pupils were often not being appropriately supported because they had not yet completed SEND assessments.

Similarly, a few respondents highlighted specific ways to support EAL learners effectively. For example, respondents thought that offering bilingual assessments or scaffolded resources, such as glossaries and simplified instructions, could enhance their understanding of assessment material. Respondents also suggested providing consistent language development opportunities throughout the school year and offering pre-assessment resources, such as preparatory materials or additional language classes. Finally, some respondents thought that assessments should avoid culturally specific or idiomatic language that could create barriers to pupils' performance.

39. Is the volume of assessment required for GCSEs right for the purposes set out above? Are there any changes that could be made without having a negative impact on either pupils' learning or the wider education system?

Most respondents felt that the volume of statutory assessments for GCSEs was too high**.** This view was shared by respondents across all respondent types. Overwhelmingly, these respondents felt that the high volume of GCSEs placed too much demand on students, particularly due to the short time frames and long exam hours required. In this regard, respondents also commonly noted the negative impacts that a high volume of assessments could have on students' wellbeing. This view was particularly prevalent among organisational respondents, such as local authorities and charities. These respondents raised concerns that the high demands of assessments could contribute to a range of mental health issues for students, including stress and anxiety.

The most frequently proposed change was to include coursework assessments. Respondents viewed this as a means of reducing the overall volume of exams and providing students who might struggle with exam conditions a better opportunity to succeed. For these respondents, coursework was thought to offer a more comprehensive assessment of a student's progress over time, enabling evaluation of skills such as creativity, research and critical thinking that exams might not fully capture.

Another proposed change, although less commonly mentioned, was to adopt a broader range of assessment tools. Respondents highlighted the importance of alternative assessment methods such as portfolios, science experiments, language speaking evaluations, research presentations, coding tasks, practical skills,

controlled classroom assessments, and speaking and listening activities across subjects, suggesting that these could be given more weight in the overall evaluation.

A minority of respondents felt that the volume of assessment was right, noting that sufficient volume was required to ensure assessment was rigorous and supported students' growth and development.

40. What more can we do to ensure that: a) the assessment requirements for GCSEs capture and support the development of knowledge and skills of every young person; and b) young people's wellbeing is effectively considered when assessments are developed, giving pupils the best chance to show what they can do to support their progression?

As with question 39, the most common suggestion put forward by respondents was to broaden assessment methods. Respondents emphasised that while final exams could be an effective means of assessment, they should represent just one of the tools in a broader set of assessment methods. This suggestion was most prevalent among organisational respondents, particularly charities, HE institutions and multi-academy trusts.

The next most frequent suggestion across respondent types was to distribute the assessment volume more effectively**,** thereby reducing the intensity/pressure of the final exams. Related suggestions included a transition from high-stakes, terminal assessments to modular, low-stakes ones spread throughout Key Stage 4, and the spreading of assessments over the course of Key Stage 4 rather than concentrating them in Year 11. These respondents felt this would help students focus on smaller chunks of material at a time, reducing the need to recall large volumes of information all at once.

Other suggestions were similar to those provided for question 39, including the incorporation of more coursework, project assessments, oral presentations and practical assessments, to provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities in different formats. Similarly, respondents also suggested reducing the overall volume of terminal exams.

In addition to changes in assessment requirements and delivery, a minority of respondents also called for better integration of wellbeing into school procedures**.** Respondents emphasised that wellbeing support should embedded within everyday life at school, both in addressing students' psychological needs and ensuring that assessments were conducted in a way that reduced stress and anxiety.

41. Are there particular GCSE subjects where changes could be made to the qualification content and/or assessment that would be beneficial for pupils' learning?

Among subject-specific suggestions, respondents commonly provided suggestions for English, Maths, and Science. A few respondents also called for broader reform (beyond just specific GCSE subjects). However, those suggestions are not included in the analysis below as it is beyond the scope of the question. The thematic analysis in this section revealed an alignment of views across respondent types.

Across subjects, suggestions were made for content to be made more up to date and relevant, and include more practical and real-world applications.

- English qualification content: The most common suggestion was to make English content more relevant. Respondents emphasised the importance of incorporating more modern, relevant and diverse texts into the English curriculum (Language and Literature) to better engage with students' interests and cultural experiences. Another suggestion was to adapt English content to widen its focus on skills such as spoken language, digital literacy and media analysis, and integral skills such as communication and interpersonal skills.
- English assessments**:** Respondents also called for changes to the English assessment formats, with two main approaches suggested. Many respondents called for alternative assessments (such as coursework, projects and teacher assessments) while other respondents advocated for changes to the format of exams, such as additional time, broader question formats, and greater flexibility to allow students to demonstrate deeper understanding and creativity. Specific suggestions included the adoption of on-screen assessments for English as this was thought to benefit students requiring accessible and inclusive assessment formats, such as those with SEND. A small number of respondents also suggested that students be given an opportunity to choose their preferred mode of assessment.
- Maths qualification content: Most commonly, respondents suggested the need for qualification content to include functional maths skills that reflected practical and real-world applications. Suggestions included increasing the emphasis on problem-solving, reasoning, focusing on personal finance, taxes and data literacy. Some proposed splitting GCSE Maths into practical and abstract subjects to better support skill development in both areas. Suggestions were also made to explore adding a numeracy strand within existing GCSE models to target key quantitative skills needed for future lives and careers. Such a separation, in the view of these respondents, could relieve some of the content burden of GCSE Maths.

- Maths assessments**:** Suggestions for change in Maths assessments echoed suggestions for English assessments, with respondents calling for streamlining of the assessment process. Some respondents supported reducing the number of Maths exams, while others called for a new system, which would have a standardised test completed by all students alongside an additional, specialised exam testing a different set of skills.
- Science qualification content: Most commonly, respondents highlighted the need to decrease the overall volume of content. As with Maths, respondents suggested that Science qualification content should incorporate more real-world applications that require students to apply knowledge and build problem-solving skills. One suggestion made by respondents was to introduce a research component to ensure that students were able to explore areas of interest to them and their communities, boosting their engagement with and attainment in Science. Another suggestion was to streamline the Science curriculum to include only foundational science knowledge required across a broad range of science disciplines. These respondents felt that non-foundational concepts that did not affect progression to A Levels should be removed from the current subject criteria.
- Science assessments**:** As with English and Maths, respondents often favoured a reduced emphasis on memorisation, advocating assessments that focus more on application. Respondents called for the assessment of more practical science knowledge and skills, highlighting the importance of both teaching and assessing practical skills.

42. Are there ways in which we could support improvement in pupil progress and outcomes at Key Stage 3?

Most commonly, respondents across all respondent types advocated for smoother transitions across key stages**.** One suggestion to achieve this, particularly among organisations, was a more joined-up approach between key stages to improve outcomes at Key Stage 3. Another suggested approach was the “whole-school approach to transition”, which combined strategies targeting all students with additional strategies to support vulnerable students, on a case-by-case basis.

The second most common suggestion across all respondent types was the need for standardisation. Some respondents called for standardisation of national guidelines and frameworks for student progress. In this regard, respondents emphasised the importance of shared guidelines for student progression across subjects. There was also a call for a unified national curriculum and clearer reporting systems to reduce confusion for parents and ease teacher workload. Additionally, respondents

advocated for national frameworks to guide in-school assessments, ensuring alignment with curriculum goals without relying solely on terminal assessments.

Respondents also cited the need for a broad and balanced curriculum at Key Stage 3. These respondents pointed out that current practices of using Key Stage 3 to begin teaching Key Stage 4 content could create an imbalance and weakness in curriculum design. Some organisations suggested the input of specialist teachers in curriculum design so that students were better able to experience a broad range of subjects before transitioning to Key Stage 4.

Another common suggestion was additional personalised and reflective learning options in Key Stage 3. Respondents believed that ongoing feedback was important to foster a growth mindset in students. These respondents also believed that teaching should be tailored to students' preferences, strengths and weaknesses. Such targeted intervention was particularly identified by organisational respondents as a key component of transition support.

A minority of respondents disagreed with the suggestion for standardised testing at Key Stage 3, noting their opposition to formal assessments and national test-driven teaching in this stage (even though this was not within scope of the question).

43. Are there ways in which we could support pupils who do not meet the expected standard at Key Stage 2?

The most common response was disagreement with the concept of "expected standard" stated in the question. This view was more common among individual respondents, who expressed concerns that the concept of an "expected standard" was arbitrary and unrealistic, as they felt it did not account for the varying rates at which children develop or learn. Many of these respondents also felt that setting a single standard for all pupils disregarded individual progress and could harm pupils' self-confidence, especially when they failed to meet these expectations. Some advocated a more flexible approach that could recognise diverse learning needs and support pupils in progressing at their own pace.

The next most frequent suggestion across respondent types was early identification of needs and targeted support**.** Respondents emphasised that learning needs were not always recognised as early as needed and discussed the importance of early identification and targeted interventions. Early intervention, whether through one-to-one tutoring, small group instruction or targeted support for pupils with special educational needs, was believed to help prevent long-term learning challenges.

Respondents also commonly noted that the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 could be challenging and emphasised the need for a more joined-up approach

between these key stages**.** These respondents called for adapting Key Stage 3 curricula to better reflect Key Stage 2 priorities. Relatedly, respondents also supported improvements to how information about students was shared between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3**.** Respondents recommended enhancing information sharing, such as implementing a “Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 skills passport”, and increasing collaboration between primary and secondary schools. In this regard, respondents recommended the consistent use of diagnostics on transfer.

Finally, a small number of respondents suggested targeted interventions such as one-to-one support and mentoring, which could address specific learning gaps in key areas like literacy and numeracy. These interventions were perceived to help provide more tailored assistance based on individual pupil needs.

44. To what extent, and in what ways, does the accountability system influence curriculum and assessment decisions in schools and colleges?

Overall, respondents felt that the accountability system had significant influence across the whole school experience. This influence was thought to extend beyond curriculum design and assessment, shaping the broader learning pathway and guiding how schools aligned their practices with accountability measures.

Respondents frequently emphasised the negative consequences of accountability. These respondents suggested that these measures could contribute to a stressful environment, limit teachers' professional autonomy and create disparities between schools. While much of the discussion centred on the impact on the curriculum and assessment, numerous respondents also cited concerns regarding teachers’ and pupils’ wellbeing, creating a pressuring and antagonistic environment for schools, limiting the professional autonomy of teachers and disadvantaging some schools.

Another common impact, cited frequently by organisational respondents, was the impact of the accountability system on shaping curriculum decisions by compelling schools to prioritise some subjects (and devaluing other subjects as a result). Respondents believed that schools had often narrowed their curriculum to focus on expected accountability results, offering a limited range of subjects available to students, particularly subjects included in the EBacc and Progress 8. These respondents felt that the targeted subjects and pathways often did not align with students’ interests or strengths, reducing opportunities for a more diverse and personalised learning experience.

45. How well does the current accountability system support and recognise progress for all pupils and learners? What works well and what could be improved?

A majority of responses focused on areas for improvement to the current accountability system and did not answer the first part of the question (or simply noted that the current system was not working well). For most suggested areas of improvement, the thematic analysis for this question revealed a similar frequency of views across respondent types.

The most frequently mentioned area of improvement was that the accountability system was not inclusive and did not consider the needs and interests of all students equally. Respondents felt students with disabilities and additional needs had not been considered in progression measures, which they believed were geared towards applying the same standards for all learners using a “one-size-fits-all” approach.

More specifically, some respondents believed that contextual information should have a greater role within the accountability system. Examples suggested by respondents included the adjustment of benchmarks for training providers working with higher numbers of SEND pupils or adjustment of progression measures for schools with students entering at lower baselines.

Respondents also commonly felt that the accountability system placed too much emphasis on attainment and grades. According to these respondents, such a high focus on attainment could not always appropriately measure the progress levels of all students and learners. Some respondents suggested that standard accountability frameworks include softer progress metrics. These metrics were noted as particularly useful for students facing barriers, whose progress could not be measured through traditional attainment metrics.

Many respondents also felt that the accountability system was often data-led and bureaucratic. Such a data-centred approach was thought to lead to experiences on the ground being left out of the picture, with most schools aspiring to reach certain targets rather than putting in place measures that could appropriately support the progression of all students. In addition, some respondents felt that the accountability system had led education providers to prioritise performance measures over student experiences. Respondents felt that performance tables emphasised headline figures such as achievement and retention rates without recognising the underlying complexities of student demographics. Respondents were also supportive of Ofsted removing single-word judgements.

Other frequently cited areas of improvement include the regulatory system (including the lack of connectivity or consistency across institutions) and unreasonable

standards imposed on learners, without taking their specific needs into account. Some respondents suggested better alignment of the requirements of different regulators, arguing that an integrated approach could streamline requirements and enable training providers to prioritise the delivery of training and education.

A minority of respondents felt that the current accountability system was working well, with some of these respondents specifically highlighting Progress 8 as effective in the progression of learners and students.

46. Should there be any changes to the current accountability system in order to better support progress and incentivise inclusion for young people with SEND and/or from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds? If so, what should those changes be?

Most respondents felt that the current accountability system needed reform to support more effectively the progress of students with SEND and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Respondents thought that the current system acted as a significant barrier to fostering inclusive educational practices, citing its reliance on academic attainment, an excessive focus on exams, and a competitive, high-pressure structure. Most of the suggestions made in responses to this question were identical to those already discussed for previous questions.

A majority of respondents highlighted the need for greater flexibility in assessment methods. To address this, these respondents called for a more diverse range of assessment types, including oral exams, project-based evaluations and collaborative work to better accommodate different needs. Similarly, many respondents noted the need to reduce the emphasis placed on high-stakes exams, suggesting that students should be allowed to progress even if they face challenges in meeting the GCSE English and Maths requirements (especially for those who struggle, despite their best efforts).

Other suggestions made to increase flexibility in assessment methods include greater incorporation of oracy skills, particularly for students with speech, language and communication needs. These respondents thought that reintroducing speaking and listening assessments could provide these students with a more inclusive platform to demonstrate their abilities and progress. Respondents also called for greater recognition of non-academic achievements. Finally, some suggested revisiting accountability measures like Progress 8 and the EBacc. These respondents thought that broadening the range of subjects and qualifications included in these measures, as well as the weighting of each subject, could provide a more accurate representation of students' achievement and progress.

The second most common suggestion was greater recognition of inclusive practices**,** acknowledging existing efforts of schools and incentivising support for SEND students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Respondents mentioned that these could involve additional funding, recognition in accountability reports, and performance funding tied to the success of inclusive practices. This suggestion was particularly prevalent among organisational respondents, including local authorities and charities.

The third most common suggestion across all respondent types was to ensure that school accountability measures focus on progress rather than attainment. These respondents acknowledged that attainment metrics could often disadvantage SEND and socio-economically disadvantaged students. Respondents advocated for the inclusion of progress metrics that would focus on tracking each student's growth from their individual starting point rather than comparing them to fixed benchmarks. These could include measuring improvements in academic skills, personal development and engagement, allowing schools to demonstrate how they were supporting each student's journey.

A related suggestion was contextualised and separate benchmarking in school accountability measures. Many of these respondents expressed concern that schools with higher numbers of SEND or disadvantaged students could be unfairly penalised in rankings, despite their efforts to support these students. This penalisation could lead to unintended consequences, such as schools being reluctant to admit SEND students or those from disadvantaged backgrounds to avoid negatively affecting their performance rankings.

Respondents discussing changes to benchmarking in school accountability measures made two suggestions:

- First, respondents called for contextualised benchmarking, which involved adjusting performance metrics to account for students' starting points and challenges, such as socio-economic status or SEND. By incorporating contextual value-added measures, schools can be assessed based on how effectively they support disadvantaged or SEND students, rather than being penalised for having higher proportions of these students.
- A second proposal, applying only to SEND students, was to separate the progress of SEND students from non-SEND students when evaluating school performance. Respondents thought that this could prevent schools from being unfairly compared to others with fewer students facing additional barriers. By developing SEND-specific progress frameworks, respondents believed that schools could clearly demonstrate the progress of their SEND pupils, while avoiding inappropriate comparisons with the general student population.

Section 7: Qualification pathways 16-19

This section invited views across five questions on existing qualification pathways available to learners between the ages of 16 and 19. Respondents were asked to share views on the adequacy of various pathways, their effectiveness in meeting the needs of learners, and any changes required to better support learners in work and life.

The thematic analysis revealed the following interrelated themes across responses in this section:

- Greater flexibility was needed to meet the needs of learners adequately.
- Greater importance should be placed on teaching practical and integral skills for employment.
- Career pathways should be better signposted and communicated to increase awareness.

47. To what extent does the range of programmes and qualifications on offer at each level meet the needs and aspirations of learners? a. Level 3; b. Level 2; c. Level 1 and entry level

Most responses to this question were not structured by level, instead providing general views across all levels. Where responses were made specific to each level, these have been summarised below. However, these themes represent a smaller proportion of respondents.

The most frequent view across all levels of programmes and qualifications was the requirement for better availability of qualifications/courses. Although beyond the scope of the Review, respondents felt that availability of programmes was closely linked to funding as well as geography, leading to inconsistency in availability across schools and limiting learners' options. While shared across all respondent sub-groups, this view was more popular among individual respondents, and frequently expressed by parents, teachers and academics.

The next most common view, held particularly by organisations, was the need for greater flexibility to meet learners' needs.[3] Respondents highlighted that flexibility to move between pathways could help support learners' needs and future career goals better. Some respondents noted that an agile, flexible and mixed pathway, with both

[3] Since the Call for Evidence was conducted, the G announced that it will not apply rules of engagement or combination, following its review of level 3 qualifications reform. See The outcomes of the Review of Qualifications Reform at Level 3 in England, UK Government (2024).

academic and vocational options, could support students in adapting to future career changes.

The next most common theme, although out of scope of the Review, was the need for further funding and resources to schools and colleges to allow them to offer a full range of programmes. These respondents noted that schools often had different levels of funding available for academic and vocational courses, which respondents thought led to inconsistency in availability of qualifications/courses across schools in England. Some respondents, particularly organisations, outlined the impact of fluctuating funding and related withdrawal of certain qualifications year to year (with specific reference to level 2). They felt that such withdrawals could create significant uncertainty, making it difficult for students and training providers to plan effectively.

Respondents who specifically discussed level 3, across all respondent types, generally agreed that the range of qualifications met the needs and aspirations of learners. One concern raised by respondents, particularly organisations, was the potential removal of specific qualifications such as AGQs following the review of level 3 qualifications. These respondents felt that BTECs were an integral part of wider level 3 qualifications, providing students with the opportunity and flexibility to pursue areas of interest for further study and employment and should therefore be supported by the Government.

As with level 3, most respondents specifically referencing level 2 recognised that the range of programmes and qualifications was adequate, with a few respondents calling for additional support for the development of job/industry-relevant and practical skills.

Among respondents specifically referencing level 1, most felt that the range of programmes and qualifications did not meet the needs and aspirations of learners. The most common issue cited by these respondents was the lack of flexibility and skills-based learning, particularly for students who required additional support.

Overall, where respondents perceived the need for a wider range of courses, suggestions included the need for more courses that developed practical skills, courses that aligned with industry demands, courses related to sustainability, and courses/qualifications in creative arts.

48. Are there particular changes that could be made to the following programmes and qualifications and/or their assessment that would be beneficial to learners: a. AS/A level qualifications; b. T Level and T Level Foundation Year programmes; c. Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 3; d. Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 2 and below

Respondents provided specific suggestions on changes to be made to existing qualifications to support learners better. As with the previous question, respondents did not always specifically discuss all four qualification types in their responses. Further, the thematic analysis showed a prevalence of responses for some qualification levels in favour of others.

For AS qualifications and A Levels, some respondents, particularly teachers, academics, senior leaders and students, suggested that AS qualifications be retained as a stepping stone to A Levels, given these were seen as useful in providing opportunities for students to explore a variety of subjects. These respondents felt that the common standard of choosing three A Levels (compared to four AS qualifications) was perceived as limiting students too early.

Some respondent organisations agreeing with this view added contextual information, explaining that the number of students taking AS qualifications had declined since 2015, following their decoupling from A Levels. Previously, students could decide which AS qualifications they would like to pursue for a further year whereas, now, they typically take a reduced number of A Levels compared to the previous format. These respondents therefore felt that the decoupling of AS qualifications from A Levels had the effect of students feeling that they had a narrower curriculum available to them in practice.

Other less frequent suggestions included shifting A Levels to a modular structure and expanding AS qualifications and A Levels to include a wider range of subjects**,** such as in creative arts, natural history, climate change and global studies. In this regard, respondents pointed to the recent decline in arts subjects, attributing this decline to existing Key Stage 4 accountability measures, particularly the EBacc and Progress 8, which did not prioritise these subjects. Respondents believed that, since schools were under pressure to deliver qualifications included in these accountability measures, consequently there had been a de-prioritisation of arts subjects and other subjects.

For T Levels, the most common view, raised particularly by charities, FE colleges and HE institutions, was stronger links with industry and employers' needs.

Respondents frequently called for clearer pathways to employment following T Levels, greater employer support for placements and more flexibility in placements. In relation to the need for flexibility in industry placement rules, respondents noted that some placement requirements (such as the requirement for 45-day placements at one or two employers) could make it difficult for some colleges to secure placements, particularly colleges in rural areas.[4]

For other applied or vocational qualifications, the most common view among respondents was the importance of retaining BTECs. Respondents making this observation felt that the range of BTECs offered students a variety of choices and were effective in supporting a diverse set of learners who have varying aspirations.[5] In line with responses to other questions, some respondents mentioned the need to integrate the development of practical skills better or ensure alignment with industry standards in these qualifications.

Similar to responses covering T Levels, respondents also commonly suggested the need for clearer progression pathways that align with skills demanded by employers.[6]

49. How can we improve learners' understanding of how the different programmes and qualifications on offer will prepare them for university, employment (including apprenticeships) and/or further technical study?

Most respondents, across all respondent types, called for additional career-oriented resources for students**.** Specific suggestions included independent career advisers for all schools, a structured career guidance programme (including career lessons and mentoring by professionals), and career hubs and career guidance events (led by employers and educational institutions). Others suggested the introduction of clearer career pathway mapping, linking level 3 qualifications to employment opportunities, and work placements to improve learners' exposure to employers.

Respondents, particularly FE/HE institutions and awarding organisations, also called for better signposting of available pathways and opportunities for future employment**.** Suggestions included the introduction of an interactive web portal, and clearer

[4] Since this Call for Evidence was conducted, the Government has introduced greater flexibility in T level industry placements. See T Level placements reformed to open up new qualification, UK Government (2024).
[5] It is not clear from the analysis why BTECs were particularly mentioned and perceived as being relatively more suitable for learners, as compared to other qualifications.
[6] Importantly, a wider policy intention of replacing BTECs is to provide clearer pathways by way of TOQs.

language and illustrated examples of progression routes to make it easier for students to understand different pathways.

A small proportion of respondents also suggested that improving staff training could help teachers better explain pathways (and potential outcomes) to their students.

50. To what extent is there enough scope and flexibility in the system to support learners who may need to change course?

Most respondents indicated they could not comment on this issue, and the largest proportion of those who did respond indicated that the system did not offer scope and flexibility, but did not give a specific explanation. The remaining responses offered more detail, but were less frequently cited. These responses both highlighted challenges and offered suggestions.

The most common suggestion was the need for more time and support for young people to make choices. Respondents (across all respondent types) agreed that time and support were needed to avoid students choosing courses that were not right for them. Similarly, respondents also emphasised the need for support and high-quality careers guidance during transitional periods.

The next most common view shared by respondents (across all respondent types) was that different curricula and key stages should have a more joined-up approach**,** as respondents noted that students could often find that their learning completed to date would not be transferable to a new course. Relatedly, many felt that credits should be transferable between academic and vocational qualifications, and that the current dichotomy between the two pathways was not needed. Several respondents, particularly awarding organisations and FE colleges, felt that it was particularly difficult to transfer in or out of T Levels.

Another issue reported by respondents was that students were required to specialise too early, related to the theme that three A Levels were too few to allow flexibility. These respondents proposed more credit-based or modular learning that would allow students to amass recognised and transferable qualifications throughout 16-19 education. Relatedly, the inflexibility of the assessment system was stressed by respondents, who noted that students were often blocked from following courses that they were interested in due to not having attained the required grade at GCSE or prevented from changing course because they had missed a mandatory exam in the new course.

Less frequently, respondents highlighted specific challenges encountered by students while changing course, particularly for longer, two-year courses. The

requirement to restart the school year if transferring after the allowed window was perceived by these respondents to be a barrier to students considering changing course, and some suggested that more short courses and training opportunities should be offered to young people to fill this gap. On the other hand, respondents noted that catching up after transferring course mid-year could be very difficult, and targeted support would be needed to avoid poor outcomes or students dropping out following a change. Similarly, a few respondents felt that there was not enough awareness of the flexible options available, leading students to believe they could not change course even when they could. Others felt that students were too frequently penalised or made to feel they had failed when wishing to change course, rather than being supported.

51. Are there additional skills, subjects, or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19 education, regardless of their chosen programmes and qualifications, to support them to be prepared for life and work?

Respondents widely suggested the introduction of transferable skills**,** including integral skills such as communication, problem solving, teamwork and critical thinking. This view was most common among organisational respondents, particularly FE and HE institutions, awarding organisations and charities. Other suggestions included skills such as financial literacy, digital literacy, and career and employability skills. These suggestions were shared equally across respondent types.

For 16-19 learners, respondents (across all respondent types) suggested the inclusion of subjects and experiences such as health and wellbeing (including mental health); work experience (such as internships and apprenticeships) and volunteering; sustainability and environmental issues; creative arts; and opportunities to pursue independent projects or research.

Section 8: Other issues on which we would welcome views

This section contained three questions and invited views on other issues. Questions explored potential changes or improvements to the curriculum, assessment or wraparound support to ensure better transition between key stages; the role of technology in improving the curriculum, assessment and qualifications; and other additional views that were not addressed in the previous sections.

Given the varied questions asked in this section, the thematic analysis revealed varying themes across responses.

52. How can the curriculum, assessment and wraparound support better enable transitions between key stages to ensure continuous learning and support attainment?

Overwhelmingly, respondents across all respondent types reiterated the need for a joined-up approach to the curriculum and assessment across key stages to better support transition and ensure that progress made in each key stage was not lost in the subsequent key stage. Relatedly, some respondents suggested the use of subject matter experts to support effective transition relating to subject-specific skills.

Many respondents, particularly teachers and parents, identified the need for targeted wraparound support, particularly for learners with SEND and those from lower socio-economically backgrounds. Among solutions to improve wraparound support, some individual respondents suggested peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities and the creation of places outside formal education and school, such as including more spaces in after-school clubs, where learners could potentially be better able to collaborate with each other and access supportive environments. A small set of respondents noted the need for increased engagement with parents, learners and local communities. A community-led approach was mentioned as particularly important in supporting students and learners in bettering transition rates.

53. How could technology be used to improve how we deliver the curriculum, assessment and qualifications in England?

Most commonly, respondents across all respondent types suggested the need for better public funding to enable schools to improve their technology and IT infrastructure and equipment, and enable education providers to better harness new technologies like AI and virtual reality (VR).

Many respondents, particularly teachers and parents, also suggested the need to improve parity of access to technology, with suggestions made to introduce requisite policy changes enabling such access for schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Given the widespread use of and need for use of technology in education, many respondents felt that addressing access parity was a pressing need.

Separately, suggestions were made for the use of technology to support existing learning modules, with respondents also suggesting that examination formats be made more adaptive and effective using technology. Individuals and organisations shared this view. However, some respondents urged caution around the use of technology as, whilst it can support learning, it should not replace in-person teaching.

54. Do you have any further views on anything else associated with the Curriculum and Assessment Review not covered in the questions throughout the Call for Evidence?

A majority of respondents reiterated their suggestions for specific changes to the curriculum and assessment that they had already provided in earlier questions, with most noting that they did not have any further comments or views outside those they had already provided.

Many respondents, across all respondent types, noted the need for bringing the “joy of learning” back into the curriculum, especially in Key Stages 1 and 2. Respondents, particularly local authority officers and parents, also emphasised the need for adapting the curriculum to support learners with disabilities and/or additional needs.

Respondents also called for the Review to prioritise teacher welfare and retention, in view of high staff workloads and high pressures on teaching staff, which they thought had negatively affected teachers’ mental health and led to trickle-down effects on the quality of teaching. This theme was most commonly mentioned by teachers, local authority officers and parents.

Other notable suggestions made by a small number of respondents highlighted areas not covered by the Call for Evidence, e.g., the limited role of psychology of education in curriculum redesign, the need for more subject experts in curriculum redesign, and the potential for adapting best practice from other jurisdictions.

Curriculum and Assessment Review

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