

Research Briefing

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The school curriculum in England



Summary

- 1 Overview: What do schools have to teach?
- 2 2025 review of curriculum and assessment
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Summary

What is the national curriculum in England?

Maintained schools in England must teach the [national curriculum](#) to pupils aged approximately 5 to 16 years old. The national curriculum is divided into four key stages. It includes different subjects at different stages, but maths, sciences, English, physical education and computing are included at all stages.

Academies and free schools don't currently have to follow the national curriculum. They must, however, offer a broad and balanced curriculum that covers English, maths, sciences and RE. Primary academies and free schools must also take part in national curriculum assessments, commonly referred to as SATs.

Provisions in the [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#), currently before Parliament, would change the position for academies and free schools, requiring them to teach a revised national curriculum, too.

Other curriculum subjects

In addition to the national curriculum, maintained schools in England must also currently offer:

- Relationships education for pupils of primary age, relationships and sex education (RSE) for pupils of secondary age, and health education for all pupils. These requirements also apply to academies and free schools.
- Religious education (RE) for all registered pupils. Content will depend on the type of school and (usually) the locally agreed syllabus. Academies and free schools are also required to offer RE through clauses in their funding agreements.

These elements, plus the national curriculum, comprise the statutory curriculum for maintained schools. Additionally, secondary schools must offer impartial careers advice to those in school years 9 to 13.

Curriculum and Assessment Review 2025

The national curriculum was last reviewed under the coalition government in the early 2010s.

In July 2024, the [Labour government announced a review of the national curriculum, and assessments](#), in England. The review was chaired by Professor Becky Francis, Chief Executive of the Education Endowment Foundation.

The [curriculum review's final report](#) was published on 5 November 2025. Its recommendations included:

- The introduction of an oracy framework
- The refreshed curriculum should retain a 'knowledge-rich' approach, should be coherent, and should support mastery and depth
- The curriculum should appropriately reflect the diversity of modern society
- Launching a programme of work to provide evidence-led guidance on how to adapt teaching and curriculum content for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

The review also made a large number of subject-specific recommendations.

The [government has published its response to the review](#). It has confirmed a revised national curriculum will be published in 2027, for first teaching in 2028. GCSEs in national curriculum subjects will be revised in line with the review's recommendations, for first teaching from 2029 onwards.

1

Overview: What do schools have to teach?

Box 1: overview of the current curriculum in state-funded schools in England

1. Maintained schools in England must follow the national curriculum.
2. Academies and free schools don't currently have to follow the national curriculum but provisions in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill would change this.
3. Some other subjects – such as RE – are not part of the national curriculum, but schools are required to teach them.
4. There are no minimum hours required for any national curriculum or other subject.
5. Following the recent curriculum and assessment review, the government has committed to publish a revised national curriculum in 2027, for first teaching in 2028.

1.1

Maintained school curriculum requirements

All maintained schools in England must offer the statutory curriculum as set out in Section 80 of the Education Act 2002, as amended. The statutory curriculum currently includes:

- The national curriculum for pupils aged around 5 to around 16.
- At primary level, a programme of relationships education, and at secondary level, sex and relationships education (SRE) for all registered pupils, providing the parents have not withdrawn their child.
- Health education for all pupils.

- Religious education (RE) for all registered pupils, unless they are withdrawn. Content will depend on the type of school and (usually) the locally agreed syllabus.¹

National curriculum key stages

The national curriculum in England is arranged into four key stages:

- Key stage one: school years one and two
- Key stage two: school years three to six
- Key stage three: school years seven to nine
- Key stage four: school years ten and eleven

1.2

Curriculum requirements for maintained schools

Section 78 of the 2002 act requires the curriculum at maintained schools to be “balanced and broadly based” and to:

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

Under Section 42A of the Education Act 1997, as amended, and related regulations,² schools are under a duty to offer impartial careers advice to pupils in school years 8 to 13.

The subjects included in the national curriculum at each key stage are prescribed in Sections 84 and 85 of the Education Act 2002, as amended. The following table shows the subjects included in the national curriculum at primary and secondary level.³

¹ In voluntary aided schools with a religious character, the governors determine RE policy. For VA and voluntary controlled schools, parents may request their child is taught RE according to the tenets of the school's designated faith.

² [The Careers Guidance in Schools Regulations 2013](#), SI 2013/ 709

³ Adapted from Department for Education, [National curriculum in England: framework for key stages 1 to 4](#), December 2014.

National curriculum subjects England				
	KS1	KS2	KS3	KS4
	Age approx. 5-7	Age approx. 7-11	Age approx. 11-14	Age approx. 14-16
Maths	✓	✓	✓	✓
English	✓	✓	✓	✓
Science	✓	✓	✓	✓
History	✓	✓	✓	X
Geography	✓	✓	✓	X
Art and design	✓	✓	✓	X
Physical education	✓	✓	✓	✓
Music	✓	✓	✓	X
(Modern) foreign languages	X	✓	✓	X
Computing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Design and technology	✓	✓	✓	X
Citizenship education	X	X	✓	✓

1.3 What topics are covered in each national curriculum subject?

Subject content and skills are set out in statutory programmes of study for each subject:

- [National curriculum programmes of study by subject](#)

Although maintained schools must teach the national curriculum, they can organise actual subject teaching as they see fit.

There is no requirement to spend a set amount of time on any one subject.

1.4 Withdrawing children from particular subjects

There is no general right for parents to withdraw children from any parts of the national curriculum.

Parents are able to withdraw their primary-aged children from sex education, if this is provided by the school. At secondary level, parents are able to request that their child be withdrawn from sex education, a request that head teachers should grant in all but exceptional circumstances. This applies until three terms before turning 16, at which point the young person is able to opt-in to sex education if they choose.

There is no right of withdrawal from relationships education, and nor can parents withdraw children from study of the biological aspects of human growth and reproduction which is part of national curriculum science.

Parents can also withdraw their children from RE.

1.5

The school curriculum in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Education is a devolved policy area. Schools in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales follow different curricula. A separate House of Commons Library briefing paper provides more information:

- [Commons Library briefing, Comparing the school curriculum across the UK](#)

1.6

Early years and reception class

The national curriculum doesn't cover children in the reception year of primary or infant school. They follow the statutory [Early years foundation stage framework](#), or EYFS.

1.7

Curriculum at academies and free schools

Academies and free schools don't currently have to teach the national curriculum although many will follow it. Mainstream academies are required to offer a broad and balanced curriculum. This must cover English, maths, science, RE and any other curriculum conditions set out in the academy trust's funding agreement with the Secretary of State. Section 1.5 below outlines the requirements in relation to relationships and sex education (RSE).

Provisions in the [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#) would mean academies would have to follow the national curriculum.

Independent fee-paying schools are also required to offer a broad and balanced curriculum, as prescribed in the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014, as amended. There is no requirement for them to follow the national curriculum.

1.8

Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE)

The Government doesn't specify the content of PSHE in England, but expects all state-funded schools to offer it. The PSHE Association has published [guidance on what schools could cover](#). Further information about PSHE can be found in another Library briefing paper:

- [House of Commons Library briefing paper, Personal, social, health and economic education in schools \(England\)](#)

1.9

Relationships, sex and health education in state-funded schools

Since September 2020, state-funded primary-phase schools have been under a new statutory obligation to deliver revised relationships and health education. State-funded secondary-phase schools are required to teach revised relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education.

There is statutory guidance on the reformed subjects:

- Department for Education, [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education](#). A revised version comes into force in September 2026.

In light of the Coronavirus pandemic, schools were given flexibility to delay the start of RSE teaching until the start of the summer 2021 term, where necessary.⁴

Further information on what is required of schools, and the policy background on RSE, can be found in a linked Library briefing paper:

- House of Commons Library, [Relationships and Sex Education in Schools \(England\)](#).

⁴ Department for Education, [Implementation of relationships education, relationships and sex education and health education 2020 to 2021](#), updated 15 July 2025

1.10

An overview of current assessments in England's state-funded schools

Primary schools

Children at state-funded primary schools in England take a number of assessments:

- In the first term of reception year, children take a baseline assessment to determine their starting points. The results aren't published at any geographical level.
- In school year one, when children are usually aged around 5 or 6, they undergo phonics screening. This is designed to test foundational reading skills.
- In school year four, children complete a times table check.
- In school year six, they take national curriculum assessments, more commonly known as SATs, in English reading, writing and maths. The results are reported at school level.

Secondary schools and further education

In school year eleven, when children are aged 15 or 16, they sit GCSEs, or equivalent qualifications. Commonly these will include English, maths, sciences and options in languages, humanities, and arts subjects although there are no mandatory qualifications. The majority of pupils take between 7 and 10 GCSE or equivalent qualifications, but there can be several exam papers per subject.

Most GCSEs are now assessed solely by examinations at the end of the course. This follows [reforms from 2014, which led to new GCSEs graded 9 to 1](#) (9 being highest). Some subjects such as art and design, drama and food and nutrition retain non-exam assessment.

Students continuing in education post-16 can follow different qualification pathways, for example, A Levels, T Levels, or vocational qualifications. Any who haven't passed maths and English GCSE at grade 4 or above will usually have to carry on studying these subjects.

2

2025 review of curriculum and assessment

2.1

Announcement of review

The national curriculum in England was last reviewed during the coalition government's term. There is more information about this in section three of this briefing paper.

In July 2024, the [Labour government announced a review of the national curriculum, and assessments](#), in England. The review was chaired by Professor Becky Francis, Chief Executive of the Education Endowment Foundation.

The [terms of reference for the review](#) said it was aiming to deliver:

- An excellent foundation in core subjects of reading, writing and maths.
- A broader curriculum, so that children and young people do not miss out on subjects such as music, art, sport and drama, as well as vocational subjects.
- A curriculum that ensures children and young people leave compulsory education ready for life and ready for work, building the knowledge, skills and attributes young people need to thrive. This includes embedding digital, oracy and life skills in their learning.
- A curriculum that reflects the issues and diversities of our society, ensuring all children and young people are represented.
- An assessment system that captures the strengths of every child and young person and the breadth of curriculum, with the right balance of assessment methods whilst maintaining the important role of examinations.⁵

⁵ Department for Education, [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Review Aims, Terms of Reference and Working Principles](#), (July 2024)

2.2

Final report, November 2025

The [curriculum review's final report](#) was published on 5 November 2025, and made a large number of recommendations, which included: ⁶

- The introduction of an oracy framework
- The refreshed curriculum should retain a 'knowledge-rich' approach
- The curriculum should appropriately reflect the diversity of modern society: all curriculum programmes of study and, where appropriate, corresponding GCSE subject content to be reviewed and updated accordingly
- Make the national curriculum a digital product
- Launch a programme of work to provide evidence-led guidance on how to adapt teaching and curriculum content for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Involve teachers in testing new programmes of study
- Introduce the revised curriculum in a careful and staged manner

There were also a number of subject-specific recommendations, including:

- **Citizenship:** Making this a mandatory subject at primary level, to include financial and media literacy, as well as climate change and sustainability, plus (at secondary level – where citizenship is already mandatory), equality duties, challenging discrimination, and democracy and government
- **Computing:** replacing computer science GCSE with a new computing GCSE.
- **English:** a greater focus on grammar in use rather than in theory, and at key stage four, retaining requirements to study “texts drawn from the recognised body of English literature”, whilst also including more diverse and representative texts.⁷
- **Languages:** updates to key stage two programmes of study to standardise expectations about what pupils should learn.
- **Maths:** re-sequence content at key stages one to three, and introduce a diagnostic maths test in year eight to identify gaps in knowledge

⁶ [Curriculum and assessment review: Final report](#), 5 November 2025

⁷ As above, p79

- Religious education: RE should be added to the national curriculum, and a draft curriculum should be produced, as a first step. The government should consider removing the requirement to teach RE in sixth form.
- Science: introduce an entitlement to triple science at GCSE, as well as ensuring climate change and sustainability is covered.

Recommendations on exams, assessments and accountability

Recommendations included:

- Key stage one: government to encourage schools to take up the optional SATs, and develop a way of assessing progress for children who cannot access the phonics screening check owing to specific special educational needs or disabilities (SEND).
- Key stage two: improve the teacher assessment frameworks for writing, replace the current grammar, punctuation and spelling test, and improve moderation processes.
- Key stage three: introduce new diagnostic English and maths tests in year eight to identify gaps in learning.
- Key stage four:
 - work with exam regulator Ofqual to reduce overall GCSE exam time by 10% or more.
 - Keep the system where subjects are mostly assessed by exam at the end of the course, while retaining non-exam assessment (coursework) where necessary.
 - Work to mitigate the risks to assessment from generative artificial intelligence (AI)
 - Continue work on on-screen assessments, particularly to reduce exam burdens on students and ensure qualifications are more accessible for learners with SEND.
 - Scrap the [Ebacc performance measure](#), but keep the [Progress 8 performance measure](#), with a minor naming change
- Post-16:
 - Introduce new V Levels, a vocational route to sit alongside T Levels and A Levels.
 - Continue work to reduce assessment burden of T Levels, and promoting more employer engagement, work encounters and industry placements.

- Introduce two new level two (GCSE equivalent) pathways for post-16 learners, as well as new level one modular qualifications in maths and English.

Government response

The government [published its response alongside the review](#).⁸ Areas where the response indicates a different approach from the review's recommendations included:

- Progress 8 and Attainment 8: [it published plans](#) for more significant reform of these performance measures than envisaged by the review.
- Maths and English checks in year 8: it will introduce a statutory reading check in year 8, whereas the maths check will be an expectation for schools. In their response, the government said its view was that “weaknesses in reading are the most critical to be resolved in the first years of secondary school”.⁹

The government has committed to:

- Publish a revised national curriculum in 2027 for first teaching in 2028
- Update GCSEs in national curriculum subjects in line with the review's recommendations, for first teaching from 2029 onwards.¹⁰

The government has also announced that all schools in England will be expected to offer a programme of enrichment activities – a so-called enrichment entitlement.¹¹ Additionally, it will explore introducing a new level three qualification in data science and artificial intelligence.¹²

Reaction to recommendations and government response

Laura Trott, Shadow Education Secretary criticised the government's response to the review, telling the Commons she had “serious concerns”:

[T]he proposed wider changes will water down standards, lower expectations and divert teaching time away from the core education, which gives every child the best chance to get on in life. The temptation to make the curriculum a repository for every social concern is ever present, but when everything is a priority, nothing is.¹³

⁸ Department for Education, [Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report: government response](#), 5 November 2025

⁹ Department for Education, [Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report: government response](#), 5 November 2025, p20

¹⁰ As above, p9

¹¹ As above, p11

¹² As above, p29

¹³ [HC Deb 5 November 2025, col 929](#)

Liberal Democrat Education Spokesperson, Munira Wilson, welcomed much of what had been announced, “particularly ... more enrichment activities and citizenship education, including financial and media literacy.” However, she raised concerns about resource implications for schools, both financial and in terms of recruiting and retaining enough specialist subject teachers.¹⁴

In a [blog for the Higher Education Policy Institute](#) (HEPI), Professor Sir Chris Husbands characterised the final review report as offering “a nip here, a tuck there and a tweak in other places”, noting that it was underpinned by “evolution rather than revolution”.¹⁵

[Natalie Perera, outgoing director of the education think-tank, the Education Policy Institute \(EPI\), said](#) the government “had set out a broadly sensible direction of travel” and particularly welcomed “a greater focus on speaking, listening and oracy and reforms to accountability measures for secondary schools”. However, she said the government needed to be “even more ambitious” in its forthcoming white paper on SEND to deliver “a system that works for all”.¹⁶

The [National Governance Association, representing school governing boards, said](#) it broadly welcomed the review’s final report.¹⁷ It was “pleased that progress has been made on our members’ two biggest asks – a stronger emphasis on skills and a greater focus on non-core subjects.” However, it said there would need to be emphasis on school staff wellbeing and workload during the period of transition to a revised curriculum.

The [National Association of Head Teachers \(NAHT\) said](#) the review was “a step in the right direction in better meeting the needs of all pupils”. In particular, the union welcomed the recommendations to scrap the Ebacc measure, to make RE part of the national curriculum and that “the review has recognised that the curriculum is outdated and overloaded”. It said, however, that the opportunity to reduce primary testing had been missed, and this was “immensely disappointing”.¹⁸

The National Education Union (NEU) welcomed the review’s recognition that the amount of curriculum content needed to be “genuinely teachable”. Similarly to the NAHT, however, it criticised the decision to retain statutory testing in primary schools. Further, it said the review had “missed the

¹⁴ [HC Deb 5 November 2025, col 933-4](#)

¹⁵ Professor Sir Chris Husbands, blog for HEPI, “[The Curriculum and Assessment Review](#)”, 6 November 2025

¹⁶ Education Policy Institute, [EPI comment on the Government’s response to the Curriculum and Assessment review](#), 5 November 2025

¹⁷ National Governance Association, “[A New Curriculum for Schools: Key Takeaways from the Francis Review](#)”, 5 November 2025

¹⁸ NAHT press notice, “[NAHT responds to curriculum review](#)”, 4 November 2025

opportunity to push for a wider, fairer range of secondary assessment methods, beyond only end-of-course exams”.¹⁹

¹⁹ NEU press notice, “[Final report of the independent Curriculum and Assessment Review](#)”, 5 November 2025

3

Historical background on national curriculum

The national curriculum was introduced by the Thatcher government following the passage of the [Education Reform Act 1988](#). A comprehensive account of its early history can be found in the 2009 report of the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee, [National Curriculum](#).²⁰

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

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

1993 – review of the national curriculum by Sir Ron Dearing in response to teachers’ observations that the curriculum was ‘unwieldy’. A revised NC was introduced in 1995 with less prescribed content and changes to testing arrangements.

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

1999 – major review of the curriculum overseen by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) resulting in the further slimming down of prescribed content, and the introduction of a statement of aims and purposes.

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

2007 – ‘root and branch’ review of the primary national curriculum announced by the government, subsequently undertaken by Sir Jim Rose from 2008 and with findings published in April 2009.

²⁰ Children, Schools and Families Select Committee, [National Curriculum, Fourth Report of Session 2008-09](#), 2 April 2009, Vol 1., HCC 344-1

Background to the coalition government's curriculum reforms

The coalition government began extensive reform of the national curriculum in England in 2011. A summary of the key milestones in curriculum reform in the early years of the coalition government is provided below.

November 2010: coalition government publishes its wide-ranging schools White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*.²¹ This confirmed plans to reform the whole national curriculum, slimming down content and reducing prescription.

January 2011: DfE announces review of national curriculum, setting out its motivations in a press notice.²²

January 2011: DfE establishes expert panel to inform the curriculum review. This was chaired by Tim Oates, then Director of Assessment Research and Development for Cambridge Assessment.

December 2011: DfE publishes expert panel's final report.²³

December 2011: Date for first teaching of revised core subjects (English, maths, science, PE) pushed back from September 2013 to September 2014.²⁴

June 2012: then-government publishes draft programmes of study for the core subjects of English, maths and science at KS1 and KS2, for discussion.²⁵ An accompanying press release said the new curricula were “more demanding” and reflected practice in other “high-performing jurisdictions”.²⁶

Reaction to the June 2012 proposals

The publication of draft programmes of study in June 2012 attracted a mixed response. An [article](#) in The Guardian reported that Prof Andrew Pollard (a member of the expert panel) had described the proposals as “fatally flawed” in showing insufficient consideration of the needs of learners, and described the programmes of study as “overly prescriptive”.²⁷ In response, the DfE said that the proposals would not act as a ‘rigid straitjacket’ for teachers, and that flexibility would remain for schools in how they covered the content.²⁸

²¹ [The Importance of Teaching. The Schools White Paper 2010](#), November 2010, Cm 7980

²² DfE press release, [National curriculum review launched](#), 20 January 2011.

²³ DfE, [The Framework for the National Curriculum. A report by the Expert Panel for the National Curriculum review](#), December 2011

²⁴ [Schools: National Curriculum Review](#), written ministerial statement by Michael Gove, HC Deb 19 December 2011, c 139 WS

²⁵ The drafts are no longer available online.

²⁶ DfE press release, [New primary curriculum to bring higher standards in English, maths and science](#), 11 June 2012.

²⁷ [“Michael Gove’s curriculum attacked by expert who advised him”](#), The Guardian, 12 June 2012.

²⁸ As above

Professor Robin Alexander of Cambridge University, and Director of the Cambridge Primary Review, criticised the government for what he saw as citing “selectively and tendentiously” from the international evidence and ignoring important contextual and cultural factors, in building the case for reform.²⁹

A press release from the National Union of Teachers (NUT) said that much of what was proposed was already covered in primary schools but that there was a risk of creating “a task orientated curriculum” which would “simply stultify the learning process and, due to its inherent inflexibility, make it impossible for many children to achieve in the time and space they need”.³⁰

The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) gave more mixed responses. ASCL welcomed the emphasis on English, maths and languages at primary level but criticised the government for not ‘seizing the opportunity’ to slim down the curriculum and for failing to make clear at this stage what the proposals in respect of the secondary curriculum were likely to be.³¹ NAHT welcomed what it saw as a ‘leaner’ science curriculum, positive aspects of the English curriculum, assurances of no further statutory testing (SATs) and a concentration on what should be taught, as opposed to how. The union, however, thought that schools would need ‘time and support’ to deliver the curriculum’s ‘more demanding’ programmes and judged that much of the content was in fact not new.³²

Other commentators welcomed the changes. An article in The Times of 13 June 2012 argued that Gove had been ‘unfairly derided’ for the new primary school curriculum, which in fact should be praised for its level of ambition.³³ Similarly, in an article for the Financial Times, commentator Stephen Robinson hailed the reforms for putting “proper content ...back into the curriculum”.³⁴

Further consultation on programmes of study: February and July 2013

Subsequently, the then government ran a number of additional consultations on further revised programmes of study.

On 7 February 2013, the DfE published further draft programmes of study, this time for formal consultation, in [a draft National Curriculum Framework Document](#). For the first time, draft programmes of study for foundation

²⁹ Alexander, R., “[Neither national nor a curriculum?](#)” in Forum, Volume 54, Number 3. 2012.

³⁰ NUT, Primary curriculum – press release, 11 June 2012

³¹ See ASCL press release, [Primary curriculum only half the picture](#), 11 June 2012

³² NAHT website article, ‘Curriculum proposals must now be tested by the professionals, says NAHT’, 11 June 2012

³³ “[Be ambitious: spell ‘conscience’, learn Keats](#)”, The Times (subscription required), 13 June 2012

³⁴ “[Gove’s back-to-basics drive is just what education needs](#)”, Financial Times (subscription required), 16 June 2012

subjects such as history, geography and music were released, as were the long-awaited secondary programmes, apart from maths, science and English at KS4.

Again, the proposals proved highly controversial and generated strong feeling among commentators – particularly with respect to the proposed subject content. On 20 March 2013, The Independent published a highly critical letter signed by a large number of academics about the curriculum proposals.³⁵ The letter’s authors criticised what they saw as the new curriculum’s “endless lists of spellings, facts and rules” and “mountain[s] of data” which would not develop young children’s understanding and expected “too much too young”. Michael Gove responded to his critics in a strongly worded article for the Daily Mail on 23 March 2013.³⁶ A subsequent DfE report on consultation responses gave a summary of feedback received.³⁷

July 2013 – second formal consultation

In July 2013, the government made further changes to the programmes of study, and launched an additional consultation. Changes made from the earlier documents included:

- More emphasis in primary English on spoken language skills and further content on vocabulary development.
- Revisions to design and technology programmes in response to concerns that it lacked aspiration and was insufficiently flexible.
- Removal of previous limitation on the languages that could be offered at KS2 – schools would now have free choice.
- Revision of the history programmes in response to concerns that earlier drafts were too prescriptive. This revision slimmed down the overall content and included additional content on world history while retaining a core focus on “teaching the history of Britain and its relationship with the world in a clear chronological framework.”³⁸

³⁵ Letter from Prof. Michael Bassey and 99 others, “[Gove will bury pupils in facts and rules](#), The Independent, 20 March 2013

³⁶ Article by Michael Gove, “[I refuse to surrender to the Marxist teachers hell-bent on destroying our schools: Education Secretary berates 'the new enemies of promise' for opposing his plans.](#)”, Daily Mail, 23 March 2013

³⁷ DfE, [Reform of the national curriculum in England/ Report of the consultation conducted February – April 2013](#), July 2013

³⁸ As above, p6

First final curriculum documents published in September 2013

On 11 September 2013, the government published summary findings of the consultation on the revised programmes of study and attainment targets.³⁹ Alongside this, it released the finalised national curriculum documents and programmes of study for introduction from September 2014. A Written Statement of 12 September 2013 gave further details.⁴⁰ Programmes of study for English, maths and science at KS4 were published later, on 2 December 2014, and were subject to a separate consultation.

Reform to GCSEs, AS and A Levels

Alongside reforms to the national curriculum, the coalition government embarked on reform of GCSEs, AS and A level qualifications. Full background on these changes is available in a separate Library briefing paper:

- [House of Commons Library briefing paper, GCSE, AS and A Level reform.](#)

³⁹ DfE, [Reforming the national curriculum in England. Summary report of the July to August 2013 consultation on the new programmes of study and attainment targets from September 2014](#), 11 September 2013

⁴⁰ [Education Reform \(Schools\)](#), Written Ministerial Statement, HC Deb 12 September 2013: c54WS

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