

Public consultation on curriculum reform

Consultation overview

30 April – 24 July 2009

www.dscf.gov.uk/consultations

QCA is managing this consultation on behalf of DCSF



department for
children, schools and families

Consultation overview

The government is proposing some important changes to the curriculum and is giving all those involved in education, including teachers, governors, parents, employers, young people and the wider education community the opportunity to comment on the proposals. The feedback you provide will be used by the government to inform its final decisions about these proposals.

The proposals are about:

- the primary curriculum
- personal, social, health and economic education across both primary and secondary phases
- subject level descriptions
- updated non-statutory guidance on religious education.

This document explains each of the proposals in more detail and then invites you to submit your views through an online consultation survey available on the QCA website.

There are four chapters to this document, one for each of the key areas where change is being proposed, and as a minimum it is recommended that you read the relevant chapter before completing the online consultation survey.

We also recommend that you refer to the more detailed documentation on each of the changes at www.qca.org.uk/curriculumconsultation.

The public consultation closes at **5pm on 24 July 2009**. After this time a full report will be submitted by QCA to the secretary of state. The government will then consider its response to the consultation and is expected to publish this in the autumn. If you complete the consultation questionnaire, we will let you know when the published response becomes available.

If you have any queries about this consultation, or the questionnaire, please contact info@qca.org.uk.

Thank you for your participation.

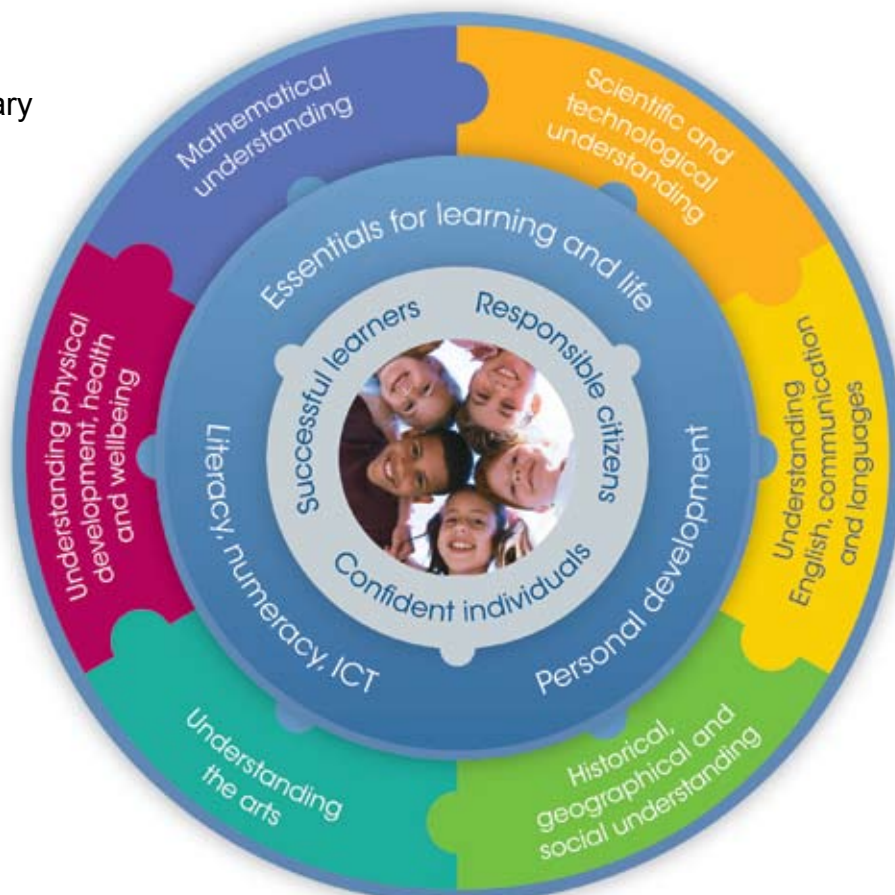
Chapter 1: The primary curriculum review

Introduction

In January 2008 the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families invited Sir Jim Rose to lead an independent review of the primary curriculum with the support of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). In his remit letter to Sir Jim Rose, the secretary of state outlined what he expected from a fundamental review of the primary curriculum. In response, Sir Jim Rose and QCA sought the views of thousands of teachers, parents and education experts, and gathered evidence from international research to develop and propose a new primary curriculum. Sir Jim Rose published an interim report, including recommendations, in late 2008.

The review was asked to focus on reducing prescription, repetition and overload in the curriculum; improving manageability for schools; strengthening the focus on literacy and numeracy; and putting a greater focus on personal development and wellbeing. In addition, since the start of the review, information and communication technology (ICT) emerged as an additional aspect that needs to be strengthened.

The proposed primary curriculum



The proposals are detailed below:

How the curriculum is organised

The proposed curriculum is organised into three parts and lays out what children should be taught in the primary years.

1. Curriculum aims

These aims should inform all aspects of curriculum planning, teaching and learning at whole-school and subject levels. The curriculum aims are:

to enable all young people to become:

- **successful learners** who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve
- **confident individuals** who are able to lead safe, healthy and fulfilling lives
- **responsible citizens** who make a positive contribution to society.

2. Essentials for learning and life

The essentials for learning and life are made up of:

- literacy
- numeracy
- ICT capability
- learning and thinking skills, personal and emotional skills and social skills.

The essentials are designed to be developed across the curriculum.

3. Six areas of learning

- Understanding the arts
- Understanding English, communication and languages
- Historical, geographical and social understanding
- Mathematical understanding
- Understanding physical development, health and wellbeing
- Scientific and technological understanding

An additional programme of learning on religious education (RE) is also part of the consultation, but will remain non-statutory. In addition, updated guidance on the teaching of RE is being consulted on separately.

Essentials for learning and life

The essentials for learning and life will run through the curriculum. These are literacy, numeracy and ICT capability, and learning and thinking skills, personal and emotional skills and social skills. Teachers will ensure that children are given sufficient opportunities to develop and apply these skills throughout the curriculum when they plan engaging learning experiences.

Areas of learning

Evidence from curricula across the world, advice of leading educationalists, and suggestions from teachers, young people and many others indicates that the curriculum should be organised into areas that bring together knowledge, skills and understanding. This allows more meaningful links between subjects and areas of learning.

The proposed six areas of learning set out the essential knowledge, key skills, experiences, progression and cross-curricular opportunities that children should be offered during the primary phase. Organising the curriculum in this way means there is more opportunity to make links between subjects and between areas of learning to deepen children's understanding.

Specific requirements for developing ICT skills are set out in each area of learning where it directly contributes to the essential knowledge and key ideas within that area of learning so that children see the skills and use of ICT as a part of their everyday learning.

Within each area of learning curricular progression is set out in three sections: early, middle and later. These are designed to help teachers plan appropriately challenging experiences for their children.

The curriculum offers teachers more flexibility to select specific subject content which will be meaningful and challenging to their pupils and will support the development of skills and understanding.

Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education

Under these new proposals, Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education will become statutory. This means that children will be taught the knowledge, skills and understanding that help them to make well-informed choices that affect their wellbeing. These elements are in the learning and thinking skills, personal and emotional skills and social skills, part of the essentials for learning and life and aspects of the six areas of learning, particularly the area entitled *Understanding physical development, health and wellbeing*.

Citizenship

In addition to PSHE education, citizenship is proposed to become a statutory part of the national curriculum. In these proposals it is within the historical, geographical and social understanding area of learning.

Languages

Within the English, communication and languages area of learning a new section on teaching additional languages brings the primary curriculum in line with the recent proposals for languages to be compulsory in key stage 2 from September 2010.

Religious education

Alongside the programmes of learning of the primary national curriculum, a non-statutory programme of learning is set out for RE, based on the non-statutory national framework. It is provided as a guide to those designing local syllabuses to help them to integrate RE with the curriculum as a whole.

Learners' needs and transition

The proposed model will help teachers design a curriculum that best suits their children's needs and takes into account the location of the school and the nature of the community.

Have your say on these proposals for the primary curriculum at www.qca.org.uk/curriculumconsultation

A successful primary curriculum will link with the strong foundations developed in the early years and enable primary children to transfer smoothly to secondary school. These design principles of the revised curriculum are intended to promote creativity and disciplined innovation in teaching and learning, so that children can respond positively to the needs of a changing society and their future world of work.

The proposed curriculum is designed to challenge, inspire and engage pupils so they develop a passion for learning both now and in the future. For teachers the model will offer greater flexibility to design and tailor the curriculum to their children's needs and the unique circumstances of their school and community. For parents the curriculum will encourage greater involvement and interest in learning beyond the classroom. It will help to bridge the gap between children's learning at school and their interests beyond the classroom.

The other recommendations mentioned in the Rose review are not being consulted on, but you can read them, and the full report, at www.dcsf.gov.uk/primarycurriculumreview.

Chapter 2: Proposals to change Personal, Social, Health and Economic education

Introduction

In October 2008 the Government announced its intention to make Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education statutory and launched an independent review, led by headteacher Sir Alasdair Macdonald, to investigate the most effective way of taking this forward.

PSHE education aims to help children and young people deal with the real life issues they face as they grow up. The issues that PSHE education covers are central to young people's wellbeing: nutrition and physical activity; drugs, alcohol and tobacco; sex and relationships; emotional health and wellbeing; safety; careers; work-related learning; and personal finance.

Sir Alasdair Macdonald's independent review, as well as previous reviews of sex and relationships education and drug and alcohol education, provided evidence that the quality of PSHE education varies significantly across the country and often does not meet the needs of children and young people. These reviews all underline that PSHE education is not given sufficient priority in many schools and that making the subject statutory is key to raising its status and improving provision.

The Macdonald review

The government acknowledged that making PSHE education statutory raises a number of areas of concern for schools, parents and young people. These key concerns include pressures on the curriculum, the role of governing bodies, and the parental right of withdrawal from sex and relationships education. These are all being considered as part of this consultation.

Wider implementation issues involved in making PSHE education statutory, such as models of delivery, workforce development, assessment, and accountability are not part of this consultation, as they do not involve legislative issues. These matters are being taken forward separately by the government.

The independent Macdonald review engaged with schools, parents and carers, children and young people, faith groups, social partners and other key stakeholder groups to build consensus and find solutions to these key issues. These solutions are outlined below

Proposals

The proposals that are being consulted on are briefly outlined below.

In the current national curriculum, PSHE education is included in the non-statutory guidelines. This means it is not compulsory, even though most schools teach it within the school day. The recommendation from the Macdonald review is that PSHE education should become a statutory part of the national curriculum so that all learners at primary and secondary levels have access to this important content.

In the proposed new primary curriculum, the issues covered in PSHE education are primarily contained within the area of learning understanding physical development, health and wellbeing. It is proposed that this area of learning be made statutory.

The new secondary curriculum has two non-statutory programmes of study that cover these elements of PSHE education – economic wellbeing and financial capability, and personal wellbeing. It is proposed that these programmes of study are made statutory. Schools have welcomed these programmes of study as they help to address the key issues that confront young people while continuing to give teachers the freedom and flexibility to design meaningful learning experiences tailored to the needs and context of the school and its pupils.

Have your say on these proposals for the teaching of PSHE education at www.qca.org.uk/curriculumconsultation

Within the current non-statutory guidelines for the teaching of sex and relationships education parents have the right to withdraw their children from this aspect of learning. The proposals are that parents should continue to be allowed to withdraw their children from the sex and relationships education aspect of PSHE education. In addition, the proposals state that all schools should develop a sex and relationships education policy. Parents should continue to be involved in this process. It is being proposed that, in secondary schools, learners should also be consulted.

Finally, during the review, many people felt that the title Personal, Social, Health and Economic education may not be the most appropriate to help people to understand the elements contained within it. This consultation seeks the views of participants on whether a better name exists for this aspect of the secondary curriculum.

The other recommendations outlined in the Macdonald review are not being consulted on, but you can read them, and the full report, at:
<http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00495-2009>

Chapter 3: Proposals to change the subject level descriptions

Background

In all National Curriculum subjects, the criteria for assessing learners' progress are set out in descriptions of performance at eight levels for each attainment target. These national standards, established in their current form in 1995, allow teachers, learners and their parents, carers or guardians to see how well they are doing in relation to their prior attainment and to expectations for learners of their age. The descriptions have been written so that:

- level 2 represents expectations for most 7 year-olds (at the end of year 2)
- level 4 represents expectations for most 11 year-olds (at the end of year 6)
- levels 5 to 6 represent expectations for most 14 year-olds (at the end of year 9).

Curriculum reviews

When the secondary curriculum was reviewed and subsequently implemented from September 2008, some amendments were proposed to the level descriptions at levels 4 to 8 to reflect changes to the programmes of study. These changes did not affect the standards being defined so that comparability of performance from previous years could be maintained.

These revised level descriptions are due to be used statutorily for the first time in the summer of 2011 when the first cohort of pupils to complete key stage 3 under the new curriculum will be assessed at the end of year 9 and their attainment reported to parents, carers or guardians.

A small but significant minority of pupils at key stage 3, including many who have special educational needs, will be achieving at levels below level 4 and so it is important that these levels are also reviewed.

The main reason for making the proposed changes is to provide a full set of revised level descriptions for subject specialist secondary teachers who may have pupils working at levels 1 to 3 and need to make end of key stage 3 judgements about their performance in National Curriculum subjects.

The recent primary curriculum review led by Sir Jim Rose recommends that the current subjects at key stages 1 and 2 are replaced by areas of learning. We do not propose to create level descriptions for areas of learning but anticipate that primary teachers might instead wish to refer to the revised subject-specific attainment targets and level descriptions as points of reference or general guides when assessing pupils' attainment in aspects of the content and skills contained in the new areas of learning. When subjects such as English and mathematics have formal national assessment during the primary phase, the intention is that the level descriptions for these subjects will formally apply to these assessments.

Proposals

For the majority of subjects (that is, art and design, design and technology, geography, history, mathematics, music, physical education and science) we propose very minor amendments to levels 1 to 3 (levels 1 to 4 for design and technology, mathematics and music) to bring the level descriptions in line with those for levels 4 to 8 which were published as part of the secondary review.

For a minority of subjects, the changes we propose to the level descriptions are more extensive:

- **Citizenship** will be introducing an eight-level scale for the first time in 2011. Revisions are proposed, based on feedback from teachers and other stakeholders, to all the draft level descriptions published in 2008. These revisions seek to reduce the length and improve the clarity of the level descriptions.
- **In English**, all of the level descriptions from levels 1 to 8 have been revised to include references to multimodal forms of communication that reflect the requirements in the English and communication elements of the primary area of learning and the key stage 3 programme of study for English.

- Proposed revisions to **information and communication technology (ICT)** reflect the raised expectations of pupil achievement in the new primary curriculum.

It is also proposed that the existing four attainment targets for **modern foreign languages (MFL)** are merged into two, to accommodate an additional attainment target for intercultural understanding. The level descriptions for the revised attainment targets 1 and 2 are largely unchanged, therefore maintain current standards and congruence with the Languages Ladder.

All proposed changes would come into effect for key stage 3 in 2011 when the first statutory assessment takes place at end of year 9. At this point the first group of pupils would have covered the new secondary curriculum since the start of year 7 in 2008.

**Have your say on these proposals
for the subject level descriptions at
www.qca.org.uk/curriculumconsultation**

Chapter 4: Updated non-statutory guidance on religious education

Introduction

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) decided to issue updated non-statutory guidance on religious education (RE) for a variety of reasons. The previous guidance on RE was contained in Circular 1/94, issued in January 1994 following the Education Act 1993. This guidance has become dated in light of subsequent social, educational and legal changes. The legislation governing the provision of RE remains the same, but the guidance reflects the contemporary context of RE in schools today.

Changes since the 1994 guidance

Changes in general legislation

A number of legislative changes such as the Human Rights Act 1998, the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 and the Equality Act 2006 contribute to the 'bigger picture' within which RE is provided.

Educational changes

Since 1994 there have been changes in both educational structures and the curriculum which impact on RE. New types of school such as academies have come into existence. Provisions for children's early years have been extended and contribute to an educational vision that now routinely caters for the needs of young people up to the age of 19.

The Every Child Matters agenda and the Children's Plan form the context for the whole learning experience. There is increased emphasis on inclusion and on the development of the whole child or young person in social and emotional as well as cognitive terms.

The updated guidance

This updated guidance is intended to provide a clear point of reference on the roles and responsibilities of schools and local authorities that have a statutory duty to provide RE. It also aims to provide clear information for partner organisations that have a role in supporting the provision of RE.

The proposed guidance covers:

- the legal framework for RE in England, including the responsibilities of local authorities, Standing Advisory Councils for Religious Education (SACREs), agreed syllabus conferences and different types of schools
- the importance of RE to the curriculum overall, and its relevance to the three curriculum aims, to community cohesion and to the promotion of pupils' well-being
- the non-statutory national framework for RE, its importance as an agreement between faith/belief groups and professional associations on the principles underpinning effective RE, and its alignment with the curriculum as a whole
- what SACREs and local authorities need to know, including the legal provision for developing agreed syllabuses
- what school governors and headteachers need to know
- what those who plan, manage, teach and support RE need to know
- the right to withdraw from RE.

Have your say on the updated guidance on religious education for the primary curriculum at www.qca.org.uk/curriculumconsultation