

Qualifications and Curriculum Association (QCA): **The secondary curriculum review consultation**

Consultation response from the General Teaching Council for England

Introduction

1. The General Teaching Council for England (GTC) is the independent professional body for the teaching profession. Its main duties are to regulate the teaching profession and to advise the Secretary of State on a range of issues that concern teaching and learning. The Council acts in the public interest to contribute to raising the standards of teaching and learning.
2. The GTC broadly supports the aims and principles of the secondary curriculum review and recommends that the review is placed within a manageable, clear and stable system for schools over the long-term.
3. Secondary schools are currently in the midst of preparation for radical reforms, notably the introduction of the Diploma and restructuring for extended school provision. Schools are being asked to increase the emphasis on skills within the curriculum, focus on employability, undergo national monitoring for standards and pursue the *Every Child Matters* outcomes. It is essential that the secondary curriculum review is, therefore, part of a considered, coherent and long-term strategy.
4. Whilst the Council welcomes this review at secondary level, the principles are equally valid at primary. The GTC therefore recommends a review of the curriculum at all Key Stages (KS). Flexibility in the curriculum is equally necessary at primary level to engage and motivate all students, address under-achievement and ensure a smooth transition between Key Stages.
5. The review has recently been extended to cover KS4, and the abrupt introduction of a wider scope for the review is a cause for some concern. The GTC has worked jointly with teachers and the QCA to examine the implications of the review for KS3, but there has been no opportunity to explore the implications for KS4. In principle, widening the scope of the review is a positive step, since the aim of enabling flexibility is valid at all Key Stages. However, the QCA and Government must ensure that they have fully taken on board the implications of the review on KS4, particularly given the ongoing 14-19 reforms. The review must ensure that issues unique to KS4 are not overlooked and that consultation has been sufficient and not piecemeal.

6. There is a clear need for supporting materials to show how the aims could be embedded in and across the curriculum, and the QCA's website guidance on organising the curriculum through lenses, subjects, and curriculum dimensions addresses this need without being overly prescriptive.

Recommendations

7. The GTC has identified four areas that will be key to the success of the secondary curriculum review within the current schools context:
- **Flexibility and entitlement:** there should be a balance between a core entitlement in the curriculum and flexibility for schools to respond to local context and learning needs. The Government should be careful not to over-prescribe content and must ensure continuity and commitment in its vision and implementation of the revised curriculum.
 - **Assessment:** the assessment system needs to shift its emphasis towards the needs of pupils and away from national monitoring. The system currently encourages schools to teach a narrow curriculum, hindering the authentic progress of pupils, and is an obstacle to the desire for flexible, tailored curricula in schools. The GTC proposes:
 - a shift towards formative teacher assessment through embedding assessment for learning in schools;
 - an accountability model that gives schools more responsibility to provide enhanced information for parents and replaces the current publication of comparisons between school performance;
 - a system of cohort sampling to monitor national progress in pupil achievement.
 - **Teacher learning:** teachers and school leaders will need enhanced learning and development opportunities to respond to the outcomes of the secondary curriculum review.

The curriculum review will be most successful where it is supported by a sustained, enquiry-based model of teacher learning. This applies not only to curriculum and lesson design, but also subject knowledge, in particular for subjects where the teacher may be teaching outside of their specialism under cross-curriculum arrangements.

- **The role of new technologies:** teachers need greater engagement with the learning potential of ICT in education if sustainable and effective innovation is to take place. The secondary curriculum review should demonstrate more clearly how technology can be used within and across subjects, and teachers will need structured opportunities to develop their practice in this regard.

Programmes of study

8. The GTC welcomes the revised programmes of study, and in particular the prominence given to the *Every Child Matters* outcomes and the aim of creating clear programmes of study that encourage cross-subject teaching.
9. Two events held jointly by the GTC and QCA in June 2006 and December 2005 found that teachers were generally supportive of the aims of the review and the revised programmes of study. Teachers see collaboration across the curriculum as important, and welcomed the inclusion of using visiting experts and identifying contexts beyond the classroom. Teachers also raised several issues that may support them further in curriculum planning and teaching:
 - teachers felt that there could be more consistency and standardisation between subjects in the 'key concepts' within the programmes of study;
 - further guidance on how new technologies can be applied across the curriculum would be welcomed by teachers;
 - assessment for learning (AfL) has a key role to play and more could be done to integrate approaches throughout the programmes of study.
10. Teachers identified the following obstacles to working with the programmes of study:
 - the balance between subjects and desire to ensure an appropriate emphasis and amount of time on for each subject;
 - the availability of appropriate technology and ICT to support teaching and learning;
 - the need to ensure that level descriptors are equal across all subjects;
 - the need for more information about using level descriptors in special needs settings.
11. The QCA will already be aware of these points raised by teachers and will wish to continue to work with teachers in developing the guidance around the programmes of study.

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