Call for evidence

Launch date 25 September 2024
Respond by 22 November 2024

Curriculum and
Assessment
Review

Supported by

Department
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Contents

Curriculum and Assessment Review: Call for Evidence

Foreword from the Review Chair

For a quarter of a century, young people in England have benefitted from a determined commitment to high standards for all within our state education system. This inspirational commitment to excellence for all has been maintained through successive administrations, resulting in a stronger position in the international league tables. The UK has maintained its place alongside Canada and Scandinavian countries as a rare international exemplar of comprehensive provision for all to age 16, ensuring that all children and young people have access to a broad and balanced curriculum for as long as feasible, thereby enhancing their options and life chances. This hard-earned success reflects the dedicated work of teachers and leaders across the education profession.

Nevertheless, there is much to be done to ensure that all children and young people gain the foundational and advanced learning that sets them up to achieve, thrive, and foster a lifelong love of learning. Through this review we'll focus on the most significant areas for improvement, with particular concern for supporting children and young people who are from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, those with a special educational need or disability (SEND) and those who are otherwise vulnerable.

In addition to the urgent need for a sufficient supply of high-quality teachers that make the most difference to young people's successful educational outcomes, there is a need to review and refresh our curriculum and assessment frameworks. This Review will address existing problems and ensure that these frameworks are fit for the future.

The Review is especially crucial if we as a nation are to prepare all our children for the future and to confront the divides that perpetuate the class ceiling. The reality is that we continue to fail the third of our young people who do not achieve five GCSEs at grade 4 or above age 16, a disproportionate number of whom are from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. There are subsequently fewer clear, well-recognised routes available to these young people at 16-19, resulting in a stymying of life chances.

Meanwhile, debates continue about the breadth and depth of the curriculum, and whether it meets young people's needs in terms of motivation and preparation for the future. This is particularly pressing in a world where social, technological, commercial and environmental conditions are rapidly changing.

There is therefore a need to review the existing curriculum and assessment frameworks to ensure that they are fit for purpose for the next quarter of a century. The Review will take stock of successes, weaknesses and opportunities, to provide a curriculum that exemplifies excellence; secures the knowledge and skills young people will need in their

future lives; enriches and motivates learning; and adapts to the changing needs of the environment they will navigate.

As we have said in the [Review principles](#), our approach will be evidence and data driven, and – recognising existing successes and the dangers of unintended consequences – committed to evolution rather than revolution.

Understanding your views and the evidence and experiences that underpin them will be crucial in informing the Review. We have deliberately kept questions as open as possible, and welcome responses from all those interested: young people and their parents, teachers, lecturers, education leaders, subject experts, researchers, employers and others.

The curriculum represents our society's collective investment in conferring our precious knowledge and skills for the younger generation, so that they in turn may flourish as individuals and as citizens that build our civil society and economy. It is right that we all have a say.

Professor Becky Francis CBE

Background to the Review

The Curriculum and Assessment Review has been set up to review the national curriculum and statutory assessment system in England, including qualification pathways. It will consider children and young people's education and experiences from ages 5 to 19. Further details about the Review's aims, its terms of reference, and working principles can be found [here](#).

The Review will be rigorously evidence and data informed. The launching of this call for evidence is the first step in hearing evidence from stakeholders. This will allow us to build our understanding of the strengths of the current system and identify the areas that most need to change if we are to improve outcomes for children and young people. It will also provide insight into how we can ensure that the curriculum is deliverable in a way that is consistent with manageable and sustainable workloads for education staff.

In your response to this call for evidence, please provide evidence to support your answers, specific examples, and, where possible, solutions that consider feasibility. Please also bear in mind the scope of the Review in your answers.

Alongside written evidence, we will undertake a period of engagement and other forms of evidence collection, including regional events, that will enable the panel to draw on expertise and experience from across the sector.

This evidence will inform the publication of an interim report in early 2025, which will set out the Review's interim findings and confirm key areas for further work. We plan to publish our final report and recommendations in Autumn 2025.

Why does the Review matter?

Education is important for its own sake. But it also plays a critical role in supporting all young people to thrive throughout life and in building a stronger economy and a more equitable society.

Our system's strengths reflect the hard work and successes of those working in education. Data suggests that schools and colleges in England perform well in several areas in comparison to other countries. We also have qualifications with strong domestic and international reputations, particularly GCSEs and A levels.

Whilst the majority of pupils perform well in literacy and numeracy, these positive outcomes do not extend to all. Significant attainment gaps persist, notably for socioeconomically disadvantaged young people. For example, there is a 24-percentage point gap between socioeconomically disadvantaged young people and their peers in the proportion achieving level 2 in both English and maths by 19[1]. Just under a fifth of young people in England who leave education do not enter sustained education, apprenticeship or employment within a year after their 16 to 19 studies[2].

Moreover, evidence shows many young people are struggling. For example, 21% of pupils and learners in years 7 to 13 reported low life satisfaction[3] and almost a fifth of pupils were persistently absent in Autumn 2023[4]. While some of this is caused by issues outside school, there is some evidence to suggest that the school curriculum offer can have an impact on student satisfaction and wellbeing[5].

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[1] See section 4 for further information on English and maths attainment. Level 2 and 3 attainment age 16 to 25, Academic year 2022/23 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

[2] 16-18 destination measures, Academic year 2021/22 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

[3] National behaviour survey reports - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) - Parent, pupil and learner panel data: behavioural wave May 2023 (table 35)

[4] Pupil absence in schools in England, Autumn term 2023/24 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk) – persistent absence defined as pupils who have missed 10% or more sessions

[5] (PDF) When children play, they feel better: Organized activity participation and health in adolescents (researchgate.net); Extracurricular activity profiles and wellbeing in middle childhood: A population-level study - PMC (nih.gov); Physical activity | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk); Arts participation | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

The curriculum and assessment system must ensure that young people leave education prepared for life and work, equipped with the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to thrive and become well-rounded citizens, who appreciate the diversity and pluralism of our society. Every pupil, across all key stages, should have an experience of education that is both stimulating and enjoyable and that provides them with the foundation and motivation to pursue lifelong learning.

To achieve these goals, we need to ensure that all young people have access to a rich and fulfilling curriculum, meaningful qualifications and assessments that are manageable, valid, fair and reliable. This call for evidence will help us to understand the wide range of views and evidence on the best way to achieve this.

What is in scope of the Review?

The Review will seek to identify the most significant and pressing issues facing curriculum and assessment. We will focus on addressing these without destabilising the system, making changes where things are working well, or where there is insufficient evidence to warrant change. In short, we seek to bring about evolution, not revolution.

Because of this, the Review is not intended to remove well respected and valued qualifications like A levels, GCSEs and T Levels[6]. Similarly, we will maintain the important role of examinations within a balanced assessment system that captures the strengths of every young person and aligns with our commitment to high standards. When the Review is implemented, all state schools, including academies, will be required to teach the national curriculum[7].

We know that there are parts of the system that require improvement. The Review is an opportunity to remove limits and ceilings to high and rising standards for all; alleviate some of the pressure and constraints on learners and educators; reduce the assessment burden where feasible and appropriate, while continuing to recognise the socially progressive benefits of public examinations; support professional expertise; address longstanding challenges in providing meaningful, rigorous and high-value pathways for all students at 16 to 19; make sure the curriculum is inclusive and accessible for all young people and address injustices and unintended consequences.

Curriculum and assessment are inextricably linked to other aspects of the education system, including accountability, inspection, pedagogy and structures. We understand the importance of these interactions. Whilst our primary focus is on curriculum,

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[6] Perceptions of A levels, GCSEs and other qualifications: wave 22 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) ; Technical education learner survey 2022 research report (publishing.service.gov.uk); Research into T Levels and industry placements in councils in England | Local Government Association.

[7] This is subject to legislation from the Department for Education.

qualification pathways and assessment, the Review may therefore, for example, offer commentary on the impact of accountability on the curriculum and assessment system. It may wish to recommend how changes to curriculum and assessment should interact with accountability measures.

We will address the curriculum and assessment system from ages 5 to 19, ensuring that children build on their learning and development in the early years. The Review focuses on the curriculum, assessment and qualifications pathways. As such, some issues are outside of its scope, including, for example, apprenticeships and traineeships, adult skills, extracurricular activities and the early years foundation stage. The wider work of the Department for Education will consider these areas.

We are aware that in some education settings, special schools for example, delivery of the curriculum may need significant adaptation in order to meet the needs of those who receive it. While the Review will seek to ensure that the curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways have enough flexibility to allow adaptation, the Review will not provide recommendations on the precise ways in which education settings might look to implement such adaptations. We are keen to seek evidence from settings not required to follow the national curriculum on how they use their expertise and innovative practices to support children and young people to engage with the curriculum and assessment system.

About this call for evidence

This call for evidence will seek views on a range of topics that are in scope of the Curriculum and Assessment Review. The call for evidence is split into the following nine sections:

- Section 1: About you
- Section 2: General views on curriculum, assessment and qualifications pathways
- Section 3: Social justice and inclusion
- Section 4: Ensuring an excellent foundation in maths and English
- Section 5: Curriculum and qualification content
- Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum
- Section 7: Assessment and accountability
- Section 8: Qualification pathways 16-19
- Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

When answering the questions, please provide specific examples and evidence to illustrate and support your responses.

Who is this call for evidence for?

This call for evidence is for anyone with an interest in curriculum and assessment from key stages 1-4 and 16-19 education in England. This includes but is not limited to:

- Children and young people
- Parents and carers
- Teachers, lecturers, teaching assistants and the wider education workforce
- Senior leaders of schools, multi-academy trusts and colleges
- Further and higher education providers
- Sector organisations and unions
- Arms' Length Bodies
- Expert organisations, voluntary and community organisations and charities
- Researchers and education experts
- Subject associations
- Careers professionals
- Awarding organisations
- Employers and employer representative bodies
- Local authorities
- The wider public

Issue date

This call for evidence was issued on 25 September 2024.

Enquiries

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation, you can contact the team by emailing: curriculum-assessment.review@education.gov.uk

If your enquiry is related to the Department for Education's e-consultation website, you can contact: coordinator.consultations@education.gov.uk

Additional copies

Additional copies are available electronically and can be downloaded from GOV.UK Department for Education consultations.

Respond online

To help us analyse the responses, please use the online system wherever possible. Visit https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/improving-the-curriculum-and-assessment-system to submit your response.

Other ways to respond

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, such as due to compatibility issues with specialist accessibility software, you may request and complete a Word document version of the form.

By email

curriculum-assessment.review@education.gov.uk

By post

CAR Review Team, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3BT

In British Sign Language

Please contact us via email at curriculum-assessment.review@education.gov.uk and the team will facilitate this.

Deadline

The call for evidence closes on 22 November 2024.

Section 1: About you

The following optional questions are about your personal details and contact preferences. Telling us more about you, your position and where you work helps us to understand your responses, as well as whether certain issues affect settings or areas differently.

1. **Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?**
   - Individual
   - Organisation

If someone selects individual in Q1 they will then complete:

2. **If you are responding as an individual, in what capacity are you responding?**

   - A student, pupil or learner
   - A parent or carer
   - Teacher, tutor or lecturer
   - Wider school, college or university workforce
   - Senior leader
   - Researcher, academic or education expert
   - Employer
   - Member of the public
   - Local authority officer
   - Other (please describe)

If someone selects organisation in Q1 they will then complete:

3. **If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, which of the below best describes which part of the sector your organisation represents?**
   - Primary school
   - Secondary school or college
   - Sixth form
   - General FE College
   - Higher Education Institution
   - Multi-academy trust
   - AP/Specialist provider
   - Middle school
   - Union or professional association
   - Employer or employer representative body
   - Charity, social enterprise organisation or non-profit organisation
   - Community organisation
   - Local authority
   - Think tank
   - Professional association

- Awarding organisation
- Other (please describe)

[ ]

[If more than one applies, please select the one that you think is most important to understanding your consultation response.]

4. **What is the name of your organisation?**

[ ]

5. **What is your role within the organisation?**

[ ]

Following either Q2 or Q3-5, everyone will then complete:

6. **What is your name?**

[ ]

7. **What is your email address?**

Please note: If you are willing to be contacted about your submission, please provide your email address. You do not have to give your email address, and your views will be considered whether or not you provide this.

[ ]

8. **Are you happy to be contacted directly about your response?**
- Yes
- No

Please note: The Review may wish to contact you directly about your responses to help our understanding of the issues. If we do, we will use the email address you have given above.

9. **Would you like us to keep your responses confidential?**
- Yes
- No

Definitions

Curriculum: When referring to the 'curriculum' we mean all of the content (both knowledge and skills) that pupils study during key stage 1, key stage 2, key stage 3, key stage 4 and 16-19 education. The detail of this is designed by schools and must include the content set out in the national curriculum programmes of study and the guidance on RSHE and Religious Education. When we are discussing secondary or 16-19 education, the specifications are set by the awarding organisations for the qualifications that pupils study. For GCSEs, A levels, T Levels and Functional Skills Qualifications, these are based on government set content.

Qualifications pathways: When referring to qualification pathways, we are referring to the different qualification options available for pupils to study both in key stage 4 and 16-19 education.

Technical qualifications: 16-19 technical qualifications and programmes cover as many of the knowledge, skills and behaviours in employer-set occupational standards as is reasonable within a course of education. It is the expectation that most qualifications will allow learners to focus on a single occupation to ensure sufficient competence and depth of focus to support progression into relevant roles. Some, however, may start with broader content, e.g. the core element of T Levels.

Vocational and applied qualifications: Vocational and applied qualifications are distinct from academic qualifications because they are typically focused on an employment sector rather than an academic subject. They are for learners who want to continue their education through applied learning. They are different to technical qualifications because they don't have to align with an occupational standard. Awarding organisations are free to design these as they wish, provided they meet regulatory requirements. As occupational standards do not apply to pre-16, 'Technical Awards' in key stage 4 can be considered vocational.

Section 2: General views on curriculum, assessment, and qualifications pathways

The national curriculum sets out the subjects that primary and secondary schools teach up to the age of 16. It includes programmes of study for each subject that provide an outline of core knowledge around which teachers design their detailed curricula.

The national curriculum is organised into key stages and different subjects. Religious Education and RSHE are not part of the national curriculum but are also compulsory in all state-funded schools, including academies. At certain points across the key stages, including key stages 1 and 2, there are formal assessments of each child's performance. A pivotal point in the education journey comes at the end of key stage 3 where, aged 14, pupils start to study for their GCSEs or key stage 4 Technical Awards[8]. Pupils are examined in these subjects when they are aged 16 and at the end of key stage 4.

Learners then transition to 16-19 study, where they embark on a diverse range of pathways and qualifications in preparation to leave education ready for life and work. There is no set curriculum. Learners take a range of qualification options, which may include academic, technical or vocational qualifications across different levels. Many are at level 3, although some may also study qualifications at level 2 and below.

This Review is keen to invite general views on the current curriculum, qualifications pathways, and assessment system across key stages 1 to 4 and 16-19 education. We want to understand the existing strengths in the system and build on those where possible to ensure positive outcomes for all children and young people.

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?**

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?**

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[8] For more information on key stage 4 Technical Awards, see the 'Broad curriculum' section.

Section 3: Social justice and inclusion

The questions in this section invite responses on aspects of the curriculum and assessment system which we could build on, or improve, to support opportunity and success for all pupils and learners and particularly for socioeconomically disadvantaged young people. The Review will also consider ways in which changes to curriculum and assessment might support pupils with SEND, pupils who are otherwise vulnerable and where there are specific gaps based on other characteristics.

There are currently substantial attainment gaps between socioeconomically disadvantaged learners and those from more affluent backgrounds. The gap is evident in early education but widens through each phase of education, with an estimated 19 months' learning gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers by the end of key stage 4[9] and a 25 percentage point gap in the proportion achieving level 3 (two A levels or equivalent) by age 19[10]. There are also attainment gaps for other pupil and learner characteristics such as gender and ethnicity, affecting different stages of education and some subject areas in particular[11].

There are significant barriers to progression for pupils and learners with SEND too. For example, pupils and learners with SEND in state-funded mainstream schools were less likely to have a sustained destination one, three and five years after completing key stage 4[12]. The Review will aim to consider how curriculum and assessment practices might be improved to better support pupils with SEND to progress and have their needs met. However, it is also important to note the diverse range of needs that exists within this cohort, which the Review will consider in ensuring the right level of flexibility and adaptation exists for all.

The Review is cemented in the belief that every child and young person should have access to a curriculum that is rich and broad, irrespective of their backgrounds and characteristics. In the questions below, please provide specific examples and suggested solutions 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 socioeconomic disadvantage?**

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[9] Annual Report 2024: Foreword & Executive Summary - Education Policy Institute (epi.org.uk)
[10] Level 2 and 3 attainment age 16 to 25, Academic year 2022/23 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)
[11] Education and training - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
[12] Longer term destinations, Academic year 2021/22 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

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.)**

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?**

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?**

Section 4: Ensuring an excellent foundation in maths and English

We want all pupils to achieve an excellent foundation in reading, writing and maths, given how important these subjects are to set them up for future success[13]. While the majority of pupils achieve expected standards, there are still substantial numbers of pupils who do not reach expected levels by the end of primary school[14] and do not catch up with their peers. In 2023, around a third of young people did not attain a grade 4 or above in both English and maths at age 16[15].

Maths and English are compulsory national curriculum subjects throughout key stages 1 to 4. Reforms to these subjects at primary level have included a strong focus on early reading, spelling, punctuation and grammar, and mastering a depth of understanding across mathematical concepts[16].

Maths and English language are also mandatory subjects in the national curriculum at secondary level. And, as with other subjects in the curriculum, there were reforms to English Language and Maths GCSEs in 2015 that included: a review of content[17]; an increase to the volume of content particularly in maths and a move to exam-based assessment at the end of study for most subjects.

Maths and English are compulsory at 16-19 for some learners. Since 2014, all 16-19 learners who have not achieved grade 4 in maths or English GCSE must continue studying these subjects[18]. This requirement means more people are achieving level 2 by age 19 than before. However, fewer than 30% of those who did not achieve level 2 in English and maths at key stage 4 go on to achieve them by age 19[19] in a typical year. Achieving a grade 4 or above in GCSE English and maths (equivalent to level 2) is sometimes used as a minimum entry requirement to employment opportunities, apprenticeships and further and higher education.

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[13] GCSE attainment and lifetime earnings (publishing.service.gov.uk); Returns to maths and English learning (at level 2 and below) in Further Education (publishing.service.gov.uk)

[14] Key stage 2 attainment (provisional): 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[15] Key stage 4 performance, Academic year 2022/23 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

[16] See section 7 for information on assessment of English and maths at primary school.

[17] Current GCSE content for English language and mathematics: GCSE English Language final (publishing.service.gov.uk) ; GCSE Mathematics final (publishing.service.gov.uk)

[18] Learners may retake the GCSE, or Functional Skills Qualifications, which are designed to be taught in an applied manner to deliver the skills needed for life and work.

[19] Level 2 and 3 attainment age 16 to 25, Academic year 2022/23 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

In this section, we are keen to understand what changes we can make to curriculum and assessment to ensure more pupils have gained the foundations in maths and English by the age of 19. This includes supporting more to achieve expected benchmarks at primary school and at key stage 4.

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.*

17. **To what extent do the English and maths *primary* assessments[20] support pupils to gain an excellent foundation in these key subjects? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support this aim?**

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?**

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?**

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? In particular, do we have the right qualifications at level 2 for these 16-19 learners (including the maths and English study requirement)?**

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, socioeconomic disadvantage, English as an additional language (EAL))? Are there any changes you would suggest to overcome these challenges?**

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[20] These include SATs at the end of key stage 2, the phonics screening check and the multiplication tables check.

Section 5: Curriculum and qualification content

The content of the national curriculum is set out in subject-specific "programmes of study". These set out what maintained schools must teach but vary by subject in terms of depth and level of prescription[21]. At key stage 4 and at ages 16-19, the 'curriculum' that pupils will study is mainly set by the specifications of the individual qualifications that pupils are taking. Though, at key stage 4, the curriculum also includes subjects that all pupils must study even if they are not studying for a qualification in that subject[22]. The government sets the required subject content for GCSE and A level subjects, T Levels[23] and Functional Skills Qualifications[24].

Schools and teachers use the national curriculum, and specifications, to develop detailed school and class curricula that set out exactly what they will teach their pupils and learners and how they will do so. The sequencing, size, nature and focus of the nationally set curriculum, subject content and specifications can either support or make it more challenging for schools and colleges to deliver good pedagogical practices that support all pupils and learners.

The Review wants to ensure the curriculum and qualifications are cutting edge and fit for purpose, appropriately balancing ambition, excellence, relevance and flexibility. Furthermore, the Review seeks to ensure that the content of the curriculum and qualifications reflects the issues and diversities of our society and that all children and young people are represented and engaged. In doing so, it will consider a wide range of protected characteristics[25], as well as social class. Within this context, the Review wants to consider whether changes should be made to the content of the curriculum and qualifications to help achieve this (recognising constraints in finite teaching time in schools and colleges)[26].

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[21] Luke, Allan, Annette Woods, and Katie Weir. "Curriculum design, equity and the technical form of the curriculum." *Curriculum, syllabus design and equity: A primer and model* (2013).

[22] The content for these is set out in the national curriculum, or for RSHE and RE in guidance.

[23] GCSE subject content - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk). GCE AS and A level subject content - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk), and the content for T Levels and Technical Occupational Qualifications (available from 2025), is based on occupational standards set nationally by employers and managed by IfATE. Ofqual sets out the assessment requirements for these qualifications. Awarding Organisations design detailed specifications based on these requirements. Other vocational qualifications (including Pearson BTECs, OCR Nationals and City and Guilds Diplomas) do not have content set by the Government. The 'curriculum' of these qualifications is set by awarding organisation specifications.

[24] Functional Skills qualifications: requirements and guidance - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

[25] As set out in the Equality Act 2010.

[26] The Review recognises that issues around diversity and inclusion are not exclusively related to the curriculum. Many factors can contribute, including funding and resources, and/or teacher confidence and training.

We also want to ensure that the curriculum and qualification pathways (see definitions section) set young people up with the best possible foundations to thrive in education and in wider life and work. The Review will also explore which life and work skills should be built into the curriculum and qualifications and which require explicit knowledge and teaching. Additionally, it will consider whether new knowledge should be built into curriculum subjects, or whether some should be developed outside the classroom through co-curricular or extra-curricular activities.

It is important to ensure the curriculum does not contain so much content that teachers have limited time to support pupils to develop a deep understanding of the subject, or that time for other educational experiences and the development of skills that prepare learners for life and work is reduced. Where new content is added, existing content will need to be removed to make space.

22. **Are there particular curriculum or qualifications subjects[27] 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.

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

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?**

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?**

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?**

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[27] This includes both qualifications where the government sets content nationally, and anywhere the content is currently set by awarding organisations.

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?

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

The Review seeks to promote a broad and balanced curriculum, ensuring all young people can access a rich range of subjects in appropriate depth, including creative subjects. We want to understand how breadth and balance are currently achieved in practice in education settings. This will help us to identify if there are any points where breadth is being compromised and whether more breadth or depth is needed at particular key stages.

All state-funded schools in England are already required to teach a broad and balanced curriculum and the national curriculum currently seeks to support schools to achieve this by providing specific requirements at each key stage. The Progress 8 performance measure incentivises a diversity of subjects at key stage 4. The national curriculum includes compulsory study of core and foundation subjects from key stages 1 to 4[28]. At key stage 4, pupils have a statutory entitlement to study a subject within each of the following areas: the arts[29]; design and technology; the humanities and modern foreign languages. As this is an entitlement and not compulsory, we are interested in understanding whether continued study of these subjects happens in practice.

At 16-19 there is no national curriculum, and courses are designed to support development and progression to either further study or employment. As part of their programmes, learners should also undertake employability, enrichment and pastoral activities e.g. work experience. On some courses, such as A levels and AS levels, we have seen a slight narrowing of the subjects that learners study. Learners now only tend to study three subjects, where previously they studied 5 subjects when AS qualifications were a modular part of A levels prior to 2015/16[30].

In this section, we would like your views on the current breadth and depth of curriculum in schools and colleges and how we achieve curriculum breadth without squeezing important content or subjects that help prepare young people for future life and work. Breadth can be reflected in a number of different ways and can include: the range of different subjects available to study; the range of content within each subject; the ability to maintain and develop multiple areas of interest rather than specialising too early and the amount of time spent focusing on specific subjects.

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[28] A full list of core and foundation subjects at each key stage, as well as additional requirements and entitlements, can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4/the-national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4.

[29] Comprising art and design, music, dance, drama and media arts.

[30] British-Academy-report-Subject-choice-trends-post-16-education-England.pdf (thebritishacademy.ac.uk)

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?**

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?**

30. **To what extent do the current qualifications 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?**

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?**

Our analysis of [curriculum subject trends over time](#) (published alongside this document) has shown that while many subject areas are thriving and take-up is growing, take-up of some subjects has declined over time. Of course, this is not necessarily a problem: these changes may reflect policy directions or other social trends, or they may reflect changes in policy and accountability measures over time.

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

Key stage 4 Technical Awards

As part of ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum, the Review wants to ensure that young people can access vocational subjects as appropriate. There are over 1,800 vocational and occupational qualifications which can be studied at key stage 4. Of these, 46 'Technical Award' qualifications are included on key stage 4 performance tables. Currently, nearly half (43%) of pupils take at least one Technical Award alongside their GCSEs. These qualifications are intended to equip 14-16 year-olds with applied knowledge not usually acquired through GCSEs, as well as associated practical skills. They exist in a range of subject areas, including travel and tourism, media and communication, performing arts, health and social care, engineering, building and construction and hospitality and catering[31]. All Technical Awards are assessed through a combination of exams and non-exam assessment.

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[31] A full list of available Technical Award qualifications can be found in the 2026 key stage 4 performance tables: [Key stage 4 qualifications, discount codes and point scores - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](#)

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?

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?

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

The Review wants to ensure that the assessment system captures the strengths of every young person, the breadth of the curriculum and has the right balance of assessment methods, while maintaining the important role of examinations. The ways in which assessments are designed and delivered[32] can have a range of impacts on young people, schools and colleges and the wider system.

Primary and national curriculum assessments

At primary, some tests have been replaced by teacher assessment, such as writing and science tests at the end of key stage 2. There are no longer statutory assessments at key stage 3. At primary level, year 1 pupils take the statutory phonics screening check. Other key stage 1 tests, such as the English grammar, punctuation and spelling test and teacher assessments in English reading and maths, are optional. Children take compulsory tests in key stage 2, including the multiplication tables check (taken in year 4) and end of key stage 2 tests (known as SATs and taken in year 6).

The assessment system at primary aims to measure whether pupils have reached expected standards in English and maths, with a focus on the end of key stage 2. Assessments at key stage 1 and 2 serve a range of other purposes. They enable a range of stakeholders (including Ofsted, governing bodies and parents) to hold primary schools to account. They also help monitor performance regionally and nationally and support schools and parents in understanding whether children need more support in the subjects being assessed. As assessing certain subjects or concepts can signal to schools their importance, it may also lead to schools spending more time on these subjects at the expense of others.

Preparation for assessment may take up time in the curriculum and there are also administrative implications for schools leading exams and assessment. In year 6, most pupils will sit six test papers in English and maths over four days, with the accompanying teacher assessments.

We would welcome your views on how effectively the current assessment system captures young people's knowledge and abilities. We also welcome your views on how the overall volume of assessments impacts the wellbeing and ability of all young people to progress to the next stage of their education.

> **35. Is the volume of statutory assessment at key stages 1 and 2 right for the purposes set out above?**

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[32] Ofqual and DfE have been working closely together on research to build the evidence base on the potential opportunities, risks and implications of using technology to deliver exams.

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?**

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?**

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)?**

Secondary assessment

The vast majority of pupils take GCSEs at 16. GCSEs fulfil different purposes – they assess learning against a defined curriculum, support progression and provide data to hold schools and colleges to account for their performance. Typically, pupils take around eight GCSEs in key stage 4 and are assessed in each subject.

Reforms have led to greater exam-based assessment, with non-exam assessment (such as coursework) used in fewer subjects. All pupils sit exam papers at the same time and papers are externally, anonymously marked. Evidence shows that externally set and marked assessments support fairness and objectivity and promote consistency in grading standards[33]. These factors are important in ensuring young people receive results which are trusted by and familiar to further and higher education providers and employers[34].

Exams, however, cannot validly assess all skills and attributes and a number of GCSEs are partly or entirely assessed in different ways. Speaking assessments in language qualifications, performance assessments in drama and music qualifications and portfolios in art and design and design and technology qualifications are all examples of non-exam assessments.

England is not an outlier in having external assessments at age 16. Many other high-performing countries assess pupils to enable them to gain subject qualifications and to help them make choices about what to go on to do next, although the extent and method of assessment is variable between countries[35]. While exams play an important

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[33] Briefing note: Should we abolish GCSEs? (ucl.ac.uk)

[34] Perceptions of A levels, GCSEs and other qualifications: wave 22 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

[35] National/central examinations (2023) : In upper secondary general programmes | Education at a Glance 2023 : OECD Indicators | OECD iLibrary (oecd-ilibrary.org)

role in our system, at GCSE, estimates suggest that pupils meeting Progress 8 requirements may sit around 30 hours of exams in the summer of year 11. This can reduce the total available key stage 4 teaching time and, to enable pupils to prepare and revise for exams, some schools choose to teach the GCSE curriculum from year 9.

We would welcome views from the sector on how effectively the current assessment system captures the full range of young people's knowledge and abilities. We also welcome views on how the overall volume of assessments impacts the wellbeing and ability of all young people to progress to the next stage of their education or into employment.

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?**

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?**

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?**

While pupils are currently not formally assessed at key stage 3, there are concerns and some evidence that some pupils make little progress in key areas at this key stage.

42. **Are there ways in which we could support improvement in pupil progress and outcomes at key stage 3?**

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

Accountability

The Review acknowledges the importance of understanding how schools and colleges are performing, and that curriculum and assessment practices are inextricably linked to accountability and performance measures[36]. The Review may therefore make recommendations on these arrangements and offer commentary on the impact of

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[36] Ofsted and the Education Inspection Framework also form part of the wider accountability landscape for schools and colleges. The review will liaise with Ofsted where appropriate on recommendations pertaining to accountability should they arise.

accountability on the curriculum and assessment system and how planned changes should interact with the system as a whole.

Accountability includes: collecting and publishing [data on school and college performance,](#) in order to hold schools and colleges to account for the service they provide; to inform their decision-making; to provide information on standards to policymakers and the wider public and to help parents make informed choices about their child's education. For more guidance on understanding school and college performance measures, see [here](#).

The next questions in this section invite general views on the accountability system (specifically in relation to performance measures) and how it, potentially, might be adapted to better support system improvement and a broad and balanced curriculum.

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

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?**

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 socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds? If so, what should those changes be?**

Section 8: Qualification pathways 16-19

After secondary school, it is compulsory for young people to be in education or training until the age of 18[37]. Around half (48%) of learners attend college (general or sixth form) and 43% are in state-funded school sixth forms[38]. Unlike pre-16 education, there is no set core 'curriculum' for all 16–19-year-old learners to follow. Instead, learners enrol on courses that are designed to support their development and progression, that are based on their interests, desired progression path and prior attainment. This means the curriculum and assessment can vary widely as schools and colleges develop courses based on the learners' needs and their career plans. Qualifications for 16–19-year-olds are offered at different 'levels', from entry level and level 1, for learners who need more support, through to level 2 and level 3 for those who are ready to progress into work or further study at a higher level.

Alongside their qualifications, learners should be undertaking activities such as work experience and they should be offered guidance, for example on careers, to develop their broader skills, attitudes and confidence to support progression. Learners who have not yet achieved a GCSE grade 4 also continue to study English and maths (see section 4). In addition, school sixth forms must also offer RE[39] and RSHE.

Level 3

Just over a third of 16 and 17 year-olds (36%) solely take academic qualifications, predominantly A levels. **A levels** are academic focused qualifications and are intended to provide enough depth of knowledge in a given subject to enable progression to university. The average A level learner studies around three A level subjects while a small minority take four or more. A levels were reformed in the last decade and assessment is mainly by exam, with other types of assessment used only where they are needed to test specific skills.

AS qualifications used to be taken at the end of year 12 and were part of the A level grade. They no longer count towards an A level and, while they can be taken alongside the A level, the number of learners taking AS qualifications has reduced significantly in recent years.

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[37] School leaving age: Can you leave school at 16 and what are your options? – The Education Hub (blog.gov.uk)

[38] Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18, Calendar year 2022 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk) - Proportions exclude the 5% of 16/17 year-olds not in education, employment and training (NEET) and those doing apprenticeships and other training with work

[39] As is the case pre-16, local authorities are responsible for deciding the RE syllabus, although faith schools and academies can set their own.

Some learners also take an **Extended Project Qualification** alongside their A levels, where they complete an independent project on a topic they have chosen.

20% of learners currently take a level 3 technical or vocational course to support progression directly to employment (including as an apprentice) or university. Typically, learners with special educational needs, or those who come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, are more likely to study technical or vocational courses compared to A levels. Hence it is crucial that our academic, technical and vocational offers are all high-quality pathways, so that all learners, including those who may need additional support, have the opportunity to progress.

Based on occupational standards set by employers, **T Levels** are two-year technical programmes where learners spend 80% of their time in the classroom and 20% on a minimum nine-week industry placement with an employer. They are designed to provide enough competence in an occupational area to enable progression into relevant roles. T Levels are assessed through a mixture of exams (typically up-to 30%), an employer-set project and practical assignments.

T Levels are still new and most learners studying vocational qualifications still take large 'applied generals' or other vocationally related qualifications, which provide an overall introduction to an employment sector (e.g. Construction, Digital, Health and Social Care). These are less occupationally specific.

Each year, about 11% of 16 and 17 year-olds study a blend of A levels and smaller applied general qualifications, as part of 'mixed' programmes, designed to offer entry to a range of higher education courses.

The Department for Education has begun reforming technical and vocational qualifications at level 3 and below to simplify the qualifications landscape and ensure all qualifications are high-quality. In July 2024, the Secretary of State for Education announced that the Department would be undertaking an internal review of Post-16 Qualifications Reform and paused the planned defunding of qualifications that was due to go ahead on 31 July 2024[40]. The outcome of this internal review will be communicated before the end of 2024.

In line with the Terms of Reference, the Curriculum and Assessment Review is reviewing the 16-19 landscape and will work closely with the internal review.

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[40] Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament

Level 2

Around 14% of 16 and 17 year-olds are on courses designed to support progression to further study at level 3 or employment, including as an apprentice. Learners studying at this level can take a variety of level 2 vocational qualifications, for example NVQs or BTEC Firsts – broadly equivalent in standard to GCSEs. The T Level Foundation Year is also being rolled out as a dedicated level 2 study programme designed to prepare learners for progression onto a T Level or further study.

Learners may study at level 2 because they want to progress into jobs for which level 2 gives a good entry point, or because they need more time to get ready for level 3, including achieving the English and maths qualifications they need. Learners at level 2 are more likely to have special educational needs or come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds compared to level 3.

Entry level and level 1

Approximately 5% of learners are working at level 1 and entry level. A significant number of learners studying at this level have special educational needs, particularly at entry level. These courses are often described as 'stepping stones' and are designed to support progression to level 2 and/or develop essential skills for life and work. They include essential/functional skills qualifications and level 1 National Vocational Qualifications.

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**

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**

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?**

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

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?

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

Transitions

We are keen to understand views on how we can best support pupils to transition from one key stage to the next.

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

Technology

We also want to understand views on the role that technology can play in supporting curriculum, assessment and qualifications. When effectively planned and implemented, technology can provide opportunities for inclusion, teaching and learning.

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

Further Views

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?**

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Curriculum and Assessment Review

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