



STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)

TUESDAY, 18 NOVEMBER 2025

2.00 pm PRIORY, ROOM 2F CENTRE BLOCK, COUNTY HALL - COUNTY HALL, LEWES

MEMBERSHIP

Cllr Colin Belsey
Cllr Trevor Webb
Cllr Abul Azad
Cllr Steve Murphy
Cllr Anne Cross
Peter White

Rosemary Roberts
Dr Norman Williamson
Pamela Hartog
Elizabeth Coleman
Andrew Jervis
Karen Sitwell-Cook

Felicity Harvest
Laura Cooper
Paul Holt

Also attending:

Barry Blakelock (RE Consultant); Claire Ramalli (RE Adviser); Claire Rivers (Primary Lead);
Rebecca Harmer (Clerk)

A G E N D A

1. Welcome & apologies
 - a) Declarations of any conflicts of interest
 - b) Welcome and introduction of new members
2. Holocaust Education Charity: Generation 2 Generation (G2G)
3. Minutes of the meeting 3rd June 2025 & matters arising
4. SIAMs feedback
5. Update on Network meetings
 - a) Secondary
 - b) Primary
 - c) Special Schools
6. Updates from Claire Ramalli
 - a) Programme of school visits (feedback and 25/26 visits)
 - b) Westhill Bid & Venues
7. Updates from Barry Blakelock (*Pages 3 - 84*)
 - a) Budget update (paper)
 - b) Self-evaluation: Section 5 (paper)
 - c) Development Plan (paper)
 - d) Review NASACRE Handbook and SACRE Induction Manual (November 2023) (two papers)
 - e) Agreed Syllabus 2022 – Formal mid-point review/self-review (paper)

8.
 - a) Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (*Pages 85 - 322*)
 - b) SACRE membership and Induction (paper)
 - c) Updates from NASACRE
 - Oak National Academy (two papers)
 - Ofsted Framework (paper)
 - In Conversation Online Event 6th November 6pm/9th March 6pm
 - Curriculum Review 'Building a world class curriculum for all' (two papers)
9. Any other business (*Pages 323 - 326*)
 - Advice for SACREs about Local Government Reorganisation (paper)
 - Encouraging School Speaker Visits

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Deputy Chief Executive
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11 November 2025

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Report to:	East Sussex SACRE
Date of meeting:	November 2025
By:	Barry Blakelock ESCC Children's Service Representative Barry.Blakelock@aquinastrust.org
Title:	SACRE Budget Update
Purpose:	To update East Sussex SACRE on the current budget position

Recommendations:

- NOTE the budget update for 2025/26.

Budget 2025/26

The allocation from Children's Services for the work of SACRE for 2025/26 has been determined as **£17,500** to support the continuation of current service. The funding for the Children's Services Representative has been brought into the budget allocation (£7500).

Budget 4415 SACRE - 2025/26		Total Amount	GL	Estimated	Actuals total
RE Adviser (Claire Ramalli) 7 days annually x £400		£ 2,800.00	32080	£ 1,525.00	£ 1,275.00
SLE support Primary Claire Rivers - 3 days x £350	FV60	£ 1,050.00	43506	£ 1,050.00	£ -
SLE support Secondary replacement for Sam Keddie - 3 days x £350	FV60	£ 1,050.00	43506	£ 1,050.00	£ -
CPD for schools and support package - delivered by RE Today	ESCC-PO-001162	£ 5,114.00	32010		£ 5,114.00
NASACRE Subscription June 2025		£ 175.00	32010	£ -	£ 175.00
NASACRE conference fees - 1 delegate		£ 60.00	36810	£ 60.00	£ -
		£ 10,249.00		£ 3,685.00	£ 6,564.00
Actual expenditure in SAP as at 23/10/2025	£ 6,564.00				
Estimated expenditure up to 31.03.2026	£ 3,685.00				
Total actuals and estimated expenditure	£ 10,249.00				
Budget	£ 10,000.00				
Total actuals and estimated expenditure	£ 10,249.00				
Balance (estimated overspend)	£ 249.00				
GL Code	Total Estimated & Actual Costs	Estimated	Actual		
32010 - NASACRE Subscription / Includes RE today	£ 5,289.00	£ -	£ 5,289.00		
32080 - Consultants	£ 2,800.00	£ 1,525.00	£ 1,275.00		
36810 - Conference expenses (training)	£ 60.00	£ 60.00	£ -		
43506 - Supply maintained schools (S Keddie & C Rivers)	£ 2,100.00	£ 2,100.00	£ -		
	£ 10,249.00	£ 3,685.00	£ 6,564.00		

We estimate a small overspend of **£250**.

This has been **approved** by Children's Services.

Budget 2026/27

Whilst not confirmed, we anticipate the allocation being maintained for 2026/27. This arrangement will take us to the next Agreed Syllabus Conference scheduled for spring 2027 when the syllabus licenses and training offer are both up for renewal.

However, if the Agreed Syllabus is renewed for another year to accommodate the re-organisation of local government, anticipated cost may be postponed for a further year.

The Local Authority has been notified of the potential for additional costs when determining the next Agreed Syllabus.

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SACRE self-assessment tool



East Sussex SACRE

Introduction

This tool has been created to help SACREs in their essential role to advise the Local Authority (LA) in meeting the entitlement of pupils across the LA to engage in high quality Religious Education (RE) and Collective Worship (CW) and to support the LA to reflect on its practice. In an educational context where standards and accountability are at the top of the agenda, a SACRE's work has become increasingly challenging and diverse, but also more rewarding and stimulating. Good SACREs will therefore tackle their responsibilities as opportunities, with enthusiasm, whilst recognising the need for realistic and ongoing appraisal and self-review.

In many ways, SACREs reflect the work of governing bodies in schools, in so far as they act as critical friends to the LA on matters of RE and CW. Like school governors, members are unpaid volunteers who give up their time to support RE and CW locally.

This toolkit is an amended version of the 2015 document. It takes account of changes in inspection arrangements and in the role of LAs, and of the development of maintained schools independent of their LA. It is designed to help individual SACREs evaluate their effectiveness, including considering their impact on pupils' educational experience and learning. It also helps SACREs review their organisational patterns and structures, and their partnership with the LA and other key stakeholders.

The toolkit highlights five key dimensions of SACRE's work and provides exemplification of good practice. A SACRE that uses this self-evaluation guidance should gain a clear picture of its strengths, identify areas for further development, and establish key priorities for action.

The DCSF publication "Religious education in English schools: Non-statutory guidance" (2010) ("the Guidance") remains the most recent official statement in this field: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/religious-education-guidance-in-english-schools-non-statutory-guidance-2010>. The Guidance sets out the responsibilities of SACREs and LAs as well as those of other stakeholders in RE. Key summaries from the Guidance are included in the Annex to this document.

Rationale

The SACRE self-evaluation toolkit focuses on the following five aspects of the work of SACREs:

1. Management of the SACRE and building the partnership between the SACRE, the LA and other key stakeholders
2. Promoting improvement in the standards, the quality of teaching, and provision in RE
3. Evaluating the effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus
4. Promoting improvement in the provision and quality of collective worship
5. Contributing to cohesion across the community and the promotion of social and racial harmony.

Each aspect forms a section within the toolkit and each section is divided into focus questions to help SACREs explore their provision. Descriptors for 'Requires improvement/struggling', 'Developing', 'Established' and 'Advanced' practice will enable SACREs to evaluate their standing within each focus question.

In the final column, SACREs may wish to identify any issues and action points within that focus, as appropriate. Key priorities can then be identified at the end of each section to inform the development of an action plan.

The intention is that, over time, exemplars of good practice from different SACREs will be made available on an open website, together with annual reports, as a way of adding further support to SACREs and LAs. Clearly the capacity of any SACRE to make the most of this will be dependent on the extent of the support it receives from, and the quality of its relationship with the LA.

SACREs are invited to use the format of this evaluation in conjunction with their annual report.

Section 1: Management of the SACRE and partnership with the LA and other key stakeholders

How far does the SACRE's partnership with the LA enable it to carry out its responsibilities effectively?

(Taken from 2010 DfE Checklist for an effective partnership between an LA and its SACRE/ASC)

- Does the LA and the SACRE/ASC carry out their statutory duties?
- Is SACRE/ASC properly resourced and well supported by subject specialist advice and training?
- Do members of the SACRE/ASC have a shared vision and understanding of their aims and purpose, seeking to sustain their positive work in the light of changing needs and priorities?
- Are SACRE/ASC meetings purposeful and focused on the major priorities of improving the quality of RE (and CW) in schools?
- Is the SACRE/ASC well informed about the quality of RE in schools and about wider LA and national priorities and developments affecting the subject?
- Has the LA adopted a high-quality agreed syllabus that provides a good grounding for planning, teaching and learning in RE and enables the schools to deliver RE as part of a coherent curriculum?
- Is there an effective process of reviewing, revising, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the locally agreed syllabus?
- How far does the SACRE's partnership with the LA enable it to help teachers and schools raise standards in RE and the quality of RE teaching?
- How far does the SACRE contribute effectively to the community cohesion agenda by supporting inclusion in schools and improving engagement within the community?

LAs must adequately fund SACREs to enable them to carry out their statutory duties and to support high quality RE and collective worship in schools.¹ We consider 2% of the CSSB to be a reasonable spend to enable this. LAs must set aside sufficient money to ensure the Agreed Syllabus review can be effective every five years. We reiterate that as a minimum expectation, LAs must provide the following:

- a clerk
- a professional officer who has expertise in RE curriculum design
- a publicly accessible place to meet
- the reasonable expenses of members
- publishing the agreed syllabus and other SACRE materials (including agendas and minutes), most usually on the LA website
- NASACRE subscription and AGM attendance.

1. The Minister for School Standards, Nick Gibb MP, included this statement in response to a parliamentary question from Stephen Timms MP: "If the Department is informed that an individual SACRE or ASC is experiencing difficulties in fulfilling its statutory duties, the Department will contact the local authority to remind them of their duty to support their activities satisfactorily."

2021HC Deb, 28 March 2018, cW <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2018-03-28/134697>

¹ *ibid.*, page 11

The relationship between a Local Authority and its SACRE is essentially one of partnership and collaboration, with mutual obligations and statutory responsibilities. So that a SACRE can advise and act effectively for the LA in the field of Religious Education and Collective Worship, the LA must ensure not only that there is a local SACRE, but also that it is able to fulfil its functions. The extent to which a SACRE is supported by funding and personnel, will determine how well individuals and committees can work together. Where a SACRE is valued by the LA, it is more likely that members of the SACRE will be able to contribute both to SACRE's work and to the LA's wider strategic objectives.

By bringing together many local stakeholders (faith/belief communities, teachers, local politicians and co-optees such as universities and parents) into a statutory body, SACREs can act positively for LAs as a sounding board on their core business of RE and CW, and also on wider strategic educational objectives such as raising standards, narrowing the gap and promoting community cohesion, as well as community matters related to interfaith collaboration and wellbeing. Core and value-added functions work best when the SACRE is appropriately supported, resourced and managed, and when channels of communication with the LA are good.

The potential for SACREs to contribute more widely is dependent on SACRE members feeling that the meetings are outward looking, focused on pupil needs, purposeful and enjoyable. This can be achieved, for example, by meeting in different locations (schools, places of worship, cultural centres and council meeting rooms) and by ensuring that all members feel they are equal partners whose views and experiences are sought, listened to and valued.

Alongside this, SACRE has the power to develop structural relationships with academies, etc. by exploring ways in which an academy "presence" can be incorporated into SACRE, e.g., by co-options (non-voting), through additional places in Group C (teacher organisations), or by creating a non-voting notional "Group E" (as had been envisaged in the Grant Maintained era). Similar considerations apply to the ASC. Although the legal framework would currently not allow voting rights to any distinct academy representation, SACREs and ASCs would surely not wish to proceed with decisions which were clearly not acceptable to the academy sector represented in their wider membership.

Key Area: 1a – Funding: Professional and financial support <i>How well supported and resourced is SACRE, by the LA exercising its statutory responsibilities?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	have no financial or management support to help SACRE to meet and operate. Members are unable to communicate with each other. There is no professional support.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have financial and management support to allow it to exist. Representatives of the LA receive papers and/or attend meetings but there is limited subject specialist advice available. There are resources for basic SACRE functions (such as a place to meet and a minute taker) but there is no specific budget for the SACRE and little opportunity for the SACRE to take initiatives requiring funding.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	access to some subject specialist advice and is informed of local and national initiatives. The LA is represented at meetings and can provide a means of communication with the wider LA. The SACRE has a modest budget which enables it to fund some initiatives. Meetings are clerked and the clerk maintains communication with the Chair and other members between meetings as needed.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	be well supported by a subject specialist who provides effective advice and is well informed about the provision and quality of RE in the LA and about national developments. Representatives of the LA attend meetings and the SACRE is also attended by a lead officer from the LA who can provide a strong link between the work of the SACRE and the wider LA. SACRE's plans are linked to other local work and projects. SACRE has a strategic, costed development plan. SACRE has access to funds to enable it to make decisions about its priorities and ensure these can be properly resourced.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	Updated June 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialist RE adviser in post and attends area meetings and is a member of NATRE. Well-grounded in the school context and strong links with schools and the LA. Primary, secondary and specialist school network leads in place to support training and professional development across the county. Children's Services Representative and associated manager in post to support SACRE in carrying out its statutory duties. SACRE work also links into structures of the school-led system e.g. primary and secondary boards. Strong clerk in place who supports with the preparation of all meetings and actions in between. Modest budget allocation of £10k a year funds licenses for the Agreed Syllabus alongside training from 'RE Today' which includes termly CPD and an Annual Conference in each phase. Costed 3-year Development Plan in place following structure of the Self-assessment tool. 	

Key Area: 1b – SACRE meetings <i>How purposeful, inclusive, representative and effective are SACRE meetings?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	not hold regular meetings, if they meet at all. Any meeting held is purely to demonstrate that the LA has allowed SACRE to meet.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	hold meetings regularly with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • routine administrative arrangements • appropriate distribution of agendas and papers Business is dealt with in a prompt and orderly way. There is limited opportunity for SACRE members to contribute to the work apart from attending meetings. Business tends to be focused solely on routine statutory requirements.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have good attendance where all four committees are well represented and meetings are quorate. Agendas and papers are distributed well in advance ensuring all members have time to consider them carefully, consulting when relevant their representing/sponsoring bodies. There are some opportunities for teachers and representatives of faith and worldview communities to be invited to share their work. Meetings are well managed with strong contributions from a wide range of members. Meetings move beyond routine matters to consider wider issues about the quality of RE and CW.	✓
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have SACRE members contributing to the development of the agenda and strategic development plan. Meetings will be lively and purposeful with a wide variety of contributions focused on the major priorities for improvement in schools. Teachers and representatives of faith and worldview communities regularly attend and participate fully in meetings, sharing their experience and insights. Meetings are held in a variety of venues, including council venues, local places of worship and schools. Procedures have been put in place so that meaningful contact can be made with and between members outside of SACRE meetings.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	Updated June 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposeful meetings with a focus on improving the quality of curriculum, teaching and assessment in RE and supporting schools in all contexts to meet their statutory duties in relation to RE and collective worship. • Agendas and papers published in advance through member services to meet requirements of public meetings and circulated to all SACRE members. • Members arrive at the meetings having read papers, informed and prepared to actively contribute to the meetings. • Representation improving and agreement to have a slot on 'my faith my belief' to draw in wider representation. • Meetings need to be held in a variety of venues including face-to-face. 	

Key Area: 1c – Membership and training		
To what extent is the membership of SACRE able to fulfil SACRE's purpose?		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	have no membership list. SACREs constitution is not fit for purpose and needs revision. The Local Authority struggles to fill all places on SACRE, SACRE members have no regular training provided.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have a membership that fulfils the basic statutory obligations. Arrangements to fill vacancies are not always pursued effectively. There are limited induction and training opportunities for SACRE members.	✓
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have an active membership that strongly reflects the diversity of the wider religious/worldview and professional community. There is regular induction training and processes for new members. There are good opportunities for SACRE members to participate in training activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	make good use of co-option to ensure membership of the SACRE is well informed and is highly representative of the diversity of the local community. There is a strong and co-ordinated programme of induction, and training opportunities for SACRE members. There are robust systems in place for succession planning for members and SACRE roles.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	Updated June 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All 4 groups are actively represented, and school representation has strengthened. Membership is developing but there is more to do to ensure wider representation that actively represents local demographics. Local programme of induction has been developed included induction checklist, new materials and access to NASACRE training. Training for SACRE members is available through NASACRE but again could develop a more local flavour. 	

Key Area: 1d – Improvement/development planning <i>How effective are the priorities and actions identified by SACRE in improving the experience of pupils in schools?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	have no development plan to focus future work. There is no knowledge of areas where the priorities of the LA's development / improvement plan potentially could link to the work of the SACRE.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have little overt linkage between the priorities of the LA's development / improvement plan and the work of the SACRE. SACRE has limited awareness of national projects or initiatives related to the work of SACRE and so is unable to plan any work or request funding to initiate new work.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have a costed development plan which is reviewed regularly and updated on an annual basis. This provides an effective focus for the SACRE's work. There is some attempt to link the plan to the wider LA priorities. SACRE has awareness of national projects or initiatives related to the work of SACRE and so is able to plan work or request funding to update and review their development plan. The SACRE is regularly represented at national events relevant to its work; for example, NASACRE.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have a well-defined development plan with clear objectives and success criteria. Resource implications are clearly defined and funding negotiated with the LA or outside funding streams. There is a clear link between the plan and the wider objectives of the LA and also to national innovations.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	Updated June 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Costed Development plan in place linked to Self-assessment tool. • Local Authority has adjusted and sustained budget so that needs of schools can be met. • Sponsorship for special projects such as Student Conference has been successfully achieved. • Children's Services Representative and Specialist Adviser join SE SACRE meetings to join up work across the region and learn from practice in other LAs. 	

Key Area: 1e - Information and advice <i>How well informed is SACRE in order to be able to advise the LA appropriately?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	not be supported to gather information (exam results, data, links to schools) or to link with national initiatives including membership of NASACRE.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	receive limited information about public examination data from the LA. Limited information is provided about wider national and local developments. The SACRE tends to receive information from the LA when the LA wishes to give it rather than ask questions of the LA or receive answers to its request. There is little opportunity to be a critical friend.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	be regularly provided with clear information relevant to the quality and provision for RE and CW in local schools and given a context within which any school is working. The SACRE receives the information in a way that enables it to act as a critical friend and question the LA's work.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	receive detailed and well-analysed information about the quality and provision for RE and CW. As a result, SACRE uses this information effectively to give advice to the LA which leads to strategic action and/or partnership work to improve standards. This can include advice related to the review of the AS. The SACRE has a strong partnership with the LA and plays an active role in promoting ideas and initiatives.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	Updated June 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular reports and updates on quality of curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment come from Primary, Secondary and Special Network Leads and feed into SACRE discussions. Annual report pupil outcomes is presented to SACRE. Programme of visits to schools resumed in Summer 2023. Information is clearly presented, and robust discussions interrogate the papers with actions and agreements on key issues. New Agreed Syllabus established. Implementation of Determination Policy. Systems need to be embedded that allow members to deepen their understanding of the quality of practice. Further work on information, advice and guidance for Collective Worship required. Further alignment to the Local Authority and their initiatives across the system needs to be undertaken. 	

Key Area: 1f - Partnerships with key stakeholders <i>What partnerships does the SACRE have with key local and national stakeholders, and what quality are these?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	be unaware of local or national agencies. SACRE has no links with sponsoring bodies in their location.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have little contact with or awareness of other local agencies (e.g. interfaith groups, dioceses), and rarely hears from pupils/students.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	be well informed about other key stakeholders supporting RE and have some meaningful contact with the groups involved. SACRE members are supported at a national level by their sponsoring body. SACRE members attend the annual NASACRE conference and other training opportunities. Hear from pupils/students as part of their work around high-quality RE and CW.	✓
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	build its activities effectively on local networks. Links with other bodies, such as local interfaith groups, are positive and able to support raising standards and developing community cohesion. The SACRE has opportunities to hear the views and experience of pupils about RE. Representatives of key support networks and higher education providers are regularly involved with the SACRE.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	Update June 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some SACRE members attend NASACRE events and the annual conference. Online events have worked well and enabled wider representation. Some links exist with other agencies. RE Today supported the review of the new Agreed Syllabus. The Specialist Adviser is a member of NATRE (National Association of Teachers of RE) and AREIAC (Association for RE Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants). Specialist Advisor supports other SACREs and makes links to national organisations, research and practice. Need to develop pupil voice and wider connections to organisations promoting RE and CW. Need to develop links with higher education providers. Need to develop more substantial links with interfaith groups. 	

Key Area: 1g – Relations with the Academies sector <i>How effectively is SACRE encouraging academies etc to see themselves also as stakeholders in their local area, specifically by devising ways in which an academies presence is incorporated into SACRE itself?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	have no opportunity to network with local academies.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have nothing formal in place. Little encouragement, if any, is extended to academies to relate to the SACRE's proceedings, and there are no channels through which academies can contribute.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have made attempts to include academies on SACRE, but these have been hampered by e.g. lack of confidence or vision on the part of SACRE, or by confusion over what is legally valid and possible, or what is possible between academies in an area.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced SACRE with advanced practice would:	have established the place of academies on SACRE. SACRE has considered systematically the legal and structural options, and established a permanent and sustainable academy presence on SACRE. A high proportion of academies in the area regard themselves as stakeholders and partner with SACRE.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	Updated June 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academies are well represented and are fully included in the work of SACRE. • Engagement with academies has improved considerably over the last two years. • SACRE has paid for new Agreed Syllabus licenses for all academies and community schools in the LA. 	

Section 1: Management of the SACRE and partnership with the LA and other key stakeholders

Successes/ What are we good at?

SACRE is well attended by a committed group of individuals that are broadly reflective of the local area. Through connections to local and national organisations they are well-informed and read papers in advance of meetings. More recently, meetings focus on the quality of the new Agreed Syllabus and have raised questions about understanding the quality of collective worship. Members routinely self-assess their work and improve the through use of a linked and costed Development Plan. The Local Authority provide stable funding which supports a substantial programme of professional development and training for schools in the Agreed Syllabus. Network Leads organise regular supportive meetings for teachers and are a source of high-quality advice and guidance. Academy involvement has increased with the new Agreed Syllabus. The Specialist Advisor is well-connected and provides several links to other SACREs. SACRE has updated all its guidance and introduced an induction programme for new members. SACRE is stable and well-organised.

Areas for development/ Action points:

- **For the SACRE:**
 - Meetings need to be held in a variety of venues including face-to-face.
 - Membership is developing but there is more to do to ensure wider representation.
 - Systems need to be embedded that allow members to deepen their understanding of the quality of practice.
 - Further work on information, advice and guidance for Collective Worship required.
 - Further alignment to the Local Authority and their initiatives across the system needs to be undertaken.
 - Need to develop pupil voice and wider connections to organisations promoting RE and CW.
 - Need to develop links with higher education providers and more substantial connections with interfaith groups.
- **For the LA**
 - Continued stability in terms of funding to support high-quality training and development activities for teachers.

Date of review: June 2024

Date of next review: March 2026

Section 2. Standards and quality of provision of Religious Education

***How effectively does the SACRE, in partnership with the LA, evaluate standards and the quality of provision for RE in schools?
How effective are the strategies to improve standards and the quality of provision?***

In principle, every pupil is entitled to RE of the highest quality. At its best, RE will be one of the most popular, relevant, stimulating and truly educative elements in the curriculum. This potential gives SACREs both a benchmark for aspiration and a spur for action.

A core duty of a SACRE is to gain an overview of the quality of the RE provision in local authority maintained schools and to develop effective strategies to promote the highest standards. SACREs may also request information from academies, academy chains and free schools where they educate pupils from the LA which appointed SACRE. In the light of the current inspection culture of partnership and self-evaluation, SACREs will need to adopt an astute and sensitive approach to achieve this overview.

Information to assist SACRE in carrying out its role is likely to come from a range of sources, which may include:

- public examination results
- reports from School Improvement Partners
- analysing questionnaires
- sharing of information from subject self-evaluation forms as appropriate, and in agreement with schools
- feedback from professional development activities
- presentations to SACRE from local teachers

The Guidance offers analysis and advice to support SACREs in reviewing their own effectiveness, their patterns of partnership, and their strategies in relation to enhancing the quality of RE provision in local authority maintained schools. In addition, in the light of the development of academies and other non-LA maintained schools, SACREs also need to take note of and respond appropriately to this new diversified scenario. (In the ensuing pages, the phrase “academies etc” is used as shorthand to refer to all non-LA maintained schools within a particular LA area.

Key Area: 2a - RE provision across the LA. <i>How effectively does the SACRE gain information about RE provision in schools and put in place strategies to support the delivery of pupil entitlement?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	have no routes by which SACRE can gain information about RE provision in schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have little knowledge of which schools are fulfilling pupil entitlement in RE because local processes are insufficient to gather such information (e.g. a website trawl)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have some knowledge of which schools are providing adequate time for effective learning in RE and have a scheme of work that enables them to deliver the AS. SACRE's process for acquiring this information is adequate but lacks coherence. Have limited opportunities to implement strategies in support of pupil entitlement. Ofsted reports are read and any comments on RE noted and brought to SACRE.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	build upon a strong relationship with the LA, whereby the LA shares its information and from this SACRE gains an overview of RE provision within the LA. It works effectively with the LA to support and promote pupil entitlement. Examples of different models for fulfilling pupil entitlement within local schools will be shared with all schools so that schools can have a menu from which to adapt an approach that delivers pupil entitlement whilst meeting the specific needs and priorities of their schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A well-received Agreed Syllabus is supporting greater consistency and better understanding about the quality of provision across the county. Engagement with the networks promotes greater understanding about the quality of provision however engagement is stronger in the primary phase than the secondary phase. SACRE is developing greater understanding of the quality of provision through school visits. Ofsted research review for RE has been discussed in detail and shared with schools, Ofsted reports are read periodically but so far few, if any comments on RE in recent reports to share with SACRE. Need to embed systematic approaches to good practice visits over the coming year. 	

Key Area: 2b – Standards of achievement and public examination entries <i>How does SACRE use information about standards and examinations to target support and training for schools?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	not be given any data to work from, and has no professional support to investigate this at a local and national level.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have limited knowledge of standards in primary and secondary schools including examination entries. The SACRE has no clear strategy to address this and the local authority does not adequately invest in professional support for this. Analysis would be limited as would strategies to address issues.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have some process in place to find out how well learners are doing in KS 1-3, (e.g. by meeting teachers, pupils and through the LA). SACRE will be provided with adequate information about examination entries and standards in examinations in secondary schools and how these relate to national figures.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have robust processes with the LA whereby SACRE can gain accurate information about standards in schools and examination entries in all secondary schools, with useful analysis that enables it to address issues effectively in partnership with the LA.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LA provides SACRE with validated data for public examinations in the summer term of each academic year. These are analysed for discussion at SACRE. Comparisons with national data are included in the analysis. Discussions of strategies to engage wider groups of pupils and schools are a part of the evaluation. Networks establishing good working relationships with schools in the context of data transparency set by the LA. Need to embed systematic approaches to data use over the coming year. Need to undertake website reviews as part of the learning process around the quality of provision. 	

Key Area: 2c - Quality of learning and teaching. <i>How well does SACRE use knowledge of quality of learning and teaching to target support appropriately?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	not have any knowledge of quality of learning and teaching to target support from the LA and professional support/adviser.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have little knowledge of the quality of learning and teaching in the LA schools and therefore is unable to provide appropriate challenge and support to the schools. The SACRE has no means to offer or recommend support to schools as there is little or no professional support in the LA working with the SACRE.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have some information regarding the quality of learning and teaching from a range of sources including contact with teachers and pupils. Limited analysis of this information is undertaken; however, this means that SACRE's attempts to improve learning and teaching have limited effect. Be able to circulate information about national courses and support mechanisms to schools	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have a robust relationship with schools and the LA to gather meaningful information about the quality of learning and teaching in RE. This information is analysed to identify trends, areas of strength and areas for development and SACRE draws on expertise in effective schools to support all schools in the LA. Advise the LA on the support that is needed and have access to professional support, linked to schools in need.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions with schools and teachers through network meetings and the schools working group are very valuable in gathering qualitative information about the teaching of RE. • Training is aligned to delivery of the Agreed Syllabus, supporting consistency and developing expertise in schools. • Need to hold SACRE meetings in schools on occasion so schools can further showcase their work. • Need to be more targeted to those schools that might need support. 	

Key Area: 2d Quality of interaction and communication with leadership and management of RE in schools <i>To what extent does SACRE have and pass on information that supports high quality RE in schools</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	not engage in communication with schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have little communication with schools. It occasionally contacts schools with resources for RE and attends Headteachers meetings.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have RE key messages communicated regularly into schools. Sends regular updates and information to schools, headteachers and governors. SACRE discussions are used to enhance leadership and management of RE in schools.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have a constructive relationship with senior leaders and subject managers in schools to develop the subject.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular information has been shared with schools through the VSB (Virtual School Bag) through emails to Headteachers and through the RE networks. Communication is an ongoing challenge and developing multiple ways of communicating with teachers and school leaders always need to be considered. <i>There is an East Sussex RE Facebook page which teachers and others can contribute to and share good practice??? [Is this still the case?]</i> Headteachers/senior leaders have engaged with the process of a new Agreed Syllabus. <i>Need to strengthen channels of communication into schools beyond the networks.</i> 	

Key Area: 2e – Relations with academies and other non-LA maintained schools. <i>To what extent has a SACRE developed a proactive strategy in relation to academies and other non-LA maintained schools in its area?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	not have the mechanisms and not have the knowledge of making contact.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have haphazard information about the RE situation in local academies etc, and little or no established relationships and liaison with them. No serious attempt has been made to develop an overall strategy.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have made some effort to establish liaison with each academy etc and to keep updated SACRE's information about their RE situation and share their advice to these schools. By and large, academies co-operate with SACRE at this level. SACRE keeps under review the ongoing situation.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have a proactive policy of liaison with all academies, etc. and of sustaining a wider professional RE network within the area. While the independence of academies, etc. is genuinely respected by SACRE, many academies value this network and look to SACRE for ongoing advice and leadership in RE.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academies are included with all communication to all schools and are not treated separately. There has been renewed interest in engagement from academies with the launch of the new Agreed Syllabus. 	

Section 2. Standards and quality of provision of Religious Education

Successes/ What are we good at?

SACRE was bold in the development and launch of a new Agreed Syllabus. It is well supported and funded through RE Today which offers a range of resources and thoughtful schemes or work. A range of communication methods have been utilised to support the launch of the Agreed Syllabus which has renewed engagement with headteachers, senior leaders and subject leaders. Furthermore, the syllabus has served to engage academies in the delivery of high-quality religious education.

Areas for development/ Action points:

- **For the SACRE**
 - Need to embed systematic approaches to good practice visits over the coming year.
 - Need to embed systematic approaches to data use over the coming year.
 - Need to undertake website reviews as part of the learning process around the quality of provision.
 - Need to hold SACRE meetings in schools on occasion so schools can further showcase their work.
 - Need to be more targeted to those schools that might need support.
 - Need to strengthen channels of communication into schools beyond the networks.
- **For the LA**
 - Continue to provide regular data to SACRE on entries and outcomes.

Date of review: November 2024

Date of next review: June 2026

Section 3: The effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus

How effectively does the SACRE, in partnership with the LA, monitor the impact and evaluate the effectiveness of the agreed syllabus in raising standards? How effectively does the Agreed Syllabus Conference in partnership with SACRE make decisions about the use of national guidance and exemplar material in a review of the agreed syllabus?

The locally agreed syllabus (AS) is the bedrock on which schools will build robust sequences of effective learning experiences in RE. A good, recent AS will support both the delivery of high quality RE in schools and RE's contribution to the schools' wider curriculum aims and impact.

The major factors to be considered in creating or revising an AS include statutory requirements, non-statutory guidance and exemplar material, developments in the school curriculum generally, and local circumstances. Key advice on producing an AS is given in the Guidance. SACREs and ASCs are recommended to take note of this advice in their work on the AS.

LAs are required to review their AS at least every five years. This cycle of reviewing, revising, re-launching and re-implementing the AS gives SACREs and ASCs opportunities for ongoing development and improvement of their effectiveness in providing schools with an AS that is truly "fit for purpose".

While the ASC holds the legal responsibility for revising the AS, in practice much of the preparatory and supplementary work will be carried by the SACRE within its routine business. Moreover, in most LAs the membership of SACRE and ASC overlap substantially or are identical. This can contribute to greater inclusivity and coherence, but good practice will ensure that it is always clear at any time which body is in place at a meeting, and that it is the ASC which is in session when decisions about the AS are considered.

Academies, etc. are, in principle, free to choose their own RE syllabus. In practice, however, many may well continue to use their local AS. There are some sound reasons for SACRE and the LA to encourage this where possible, and to enable academies, etc. to have some involvement in the process of revising the AS or of devising a new AS. Relationships between SACREs and academies will necessarily be entirely voluntary and not covered by legislation or guidance. SACREs should therefore approach such relationships in a spirit of mutual respect and collegiality. These issues have not been incorporated into the matrix below, but see Section 4.

Key Area: 3a – The review process <i>How does the SACRE review the success of the existing agreed syllabus?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	not have any way of contacting schools to carry out a review of the existing syllabus. It will not be supported by the LA or professional support.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have limited arrangements in place to monitor the impact of the AS, particularly in raising standards, providing little or no opportunity to review the effectiveness of the AS. Not know the views of teachers and have had no systematic evaluation of the strengths/weaknesses of the syllabus. Unclear how to proceed with the five-yearly syllabus review and there is little or no budget allocation from the LA. Have little knowledge of wider recent RE national guidance, research and developments.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have reviewed the opinions of schools and RE teachers in several ways and have a good idea of the strengths/areas of weakness of the current AS. Have devised a costed action plan in partnership with the LA, and been allocated a sufficient budget for the AS review and relaunch.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have a clear and systematic process for monitoring the effectiveness of the AS built into its development plan. Reviewing the AS includes full consultation with schools and other key stakeholders, including faith communities and academics. Issues that have arisen have been discussed and addressed in planning for a review. An ASC budget has been planned and allocated in partnership with the LA to include consultation meetings, administrative support and design/distribution costs. There is a strong sense of shared ownership of the prospective AS review, with clear targets for what needs to be achieved.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routine reviews of the Agreed Syllabus over the last 2 years have shown it to be successful with high levels of engagement from maintained schools and an increasing number of academies. • The Agreed Syllabus was developed in consultation with faith groups, schools and governors. • Launch event for the new syllabus was attended by most schools and academies. • A costed plan to sustain the Agreed Syllabus and associated training up to the next Agreed Syllabus Conference has been determined. • Need to undertake ongoing review of the implementation of the syllabus. • Need to track schools to ensure they remain aligned to the syllabus. 	

Key Area: 3b – The quality of the local Agreed Syllabus <i>How well does the locally Agreed Syllabus promote effective learning & teaching in RE? Is it “fit for purpose”?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	not have knowledge of other agreed syllabi nationally. Not have access to professional support with a national knowledge of high-quality teaching and learning in RE.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	ensure that the AS sets out what is to be learnt at each Key Stage. Progression in RE is stated, but this does not link directly to the learning and there is no clear expectation of quality learning in the AS.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	ensure that the AS provides a clear framework for and expectations of learning in RE. Make clear the value of RE in school, both in terms of learning and of wider issues. Ensure that the AS development has involved teachers and meets their needs.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	ensure that the AS provides a thoroughly professional and inspirational framework for effective learning in RE which is proactively supported and promoted by the LA. Have set out clear expectations of the role of the LA and school leadership in ensuring adequate resources and provision in schools. References latest RE research that is relevant to help pupils make good progress in RE.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Agreed Syllabus is in place and has been very well received by schools. • It is well resourced through provision of planning and resources through schemes of work. • Fit for purpose and well supported by approaches to teaching and learning and a framework for implementation. • Need to ensure engagement at the next Agreed Syllabus Conference to ensure it reflects the latest research. • Need to support schools with the provision of appropriate accompanying resources if needed. 	

Key Area: 3c – Launching and implementing the Agreed Syllabus <i>How well does SACRE promote the AS and provide training to prepare teachers to use it effectively?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	not have a launch for the new syllabus. Not have any in-service training for teachers/schools for implementing the new AS. Not have the mechanisms to advertise, promote and share the syllabus with local schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	provide for no special launch or other publicity, so that schools are unaware of the significance of the syllabus revisions for learning and teaching in RE. Have little training provision for implementing the revised syllabus. Be prevented from providing any significant additional guidance or extended training on using the AS by a shortage of financial and human resources.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	use other forms of communication (for example the LA website) to promote the launch. Have clear arrangements for training teachers on implementing the syllabus provided by the LA; this training is well supported and managed. Provides additional guidance or extended training on using the AS over its life.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	Involve the wider community and use strong media coverage, to give the AS a high profile as an important development in the work of the LA and local community. The launch event includes high quality presentations from a range of local religious and worldviews groups, schools and professional LA officers/councillors. Provides effective training on implementing the AS, which is supported by all schools, leads to teachers being clear about standards and expectations in the AS and the implications for teaching and learning. Provides clear guidance about ways in which schools might begin the process of reviewing their own provision for RE in the light of the revised syllabus.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch event attended by 91% of all schools and academies in East Sussex. • Programme of training and support through RE Today funded through the LA. • Need to support schools in how they might systematically review they own provision considering the Agreed Syllabus. 	

Key Area: 3d – Membership and training of the Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) To what extent is the membership of ASC able to fulfil its purpose?		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	not have the structures in place to convene an ASC. Not have any admin and advisory support for its work.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have a membership that fulfils basic statutory requirements. Limited induction and training opportunities; members are unclear of their roles, or how an AS can be structured. Particular faith or belief groups or teachers from different phases do not attend. Provide clerking, admin and advisory support for only a very limited amount of time or range of work. Routine admin arrangements are in place. Agendas and papers are distributed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have a membership that strongly reflects the diversity of the wider religious/worldview and professional community. Some opportunities for members' training and the purpose and action plan for the work of the ASC are clear. Have all four committees well represented at meetings. Agendas and papers are distributed well in advance, so all members have time to consider them carefully. Meetings are well managed with strong contributions from a wide range of members.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have a membership that is well informed and highly representative of the diversity of the local community. Where particular faith or belief expertise is missing locally there are arrangements to work with consultants to ensure this voice is added into the process. There is a strong, co-ordinated programme of induction and training opportunities for members. Have lively and purposeful meetings with a wide variety of contributions. Members of all 4 groups regularly attend and participate fully in meetings, sharing their experience, expertise and insights. Provide effective admin to support the process	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agendas and papers distributed in advance of meetings and members arrive informed and actively contribute to discussions. • Four committees represented at meeting. • Visitors join meetings to contribute to 'my world, my faith' or share their experiences as teachers and leaders. • Need to widen membership to reflect diversity of belief across the local authority. 	

Key Area: 3e - Developing the revised agreed syllabus <i>How robust are the processes for producing a strong educational Agreed Syllabus?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	not have an agreed plan linked to finance for developing their AS. Have met the five-year review deadline of revising and publishing a new AS.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have no clear structure for developing a new AS. It does not undertake a thorough revision, tending to add material rather haphazardly to the existing syllabus, leading to lack of coherence in the final outcome. There is little or no consultation during the development of a new AS with teachers, SACRE members and the local religious/worldview communities.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have clear objectives for the revision and involve a wide range of local expertise in its construction. The LA and the ASC in partnership ensure that strong direction is provided to design an AS which is coherent, clear and accessible. Working parties and consultations are reasonably managed and supported.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	ensure that high quality advice is sought to review and advise on the revisions as they develop. The ASC in partnership with the LA holds well attended consultation meetings and briefings to ensure teachers are fully involved in, and have a sense of ownership of, the revision process. The AS has a clear framework for progression and challenging learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Agreed Syllabus involved wide consultation with all stakeholders and an open process for developing the new syllabus working in partnership with RE Today. • Working mainly online was positive for boosting engagement with the process. • Clear direction of travel and regular networks maintain momentum around the revision of the Agreed Syllabus. • Need for meaningful review and consultation of the current provision ahead of the next Agreed Syllabus Conference that leads to meaningful adaptation of the syllabus if necessary. 	

Key Area: 3f – Making best use of National Guidance <i>How does the Agreed Syllabus Conference make choices relating to the use of national documentation? (See footnote*)</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	not be aware of national documentation in relation to the AS review process and are therefore unable to use this guidance appropriately.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have a limited awareness and understanding of national documentation in relation to the AS review process and are unable to use national guidance in a coherent way. Have members not fully understanding the broader curriculum and how this is organised and have no opportunity for training to give them the skills to understand how RE might best play a part in the holistic education of the child.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	be aware of national documentation and some of its implications for the AS review process, but does not ensure its use reflects local circumstances. Have ASC members who take note of the broader curriculum picture but do not link the AS to it systematically or appreciate how teachers will be able to make use of it to link to the wider curriculum in schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	take full account of national documentation in the construction of the revised AS, while ensuring their work reflects local circumstances. The syllabus is devised so that RE fits appropriately with other curriculum areas at all key stages and guidance about how to make the best links is given to schools.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of national reports and links to national organisations are in place.• Chair is a member of NASACRE.• Specialist adviser is a member of AREIAC.• Use and review reports and research to inform our thinking – e.g. Ofsted subject reports.	
*Documentation includes: the Non-Statutory National Framework in RE; the Programmes of Learning in RE (Primary) and Programmes of Study in RE (Secondary), the new Primary and Secondary Curriculums, and “Religious Education in English schools: “Non-statutory guidance 2010”; CoRE; Big Ideas in RE publication 1 & 2; Ofsted RE literature review		

Section 3: The effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus

Successes/ What are we good at?

SACRE consulted widely on the introduction of a new Agreed Syllabus. New Agreed Syllabus is well resourced through provision of planning and resources through RE Today. The launch of the new Agreed Syllabus was well-attended and a funded high-quality training programme is planned to support with embedding. Networks maintain high levels of engagement and begin the process of teacher input into the ongoing development process. Key members of SACRE are engaged in national organisations and regularly review key documentation to ensure they are informed about best practice around the Agreed Syllabus. Momentum has been maintained through the Subject Network Meetings.

Areas for development/ Action points:

- **For the SACRE**

- Need to undertake ongoing review of the implementation of the syllabus.
- Need to track schools to ensure they remain aligned to the syllabus.
- Need to ensure engagement at the next Agreed Syllabus Conference to ensure it reflects the latest research.
- Need to support schools with the provision of appropriate accompanying resources if needed.
- Need to support schools in how they might systematically review their own provision considering the Agreed Syllabus.
- Need to widen membership to reflect diversity of belief across the local authority.
- Need for meaningful review and consultation of the current provision ahead of the next Agreed Syllabus Conference that leads to meaningful adaptation of the syllabus if necessary.
- Need to consider pupil voice as part of the review of the Agreed Syllabus ahead of the ASC.

- **For the LA**

Date of review: March 2025

Date of next review: November 2026

Section 4. Collective Worship

How effectively does the SACRE fulfil its responsibilities for the provision and practice of Collective Worship?

Maintained schools are required to provide a daily act of Collective Worship for every pupil. In community schools not having a religious foundation, the acts of CW should be “wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character”, without being distinctive of any particular denomination. Part of a SACRE’s role is to support the effective provision of CW in community schools and to advise the LA on issues related to provision and quality. It must also consider applications from headteachers in community schools that the requirement for CW to be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character be disapplied for some or all of the pupils in that school. SACRE ‘determines’ the appropriateness of that application and grants a ‘determination’ to those schools where the application is judged to be in the best interests of the pupils. All pupils in schools with determinations continue to have an entitlement to daily CW.

CW can be a rich and rewarding element of the curriculum as a whole and SACREs have the opportunity to enhance its quality by offering appropriate guidance and support.

Key Area:4a – Supporting pupil entitlement <i>What strategies are in place to enable the SACRE to support the delivery of pupil entitlement in the LA's schools?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	not have any knowledge regarding the provision of CW nor have any mechanism in place to gain such knowledge.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	be unaware of the issues facing schools in providing CW as part of the pupil entitlement. Provide little advice or support towards fulfilling pupil entitlement to CW.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	understand local issues of delivering pupil entitlement and of the challenges schools face in providing CW. Provide some advice in support of delivering pupil entitlement. Seek to ensure that schools had access to, and advice on, appropriate resources for the delivery of CW.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have a balanced and realistic overview of provision and its challenges across the LA. Provide or arrange for systematic support and guidance for schools experiencing difficulty in delivering pupil entitlement. Obtain feedback from schools to evaluate the impact of advice and support. Periodically review its strategies for supporting pupil entitlement.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SACRE understand the challenges of delivering collective worship in schools and the different challenges experienced by primary and secondary schools. SACRE understands the impact of fragmentation of the school system and the impact of the variable approach to collective worship across schools as a result. Collective Worship Guidance published. Training given to Governors in the Local Authority with opportunity to hear feedback from governors themselves. Greater focus on collective worship through networks. Collective worship included as part of school visits programme. Need to consider how to further extend the offer of support to impact the quality of collective worship. 	

Key Area: 4b – Enhancing the quality of provision of collective worship <i>How does SACRE seek to influence the quality of collective worship in the LA's schools?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	not be able to influence the quality of CW due to lack of support either from the LA or CW/RE professional. Have no knowledge of what good quality CW in schools looks like.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	not be adequately supported by the LA / RE professional to promote quality provision of CW. Have agenda items about CW dominated by the issue of how SACRE obtains data. Have little understanding of the nature and potential of CW and of what effective provision in each school might be.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have occasional agenda items on CW, with some insight into how it is being delivered in the LA's schools. Understand what effective provision is, but SACRE members have little 'hands-on' experience of CW. Promote in-service support for teachers with responsibility for CW. Advise on enhancing quality of provision.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have a good overview of quality of provision across the LA, with information from the LA and from presentations by schools. Have first-hand experience of CW in schools. Disseminate good practice in consultation with schools and teachers. Sponsor an ongoing programme of in-service development and assist schools in evaluating and enhancing the quality of their provision.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SACRE understands some of the challenges facing schools in delivery of collective worship but recognises more work in this area needs to be done to encourage consistency and equity in access to entitlement. Greater focus on collective worship through networks with dedicated items. Collective worship included as part of school visits programme allowing members to reflect on what they have seen and build up a picture over time. Need to further improve offer to schools through in-service training and consider provision of a self-evaluation tool for schools to use. 	

Key Area: 4c – Responding to requests for determinations <i>How robust are SACRE's procedures for responding to requests from schools for a determination?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	not have any understanding of what a determination is. Have no documentation for schools to use to make application for a determination.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have had little or no experience of any requests for a determination, and have given at most only minimal attention as to how it might respond to such a request, due to a lack of support provided to SACRE by the LA via a professional officer. Found unprepared and at risk of making an unsound decision or giving erroneous advice by a request for a determination.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	be aware that schools have the option of requesting a determination, and that SACRE has a major role in this process. Have provided some training to its members regarding determinations, either directly through working on earlier requests, or through specific elements in developmental sessions. Responds in an adequate but piecemeal fashion, when requested for a determination, without a systematic overview of this area of work.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	be fully equipped for responding to requests for determinations, with a good understanding of SACRE's responsibilities. Have a well-established and effective framework for responding to requests, with which members are familiar and comfortable. Meet a request with a judicious and well-informed appraisal of the request by SACRE, leading to a sound decision communicated clearly to the school in a context of ongoing advisory support. Periodically review all existing determinations together with keeping the guidance from the RE professional.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision in place though rarely tested. • Determination policy in place. • Provision needs to be tested to evaluate quality of determinations. 	

Section 4. Collective Worship

Successes/ What are we good at?

SACRE is aware that on the back of the launch of the new Agreed Syllabus, further support, training and resources needs to be given over to Collective worship.

Areas for development/ Action points:

- **For the SACRE**
 - Better understanding of where schools are in relation to deliver of Collective worship
 - Support, training and resources needs to be given over to Collective worship.
 - Need to consider how to further extend the offer of support to impact the quality of collective worship.
 - Need to further improve offer to schools through in-service training and consider provision of a self-evaluation tool for schools to use.
 - [Provision for determinations needs to be tested to evaluate quality of determinations.]
- **For the LA**

Date of review: June 2025

Date of next review: March 2027

Section 5: Contribution of SACRE to promoting cohesion across the community

How effectively does SACRE, in partnership with the Local Authority and the faith communities, contribute to the promoting of cohesion across the community?

“By community cohesion, we mean working towards a society in which there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities; a society in which the diversity of people’s backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued; a society in which similar life opportunities are available to all; and a society in which strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community”².

Schools play a major role in helping to shape the future of our society, and the duty laid on each school to promote community cohesion is a significant part of that role. One of the most obvious and effective contributors to the community cohesion agenda is Religious Education. SACREs should take every opportunity to promote the contribution of RE to the community cohesion programmes in local schools. Where properly supported by the LA, SACREs themselves can act as powerful vehicles for promoting community cohesion in schools, in education more widely, and in the local community. SACREs should exemplify good practice in their internal relations and in the ways in which they go about their business. Advice on the contribution of SACREs and RE to community cohesion is given in the Guidance.

² Alan Johnson, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, speaking in Parliament on 2 November 2006. Based on the Government and the Local Government Association’s definition first published in Guidance on Community Cohesion, LGA, 2002 and resulting from the Cante Report in 2001.

Key Area: 5a – SACRE's membership <i>How representative is SACRE's membership of the local community?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	rarely meet and its membership will include many vacancies. The LA needs to review its membership and constitution in partnership with the SACRE and fulfil its obligations to convene an appropriately diverse SACRE	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have a membership that is not necessarily strongly representative of the religious diversity of the local community. Membership needs to be reviewed.	✓
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have membership that broadly reflects the religious diversity of the local community. This is regularly reviewed by the SACRE in partnership with the LA particularly where there is a high mobility of communities.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have strong representation from all major local religious communities including different groups within the same religious tradition (e.g. different Muslim or Christian communities). Endeavours to include representation from small local faith communities and/or have links with national bodies that can broker advice from those communities elsewhere in the UK.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SACRE is broadly representative but faces challenges in terms of recruitment. Current membership is loyal, but SACRE is attracting fewer representatives from diverse communities in the county. New chairperson and change of members present new opportunities to attract members. • Need to be conscious of implications of local government re-organisation. 	

Key Area: 5b SACRE's understanding of the local area <i>How much do SACRE members know and understand the local community in its religious, cultural and ethnic dimensions?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	meet rarely and this aspect of membership would not be an agenda item when they meet.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have limited knowledge about the religious, cultural and ethnic diversity in the local area.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	be provided with a detailed analysis of the religious and cultural diversity within the LA and therefore be well aware of different groups representing the diversity within the local area. Know about and have a relationship with local interfaith groups and the work that they do in the locality.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	have detailed knowledge of the nature of the religious, ethnic and cultural diversity in the local area. Take active steps to inform itself further about the distinctive needs and opportunities created by this diversity. SACRE would have good liaison and seek to develop initiatives with local interfaith groups. Be aware of the impact of this local context on schools and on the provision for RE and CW in those schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SACRE to analyse census data (once published) on religious groups in local area. • SACRE members have had diversity training in January 2025 which included data on the local area. 	

Key Area: 5c – SACRE's engagement with the community cohesion agenda. <i>How much does SACRE understand the contribution which RE/CW can make to a schools' provision for community cohesion?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	have little or no grasp of what community cohesion means and little understanding of the contribution which RE can make to the community cohesion agenda. Have no opportunity to promote RE's contribution to cohesion.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	have a basic grasp of what community cohesion means and therefore a limited understanding of the contribution which RE can make to the community cohesion agenda. Have little opportunity to promote RE's contribution to cohesion.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	have an understanding of what community cohesion means and the duty on schools to promote this. Understand and have a clear commitment to the part RE can play in promoting community cohesion and seek to promote this throughout its work.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	understand what community cohesion means and be clear about the duty on schools and the LA to promote this. SACRE members appreciate their key role in promoting RE's contribution to the community cohesion offer of its schools. SACRE would ensure this is explicit in the local AS and related guidance.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership means that importance of community cohesion is understood. • Members committed to seeing this reflected in their work. • SACRE members have had diversity training in January 2025 which included section on community cohesion. • Equalities/diversity a standing item on the agenda. 	

Key Area: 5d – SACRE’s role within wider LA initiatives on community cohesion <i>How well is SACRE linked to or consulted about LA initiatives promoting community cohesion?</i>		
Requires improvement/struggling A SACRE in this position would:	be given no information about, or contact with, wider LA initiatives linked to the promotion of community cohesion.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developing A SACRE with developing practice would:	be given little information about, or contact with, wider LA initiatives linked to the promotion of community cohesion.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Established A SACRE with established practice would:	be aware of some LA initiatives promoting community cohesion and have opportunity to discuss and contribute to this work.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advanced A SACRE with advanced practice would:	be a key partner and stakeholder in the work of the local authority in this area. Aware of local interfaith groups and in regular communication with them to ensure opportunities to support high quality RE/CW in schools.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Where are we and where do we find evidence to support this?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SACRE members have had diversity training in January 2025 which included section on community cohesion. 	

Section 5: Contribution of SACRE to promoting cohesion across the community

Successes/ What are we good at?

Membership understands the importance of community cohesion and are committed to seeing this reflected in the work of SACRE.

Areas for development/ Action points:

- **For the SACRE**
 - SACRE received analysis of the religious and cultural diversity within the LA in recent diversity training (January 2025).
 - SACRE continues to take steps to ensure good representation on the committee.
 - Maintain engagement with local authority's work on community cohesion.
 - Wider representation across various communities and faith groups.
 - Be mindful of the upcoming reorganisation of local government.

- **For the LA**

Date of review: November 2025

Date of next review: June 2027

ANNEX

The responsibilities of a Local Authority

The detailed rights and responsibilities of local authorities can be seen in full in *RE in English Schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010*.

This can be found at <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/subjects/re/guidance/>

In brief, local authorities are legally required to:

- establish a SACRE and appoint representatives to each of the four committees
- establish an occasional body called an agreed syllabus conference (ASC)
- institute a review of its locally agreed syllabus every five years
- appoint members of the committees represented on the ASC
- ensure that membership of Group/Committee A on the SACRE and ASC is broadly representative of the local area
- take all reasonable steps to ensure that SACRE and ASC membership is representative

The responsibilities of a SACRE

The detailed rights and responsibilities of SACREs can be seen in full in *RE in English Schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010*.

This can be found at <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/subjects/re/guidance/>

In brief, SACREs are legally required to:

- advise the local authority on RE and collective worship
- publish an annual report on their work
- send the annual report to QCDA (or its successor body)
- meet in public, unless confidential information is to be disclosed
- make their minutes available to the local authority and make provision for public access to their agenda and reports

The Guidance also indicates that SACREs should, as a matter of good practice:

- Monitor the provision for both RE and Collective Worship
- Provide advice and support on RE and Collective Worship to schools
- In partnership with the local authority, keep the locally agreed syllabus and provision in schools under review
- Offer advice to the local authority

In addition, SACREs may:

- Require their local authority to review the locally agreed syllabus
- Decide to advise their local authority
- Co-opt members who are not members of any of the four groups.

The Guidance also makes it clear that SACREs can and should make a strong contribution to the promotion of community cohesion in schools and in the local community through their promotion of good quality RE and through their operation as a SACRE.

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East Sussex SACRE
Development Plan to Summer 2026
June 2023 (Updated November 2025)



Section 1	Management of the SACRE and partnership with the LA and other key stakeholders				
	How far does the SACRE's partnership with the LA enable it to carry out its responsibilities effectively?				
	Actions	Lead	Timescale/cost	Success criteria	RAG
1A	Improve the use of local, national and subject specific grants to maximise opportunities for children and young people.	RE Advisor	Ongoing (£500 per annum)	Pupil voice activities take place on an annual basis including consideration of a conference.	
1B	Hold meetings at a variety of local places including local places of worship and schools. At least one meeting per year is held face-to-face.	Chairperson	Each Meeting	SACRE Members broaden their experience of faith and education.	
1C	Develop a clear programme of induction and ongoing training for SACRE members drawing on national (NASACRE) and local resources.	Chairperson RE Advisor	Reviewed annually	All SACRE Members are fully trained and fulfil their roles and responsibilities.	
1D	Ensure the development plan is costed, as appropriate. Systematically, review sections of the self-evaluation tool and in turn the development plan at each meeting.	Chairperson CS Rep.	Ongoing	A balanced budget is well-managed. Accurate self-evaluation is ongoing and feeds into the Development Plan.	
1E	Share detailed and well-analysed information about the quality of provision for Religious Education and Collective Worship.	Network Leads	Each meeting	SACRE Members understand the impact and consistency of provision across the county.	
1F	Strengthen partnerships with key stakeholders including NASACRE, RE Hubs, Further Education...	RE Advisor ALL		Engagement with key stakeholders supports continuous improvement and raising of standards.	⬆
1G	Foster strong relationships with academies through training, support and networking.	RE Advisor Network Leads	Ongoing	Universal engagement with the Agreed Syllabus.	

Section 2	Standards and quality of provision of Religious Education				
	How effectively does the SACRE, in partnership with the LA, evaluate standards and the quality of provision for RE in schools? How effective are the strategies to improve standards and the quality of provision?				
	Actions	Lead	Timescale/cost	Success criteria	RAG
2A	Widen the number of SACRE members who undertake school visits. Members report to committee on their learning using the agreed format.	ALL RE Advisor Network Leads	Ongoing	Programme of visits planned and agreed. Reports evaluated to identify support needs and actions for schools and SACRE.	
	Provide support that empowers schools to deliver religious education in their context.	RE Advisor Network Leads	Annually	Schools increasingly engage with a variety of models to successfully deliver provision.	
2B	Secure an effective reporting cycle for academic outcomes and entries.	CS Rep.	Annually	SACRE Members have a full understanding of academic performance. LA shares data with SACRE in a timely way to celebrate success.	⬆
	Review a cross section of school websites to ensure the RE curriculum is available.	ALL Clerk		All schools meeting statutory requirements.	
2C	Understanding of strengths and areas for development in quality of provision across the county leads to targeted support through networks and beacon schools.	RE Advisor Network Leads	Ongoing	Support for schools becomes increasingly bespoke and delivered school-to-school. Use of the SLE.	
2D	Further strengthen networks and ways of communication to support school engagement e.g., development of website, use of VSB, maintenance of a contacts list.	Network Leads	Ongoing	Networks provide SACRE with insight into the delivery of provision across the school-system. Examples of effective practice are shared during network meetings. Attendance record to network meetings and other training is kept and shared with SACRE.	⬆
2E	As 1G				

Section 3	The effectiveness of the locally agreed syllabus				
	How effectively does the SACRE, in partnership with the LA, monitor the impact and evaluate the effectiveness of the agreed syllabus in raising standards? How effectively does the ASC, in partnership with SACRE, make decisions about the use of national guidance and exemplar material in a review of the AS?				
	Actions	Lead	Timescale/cost	Success criteria	RAG
3A	Use the networks to further understand the quality of implementation, the strengths and areas for development of the syllabus. Undertake a broader mid-point review of the syllabus across all schools.	RE Advisor Network Leads	Ongoing	SACRE understands the effectiveness of the syllabus and how schools are supporting each other to improve provision. Broader review of syllabus involves wide range of stakeholders and feeds back to RE Today.	
3B	Provide schools with tools to enable them to evaluate the quality of their own curriculum and encourage sharing of strengths and areas for development. Support schools in developing a body of high-quality resources to deliver the syllabus.	RE Advisor Network Leads	Ongoing	Schools openly self-evaluate their own provision and support one another in addressing areas for development. A well-managed resource of high-quality materials is accessible to schools. Consideration is given to how best sharing of some specific resources between schools can take place.	⬆
3C	NA				
3D	NA				
3E	NA				
3F	NA				

Section 4	Collective Worship				
	How effectively does the SACRE fulfil its responsibilities for the provision and practice of Collective Worship?				
	Actions	Lead	Timescale/cost	Success criteria	RAG
4A	Understand the challenges faced by schools in the delivery of Collective Worship through school visits, surveying and networks.	ALL RE Advisor Network Leads	Year 1 and 2	SACRE Members have engaged with a range of schools and can articulate good practice and challenges faced by schools.	
	Monitor provision of collective worship through questionnaires and school visits.		Year 2 and 3	All East Sussex schools meeting statutory requirements for Collective Worship.	
4B	Provide support and guidance for schools experiencing difficulty in delivering pupil entitlement.	ALL RE Advisor Network Leads	Year 1 and 2	Schools can readily access the necessary resources to meet expectations.	
	Broaden the training offer to include access to best quality advice on delivery of Collective Worship.		Year 2 and 3		
4C	Provide SACRE Members with further training on making Determinations as part of their ongoing training.	Chairperson RE Advisor	Year 1	SACRE Members meet requests with a judicious and well-informed appraisal leading to a sound decision communicated clearly to the school.	
	Regularly revisit the Determinations Procedure to ensure SACRE Members are familiar with the framework.	ALL	Ongoing		

Section 5	Contribution of SACRE to promoting cohesion across the community				
	How effectively does SACRE, in partnership with the Local Authority and the faith communities, contribute to the promoting of cohesion across the community?				
	Actions	Lead	Timescale/cost	Success criteria	RAG
5A	<p>Develop initiatives to ensure diverse representation on the committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach to different faith groups • My World, My Faith <p>Co-opt or encourage ad hoc visits from members of a diverse range of faith groups to understand the work of SACRE and their potential role.</p>	Chairperson	Ongoing	<p>Representation of diverse groups increases over time increasingly reflecting the local community.</p> <p>A wide range of different faith groups are given opportunities to attend meetings, share their work and understand the work of SACRE.</p>	⬆
5B	<p>Draw on analysis of demographic data to understand religious character of the county e.g. Census 2021.</p> <p>Take steps to reflect those communities in the make-up of the committee.</p>	<p>RE Advisor ALL</p> <p>Chairperson ALL</p>	Regular revisiting	SACRE Members have a demonstrable understanding of the diversity of faith groups across the county and reach out to them to encourage participation.	⬆
5C	<p>Promote community cohesion through seeking to strengthen engagement with SACRE by faith groups and those with worldviews.</p> <p>Increase SACRE's profile in the community by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing profiles and photos for the SACRE website • Attending governor forums • Regularly communicating with schools through the VSB and CZone 	<p>Chairperson RE Advisor ALL</p>	Annual updates	<p>SACRE Members can clearly articulate how fulfilment of their duties promotes community cohesion in the county.</p> <p>SACRE has a known profile in the education system.</p>	
5D	Take steps to understand how the local authority promotes community cohesion.	Chairperson ALL	Ongoing	SACRE Members are well-informed about how the local authority promotes community cohesion are their role in it.	

Outcomes and take-up 2022 – 2024

School	Cohort			GCSE Full Course Entries RE			GCSE Full Course % Attainment					
	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024	(9-4)	(9-5)	(9-4)	(9-5)	(9-4)	(9-5)
							2022	2023	2022	2023	2024	2024
England (All Schools)	645,475	671,390	697,794	221,410	224,436	224,896	70.1	60.4	72.2	61.4	72.0	61.5
England (State Funded Schools)¹	587,660	606,915	629,207	207,491	210,323	210,775	68.8	58.7	70.8	59.7	70.7	59.9
East Sussex	5,026	5,062	5,163	937	1,134	1,151	78.2	65.7	63.6	51.9	63.0	51.8

School	Cohort			GCSE Full Course Entries RE			GCSE Full Course % Take up		
	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024	2022	2023	2024
England (All Schools)	645,475	671,390	697,794	221,410	224,436	224,896	34.3	33.4	32.2
England (State Funded Schools)	587,660	606,915	629,207	207,491	210,323	210,775	35.3	34.7	33.5
East Sussex	5,026	5,062	5,163	937	1,134	1,151	18.6	22.4	22.3

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A handbook for SACRE members



Contents

Introduction	2
Joining your local SACRE.....	2
What is this handbook for?	2
SECTION 1: SACRE duties, roles and responsibilities	3
What is a SACRE?.....	3
Why is there a SACRE?	3
What does a SACRE do?	3
What else can a SACRE do?	5
SECTION 2: SACRE membership, composition, Group representation, roles and responsibilities	6
Who attends the SACRE meetings?.....	6
How is the membership of a SACRE decided?	6
The composition of a SACRE.....	6
Who are the representatives?.....	7
What will be my responsibilities as a SACRE member?	8
Do we all have the same responsibilities?	8
SECTION 3: Religious education and collective worship.....	10
What should I know about religious education?	10
What is a locally Agreed Syllabus for RE?.....	10
What is the Agreed Syllabus Conference?	11
What should I know about determinations?	12
Parent/Carer rights.....	12
Religious teaching from within the faith community.....	12
SECTION 4: Local Authorities and SACREs.....	13
What are the local authority's responsibilities regarding its SACRE?	13
Does SACRE's remit cover all schools in the local authority?	13
How does a SACRE make its work known?	13
SECTION 5: FAQs for new SACRE members.....	15
APPENDIX: A good SACRE member	16
APPENDIX: An effective SACRE	17

Introduction

Joining your local SACRE

This is a handbook for all SACRE members, new or experienced.

It is designed to:

- help SACREs become more effective through the informed participation of their members
- clarify the context and work of a SACRE
- be a point of reference

As a member of a SACRE you are serving your community and the Local Authority (LA) in an important way. Whichever community or group you represent, your active participation makes a valuable contribution to the quality of religious education (RE) and collective worship (CW) that pupils experience in schools. Your work also makes an important contribution to community relations locally, thereby building stronger communities.

What is this handbook for?

The handbook is designed as a point of reference for all SACRE members, and to be of interest and support, particularly to those who are new to the role, by:

- explaining the work of a SACRE and the roles of its individual members
- helping you understand the nature and purpose of religious education and collective worship
- explaining what the law says about religious education and collective worship
- helping you work within your SACRE to support and encourage local schools to ensure high standards in religious education and collective worship

It is also designed to help SACREs become more effective through the informed participation of their members.



SECTION 1: SACRE duties, roles and responsibilities

What is a SACRE?

SACRE stands for **Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education**.

Why is there a SACRE?

A SACRE is a statutory council appointed by, but separate from, a local authority with responsibility for education.

SACRE's main statutory function is to advise the local authority on matters related to religious education and collective worship in maintained schools. Since 1988, every LA must have a SACRE by law. SACREs are funded through the Central Schools Services Block (CSSB). The LA has a legal requirement to take responsibility for making sure SACRE is well supported and that SACRE's work connects to schools and their curriculum. There is no other body like it; SACRE is unique.

SACRE's remit does not extend to voluntary aided schools with regard to RE or CW, or voluntary controlled schools with regard to CW. Academies are covered by their funding agreement with government and their relationship to the local authority differs from maintained schools. Many of these schools and academies value the work of their local SACRE and SACRE's advice and support. Working with the LA, SACRE has a responsibility to monitor the provision of RE and CW in all schools, including academies, to ensure that they are meeting their statutory duty.



What does a SACRE do?

The law says that RE must be taught in all maintained schools and a SACRE's role is to advise its local authority on what needs to be done to improve religious education and collective worship for those schools in its area. This is because RE is not part of the National Curriculum (NC); it is locally determined. Through the SACRE, local communities and teachers can influence and support what pupils are learning in RE.

The following is adapted from the Non-Statutory Guidance (DCSF, 2010):

Religious Education

A SACRE must:

- advise the LA on RE in accordance with the Agreed Syllabus
- publish an annual report on its work and on actions taken by its representative Groups, specifying matters on which it has advised the LA
- email a copy of the annual report to the Secretary of State; annual reports have been analysed by the DfE and NASACRE since September 2021
- meet in public, unless confidential information is to be disclosed
- make minutes of meetings available for public inspection.

A SACRE should:

- monitor the provision and quality of RE taught according to the Agreed Syllabus, together with the overall effectiveness of the syllabus
- provide advice and support on the effective teaching of RE in accordance with the locally Agreed Syllabus
- in partnership with the LA, consider whether any changes need to be made to the Agreed Syllabus
- offer advice to the LA, and through the LA to schools, concerning the way an existing Agreed Syllabus can be interpreted to fit with a broad, balanced, coherent and cohesive curriculum.

A SACRE may:

- require the LA to review the Agreed Syllabus; if a vote is taken on this matter, SACRE Group D (the LA) is not entitled to cast a vote; a majority decision by the three other committees is sufficient
- decide to advise the LA on matters related to its functions; equally, an LA may decide to refer matters to the SACRE
- co-opt members who are not members of any of the four SACRE Groups; such co-opted members may provide educational expertise, young people's views or religious and non-religious views, reflecting a diverse multicultural society.

Collective Worship

A SACRE must:

- Advise the LA on matters relating to collective worship, either in response to a referral from the LA, or as the SACRE sees fit
- consider applications from a headteacher that the school be allowed to modify the 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' requirement for collective worship. This is known as a determination.

What else can a SACRE do?

SACRE's role is to support good RE and collective worship within its schools by:

- giving advice on ways of teaching the Agreed Syllabus, including the choice of teaching materials
- monitoring schools' provision for RE and collective worship as well as pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC)
- advising the LA on the provision of RE training for teachers
- considering complaints referred by the LA about the provision and delivery of religious education or collective worship.

Assessment

In order to offer advice, SACRE should monitor school approaches to assessing pupils' progress in RE and review the uptake and standards achieved in external religious studies examinations.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development

SACRE should be aware of the contribution that RE and CW can make to pupils' personal development including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Additionally, members of Groups A and B may support pupils' awareness of religious beliefs and their influence on the formation of pupils' attitudes and values.

The most effective SACREs may also:

- monitor good practice in the delivery of the Agreed Syllabus in a range of ways, taking note of any difficulties
- disseminate good practice in the teaching of RE
- review provision for in-service training and development
- receive school inspection reports, in whole or part



SECTION 2: SACRE membership, composition, Group representation, roles and responsibilities

Who attends the SACRE meetings?

SACRE represents a balance of all the interests of the local community. It may comprise elected councillors, representatives of faith and belief communities and members of the education community, including teachers and headteachers, with others representing governors, teacher training, universities and local academies.

SACRE has two types of members - those appointed by the local authority and those co-opted by SACRE itself. When the LA appoints a member, they will be in one of four Groups (see below).

Co-opted members do not belong to a specific Group and therefore have no vote, but they can speak at meetings.

How is the membership of a SACRE decided?

The structure of the SACRE is defined by law; the specific numbers of members in each Group will usually be set out in the individual SACRE's constitution, based on the most recent census data. These are frequently decided by the LA, usually in consultation with the SACRE, depending on local circumstances and in collaboration with the organisations and communities represented.

The composition of a SACRE

Group A	Christian denominations and such other religions and religious denominations as, in the authority's opinion, will appropriately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area
Group B	The Church of England
Group C	Teacher and headteacher associations and others representing education interests. Some SACREs ensure representation from different phases and types of schools such as SEND, academies and Free Schools.
Group D	The Local Authority

When a formal vote is required, each of these Groups has equal voting rights; there is one vote per Group; each group makes its own arrangements for how to decide, most commonly through internal discussion and then a majority vote.

Who are the representatives?

Group A

Group A is made up of representatives of Christian denominations other than the Church of England. It may include, for example, representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, the Free Churches (e.g. Baptist, Methodist, United Reformed Church, Pentecostal, The Salvation Army) and The Society of Friends. It also has representatives from other faiths in the area, e.g. Buddhists, Baha'is, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Parsees, Sikhs. If there is no local community of a principal religion, it is common practice to seek representation so that local SACRE meaningfully reflects the principal religions in Great Britain, consistent with the efficient discharge of SACRE's functions.

Following the judgement by Justice Constable on the *Bowen v Kent CC* case, [Bowen, R \(On the Application Of\) v Kent County Council \[2023\] EWHC 1261 \(Admin\) \(26 May 2023\)](#) in order to comply with human rights legislation, the composition of Group A should be read so as to include the representation of non-religious belief systems.

By law, the make-up of Group A will vary from SACRE to SACRE, as it should reflect the diversity of the various faith and belief communities in the locality.

Group B

Group B is made up of representatives nominated by the local Church of England diocese, or dioceses, within the local authority area.

Group C

The members of Group C are usually representatives of professional teacher/headteacher associations. The local authority decides which associations will be invited to be represented, and they will usually approach the teacher unions, but local associations of RE teachers may also be asked to provide a representative. Sometimes a local teacher training establishment is invited to make a nomination, and/or someone representing the interests of local academies.

Group D

It is the local authority's responsibility to provide their own representatives for this committee. They are usually elected members or other political nominees, together with a representative of Children's Services. It is good practice for the LA to have all parties and viewpoints from across the political spectrum represented on the SACRE. In some LAs, a representative of school governors may also be on Group D.

Co-options

SACREs may co-opt other members who have particular expertise or represent a small local faith or belief community. Members can be co-opted for a specific time and purpose, or for more general contribution to SACRE's work, but as they are not in a Group, they do not have voting rights.

What will be my responsibilities as a SACRE member?

As a SACRE member you should be committed to the importance of religious education and to respecting the views of others. You have a responsibility to promote children's learning in RE and the quality of their CW, and to work for the highest standards in both.

You should represent the perspective of your community or sponsoring body in the work of SACRE and communicate the interests and the work of the SACRE back to them. You should be able to network effectively to contribute to the relationship and dialogue between the SACRE, your sponsoring body, the local community and schools. The specific opportunities you have will also depend on the organisation you represent. How you present yourself and work with others will be seen as reflecting on the values and ethos of the body you have been appointed to represent.

This is a unique opportunity to serve your local community and influence the attitudes of children and young people more widely than in a purely academic context. Social cohesion is recognised as being important to our society, and young people as present and future citizens of the UK. The effective SACRE is a model of social cohesion in which every member is heard and respected, even when there are many different positions or opinions on issues under discussion. In an effective SACRE, potential conflict is managed harmoniously. By the same token, SACREs have the potential to promote social cohesion more widely, in schools and within their local community.

Do we all have the same responsibilities?

Everyone shares the responsibility to put children's learning before personal interest.

Members of **Groups A and B**, each of whom represents a faith community within the locality:

- should present and foster a realistic image of their religion or belief, so that negative stereotyping is avoided. They must also make clear any grounds on which they may differ from each other, whilst showing respect for each other's viewpoints, since such convictions and mutual understanding both lie at the heart of effective classroom RE
- can create opportunities within SACRE meetings to raise awareness of sensitive and controversial issues in teaching RE to the children of their faith community, and also in the presentation of their faith and religious tradition within religious education, always taking an educational approach
- should be mindful of any difficulties local schools are facing, support their best endeavours, and where necessary, act as a link between schools and the faith communities
- should be aware of other local minority faith communities not represented; some SACREs address this and co-opt representatives from these communities
- consult with their communities on matters of particular importance to SACRE's work.

Members of **Group C**, representing teacher associations and education:

- should have a real and positive interest in RE in primary, secondary or special schools
- should ensure that the needs of schools and teachers are considered by the SACRE in their discussions
- should provide the SACRE with information about the context in which RE is taught in the schools in the local authority
- should ensure that the bodies they represent are informed about the work of the SACRE and about RE in local schools
- should create opportunities for other teachers to learn more about the work of the SACRE and give them the opportunity to have their views expressed at SACRE meetings
- should consult their colleagues on matters of particular importance to SACRE's work
- should bring a 'public' dimension to the debate about RE provision and support.

Members of **Group D**, representing the local authority:

- bring the concerns of the electorate for consideration
- bring to the meeting the breadth of educational issues and concerns that elected members are wrestling with, and place the role of RE within them
- can be supporters of RE within the various committees and structures of the LA
- can give political support to enable locally determined RE to flourish within the LA
- can appreciate the issues raised by a multi-faith, multicultural society and reflect these issues in support of RE in the relevant council structures
- can particularly support the efforts of the SACRE to be effective, through publicising its work with fellow elected members and officers of the LA, ensuring it is taken seriously and is appropriately funded and supported by advisers.



SECTION 3: Religious education and collective worship

Type of school	Religious education	Collective worship
Community/maintained schools	is taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus and comes within SACRE's remit.	follows the 1996 Education Act and is 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'.
Voluntary controlled (VC) schools	is taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus and comes within SACRE's remit. ²	reflects the religious character of the school.
Voluntary aided (VA) schools	is determined by the governors in accordance with the trust deed and reflects the religious character of the school. ¹	reflects the religious character of the school.
Foundation schools without a religious character	is taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus.	follows the 1996 Education Act and is 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'.
Foundation schools with a religious character	is taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus. ²	reflects the religious character of the school.
Trust schools	is taught according to the local authority's agreed syllabus.	follows the 1996 Education Act and is 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'.
Academies without a religious character	must be part of the curriculum but is taught according to the school's funding agreement.	must be offered to every pupil every day, but provision is determined by the school's funding agreement.
Academies with a religious character	is defined by the funding agreement and is usually that same as the former (VA/VC) status of the school.	reflects the religious character of the school.

What should I know about religious education?

Religious education is a statutory element of the school curriculum. Although it is not part of the National Curriculum, it forms part of the Basic Curriculum, which along with the NC, forms the statutory school curriculum; it is therefore part of every pupil's entitlement.

Religious Education does not seek to nurture religious faith, rather it provokes challenging questions about meaning and purpose, the nature of reality and the self, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human.

What is a locally Agreed Syllabus for RE?

The locally Agreed Syllabus is the statutory document for RE in maintained schools in the local authority. It sets out what should be taught to pupils in all key stages and the standards expected at the end of each key stage. It is produced by an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC).

The Agreed Syllabus must be reviewed every five years. If, at some other time, a majority of the SACRE Groups (excluding Group D) asks the LA in writing to reconsider its Agreed Syllabus, it must convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference for that purpose. (Education Act 1996, Chapter III)

What is the Agreed Syllabus Conference?

An Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) is a statutory body brought together to produce an Agreed Syllabus for RE. It is a separate legal entity from a SACRE.

An ASC:

- has the same structure as the SACRE, but Groups are referred to as Committees
- can be made up of some SACRE members but need not be so; there is no provision for co-opted members

In some LAs, the Chair of the ASC is appointed by the LA, whilst in others, the ASC chooses its own Chair. The LA's responsibility to convene the ASC includes the duty to provide funds and support for its work.

If the ASC cannot agree a syllabus, the Secretary of State appoints a Conference to ensure there is a syllabus for that LA.



What should I know about collective worship?

Schools are required to provide a daily act of collective worship, the majority of which would be 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character'. This means that it 'reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief without being distinctive of any particular Christian denomination'. It does not mean it has to be exclusively Christian. It must, however, be educational and appropriate to the age, aptitude and family background of pupils. When done well, collective worship provides an excellent opportunity for schools to contribute to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development and to the ethos of the school community.

In relation to collective worship, SACREs should:

- receive inspection reports, noting any references to the quality of collective worship in the context of pupils' SMSC development, including Fundamental British Values
- monitor the quality of provision where possible and share good practice
- offer advice to headteachers and governing bodies, including where there may be difficulties.

Many SACREs produce their own advice and guidance on collective worship. The SACRE may also provide training for teachers, headteachers and governors or other people who are involved in leading collective worship in school as visitors.

What should I know about determinations?

Schools apply for a determination if they feel that the proportion of collective worship which reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief as required by law is not appropriate for their pupils. That does not mean they do not have to offer collective worship at all.

The determination procedure allows this requirement to be lifted in respect of some or all pupils in a school. They are called determinations because SACRE 'determines' whether the case being made in an application to modify the law for all, or a group of, pupils in a school is appropriate.

Applications for determinations are made to the SACRE by the headteacher of any community school after consultation with the school's governing body.

Determinations are only possible for schools that do not have a religious character. Many SACREs have an agreed process to enable such an application to take place. The SACRE should review each determination every five years.

Parent/Carer rights

Parents/carers have the right, on conscience grounds, to withdraw their children, in any school, from all or any part of RE and collective worship. Sixth form students aged 18 may withdraw themselves from collective worship.

Parents also have certain rights regarding the provision of RE in different categories of school. However, these rights are rarely exercised.

- In Aided schools*, parents can opt for their children to receive Agreed Syllabus RE
- In these schools, parents can opt for their children to receive RE in accordance with the religious character of the school

In community schools and foundation schools without a religious character, where parents ask to withdraw their child from religious education, alternative RE provision for that child can be made elsewhere by the parents, provided there are no additional costs to the school and the child does not miss any of the taught sessions of the school curriculum.

The school continues to have responsibility for ensuring any pupil withdrawn from RE is supervised and safe. (*See RE and collective worship in school table, page 10.)

Religious teaching from within the faith community

SACRE members should be aware that some pupils will be formally receiving teaching about their own religion from their parents or through attendance at classes sponsored by their place of worship. The purpose of this teaching will usually differ from that of the religious education delivered in their schools, and the approach to learning may differ significantly.

There is a clear distinction between this religious nurture, which is the responsibility of the family and community, and religious education, by nature an open and explorative activity, appropriate in schools. It is important that the home and community background of the pupils is recognised and respected in school, but also that the educational approach is understood to promote reflection on faith and belief stances. SACREs might consider how they will support schools and communities in understanding each other's different roles to ensure that any potential tension is creative rather than threatening.

SECTION 4: Local Authorities and SACREs

What are the local authority's responsibilities regarding its SACRE?

Every local authority has a duty to ensure that:

- there is a SACRE
- all four Groups are represented
- there is an Agreed Syllabus, reviewed every five years
- support is in place to enable SACRE to fulfil its duties, which includes providing appropriate clerking and specialist advice
- it takes note of, and responds to, advice from the SACRE.

Does SACRE's remit cover all schools in the local authority?

No, SACRE's responsibility covers the majority of schools, but there are some exceptions, depending entirely on the category of a school. Some schools have a specific religious character and these are either voluntary aided (VA) i.e. voluntary schools, aided by the LA but controlled by a religious body, or voluntary controlled (VC) i.e. voluntary schools, controlled by the local authority and aided by a religious body. The difference from SACRE's perspective is crucial. There are also some non-religious schools for which SACRE has no responsibility, including new academies, although many SACREs engage and work with academies, including the development and provision of the Agreed Syllabus. (*See RE and collective worship in school table, page 11.*) SACREs have a responsibility to monitor provision in all schools to ensure that they are fulfilling their statutory duty to provide RE for all registered pupils.



How does a SACRE make its work known?

Local Authorities

The relationship between SACREs, local authority officers and elected members is important. SACRE's proceedings need to be reported to the appropriate LA committee where decisions are made about the education service and schools. The agreed minutes of meetings should be brought to their attention and made public, and the SACRE's Annual Report should be formally presented. Where such a person is in post, the local RE adviser is a vital source of professional guidance, support, advice, information, and practical expertise for the SACRE. His or her attendance at SACRE meetings is essential.

Local authority representatives on SACRE also have a role in ensuring SACRE's work, and any issues of concern raised are brought to the attention of the relevant sections of the council and the local authority.

Schools

Many schools seem unaware of the responsibilities and activities of their local SACRE. The specialist expertise on different faiths represented on a SACRE may be a source of advice to schools, being reliably representative of their local community. Some SACREs also hold their meetings in schools where they can meet and hear from pupils and teachers working there with a responsibility for RE or CW.

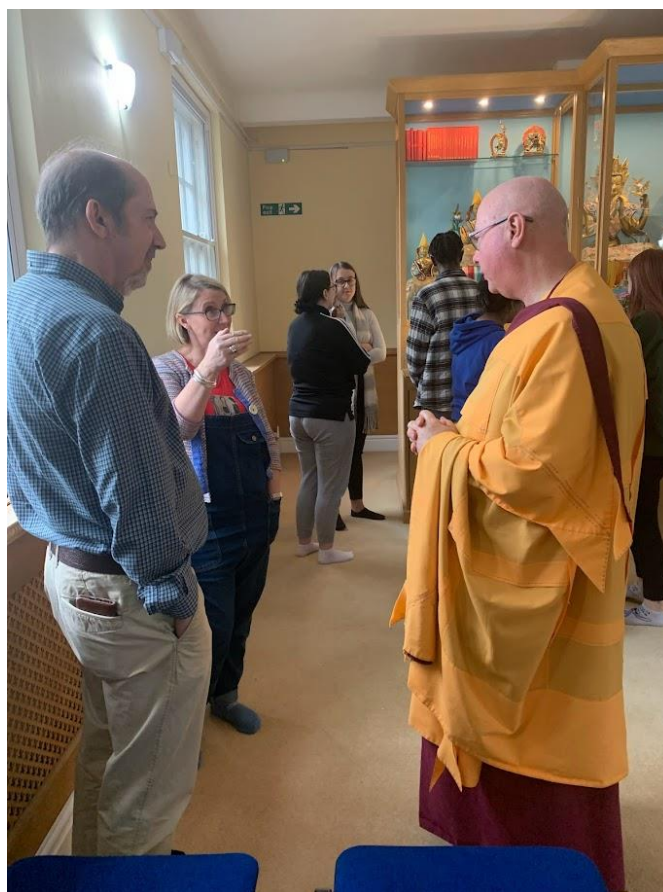
Faith communities

Sometimes SACREs hold meetings in local places of worship to build relationships. Individual faith community members have a responsibility to inform those they represent about the activities of the SACRE. They should also be available to receive the views of their community to feed into SACRE discussions.

It is good practice to send the SACRE annual report to the faith communities represented on the SACRE. It should also routinely be sent to local libraries and be on the agenda of the local Inter Faith Group or Faith Forum.

General public

SACRE meetings are by law open to the general public and notice of all meetings should be published, usually on the council's website. In the event of anyone requesting them, relevant documents should be made available.



SECTION 5: FAQs for new SACRE members

How often does a SACRE meet?

There is no hard and fast rule about the number of meetings a SACRE should hold each year. It must, however, meet a sufficient number of times to fulfil its statutory duties. Almost all SACREs meet at least three times a year, i.e. once a term, and some are more active and meet more frequently. Sometimes working parties made up of SACRE members meet between full meetings to move forward specific areas of the SACRE's work.

Will I be asked to chair the meeting?

The law does not state how the Chair of SACRE should be appointed. The local authority can appoint the Chair or it can allow the SACRE to elect the Chair from amongst its members. As a SACRE member, you could therefore be appointed Chair of SACRE, but not against your will!

Will I be asked to take the minutes?

The local authority's responsibility to set up a SACRE carries with it a duty to fund and ensure it can function efficiently. This means the LA should provide a clerk for the SACRE who will agenda and minute each meeting. The clerk is usually the point of contact for SACRE matters within the local authority.

If I'm not there, will it matter?

When you are unable to be present, it may be that no one else will be able to provide your special knowledge or make connections to your specialist networks to support the SACRE's work.

SACRE has a right to expect a level of commitment from its members, reflected in regular attendance at meetings. When this is not possible, it is common practice and polite convention to send apologies for absence.

Some SACREs invite members from whom they have not received apologies on three consecutive occasions to confirm their interest in continuing to serve. Some SACREs allow members who cannot attend to send someone else on their behalf. Some SACREs hold hybrid meetings, where members who cannot attend in person can do so virtually. Remember that when you are unable to be present, no one else will be able to provide your special knowledge in any discussions or make connections to your specialist networks to support SACRE's work.

Rules about quoracy are usually laid down in an individual SACRE's constitution, but generally:

- each Group should have at least one member present at each meeting
- decisions cannot be made unless there is at least one person present to cast the Group's single vote
- co-opted members do not have a vote.

This applies particularly to meetings at which decisions are to be made.

APPENDIX: A good SACRE member ...

In pairs or small groups, consider how you would rank each of these characteristics of a good SACRE member, the most important first and the least significant last, discarding any that you think are inappropriate.

... listens to all views and ideas.	
... seeks to understand the views of other members, rather than promoting his/her own agenda.	
... is willing to contribute to discussions.	
... understands his or her role as a SACRE member.	
... thinks his or her point of view is important.	
... is committed to SACRE meetings.	
... is well informed about the work of their SACRE.	
... works harmoniously with other members.	
... has time to spend in school.	
... listens more than he or she speaks.	
... wants to build good partnerships with other SACRE members.	
... is keen and able to communicate with teachers and pupils.	
... takes an active participative approach, following lines of enquiry of personal interest.	
... supports and encourages local schools to aspire to high standards in RE and collective worship.	
... is prepared to bring issues to SACRE from their faith, belief or other sponsoring group.	
... cares about pupils' learning and their personal development.	
... is confident about everything to do with RE and CW in schools.	
... takes an active part in meetings.	
... is able to offer relevant experiences.	
... understands and believes in the positive value of RE and CW in schools.	
... keeps in touch with national issues in RE and CW.	
... knows about local faith communities.	
... has the ability and confidence to question perceived wisdom.	
... takes an interest in key RE and CW issues facing schools.	
... works to create a bridge between SACRE, local communities and local schools.	

APPENDIX: An effective SACRE ...

In pairs or small groups, consider how you would rank each of these characteristics of an effective SACRE, the most important first and the least significant last, discarding any that you think are inappropriate.

... plans and evaluates its work rigorously.	
... is representative of the variety of beliefs within the local community.	
... understands the difference between RE and religious indoctrination and focuses its work appropriately.	
... promotes inclusivity and social cohesion.	
... is well attended by committee members and consistently quorate.	
... is well chaired.	
... is one that works strategically.	
... is able to secure adequate funding from its LA.	
... has a good partnership with the LA.	
... is one that uses its resources wisely and efficiently.	
... has professional RE advice and support from the LA.	
... demonstrates a hands-on approach with schools and their staff.	
... is committed to making RE relevant, interesting, appropriate, exciting and thoroughly enjoyable.	
... is one where there is good listening and communicating.	
... gives information in plain English.	
... has a committed membership.	
... is able to offer schools advice and support through well informed members.	
... is generally aware of issues related to pupils' progress in RE.	
... is representative of the interests of the local community.	
... constantly seeks to self-evaluate and improve.	
... is proactive not passive.	
... provides or secures relevant training for RE teachers.	
... monitors schools' RE provision and offers them support in self-review.	
... works to develop strong partnerships between SACRE members in order to model the cohesion they believe that should develop in their community.	
... advises its LA on RE, CW and the promotion of pupils' SMSC development and social cohesion.	
... encourages and values the contribution of all members and ensures they know they're appreciated.	
... responds readily to national or international issues relating to its sphere of interest.	

East Sussex SACRE

Induction for New Members

November 2025



East Sussex
County Council



SACRE Induction

Welcome to East Sussex SACRE¹

Thank you for joining East Sussex SACRE.

Serving on East Sussex SACRE is a rewarding experience which supports your local community in an important way. Whichever group you represent, your active participation can make a valuable contribution to the quality of religious education and collective worship that pupils experience in our schools and to the coherence of our community.

What is SACRE?

SACRE stands for: Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education. SACREs were established as permanent bodies legally constituted by local authorities by the Education Reform Act 1988.

The role of SACRE is to advise the local authority on religious education and collective worship in community, foundation and voluntary controlled schools without a religious designation.

What is the purpose of a SACRE?

A SACRE is unique. The law says that RE must be taught in all schools and a SACRE's role is to advise its local authority on what needs to be done to improve religious education (RE) and collective worship (CW) for schools in its area. This is because RE is not part of the National Curriculum; it is a local responsibility. Through the SACRE, local communities and teachers can influence directly what pupils learn in RE.

Who attends meetings?

A SACRE is set up to represent a balance of all the interests of the local community. Each SACRE is made up of four groups:

- Group A
Christian denominations other than the Church of England and representatives from faiths in the local area
- Group B
Church of England
- Group C
Associations representing teachers
- Group D
Local authority representatives

In addition, SACRE can co-opt people to support its work.

¹ Adapted from NASACRE's "Your Local SACRE"

What are SACRE's duties?

The SACRE's main function is to advise the local authority on matters related to the religious education, which follows the locally agreed syllabus, and on collective worship in schools.

- It can require the LA to review its agreed syllabus.
- It must consider applications from a headteacher that the school be allowed to modify the 'wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character' requirement for collective worship. (This is known as a determination.).
- It must publish an annual report of its work.

In a broader sense, SACRE's role is to support good RE and collective worship within its schools by:

- Giving advice on ways of teaching RE according to the locally Agreed Syllabus, including the choice of teaching materials.
- Monitoring schools' provision for RE and collective worship as well as the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development (SMSC) of pupils.
- Advising the LA on the provision of training for teachers in RE.
- Considering complaints about the provision and delivery of religious education and collective worship referred to it by the LA.

What is a locally agreed syllabus?

The locally agreed syllabus is the statutory document for RE in the local authority. It sets out what should be taught to pupils in all key stages and the standards expected of them at the end of each key stage. It is produced by an agreed syllabus conference.

The agreed syllabus must be reviewed every five years. If, at some other time, a majority of the members of SACRE asks the LA in writing to reconsider its agreed syllabus, it must convene a conference for that purpose.

And collective worship?

By law every pupil must take part in a daily act of collective worship unless they have been withdrawn by their parents, or if in the sixth form they have decided to withdraw themselves. Most acts of collective worship should be wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character.

As with RE, SACRE has a monitoring role, but it also makes decision on *determinations*.

Determinations?

A school can apply to SACRE for a determination to provide alternative collective worship if it feels that collective worship which reflects the broad traditions of Christian belief is not appropriate for their pupils. Applications for determinations are made to the SACRE by the headteacher of any community school after consultation with the school's governing body.

Determinations are only possible for schools that do not have a religious character. Many SACREs have an agreed process to enable such an application to take place. (They are called determinations because SACRE ‘determines’ whether the case being made in an application to modify the law for all or a group of pupils in a school is appropriate.)

What are my responsibilities as a SACRE member?

As a SACRE member, you should be committed to education and to respecting the views of others. You will have responsibility to support children’s learning in RE and collective worship, and to work for the highest standards in both.

You should represent your community or sponsoring group in the work of SACRE and communicate the interests of the SACRE back to them. You should be able to network effectively to contribute to the relationship between SACRE, your local community, and schools. The specific opportunities you have will also depend on the interest group you represent.

How does SACRE fulfil its role?²

Being part of the team

In East Sussex SACRE meets three times a year. All SACRE meetings and documents are open to the public. SACRE agendas, minutes and papers are published seven days before the meeting on the council website. SACRE discusses the issues set before it, considers evidence in the papers and then discusses whether to make any recommendations. All members are expected to attend and contribute to meetings and to take part in other working groups that may be set up.

Before your first meeting

- Find out who’s who - especially the Chair, the Clerk and Officer.
- Ask the Clerk for the username and password for the National Association of SACRE’s website (NASACRE).
- Ask the Clerk for the SACRE development plan, the minutes of the last meeting and the agenda for the next meeting.
- Be clear about where and when your first meeting is (virtual or venue).
- Ask the Clerk for the username and password to access the Locally Agreed Syllabus.

Preparing for a SACRE meeting

- Members will find it helpful to check the NASACRE website for current RE news. Members who are also teachers can visit the NATRE website for updates.
- Look at your local SACRE website to familiarise yourself with the members and its current actions:
 - [Committee details - Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education \(SACRE\) | East Sussex County Council](#)

² Adapted from NATRE’s “Being on Your Local SACRE”

- [Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education \(SACRE\) | Czone \(eastsussex.gov.uk\)](https://eastsussex.gov.uk)

At the meetings

- Get to know your fellow SACRE members, there may be useful links for you in your local area and vice-versa.
- Take note of any area you can make contributions, remember, each member offers their own insight into their community.

Between meetings

- Keep checking the NASACRE and SACRE websites and email relevant information to the Chair of SACRE.
- Request for important issues to be added to the agenda of the next meeting.
- Familiarise yourself with existing documentation,
- Read papers for your next meeting.

Other activities of SACRE³

SACRE Activities may include:

- Reviewing the Agreed Syllabus.
- Undertaking school visits to see the provision for religious education and collective worship.
- Ensuring there is sufficient training for teachers of religious education.
- Responding to complaints about religious education or collective worship.
- Reviewing data on Religious Studies examinations.
- Reading Ofsted reports for comments on religious education, collective worship, and Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural education (SMSC).
- Visiting schools or organising events to promote good practice in religious education, collective worship or SMSC.
- Publishing guidance to schools on religious education, collective worship or SMSC.

³ Adapted from "Introduction to Ealing SACRE"

Membership of East Sussex SACRE – June 2025

Group A – Representatives of other Christian denominations and other Religions and beliefs (15)		
Denomination/Area	Name	Appointment
Diocese of Arundel & Brighton	Vacancy	
Hinduism Community	Vacancy	
Islamic Community	Vacancy	
Quaker Community	Vacancy	
Baha'i Community	Elizabeth Coleman	June 2021
Jewish Community	Pamela Hartog	June 2021
Southeastern Baptist Association	Peter White (Vice Chairperson)	June 2021
Unitarian Church	Dr Norman Williamson	June 2021
Humanist Community	Felicity Harvest	June 2024
Group B – Representatives of the Church of England (4)		
Church of England Representative	Andrew Jervis	September 2025
Church of England Representative	Rosemary Roberts	June 2021
Church of England Representative	Vacancy	
Church of England Representative	Vacancy	
Group C – Representative of the Teacher Associations (6)		
Denomination/Area	Name	Appointment
National Association of Headteachers NAHT (Primary Phase)	Laura Cooper	June 2021
Academy Representative (Secondary Phase)	Peter Holt	September 2025
National Education Union (NEU)	Claire Ramalli	June 2021
Special Schools Representative (Special)	Karen Sitwell-Cook	February 2025
Group D – Representatives of the Local Authority (5)		
Local Authority Representative	Cllr Colin Belsey (Chairperson)	June 2021 [09/09]
Local Authority Representative	Cllr Abul Azad	June 2022 [05/21]
Local Authority Representative	Cllr Steve Murphy	November 2022 [05/21]
Local Authority Representative	Cllr Trevor Webb	June 2021 [05/97]
Local Authority Representative	Cllr Anne Cross	May 2025 [07/23]
Local Authority Advisors [No voting rights]		
RE Consultant	Barry Blakelock	
East Sussex County Council Advisor	Claire Ramalli	
Primary Network Lead	Claire Rivers	
Secondary Network Lead	Vacancy	
Clerk	Rebecca Harmer	

Induction Checklist

Activity		✓
People		
	Meet the Chairperson	
	Meet the Clerk	
	Meet the RE Specialist Advisor	
	Meet the Primary Network Lead	
	Meet the Secondary Network Lead	
	Meet the Children's Services Representative	
	Meet 'Link Member' to support induction	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On attending first meeting After attending second meeting During completion of induction checklist 	
Activities		
	Attend a SACRE Meeting	
	Attend a Primary/Secondary Network Meeting	
	Attend a Governor Briefing	
	Watch NASACRE So, you've joined your local SACRE... @VTW5e^X	
Documentation		
	NASACRE Member Handbook	
	Induction Checklist	
	Code of Conduct	
	Constitution	
	Annual Report	
	Role Descriptions	
	Development Plan	
	Self-evaluation	
	Local Agreed Syllabus (password required) - Schemes of Work	
	Understanding Christianity (understandingchristianity.org.uk)	
Websites		
	RE and collective worship in schools (www.gov.uk)	
	NASACRE (NASACRE.org.uk)	
	Username: members	
	Password: 2425Gr8RE4a7L!	
	SACRE East Sussex County Council	
	SACRE Czone (eastsussex.gov.uk)	
	Explore RE in your Region (re-hubs.uk)	
	RE Today supporting Religious Education in schools	
NASACRE Training		
	About SACREs	
	SACREs and Collective Worship	
	SACREs and Religious Education	
	SACREs and Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural	
	Other presentations and recordings	

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East Sussex SACRE

RE and Collective Worship Self-reflection tool

October 2025



THIS IS AN OPTIONAL TOOL TO HELP SCHOOLS REFLECT ON THEIR PROVISION FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

School:

Date of self-reflection:

Completing the self-reflection

When answering the questions subject leaders should consider the impact of teaching and learning on pupils.

In each section, we recommend using:

- **Y** – In place
- **N** – Not in place
- **P** – Partly in place.

The other columns allow for a brief explanation of the current position, the quality of provision, evidence behind those judgements and what areas need developing in the future.

Religious Education	Y/N/P	How good is this? Evidence	Areas for development
Is there a clear policy for RE, matching other policies in school?			
Is there a scheme of work for RE that ensures delivery of the most up to date version of the local Agreed Syllabus?			
Is adequate time allocated to RE? (About 5% of timetable.)			
Does the school website inform parents of their right to withdraw their children from RE? Are teachers aware of their right to withdraw from teaching RE?			
How many pupils are withdrawn from RE? How are withdrawn pupils supervised?			
Is there a teacher with responsibility for RE? Are they an RE specialist?			
Does RE feature in the school's improvement plan?			
Is the subject leader given time and opportunities to develop their subject knowledge? Are other staff?			
Is the RE curriculum and teaching monitored regularly? Does monitoring influence plans for the development of RE?			

THIS IS AN OPTIONAL TOOL TO HELP SCHOOLS REFLECT ON THEIR PROVISION FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Is assessment aligned to local Agreed Syllabus?			
Is assessment used to inform future teaching?			
Do teachers use a variety of strategies in lessons to engage pupils e.g. drama, artefact handling, ICT, video, music, dance, written work?			
Are learning outcomes expressed in relation to the three elements of the teaching and learning approach (making sense of beliefs, understanding the impact, making connections)?			
Is formative assessment undertaken regularly?			
Is there a report to parents on progress in RE at least annually?			
Is there sufficient budget for resources?			
Are there adequate artefacts, books, posters, licenses etc.?			
What further resources would be useful?			
How well does teaching in each key stage meet the needs of all pupils?			
What are the strengths of RE teaching in your school?			
What are the areas for development?			
How well do pupils achieve in the subject?			
Do pupils know more and remember more over time?			
How do you know?			
To what extent does RE contribute to personal development?			
To what extent does RE contribute to the spiritual, moral social and cultural education of pupils?			
How inclusive is RE?			
To what extent does it reflect the lives of pupils in school?			

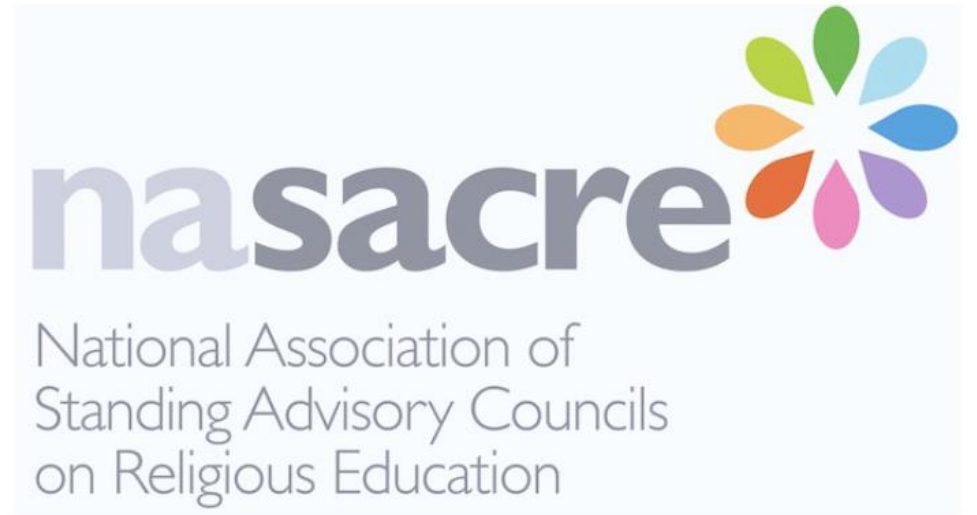
THIS IS AN OPTIONAL TOOL TO HELP SCHOOLS REFLECT ON THEIR PROVISION FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Collective Worship	Y/N/P	How good is this? Evidence	Areas for development
Is there a daily act of Collective Worship? What form does this take e.g. whole school, year group, class, form time?			
Is there a separate policy for Collective Worship, matching other policies in school?			
Who is responsible for Collective Worship planning and themes?			
Are records kept of Collective Worship content? Are they evaluated over time for quality?			
Do all adults and pupils working in the school attend Collective Worship?			
Does Collective Worship involve a variety of leaders, including pupils, staff and visitors?			
Is there a specific way to mark the difference between assembly and Collective Worship?			
Does the school website inform parents of their right to withdraw their children from Collective Worship?			
How many pupils are withdrawn from Collective Worship? How are withdrawn pupils supervised?			
Is there an opportunity to pause, reflect and/or prayer?			
Is there regular contact with a local minister? Is there contact with ministers of other faiths?			

THIS IS AN OPTIONAL TOOL TO HELP SCHOOLS REFLECT ON THEIR PROVISION FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

Governance	Y/N/P	How good is this? Evidence	Areas for development
Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools			
Do governors ensure that RE is taught according to the locally agreed syllabus set by the local SACRE?			
Do governors make sure RE is provided for all pupils, unless they have been withdrawn by their parents?			
Do governors ensure that sufficient time and resources are allocated to RE within the curriculum?			
Do governors monitor the quality and impact of RE teaching as part of their oversight of the curriculum?			
Do governors support the headteacher in ensuring staff are appropriately trained and confident to deliver RE?			
Do governors ensure that a daily act of collective worship takes place for all pupils?			
Voluntary Aided Schools			
Do governors ensure that RE is taught in line with the school's trust deed or religious character?			
Do governors oversee the content and delivery of RE to ensure it reflects the school's faith ethos?			
Do governors ensure that teachers of RE are appropriately qualified and that the curriculum reflects the denominational teaching required?			
Do governors ensure that collective worship reflects the school's religious character?			
Academies and Free Schools			
Do governors ensure RE is provided in line with the funding agreement?			
If the academy has a religious designation, do governors ensure RE is taught in accordance with its faith ethos?			
If it does not, do governors ensure RE reflects the fact that the religious traditions of Great Britain are mainly Christian, while taking account of other principal religions?			
Do governors provide daily collective worship as set out in their funding agreement?			
If faith-designated, do governors ensure worship reflects the religious character of the school?			
If not faith-designated, do governors ensure worship is broadly Christian in character, with flexibility similar to that in community schools?			

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Oak National Academy Resources; how might they help SACREs?

- supporting
- strengthening
- promoting

Aims for tonight's training

This training tonight will look at the following:

- *Understanding the Oak National Resources for Religious Education*
- *Knowledge of what Oak is providing free of charge for all schools in England*
- *An opportunity to look at some the materials*
- *A time to ask questions to the national Oak RE lead*
- *Consider how a SACRE might want to interact with these new resources*

Links to Oak resources for RE

Key Stage 1 new supports

- <https://www.thenational.academy/teachers/programmes/religious-education-primary-ks1/units>

Key Stage 2 new supports

- <https://www.thenational.academy/teachers/programmes/religious-education-primary-ks2/units>

Key Stage 3 new supports

- <https://www.thenational.academy/teachers/programmes/religious-education-secondary-ks3/units>

Key Stage 4 new supports

- <https://www.thenational.academy/teachers/key-stages/ks4/subjects/religious-education/programmes>

How do Oak resources link with the NCS?

The **diversity** and **complexity** of religious or non-religious worldviews, nationally and globally

Developing knowledge of **scholarly approaches** and **methods** within RE (and the wide range of related **disciplines** including theology, philosophy and social sciences).

Opportunities for pupils to build an awareness of their **own presuppositions and values**; draw on their own experience; and interpret the **significance and meaning** of what they have been taught

Linking the NSE with Oak: content selection



☐ Authority and influence

☐ Continuity, change and diversity

☐ Expressing belief

☐ Meaning and purpose

☐ Nature of religion and belief

☐ Values and morality

Year 6

1

Hindus: how do Hindus see Brahman?

[Unit info >](#)

2

Sikhs: What does Khalsa mean to Sikhs today?

[Unit info >](#)

3

Pilgrimage: why are people still drawn to ancient places?

[Unit info >](#)

4

The Church: Has there always been diversity?

[Unit info >](#)

5

Ethics: How do we decide what is good?

[Unit info >](#)

6

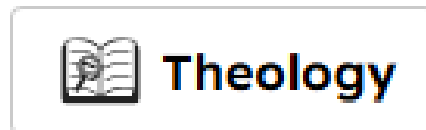
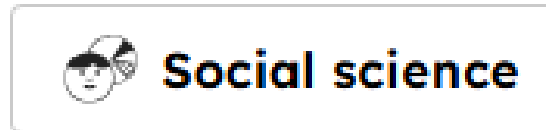
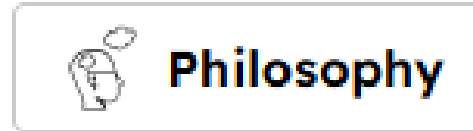
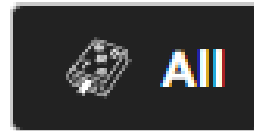
Worldviews: how is our country and community changing?

[Unit info >](#)

Linking the NSE with Oak: ways of knowing



Category



Year 2

Philosophy

1

Choices: Do we need rules to live by?

[Unit info >](#)

Year 6

Philosophy

1

Ethics: How do we decide what is good?

[Unit info >](#)

Philosophy in Year 2

Why do we have rules?



Sofia and Andeep are talking about thinking.

The more I think about something like **rules**, the more questions I have!



Andeep



Sofia

It is great to think hard and ask questions!
People who do this are called philosophers.
Philosophy is about thinking hard and asking questions that don't have simple answers!

Philosophy in Year 2

Why do we have rules?



Here are some questions you might ask in **philosophy**:

What makes you, you?

Where do your thoughts come from?



Sofia

If animals could talk, what would they say?

Can you think of any big and tricky questions?

Philosophy in Year 6

What do we mean by ethics?



Philosophers like to think deeply and have discussions about difficult questions.

They might ask ethical questions such as:

Is it okay to harm one person in order to save many others?

This is an ethical question because it is **about how principles of right and wrong might be applied to a situation.**

Philosophy in Year 6

What do we mean by ethics?



Some questions are **not** ethical questions. For example:

What is the best way to make a chocolate cake?

This is about opinions, not about **principles** of right and wrong.

Which planet is furthest from the sun?

This is about facts, it is not about **principles** of right and wrong.

Can you think of any ethical questions?

Theology in Year 2

What is the Parable of the Lost Son?



Explanation



The younger son decided to go home.

His father was already watching and waiting for him.

Theology in Year 2

What different meanings might Christians find?



David is thinking about what the Parable of the Lost Son means to him.



David

I became a Christian a few years ago. I made some bad choices in my life.

I was happy when I learned that God forgave me and welcomed me, just like the **father** forgave the younger son and welcomed him home.





Theology in Year 9

Task C Junia: a case study



Practice

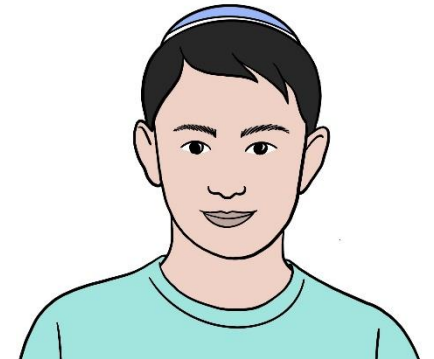
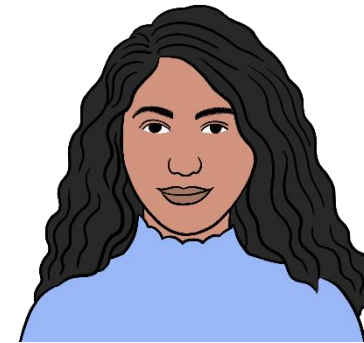
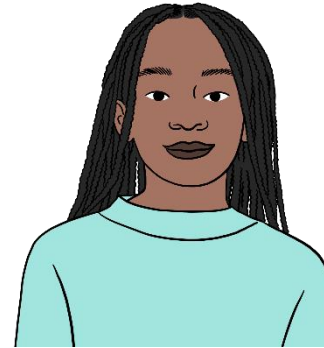
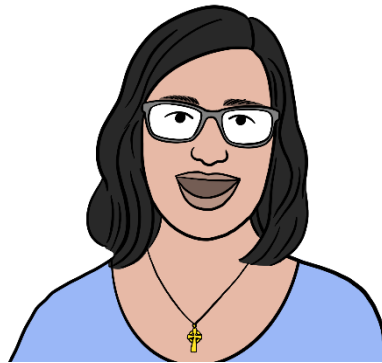
Tamara, Fiona, Fergus, and Danielle are discussing women in the New Testament. For each point in the table, give a piece of evidence from the Bible to support it.

Tamara 	Fiona 	Fergus 	Danielle 
Women have been given the gifts of the Holy Spirit just as much as men and can use them.	The New Testament has lots of examples of women leading churches, including in Paul's letters.	There is no difference for me between male and female church leaders.	Women can have an important role in the Church but they can't be in authority over men.



Linking the NSE with Oak: lived experience

Page 98



A historical lived experience case study

What happened to Coventry Cathedral?



Do you recognise anyone in this photograph?



The person in the middle is Winston Churchill. He was Prime Minister during the Second World War.

The person on the left is Richard Howard. He was the Provost of Coventry Cathedral. We are going to hear his story.



A contemporary lived experience case study

How are Hindus responding to the climate crisis?



I understand that many Hindus see **dharma** as taking action for the good of all living things. But how do they take action?

I am going to meet with Aarya who volunteers with a group called **Hindu Climate Action**.



HINDU
CLIMATE
ACTION



Sofia

A contemporary lived experience case study

How are Hindus responding to the climate crisis?



Sofia

Aarya, why do you volunteer with Hindu Climate Action?



Aarya

As a Hindu, I think we should help because we want to **live peacefully and in harmony** with all living things. Climate change puts this at risk. I volunteer because I want to play my part in making this world a better place. I also hope my example will inspire future generations to lead a sustainable lifestyle.

Lived experience to explore worldview diversity

How might music be used in Islam?



Listen to the audio recording to hear a traditional **nasheed**.



Hasbi Rabbi
means 'My

This **nasheed**
this means
instrument

What do different Muslims say about music?



Nadia explains how she uses music.



Nadia

Music is a very important part of my worship and I follow some **Sufi** traditions. Music and **harmony** help me to feel close to Allah (God). Music lifts my spirits and gives me a deep sense of peace.

Questions



What the Oak resources are...

Resources that can be used to help teach units in an agreed syllabus.

Free and adaptable by SACREs and teachers to fit their own contexts.

Clear and reliable subject knowledge for teachers. confidence.

Checked with authentic sources.

Photographs, stories and ways to show RE is lived and real.

Case studies to use in the classroom.

What the Oak resources are not...

A syllabus.
They are sequenced curriculum resources.

A script to be followed.
They are made to be adaptable to local context.

Rigid and inflexible.
They can be adapted to teach with different age groups – or elements used for particular lessons or units.

Resources adaptable to local context

How are places of worship changing?



Page 106



This building is in Bristol.
It has now been **converted** into
a theatre.

Previously it was a place of
worship.

It was a chapel for Methodist
Christians.

Resources adaptable to local context

How are places of worship changing?



This is a mosque in Bristol.

It was built as a school in 1855. You can see the old school building.

It was **converted** to a mosque in 1983.

The mosque was enlarged with a new dome in 2017. 

Resources adaptable to local context

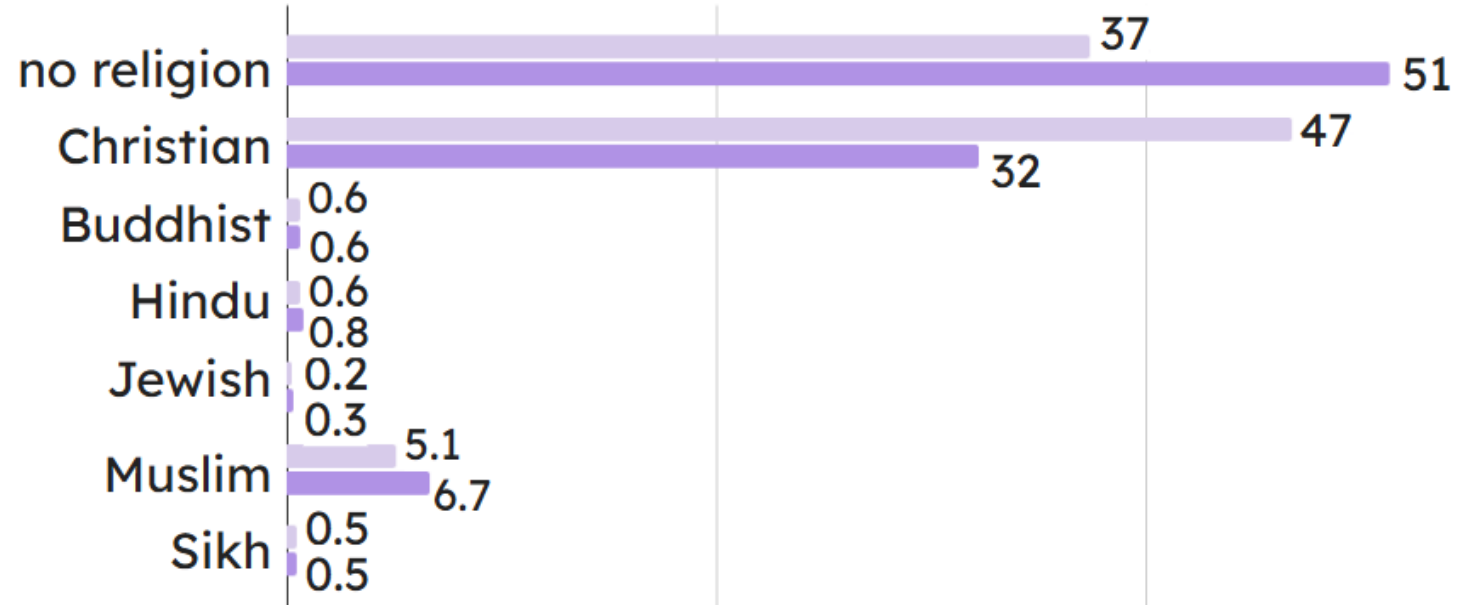
How are places of worship changing?



This graph compares Bristol **census** data on **worldviews** in 2011 and 2021.

The light purple is 2011.

The dark purple is 2021.



percentage of population

What patterns do you notice?



Jacob

Data source: Office for National Statistics - Census 2021



Resources adaptable to local context

What are the different types of mosques?



How does Nadia's mosque look different to Ahmed's mosque?



Nadia's mosque



Ahmed's mosque



Resources adaptable to local context

What are the different types of mosques?



This is Easton Jamia mosque in Bristol.

What do you notice is similar or different to Nadia's mosque?



Easton Jamia mosque



Nadia's mosque



Questions



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NASACRE Statement: Oak National Academy Resources.

One of the key activities that a SACRE should do is provide advice and support on the effective teaching of RE in accordance with the locally Agreed Syllabus.

When writing an Agreed Syllabus, conferences should be mindful of the wide range of resources, free and paid-for, available to teach the syllabus, and/or the SACRE's capacity to create resources, if they do not already exist.

There are various resources that RE teachers may use and that SACRE's might recommend, including commercially produced textbooks, websites, materials from organisations and resources produced by teachers and advisers locally.

One recent set of resources that SACREs might find useful to be aware of are those produced by Oak National Academy. Oak National Academy is a body funded by the DfE but independent of it. They provide free access resources that they have created that may help support teachers to teach RE according to your Agreed Syllabus (and all other National Curriculum subjects).

The resources have been produced by subject experts. The creators were mindful of the REC's National Content Standard, and the disciplinary approach to RE. All resources can be adapted to ensure they fit anyone's context and are free.

The Oak RE materials are presented in a way that means there are six units for each school year and six lessons in each unit. Each lesson follows a similar knowledge rich pedagogy and format, and slides, worksheets, starter and exit quizzes and a video of the lesson being delivered by an expert teacher are provided.

While this can look like a fully planned, coherent, sequenced curriculum it is not. Oak makes it clear that RE maintained schools must follow the Agreed Syllabus (or Trust Deed in Academies) and suggests "Therefore where any maintained school is following a locally agreed syllabus through its SACRE or other denominational syllabus, it may wish to consider how to use specific Oak RE units, lessons or resources flexibly to help fulfil the requirement of their particular syllabus."

Your SACRE may, having looked at these resources, decide to recommend, adapt all or part of the Oak resources where they support the teaching of your syllabus.

September 2025

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What changes will Ofsted's 'Renewed Education Inspection' Framework and toolkit bring to the inspection of Religious Education and related areas?

Ofsted's new 2025 inspection framework and toolkit: what it means for RE?

NATRE has produced a brief powerpoint presentation comparing Ofsted's [current School inspection handbook \(September 2024\)](#) with the new [State-funded school inspection toolkit \(2025\)](#) due for implementation **from November 2025**—focused specifically on **Religious Education (RE), religion and belief, equalities, and SMSC.**

The presentation highlights what continues and what's new for RE, including: RE's place in the **basic curriculum**, the strengthened framing of the curriculum as an “**entitlement for every pupil**” (including pupils with **SEND**), the re-framed **Personal development and well-being** area (with explicit references to **faiths and beliefs** and **British values**), a clearer emphasis on **Inclusion** and **protected characteristics**, explicit recognition of **prejudice-motivated bullying** (including on grounds of **religion or belief**), and expectations to **track participation** so all pupils including those with SEND, access RE and related opportunities.

You may want to use the slides in staff briefings, with governors/SACRE, and when planning curriculum and enrichment for 2025/26. They include **verbatim extracts** from both documents to support accurate messaging and practical next steps for subject leaders.

1) RE in the curriculum & inspection in different types of school

2025 clarifies the place of RE in inspection by referring to the subject as part of the basic curriculum, mentioning statute and framing it as **an entitlement for every pupil.**

As in previous frameworks, Ofsted does not inspect denominational RE, but does inspect RE in foundation and voluntary-controlled schools with a religious character

*2025 “the curriculum ... covers the statutory requirements set out in the basic curriculum which includes the national curriculum, and relationships and sex and health education **and religious education**” page 19*

2025 ...this curriculum is an entitlement for every pupil.” page 19

2025: “The curriculum ... is at least as ambitious in breadth and depth as the National Curriculum” page 19

Note: the *draft* report cards only referenced the National Curriculum, but after NATRE and REC feedback, Ofsted changed the final version to include the basic curriculum and therefore RE

2) SMSC & British values remain central (faiths/beliefs explicit)

There is continuity with previous frameworks about the importance of SMSC and British values. The 2025 toolkit makes with explicit reference to different faiths and beliefs. This includes:

- Reflection on one's own beliefs (religious or otherwise)
- Both knowledge of, and respect for, different people's faiths
- mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

2024: 344. Inspectors will evaluate the effectiveness of the school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. This is a broad concept that can be seen across the school's activities

2025 this evaluation area [personal development] considers ...pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development, which can be seen across the school's activities" page 44

*2025:" "Inspectors focus on... ensuring that **the curriculum contributes to** pupils' personal development and **their SMSC development...**" page 44*

2024: 345 "Provision for the spiritual development of pupils includes developing their ... ability to be reflective about their own beliefs (religious or otherwise) and perspective on life ..."

*2025: "pupils develop their ability to be reflective about their own beliefs (religious or otherwise) and perspective on life, **including developing their knowledge of, and respect for, different people's faiths, feelings and values**" page 47*

*2025 "... developing and deepening pupils' understanding of the **fundamental British values** of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and **mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.**" page 44*

3) Religion, equalities (protected characteristics)

A focus on equality remains from previous frameworks. It is, in places, made more explicit.

Inclusion becomes a defined evaluation area

The toolkits contain explicit references to the Equality Act 2010 and protected characteristics (including religion or belief).

The toolkits say that Ofsted will evaluate inclusive environments that respect difference and commonality across communities.

*2024: 338 “Promotes equality of opportunity so all pupils can thrive together... This includes, but is not limited to, **pupils’ understanding** of the protected characteristics and how equality and diversity are promoted”*

*2025: “**Promoting equality of opportunity** so that all pupils can thrive together... includes, but is not limited to, **an age-appropriate understanding** of the **protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010.**” page 44*

4) Bullying & prejudice (including religion/belief)

The 2025 framework and toolkit names prejudice-motivated bullying explicitly, including on grounds of religion or belief.

It contains an expectation that bullying is not tolerated and is addressed swiftly (this was also in the 2019 previous framework).

It refers to prejudice-based motivations, explicitly including religion or belief.

2024: 334 “Leaders, staff and pupils create a positive environment in which bullying is not tolerated.”

*2025: “Leaders recognise that bullying takes various forms, and is often motivated by prejudice against particular groups, **for example on grounds of ... religion or belief ...**”*
page 38

5) Participation & tracking – make RE entitlement visible for all

The 2025 toolkit makes it **clearer and more operational** that RE is for **every** pupil, including those with SEND.

It does this in two ways that go beyond the previous framework:

- (1) it frames the *whole basic curriculum (which includes RE)* as an **“entitlement for every pupil,”** and
- (2) it requires leaders to **ensure and track participation** (with reasonable adjustments) for **SEND** pupils.

2024: 230 **“All pupils in maintained mainstream and special schools are expected to study the basic curriculum, which includes ... religious education.”**

2025: *“The personal development programme is an entitlement for every pupil. Leaders track participation. They take steps to ensure that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils [and] those with SEND ... can participate appropriately.”* page 51

2025: **“When inspectors evaluate curriculum for pupils with SEND ... they consider whether pupils have access to a suitable curriculum and is adapted to their needs.”** page 18

6) Social and community cohesion

Social and community cohesion, is not a standalone section but receives greater attention in, and is woven throughout the 2025 toolkit

Made explicit across Personal Development & Well-Being, Inclusion, Leadership & Governance, and Pastoral Support).

Dialogue skills matter: pupils should discuss and debate differing views constructively (high relevance to RE).

Leaders are expected to work with parents, local authorities and partners and consult the school community to strengthen culture and outcomes.

[NATRE note: many subject leaders of RE work hard to develop relationships with communities of religion and belief]

*2024: 474 Pupils **engage with views, beliefs and opinions that are different from their own** in considered ways. (Grade descriptor for Good personal development)*

*2025 “Pupils **know how to discuss and debate issues and ideas** in a considered way and how to **engage with views, beliefs and opinions that differ from their own.**”*

*2025 “Pupils understand, appreciate and respect differences... they **celebrate what we have in common across cultural, religious, ethnic and socioeconomic communities**... Pupils **respect the different protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010.**” page 49*

**Curriculum and
Assessment
Review**

Building a world-class curriculum for all

Final Report

November 2025

Table of contents

Foreword	5
Executive summary	7
Introduction	14
Background	14
Methodology	15
Context: curriculum and assessment in England	17
Towards a world-leading curriculum	23
What is going well and should be maintained	23
‘High standards’ must mean high standards for all	25
Preparing learners for a changing world	34
Curriculum shape and content	44
Our view of the key stages	44
Curriculum principles	46
The national curriculum as a tool for teachers	52
Curriculum recommendations by subject	55
Art and Design	55
Citizenship, RHE/RSHE and PSHE	57
Computing	62
Design and Technology, including Cooking and Nutrition	66
English, including Drama	73
Geography	81
History	84
Languages	87
Maths	92
Music	96
Physical Education (PE), including Dance	100
Religious Education (RE)	107
Science	111
Key Stage 4 Technical Awards	118

Accountability, performance measures and assessment	121
Accountability and performance measures	121
Primary assessment	127
Secondary assessment	131
16-19 education	141
Level 3	141
Level 2	153
Level 1 and entry level	157
16-19 Maths and English	158
Non-qualification activity within 16-19 study programmes	164
Future curriculum reviews	167
Conclusion	171
Annex 1: Accountability measures in England's primary, secondary and 16-18 education system, 2024/25	172
Annex 2: Stakeholder engagement	175
Annex 3: List of all recommendations	180

Table of figures

Figure 1. Curriculum subjects by key stage	18
Figure 2. Participation in education, training and employment aged 16 and 17 in England, 2024	20
Figure 3. National assessments and exams in England's education system	21
Figure 4. Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 disadvantage gap index	26
Figure 5. Percentage of state-funded mainstream schools with no entries into GCSE D&T in 2024/25	68
Figure 6. Modern Foreign Language GCSE uptake as a proportion of all pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 by year	88
Figure 7. Proportion of Key Stage 4 students taking GCSE History, GCSE Geography, and GCSEs in at least one Modern Foreign Language	122
Figure 8. Additional employment in priority occupations between 2025 and 2030 by expected education level	147
Figure 9. Attainment of level 2 Maths and English by age 16 for the 2018/19 cohort	159
Figure 10. Percentage of 16-19 learners who did not achieve level 2 in Maths and English by age 16 who achieved it by age 19, by free school meal status	160
Figure 11. List of headline accountability measures in primary, secondary and 16-18 education in England, academic year 2024/25	172
Figure 12. Structure of the EBacc	174

Foreword

The importance of our national curriculum cannot be overstated. It is an entitlement to the most important knowledge that we expect children and young people to learn, both for their benefit and for the benefit of the nation.

The Review Panel and I have approached the task of reviewing the national curriculum, 16-19 pathways, and their assessment mindful of this responsibility. We have sought to ensure the curriculum is fit for the future, addresses the rich knowledge and skills young people need to thrive in our fast-changing world, and encourages a love of learning.

There are many strengths in our existing curriculum and assessment arrangements. We have sought to build on these strengths, in addition to identifying numerous opportunities for improvement; and we have taken an evidence-led approach in diagnosing problems and their solutions. We have also been mindful of the importance of the school curriculum beyond the national curriculum, and the important things that schools and colleges provide for their students every day: the enrichment activities, sports, performances, work experience and careers advice (to name a few) that provide young people with transferable skills, develop confidence, and bring their learning to life.

It is vital that schools and colleges are able to innovate and respond to local needs, and that teachers have the flexibility to extend the curriculum and draw out its relevance for the young people in their classrooms. As such, we have been mindful both to ensure the national curriculum comprises an aspirational entitlement for all and that there is adequate space for schools and colleges to go beyond it.

All the subjects in the national curriculum are valuable and play an important role in preparing young children for life and work. We have sought to balance breadth with depth, ensuring all young people have access to a portfolio of crucial knowledge balanced with the choice that facilitates a love of learning. We have also sought to ensure that these opportunities are open to all so that young people are not held back by background or circumstance.

I want to thank the huge number of stakeholders that have engaged with the Review process: the schools and colleges that have hosted us; and the children and young people, parents and carers, education staff and leaders, experts and officials who have responded to our Call for Evidence, participated in our polling and attended our events and roundtables. Your passion and expertise have been both enlightening and inspiring. I also want to thank the members of the expert panel, with whom it has been an exceptional privilege to work.

There are so many in our system striving to ensure that every young person has access to an excellent education and develops a thirst for learning that will remain with them for life. My hope is that the recommendations contained in this report will take us a step

closer towards this aspiration by building a world-class curriculum and assessment system for all.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Becky Francis', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Professor Becky Francis CBE, Chair of the Curriculum and Assessment Review

Executive summary

The national curriculum is an investment in all our young people, for their benefit and for the benefit of the nation. Education is inherently valuable and important for its own sake, but it also plays a crucial role in supporting individual success, in providing young people with the necessary knowledge and skills to build a prosperous economy and flourishing civil society, and in promoting social cohesion and democracy. For these reasons, it is imperative that the national curriculum provides all children and young people with a rich, aspirational, and challenging offer to support high and rising standards.

In July 2024, the Government commissioned Professor Becky Francis CBE to convene and chair a panel of experts (the Review Panel) to conduct a review of the curriculum and assessment system in England (the Review), including qualification pathways, across the primary, secondary and 16-19 phases.

The Review Panel recognises the hard-won successes and educational improvements of recent decades, but it is clear that these have not yet benefited all. We must promote high aspirations and raise standards for the significant group of young people for whom the current system creates barriers. In this way, we can ensure the best life chances for all young people, irrespective of their background.

It is more than a decade since the national curriculum was last reviewed. It is timely that it is now refreshed so that it remains cutting edge and fit for purpose to equip young people for our rapidly changing world. In formulating our recommendations, we have tried to make sure our curriculum enables teachers to impart critical knowledge and inspire a love of learning. This will ensure that young people are supported to flourish as informed and fulfilled individuals, as contributors to our democratic society, and as members of a better qualified workforce that builds economic prosperity.

As a defining feature, the Review has been determinedly evidence-led. Our deliberations have been informed by robust research evidence, analysis of large-scale datasets and a range of commissioned research and polling. We have drawn on a wealth of perspectives from experts, stakeholders and the public, including over 7,000 responses to our Call for Evidence. Our work has been undertaken in close consultation with education professionals and other experts, parents and carers, children and young people, and wider stakeholders such as employers, universities and trade unions.

Towards a world-class curriculum and assessment system

This Review represents an opportunity to build on what is working well, and to address what is not, to ensure that the curriculum and assessment system in this country is truly world class.

In addition to refreshing the curriculum and ensuring that it reflects the knowledge and skills young people need to achieve and thrive, it is an opportunity to build excellence and support life chances.

It is essential that more children and young people build strong foundations and a love of learning in the primary years, embarking on their secondary education with their literacy and numeracy secure, and with knowledge, confidence and enthusiasm sparked for other subjects.

We must also facilitate more successful transitions into secondary education. Too many young people fall behind at this stage and so we must ensure that more of them maintain their momentum and enthusiasm across a rich and broad array of subjects.

Finally, we must maintain the strong academic core for all that supports life chances and ensure that more young people secure the expected standards in Maths and English. However, we must also grasp the opportunity to ensure that more young people are able to choose qualifications that inspire them, and which speak to their strengths and the directions they wish to take.

As our [Interim Report](#) noted, many aspects of the current system are working well. In comparison to other jurisdictions, we have a reasonably broad and balanced curriculum to age 16 which offers all children an entitlement to a core set of knowledge. International comparisons suggest that the present arrangements have had a positive impact on attainment, and we therefore intend to maintain and build on the knowledge-rich approach and on the coherent structural architecture established by the last review.¹

The present architecture of key stages is generally working well and we recommend retaining it. Likewise, our national assessments and qualifications are, broadly, working well. We therefore recommend that the majority of the present framework arrangements and milestones for the curriculum and assessment remain.

However, our analysis has also identified many areas that need attention. This includes areas where we see significant opportunities and need for improvement, including making improvements to the curriculum and assessment in primary and secondary education and more extensive changes to 16-19 qualifications.

¹ DfE (2011) - [Framework for the national curriculum: A report by the Expert Panel for the national curriculum review](#)

The current system is not working well for all

The socio-economic gap in relation to educational attainment remains stubbornly wide, and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) make less progress than their peers. Whilst the explanations for this often lie outside the curriculum and assessment, the Review has worked to ensure that the system reflects high expectations for all and properly supports all young people's progress and achievement.

Our recommendations aim to improve curriculum quality for all young people but will particularly benefit those for whom the system is currently not working well. We have also made recommendations to support better equity, access and inclusivity in subject areas where we have identified specific barriers to progress. In addition, we have sought to ensure that the curriculum and assessment are helpful to teachers in supporting progress, momentum and successful outcomes as learners move from one key stage to the next.

We also highlight the roles other government agencies and bodies can play in exemplifying how to meet diverse needs in an inclusive mainstream school and in supporting good practice.

Curriculum shape and challenges with specific subjects

Specific problems with content in some curriculum areas impede the quality of teaching and learning, as well as pupil outcomes. There are tensions with curriculum breadth and depth and, consequently, these present a challenge for schools and colleges in meeting the important local needs and enrichment provision which are highly valued by young people and their parents and carers.

The statutory guidance for the current national curriculum says that it is 'just one element in the education of every child';² it was not intended to take up an entire school day. It is important that the national curriculum maintains its position as an ambitious entitlement for all. However, schools must have space to go beyond it to provide innovative practice, locally tailored content, and enrichment activities that help to ensure young people thrive in education and later life.

Evidence supports the need to build secure foundations and mastery of key subject concepts to raise standards and enable the development of expertise. But, in some subjects, the current construction and balance of content appear to be inhibiting this. This may impede mastery and prevent young people developing an appropriate depth of understanding, hindering their progress and undermining standards.

² DfE (2013) - [National curriculum: primary curriculum](#)

The causes of the tension between breadth and depth are complex.³ We have therefore discussed these subject by subject. Getting this right will have a beneficial impact on the capacity of schools to make sure children and young people have access to a full range of subjects, and to provide vital enrichment activities. Our recommendations are intended to ensure that teachers have enough flexibility to challenge high attainers and to make sure that those who are struggling with learning can master core concepts, thus ensuring that all children and young people get the best from the curriculum.

Many submissions to our Call for Evidence have argued for improvements in a range of curriculum subjects, some minor, some more significant. We make recommendations to resolve the various subject-specific challenges the Review has identified.

We have also taken steps to ensure that the curriculum (and related material) is inclusive so that all young people can see themselves represented. This should also help them to broaden their horizons and better understand the perspectives of others.

Over the last two decades, some subjects have thrived and seen increased take-up; in others, take-up has declined. The reasons for this are complicated. However, it is clear that the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) performance measures have to some degree unnecessarily constrained students' choices. This has affected their engagement and achievement, and limited their access to, and the time available for, arts and vocational subjects. We endorse the need for a broad and balanced academic curriculum up to 16 for all, but we also recognise the need for a better balance between that entitlement and wider choice. As such, we recommend the removal of the EBacc measures but the retention of the EBacc 'bucket' in Progress 8 under the new title of 'Academic Breadth'.

The curriculum needs to respond to social and technological change

In a world of rapid technological, environmental and social change, subject-specific knowledge remains the best investment. Being secure in core subjects such as Maths and Science will remain pivotal for young people, now and in the future, as will their understanding of human culture through the humanities, languages, and arts. However, additional knowledge and skills will be needed if we are to maximise young people's opportunities and equip them to meet challenges presented by our fast-changing world. The rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and trends in digital information demand heightened media literacy and critical thinking, as well as digital skills. Likewise, global challenges, both social and environmental, require attention to scientific and cultural knowledge and skills.

³ For example, in some cases, the problem is with over-specification and volume in subject curricula; in others, with under-specification, or other factors.

Young people and their parents or carers have been clear that they would like to see more applied knowledge in certain areas. We have examined the evidence to identify those most in need of critical attention. These include the areas mentioned above, plus important areas such as financial literacy and oracy. We have recommended ways to make sure these are properly incorporated into the curriculum through all key stages. We have also sought to make sure that the scale of the national curriculum does not prevent schools from providing enrichment activities, and building knowledge and transferable skills that are bespoke to their pupils' local needs.

16-19 education

A Levels provide successful preparation for university study, whilst T Levels have introduced a new, high-quality, technical route for young people who are clear about their intended career destination. Although teething problems remain, T Levels show great promise. However, A Levels and T Levels are not appropriate for all students. Some have not decided on a career path but have an interest in a particular sector, whilst others want to pursue a career in a sector not currently supported by A Levels or T Levels. A significant proportion of young people take a mix of qualifications and some, although ready to study at level 3, cannot access A Levels or T Levels or seek more applied qualifications that provide a range of progression options. Given the complexity of the existing system, employers, the public and young people themselves are often unclear about suitable pathways.

Furthermore, for young people who did not secure strong level 2 qualifications at school, including those who need to continue studying Maths and English, the quality of provision is uneven and many are not making progress. They include a disproportionate number of young people with SEND and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It is especially important that these challenges are resolved. We therefore recommend the development of a new third pathway at level 3 to sit alongside A Levels and T Levels.

This pathway, based on new qualifications which we recommend calling V Levels, would contribute to a clearer set of pathways for young people during 16-19 education. It would incorporate an ambitious, high-quality and cohesive offer for those not pursuing three A Levels or a T Level to make sure they have access to meaningful and rewarding destinations. We make recommendations for the shape and principles for these pathways, as well as changes to pathways at level 2.

We also make recommendations to drive greater nuance in Maths and English provision for those who have not secured level 2 (the equivalent of GCSE grade 4) in GCSE Maths and English Language at age 16. This includes introducing a level 1 stepped qualification

at 16-19 for those who need greater support.⁴ These recommendations are intended to ensure that more young people attain Maths and English at level 2 and make progress during 16-19 study.

Assessment

The Review has sought to ensure that the assessment system captures the strengths of every young person and the breadth of the curriculum and that it has the right balance of assessment methods. The system must maintain the important role of exams, which are the fairest way of assessing students nationally⁵ and which mitigate the risks to assessment posed by generative AI. We consider that the system is broadly working well, with an appropriate balance of formative, diagnostic and summative assessments, and we recommend retaining the broad thrust of the existing arrangements. However, opportunities for improvement exist, such as improving the assessment of pupils' writing at the end of Key Stage 2.

We are keen to support transition into secondary education and students' progress in Key Stage 3 so that more of them maintain their momentum during that key stage and succeed at Key Stage 4. This is especially critical in GCSE Maths and English, since these are a passport to further opportunities. We therefore recommend developing diagnostic Maths and English tests to be taken in Year 8. The aim is to support teachers in identifying and remedying any problems before students progress to Key Stage 4.

England is by no means an international outlier in providing national exams at 16, and these remain important for discerning routes for 16-19. However, it is an outlier with regard to the volume of this assessment. The amount of time that young people spend in exams at Key Stage 4 has become excessive. We reject calls from campaigners to scrap exams at 16. However, time spent on them at GCSE level should be reduced, through a subject-by-subject approach where this can be done without materially affecting reliability and efficacy. We have also made recommendations for improvements to assessment in specific subject areas.

⁴ The existing condition of funding requirements to study Maths and English are not impacted by this recommendation.

⁵ UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities (CEPEO) (2021) - [Should we abolish GCSEs?](#)

Conclusion

All potential reforms to curriculum and assessment come with trade-offs, and it has been the job of this Review to weigh up and manage these carefully. We have therefore taken a considered approach of ‘evolution not revolution’ in our deliberations and recommendations, which has been widely welcomed. Our recommendations follow extensive consideration of the available options and a balanced appraisal of risk and reward.

Our approach has allowed us to navigate the diverse and often conflicting views that stakeholders have expressed. Many of the matters are extremely complex. Furthermore, some elements of the education system and other factors outside the scope of this Review undoubtedly contribute to the outcomes we have observed.

We also have sought to remain cognisant of the impact that substantial changes to the curriculum and assessment would have on the stability of the wider education system and on the workload of education staff. Our recommended changes are intended to lead to meaningful improvements in outcomes for learners without destabilising the system.

[A full list of our recommendations can be found here.](#)

We believe that our vision for a world-leading curriculum and assessment system in England and the recommendations we set out will have a positive impact on the educational experiences and outcomes of children and young people, supporting success for all.

Introduction

Background

In July 2024, the Government commissioned Professor Becky Francis CBE to convene and chair a panel of experts (the Review Panel) to conduct a review of curriculum and assessment in England, including qualification pathways (the Review). At the outset of the Review, the Government published its [Terms of Reference](#).

In March 2025, the Review published its [Interim Report](#), which presented initial findings and insights. Our subsequent work has involved further developing and expanding on this analysis to develop a set of recommendations that seek to build a world-leading curriculum and assessment system for all and address the most pressing issues impacting curriculum and assessment in England. This report sets out the Review's methodology, evidence, deliberations and recommendations.

The Review Panel⁶

- **Professor Becky Francis CBE** (Chair), CEO of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF)
- **Gary Aubin**, Gary Aubin, Director of SEND for Whole Education
- **Professor Jo-Anne Baird**, Director of the Oxford University Centre for Educational Assessment
- **Professor Nic Beech**, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Salford
- **Cassie Buchanan OBE**, CEO of the Charter Schools Educational Trust
- **Professor Zongyi Deng**, Professor of Curriculum and Pedagogy at the UCL Institute of Education, University College London
- **Jon Hutchinson**, Regional Director, East of England, at Reach Foundation
- **John Laramy CBE**, Principal and Chief Executive of Exeter College
- **Dr Vanessa Ogden CBE**, CEO of Mulberry Schools Trust
- **Lisa O'Loughlin**, Principal and CEO of East Lancashire Learning Group
- **Funmilola Stewart**, Trust Assistant Principal at Dixons Academies Trust
- **Sir Ian Bauckham CBE** (Observer), Chief Regulator at the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)

In line with our [Terms of Reference](#), the Review has considered Key Stage 1 through to Key Stage 4, and 16-19 education. In approaching assessment and accountability, we

⁶ For detailed biographical information for all members, see: [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Set-up](#)

have focused on capturing the strengths of every student while ensuring a robust and fair system.

Several important areas that relate to curriculum and assessment sit outside the scope of this Review, including the Early Years Foundation Stage, pedagogical approaches, careers advice and guidance, work experience and enrichment activities. Education funding, teacher training and development and workforce supply issues are also outside our [Terms of Reference](#).

Methodology

The Review has been committed to an evidence-led approach. This has been critical in meeting the aims set out in the [Terms of Reference](#) to identify and prioritise the most pressing issues facing curriculum and assessment and to recommend practical and deliverable changes that will improve young people's outcomes without destabilising the system.

The Review Panel has undertaken an assessment of stakeholder input, polling data, secondary sources and expert consultation. This evidence base informed the identification of key themes, problem diagnosis and areas requiring support.

The Final Report's recommendations reflect a considered balance between stakeholder perspectives and empirical evidence.

The Review used two main types of evidence:

- Quantitative evidence, including large-scale national and longitudinal datasets and commissioned polling.
- Qualitative evidence gathered from education professionals and other experts, parents and carers, children and young people, and stakeholders such as employers, colleges, universities, and trade unions.

We used publicly available data from the Department for Education (DfE), including national statistics on pupil entries, pupil characteristics, subject uptake, outcomes and post-16 destinations such as further education, apprenticeships and employment. To complement this, internal DfE datasets provided detailed qualification data linked to school census records and prior attainment. Similarly, a more granular view of curriculum access, subject availability, and learner progression was reached by using teacher feedback from the School and College Voice survey and by analysing 16-19 learners' progression using the Young Person's Matched Administrative Dataset (YPMAD) and Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO).

We also polled over 2,000 young people who had just completed their Key Stage 4 and 16-19 exams in summer 2024, and their parents and carers. This polling was

supplemented with surveys undertaken by other organisations, including Parentkind, which surveyed over 5,000 parents across the UK, Teacher Tapp, and Public First.

In addition, the Review has been supported by academic research and policy analysis from organisations. These sources of data and evidence have played a crucial role in helping us to establish present trends, analyse trends over time and interrogate assumptions.

We have gathered qualitative evidence through extensive engagement with the education sector and beyond. A major aspect of this was our Call for Evidence, which ran from 25 September 2024 to 22 November 2024. We received 7,021 responses, including 5,327 individual responses and 1,694 from organisations. This provided a wealth of evidence and feedback on a broad range of issues.⁷

In addition to the Call for Evidence, the Review Panel has:

- Held public events across the country to discuss the themes of the Review as laid out in the [Terms of Reference](#), with over 3,600 attendees. Each roadshow incorporated school and college visits where the Review Chair and members of the Review Panel met students, teachers, lecturers, support staff and leaders to seek their views. These have been supplemented by further school and college visits carried out throughout the Review.
- Hosted webinars, open to all, which reached more than 2,000 people.
- Met with a range of subject and curriculum experts such as subject associations, practitioners and academics to gather feedback and evidence about the subject-specific challenges and opportunities for improvement.
- Held issue-specific roundtables with employers, subject associations and awarding organisations; and oral evidence sessions to gather evidence from experts on key areas such as socio-economic disadvantage and SEND.
- Engaged in external events and gave presentations at conferences.
- Met with officials from other international jurisdictions to better understand their curriculum and assessment systems, approaches to curriculum and assessment reform, and the challenges other jurisdictions face.

[Annex 2](#) provides more details on stakeholder engagement.

We have taken every step to ensure that a wide range of voices and perspectives have been heard. A balanced and considered approach has been taken, given the diverse and often conflicting views expressed by stakeholders.

⁷ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Call for Evidence](#)

Context: curriculum and assessment in England

The following sections provide a brief account of the present curriculum, assessment and accountability system, to provide context for our subsequent analysis and recommendations.

The national curriculum for Key Stages 1 to 4

All state-funded schools in England are required to teach a 'broad and balanced' curriculum, as stipulated by the Education Act 2002⁸ and the Academies Act 2010.⁹ The national curriculum is divided into four key stages (Key Stages 1 to 4)¹⁰ and sets out the Programmes of Study for all subjects in these key stages, covering what subjects should be taught and the standards that children and young people should reach in each subject. Different phases of the national curriculum are taught at each key stage and Figure 1 sets out the current national curriculum subjects across the four key stages, as well as the basic curriculum.

The Education Reform Act 1988 introduced the national curriculum, including statutory Programmes of Study and non-statutory guidance for individual subjects. Successive governments have reviewed it in 1993-1995, 1997-1999, 2005-2009, and 2011-2013. Reviews have led to amendments and new requirements.

The national curriculum is statutory for mainstream local authority maintained schools. All state-funded schools are also required to teach the 'basic' curriculum subjects of Religious Education (RE) and Health Education at every key stage, as well as Relationships Education (RHE) in primary education and Relationships and Sex Education (RSHE) in secondary education.

⁸ The National Archives (2025) - [Education Act 2002](#)

⁹ The National Archives (2025) - [Academies Act 2010](#)

¹⁰ Key Stage 1 covers Years 1 and 2, Key Stage 2 Years 3 to 6, Key Stage 3 Years 7 to 9 and Key Stage 4 Years 10 and 11. These key stages are bookended by the Early Years Foundation Stage and 16–19 education.

Figure 1. Curriculum subjects by key stage

Subject	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4
Maths	C	C	C	C ⁺
English	C	C	C	C ⁺
Drama ¹¹				E
Science	C	C	C	C ⁺
Physical Education	F	F	F	F ⁺
Dance ¹²	F	F	F	E
Computing	F	F	F	F ⁺
Citizenship	F	F	F	F
History	F	F	F	E ⁺
Geography	F	F	F	E ⁺
Languages ¹³	-	F	F	E ⁺
Design and Technology	F	F	F	E
Cooking and Nutrition ¹⁴	F	F	F	-
Art and Design	F	F	F	E
Music	F	F	F	E
Religious Education	B	B	B	B

¹¹ Drama sits in English at Key Stages 1 to 4 and has a standalone qualification at Key Stage 4.

¹² Dance sits in PE at Key Stages 1 to 4 and has a standalone qualification at Key Stage 4.

¹³ Ancient Languages and/or Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) are statutory at Key Stage 2, but only MFL is statutory at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, students are entitled to study MFL, while either an Ancient Language or an MFL counts towards the EBacc.

¹⁴ Cooking and Nutrition sits in D&T at Key Stages 1 to 3 and is a standalone qualification at Key Stage 4.

Subject	Key Stage 1	Key Stage 2	Key Stage 3	Key Stage 4
RHE/RSHE ¹⁵	B	B	B	B

C Core subjects: must be taught and are covered in more detail than foundation subjects. At Key Stage 4, these subjects must be taught and are assessed.

F Foundation subjects: must be taught but are covered in less detail than core subjects. At Key Stage 4, these subjects must be taught but are not necessarily assessed; some students will choose to study a qualification in them.

E Entitlement subjects: at Key Stage 4, schools must offer students the chance to study for a qualification in at least one subject from four subject groups.¹⁶

B Basic curriculum subjects: not in the national curriculum but must be provided by schools. Parents and carers have the right to withdraw their child from some of these subjects.

+ EBacc subjects.

As stated in the statutory national curriculum framework, the national curriculum ‘is just one element in the education of every child’ and it is intended that there is ‘time and space in the school day and in each week, term and year to range beyond the national curriculum specifications’.¹⁷ The national curriculum sets out the Programmes of Study but it does not specify the amount of time that schools should teach each subject. Whilst the amount of time spent on different national curriculum subjects varies across the key stages, a strong focus on English and Maths is maintained across all key stages, reflecting the importance of good literacy and numeracy for learning and wider outcomes.¹⁸

For academies, although their curriculum must be ‘broad and balanced’, they do not currently have to follow the national curriculum. However, the Government’s Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill¹⁹ contains a provision to require academies to teach the national curriculum. Academies’ funding agreements stipulate the teaching of English, Maths and Science, as well as the basic curriculum subjects of RHE, RSHE and RE. They are, however, like any state-funded schools, subject to inspection by the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) in relation to the intent, implementation and impact of their curriculum, which must be ‘at least as ambitious in breadth and depth as the national curriculum’.²⁰

¹⁵ Primary schools must provide Relationships and Health Education (RHE), and secondary schools must provide Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE).

¹⁶ Arts (Art and Design, Music, Dance, Drama and Media Arts), Design and Technology, the Humanities (Geography and History) and MFL.

¹⁷ [National curriculum in England: framework for key stages 1 to 4 - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁸ In primary, the DfE’s [School snapshot survey: summer 2018](#), the NEU’s [Primary Curriculum Survey \(2024\)](#) and responses to the Call for Evidence indicate a strong focus on English and Maths. At Key Stages 3 and 4, [Teacher workforce data](#) shows that English and Maths occupy a large proportion of teaching time.

¹⁹ UK Parliament (2024) - [Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill](#)

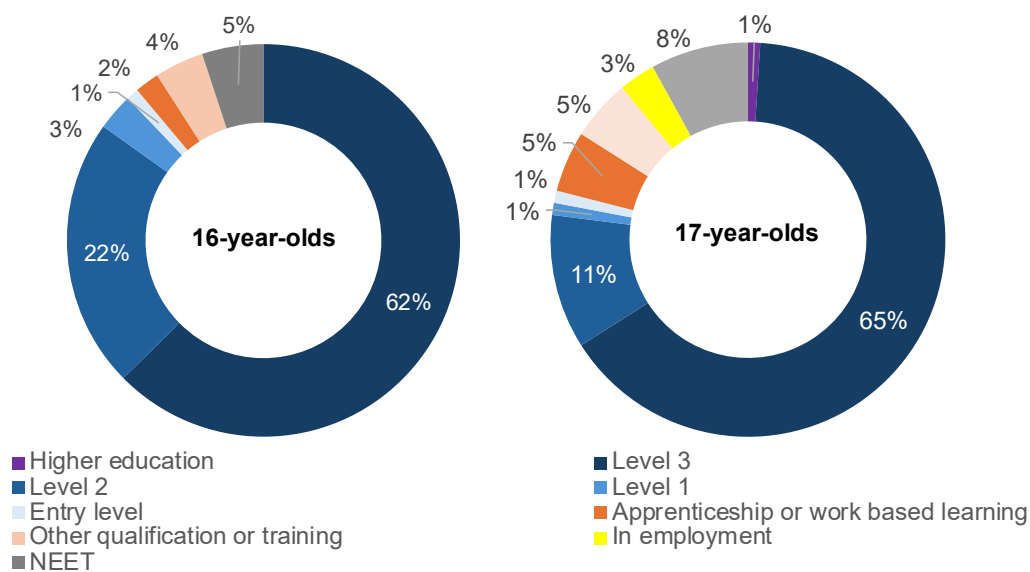
²⁰ Ofsted recently updated its [Education inspection framework](#), which will be used from 10 November 2025. This includes updated inspection toolkits, operating guides and information.

The current national curriculum framework makes it clear that, with effective planning for pupils with SEND, ‘in many cases such planning will mean that pupils will be able to study the full curriculum’. For some pupils, including in education settings such as special schools and alternative provision, the curriculum may need significant appropriate adaptation to meet individual needs. The Special Education Needs (SEN) Code of Practice also states that schools should set out ‘details of how the curriculum is adapted or made accessible for pupils with SEN’. Where pupils have Education, Health and Care Plans, these should also detail ‘any appropriate modifications to the application of the National Curriculum’.

16-19 qualifications and programmes

16-19 study programmes²¹ are designed to be flexible and tailored to individual needs, abilities and career goals, with learners able to pursue various 16-19 qualifications at different levels, including A Levels, Applied General Qualifications (AGQs), T Levels, Tech Levels, Technical Certificates and other vocational qualifications.

Figure 2. Participation in education, training and employment aged 16 and 17 in England, 2024²²



Nearly two-thirds (62%) of young people start their 16-19 education studying towards a level 3 qualification, 22% a level 2 qualification and 4% a qualification at level 1 or below. However, this changes over the course of 16-19 studies, with some students advancing in their levels of study or leaving education to join the labour market.

²¹ DfE (2025) - [16 to 19 study programmes guidance: 2025 to 2026 academic year](#)

²² DfE (2024) - [Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18, calendar year 2024](#)

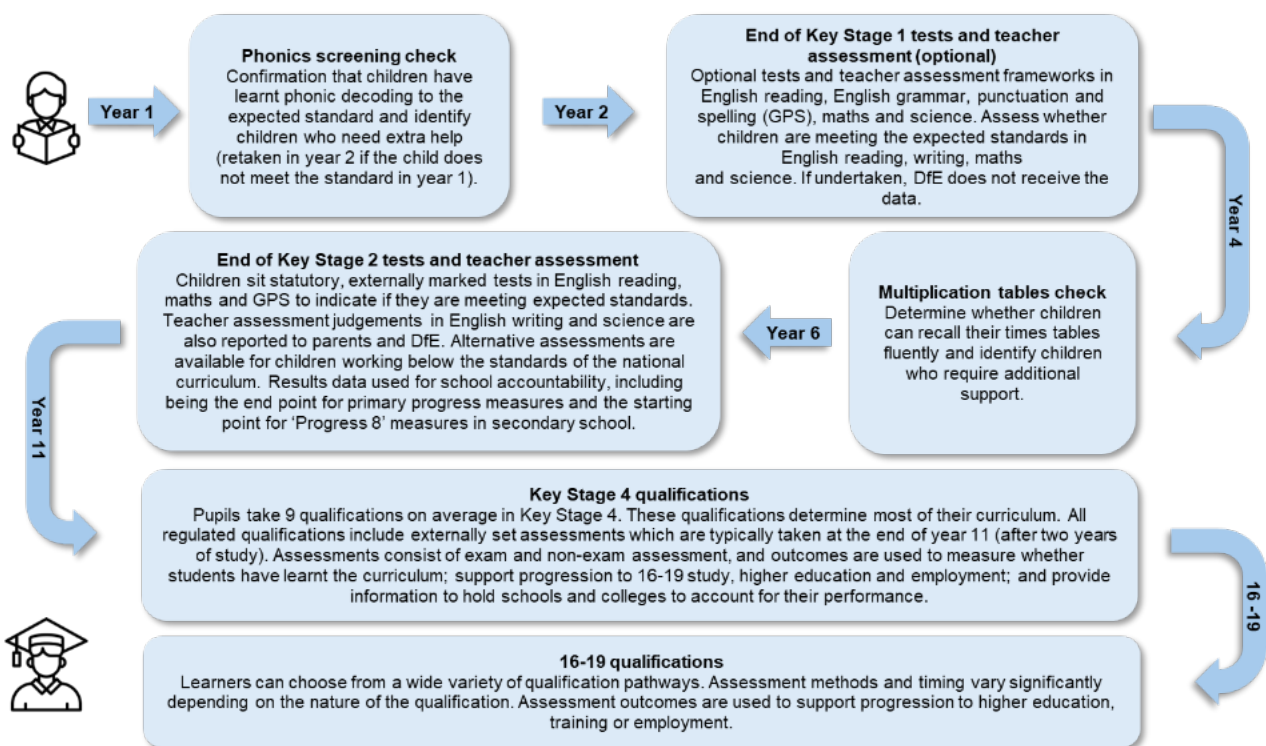
A Level learners represent the largest group at level 3 (34% of 16-year-olds), with an additional 10% combining A Levels with AGQs as part of a mixed programme. T Level learners currently represent only a small proportion of the cohort (3%),²³ with a much larger share (15%) working towards other level 3 qualifications (e.g. AGQs and Tech Levels).

For 16-19 learners who study a level 2 programme, many study towards GCSEs, either as their only level 2 qualifications (8% of 16-year-olds) or, more commonly, in combination with other types of level 2 qualifications, such as Technical Certificates (10% taking GCSEs and other level 2; 4% taking other level 2 only). These qualifications are supplemented by other non-qualification activities which can be used to broaden a learner's experience.²⁴

Assessment and accountability

Figure 3 shows the range of assessments in England from Key Stage 1 to 16-19.²⁵

Figure 3. National assessments and exams in England's education system



²³ T Levels were launched in September 2020 and take-up has been increasing each year since. Source: Extract from DfE (2024) - [Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18](#)

²⁴ Non qualification activities include mentoring and coaching, certificates such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, work placement or experience and work-related activities like preparing CVs and practising interview skills and techniques, as well as personal and social development enrichment activities.

²⁵ The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is out of scope of this Review. During the EYFS, there are also statutory requirements for schools to complete the Reception Baseline Assessment (RBA) and the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) for each child.

In primary, statutory assessments (Phonics Screening Check, Multiplication Tables Check and Key Stage 2 assessments) and non-statutory tests (Key Stage 1 tests) focus on English and Maths.²⁶ These assessments are taken to inform pupil attainment and progress, and, in the case of Key Stage 2 assessment, inform accountability measures.

Learners take national exams at the end of Key Stage 4 and in their 16-19 studies. At Key Stage 4 they take GCSEs and may also take Technical Awards, and in 16-19 education learners can choose from a range of academic qualifications (e.g. A Levels) and technical qualifications (e.g. T Levels, AGQs and Tech Levels) at different levels. These various qualifications are delivered by exam boards and awarding organisations which are independently regulated by Ofqual. Take up for different subjects changes over time, [illustration of these trends is available here](#).²⁷

National assessments and qualifications in England are linked to accountability measures. For example, qualifications at the end of Key Stage 4 are linked to performance measures such as the EBacc, Attainment 8 and Progress 8. Performance measures are typically used to measure the attainment, progress and/or destinations of learners. A list of performance measures across key stages can be found at [Annex 1](#), which also includes an explanation of the subjects included in the EBacc measure.

²⁶ National curriculum assessments in primary schools are developed and delivered by the Standards and Testing Agency (STA), an executive agency of the DfE, and the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) has a regulatory responsibility for these assessments.

²⁷ [Curriculum and Assessment Review - Department for Education - Citizen Space](#)

Towards a world-leading curriculum

What is going well and should be maintained

Our present national curriculum provides a knowledge-rich offer, and international comparisons suggest that the present arrangements have had a positive impact on attainment. This builds on the commitment to high standards and the hard work of education professionals to realise improvement across the last quarter century. Despite disruption from the pandemic, England continues to show comparatively strong educational outcomes in international assessments:²⁸

- England's Year 5 pupils continue to perform significantly better than the international average in reading.²⁹
- For Year 5 and Year 9 pupils, there have been significant improvements in performance in Science between 2019 and 2023, with Maths performance remaining stable over the same period.³⁰
- England's 15-year-olds continue to perform above the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average in reading, Maths and Science.³¹
- England's 16- to 19-year-olds scored substantially better than the OECD average in literacy and adaptive problem solving (and similar to the OECD average in numeracy) in the 2023 OECD international Survey of Adult Skills, having made significant improvements in literacy and numeracy since 2012.³²

Of course, in some areas England's performance has nevertheless fallen over time (especially during the pandemic), and as we shall discuss, there remain significant gaps according to social background, different levels of prior attainment and so on. Nevertheless, these outcomes provide a reasonably positive comparative picture.

Subjects in England's national curriculum are broadly in line with subjects studied in other OECD countries, including high-performing jurisdictions.³³ Likewise, national assessments and exams in both primary and secondary are common in most OECD countries. They are intended to provide a range of functions, including diagnostic information for teachers, monitor the education system, evaluate school performance,

²⁸ We recognise the various methodological complexities and limitations of international comparisons and resulting caveats. We also recognise that, in some cases, England's performance has fallen, for example, for England's 15-year-olds, performance Reading and maths have declined since 2018 and whilst performance in Science remained stable compared to 2018, it has declined compared to previous years. Nevertheless these outcomes provide a positive comparative picture.

²⁹ DfE - [PIRLS 2021: National Report for England](#)

³⁰ DfE - [Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study \(TIMSS\) 2023: National report for England Volume 1](#)

³¹ DfE - [PISA 2022: national report for England](#)

³² DfE - [Survey of Adult Skills 2023 \(PIAAC\): national report for England](#)

³³ OECD (2023) - [Education at a Glance 2023](#) (see table D1.3 for primary and D1.4 for lower secondary)

provide formative feedback for parents and carers, and support students' progression to tertiary education.³⁴

There is much to celebrate in the current national curriculum. The breadth of subjects taught across Key Stages 1 to 4 has enabled children and young people to develop knowledge and skills across a wide spectrum. Responses to our Call for Evidence highlighted the value of this breadth, with stakeholders noting that it supports well-rounded development and offers multiple pathways for children and young people to achieve and thrive. In 2023/24, 89% of state-funded students studied eight or more qualifications at Key Stage 4, with the most common number being nine.³⁵ Polling also suggests that the majority of Key Stage 4 students (76%) were able to study the subjects they wanted, reflecting a curriculum that provides access and choice for many.³⁶

We strongly affirm the value of all the subjects in the national curriculum and basic curriculum. Each plays a vital role in equipping children and young people with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate the world, while engaging and contributing to our society and culture, and pursuing their individual aspirations. Whether academic, creative, vocational or physical, every subject contributes to a rich and balanced education. Our recommendations build on the knowledge-rich approach and on the coherent structural architecture established by the previous Review.³⁷

The current subject architecture provides a strong foundation, introduces subjects to young people at the appropriate stage, and allows them to pursue their interests once they have experienced the full range of subjects. Therefore, we recommend only minor amendments to the existing subject structure, ensuring continuity and stability whilst improving curriculum content and delivery. Our [subject-level recommendations](#) seek to support each of these subjects to flourish, while our recommendations on [performance measures](#) aim to balance breadth with flexibility and choice.

We also value the holistic ethos of Key Stage 1 and broader primary education. Here, learning and social behaviours are developed, literacy and numeracy skills are established, and other subjects are introduced, encouraging a love of learning and enabling success. Children and their parents and carers tend to be happy with their primary education, and it is important we preserve this.³⁸ We consider that the present architecture of key stages is functioning effectively overall, and we propose its retention

³⁴ OECD (2013) - [Synergies for Better Learning](#);

OECD (2023) - [Education at a Glance 2023: What assessments and examinations of students are in place?](#)

Suto, I., Oates, T. (2021) - [High-stakes testing after basic secondary education: How and why is it done in high-performing education systems?](#)

³⁵ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

³⁶ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#) (Polling of Key Stage 4 and 16-19 learners and parents)

³⁷ DfE (2011) - [Framework for the national curriculum](#)

³⁸ Parentkind (2024) - [The National Parent Survey 2024](#) – the underlying data shows that 81% of parents with primary school aged children are happy with the education their children receive from their schools

(see [our view of the key stages](#)). Likewise, our national assessments and qualifications are broadly working well, including the Phonics Screening Check, the Multiplication Tables Check, national tests at the end of Key Stage 2, GCSEs and Key Stage 4 Technical Awards, A Levels and T Levels.³⁹

Despite the strengths of our current system, our analysis has identified many areas that require attention. There are clear opportunities for improvement in curriculum and assessment across both primary and secondary education, as well as more substantial reform of 16-19 qualifications. The remaining sections of this report set out the key challenges and present targeted recommendations, with the aim of beneficial and lasting improvement across the education system.

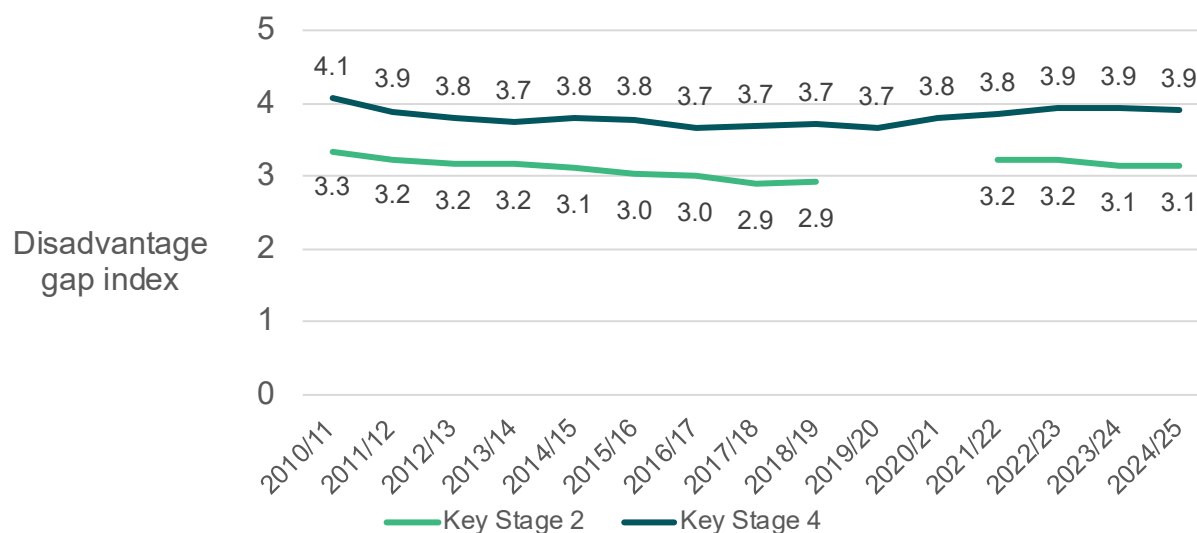
‘High standards’ must mean high standards for all

A world-leading education system must deliver excellence for all young people, irrespective of background. Our curriculum and assessment system is working well in many respects, but it is not delivering high standards for all, and some gaps are widening rather than narrowing. In particular, a stubborn attainment gap remains between those that are socio-economically disadvantaged and their peers (Figure 4), while children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) make less progress in comparison to those without SEND.⁴⁰

³⁹ EYFS and reception baseline assessment are out of scope of the Review.

⁴⁰ See ‘Attainment and progress by pupil characteristics’ in DfE (2023) - [Key stage 2 attainment, Academic year 2022/23](#); DfE (2025) - [Key stage 2 attainment, Academic year 2024/25](#) – please note: Key Stage 2 progress scores were not published in 2023/24 and 2024/25 due to COVID-19; See disadvantage gap index and Progress 8 measure in DfE (2025) - [Key stage 4 performance, Academic year 2024/25](#)

Figure 4. Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 disadvantage gap index



For socio-economically disadvantaged young people, slower progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 (as indicated by their Progress 8 scores) widens the attainment gap that already existed between these pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers at Key Stage 2, with a gap of 15 points in their Attainment 8 scores broadly equivalent to one and half a grades per subject (Table 1).

Table 1. Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 attainment and progress, by disadvantage status (2024/25, unless stated otherwise)⁴¹

	All pupils	Disadvantaged	Not disadvantaged
Key Stage 2 - % achieving the expected standards in:			
Reading	75	63	81
Writing	72	59	78
Maths	74	61	80
Reading, Writing and Maths	62	47	69
Key Stage 4			
Average Attainment 8 score	45.9	34.9	50.3
Average Progress 8 score (2023/24) ⁴²	-0.03	-0.57	0.16

⁴¹ DfE (2025) - [Key stage 2 attainment, Academic year 2024/25](#); DfE (2025) - [Key stage 4 performance, Academic year 2024/25](#)

⁴² Progress 8 is not being published in 2024/25 as Key Stage 4 pupils in this year did not have their Key Stage 2 assessments due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pupils with SEND also make less progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 compared with those without identified SEND, again widening the attainment gap that already existed at Key Stage 2.⁴³ These progress gaps are deeply concerning in a society that promotes equality of opportunity for all.

Table 2. Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 attainment and progress, by SEN status (2024/25, unless stated otherwise)⁴⁴

	All pupils	SEN	No identified SEN
Key Stage 2 - % achieving the expected standards in:			
Reading	75	42	85
Writing	72	32	84
Maths	74	40	84
Reading, Writing and Maths	62	24	74
Key Stage 4			
Average Attainment 8 score	45.9	28.1	50.1
Average Progress 8 score (2023/24)	-0.03	-0.63	0.10

We recognise these inequalities exist alongside, and intersect with, other factors (including ethnicity, sex⁴⁵ and geographical location), which result in poorer outcomes for particular groups - either generally or for specific subjects. For example, girls' attainment in the expected standards in the Key Stage 2 writing assessment is 12 percentage points higher than boys'. This gap is even wider when comparing socio-economically disadvantaged pupils with their peers (a gap of 19 percentage points). For both boys and girls, disadvantaged Gypsy and Irish Traveller have some of the lowest Key Stage 2 writing outcomes, as have disadvantaged white and Black Caribbean-heritage boys.⁴⁶ Writing gaps therefore vary according to a range of characteristics. Some of these inequalities extend across subjects, both in terms of uptake and attainment. At Key Stage 4, rates of uptake differ across most non-core

⁴³ Slower progress is common across pupils with all types of SEND irrespective of prior attainment. Those with hearing impairments, visual impairments, and other physical disabilities are more likely to meet the expected standards at Key Stage 2 and have higher attainment at Key Stage 4 than those with speech, language or communication needs or autistic spectrum condition. Extract from DfE (2025) - [Key Stage 2 attainment, Academic year 2024/25](#); Extract from DfE (2024) - [Key Stage 4 performance, Academic year 2023/24](#). Note that within these statistical publications, autistic spectrum conditions are referred to as autistic spectrum disorder.

⁴⁴ DfE (2025) - [Key Stage 2 attainment, Academic year 2024/25](#); DfE (2025) - [Key Stage 4 performance, Academic year 2024/25](#); Progress 8 is not being published in 2024/25 as Key Stage 4 pupils in this year did not have their Key Stage 2 assessments due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁴⁵ The Department does not collect statistics on gender identity.

⁴⁶ DfE (2025) - [Key stage 2 attainment, Academic year 2024/25](#)

subjects, depending on factors such as protected characteristics, special educational needs and socio-economic status. For example, students from disadvantaged backgrounds or who have an identified SEND are much less likely to take a GCSE in a Modern Foreign Language compared with their peers, with 16 and 32 percentage point gaps respectively; and girls are much less likely to take Computer Science compared to boys, with boys being over three and a half times more likely to take the GCSE than girls.⁴⁷ Evidence also shows that disadvantaged young people tend to have less access to a broad curriculum, in both primary and secondary.⁴⁸

Many explanations for the relative lack of progress for socio-economically disadvantaged children and young people and those with SEND lie beyond the curriculum. Most of the variation in outcomes stem from factors outside of school (for example, child poverty). Other sources of variation include educational factors such as pedagogy, school approaches and resources.⁴⁹ These factors are outside the scope of this Review. However, a well-structured and refreshed curriculum can still make a difference. When the curriculum is designed thoughtfully, it can reduce unnecessary inequities and barriers to learning, provide clarity and coherence for teachers, and better support young people with diverse needs.⁵⁰

A commitment to social justice

We think every child is entitled to high standards, including a rich curriculum that articulates what they should learn, and reliable assessments that support their learning and capture their achievements. An excellent national curriculum and a high-quality assessment and qualifications system are fundamental to achieving these ends.

As set out in the [Terms of Reference](#), the Review has a commitment to ‘Remediate existing blocks to progress and good outcomes, with an especial concern for equity and ensuring positive outcomes for children and young people who are from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, have a special education need (SEN) or disability and/or are otherwise vulnerable’. We have applied a social justice lens to all aspects of our work, seeking to identify and remove barriers to progress within the curriculum and assessment system. In doing this we recognise that young people from both socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those with SEND are not generalised groups. They contain individuals with a wide range of prior attainment and characteristics, strengths, interests, barriers to learning, and needs regarding the curriculum.

⁴⁷ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

⁴⁸ EPI (2018) - [Key drivers of the disadvantage gap - Literature Review](#); [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

⁴⁹ DfE (2024) - [Factors influencing primary school pupils' educational outcomes](#);

DfE (2024) - [Factors influencing secondary school pupils' educational outcomes](#)

⁵⁰ Luke, A., Woods, A. and Weir, K. (2012) - [Curriculum, Syllabus Design and Equity](#)

Throughout the Review, we have recognised the wider policy landscape and Government activity, considering our recommendations alongside the work of Dame Christine Lenehan, the DfE's strategic adviser on SEND, Tom Rees, Chair of the Expert Advisory Group for Inclusion (EAG), and Professor Karen Guldberg, Chair of the Neurodivergence task and finish group.

Promoting social justice brings with it a variety of dilemmas. The Review has faced the challenge of balancing our unequivocal commitment to high aspirations for all, while simultaneously providing the necessary flexibility to address young people's diverse needs. On many occasions, the Review Panel heard convincing evidence of issues about inclusivity, yet further consideration revealed that potential solutions risk greater harms and inequities than the existing problem. An example is aspects of assessment, where the negative consequences of marking out some young people as underachieving must be balanced with the requirement for formative analysis, which is crucial for supporting further progress for individuals and benchmarking standards. A further area where this dilemma presents itself is performance measures, where incentivising particular behaviours may be beneficial but also have unintended consequences.

Nevertheless, we have sought to make recommendations in many areas that will improve progress for groups disadvantaged in the present system, and where improvements to curriculum and assessment may contribute to narrowing gaps. The remainder of this section outlines several overarching recommendations designed to benefit all young people, but which are likely to be most beneficial to young people struggling with or disaffected from their learning, among whom those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those with SEND are overrepresented. We have also made recommendations relating to specific subject areas that aim to support social justice and inclusion. These are detailed in the subject sections.

A high-quality and inclusive curriculum for all

Although a well-designed curriculum is important for all young people, it is particularly beneficial for those with SEND and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. They suffer disproportionately when the curriculum is poorly articulated, overloaded, badly organised or depends on experiences outside the classroom. By ensuring that the volume of content in the national curriculum is appropriate for the teaching time that is available, we aim to give schools sufficient time to consolidate learning, as well as the space to provide the enrichment activities and life skills that prepare young people for life and work. This is important for enabling an accessible and inclusive school curriculum, and also to support engagement, particularly for secondary students. Evidence shows that there is a substantial drop in pupil engagement and views on the value of education as they transition from primary education, especially for those

from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.⁵¹ In our chapter on curriculum principles, we therefore set out recommendations to improve the clarity, specificity and sequencing of the curriculum, ensuring space for mastery of core concepts (see [curriculum principles](#)). Of course, curriculum design is just one step in an inclusive learning experience. Adaptive teaching practices, teachers' expertise, the engagement of parents and carers, the role of support staff and the classroom environment are examples of factors that also contribute to truly inclusive education.

Access to the national curriculum should remain an expectation and an entitlement for all children and young people, including those in specialist and alternative provision. However, the Review acknowledges the ongoing need for the national curriculum to be appropriately adapted (and in certain cases in specialist settings, disapplied) to meet the specific needs of young people. It is therefore important that specialist, alternative and other education settings retain their freedom to adapt the national curriculum as appropriate, and that they are supported to be appropriately ambitious for pupils in how they use these freedoms. Therefore, as well as providing principles to support the refreshed drafting of the national curriculum, we make recommendations to foreground the role of wider guidance and exemplification to support practitioners, across all settings, to adapt the national curriculum where required (see [the national curriculum as a tool for teachers](#)).

To better support high aspiration and success for young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and to ensure young people have the same opportunities to achieve and thrive, we are making a series of subject-specific recommendations where the design of the curriculum itself may be creating barriers to learning. In some cases, structural issues within the curriculum can unintentionally limit access or disadvantage certain groups.⁵² These are explored in more detail in the subject-specific sub-sections (see [curriculum recommendations by subject](#)).

Young people need to access an ambitious, broad and balanced curriculum that supports life chances, irrespective of background. To avoid their engagement or outcomes being unintentionally impeded, they also need access to subjects that best meet their individual interests and pathways. We need to strike the right balance between offering young people choices that allow them to follow their interests or pursue a particular future path, and making sure every young person has access to a broad and balanced curriculum that does not close off avenues. And we must particularly avoid facilitating trends for young people from some backgrounds to take routes that are narrower or less demanding. Our assessment of the evidence suggests that the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) performance measures - whilst well-intentioned - have not achieved this

⁵¹ Jerrim, J. (2025) – [Mind the Engagement Gap: A National Study of Pupil Engagement in England's Schools](#); Jerrim, J. (2025) - [How engaged are low-income White children during secondary school?](#)

⁵² For example, access to GCSE Triple Science is not universal, which can restrict opportunities for some pupils wishing to pursue Science further. Similarly, high attainment in GCSE Music often depends on access to extra-curricular tutoring, which is not equally available to all students.

balance. Our recommendations on performance measures seek to do so, by removing the EBacc measures, whilst retaining an 'Academic Breadth' bucket within the Progress 8 measure to maintain its various benefits (see [accountability and performance measures](#)).

In addition, the assessment and qualification system must be inclusive and accessible so that all young people are able to demonstrate their learning. Our assessment recommendations emphasise the importance of embedding accessibility into the design of new specifications. This includes careful consideration of how subject content interacts with assessment methods, and the broader implications for teaching and learning for all groups of students, including pupils with SEND (see [assessment](#)).

Smooth transitions that support progress

Many factors contribute to the large attainment gaps for young people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those with SEND. Two curriculum-related problems are the transition between primary and secondary school and insecure core knowledge and skills at this critical juncture.

Strong teaching and a well-designed curriculum in the primary phase both play a vital role in establishing foundational knowledge in English and Maths. However, not all pupils complete Key Stage 2 with the secure foundations needed for confident progression. Students entering Key Stage 3 without these strong foundations often struggle to build momentum in their learning. Instead of progressing confidently, many begin to fall further behind. This highlights the need for coherence, responsiveness and effective support at the point of transition.⁵³ Other factors in Key Stage 3 compound this, such as the challenge for pupils to adapt to a larger school community and multiple teachers, and the tendency for the strongest teachers to be deployed in Key Stage 4.⁵⁴ Our recommendations to improve curriculum coherence, to make better use of data from Key Stage 2 assessments, and to transform the national curriculum into a digital tool that enables teachers to easily see links between phases and subject, should facilitate this more effective support across transitions.

Securing level 2 in Maths and English by the age of 16 has a strong impact on young people's life chances.⁵⁵ Yet too many struggle to achieve this, especially those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds or those with SEND. We believe that far more are capable of reaching level 2 in English and Maths than - despite 12 years of schooling - do currently. It is imperative that we narrow this gap.

Therefore, in addition to making recommendations to improve the Maths and English curriculum, we recommend the development of a diagnostic (formative) test in Maths and

⁵³ DfE (2024) - [Factors influencing secondary school pupils' educational outcomes](#)

⁵⁴ Ofsted (2015) - [Key stage 3: the wasted years?](#)

⁵⁵ Department for Business Innovation & Skills (2016) - [Further education qualifications in maths and English: returns and benefits - GOV.UK](#)

English in Key Stage 3 (see [curriculum recommendations by subject](#) and [Key Stage 3 assessment](#)). Evidence shows that formative assessments are an effective tool in raising attainment.⁵⁶ This would support teachers in identifying and addressing gaps in knowledge during Key Stage 3 at an earlier stage, ensuring more students are supported to progress successfully into Key Stage 4.

High-quality pathways for all learners

Given the importance of level 3 learning and qualifications in shaping life chances and supporting our economy, and recognising the longstanding complexity and inconsistency in this area, we make recommendations to establish clear, high-quality pathways at level 3. We also recommend that the Government introduces a revised third pathway with a streamlined qualification offer at level 3, to sit alongside the academic and technical pathways. This pathway should provide an aspirational alternative to A Levels and T Levels and should be based on new vocational qualifications, which we recommend calling V Levels. This should also support the significant proportion of young people for whom these former routes are not suitable to pursue high-quality and rewarding level 3 study. This group disproportionately includes those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those with SEND.⁵⁷

Our recommendations focused on level 2 pathways at 16-19 seek to support all young people to pursue high-quality routes into occupations or further study, reflecting the Review's approach to improving social justice. Strengthened level 2 pathways will provide ambitious and clear opportunities for learners, especially benefitting those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those with SEND.

Finally, we make recommendations to support greater efficacy in the provision of Maths and English at 16-19 to help those young people who do not secure a level 2 qualification by 16 to achieve this at 16-19. This recommendation supports low prior attainers, among whom young people from socio-economically disadvantaged and those with SEND are over-represented (see [16-19 Maths and English](#)).

A curriculum that reflects our society

The national curriculum is for all our young people. Our diversity and commitment to equality of opportunity and fairness are some of this country's greatest strengths. Throughout the Review we are seeking to deliver a curriculum that reflects the issues and diversities of our society, ensuring all children and young people are represented,⁵⁸ whilst also exposing them to a wide range of perspectives that broaden their horizons.

⁵⁶ OECD (2005) - [Formative Assessment | OECD](#); EEF (2021) – [Feedback](#); Baird, J., Andrich, D., Hopfenbeck, T. & Stobart, G. (2017) - [Assessment and learning: fields apart?](#); Kingston, N. & Nash, B. (2011) - [Formative Assessment: A Meta-Analysis and a Call for Research](#)

⁵⁷ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

⁵⁸ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Set-up](#)

Our recommendations seek to ensure that all young people feel included in and engaged by the national curriculum.

The national curriculum already offers teachers scope to create inclusive learning experiences by weaving together topics and themes and drawing on case studies and exemplars. Often what is needed is greater exemplification and access to high-quality resources that support this work - including local exemplification that brings the curriculum to life. However, we have heard compelling arguments, some directly from young people in our roundtables, that the curriculum needs to reflect society, support equality of opportunity, and challenge discrimination.

Young people have told us that not seeing themselves in the curriculum, or encountering negative portrayals, can be disempowering and demotivating, a point supported by wider evidence.⁵⁹ To foster engagement and support positive outcomes, it's important that the curriculum covers a wide range of experiences and representation, as well as promoting our shared values, to build empathy and understanding of others.⁶⁰

Representation must go hand in hand with broadening horizons; it should not mean limiting children and young people to narrow frames of reference based on their background. Inclusion is also fostered through shared experiences, creating connections and opportunities to explore a wide range of viewpoints. As such, mutual access to core knowledge, and curriculum coherence, efficacy and breadth for all children should remain central as we work to ensure the curriculum is more broadly representative. With this in mind, we make an overarching recommendation that the curriculum reforms should be guided by the principle that they reflect the diversity of our society and the contributions that have shaped it (see [a curriculum for all](#)).

⁵⁹ The Centre for Education and Youth [formerly LKMco] (2018) - [‘Boys on Track’: Improving support for white FSM-eligible and black Caribbean boys in London - CfEY](#)

⁶⁰ Elliott, V., Nelson-Addy, L., Chantiluke, R. & Courtney, M. (2021) - [Lit in Colour: Diversity in literature in English Schools](#); Sleeter, E. & Zavala, M. (2020) - [What the Research Says About Ethnic Studies](#)

Preparing learners for a changing world

Our curriculum must equip young people for a world that is changing quickly. Rapid technological advancements, including the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), are likely to significantly change the way we work. The climate crisis brings wide-ranging, urgent challenges to address - but also opportunities to seize, as we seek to restore our environment. Global geo-politics and means of communication are also shifting. New media channels are enabling greater connectivity than ever before, whilst amplifying the risks posed by online harms or misinformation.

Subject-specific knowledge remains the best investment in preparing young people for these challenges and opportunities: Science and Maths will remain crucial, as will an understanding of communication and culture, through the humanities, languages, and the arts. But the curriculum also needs to adapt to ensure that young people have the requisite knowledge and skills to shape our changing social and physical environment.

Through responses to our Call for Evidence, our review of existing research and our public engagement and polling, the Review has heard repeated concerns that certain areas of applied knowledge and skills require more attention within the curriculum.

Many areas have been raised, including those that fall beyond our [Terms of Reference](#) (such as careers education). Five areas have received the most attention from young people, parents and carers, and other stakeholders. These are the applied knowledge areas (frequently referred to as 'life skills') of financial literacy, digital literacy and media literacy; education on climate change and sustainability; and the skill of oracy. Young people also raised political knowledge frequently; this is addressed in our recommendations in [Citizenship](#).

We have reviewed where these applied knowledge areas already exist in the national curriculum and indicated where that provision should be updated or strengthened, setting out where gaps need addressing. We have also looked at non-qualification activity as part of 16-19 study programmes. While individual recommendations for the five areas are set out in greater detail in the subject-specific sections, our high-level findings are set out below.

Financial education

Financial education includes understanding core financial concepts such as budgeting, debt, interest, mortgages and pensions, alongside an awareness of how mathematical concepts can be applied to real-world scenarios. Greater financial literacy, which is a consequence of a suitable financial education, can bring benefits to both individuals and

to the economy,⁶¹ while lower levels of financial literacy can leave individuals less able to manage their finances effectively on a day-to-day basis or plan for the future.⁶²

Financial education should not be delayed until later life. Research shows that children's habits and attitudes towards money develop at an early age, including their disposition to spend or save, and this underpins their financial capability in adulthood.⁶³ At this critical time in their development, children are also increasingly making digital financial transactions themselves, with the majority of 7 to 17-year-olds (71%) making online purchases; of those who have bought online, two-thirds (67%) have done so without adult supervision.⁶⁴ Young people may also have to make significant financial decisions early on, such as deciding whether or not to apply for tuition fee loans for higher education. In addition, the likelihood that children and young people receive meaningful financial education at home varies according to their background.⁶⁵ Given these disparities, it is therefore vital that the curriculum provides young people with appropriate financial education from an early age.

In 2014, financial education was made compulsory in the Citizenship curriculum for 11 to 16-year-olds. Young people also receive some limited financial education through the Maths curriculum. In primary, the Maths curriculum promotes the use of financial contexts, while in secondary it requires some exemplification of using mathematical knowledge to interpret and solve problems. At 16-19, some providers typically offer learners support with career planning and financial education as part of non-qualification activity, alongside their substantive qualifications.

Despite this, evidence suggests that, in practice, the financial education content which already exists in the national curriculum is not always taught, with only a third (33%) of children able to recall learning about money in school and finding it useful.⁶⁶ As a result, many young people are leaving education with low levels of financial capability.⁶⁷ The Review has consistently heard that children and young people would like more financial education at school, and this is supported by polling of young people and parents and

⁶¹ Research by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) suggested that greater financial literacy could add an additional £7 billion to the UK economy each year by boosting entrepreneurship and business formation, creating up to 123,000 jobs annually: CBI Economics (2022) - [Paving the way to financial wellbeing](#)

⁶² Money Advice Service (now part of Money & Pensions Service) (2018) - [Financial Capability Survey, 2018](#)

⁶³ Money & Pensions Service (2023) - [Developing children and young people's financial capability](#)

⁶⁴ Money & Pensions Service (2024) - [Literature Review: The impact of digital money on children and young people's financial education | Money and Pensions Service](#)

⁶⁵ Money & Pensions Service (2023) - [UK Children and Young People's Financial Wellbeing Survey: Financial Foundations](#)

⁶⁶ Money & Pensions Service (2023) - [UK Children and Young People's Financial Wellbeing Survey: Financial Foundations](#); Over half (54%) of Year 7 to 11 pupils stated that they had been taught topics related to money since the start of secondary school: [Parent, pupil and learner voice: omnibus surveys for 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK](#) (December 2024)

⁶⁷ Money & Pensions Service - [Hundreds of thousands of young people leaving school every year without money skills](#)

carers. Nearly half (48%) of parent respondents to the National Parent Survey said that too little time is spent on financial management skills,⁶⁸ whilst finance and budgeting was the most commonly selected area cited for greater focus in the Review's polling.⁶⁹

Whilst the Review recognises the importance of building a strong foundation in numeracy for developing financial literacy, we have heard from stakeholders and learners that financial education's main 'home' should not be in Maths.⁷⁰ Because financial education incorporates more applied concepts (such as how to manage money well, how to budget and how to use financial products), the Review recommends greater application of such concepts in the Citizenship Programme of Study. However, there are interdependencies between Maths and Citizenship. We therefore recommend that mathematical concepts relevant to financial education should be introduced in Maths before students are exposed to them in other subjects. For example, before the topic of compound interest arises in financial education, students should have first learnt about percentages in Maths. This would provide the foundational knowledge required before studying loans in Citizenship. The Citizenship and Maths Programmes of Study should reflect this through coherent sequencing.

To ensure that all children have access to financial education and other critical elements of the Citizenship curriculum within primary education onwards, we recommend making Citizenship (including the financial education elements) part of the national curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2 (see [Citizenship](#)). We also note the value of further exemplifying the effective teaching of financial literacy, through resources such as those created by Oak National Academy.⁷¹

At 16-19, we heard positive examples of developing financial literacy as part of the non-qualification activity element of learners' study programmes, including initiatives delivered in collaboration with employers. Good practice like this should be encouraged, and our assessment of the evidence and recommendations for non-qualification activity at 16-19 are set out in more detail (see [16-19 non-qualification activity](#)).

Digital literacy

Digital literacy encompasses the knowledge, behaviours and confidence required to use technologies and computer systems creatively, safely and effectively. It also involves the ability to make well-informed critical judgements about the implications, risks and impact

⁶⁸ Parentkind (2024) - [The National Parent Survey 2024](#)

⁶⁹ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#) (Polling of key stage 4 and 16-19 learners and parents)

⁷⁰ Two thirds (65-67%) of 11 to 18-year-olds indicated that they would prefer financial literacy to be taught outside of Maths. Source: Maths Horizons (2025) - [Financial literacy report](#)

⁷¹ Oak National Academy (2025) - [Free Key Stage 3 Financial education teaching resources](#)

of how digital technology is used.⁷² Being digitally literate empowers children and young people to adapt and thrive in a technology-driven world, use technology safely, and fully engage with learning across the whole curriculum.

Currently, digital literacy is predominantly located within the Computing curriculum which comprises Computer Science (50%), Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (25%) and digital literacy (25%). As set out elsewhere, there is scope to refine the Computing curriculum to better reflect the knowledge and skills needed for everyday life, including commonly used technologies (see [Computing](#)). Elements of digital literacy also appear in other subjects. For example, Citizenship addresses misinformation and disinformation, while Relationships and Sex Education (RSHE) covers online safety, relationships and digital harms. Geography and Design and Technology incorporate digital tools such as Geographical Information Systems and 3-D modelling. At 16-19, learners may access enrichment activities that build digital confidence, although availability and support vary.

The Review's Call for Evidence and wider engagement highlights widespread concern that young people are not developing adequate digital literacy skills, which are essential both for everyday life and future employment. There are also significant concerns about the misuse of online technologies and its impact on young people's wellbeing.⁷³

In our polling, 41% of students said they would like greater emphasis on digital skills or computing.⁷⁴ Stakeholders expressed concern about the lack of specificity around digital literacy within the curriculum, particularly in the Key Stage 4 Computing Programme of Study. We heard that this lack of clarity is leading to inconsistent practice.

A lack of digital literacy has a negative impact on the ability to safely use, and critically engage with, digital technology for personal and work-related purposes. Those who are digitally disengaged can struggle to navigate a digital society and access work opportunities. Evidence points to a growing but unmet demand for digital skills within the job market. For example, of vacancies reported to be a result of skills shortages, 29% relate to a lack of digital skills, including 17% that relate to a lack of advanced digital skills.⁷⁵ The assumption that young people will acquire digital literacy automatically is

⁷² We use 'digital literacy' over 'digital skills' as literacy includes knowledge as well as skills. With rapid technological change, skills alone can date quickly. The knowledge that underpins these skills, such as how systems work, is therefore a vital component.

⁷³ Education Select Committee (2024) - [Screen time: impacts on education and wellbeing](#); Young Minds (2023) - [Putting a stop to the endless scroll](#)

⁷⁴ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#) (Polling of key stage 4 and 16-19 learners and parents); DfE (2024) - [Skills England report: driving growth and widening opportunities](#) also reported that 'digital and computing occupations and were much more likely to be due to skills shortages (81%) than they were across all occupations (63%)'.

⁷⁵ EPI (2022) - [Digital Skills Divided: Technical provision for 16 to 19-year-olds](#) - Advanced digital skills refer to capabilities such as specialist hardware/software system knowledge, application programming, graphic design, data analysis and web development.

incorrect.⁷⁶ To prepare children and young people for life and work, the curriculum must offer more robust digital education.

Recent advancements in AI and generative AI have made digital literacy even more critical. While the long-term impact of AI remains uncertain, young people should understand how it works, its capabilities and its limitations. They should learn how to use AI effectively, without becoming dependent on it, and be engaged in the developing knowledge about both AI's strengths and limitations.⁷⁷ Currently the national curriculum contains limited references to AI, and we recommend this be addressed within the Computing curriculum (see [Computing](#)). We also recommend more frequent updates to the curriculum in subjects involving rapidly evolving digital technologies (see [future curriculum reviews](#)).

The Review identifies Computing as the primary subject to deliver digital literacy content and recommends that it provides greater clarity on what should be taught at each key stage. This will ensure students build essential digital competencies for life and work. This recommendation applies to all key stages but is particularly important at Key Stage 4, where the Computing Programme of Study presently consists of just three bullet points. We also recommend broadening the GCSE to incorporate the full breadth of the Computing curriculum. While other subjects should be enriched through the thoughtful use of digital technologies, such as using 3-D modelling in Design and Technology (D&T) and use of geographical information systems in Geography, the foundations must be developed through Computing.⁷⁸

Responsible technology use and awareness of online harms and safety should be addressed in RSHE, where young people explore the social, emotional and ethical dimensions of digital life.⁷⁹ We also recommend that these topics be reinforced in Computing, given its central role in digital literacy. Critical evaluation of online content, essential for navigating misinformation and disinformation, should be covered in Citizenship (see also [media literacy](#)). To support teachers, optional resources are available from Oak National Academy and other providers. However, safeguarding young people in a digital world demands clear, consistent, and compulsory coverage across the curriculum.

⁷⁶ Allmann, K. (2022) - [UK Digital Poverty Evidence Review – Digital Poverty Alliance](#)

⁷⁷ Christodoulou, D. (2025) - '[Are we living in a stupidogenic society?](#)'

Yan, L., Greiff, S., Teuber, Z. & Gašavić, D. (2024) - [Promises and challenges of generative artificial intelligence for human learning](#)

UNESCO (2024) - [Generative Artificial Intelligence in education: Think piece by Stefania Giannini](#)

Ahmad, S., Heesup, H., Alam, M., Rehmat M., Irshad, M., Arraño-Muñoz, M. & Ariza-Montes, A. (2023) - [Impact of artificial intelligence on human loss in decision making, laziness and safety in education](#)

⁷⁸ As with other recommendations for Computing, the Review notes that wider challenges, for example, the sufficiency of school infrastructure and access to technologies, will need to be considered in implementing our recommendations.

⁷⁹ [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education guidance](#)

Media literacy

The Review considers media literacy to involve understanding and engaging critically with the messages conveyed through different media channels, including AI.

This includes understanding how to identify and protect against misinformation and disinformation by questioning and applying critical enquiry to information and information sources. Having secure knowledge is essential to discerning truth from falsehoods and is one of the many reasons why a knowledge-rich curriculum is more, not less important in the modern world. In addition, it is important that learners utilise the processes of investigating sources, weighing evidence and applying an informed critical lens. This is essential in a world where misinformation is prevalent, and facts are increasingly disputed.

Misinformation and disinformation can take many forms, including scientific (as in the case of anti-vaccine campaigns or climate change denial), political (as in the case of deepfake content of political figures or wider misrepresentation of current or historical events) or more general (such as the prevalence of unverified claims online). Research has shown this is a growing concern for young people, as well as for teachers and parents and carers. Over half of young people reported that they have encountered someone in their class (51%) or on social media (52%) who believes in a conspiracy theory and almost half of teachers (49%) reported they are at least moderately worried about a pupil expressing a belief in a conspiracy to them in the classroom.⁸⁰ Ofcom has observed reduced confidence among young people in identifying fake online content,⁸¹ and 42% of parents of Year 6 pupils are not confident that their child is being taught in school how to fact-check media.⁸² As such, building media literacy is crucial to equip children and young people with the necessary tools to critically appraise and engage with media in all its forms. We recognise the important links to some elements of digital literacy, particularly when dealing with misinformation and disinformation online.

Some subjects, such as History and Science, already support the development of the critical analysis which underpins media literacy. In History, students learn (through the process of historical analysis) to assess separate information sources while accounting for biases, reliability, perspective and inaccuracies. In Science, students are similarly taught to critically and empirically evaluate scientific claims. These processes are essential for encouraging the investigative process which underpins media literacy and teachers should be encouraged to make these links.

⁸⁰ Public First (2025) - [Commission into Countering Online Conspiracies in Schools](#)

⁸¹ Ofcom (2025) - [Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2025](#). Misinformation and disinformation have resulted in less than half of UK adults (45%) feeling confident that they can judge whether sources of information are truthful (Ofcom (2024) - [Understanding misinformation: an exploration of UK adults' behaviour and attitudes](#)).

⁸² DfE (2023) - [Parent, pupil and learner panel omnibus surveys for 2022 to 2023 - Parent, pupil and learner panel: 22/23 March/April wave](#)

The national curriculum also has some direct media literacy coverage in Citizenship (Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4), RSHE, Computing and English, and in the optional GCSE Media Studies. Together, these subjects aim to equip children and young people with the knowledge and skills required to become discerning consumers of media⁸³ and to use information and communication technology creatively, purposefully and critically. Yet this coverage could be strengthened.

To empower young people to engage critically with the messages they encounter through different media channels, the Review recommends that the Government strengthens the role of media literacy in English and Citizenship. We recommend that the nature and expression of emotive language be explored so that students can understand the various ways in which language can be used to persuade, and that GCSE English Language includes analysis of multi-modal and ephemeral text types. Media literacy should be better specified in both the primary and secondary Citizenship curriculum (and Citizenship should be added to the national curriculum in Key Stage 1 and 2). This coordinated approach will ensure all young people are equipped with the knowledge and skills they need for discerning and critical engagement with all forms of media.

Climate education and sustainability

The climate crisis is already impacting our physical landscape and many connected aspects of our lives. Given the significance of climate change for our society and the planet, it is crucial that young people benefit from an understanding of the climate crisis's causes, consequences and possible solutions and that they are empowered with the necessary knowledge and skills to thrive in tomorrow's industries and tackle the serious challenges facing our planet.

There is currently minimal explicit inclusion of climate education in the national curriculum. For example, there are only limited references to climate science and scientific work to combat climate change in the Science curriculum, while climate change is not explicitly included in the purpose of study for Geography. There is also no statutory requirement to teach climate education in Key Stage 1 or 2 (beyond a non-statutory reference in Citizenship). Whilst there is some climate education at later key stages in the Programmes of Study for Geography and Science (Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4), the depth of content is either minimal or out of date and therefore in need of refreshing. Similarly, D&T has no focus on sustainability, despite the importance of material choice and renewable supply chains in this subject. Teachers have said that the lack of visibility and emphasis on climate education within the national curriculum is a barrier to creating

⁸³ Kahne, J. & Bowyer, B. (2016) - [Educating for Democracy in a Partisan Age: Confronting the Challenges of Motivated Reasoning and Misinformation](#): 'media literacy learning experiences that aim to promote accurate judgment of truth claims appear to be helpful'.

an effective curriculum on climate education.⁸⁴ 16-19 providers have also shared evidence of the need for stronger provision.

Climate education is critically important to the economy and for providing learners with the knowledge they need for future work. The solutions to the climate crisis require the expansion of green technology, and this in turn is creating new industries and jobs, and affecting nearly all sectors of the economy. If young people are to make the most of these opportunities, it is crucial that they acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to do so.⁸⁵

Young people have been clear about their desire for a greater focus on this area in their education. As well as being a common theme in our engagement with young people, polling emphasises their level of concern and significant appetite for further information on climate change and climate science, including their desire to support solutions.⁸⁶

We therefore make recommendations to bolster the presence of climate education and sustainability in the Science and Geography curricula, and to emphasise sustainability in the D&T curriculum. Recommendations for earlier sequencing and refreshed content are set out in the relevant chapters of this report focusing on Geography, D&T and Science (see [curriculum recommendations by subject](#)). It is important to note that curriculum content is only one part of the issue: pedagogy has an important role in applying an engaging climate lens to existing curriculum content. The Review has seen excellent examples of individual schools and teachers showing leadership in this area, and this is to be encouraged. For 16-19 learners, the Review heard that opportunities in study programmes should build on updated content in the pre-16 national curriculum subjects and equip learners to rise to the challenges of a sustainable future.

⁸⁴ Elizabeth A. C. Rushton & Nicola Walshe (2025) - [Curriculum making and climate change and sustainability education: a case study of school teachers' practices from England](#)

⁸⁵ The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) has expressed concern about a lack of awareness about the green economy and its potential for growth, and that it is a 'huge task' to educate the public about the path to net zero. Skills England has emphasised that the transition to net zero is likely to affect one in five jobs, yet despite employment in green industries growing rapidly, awareness of green jobs among young people remains low, with less than half (47%) of secondary students and learners saying they have heard of green job opportunities: DfE (2024) - [Skills England: driving growth and widening opportunities](#). DfE (2024) - [Parent, pupil and learner voice: May 2024](#)

⁸⁶ A recent poll conducted by the British Science Association found that 85% of young people aged 14 to 18 years think that climate change will affect their future (British Science Association (2020) - [Future Forum: Ageing society, AI & data, clean growth and future of mobility](#)). A survey by the Lancet (16 to 25-year-olds) similarly found four in five young people (84%) feel moderately to extremely worried about climate change, and over half (56%) feel powerless to tackle it: (Hickman, C., Marks, E., Pihkala, P., Clayton, S., Lewandowski, E., Mayall, E. et al. (2021) - [Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey](#)). A survey by the Woodland Trust & YouGov (of 16 to 24-year-olds) found that over two-thirds (70%) of young people are worried about climate change and nearly half (46%) feel they have no influence over it (YouGov / Woodland Trust (2023) - [Trust Results 230210](#)); Youth Shadow Panel (2025) - [Interim Report](#)

Oracy

The Review considers oracy to incorporate speaking, listening, and communication, including verbal as well as other forms of non-written communication, such as sign language, non-verbal and Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC). The evidence for the benefits of oracy for young people's learning and life chances is well established. According to the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), oracy interventions lead to significant improvements in student outcomes.⁸⁷

Oracy is also important for future study, life and work. Evidence suggests that oracy can support active learning, critical thinking, and enhance students' engagement and understanding.⁸⁸ In addition, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) lists communication skills and English language skills in the top 20 skills (out of 161) in both current demand for these skills and the expected future increased demand.⁸⁹ Strong verbal communication also has clear benefits throughout life. For example, it improves workplace cohesion and productivity,⁹⁰ and it has important benefits for psychological and physical health in later life.⁹¹

Our review of the evidence has highlighted the need for further support and guidance for oracy and spoken language interventions. In 2024, over a fifth of children did not meet the expected standards in all the early learning goals in communication and language in their Early Years Foundation Stage profile, while those eligible for free school meals (FSM) and those with SEN were less likely than their peers to meet the same standards.⁹²

The current national curriculum has some emphasis on spoken language, including in the overarching curriculum aims and individual Programmes of Study throughout the key stages, including the English, Maths and Science curricula at primary and secondary. At 16-19, through the Review's evidence-gathering and conversations with sector specialists, we heard many good examples of schools and colleges designing enrichment, employment and pastoral activities. These were designed to provide opportunities for learners to build confidence in core skills for employment such as communication, teamwork, and leadership. However, we have also heard clearly that these are not sufficiently widespread and that the attention to oracy is insufficient.

Through the Call for Evidence and our wider engagement with the education sector, stakeholders told us that the guidance for schools on spoken language is limited in its

⁸⁷ EEF (2025) - [Oral language interventions: Technical Appendix](#)

⁸⁸ EEF (2025) - [Oral language interventions](#)

⁸⁹ NFER (2024) - [An analysis of the demand for skills in the labour market in 2035 - Revised projections](#)

⁹⁰ Haq, I. & Faizan, R (2023) - [Communication Within the Workplace: Systematic Review of Essentials of Communication](#)

⁹¹ Fisher, C. & Roccotagliata, T. (2017) - [Interpersonal Communication Across the Life Span | Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication](#)

⁹² DFE (2025) - [Early years foundation stage profile results](#)

scope and specificity. As a result, teaching and spoken language interventions are implemented inconsistently. In addition, the Review Panel received feedback that there is a lack of clear progression for spoken language across both primary and secondary education, with little support or guidance to define progression. This is also emphasised in the Oracy Commission's 2024 report.⁹³ In summary, the evidence suggests that the current emphasis on spoken language in the curriculum aims is not always reflected in classroom practice, nor is it meeting the needs of all children and young people.

The Review has considered how oracy might be strengthened in specific subjects within the curriculum. The recommendations for oracy in the English chapter emphasise the need for the English curriculum to make speaking and listening requirements more prominent, including through giving greater prominence to Drama (see [English](#)). The Citizenship chapter recommends greater specificity on oracy within both the primary and secondary curriculum (with Citizenship being added to the national curriculum in Key Stages 1 and 2) (see [Citizenship](#)). More widely, we recommend the introduction of a new oracy framework to support good practice. These recommendations are intended to secure an improved oracy offer to ensure young people benefit from a skill that will help them at every stage of their lives.

We recommend that the Government:

- Introduces an oracy framework to support practice and to complement the existing frameworks for Reading and Writing.⁹⁴

⁹³ Oracy Education Commission (2024) - [We need to talk, 2024](#)

⁹⁴ DfE (2023) - [The reading framework](#); DfE (2025) - [The writing framework](#)

Curriculum shape and content

The following section sets out our analysis of compulsory education for children and young people age 5 to 16. We begin by examining the structure and content of the national curriculum. We then set out the curriculum principles we recommend for the refreshing of Programmes of Study. Finally, we assess and make recommendations for each curriculum subject.

Our view of the key stages

The Review considers the architecture of key stages to be a feature of the English education system that is working well in structuring young people's learning to the end of compulsory schooling.

Key Stages 1 and 2 provide the foundation for future learning and development. It is a time when pupils develop core knowledge and skills, and consolidate and deepen their understanding across a broad range of subjects, but it is also when they begin to develop curiosity, enthusiasm and joy in learning which can last a lifetime.

Whilst the Review has taken a subject-by-subject approach, recognising the distinct ways in which knowledge and skills develop within each discipline, we also acknowledge the unique nature of primary education and the developmental needs of primary-aged pupils. Key Stages 1 and 2 are not merely preparation for secondary education; they are formative in their own right. The primary context offers opportunities for breadth and for meaningful connections to be drawn across subjects. These connections should be developmentally appropriate and pedagogically rich, helping pupils to build secure foundations for future learning. This approach is not in contrast with the disciplinary integrity of individual subjects but reflects the distinctive potential of the primary phase. A well-designed curriculum in Key Stages 1 and 2 can nurture curiosity, support mastery and foster a love of learning whilst ensuring that pupils are well prepared for Key Stage 3.

Throughout the Review, primary practitioners and subject experts have consistently highlighted that, whilst the curriculum at Key Stages 1 and 2 is broad in its scope, this can come at the expense of depth. The volume of content in many subjects makes it challenging to explore topics in sufficient detail, affecting pupils' ability to master key concepts. Conversely, many of the foundation subjects in the national curriculum lack detail, which means that teachers are unclear about what is sufficient in terms of depth or breadth. This lack of clarity also leads to inconsistent coverage of content across schools, making it more challenging to ensure knowledge is built coherently and sequentially across the key stages. Through our recommendations, we aim to secure strong foundations in numeracy and literacy, ensuring all pupils complete Key Stage 2 with fluency in reading, writing and number. We also seek to guarantee access to a

broad and rich primary curriculum, including subjects such as Citizenship, Languages, and Music. Finally, we support greater breadth and depth in learning to foster curiosity, confidence, and long-term engagement.

Key Stage 3 lays the foundation for success at Key Stage 4 and beyond. A well-designed Key Stage 3 curriculum is essential for sustained momentum in learning. It covers a broad range of subjects which should engage students, stimulate interest and build successful learning. However, evidence suggests that their progress is being held back by structural challenges. This includes limited continuity between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, and lower resource and/or prioritisation of Key Stage 3 relative to Key Stage 4.

The absence of national data at Key Stage 3 makes it difficult to monitor attainment robustly, but it is clear that progress at Key Stage 3 is often slower than at Key Stage 2, particularly in core subjects.⁹⁵ Similar to other key stages, there is also evidence that in Key Stage 3 students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are at risk of falling behind their more affluent peers (even when accounting for prior performance). At this key stage, the performance of initially high-achieving students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds converges significantly with that of initially lower-achieving students from the least disadvantaged backgrounds.⁹⁶

Transitions between schools can be challenging. Entering Key Stage 3, students often face a new school environment and a new curriculum, which can compound any existing difficulties.⁹⁷ Stakeholders frequently report that secondary schools tend to plan their Key Stage 3 curriculum backwards from GCSE requirements rather than forward from Key Stage 2 learning, resulting in repetition and leading to disengagement, especially among higher-attaining students.⁹⁸ We heard that a lack of detail relating to the requirements many national curriculum subjects across Key Stage 3 - including a lack of clarity on what progression from Key Stage 2 to 3 should look like - hampers effective transitions and the building of knowledge and skills.

Our recommendations are designed to tackle these challenges by improving curriculum content, specificity and continuity, introducing a diagnostic assessment tool to support progress and strengthening the educational experience during this critical stage.

⁹⁵ DfE (2011) - [How do pupils progress during key stages 2 and 3?](#); EPI (2023) - [Star Assessments Benchmarking Report 2022/23](#)

⁹⁶ Crawford, C., Macmillan, L. & Vignoles, A. (2015) - [When and why do initially high attaining poor children fall behind?](#)

⁹⁷ DfE (2015) - [Key stage 3: the wasted years?](#); van Rens, M., Haelermans, C., Groot, W. & Maassen van den Brink, H. (2018) - [Facilitating a Successful Transition to Secondary School: \(How\) Does it Work? A Systematic Literature Review](#); Evans, D., Borriello, G. & Field, A. (2018) - [A Review of the Academic and Psychological Impact of the Transition to Secondary Education](#)

⁹⁸ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Analysis of Call for Evidence responses](#); ASCL (2024) - [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Call for Evidence](#).

Key Stage 4 is when students begin to specialise. They select qualifications that shape their learning and influence their future pathways because they have a direct impact on access to further education, training and employment. A wide range of academic and vocational subjects are available at Key Stage 4, supported by performance measures designed to encourage breadth and ambition. In particular, Progress 8 has helped to shift the focus towards development over time, rewarding schools for the progress their students make rather than simply their final grades.

We have consistently heard from stakeholders that two challenges impede progress at Key Stage 4. First, the volume of content in Key Stage 4 qualifications, especially in GCSEs, can limit subject depth and squeeze the time available for non-assessed but mandatory subjects such as Physical Education (PE), Religious Education (RE), Citizenship and Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE). Second, although the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) was introduced to promote access to a core academic curriculum and reduce inequalities in subject choice, concerns persist about its impact on students' engagement, curriculum flexibility and the breadth of study (see [accountability](#)).

Key Stage 4 should be a phase where students pursue meaningful qualifications, experience a rich and balanced curriculum and prepare confidently for the next stage of their education or training. Our recommendations aim to refine curriculum expectations, recalibrate accountability measures and ensure that all students can access a curriculum that reflects their interests and enables them to achieve and thrive.

Curriculum principles

We recommend that the Government adopts the following curriculum principles when drafting Programmes of Study for the refreshed national curriculum.

An entitlement for children and young people

The national curriculum is an entitlement for all children and young people. It ensures their access to the precious knowledge and skills that best supports them to thrive as individuals and as future citizens and workers; in turn, they contribute to the knowledge and experience imparted to future generations. This expression of what we want young people to know and be able to do by the end of statutory schooling is, therefore, an investment, for their benefit and for that of the nation. It should promote their intellectual, social, cultural, spiritual and moral, emotional and physical development. It should be appropriately aspirational, engaging and demanding to reflect the high expectations and excellence our young people deserve.

Curriculum principle:

- The refreshed national curriculum must be an aspirational, engaging and demanding offer that reflects the high expectations and excellence our young people deserve, irrespective of background.

Knowledge-rich

The refreshed national curriculum should maintain a knowledge-rich approach. This emphasises the building of a deep understanding of subject matter and concepts via carefully sequenced teaching, supporting retention and fluency.⁹⁹ This approach also ensures that all children and young people, regardless of background, have access to a broad and rich foundational body of knowledge, thereby reducing inequalities. A curriculum centred on ‘powerful knowledge’¹⁰⁰ provides a shared frame of reference for children and young people from different backgrounds, enabling them to engage more effectively with issues affecting them and the world around them.¹⁰¹

The refreshed curriculum must provide the knowledge and skills that will empower young people to thrive as citizens, in work and throughout life, in the light of the challenges and opportunities facing them today. A knowledge-rich curriculum need not omit or be in opposition to the development of skills. The skills and capabilities that are an inherent and desirable aspect of a rich, broad and balanced curriculum arise from, and are situated within, a knowledge-rich curriculum.¹⁰²

Curriculum principle:

- The refreshed national curriculum should retain a knowledge-rich approach, ensuring skills are developed in conjunction with knowledge in ways that are appropriate for each subject discipline.

⁹⁹ Surma, T., Vanhees, C., Wils, M., Nijlunsing, J., Crato, N., Hattie, J., Muijs, D., Rata, E. & Wiliam, D. (2025) - [Developing Curriculum for Deep Thinking: The Knowledge Revival](#) (page 46); EEF (2019) - [What do we mean by ‘knowledge rich’ anyway?](#); Willingham, D. (2009) - [Why Don't Students Like School?: A Cognitive Scientist Answers Questions About How the Mind Works and What It Means for the Classroom](#)

¹⁰⁰ Young, M. & Muller, J. (2014) - [On the Powers of Powerful Knowledge](#); Young, M., Lambert, D., Roberts, C. and Roberts, M. (2014) Knowledge and the future school: Curriculum and social justice. Bloomsbury Publishing

¹⁰¹ Wheelahan (2012) - [Why Knowledge Matters in Curriculum | A Social Realist Argument](#); Young, M. (2013) - [Overcoming the crisis in curriculum theory: a knowledge-based approach](#)

¹⁰² Albeit it is important to note that it is teachers, as ‘curriculum makers’ that enable this in practice; see Deng, Z. (2022) - [Powerful knowledge, educational potential and knowledge-rich curriculum: Pushing the boundaries](#); Lambert, D., Béneker, T. & Bladh, G. (2023) - [Teaching Quality in Geography: What Are We Trying to Achieve?](#)

Curriculum depth and mastery of core concepts

Mastery of core concepts¹⁰³ is necessary for children and young people to develop a deep understanding of subject disciplines. Knowledge is cumulative and, with a strong knowledge base (and deliberate revisiting of prior knowledge), they can build new knowledge in their long-term memory more easily.¹⁰⁴ An absence of this can inhibit them from securing the necessary depth of knowledge to make progress in their learning, particularly for some with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).¹⁰⁵ We are not advocating unnecessary repetition, which can reduce engagement. Rather, the curriculum should ensure that children and young people have sufficient space to secure, deepen and extend their foundational knowledge and skills, building on prior learning.

A broad and balanced curriculum remains important, and breadth, particularly across subjects, is essential. Within subjects, however, there must be depth, with a volume of content that permits this.

Curriculum principle:

- The national curriculum should be constructed so that it supports children and young people to master core concepts, ensuring sufficient space for them to build their knowledge and deepen their understanding.

Curriculum coherence

For a curriculum to work successfully, it needs to be coherent. Coherent curricula are 'articulated over time as a sequence of topics and performances that are logical and reflect, where appropriate, the sequential or hierarchical nature of the disciplinary content from which the subject matter derives'.¹⁰⁶

Building deep understanding in a curriculum area requires vertical coherence through all phases, meaning the curriculum is carefully sequenced to build on the content and essential concepts in each phase.¹⁰⁷ The construction of such sequences of learning will vary between subject disciplines: for example, it would look different in subjects that are

¹⁰³ In this report, we define 'mastery' as acquiring a deep understanding of subject matter, which involves secure knowledge retention and the ability to apply this knowledge in different scenarios. We are not referring to 'mastery learning', a pedagogical approach which EEF gives a clear definition of [here](#), or 'teaching for mastery', a specific approach to teaching mathematics that originated in East Asia.

¹⁰⁴ Alexander, P., Kulikowich, J. & Schulze, S. (1994) - [How Subject-Matter Knowledge Affects Recall and Interest](#); Ansari, A. (1968) - [Educational psychology: A cognitive view](#); Shapiro, A. (2004) - [How including Prior Knowledge as a Subject Variable May Change Outcomes of Learning Research](#)

¹⁰⁵ For example, space in the curriculum to ensure foundational knowledge is secure particularly supports pupils with learning difficulties, allowing them to master the core concepts needed to develop further understanding.

¹⁰⁶ Schmidt, W., Houang, R., Cogan, L. (2002) - [A coherent curriculum: The case of mathematics](#)

¹⁰⁷ Curriculum designers and academics use different names for the essential concepts of a coherent curriculum, including the 'unifying ideas of the discipline', 'big ideas', 'threads' and 'core concepts'.

largely hierarchical in nature to those that are largely cumulative. Crucially, curriculum coherence should be evident in all cases, because a coherent curriculum supports effective progression between key stages, with students building clear connections between what they have previously learned and what they are learning today.

Vertical coherence is not just about sequencing content; it can also support its selection and prioritisation, helping to avoid the overcrowding that can result in rushed and shallow coverage.

It is also important to ensure horizontal coherence in the curriculum. We are committed to the existing subject architecture of the national curriculum. However, better horizontal links could be made across subjects to highlight where content in one area relies on content in another. This supports teachers as well as children and young people. For example, the mathematical content in a given phase might be required simultaneously to access other parts of the curriculum, such as science or financial education. This is particularly important in areas such as literacy, oracy, numeracy or digital literacy, which have coverage and application across numerous curriculum areas. It is especially relevant in the primary phase, where teachers typically teach the full breadth of the curriculum and where well-aligned, cross-disciplinary content can support effective teaching and learning. Horizontal coherence in the curriculum provides children and young people with a coordinated and logical arrangement of topics across subjects, as well as within them.

Curriculum principle:

- Curriculum coherence should be an organising principle for curriculum drafters and support the selection and prioritisation of content. Where appropriate, vertical core concepts on which subjects have been constructed should be clearly presented, and horizontal coherence should be ensured.

Specificity

Specificity and precise language are essential to securing curriculum continuity, curriculum coherence and aiding mastery of concepts. The Programmes of Study for some foundation subjects currently lack specificity, which can result in teachers feeling pressured to 'cover all bases' or repeat content across years and key stages. We are clear that greater specificity should not mean greater volume of content and should not unnecessarily impede schools' or teachers' autonomy. Foundation subjects' Programmes of Study should be drafted with a minimalist approach to added detail, carefully balanced with the need to ensure the greater specificity which aids conceptual mastery, continuity and coherence.

We know that some groups of children and young people are more likely to struggle with transitions between key stages and tend to make poorer progress following them.

We heard through the Call for Evidence that transitions are not always effective between key stages, particularly between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 3, we also heard that there is repetition in the curriculum which can cause learners to become disengaged. It is essential that curriculum content is clear, specific and demonstrates continuity, avoiding both gaps in essential content and unnecessary repetition of it.

Curriculum principle:

- Foundation subject content should specify the essential substantive knowledge and skills which should be taught to enable children and young people to meet expectations at the end of each key stage.

Professional autonomy

The national curriculum is only one part of a school's overall curriculum, and it is important that teachers and leaders have space to exercise their professional judgement and innovate. Professional autonomy allows teachers, schools and multi-academy trusts to be creative, innovative and ensure that they can meet children and young people's needs through a locally relevant curriculum.

As we stated in our conceptual position paper,¹⁰⁸ a rich and well-specified national curriculum supports and empowers teachers' professional practice. Teachers act as 'curriculum makers', interpreting and transforming the content in the national curriculum to 'author' instructional events with students in the classroom. At the core of curriculum-making is the process of unpacking and interpreting content to unlock its educational potential.¹⁰⁹ The Review supports the innovation and professionalism of teachers, enabling them to adapt how they teach the curriculum to reflect their students' lives and experiences. The national curriculum is intended as a baseline rather than imposing limits, and it is the expertise of our teachers that brings it to life in the classroom.

Ensuring the profession has the space to develop the curriculum is essential to enable the stretch and/or support learners need, enabling inclusive and adaptive teaching to happen for individual children and young people. This is particularly important in the context of greater numbers of them being identified as having SEND.¹¹⁰ To that end, the national curriculum should be teachable within the time available and should not be so specific that it restricts teachers' autonomy (see [the national curriculum as a tool for teachers](#)).

¹⁰⁸ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#) (Conceptual position paper)

¹⁰⁹ Deng, Z. (2022) - [Powerful knowledge, educational potential and knowledge-rich curriculum: pushing the boundaries](#); Deng, Z. (2025) - [Knowledge and curriculum: towards an educational and Didaktik/curriculum way of thinking and theorizing](#)

¹¹⁰ DfE (2025) - [Special Educational needs in England over time](#)

Curriculum principle:

- The refreshed national curriculum should ensure the professional autonomy of teachers is maintained, making sure that greater specificity does not substantially restrict teachers' flexibility to choose lesson content and how to teach it.

A curriculum for all

The national curriculum is for all our children and young people, and they should feel both included in it and represented by it. This is intrinsically important, but it also supports engagement,¹¹¹ and ensures that all young people are exposed to a wide range of perspectives that serve to broaden their horizons, rather than limiting them to narrow frames of reference based on their background. As set out in our [Terms of Reference](#), the Review will seek to deliver a curriculum that reflects the issues and diversities of our society (such as protected characteristics and socio-economic background), ensuring all children and young people are represented.

While the national curriculum already offers flexibility for teachers to integrate inclusive and diverse learning experiences, we heard that more needs to be done to ensure that all young people feel represented, to deliver on the equalities duties to support equality of opportunity, and to challenge discrimination.¹¹² Responses to our Call for Evidence identified opportunities to broaden representation in relation to protected characteristics and socio-economic background across many subjects. In Art and Design, research shows that works by minority ethnic artists are rarely used, despite the subject's potential to reflect Britain's cultural diversity and contributions to the discipline.¹¹³ In English, while the curriculum allows for a range of texts, we heard that in practice selections often lack breadth, shaped by limited availability of resources and a tendency to rely on well-established works.¹¹⁴ Likewise, we heard that in Drama and Dance, work is needed to broaden the range of creators, performers, styles and genres studied. In History, teachers called for clearer guidance to help them reflect the subject's inherent diversity without replacing core content.¹¹⁵ In Music, stakeholders noted that terminology and

¹¹¹ DfE (2012) - [The impact of pupil behaviour and wellbeing on educational outcomes - GOV.UK](#);

UNESCO (2017) - [A Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education](#)

¹¹² The National Archives (2025) - [Equality Act 2010](#)

¹¹³ Runnymede trust (2024) - [Race & inclusion in secondary school art education](#)

¹¹⁴ Penguin books UK and Runnymede trust (2021) - [Lit in Colour](#); T.S. Dee & E.K. Penner (2017) - [The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance](#)

¹¹⁵ Survey of 497 secondary History teachers in England. Historical Association (2024) [Secondary Survey](#).

¹¹⁵ Association of School and College Leaders (2024) - [ASCL response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review call for evidence](#)

¹¹⁵ Runnymede Trust (2024) - [Curriculum and Assessment Review: A Response from the Runnymede Trust](#)

¹¹⁵ United Learning (2024) - [Curriculum and Assessment Review Call for Evidence: United Learning response](#)

assessment criteria can limit the inclusion of diverse genres and styles. We recommend updating subject content and Programmes of Study to reflect a broader range of perspectives and experiences, while retaining foundational disciplinary knowledge. Core knowledge and key works that shape a subject must remain central. However, we are clear that diverse contributions to subject disciplines enable a complete, broad and balanced curriculum. This is sometimes more appropriately achieved through teacher selection of content than centralised prescription in the national curriculum and should be supported by high-quality exemplification resources (for example, from Oak National Academy and other providers) and a wider selection of inclusive materials from publishers and exam boards.

Curriculum principle:

- The national curriculum is for all our children and young people. As such, it should reflect our diverse society and the contributions of people of all backgrounds to our knowledge and culture.

We recommend that the Government:

- Reviews and updates all Programmes of Study - and, where appropriate, the corresponding GCSE Subject Content - to include stronger representation of the diversity that makes up our modern society, allowing more children to see themselves in the curriculum.

The national curriculum as a tool for teachers

The current static nature of the national curriculum's Programmes of Study, which exist online in a series of PDFs, makes it difficult for teachers to locate content in the phases or subjects they do not teach. This has implications for transitions between years and key stages, particularly when this involves a change of teacher or school for children and young people. It can make it harder for teachers to understand previous coverage, make connections to earlier or future learning and set appropriate expectations. This challenge also applies to the GCSE subject content documents, which are presented in the same format. As discussed earlier, if teachers can see the horizontal links across subjects as well as the vertical links within them, the benefits are clear.

The national curriculum should therefore be an active, navigable, online product that is easy to use for teachers and school leaders. Improving its presentation should enhance professional practice by helping teachers to place curriculum content within a larger sequence. By clearly identifying the knowledge and skills which should have been learnt in earlier phases, teachers can introduce new material as part of a seamless education.

We recommend that the Government:

- Develops the national curriculum as a digital product that can support teachers to navigate content easily and to see and make connections across key stages and disciplines.

The curriculum principles already outlined support curriculum design that is inclusive for the majority of students. Access to the national curriculum should remain an expectation for all children and young people and is important for ensuring a broad and balanced education for all, supporting their engagement and wider opportunities. Adaptive teaching plays an important role in supporting inclusion, and in the majority of cases these pupils will be able to study the full national curriculum. There is, however, also a need for clear advice on effective approaches to adapting the curriculum, both to enable young people to access the full curriculum, and to ensure a rich offer and good progress for those who are unable to access it in full. This must support teachers and school leaders to adapt their curriculum for children and young people with SEND, taking into account their varied, multi-faceted needs. Such guidance should be non-statutory.

Bodies such as Oak National Academy may be able to support teachers in this area by providing teachers with resources, progression scaffolds and exemplification of good practice.

We recommend that the Government:

- Develops a programme of work to provide evidence-led guidance on curriculum and pedagogical adaptation (as well as exemplification) for children and young people with SEND, including those in specialist provision, who experience various barriers to accessing the curriculum.

When drafting Programmes of Study, clear aims and ways of working should be established at the outset. All participants and external advisers should subscribe to these. This should aid clarity, manage expectations and avoid sub-optimal compromises being made which are not led by robust evidence, but rather by consensus-seeking.

Maintaining an evidence-led approach is crucial. This must include a variety of evidence, including robust longitudinal data and research. It should include a critical approach to claims and assumptions which are not rigorously substantiated by independent research.

To ensure the refreshed Programmes of Study are deliverable and to help teachers to teach content effectively, the drafting process must involve teachers, as well as be informed by subject specialists' knowledge of the discipline. Consideration of the

curriculum time available is important in drafting Programmes of Study to ensure the national curriculum is ambitious but deliverable. This is crucial for avoiding an overcrowded, 'shallow' curriculum.

We recommend that the Government:

- Involves teachers in the testing and design of Programmes of Study as part of the drafting process. This must take into consideration the curriculum time that is available, ensuring the national curriculum is ambitious but teachable within a typical school timetable.

Curriculum recommendations by subject

In the following sections we discuss and make recommendations for each curriculum subject, in alphabetical order (Cooking and Nutrition, Drama and Dance are included within their parent subjects of Design and Technology (D&T), English and PE, respectively). This includes a summary of some key information on each curriculum subject, including their status in the national curriculum and qualification take-up, where applicable.¹¹⁶

Art and Design

- Art and Design is a statutory foundation subject in the national curriculum from Key Stages 1 to 3.
- At Key Stage 4, the entitlement to study a subject in the arts includes Art and Design. GCSE Art and Design take-up was 26% in 2009/10 and 27% in 2024/25. Technical Award take-up has been 1% since 2015/16.
- In 2024/25, 93% of state-funded schools had entries in the GCSE qualification and 5% into the Technical Award. Overall, 94% of schools offer Art and Design qualifications.
- A Level Art and Design entries made up 6% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 5% in 2023/24.

Art and Design remains a popular subject in the national curriculum. We have heard from many art teachers through our Call for Evidence and public engagement that they enjoy teaching art and that they relish the flexibility of the present curriculum across all key stages. In particular, Art and Design continues to thrive at Key Stage 4. The number of students choosing to take GCSE Art and Design remains strong, demonstrating the subject's continued appeal to young people.¹¹⁷

However, sector research and responses to our Call for Evidence highlight certain areas where the national curriculum and the GCSE qualification should be strengthened.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ For 2024/25, Key Stage 4 subject take-up refers to the proportion of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 entering the subject. This is taken by dividing the number of pupils taking each subject ([Subject entries 2024/25](#)) by the [number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2024/25](#); for earlier years, subject trends are taken from [Curriculum subject trends over time](#). A Level entry figures by subjects are taken from: DfE (2024) - [16 to 18 time series attainment and single year entry dashboard](#)

¹¹⁷ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Call for Evidence](#): (Curriculum subject trends over time); DfE (2025) - [Pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 2024/25](#); DfE (2025) - [Subject entries 2024/25](#). To note, whilst GCSE uptake has remained strong, trends for teaching time for Art and Design indicate a slight decline, from 3.5% in 2011/12 to 2.9% in 2024/25. DfE (2025) - [Teaching time Key Stage 3-4](#)

¹¹⁸ Fabian Society (2019) - [Primary colours](#); All-Party Parliamentary Group for Art, Craft and Design (2023) - [Art Now: An Inquiry into the state of Art and Design teaching in early years foundation stage, primary and secondary education](#)

We therefore recommend some limited revisions are made to the Art and Design curriculum so that this popular subject continues to deliver the knowledge and skills young people require to thrive creatively.

The current Key Stage 1 to 3 Programmes of Study¹¹⁹ offer flexibility and autonomy, which are valued by many art teachers. However, feedback from our Call for Evidence highlighted challenges with curriculum content. Sector stakeholders asserted that non-specialist teachers, particularly at primary,¹²⁰ can lack the confidence and training to teach the curriculum effectively, citing the lack of detail in the Programmes of Study as a barrier. Ofsted notes the value of building sequential disciplinary, theoretical and practical knowledge in Art and Design through practice, reflection and engagement.¹²¹ However, respondents to the Call for Evidence told us that the current curriculum could do more to articulate how students' practical knowledge and skills should progress throughout their study. We also heard calls to include more detail on using alternative media to meet concerns about a narrow focus on drawing and painting in many settings.¹²²

We therefore recommend that the Key Stage 1 to 3 Programmes of Study are revised to clarify the knowledge and skills that pupils are expected to develop. Any revisions should be relatively minimal, retaining the aims of the current Art and Design curriculum and maintaining its focus on creativity. The overall volume of content should not increase, and revisions should add specificity about how to develop knowledge and skills in a sequenced and meaningful way.

GCSE Art and Design is wholly practically assessed, with 60% of the grade based on coursework, and 40% on the production of one or more 'artefacts' during a 10-hour timed period in exam conditions.¹²³ However, concerns were raised about a lack of clarity around the expected volume of work in a high-stakes context. This has created a perception that, to achieve higher grades, students are expected to generate types or volumes of coursework that are not strictly required by awarding organisations, resulting in significant workload for them, much of it undertaken outside classroom time. In particular, it was felt that expectations around products such as sketchbooks were unclear, especially regarding how much time students should spend creating them and what quantity of work should be represented. We therefore recommend that the volume and range of work required at GCSE are clarified to support teachers to use teaching time more effectively and to ensure that students' workload is proportionate.

¹¹⁹ DfE (2013) - [National curriculum in England: art and design programmes of study](#)

¹²⁰ An Art Now Inquiry survey of 1860 art and design teachers at nursery, primary, secondary and sixth form found that 59% of primary and nursery teachers reported they had no qualifications in art and design at undergraduate degree level or above, compared to 1.6% of secondary teachers: APPG & NSEAD (2023) - [Art Now: An Inquiry into the state of Art and Design teaching in early years foundation stage, primary and secondary education](#)

¹²¹ Ofsted (2023) - [Research review series: art and design - GOV.UK](#)

¹²² Cultural learning alliance (2025) - [Evidence – Report card 2025](#); The Council for Higher Education in Art & Design (2024) - [CHEAD response to Curriculum and Assessment Review](#)

¹²³ DfE (2015) - [GCSE Subject Level Conditions and Requirements for Art and Design](#)

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Makes limited revisions to the Key Stage 1 to 3 Art and Design Programmes of Study to clarify and exemplify the knowledge and skills pupils should develop, including through their own creative practice, reflection and critical engagement.
- Works with Ofqual and awarding organisations to clarify the volume and range of coursework students are expected to produce for GCSE Art and Design.

Citizenship, RHE/RSHE and PSHE

Citizenship

- Citizenship is a statutory foundation subject at Key Stages 3 and 4. It is not mandatory at Key Stages 1 and 2, although primary schools can choose to teach it using non-statutory Programmes of Study.
- At Key Stage 4, Citizenship must be taught to all students, and some will choose to take a qualification in it. Take-up of the optional GCSE Citizenship Studies qualification is very low (<5%).¹²⁴
- In 2024/25, 18% of state-funded schools had entries into GCSE Citizenship Studies.¹²⁵
- There was no standalone A Level in Citizenship in 2023/24.

Citizenship education helps young people to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to play a full and active role in society.¹²⁶ Through the current Programmes of Study, students build their knowledge of democracy, government and the law. They learn about their rights and responsibilities in local, national and international contexts, with opportunities to evaluate evidence critically, to develop reasoned argument and to debate. Evidence from the Association of Citizenship Teaching suggests that Citizenship education leads to positive outcomes in adulthood in relation to attitudes towards, and levels of engagement in, various forms of civic participation.¹²⁷ Unlike other national

¹²⁴ [Entries into Community Development \(Citizenship\)](#) divided by the [total number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4](#).

¹²⁵ Citizenship is categorised under the subject discount group 'Community development'. See [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex).

¹²⁶ DfE (2013) - [National curriculum in England: citizenship programmes of study for key stages 3 and 4](#)

¹²⁷ Association for Citizenship Teaching (2022) - [The Impact of Citizenship Education: a review of evidence for school leaders](#)

curriculum subjects, Ofsted considers Citizenship primarily within the ‘personal development’ judgement in its current inspection framework.¹²⁸

Recently, there has been strong interest in Citizenship education among a range of stakeholders. Through the Call for Evidence, a number of issues in the Citizenship curriculum have been brought to the Review’s attention. They include:

- Financial education: where polling of parents and carers and students, as well as responses to our Call for Evidence, indicate dissatisfaction with present attention to this topic and a strong appetite for more.¹²⁹
- Democracy and government: young people have told us they would like better grounding in this, and stakeholders have highlighted it in relation to the Government’s policy to lower the voting age to 16 for all UK elections.¹³⁰
- Media literacy: young people have highlighted a need for greater support to interrogate information in the context of a proliferation of misinformation and disinformation through various media,¹³¹ especially given the amount of time that many children are now spending online.¹³²

Citizenship has a key role in teaching many areas of knowledge and skills that support young people to become active and thoughtful citizens. In addition to the three areas above, these include topics such as climate and sustainability, equality duties and challenging discrimination, as well as the development of oracy skills, such as expressing opinions, listening to others’ points of view, and agreeing and disagreeing respectfully.

Within this context, the Review has heard many calls for Citizenship to become mandatory at primary to fill perceived gaps in the curriculum. Respondents to the Call for Evidence raised concerns that its non-statutory status is leading to uneven and inconsistent progress in the subject. This also means that opportunities for primary-aged pupils to learn about many of the important topics set out above are inconsistent.

The Review’s own research into primary provision, through Teacher Tapp polling, has confirmed this inconsistency. Over 80% of primary teachers, school leaders and headteachers responded that their school provided Citizenship education, but only 41% of primary headteachers said their school followed the non-statutory Programmes of Study.¹³³ As such, some topics, most notably Active Citizenship and Law and Justice are not always taught in Key Stages 1 and 2. This is in line with research from the University

¹²⁸ As opposed to within the ‘quality of education’ judgement, like other national curriculum subjects. See: Ofsted (2025) - [Education inspection framework](#)

¹²⁹ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#)

¹³⁰ Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2025) - [16-year-olds to be given right to vote through election reforms](#)

¹³¹ Ofcom (2024) - [Understanding misinformation: an exploration of UK adults’ behaviour and attitudes](#)

¹³² Ofcom (2024) - [Children’s media literacy report](#)

¹³³ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex). To note, MATs have been excluded when calculating the percentage that provide Citizenship education

of Kent, which, likewise, highlights inconsistent practice and indicates that children experiencing greater socio-economic disadvantage have fewer opportunities to develop civic skills and are less likely to be prepared for civic life.¹³⁴

The non-statutory primary Programmes of Study¹³⁵ have not been updated since 2001. As a result, some content is duplicated, namely the content relating to health and relationships that now sits in Relationships and Health Education (RHE), first introduced in 2019. Such duplication may be adding to the volume of content in the primary curriculum.

The Review has received compelling evidence and feedback on the need for all primary pupils to receive an education in Citizenship. As such, we are committed to delivering a Citizenship curriculum that has greater clarity and consistency so that all children and young people have the opportunity to develop the skills and knowledge to thrive. We therefore recommend that Citizenship becomes statutory from Key Stage 1.

In order not to increase pressures on primary curriculum time, it is important that the statutory Programmes of Study at Key Stages 1 and 2 contain only the essential core elements to support a smooth, sequenced transition into study at Key Stages 3 and 4, and that they complement RHE content. Content duplicated within RHE should be removed from Citizenship in Key Stages 1 and 2. This should ensure that all young people have access to a core entitlement, but nothing precludes primary schools from going further, should they wish.

We recommend the following topics are prioritised in the statutory primary curriculum:

- **Financial literacy:** current Citizenship content includes the purpose of money, how to manage, spend and save money, and the difference between needs and wants. A statutory primary Programme of Study should also equip pupils to develop their financial literacy skills, by understanding risks, core financial concepts, responsible practice, and the use of digital tools. See [financial education](#).
- **Democracy and government:** the curriculum should support democratic understanding and engagement, and develop awareness of and readiness for the planned lowering of the voting age to 16.¹³⁶ Content should align with the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance for those of different faiths and beliefs, all of which schools are already required to promote actively.
- **Law and rights:** a new Programme of Study should ensure that pupils develop an understanding of rules and laws, why they are important, who makes them and the

¹³⁴ ESRC (2025) - [Educating for Social Good Final Report](#)

¹³⁵ DfE (2015) - [Citizenship programmes of study for key stages 1 and 2](#)

¹³⁶ Subject to legislation.

consequences of not following them. Content should also introduce them to concepts such as fairness and equity, including rights and responsibilities.

- **Media literacy:** new content should ensure age-appropriate skills are developed from primary schooling onwards, including research skills and evaluating information and news sources. See [media literacy](#).
- **Climate education:** primary curriculum content should explore complementary and age-appropriate issues, including sustainable choices and habits and climate justice. See [climate education](#).

To build on this foundation, the secondary Programmes of Study should be aligned with the new primary core. Many responses to the Call for Evidence highlighted the need for updates at Key Stages 3 and 4, asserting that a lack of specificity as well as ambiguous phraseology in the secondary Programmes of Study adds complexity when translating requirements into teaching units and lessons. There were therefore calls for teaching requirements at secondary to be clearer to improve impact and efficiency.

These changes should be delivered by ensuring that currently implicit content at Key Stages 3 and 4 is made more explicit and specific. The intention is not to include additional content. Aligning with primary, content should also be strengthened to address societal changes in an age-appropriate way; for example, equality, equity and countering discrimination and hate, financial education, climate change and the rise of misinformation and disinformation.

Such changes may have implications for the content of GCSE Citizenship Studies. The Review is not making any specific recommendations about this, but the Government should consider and address the impact that any changes to the mandatory non-assessed subject may have on the qualification.

Relationships and Health Education (RHE) and Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE)

- RHE is a basic curriculum subject¹³⁷ for all Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils.
- RSHE is a basic curriculum subject for all Key Stage 3 and 4 students, and for learners in school sixth forms.¹³⁸
- At Key Stage 4, RSHE is not formally assessed and does not have any related qualifications.

¹³⁷ A 'basic curriculum' subject is not on the national curriculum, but must be provided by schools. Parents or carers have the right to withdraw their child from these subjects: GOV.UK (2025) - [The national curriculum: Overview](#).

¹³⁸ The requirement does not apply to further education colleges.

RHE and RSHE were first introduced to the basic curriculum in 2019. Legislation at that time created a new statutory requirement for schools to publish a written policy for RHE/RSHE and to consult parents and carers on it in advance.

The statutory guidance for RHE/RSHE outlines required content but it is not broken down by key stage. Instead, it presents topics for primary and secondary phases, allowing schools the flexibility to determine when to teach specific content based on students' needs.

The DfE has recently concluded a separate review of the statutory RSHE guidance, which had been announced in March 2023, under the previous Government. As such, the content of RSHE was outside the scope of this Review, although the DfE kept the Review Panel informed of progress. The teaching of the new content will begin from September 2026.

Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE)

- PSHE is not statutory for state schools.
- At Key Stage 4, PSHE is not formally assessed and does not have any related qualifications.

PSHE is a broader subject than statutory RSHE, typically encompassing economic education, careers and personal safety, although no content is stipulated beyond what is contained in statutory RSHE. Many schools choose to deliver a wider PSHE curriculum and embed statutory RSHE within it, although approaches vary significantly. PSHE is compulsory in independent schools, as they must meet the standards set out in the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISS).¹³⁹

Feedback gathered through the Call for Evidence and the Review's wider engagement highlighted widespread confusion about and conflation of the requirements for RSHE, PSHE and Citizenship education. Many respondents called for clearer guidance and about and expectations for each subject and the distinctions between them.

Concerns were also raised that, although RHE was made compulsory at primary in 2019 and RSHE at secondary, the PSHE components relating to personal finance and careers education were not included as statutory requirements.

The Review's recommendations for Citizenship seek to resolve some of these concerns. By introducing clearer requirements around financial literacy at both primary and

¹³⁹ Standard 2.2(d) personal, social, health and economic education which (i) reflects the school's aim and ethos; and (ii) encourages respect for other people, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the 2010 [Equality] Act.

secondary, we intend to ensure that all young people receive education on this important topic. Additionally, our recommendation to remove overlapping content from the Citizenship Programmes of Study at Key Stages 1 and 2 should help to clarify the distinct roles of RHE/RSHE and Citizenship. Alongside our proposal to make Citizenship statutory at primary level, these changes should support greater coherence across subjects and improve access to essential knowledge.

Separate legal duties apply to maintained schools and academies to secure independent careers guidance for all Year 7 to 13 students, covering the full range of education and training options. The funding agreements of all sixth form colleges and further education (FE) colleges include an equivalent requirement. We have not made any recommendations on these duties as they are outside the scope of the Review's [Terms of Reference](#).

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Introduces a statutory measure to ensure that all are taught a core body of essential Citizenship content at primary (including elements of financial and media literacy, and climate change and sustainability).
- Improves the efficacy of primary Citizenship by clarifying the purpose and content of the Key Stage 1 and 2 curriculum and removes any content that duplicates the new RSHE Programme of Study.
- Updates the secondary Programmes of Study for Citizenship to clarify their purpose, improve specificity and improve progression from Key Stage 3 to 4 or to the optional GCSE (including a renewed focus on financial literacy, media literacy, climate and sustainability, equality duties and challenging discrimination, and democracy and government).

Computing

- Computing is a statutory foundation subject from Key Stages 1 to 4.
- At Key Stage 4, Computing must be taught to all students following the national curriculum, and some will choose to take a qualification in it. Take-up of optional GCSE Computer Science was 3% in 2013/14¹⁴⁰ and 13% in 2024/25. Technical Award ICT take-up was 27% in 2015/16 and 3% in 2024/25.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ GCSE Computer Science was introduced in 2013/14.

¹⁴¹ There was a significant drop in take up of ICT Technical Awards from 30% in 2016/17 to 9% in 2017/18 due to the removal of the European Computer Driving License from performance tables.

- In 2024/25, 75% of state-funded schools entered students for the GCSE and 25% for the Technical Award. Overall, 81% of schools offer Computing-related qualifications.
- A Level Computer Science entries made up 1% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 2% in 2023/24.

Computing education must equip children and young people to participate fully in a technology-driven world and to thrive in the workplace, whether they want to pursue careers in the digital sector or use technology effectively in other fields. However, evidence suggests a decline between 2011/12 and 2024/25 in dedicated teaching time for Computing, falling from 4% to 3% of total teaching time at Key Stage 3 and from 5% to just 2% at Key Stage 4.¹⁴²

Despite reasonably wide access in schools,¹⁴³ take-up of Computing qualifications is relatively low at Key Stage 4. Following its introduction in 2013/14, GCSE Computer Science saw rapid initial growth, but entries have since plateaued at 12-13%. Technical Awards in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) also continue to see limited uptake.¹⁴⁴ Especially, take-up of Computing has declined among girls: take-up of GCSE Computer Science is now 20% for boys versus 6% for girls, and for the ICT Technical Award it is 5% for boys versus 2% for girls.¹⁴⁵

Computing must be taught to all students following the national curriculum to the end of Key Stage 4.¹⁴⁶ However, we have heard concerns that this requirement is not consistently met. Polling conducted for the Review found that approximately 80% of teachers from maintained schools report that Computing is taught at Key Stage 4 only to students taking GCSE Computer Science, while only around 10% of them say that Computing is taught to all Key Stage 4 students.¹⁴⁷ This suggests a significant gap between policy and practice.

Where Computing is being taught, we have heard concerns that it is being taught inconsistently. Apart from important issues of teacher supply, responses to the Call for Evidence suggest that this inconsistency stems from a lack of clarity in the

¹⁴² DfE (2025) - [Teaching time for Key Stage 3-4](#)

¹⁴³ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

¹⁴⁴ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Call for Evidence](#): (Curriculum subject trends over time); DfE (2025) - [Pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 2024/25](#); DfE (2025) - [Subject entries 2024/25](#)

¹⁴⁵ Findings from the SCARI (2024) - [The Future of Computing Education](#); [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

¹⁴⁶ This requirement will also apply to academies following the Government's Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill: DfE (2025) - [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill: policy summary notes](#)

¹⁴⁷ Polling of secondary senior leaders undertaken through Teacher Tapp commissioned by the Review. Results weighted to reflect national teacher and school demographics. To note, MATs have been excluded here.

secondary Programmes of Study, particularly at Key Stage 4, where they are exceptionally short (just three bullet points). Many respondents called for greater specificity to support stronger implementation and improve the quality of teaching. We therefore recommend that the Computing curriculum is updated to provide greater clarity at each key stage. Programmes of study should support students to develop the knowledge and skills they need to flourish as well-informed and competent participants in a digital world, and to develop the behaviours and confidence to use technologies (including AI) and systems creatively, safely and effectively.

Responses to the Call for Evidence called for a stronger integration of digital literacy across the curriculum, given the ubiquitous and cross-cutting nature of digital technology. While Computing should remain the primary subject for teaching computing knowledge and skills, we recognise that aspects of digital literacy are relevant to other subjects. Certain subjects can be enriched through the thoughtful application of computing knowledge.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, we see an opportunity to support students in applying the skills they learn in Computing by including clearly defined references to using computing skills in other subjects, where relevant and feasible, bearing in mind constraints on resources and school IT infrastructure. These references should be aligned with the Computing curriculum at each key stage to ensure coherence and progression.

Some responses highlighted the absence of AI and real-world applications in the Computing curriculum, suggesting updates are needed to keep the subject up to date. The current curriculum does not preclude teachers from integrating the latest developments into their teaching and at least one exam board already includes AI content in its GCSE Computer Science specification.¹⁴⁹ This is to be welcomed. AI is a transformative new technology and, while the Review considers the best approach to future-proofing students' learning is to ensure they have a strong foundation in core knowledge, we also recognise the need to integrate emerging technologies where appropriate. A revised Programme of Study should therefore specify the core computing concepts that students should have mastered at each stage and explicitly incorporate AI. GCSE Computing specifications should also include AI where they do not already. However, given the rapid pace of digital innovation, we recommend minimising references to specific products or versions of fast-evolving technologies, and allowing for light touch updates to the curriculum as needed (see [future curriculum reviews](#)).

Computing in the national curriculum encompasses computer science, information technology and digital literacy topics. There are concerns that the GCSE, which focuses primarily on computer science, does not represent the full breadth of the subject. Unlike other GCSEs that offer a broad and balanced foundation, GCSE Computer Science is seen as a more specialised qualification. Analysis of pre-pandemic data supports this

¹⁴⁸ Current examples include the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) in Geography, and 3-D modelling in Design and Technology.

¹⁴⁹ For example, Pearson Edexcel GCSE (2020) [GCSE L1 L2 Computer Science 2020 Specification](#)

concern; on average students achieved 0.72 of a grade less in GCSE Computer Science compared to their other subjects.¹⁵⁰ This discrepancy is worse for girls taking the GCSE, who typically achieved 1.11 of a grade lower than in their other subjects.¹⁵¹ This is a significant cause for concern, given the importance of digital and computing knowledge. There is evidence that a range of factors, many outside of the Review's remit, affect girls' engagement with Computer Science, including systemic factors such as gender stereotyping of computing and related careers, as well as factors more specifically school-based, such as pedagogy and resources.¹⁵² The Review Panel has also considered evidence that GCSE Computer Science is perceived to be less relevant to girls and that integrating more of the wider Computing curriculum would better engage a broader range of students, including girls.¹⁵³

Engagement with computing experts and organisations during the Review highlighted the potential benefits of a broader GCSE in Computing. Such a qualification could better reflect the range of knowledge and skills young people need and address current shortages in the digital economy. Research shows that nearly one in four (23%) businesses face skills gaps in basic digital skills, rising to over one in three (37%) with gaps in advanced digital skills.¹⁵⁴ Expert stakeholders have therefore called for the GCSE to cover a wider range of topics beyond Computer Science in order to appeal to a more diverse student population and to meet society's broader needs.

The Review therefore recommends introducing a revised GCSE in Computing that retains a foundation in Computer Science, while expanding to include content on the effective and critical application and creation of technology. This broader qualification should replace the current Computer Science GCSE and prepare young people for both specialist careers in computing and for applying digital technology and data across a wide range of fields. It should enable them to progress to further study, including A Level Computer Science, and/or to pursue a career in computing and digital fields.

It is important to note contextual challenges. A significant shortage of specialist Computing teachers affects the quality of provision.¹⁵⁵ Access to devices and

¹⁵⁰ The SCARI Computing Project (2024) - [GCSE results comparison](#)

¹⁵¹ The SCARI Computing Project (2024) - [GCSE results comparison](#)

¹⁵² National Centre for Computing Education (2023) - [Gender Insights in Computing Education](#)

¹⁵³ Evidence from the SCARI (2024) - [Subject Choice, Attainment and Representation in Computing project](#), found that at Key Stage 3 girls were significantly more interested than boys in topics such as digital media, project work and presentation work. Raspberry Pi (2022) – [Using relevant contexts to engage girls in the Computing classroom](#) also found that contextualising computing skills can make the subject more relevant for women and girls.

¹⁵⁴ WorldSkills UK & Enginuity (2021) - [Disconnected: Exploring the digital skills gap](#) - In this report, World Skills UK define 'basic digital skills', as 'a proficiency with common software such as Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint; ability to process digital information and content; ability to communicate digitally; and the ability to learn new digital skills etc'. They define 'advanced digital skills' as 'a good knowledge across a range of digital skills, as well as in-depth specialist knowledge in one or more area, such as computer aided design, coding, specialist digital software etc.'

¹⁵⁵ Demonstrated by the fact that, in 2024/25, only 66% of teachers teaching Computer Science in Key Stage 3 had a relevant post-A Level qualification; for ICT this was 48%. Whilst this is less severe for Key

infrastructure also varies in schools, although we note that the DfE has made £45 million available to improve schools' digital connectivity to close the 'digital divide'.¹⁵⁶ These realities must be considered, but we must ensure that the curriculum is ambitious and provides children and young people with the knowledge and skills they will need.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Provides greater clarity in the Computing curriculum about what students should be taught at each key stage so that they build the essential digital literacy required for future life and work.
- Replaces GCSE Computer Science with a Computing GCSE which reflects the full breadth of the Computing curriculum and supports students to develop the digital skills they need.
- Reviews where digital skills and technologies have become an integral part of subject disciplines other than Computing. Where this is the case, it should determine whether to include this specific digital content in those subjects' Programmes of Study, sequenced and aligned with the Computing curriculum.

Design and Technology, including Cooking and Nutrition

Design and Technology (D&T)

- At Key Stages 1 to 3, D&T is a compulsory foundation subject.
- At Key Stage 4, there is an entitlement to study D&T. Take-up of any D&T (including Food Technology) GCSE¹⁵⁷ was 40% in 2009/10. Take-up of GCSE D&T was 11% and 8% for GCSE Food Preparation and Nutrition in 2024/25.
- In 2024/25, 57% of state-funded schools entered students for GCSE D&T.
- A Level D&T entries made up 2% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 1% in 2023/24.

Stage 4 the problem persists: 84% of teachers teaching Computer Science in Key Stage 4 had a relevant post-A Level qualification; for ICT this was 72%. DfE (2025) - [School workforce in England](#)

¹⁵⁶ The Education Hub (2025) - [How we're breaking down the digital divide in schools](#)

¹⁵⁷ From 2009/10 to 2017/18, GCSE D&T had several different optional strands: Electronic Products, Food Technology, Graphic Products, Industrial Technology, Product Design, Resistant Materials Technology, Systems & Control and Textiles Technology. One D&T GCSE in all material areas was introduced in 2017/18, with the exception of Food Preparation and Nutrition, which became a standalone GCSE in 2016/17.

The evidence gathered during the Review suggests that D&T in schools has long been in poor health. We have seen a substantial decline in entries for GCSE D&T since 2005,¹⁵⁸ and many stakeholders attribute this decline to the omission of D&T from accountability measures, such as the English Baccalaureate (EBacc). However, uptake had already been declining before the EBacc was introduced,¹⁵⁹ especially given D&T ceased to be a compulsory GCSE subject in 2000.¹⁶⁰

Evidence indicates that D&T may not be offered consistently across schools. Although the national curriculum (and therefore the Key Stage 4 entitlement) is not currently compulsory in academies or free schools, Ofsted expects them to offer a curriculum that is similar in 'breadth and ambition' to the national curriculum and it inspects against this requirement. Figure 5. Percentage of state-funded mainstream schools with no entries into GCSE D&T in 2024/25 shows that 37% of state-funded mainstream schools had no GCSE entries in D&T in 2024/25. This is more pronounced in free schools (57%) and sponsor-led academies (52%), but 35% of foundation mainstream schools, 31% of voluntary aided schools and 22% of community schools (who have to follow the national curriculum) also did not enter any students for the GCSE.¹⁶¹ Omnibus survey data shows that 17% of Key Stage 3 students wanted to study D&T but were unable to, the highest rate among subjects in the national curriculum.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Call for Evidence](#): (Curriculum subject trends over time); DfE (2025) - [Pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 2024/25](#); DfE (2025) - [Subject entries 2024/25](#)

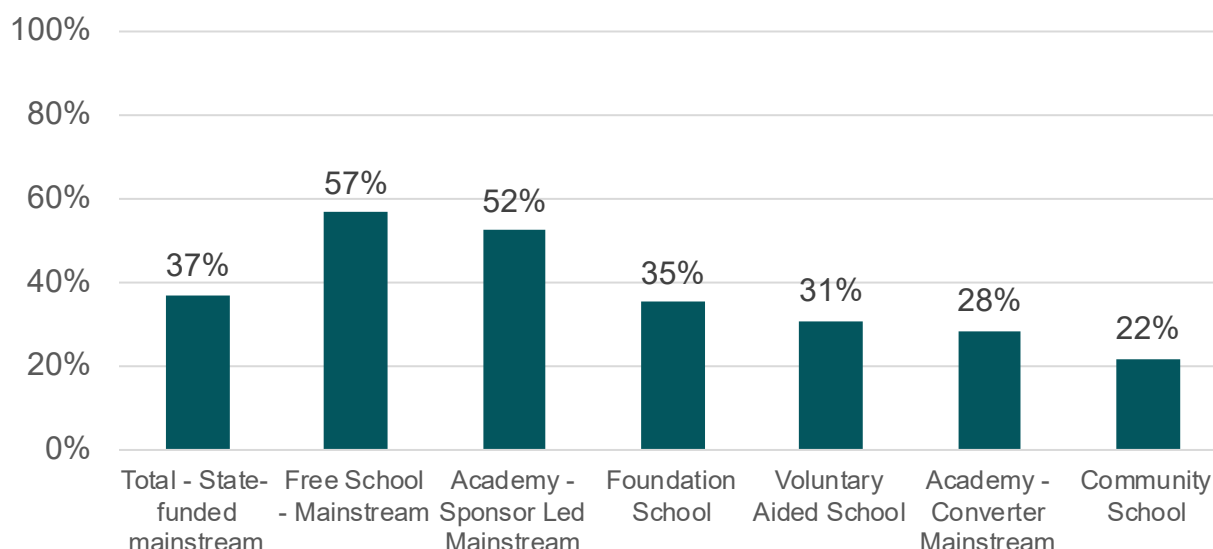
¹⁵⁹ Ofqual (2025) - [GCSE outcomes in England](#)

¹⁶⁰ D&T Association (2015) - [Why has the number of teenagers taking design and technology GCSE dropped?](#); JCQ (2009) - [Entry trends for GCSE, Applied GCSE and Entry Level Certificate Results, Summer 2009](#)

¹⁶¹ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

¹⁶² DfE (2023) - [Parent, pupil and learner panel omnibus surveys for 2022 to 2023](#) – see table 4 in 'Parent, Pupil and Learner Panel - wave 5 - pupils and learners' in the underlying data for responses from year 7 to 9 pupils

Figure 5. Percentage of state-funded mainstream schools with no entries into GCSE D&T in 2024/25¹⁶³



This inequality of access is especially pronounced along lines of disadvantage. In 2024/25, 60% of state-funded mainstream schools with the highest proportion of disadvantaged students had no entries for GCSE D&T, compared to less than a fifth (17%) of schools with the lowest proportion of disadvantaged students.¹⁶⁴

We recognise that the decrease in the number of schools offering D&T is likely to reflect a range of factors, rather than necessarily indicating a reduction in how schools value D&T. It is therefore unlikely that this complex issue can be tackled solely through this Review. We have heard that many of the barriers extend beyond the curriculum, such as a lack of specialist staff, lack of infrastructure and the cost of delivery. The lack of specialist D&T staff is reflected in the fact that, in 2023/24, only 27% of the initial teacher training recruitment target for D&T was met.¹⁶⁵ Since the Government's Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024 contains a provision that all state-funded schools, including academies, will be required to teach the national curriculum,¹⁶⁶ these challenges may become more pronounced. The DfE will need to consider how to tackle them during the implementation of any curriculum changes following the conclusion of the Review.

Although there are wider barriers to delivering D&T, changes can be made to curriculum content to refresh the subject and make it more relevant and easier for schools to deliver.

¹⁶³ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

¹⁶⁴ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

¹⁶⁵ HoC Education Committee (2024) - [Teacher recruitment, training and retention](#)

¹⁶⁶ DfE (2025) - [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill: policy summary notes](#)

The Call for Evidence showed that primary D&T is broadly working well and that content is relevant and ‘deliverable with guidance’ by non-specialist teachers.¹⁶⁷ However, respondents highlighted that the transition from Key Stage 2 to 3 remains problematic, with Key Stage 3 not building on what has been achieved earlier.

Stakeholders highlighted that the purpose of study and aims¹⁶⁸ of the D&T curriculum were becoming increasingly outdated. Experts told us that the current aims should be updated to clarify the subject’s distinctive and practical nature. They wanted the aims to specify the core knowledge and skills which build D&T capability, to better support students to think like designers and engineers. This was especially noted for Key Stage 3. Stakeholders argued that updates were needed to support progression to GCSE and beyond, and that they should explicitly embed attributes such as problem solving, iteration and testing.¹⁶⁹

Stakeholders also told the Review of the importance of decision-making in relation to material selection. They stated that pupils and students should experience working with a range of materials, guided by a contextual understanding of why the materials have been chosen. Stakeholders noted that this is often not the case at present, as many pupils and students are simply required to memorise a list of materials and their properties in isolation. They argued that changes in this area would align the D&T curriculum better with modern, real-world design practice.

Stakeholders also suggested that social responsibility and inclusive design should be more explicitly embedded.¹⁷⁰ They argued that D&T has the potential to be a key subject for learning green knowledge and skills,¹⁷¹ teaching children and young people how they can use D&T to solve problems and create solutions for societal and environmental issues. However, stakeholders highlighted that the current programme of study for D&T does not explicitly mention sustainability or the benefits of a circular economy (see [climate education](#)).

Finally, stakeholders have called for clearer expectations about a ‘final product’, especially at Key Stage 3. They said this should be alongside a clear emphasis on the full design process, including design content and theory. Following the last curriculum review, the focus is on the process of iterative design and ‘prototyping’ to solve real-world

¹⁶⁷ See, for example, the Design & Technology Association’s response to the Call for Evidence (2024), which was informed by over 200 teacher submissions: [Curriculum review response](#)

¹⁶⁸ As outlined at DfE (2023) - [National curriculum in England: design and technology programmes of study](#)

¹⁶⁹ Design and technology association - D&T Association (2023) - [Reimagining design and technology report](#)

¹⁷⁰ ‘Social responsibility’ in the design sector refers to a broad set of societal considerations that go into ‘good’ design, such as inclusivity (user needs including abilities, ages, culture), environmental sustainability (materials and processes, reducing waste), and ethical practices (labour practices, ethical sourcing of materials, transparency, repairability).

¹⁷¹ For example, concepts such as material responsibility, circularity, energy, product lifecycles, and manufacturing processes.

problems, although requirements to create high-quality products have been retained.¹⁷² This Review recognises young people's satisfaction and enjoyment in realising a finished article. These opportunities are important and should be maintained. However, we understand that some confusion exists about what creating 'high-quality prototypes and products' means in practice, and we are clear that understanding the design process and developing iterative design skills should remain fundamental.

We therefore recommend updating the purpose of study and aims of D&T to reflect these changes and clarifications, so that it is seen as an exciting and ambitious subject that can introduce students to skills in design and making, as well as prepare them for technical careers in design, creative and advanced manufacturing industries.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Rewrites the D&T subject aims to be more aspirational, and clarifies the purpose of study to focus on the subject's distinct body of knowledge and capabilities, with a particular focus on Key Stage 3.
- Refines the D&T curriculum and GCSE subject content to:
 - Explicitly include how to achieve sustainable resolutions to design challenges.
 - Embed the teaching of social responsibility and inclusive design explicitly within the curriculum, as appropriate to the key stage, throughout the design process.
 - Support the development of critical decision-making skills about material selection.
 - Ensure that realising designs remains integral to pupils' experience of D&T.

Cooking and Nutrition

- At Key Stages 1 to 3, Cooking and Nutrition forms part of the statutory D&T Programmes of Study.
- At Key Stage 4, GCSE Food Preparation and Nutrition is a separate qualification and is not part of the Key Stage 4 D&T entitlement.
- From 2009/10 to 2016/17, GCSE D&T had a Food Technology strand which saw a decline in take-up from 10% to 5% during that time. Take-up of the standalone

¹⁷² DfE (2013) - [National curriculum in England: design and technology programmes of study](#)

GCSE in Food Preparation and Nutrition was 8% in 2017/18 and 8% in 2024/25.¹⁷³

- In 2024/25, 46% of state-funded schools entered students for GCSE Food Preparation and Nutrition.¹⁷⁴

Cooking and Nutrition teaches pupils how to cook and apply the principle of nutrition and healthy eating, a crucial life skill that enables them to feed themselves and others affordably and healthily, now and in later life.¹⁷⁵ Since 2010/11, teaching time for Cooking and Nutrition at Key Stage 3 has consistently comprised between 0.7 and 0.8% of all hours taught.¹⁷⁶ Stakeholders argue that common school timetabling, which incorporates D&T 'rotational' or 'carousel courses' of just a few weeks each year, inhibits effective progression and results in less teaching time for Cooking and Nutrition. The food teaching sector has called for it to become a standalone subject, with 73.5%¹⁷⁷ of respondents to a Food Teachers Centre survey saying that they would like to see it removed from D&T.¹⁷⁸

The Review does not recommend separating out Cooking and Nutrition from D&T at Key Stages 1 to 3 due to existing pressures on curriculum time and the additional burden that this would place on schools. However, we heard through the Call for Evidence and sector engagement that the Cooking and Nutrition section of the D&T Programme of Study is currently under-specified. Respondents argued that this lack of detail results in inconsistent and patchy provision and, as a result, too many pupils are being denied the opportunity to master the subject's core knowledge and skills. According to stakeholders, this is especially concerning given the skills shortages in the UK food systems sector.¹⁷⁹

Many stakeholders have stressed the need for additional wording in the Programme of Study about practical cookery to emphasise that it is not only about how to prepare food. Respondents to the Call for Evidence identified topics that are either not as prominent as they should be or not included at all, such as food hygiene, healthy eating and sustainability. Although some students will pursue a qualification in Food Preparation and Nutrition at Key Stage 4, and so preceding key stages should prepare them for this, many students' Cooking and Nutrition education ends at Key Stage 3. The Review feels,

¹⁷³ From 2009/10 to 2017/18, GCSE D&T had several different optional strands: Electronic Products, Food Technology, Graphic Products, Industrial Technology, Product Design, Resistant Materials Technology, Systems & Control and Textiles Technology. One D&T GCSE in all material areas was introduced in 2017/18, with the exception of Food Preparation and Nutrition, which became a own standalone GCSE in 2016/17.

¹⁷⁴ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex). To note, GCSE Food Preparation and Nutrition is categorised under the subject group 'Food Technology'.

¹⁷⁵ DfE (2013) - [National curriculum in England: design and technology programmes of study - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁷⁶ DfE (2025) - [Teaching time Key Stage 3-4](#)

¹⁷⁷ Of 517 respondents, the majority of whom were Food teachers.

¹⁷⁸ The Food Teachers Centre (2023) - [Food education – fit for the future?](#)

¹⁷⁹ Food Standards Agency (2023) - [Impact of labour shortages: Labour shortages in UK food systems](#)

therefore, that the focus should be on learning about food and nutrition, including how to cook healthy, nutritious meals, which is also an essential building block for further study and professional routes.

We recommend renaming 'Cooking and Nutrition' as 'Food and Nutrition' and drafting a new set of subject aims so that young people receive a thorough grounding in practical cooking skills, as well as a broader understanding of concepts such as food hygiene and sustainability. To accompany this, we recommend further detail in the Programmes of Study for Key Stages 1 to 3 about developing the knowledge and skills students need to live a healthy, balanced life, as well as those necessary for further study (with a view to future careers). This should not mean removing essential cooking content, but rather that the curriculum should set out more clearly the full breadth of foundational knowledge and skills that students will need throughout their lives, and which will allow them to make informed food choices as individuals.

Finally, we have heard concern that the removal of A Levels in Food Technology and Food and Nutrition in 2016 has removed routes for learners interested in careers in food science, nutrition, dietetics and food technology.¹⁸⁰ There are currently limited alternative level 3 qualifications in this sector, with the focus mainly on hospitality and catering. We therefore recommend that the Government reviews the current level 3 vocational qualifications in Food and Nutrition and considers whether our recommended changes to introduce V Levels offers an opportunity to review this (see [V Levels](#) recommendations).

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Renames the subject 'Food and Nutrition' and ensures it has its own aims and purpose of study that better reflect what it covers and its discrete identity within D&T.
- Ensures that sufficient detail in the curriculum sets clear expectations about what should be taught at each key stage to reflect the fact that the subject develops skills for life as well as progression to further study.
- Reviews the level 3 vocational options for food science to determine the best means of ensuring that the needs of learners are met and that there is a strong 'pipeline' into higher education and careers.

¹⁸⁰ Food teachers centre (2021) - [A Level Food: The Gap that Remains](#)

English, including Drama

English

- English is a statutory core curriculum subject throughout Key Stages 1 to 4.
- At the end of Key Stage 2 in 2024/25, 75% of pupils met the expected standard in reading, 72% in writing and 73% in grammar, punctuation and spelling. In 2024/25, 80% of pupils met the expected standard in the Phonics Screening Check in year 1, increasing to 89% by the end of Year 2.
- Any English¹⁸¹ GCSE take-up was 94% in 2009/10; for GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature, take-up was 91% and 87% respectively in 2024/25.
- In 2024/25, 98% of state-funded schools had entries into GCSE English Language and 93% into GCSE English Literature.
- A Level English entries (including A Level English Language, A Level English Literature and A Level English Language and Literature) made up 11% of all entries in 2009/10¹⁸² and 7% in 2023/24.
 - A Level English Language entries made up 3% of A Level entries in 2015/16 and 2% in 2023/24.
 - A Level English Literature entries made up 6% of A Level entries in 2015/16 and 5% in 2023/24.
 - A Level English Language and Literature entries made up 2% of A Level entries in 2015/16 and 1% in 2023/24.

Children's progress in literacy and English is assessed through the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) in Key Stage 1, and end of Key Stage 2 assessments in English reading, writing and grammar, punctuation and spelling (GPS). PISA 2022 compared the performance of 15-year-olds in 81 countries and economies around the world and found that England's average score in reading (496) was significantly above the OECD average (476).¹⁸³ Attainment in reading at the end of Key Stage 2 has been recovering and has returned to pre-pandemic levels.¹⁸⁴ The percentage of pupils who met the expected standard in the Phonics Screening Check in Year 1 is nearing pre-pandemic (2018/19) levels of 82%, standing at 80% in 2024/25.¹⁸⁵ The effectiveness of phonics is well

¹⁸¹ Data on separate GCSE English subjects (Language; Literature; and Language & Literature) are not available for 2009/10 because of the way English entries were recorded.

¹⁸² Due to the way English entries were recorded, data on separate A Level English subjects (Language; Literature; and Language & Literature) were available only from 2015/16 onwards.

¹⁸³ PISA (2022) - [National report for England](#)

¹⁸⁴ DfE (2025) - [Key stage 2 attainment: National headlines, Academic year 2024/25](#)

¹⁸⁵ DfE (2025) - [Phonics screening check attainment 2024/25](#). Some pupils take the PSC in Year 2 (see [2025 phonics screening check assessment and reporting arrangements - GOV.UK](#)). When considering all

evidenced,¹⁸⁶ and respondents to the Call for Evidence generally praised the role of phonics in teaching literacy.

However, attainment in writing and in GPS has still not fully returned to pre-pandemic levels, and gaps remain in English attainment across key stages. Over a quarter of pupils did not meet the expected standard in writing (28%) or in GPS (27%) in 2024/25 by the end of Key Stage 2, and one quarter (25%) of pupils did not meet the expected standard in reading.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, 31% of students do not achieve level 2 in English by age 16 each year and 20% do not achieve this by age 19 (Table 3). This is significant, since level 2 English, indicated by a GCSE grade 4, is typically required for access to further study and employment.

Table 3. Percentage of learners not achieving level 2 English by age 16 and 19, split by FSM status, 2018/19¹⁸⁸

	Age 16	Age 19
All Students	31%	20%
Free school meals	52%	39%
No free school meals	27%	17%

Uptake at A Level has been declining. Between 2009/10 and 2014/15, entries to A Levels in English (Language, Literature and combined) consistently represented around 11% of entries, but this had declined to 7% by 2023/24.¹⁸⁹

The Call for Evidence highlighted several areas for improvement. First, a clear dissonance exists between highly specified curriculum content at Key Stages 1 and 2 and under-specified content at Key Stages 3 and 4.¹⁹⁰ Consultation with expert stakeholders indicates that this leads to challenge at transition because, for example, literacy-focused content at Key Stages 1 and 2 is not always reviewed and built on at subsequent key stages. This can mean that pupils who did not master key skills and knowledge by the end of Key Stage 2 are left behind. We therefore recommend that the curriculum provides greater clarity and precision on the aims of each key stage so that both English and literacy are developed sequentially and coherently. We recommend that

pupils who have taken the PSC by the end of Year 2, a similar trend is observed, with 89% reaching the expected standard in 2024/25 compared with 91% doing so in 2018/19.

¹⁸⁶ EEF (2021) – Phonics, [Teaching and Learning Toolkit](#)

¹⁸⁷ DfE (2025) - [Key Stage 2 attainment: National headlines, Academic year 2024/25](#)

¹⁸⁸ DfE (2025) - [Attainment by characteristics](#) – based on the cohort of learners reaching academic age 18 in 2018/19, the latest cohort of learners not affected by COVID-19--related grading changes.

¹⁸⁹ DfE (2025) - [A level time series](#)

¹⁹⁰ DfE (2014) - [National curriculum in England: English programmes of study](#)

particular attention is given to the Key Stage 3 Programme of Study so that it can better support transition.

Respondents also called for more specificity in oracy¹⁹¹ and Drama, recognising these as beneficial for life and work.¹⁹² Although requirements for speaking and listening and Drama exist in the current English Programmes of Study, responses to the Call for Evidence highlighted that lack of specificity can lead to variation in the quality of teaching. Ofsted also found that spoken language is not always well understood or taught effectively.¹⁹³ We therefore recommend that, throughout the English curriculum, requirements for speaking and listening are given greater clarity and the curricular aims and outcomes are better specified. This should be supported by the creation of an oracy framework to give further guidance (see [oracy](#)).

We also heard that the English curriculum contains a high volume of grammatical content and terminology, assessed by the GPS test at the end of Key Stage 2.¹⁹⁴ For example, pupils are required to identify and name grammatical constructs, such as fronted adverbials, the subjunctive mood and the present progressive tense. Responses to our Call for Evidence suggest that this content is advanced and overly theoretical at this key stage, disengages pupils, and, crucially, does not help them to write well, with significant time often dedicated to teaching grammar in isolation at the expense of teaching effective application. This is a particular concern given that over a quarter (28%) of pupils do not meet the expected standard in writing at Key Stage 2.¹⁹⁵ The Call for Evidence responses suggested there is too much emphasis given to reproducing textual features rather than developing composition skills. We note that the DfE is acting to address weaknesses in writing, and we welcome the publication of its writing framework.

We are clear that a thorough knowledge and understanding of grammar is crucial to success, not just in English but across all subjects. We therefore recommend that the grammatical content in the primary Programmes of Study should be reviewed and streamlined in order to place greater emphasis on content that supports pupils' ability to read and write effectively. This should include a stronger focus on using and applying grammar rather than on identifying theoretical constructs by name, which is not developmentally appropriate or meaningful. This should help to ensure a stronger foundation in literacy while avoiding curriculum overload. We also recommend that the current Key Stage 2 GPS test should be amended, retaining some elements of the GPS

¹⁹¹ As detailed in [Oracy](#), the Review considers oracy to incorporate speaking, listening and communication, including verbal as well as other forms of non-written communication such as sign-language, non-verbal and Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC).

¹⁹² Oracy Education Commission (2024) - [We need to talk](#)

¹⁹³ Ofsted (2024) - [Telling the story: the English education subject report](#)

¹⁹⁴ Note that the assessment of grammar, punctuation and spelling is not entirely separate from teacher-assessed writing as the teacher assessment framework evaluates the extent to which pupils employ these features correctly.

¹⁹⁵ DfE (2025) - [Key stage 2 attainment: National headlines, Academic year 2024/25](#)

test, but including new tasks to more effectively assess writing composition and the use of grammar and punctuation (see [primary assessment](#)).

It is essential that knowledge gaps in reading, writing, grammar, punctuation and spelling are diagnosed as early as possible. We encourage all schools to use the non-statutory Key Stage 1 tests to provide greater insights for Key Stage 2 teachers. We also recommend introducing a diagnostic test, in Year 8, to assess key capabilities, aiming to support teachers in identifying and tackling areas of weakness in good time before students progress to Key Stage 4 (see [secondary assessment](#)).

We also heard two key areas of feedback relating to GCSE English. Almost all students are entered for English Language at the end of Key Stage 4 (91%), and the majority also take English Literature (87%). However, stakeholders and responses to the Call for Evidence identified substantial duplication between the two qualifications, with the study of literary texts a significant feature of GCSE English Language. Stakeholders overwhelmingly argued for significant changes to this qualification, including greater use of a broader and more relevant range of text types, and a greater focus on the study of language.¹⁹⁶

The Review therefore believes that a fundamental change to GCSE English Language is needed, achieved through changes to the Key Stage 4 English Programme of Study. We propose that the revised GCSE English Language should have a distinct purpose from GCSE English Literature, focusing on the study of the nature and expression of language (including spoken language). The range of text types studied in English Language should be expanded to include multi-modal and ‘ephemeral’ texts (such as online content and print media), an understanding of which is essential for navigating the contemporary world.¹⁹⁷

The written assessment should reflect, in two ways, the greater focus on the nature and expression of language and more diverse text types. First, the unseen texts used for language analysis should avoid direct duplication with English Literature exam content. Second, extended writing tasks should draw from a broader range of writing genres to increase students’ opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities. We believe that these changes will better reflect the purpose of English Language and equip students to use language more effectively to express themselves. It should also provide an opportunity to support young people in their development of media literacy skills, particularly in learning how the nature and expression of language can influence readers. See [media literacy](#).

¹⁹⁶ English Association (2024) - [EA response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review call for evidence](#); Cambridge OCR (2024) - [Striking the balance: A review of 11–16 Curriculum and Assessment in England](#); National Association for Teaching of English (2024) - [NATE calls for reforms to English Curriculum and Assessment](#)

¹⁹⁷ Cambridge OCR (2024) - [Striking the balance: A review of 11–16 Curriculum and Assessment in England](#)

As noted above, GCSE English Literature has seen a marked increase in entries since 2015/16, the year in which Progress 8 was introduced to all schools. However, take-up at A Level has fallen. English Literature entries made up 6% of all state-school A Level entries in 2015/16, falling slightly to 5% by 2023/24.¹⁹⁸ Many respondents to our Call for Evidence and expert stakeholders argued that a ‘dry’ curriculum diet in GCSE English has contributed to a reduced enthusiasm for English at A Level. They suggested that greater representation within, and diversity of, GCSE texts would engage students more effectively. This approach has been found to support students’ engagement and outcomes, alongside empathy and understanding of others.¹⁹⁹

The current Key Stage 4 Programme of Study for English allows for the inclusion of diverse texts. The GCSE English Literature subject content document requires students to study at least one play by Shakespeare, at least one 19th century novel, fiction or drama from the British Isles from 1914 onwards and a selection of post-1789 poetry (which must include representative Romantic poetry, consist of a minimum of 300 lines of poetry and at least 15 poems).²⁰⁰ Exam boards specify the texts approved in their GCSE specifications, and these include a range of texts that teachers can select. However, we have heard concern that, in practice, the texts selected often lack breadth and representation. Due to a lack of resource and capacity (and, for some, a relative lack of confidence in teaching new works), teachers often rely on texts that they have taught for a long time.

The Review Panel believes it to be crucial that all students, regardless of background, continue to study our rich literary heritage. This should include Shakespeare and classic novels that explore enduring social and political themes and debates which remain at the heart of our culture and politics. Without access to these established works, young people risk missing out on important cultural capital, as well as broader enrichment. However, given the breadth that exists within English literature, the curriculum must also allow space for teachers to exercise autonomy in selecting from a broader range of texts and authors, so that students are able to see themselves in the curriculum, as well as be exposed to a wide range of perspectives that serve to broaden their horizons.

We believe the curriculum can better promote a wider range of literary voices while retaining core texts. Alongside the continued study of Shakespeare and 19th century literature, students should have the opportunity to explore a more diverse array of authors from the British Isles without adding to the mandatory volume of content. We also recommend reviewing the specified amounts and types of poetry studied to reduce prescription and encourage more flexibility in the poetry studied.

¹⁹⁸ DfE (2025) - [A level time series](#)

¹⁹⁹ Penguin books UK and Runnymede trust (2021) - [Lit in Colour](#); Dee, T.S., & Penner, E.K. (2017) - [The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance](#)

²⁰⁰ DfE (2013) - [GCSE English Literature: subject content and assessment objectives](#)

In addition, we note that this ambition could be supported in a number of additional ways, such as exemplification resources (such as those produced by Oak National Academy) and encouraging publishers and exam boards to continue to offer a wide selection of texts and accompanying materials.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Ensures that the English curriculum sets out a clearer purpose, with more clarity and specificity at each key stage, including clarifying the distinction between English and literacy. This should include more clearly drawing out curriculum requirements for speaking and listening, as well as Drama. In particular, more clarity and specificity at Key Stage 3 should improve coherence between primary and secondary.
 - To support this, we recommend that the Government introduce an oracy framework to support practice and to complement the existing frameworks for reading and writing.²⁰¹
- Reviews grammatical content to determine what content should be re-sequenced to later key stages, and what content should be removed entirely at Key Stage 2 to enable a greater focus on grammar in use rather than grammar in theory.
- Replaces the current GPS test with an amended test, which retains some elements of the current GPS test but with new tasks to better assess composition and application of grammar and punctuation.
 - Once the new test is established in schools, the DfE may wish to consider whether the role of the test in accountability should remain as stands, or whether any changes, such as including the new test in headline measures, should be explored.
- Introduces a diagnostic test in English, to be taken in Year 8, with the aim of supporting teachers to identify and address any areas of weakness before gaps widen further.
- Makes significant changes to the Key Stage 4 English Programme of Study and the GCSE English Language subject content, introducing greater clarity of purpose to focus English Language more clearly on the nature and expression of language, and to support critical analysis of a wider variety of text types and genres, including multi-modal and ephemeral text types.

²⁰¹ DfE (2023) - [The reading framework](#); DfE (2025) - [The writing framework](#)

- Reviews the genres specified in the English Key Stage 4 Programme of Study and GCSE English Literature subject content to ensure that students continue to study texts drawn from the recognised body of English literature (including the expectation of at least one play by Shakespeare, a selection of poetry, fiction or drama from the British Isles from 1914 onwards, and at least one 19th century novel), and that they also benefit from studying texts drawn from the full breadth of our literary heritage, including more diverse and representative texts. This should not increase the volume of content.

Drama

- Drama is a statutory part of the English curriculum from Key Stages 1 to 4.
- At Key Stage 4, the statutory entitlement to study an arts subject includes Drama, as a standalone subject separate from English. GCSE Drama take-up was 13% in 2009/10 and 7% 2024/25. Take-up of the Speech and Drama pathway within the Performing Arts Technical Award was 2% in 2015/16 and 2% in 2024/25.
- In 2024/25, 57% of state-funded schools had entries into the GCSE qualification and 21% in the Technical Award. Overall, 74% of state-funded schools offered Drama.
- A Level Drama entries made up 2% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 1% in 2023/24.

Drama has strong links to oracy and presenting skills and provides an important introduction to the performing arts. It is a valuable part of a broad and balanced curriculum that builds students' confidence and prepares them for later life.²⁰²

The current English curriculum content was last updated in 2013, which significantly reduced the amount of Drama content within the Key Stage 1 to 4 curriculum. This was criticised at the time for not recognising Drama as a discipline in its own right.²⁰³ Responses to our Call for Evidence argued that the resulting lack of clarity and specificity in the requirements for Drama means that it is not clear how the subject should be taught, what essential knowledge and skills pupils should acquire or what outcomes are expected at the end of each key stage.

²⁰² Oracy Education Commission (2024) - [We need to talk](#)

²⁰³ Department for Education consultation response (2013) - [Reforming the national curriculum in England](#)

The Key Stage 1 and 2 Programmes of Study require all pupils to participate in and gain knowledge, skills and understanding associated with the artistic practice of Drama.²⁰⁴ We heard that, in primary schools, drama and performance tend to be strongly valued and practised.

Teaching time for Drama at Key Stage 3 has remained at broadly 3% of total teaching time, which is around one fifth of the teaching time for English (which has ranged from 13% to 15%).²⁰⁵ At Key Stage 3, students are expected to learn how the work of dramatists is communicated effectively through performance and how to improvise, rehearse and perform plays. Evidence from Ofsted suggests that, in most secondary schools, Drama is taught separately from English at Key Stage 3 and is usually grouped with other performing arts subjects rather than with English.²⁰⁶ However, we have heard that schools are filling the current national curriculum gap with their own Drama curricula because of a lack of detail in the Key Stage 3 English Programme of Study. This can be positive in terms of enabling access to Drama, and in many cases may reflect outstanding, innovative practice. However, it may also mean that the quality and quantity of Key Stage 3 Drama provision vary, especially for students who do not experience it as a discrete subject, and it may not always be preparing them well for GCSE. This is felt to be deterring students both from taking the GCSE and from progressing to A Level, with A Level Drama having seen a significant decline in entries over recent years.²⁰⁷

We therefore recommend that Drama has its own discrete section within the English Programme of Study at Key Stage 3 to set out expectations more clearly and ensure equitable access to Drama education. Some additional specificity about Drama should also be added to the Key Stage 1 and 2 English Programmes of Study, setting out existing Drama content more clearly to build solid foundations and support transition to Key Stage 3.

Drama has relatively low take-up at GCSE and entries have declined in recent years,²⁰⁸ whilst take-up of the Speech and Drama pathway within the Performing Arts Technical Award²⁰⁹ has remained relatively stable. These trends are often attributed to the introduction of the EBacc, although evidence for this is mixed. Other factors are likely to also be at play, such as the supply of specialist secondary teachers.²¹⁰

GCSE Drama should allow students to perform, devise and respond to drama and theatre; the current GCSE subject content reflects this. However, Call for Evidence

²⁰⁴ DfE (2014) - [National curriculum in England: English programmes of study](#)

²⁰⁵ DfE (2025) - [Teaching time Key Stage 3-4](#)

²⁰⁶ Ofsted (2024) - [Telling the story: the English education subject report - GOV.UK](#)

²⁰⁷ DfE (2025) - [A level time series](#)

²⁰⁸ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Call for Evidence](#): (Curriculum subject trends over time); DfE (2025) - [Pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 2024/25](#); DfE (2025) - [Subject entries 2024/25](#)

²⁰⁹ There is also a Dance pathway in the Performing Arts Technical Award, which is reported separately: [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Call for Evidence](#): (Curriculum subject trends over time); DfE (2025) - [Pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 2024/25](#); DfE (2025) - [Subject entries 2024/25](#)

²¹⁰ DfE (2025) - [Initial teacher training census](#)

submissions argued that there is currently too much theoretical content and assessment in the GCSE and too much written assessment, so that the focus on creating and devising works and practical performance is insufficient. Knowledge of practical skills such as performing and production are assessed partly through a written exam (worth 40% of the GCSE); and although 60% of Drama is assessed through non-exam assessment, a significant proportion of this non-exam assessment can be written (although this is, to some extent, the choice of the school).²¹¹

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Updates the Key Stage 3 English Programme of Study to include a discrete section on Drama. This should include more detail to provide greater clarity about expectations for performing, creating and responding to dramatic works. Greater specificity about Drama should be added to the Key Stage 1 and 2 English Programmes of Study, aiming to build solid foundations and support transition to Key Stage 3.
- Reviews the subject content for GCSE Drama, assessment methods and the balance of assessment to ensure that the qualification is up to date, suited to the discipline and enables progression to further study and careers in drama and theatre.

Geography

- Geography is a statutory foundation subject from Key Stages 1 to 3.
- At Key Stage 4, there is an entitlement to study a humanities subject, including Geography. GCSE Geography take up was 26% in 2009/10 and 41% in 2024/25.
- In 2024/25, 89% of state-funded schools entered students for GCSE Geography.
- A Level Geography entries made up 4% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 4% in 2023/24.

Geography has undergone significant improvement in recent years and is now widely acknowledged and valued, not only by the sector and subject experts, but also by the

²¹¹ For the NEA, alongside performance, students have to produce a portfolio (a 'devising log') which can be audio, visual, written, or a mix of these. This can mean that up to 70% of the total marks for GCSE Drama, when combining the examined and non-examined assessment, can be awarded for written material. Ofqual (2017) - [GCSE Subject Level Conditions for Drama](#)

public.²¹² The real-world focus of the Geography curriculum is one of its key strengths, allowing young people to gain significant insights into contemporary world issues and evaluate potential solutions to pressing global challenges.²¹³ As such, the subject remains popular in terms of take-up for both GCSE and A Level and, as Ofsted observes, teaching is now ‘more ambitious and better represents the distinctive nature of the subject’.²¹⁴

It is important that these improvements are maintained. However, the Review heard of some limited areas for improvement. Responses to the Call for Evidence, engagement with subject bodies, sector experts and research reports have shown that some GCSE subject content in Geography is overly dense and repetitive, with some that is duplicated and outdated. There is repetition in certain topics (for example hazards, ecosystems and development), limiting opportunities for deeper understanding of key geographical concepts, processes and interconnections. We therefore recommend light-touch attention to the Geography Programme of Study and GCSE subject content to remove unnecessary repetition and update content to support greater use of contemporary, local and representative case studies and contexts.

Geography teachers have highlighted the importance of pupils developing core geographical skills - particularly geospatial, decision-making and green skills.²¹⁵ When planned effectively, high-quality fieldwork offers a ‘real world’ opportunity for students to build disciplinary capabilities and subject understanding in Geography, with fieldwork enquiry also opening doors to the development of wider skills such as data collection, analysis and problem-solving.²¹⁶ Despite these benefits, we have heard that fieldwork is inconsistently provided, particularly at GCSE, and this risks a significant skills gap for students when they progress to further study. This leads to missed opportunities, with some students not experiencing the purposeful, hands-on study that reflects how geographers collect and evaluate data and reach conclusions in their work.

We recommend light-touch review of current fieldwork requirements in Geography to explore how they are integrated across key stages, with a particular focus on GCSE subject content and assessment. This recommendation does not propose adding to existing requirements. Rather, it aims to clarify and strengthen how fieldwork is embedded within the curriculum, showing how it connects to other geographical skills and knowledge. Changes should remain proportionate. Great care should be taken not to inadvertently create access problems for socio-economically disadvantaged students based on geographical location or the potential costs associated with fieldwork trips and

²¹² YouGov (2025) - [How important is it to teach Geography at secondary school?](#)

²¹³ Royal Geographical Society (2024) - [Response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review](#).

²¹⁴ Ofsted (2023) - Getting our bearings: [Geography Subject Report](#)

²¹⁵ The United Nations Industrial Development Organization defines ‘green skills’ as the ‘knowledge, abilities, values and attitudes needed to live in, develop and support a sustainable and resource-efficient society’. See: UNIDO (2022) - [What are green skills?](#)

²¹⁶ Geographical Association (2024) - [The importance of fieldwork](#)

resources.²¹⁷ Any amendments should not imply fieldwork involving costly, far-afield trips. Instead, any changes should highlight that effective fieldwork can be delivered through, for example, local visits, and that schools can be supported through additional guidance and initiatives.²¹⁸

The current Geography curriculum has notable gaps in relation to climate change. Responses to the Call for Evidence highlighted strong support from subject experts and young people for greater attention to this in the Geography curriculum.²¹⁹ The climate crisis is the most significant environmental challenge of modern times and, given that climate and weather are anchored in the existing Geography curriculum, it is essential that the Geography curriculum embeds climate education and sustainability appropriately across the key stages. In addition to the presently scant mention in the curriculum, the present overall purpose of study in the national curriculum does not explicitly identify climate change as a key concept. This has not prevented schools from teaching climate-related content but integrating it successfully has depended largely on the initiative of individual teachers or school leaders.²²⁰ The purpose of study in the national curriculum should be amended to ensure explicit wording, empowering the next generation of geographers to understand and tackle climate change through suitable climate education.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Makes minor refinements to the Geography Programmes of Study and GCSE subject content to respond to the issues identified, including by:
 - Refining content to support progression better to further study, deepen children and young people's understanding of key geographical concepts, make content more relevant and inclusive, and remove unnecessary repetition across topics.
 - Embedding disciplinary knowledge more explicitly at Key Stage 3, such as geographical enquiry, spatial reasoning, use of digital tools, human

²¹⁷ Child Poverty Action Group (2025) - [Back-to-school but blocked from learning – secondary pupils excluded by costs](#)

²¹⁸ Such as the National Education Nature Park, which already supports schools in embedding geospatial and environmental skills through fieldwork projects.

²¹⁹ Geographical Association (2024) - [Response to Review of Curriculum and Assessment](#)

²²⁰ The above UCL survey found that, of teachers and headteachers who reported participating in professional development related to climate change and sustainability, the most commonly reported type of professional development was 'self-taught' (70.5%). UCL Institute of Education (2023) - [Teaching climate change and sustainability: A survey of teachers in England](#).

geography and use of evidence, to ensure all children and young people have access to high-quality geographical education.

- Clarifying and reinforcing requirements for fieldwork to demonstrate its role more effectively in supporting content and the developing of disciplinary knowledge, ensuring changes remain proportionate and inclusive.
- Embeds climate change and sustainability more explicitly across different key stages, including across the physical geography, geographical applications and human geography sections of the curriculum, ensuring early, coherent, and more detailed engagement with climate education. This should be done without risking curriculum overload.

History

- History is a statutory foundation subject from Key Stages 1 to 3.
- At Key Stage 4, there is an entitlement to study a humanities subject, including History. GCSE History take-up was 31% in 2009/10 and 42% in 2024/25.
- In 2024/25, 90% of state-funded schools entered students for GCSE History.
- A Level History entries made up 6% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 5% in 2023/24.

History is a popular subject, and we heard through the Call for Evidence that the History curriculum is broadly working well. The 2013 curriculum reforms sought to strengthen children and young people's chronological understanding, avoid repeating content between key stages, and address evidence indicating that History was often taught as a series of disjointed topics.²²¹ GCSE entries for History have increased in recent years, at least in part likely as a result of including History in the EBacc and Progress 8.²²² Uptake at A Level has stayed within a consistent range during the same time-frame.²²³

Even so, there are clear areas for improvement. At Key Stages 1 to 3, feedback from our Call for Evidence suggested a need to enhance students' knowledge of how historians study the past, and how they construct historical claims, arguments and accounts.²²⁴ The Review has heard calls for the curriculum to provide more space for exploring and

²²¹ Ofsted (2011) - History for all: [History subject report](#)

²²² [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Call for Evidence](#): (Curriculum subject trends over time); DfE (2025) - [Pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 2024/25](#); DfE (2025) - [Subject entries 2024/25](#)

²²³ DfE (2025) - [A level time series](#)

²²⁴ Ofsted (2023) - [Rich encounters with the past: History subject report](#)

embedding these disciplinary skills which are essential for further study.²²⁵ The ability to assess varying sources of information critically also plays a role in supporting wider life skills, such as [media literacy](#). We therefore recommend the Key Stage 1 to 3 Programmes of Study should update and enhance the requirement for disciplinary understanding, without adding excessive content.

We also believe there should be clearer messages about what is and what is not statutory in relation to History at Key Stages 1 to 3, and where flexibility exists in a given framework. For example, our engagement has highlighted that extensive lists and elements in the Programmes of Study at Key Stages 2 and 3 make the curriculum appear overloaded, with teachers feeling pressure to teach all these separate components in depth. In recommending greater clarity about and coherence between statutory and non-statutory content, we aim to support teachers (particularly non-specialists in History) to identify and navigate the optionality that exists across the History curriculum. Further clarification should also support teachers to decide whether to treat elements in depth or at a high level. Where applicable, this should be achieved by minor redrafting of content. These changes should not detract from the historical and chronological understanding that is currently required across curriculum topics nor reduce the subject's rigour.

The Review has received evidence which suggests that GCSE History requires significant review. There have been widespread calls to tackle content overload. The majority of History teachers would like to see the level of prescribed content at GCSE reduced significantly.²²⁶ At present, they are required to teach five distinct components,²²⁷ with significant detail set out for each one. A review of the content requirements within each component, and how they interact and overlap, may allow clearer connections to be made and, in turn, identify where content could be streamlined.

In addition, the Review understands that pressures to cover the current content at GCSE may be leading to a disproportionate focus on rote learning to pass exams rather than ensuring that students gain a comprehensive grounding in important disciplinary and subject skills. As such, we recommend assessment objectives and approaches are revisited to ensure they better encourage the knowledge and application of disciplinary rigour.

History as a subject covers a wide array of eras, contexts and cultures. We have heard that many teachers would welcome clearer guidance and more examples to help them capitalise on existing flexibility, particularly when representing a wider range of perspectives in British history.²²⁸ We suggest this is done by updating the aims and

²²⁵ Historical Association (2024), [Response to the Call for Evidence](#)

²²⁶ Social Market Foundation (2024) - [Testing patience: Reducing the burden of the English school curriculum](#)

²²⁷ A thematic study, a period study, two depth studies and a study of the historic environment.

²²⁸ The requirement is for British history to form a minimum of 40% of the assessed content over the full GCSE History course. However, sector organisations have challenged the division between, for example, 'British' and 'World' history and argued for a more inclusive approach which better recognises the

refreshing the non-statutory examples in the Programmes of Study across key stages and GCSE subject content.

Responses to the Call for Evidence made clear that exemplification should not involve replacing existing content. For example, it is essential that significant topics such as the Holocaust and the Second World War continue to be taught. Instead, exemplification should enrich the curriculum by introducing a broader mix of perspectives and connections across different times and places, deepening students' historical understanding. This should include analysis of a wide and diverse range of sources, including, where appropriate, a focus on local history to help students engage better with their local contexts. Such practice might be bolstered through exemplification resources, such as those published by Oak National Academy.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Adjusts the History Programmes of Study to:
 - Improve the understanding and application of disciplinary knowledge and skills through additions and amendments to the disciplinary terms used.
 - Clarify statutory and non-statutory content requirements to better support teachers in recognising and understanding the optionality that exists across Key Stages 1 to 3.
 - Support the wider teaching of History's inherent diversity, including through the analysis of a wide range of sources and, where appropriate, local history.
- Reviews GCSE History subject content and assessment (including assessment objectives) to:
 - Ensure understanding of disciplinary knowledge is advanced and concerns about overload are tackled.
 - Ensure that assessment is fit for purpose and aligned with the aims of the GCSE.

complexities and diversities of our national history. For example, Runnymede Trust (2012) - [Making British Histories: Diversity and the National Curriculum](#)'

Languages

- Study of a foreign language, either modern or ancient, is compulsory at Key Stage 2. Study of a Modern Foreign Language (MFL) is compulsory at Key Stage 3.
- At Key Stage 4, there is an entitlement to study an MFL GCSE. Take-up in any MFL GCSE was 43% in 2009/10 and 44% in 2024/25.
 - GCSE French take-up was 25% in 2009/10 and 18% in 2024/25.
 - GCSE German take-up was 10% in 2009/10 and 5% in 2024/25.
 - GCSE Spanish take-up was 9% in 2009/10 and 19% in 2024/25.
- In 2024/25, 75% of state-funded schools had GCSE entries in French, 32% in German and 74% in Spanish.
- GCSE Classical Greek and GCSE Biblical Hebrew take-up is consistently less than 1%. GCSE Latin take-up was 1% in 2012/13 and 1% in 2024/25. In 2024/25, 1% of state-funded schools had GCSE entries in Classical Greek or Biblical Hebrew; 7% had entries in GCSE Latin.
- A Level French entries made up 2% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 1% in 2023/24. A Level Spanish entries made up 1% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 1% in 2023/24. A Level German entries made up 0.6% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 0.3% in 2023/24.

The requirement to study a language at Key Stage 4 was removed in 2004,²²⁹ and Figure 6. Modern Foreign Language GCSE uptake as a proportion of all pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 by year shows that between 2004/05 and 2011/12 take-up of GCSEs in MFL declined. Following the introduction of the EBacc (of which Languages, both modern and ancient, are a pillar), take-up of any MFL spiked initially and since plateaued. Looking at these trends, it is reasonable to assume that the introduction of the EBacc may have initially arrested a decline in take-up. As such, we have heard concerns that removing the EBacc may have a negative impact on take-up.

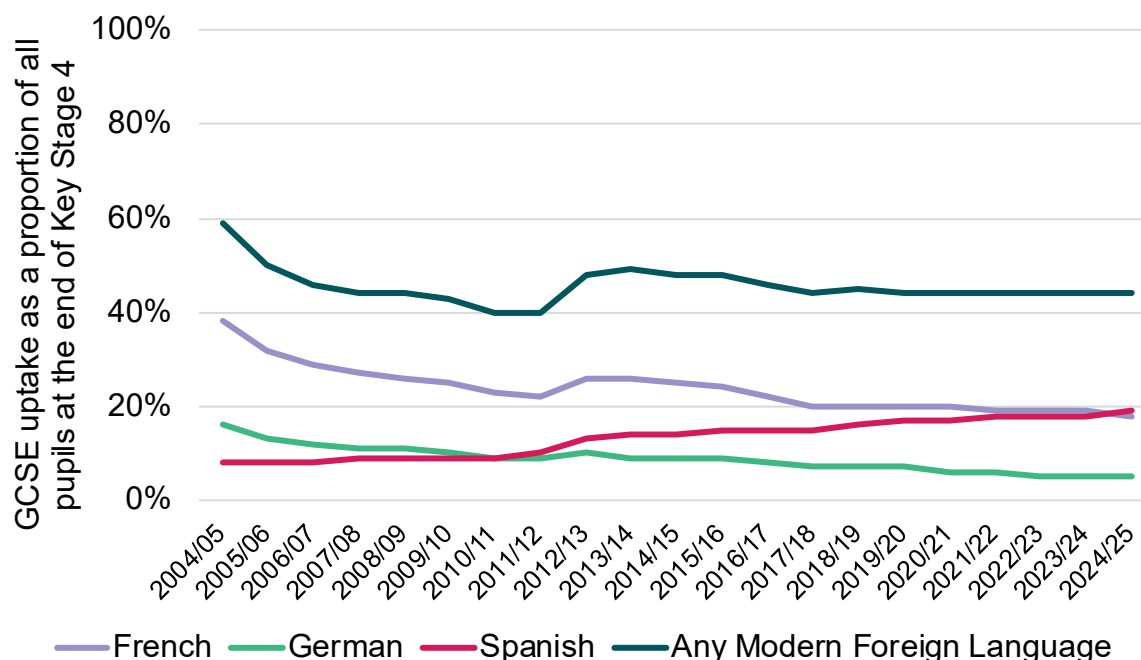
However, the continuing impact of the EBacc is less clear. GCSE take-up in French and German since 2009/10 has decreased for both languages, but take-up in Spanish has increased substantially, while take-up in ancient Languages has remained consistent.²³⁰ We discuss the impact of removing the EBacc further later (see [accountability](#)). However, we consider that change to the Languages curriculum rather than to accountability

²²⁹ Multilingualism: Empowering Individuals, Transforming Societies (MEITS) (2019) - [Policy Briefing on Modern Languages Educational Policy in the UK](#)

²³⁰ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Call for Evidence](#): (Curriculum subject trends over time); DfE (2025) - [Pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 2024/25](#); DfE (2025) - [Subject entries 2024/25](#)

measures is necessary to address concerns about take-up and, ultimately, to improve outcomes for young people.

Figure 6. Modern Foreign Language GCSE uptake as a proportion of all pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 by year²³¹



In 2024/25, take-up of any MFL GCSE by disadvantaged students was 34% compared to 50% by those who were not disadvantaged.²³² Outcomes are comparatively lower than for other national curriculum subjects. Results data²³³ and research²³⁴ show that students who have similar prior attainment (that is, they achieved the expected standard or above in English and Maths at Key Stage 2) are less likely to achieve a GCSE grade 4 or above in French, German and Spanish than in English and Maths. Perceived difficulty and harsher grading have been cited as factors.²³⁵ The DfE's recent reforms to French, German and Spanish GCSEs have sought to address this. The Review is aware, however, that these reforms are still in their infancy, with first teaching beginning in 2024/25 and first assessment not due until summer 2026. As such, it is too soon for the Review to comment on their impact and whether they have had the intended effect. The Review notes the importance of evaluating these changes following the first assessment.

A number of factors affecting the take-up and outcomes of Languages are beyond the scope of the Review. For example, we are aware of the challenges related to the workforce, with just 43% of initial teacher training recruitment targets being met for

²³¹ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#) (Analytical annex)

²³² [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

²³³ DfE (2025) - [Key Stage 2 to 4 transition matrices GCSE subjects](#)

²³⁴ DfE (2025) - [Inter-subject comparability in GCSEs and A levels in summer 2024](#)

²³⁵ FFT education datalab (2025) - [Grading severity at Key Stage 4 in 2024](#)

Modern Foreign Languages in 2024/25.²³⁶ Teaching time is also a factor, with some primary pupils receiving less than 30 minutes a week²³⁷ and many secondary students receiving less than two hours,²³⁸ despite evidence showing more time is needed to make significant progress.²³⁹ These factors need to be taken into account by the DfE when implementing any changes.

The Review's Call for Evidence received many responses focusing on the challenges with Languages at primary, with calls for reform at this stage to strengthen progression into secondary and improve outcomes at Key Stage 4 and beyond. There was a relatively prevalent view that introducing a statutory requirement to teach Languages from Key Stage 2 in 2014 had been a positive move in supporting the subject, but a number of concerns and gaps were identified with current provision in primary schools.

The Review recognises that a variety of factors, many of which fall outside its scope, contribute to inconsistencies in Languages provision at primary and outcomes across schools and regions. These include low subject knowledge among non-specialist teachers and little access to relevant professional development, as well as challenges in finding sufficient teaching time, noted above.²⁴⁰ However, the curriculum could be strengthened to support better progression to Key Stages 3 and 4. The Review's recommendations recognise that some wider support will be needed to ensure that change is implemented effectively, for example, from Oak National Academy and the National Consortium for Languages Education (NCLE).²⁴¹

Through the Call for Evidence and our broader engagement, the Review has heard that the current Key Stage 2 Languages Programme of Study is unclear about what constitutes the requirement to make 'substantial progress in one language'. Respondents emphasised that this is leading to inconsistent interpretations and delivery, resulting in varied teaching approaches and uneven outcomes across schools.

The Review also heard concerns that the transition between primary and secondary is challenging to do well. According to the British Council's 2024 Languages Trends survey, only 14% of English secondary schools said they could organise classes based on the languages pupils had studied at Key Stage 2.²⁴² The range of languages taught across different primary schools means that many secondary students have to repeat content

²³⁶ DfE (2025) - [Initial teacher training census](#)

²³⁷ British Council (2024) - [Language Trends England 2024](#)

²³⁸ British Council (2023) - [Language Trends England 2023](#)

²³⁹ For instance, FCDO provides 450 hours of training to get an adult from zero to C1 standard (a proficient user of that language) in French and German, and 1,200 hours of training to get from zero to C1 standard in Mandarin Chinese. See Council of Europe (2023) - [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#)

²⁴⁰ Research in Primary Languages RiPL (2018) – [White Paper on 'Primary Languages Policy in England – The Way Forward'](#)

²⁴¹ National Consortium for Languages Education NCLE (2025) - [National Consortium for Languages Education](#)

²⁴² British Council (2024) - [Language Trends England 2024](#)

that they have already covered. Alternatively, they have to begin a new language from scratch in Year 7 (often alongside peers who already have some knowledge of that language), despite the fact that they have made progress in a different language up to Year 6. This is a key impediment to success in Languages education in England. It marks a notable point of difference with the majority of European countries that teach English as the main second language from early primary onwards.²⁴³ However, we consider that the solutions required to implement this type of model would be very controversial (such as identifying a national second language), and we have been struck by the evidence that many other English-speaking nations face similar challenges with low take-up of Languages.²⁴⁴

Instead, to deal with the challenges about both the specificity of requirements and the transition between Key Stages 2 and 3, responses to the Call for Evidence showed strong support for a defined minimum core content within the Key Stage 2 Languages Programme of Study. This is backed up by polling published in the 2024 Language Trends Survey, with 80% of primary teachers in state schools in favour of a language-specific list of minimum vocabulary and grammar to be covered by the end of Key Stage 2.²⁴⁵ The Review agrees that a minimum core content for French, German and Spanish would provide greater clarity and consistency, especially for non-specialist teachers. Covering commonly occurring phonics, vocabulary, and grammar, this should align closely with the content and teaching approaches at secondary and thus build more securely the foundations of knowledge for success at Key Stage 4 and beyond more securely. This should support a smoother transition into Key Stage 3. Primary schools could also use the core content for French, German and Spanish as an exemplar for provision in any other languages they may choose to teach. With a shared understanding of what constitutes 'substantial progress' in a language, secondary schools would be better equipped to build on students' prior learning.

According to the 2024 Languages Trends survey, over half of primary schools reported no contact with local secondaries regarding Languages provision.²⁴⁶ While reviewing different means to support the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, the Review was interested to learn about the approach taken in Hackney, where the majority of schools in the borough focus on teaching a single language (Spanish) to ensure continuity and consistency from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4. The initiative also includes

²⁴³ Eurostat (2025) - [Foreign language learning statistics](#)

²⁴⁴ Canada: Statistics Canada (2023) - [Number of students in elementary and secondary schools, by school type and program type](#) [Number of students in official languages programs, public elementary and secondary schools, by program type, grade and sex](#);

USA: Modern Language Association (2021) - [Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education | Modern Language Association](#);

Australia: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority acara (2023) - [Year 12 subject enrolments](#);

New Zealand has also seen a fall in non-native languages but an increase in native second languages such as Māori: Education Counts (2024) - [School subject enrolment](#)

²⁴⁵ British Council (2024) - [Language Trends England 2024](#)

²⁴⁶ British Council (2024) - [Language Trends England 2024](#)

an emphasis on inter-school relationships, teachers' professional development and close engagement with cultural institutions such as the Spanish Consejería de Educación.²⁴⁷ Analysis of the 2024/25 GCSE entry data shows Hackney had the highest take-up of Spanish of all local authorities in England.²⁴⁸ This does come at the expense of the study of other languages, with almost no take-up of German in 2025 and French take-up at approximately half of the regional and national average. Overall, however, take-up of a modern language in Hackney is much higher than the national average.

With little evidence of similar initiatives in other regions, the Review cannot conclusively determine the extent to which the single Language model alone has contributed to the increase in uptake. Nevertheless, many positive features have been brought about by the increased collaboration in Hackney, including closer communication between primary and secondary schools. The Review therefore sees an opportunity for local authorities, multi-academy trusts and schools to explore a coordinated, single-language approach to support transition.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Updates the Key Stage 2 Languages Programme of Study to include a clearly defined minimum core content for French, German and Spanish to standardise expectations about what 'substantial progress in one language' looks like.
- Should not make immediate changes to the new content of the GCSEs in French, German and Spanish but that the DfE should review the impact of these following the first exams in 2026.

We recommend that local authorities, multi-academy trusts and schools:

- Should explore the potential benefits of a coordinated approach in their local areas to the main language taught from Key Stage 2 through to Key Stage 4, taking account of their local context and priorities. The Government should look to encourage this activity where appropriate.

²⁴⁷ Ministerio de Educación, Formación Profesional y Deportes (2025) - [Consejería de Educación in the United Kingdom - Reino Unido](#)

²⁴⁸ The proportion of pupils taking Spanish is derived by taking the DfE (2025) - [number of pupils taking Spanish in each local authority](#) divided by the DfE (2025) - [number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 in each local authority](#).

Maths

- Maths is a statutory core curriculum subject throughout Key Stages 1 to 4.
- At the end of Key Stage 2 in 2024/25, 74% of pupils met the expected standard in Maths.
- GCSE Maths take-up was 93% in 2009/10 and 90% in 2024/25.
- In 2024/25, 99% of state-funded schools entered students for GCSE Maths.
- A Level Maths entries made up 9% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 12% in 2023/24; for A Level Further Maths, it was 1% in 2009/10 and 2% in 2023/24. There were also over 15,000 entries into Core Maths in 2024/25, increasing from under 3,000 entries in 2015/16, when it was first taken.²⁴⁹

There is much to celebrate within Maths education in England. Young people in England perform relatively strongly in Maths relative to other jurisdictions.²⁵⁰ Feedback from the Call for Evidence suggests that the curriculum is rigorous, ambitious and prepares many young people for success in further study or the world of work. This is reflected in the uptake of A Level Maths which, since 2013/14, has become the most popular A Level, with numbers nearing 100,000 in 2023/24.²⁵¹ It is important that we recognise the significant progress made in Maths education in England over recent decades, and that our recommendations maintain and build on the many strengths detailed in this report.

However, for a proportion of young people, the current system is not working well. Many lower attainers are being left behind and the proportion of students who do not achieve level 2 in Maths by age 16 (as indicated at GCSE by grade 4), and who still do not reach level 2 by age 19, remains far too high. This is significant because - as well as supporting daily life - level 2 Maths is typically required for access to further study and employment. Latest data shows that 31% of all students did not secure level 2 by age 16.²⁵² Table 4 shows that learners who are eligible for free school meals are disproportionately likely not to secure level 2 in Maths by age 16 or 19 when compared with their peers who are not eligible (focusing on the 2018/19 cohort, the latest cohort of learners not affected by COVID-19 related grading changes at both age 16 and 19).

²⁴⁹ MEI (2025) - [Summary of Core Maths entries and results August 2025](#)

²⁵⁰ DfE (2023) - [PISA 2022: national report for England](#)

²⁵¹ DfE (2025) - [Entries and Results - A level and AS by subject and student characteristics](#)

²⁵² DfE (2025) - [Attainment by characteristics](#)

Table 4. Percentage of learners not achieving level 2 Maths by age 16 and 19, split by FSM status, 2018/19²⁵³

	Age 16	Age 19
All pupils	31%	24%
Free school meals	54%	45%
No free school meals	28%	20%

The proportion of students who achieve level 2 over the course of the 16-19 resit process continues to be far too small (see [16-19 Maths and English](#)). This must not be allowed to continue, and we believe scope exists to make changes pre-16 to help resolve this.

The Review considers the curriculum to have an appropriately strong focus on Maths across all key stages. Parents and carers broadly agree. The 2024 National Parent Survey found that 76% of them thought that schools have about the right amount of focus on English, Maths and Science.²⁵⁴ However, feedback from our evidence gathering suggests that this time is not always well spent (as discussed below) and that pupils' experience of Maths pre-16 can contribute to the high proportion not securing grade 4 at GCSE. Many of these issues can start at Key Stage 1, go unresolved at Key Stage 2, and persist into Key Stage 3.

Through extensive engagement with subject experts, and through drawing comparisons with other high-performing jurisdictions, we have determined that the overall volume of content in the Maths curriculum is appropriate, but we remain concerned that too much is introduced too quickly, followed by excessive repetition in later years and stages.²⁵⁵ As a result, pupils often have limited opportunity to engage deeply with foundational mathematical concepts and have insufficient time for more challenging, non-routine problem solving that such concepts underpin. This can lead to only a superficial understanding of the fundamentals, preventing sufficient opportunity for them to secure mathematical fluency and apply their knowledge in meaningful contexts.²⁵⁶

The Review believes there should be a stronger focus on developing fluency²⁵⁷ in the fundamentals of number at Key Stage 1 and that space should be made within the number domain to prioritise this. Evidence suggests that understanding in number is

²⁵³ DfE (2025) - [Attainment by characteristics](#), based on cohort of learners reaching academic age 18 in 2018/19, the latest cohort of learners not affected by COVID-19-related grading changes. Data for the latest cohort is also available in this source.

²⁵⁴ Parentkind (2024) - [The National Parent Survey 2024](#)

²⁵⁵ Maths Horizons (2025) - [How England should reform maths education for the age of AI](#)

²⁵⁶ Maths Horizons (2025) - [How England should reform maths education for the age of AI](#)

²⁵⁷ See NCTEM for definition and explanation of the elements of number fluency: National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics (2025) - [The Five Big Ideas at Primary – Fluency](#)

one of the most critical elements of Maths for preparation for later life.²⁵⁸ Without secure foundations in number, pupils are restricted in their ability to reason in everyday contexts. Yet, at Key Stage 1, some pupils do not build a deep understanding of numbers and their composition, a shortfall which can often impede access later to other mathematical concepts. We therefore recommend placing greater emphasis on fluency in number in Key Stage 1, with a particular focus on developing fluency in number bonds and addition and subtraction in a range of contexts. This enhanced focus should be integrated alongside other content taught at this stage, such as shape and measurement.

Given the foundational importance of number fluency, during these years and beyond, it is essential that knowledge gaps in this area are diagnosed as early as possible. While we do not recommend reintroducing the statutory national tests at the end of Key Stage 1, we encourage all schools to administer the non-statutory test for Maths. Doing so provides teachers at Key Stage 2 with a greater understanding of which pupils will need further support to master the foundational concepts.

To enable this increased focus on the fundamentals of number in Key Stage 1, and to support learning in later years, we believe there is a strong case for resequencing the Maths curriculum whilst protecting curriculum time or content. This would involve spacing content more evenly and appropriately across key stages, supporting pupils and students to develop fluency and allow for non-routine problem solving that stretches all pupils in using fundamental concepts. This is particularly important across Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, where we have heard that the breadth of topics at Key Stage 2 has resulted in significant challenges for primary to secondary transition.

We believe the priority at Key Stage 2 should be ensuring all pupils build competence in multiplicative reasoning and problem-solving. Multiplicative reasoning includes secure understanding of multiplication and division scaling, repeated addition, arrays, and whole number rates. Appropriate stretch and challenge for all pupils, including the highest attainers, should come primarily through reasoning and problem solving. A strong foundation in number, combined with an expectation that all pupils have the chance to apply what they know through problem-solving and reasoning, should support transition better.

Greater fluency in number at Key Stages 1 and 2 should better prepare pupils to be able to reason proportionally and algebraically, the bulk of which we think should be introduced in Key Stage 3, consistent with the staggered expansion in the range of topics introduced in other high-performing systems internationally.²⁵⁹ Analysis of past GCSE Maths scripts indicates that students who do not have a basic understanding to reason multiplicatively or proportionally rarely achieve grade 4 at GCSE. This means that, despite receiving 12 years of Maths education, too many struggle to demonstrate these

²⁵⁸ Ofsted (2025) - [Research review series: mathematics](#)

²⁵⁹ OECD (2024) - [An Evolution of Mathematics Curriculum](#)

mathematical competencies.²⁶⁰ It is essential, therefore, that the progression from number composition and counting through to additive, multiplicative, proportional and algebraic reasoning is made more explicit and intentional across key stages. We are confident that this, in addition to being able to tackle non-routine problems, will be better prepare students for GCSE exams.

Improving the sequence of when certain mathematical concepts are introduced so that pupils can master them more deeply would require adjustments to both non-statutory Key Stage 1 assessments and the Key Stage 2 national tests to reflect such content amendments. We recommend retaining the Multiplication Tables Check (MTC) in Year 4 as an important indicator of multiplicative competence. The DfE and Standards and Testing Agency (STA) should explore ways in which it can refine access arrangements for pupils who find the MTC inaccessible in its current format (see [primary assessment](#)).

To support as many young people as possible to progress through secondary education and succeed in GCSE Maths, we recommend introducing a diagnostic test in Year 8 (see [secondary assessment](#)). The purpose is to support teachers in identifying areas of weakness in order to deal with gaps in good time before students progress to Key Stage 4.

It is imperative that students who fail to attain a grade 4 at GCSE at age 16 are given the opportunity to achieve this standard by the time they reach age 19. Table 4 shows that the current arrangements for resits are not fit for purpose in achieving this. As a result, we are making recommendations to improve their chances of success (see [16-19 Maths and English](#)).

As discussed, pupils have been clear that they want the curriculum to provide a more secure grounding in financial literacy (see [financial education](#)). As such, we are keen to make the link that exists elsewhere in the curriculum between Maths and financial education more explicit, but we do not expect Maths to be the primary home for financial education.²⁶¹ We consider it is placed more appropriately elsewhere in the curriculum, particularly in Citizenship, where there is greater scope to explore practical financial concepts in real-life contexts. However, students should be introduced to the relevant mathematical concepts in Maths first, before being exposed to them in other subjects, and the curriculum should be sequenced to this end.

²⁶⁰ OCR (2024) - [Striking the Balance: A review of 11 – 16 curriculum and assessment in England](#)

²⁶¹ Maths Horizons (2025) - [Financial Literacy Report](#)

Recommendations²⁶²

We recommend that the Government:

- Retains the amount and type of content in the Key Stage 1 to 3 curriculum, but re-sequences it so that topics are introduced in such a way that pupils can master them deeply, with opportunities for more complex problem-solving in each area, and reduce repetition in later years.
- Ensures that Maths should be the subject in which pupils are exposed to mathematical concepts for the first time and the curriculum is sequenced as such. These concepts should then be applied in different contexts, where appropriate, in other subjects - for example, aspects of financial education in Citizenship.²⁶³
- Ensures that the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) works with DfE to refine the current non-statutory Maths test at Key Stage 1 to reflect any updates to the Maths curriculum. Alongside this, the DfE should consider ways in which it can encourage more schools to use it.
- Ensures that the STA works with the DfE to redesign Key Stage 2 assessments minimally to reflect a re-sequenced curriculum and include a stronger focus on mental arithmetic and reasoning.
- Introduces a diagnostic test in Maths, to be taken in Year 8, with the aim of supporting teachers to identify and deal with any weakness before students progress to Key Stage 4.

Music

- Music is a statutory foundation subject from Key Stage 1 to 3.
- At Key Stage 4, the entitlement to study an arts subject includes Music. GCSE Music take-up was 7% in 2009/10 and 5% in 2024/25. Technical Award take-up was 1% in 2015/16 and 2% in 2024/25.
- In 2024/25, 57% of state-funded schools had entries into GCSE Music, 19% into the Music Technical Award and 3% in the Music Technology Technical Award.
- A Level Music entries made up 1% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 1% in 2023/24.

²⁶² For recommendations relating to Maths at 16–19, see [16–19 Maths and English](#).

²⁶³ For example: a student should not be exposed to compound interest during their financial education in Citizenship without first having been introduced to in Maths.

The proportion of students entering GCSE Music has declined in recent years. Although entries into the Technical Award in Music have increased over the same period, the overall picture is one of a slight decline in entries to Music qualifications at Key Stage 4.²⁶⁴ This is often attributed to the introduction of the EBacc in 2010/11 and the subsequent introduction of the Attainment 8 and Progress 8 measures but, especially given the growth in Technical Award take-up we cannot be certain that performance measures are solely responsible.²⁶⁵

Evidence of inequitable access to and success in Music is substantial. A 2020 Education and Policy Institute (EPI) report identified Music as having the highest disadvantage attainment gap of any subject at GCSE.²⁶⁶ In addition, 61% of schools with the highest proportion of disadvantaged students had no entries for GCSE Music in 2024/25, compared to 10% of schools with the lowest proportion. Taking GCSEs and Technical Awards together, 30% of schools with the highest levels of deprivation did not have entries in Music at Key Stage 4 in 2024/25, compared to 7% with the lowest levels.²⁶⁷ This suggests that although the Technical Award reduces the access gap between disadvantaged students and their peers, a significant gap still remains.

This inequity may be driven by the benefit that students from advantaged backgrounds gain from additional, out-of-classroom instrumental tuition. Nearly three times as many children from the highest-income households take part in music classes outside school (32%) compared to the lowest-income households (11%).²⁶⁸ We have heard from stakeholders that success in GCSE Music relies on the ability to read music, a skill usually developed through learning and playing a musical instrument. Although GCSE specifications do not explicitly require students to play a musical instrument, the performance component requires them to 'interpret and communicate musical ideas with technical control and expression'. This can be achieved through 'playing or singing music, improvising, or realising music using music technology'. The subject content is specific in its expectations regarding reading music, requiring students to 'demonstrate knowledge of...musical language'.²⁶⁹ These expectations clearly suggest that the ability to read music (and therefore to play an instrument) is strongly advantageous. However, omnibus survey results show that 29% of primary school pupils and 26% of Key Stage 3

²⁶⁴ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Call for Evidence](#): (Curriculum subject trends over time); DfE (2025) - [Pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 2024/25](#); DfE (2025) - [Subject entries 2024/25](#)

²⁶⁵ FFT education datalab (2023) - [What has Progress 8 done for the creative subjects?](#); [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Call for Evidence](#): (Curriculum subject trends over time); DfE (2025) - [Pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 2024/25](#); DfE (2025) - [Subject entries 2024/25](#)

²⁶⁶ EPI (2020) - [Education in England: Annual Report 2020](#)

²⁶⁷ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

²⁶⁸ Social Mobility Commission (2019) - [Extra-curricular activities, soft skills and social mobility](#)

²⁶⁹ DfE (2015) - [GCSE music](#)

students had not received any musical instrument teaching at school, and 31% of primary schools do not use sheet music in music lessons or in extra-curricular music activities.²⁷⁰

Technical Awards should provide an alternative Key Stage 4 pathway, but stakeholders have expressed the view that recent reforms to the Music Technical Award have resulted in a qualification which overlaps considerably with the GCSE in terms of content, is too prescriptive, has heavy writing demands, and is more constrained in terms of performance.

These disparities in access to Music education have often been attributed to inequality of resources, both between and beyond schools. We note that, since 2012, the Government has provided funding for a national network of 43 Music Hub partnerships across England.²⁷¹ We also note that, in March 2025, the Government announced its intention to launch a National Centre for Arts and Music Education.²⁷² This is welcome. However, given the clear evidence of inequality of access to Music tuition and its impact on progression beyond Key Stage 3, we believe more needs to be done, especially to ensure reach and coverage of this support. Music is statutory in the national curriculum to the end of Key Stage 3, and the curriculum and its implementation must therefore support potential progression to Key Stage 4 qualifications through within-school provision. We therefore recommend that the Government explores ways to better optimise its investment in Music education to support the teaching and learning of musical instruments and the reading of music to ensure equitable access to and progression in Music education.

In addition, we believe some changes to curriculum content, qualification pathways and assessment modes should be made throughout Key Stages 1 to 4 to increase the quality of musical education and improve equity of access. Through our Call for Evidence, we heard that there is a lack of clarity about the purpose of the Key Stage 1 to 3 curricula.²⁷³ In particular, the language of the Programmes of Study is described as vague, referring to general skills such as ‘confidence’ rather than to subject-specific outcomes. This means that endpoints are not clear, particularly when the subject is taught by non-specialists. In addition, some of the terminology is cited as lending itself to a narrow interpretation of genres and repertoires (for example, the reference to ‘the musical canon’).

Ofsted’s subject report echoed this.²⁷⁴ It found a lack of specificity in the Music Programmes of Study about the fundamentals of musical understanding and reported

²⁷⁰ DfE (2023) - [PPLP omnibus surveys 2022 to 2023: March 2023](#)

²⁷¹ These offer a range of services to support schools, including instrument tuition to individuals, groups and whole classes; instrument loans; and teacher CPD: DfE (2025) - [Subject hubs](#)

²⁷² This will promote arts education, support teaching through a CPD offer and support partnerships between schools and arts organisations: DfE and The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP (2025) - [Young people to benefit from creative education boost](#)

²⁷³ DfE (2021) - [National curriculum in England: music programmes of study](#)

²⁷⁴ Ofsted (2023) - [Striking the right note: the music subject report](#)

that the curriculum is often interpreted by teachers as a list of disconnected genres and composers. This encourages breadth, but not depth, of study. Ofsted observed that it is important for progression that pupils can build incrementally on their knowledge and technical ability. The Cultural Learning Alliance has also noted that musicians need to build a subject-specific knowledge of theory, notation and instrumental techniques.²⁷⁵

We heard clearly from Call for Evidence responses and sector experts that, without robust foundations having been built by the end of Key Stage 3, GCSE Music becomes inaccessible to most students unless they have external or extra-curricular tuition. We therefore recommend specifying the core knowledge and skills that should be taught in Music from Key Stages 1 to 3 to create a better sequenced and more equitable curriculum. This should ensure that all students have a more solid foundation in Music by the end of Key Stage 3, equipping more young people to study it at Key Stage 4. This should provide clarity for teachers, and especially for non-specialists, on how to build musical understanding, rather than taking an isolated, topic-by-topic approach.

In terms of Key Stage 4 pathways, students generally perform well in Music, with 76% achieving a grade 4 or above, and 33% achieving a grade 7 or above.²⁷⁶ Some Call for Evidence submissions reported concerns that GCSE content is overly theoretical, but further exploration with subject experts suggests that reducing theoretical content may dilute the standard of the qualification and would risk removing essential subject knowledge, making it less comparable to other GCSEs and less suitable as a progression route.

However, subject experts did note challenges in relation to the GCSE assessment criteria, modes and requirements. Stakeholders raised concerns that, in the musical performance assessment, although there is a strong focus on technical accuracy, there is not enough focus on other skills such as musicality and fluency. They also raised concerns that the written component of the exam is overly rigid. We therefore recommend revising GCSE subject content and assessment objectives to ensure they are suited to the discipline, including considering whether the requirement to 'demonstrate musical knowledge' should be woven as a thread throughout the three other core areas (performance, composition and appraisal) rather than being defined as a separate objective.

Finally, we recommend that, concurrently, the purpose and aims of the Key Stage 4 Music Technical Award are reviewed to clarify its distinct purpose in comparison to the GCSE. Consideration should also be given to the extent to which the structure and content of the current qualification reflect the purpose and aims, to ensure that

²⁷⁵ Cultural Learning Alliance (2025) - [What if we think of the arts as knowledge-rich?](#)

²⁷⁶ DfE (2025) - [Key Stage 4 performance, Academic year 2024/25](#)

Key Stage 4 pathways are suitable for different cohorts and facilitate progression to further study or careers in the music industry.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Revises the content of the Programmes of Study for Key Stages 1 to 3 to ensure a curriculum pathway which gives all pupils a rigorous foundation in musical understanding and enables broader access to further study at Key Stage 4. This could be achieved by:
 - Revisiting the purpose and aims, ensuring that they better reflect intended outcomes.
 - Adding some further specificity, without increasing volume, to clarify how pupils should progress in the three pillars of musical understanding (technical, constructive and expressive), and to ensure that a range of genres and repertoires can be covered.
- Reviews the Music GCSE and Technical Award concurrently to ensure their purposes are both clear and distinct and that qualification content and assessment meet these aims. As part of this, the Government should consider:
 - GCSE assessment objectives, modes and requirements, and whether these are suited to the discipline.
 - The extent to which the most recent reforms to Technical Awards have effectively changed the purpose and suitability of the Music Technical Award, and whether this qualification is still fit for purpose or requires further adjustments.
- Explores ways to better optimise its investment in Music education to support the teaching and learning of musical instruments and the reading of music to ensure equitable access to, and progression in, Music education.

Physical Education (PE), including Dance

PE

- PE is a statutory foundation subject for all pupils from Key Stage 1 to 4.
- At Key Stage 4, PE must be taught to all students, and some will choose to take a qualification in it. Take-up of the optional GCSE in PE was 19% in 2009/10 and

11% in 2024/25. Take-up of the Sports Studies or Sports Science Technical Award was 7% in 2015/16 and 11% in 2024/25.²⁷⁷

- In 2024/25, 55% of state-funded schools had entries into GCSE PE, 55% had entries into the Sports Studies Technical Award and 10% had entries into the Sports Science Technical Award.
- A Level PE entries made up 3% of all A Level entries in 2009/10 and 2% in 2023/24.

A report from UK Chief Medical Officers on the guidelines for physical activity notes that regular physical activity contributes to cardiovascular fitness and healthy weight and is also associated with improved learning, attainment and better mental health. A secure grounding in PE at school is important for developing children's skills and confidence to be physically active, ultimately reducing the risk of coronary heart disease, obesity, type 2 diabetes and non-physical issues such as social isolation.²⁷⁸

Schools are strongly encouraged to deliver a minimum of 2 hours of PE per week.²⁷⁹ Many schools meet this ambition at Key Stages 1 to 3, but evidence suggests that this drops off as students enter Key Stage 4. Teaching time for PE as a percentage of all hours taught has remained broadly stable in Key Stages 3 and 4 since 2011/12.²⁸⁰ Despite the subject's significant benefits, we heard through our Call for Evidence that, nationally, PE varies in quality. This is particularly concerning given that, for many pupils, their participation in physical activity or sport may not extend beyond their PE lessons at school. Ofsted found that, in many of the schools inspectors visited, the PE curriculum did not match the ambition of the national curriculum because some activities it specifies, such as dance or outdoor adventurous activities, were either not being taught well or not being taught at all.²⁸¹ Evidence shows that four in 10 primary schools (40%) used external PE teachers or providers, such as coaches.²⁸² In roundtable sessions held as part of the Review, we heard that the quality of these providers can vary.

In the Call for Evidence, we heard suggestions that the statement of purpose in the national curriculum is no longer appropriate, and that there is too much emphasis on success in competitive sport.²⁸³ Evidence suggests that England is an international outlier in this regard: a 2019 OECD report found that many countries are shifting towards

²⁷⁷ Computed as the sum of students taking PE and Sports.

²⁷⁸ Department of Health and Social Care (2020) - [Physical activity guidelines: UK Chief Medical Officers' report](#)

²⁷⁹ DfE, Department for Culture, Media and Sport and Department of Health and Social Care (2023) - [School Sport and Activity Action Plan](#)

²⁸⁰ DfE (2025) - ['Subjects taught and Specialist teachers and hours' from 'School workforce in England'](#)

²⁸¹ Ofsted (2023) - [Levelling the playing field: the physical education subject report](#)

²⁸² DfE (2023) - [School and college panel: omnibus surveys for 2022 to 2023 – April 2023](#)

²⁸³ DfE (2013) - [National curriculum in England: physical education programmes of study](#)

a more holistic curriculum that balances competition and sports with other less competitive dimensions.²⁸⁴ England is referred to as a ‘notable exception’, with competitive sports ‘becoming an increasingly central component in the PE national curriculum’. The OECD report found that this could be limiting participation among certain groups of students.

The Review acknowledges the importance of striking a balance between competition and inclusive participation. However, we believe that England’s distinctive approach to competitive sport in schools should be recognised and celebrated. Sport is part of our national identity and our strong tradition in competitive sports can foster mastery, confidence, and motivation across a variety of backgrounds. It is crucial that all young people, regardless of background, are supported to access competitive sport and have the chance to realise their talents at the highest level.

Nevertheless, PE must serve broader purposes. It should engage and motivate all young people. We therefore recommend that the defined purpose of compulsory PE is broadened slightly to reflect the role it plays in pupils’ holistic development, while preserving the role of competitive sports and emphasising the subject’s physical, social, cognitive, and emotional benefits.

In addition to recommending that the DfE refreshes the purpose statement for PE, we also consider there is value in updating the subject aims for each key stage. Feedback to the Call for Evidence suggests that the current aims are brief and lack clarity, posing challenges for non-specialist PE teachers in planning and teaching high-quality lessons to meet diverse needs and achieve broader educational outcomes.

Stakeholders have argued for a clear and coherent PE curriculum that focuses on developing physical skills in contexts, activities and sports that become more challenging as pupils progress. Ofsted found that many schools aim to cover a wide range of activities in PE, but the average time spent on one ‘topic’ or activity is only 5 hours each year. The Review is concerned that this does not support pupil development in, or mastery of, competitive sports, as there is insufficient time to build knowledge or gain relative fluency before moving on to a new activity.²⁸⁵ We therefore propose that the DfE considers a clearer and more structured outline of what pupils should learn at each key stage, aligned with the refreshed subject aims.

The Call for Evidence also highlighted concerns relating to the profile of specific activities such as dance, swimming, and outdoor activities. We heard particular concern about Dance, which forms part of the PE curriculum in Key Stages 1 to 4, but which is reportedly not taught to all pupils as part of PE or, where it is taught, is not well organised (see [Dance](#)). We also recognise the importance of children learning to swim competently

²⁸⁴ OECD (2019) - [Making Physical Education Dynamic and Inclusive for 2030](#)

²⁸⁵ Ofsted (2023) - [Levelling the playing field: the physical education subject report](#)

and confidently. Though all schools must provide swimming and water safety instruction either in Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2,²⁸⁶ data shows that in 2022/23 9% of primary schools did not offer swimming and/or water safety lessons, with only half (55%) teaching their pupils safe self-rescue in different situations.²⁸⁷ There is scope, therefore, to improve specificity in the Programme of Study for these activities.

According to Ofsted, the teaching of PE qualifications is often stronger than, and prioritised over, the teaching of compulsory PE at Key Stage 4. In some cases, the GCSE exam specification is informing the curriculum at earlier key stages.²⁸⁸ This aligns with the many responses to the Call for Evidence raising concerns about the effect of GCSE PE has on earlier, compulsory, non-assessed PE. Many respondents were concerned that time and focus are being taken away from physical activity in favour of theoretical PE, such as anatomy and physiology, to prepare students more effectively to follow exam pathways. It is essential that core compulsory PE from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4 remains physical in nature, ensuring that pupils and students are active for most of the lesson.

We therefore think that the DfE should rename the GCSE PE qualification - for example, to GCSE Sports Science or GCSE Sports Studies - to reflect its content more accurately and to draw a clearer distinction between it and compulsory PE.

It is also necessary to consider whether any changes to content are required to distinguish across the GCSE, the Technical Award and compulsory PE and so that the overall offer is coherent. The compulsory PE pathway should focus on practising competitive sport, developing physical capability and movement skills and fostering positive attitudes towards physical activity. In contrast, the GCSE and other qualification pathways should emphasise sports science and prepare students for further study and/or professional roles in the sports industry.²⁸⁹

Finally, we have heard problems relating to equity of access in GCSE PE and that students with special educational needs (SEN) are under-represented in the take-up of PE qualifications. In 2024/25, just 6% of students with an identified SEN entered GCSE PE compared with 12% of students with no identified SEN.²⁹⁰ We heard arguments from sector stakeholders that the current GCSE PE activity list undermines the inclusivity of the qualification.²⁹¹ It comprises 58 activities, including 33 team activities and 25 individual activities. Currently, of these 58 activities, only eight are 'specialist'²⁹² (six team activities, including blind cricket, and two individual activities, namely boccia and polybat).

²⁸⁶ DfE (2013) - [National curriculum in England: physical education programmes of study](#)

²⁸⁷ DfE (2023) - [School and College Panel – April 2023](#)

²⁸⁸ Ofsted (2023) - [Levelling the playing field: the physical education subject report](#)

²⁸⁹ See, for example National Council for Further Education NCFE (2025) - [Level 1/2 Technical Award in Sports Studies](#)

²⁹⁰ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

²⁹¹ DfE (2021) - [GCSE physical education](#)

²⁹² Activities designed to include those with disabilities.

While any of the listed activities may be adapted or adjusted to meet the needs of disabled students, the absence of a wider range of specialist activities could still be restricting opportunities. We believe that the PE activity list should be reviewed. Caution must be exercised when undertaking this review to ensure that any changes can be assessed effectively within the existing framework.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Redrafts the purpose of study for PE, retaining the importance of competitive sports, but clarifying the significance of providing all pupils with opportunities to learn in a physical environment and emphasising its physical, social, cognitive and emotional benefits that complement and enhance overall academic performance and general wellbeing.
- Redrafts the aims of PE so that they are clearer and more coherent at each key stage.
- Introduces a concise, scaffolded approach to the attainment targets and key stage subject content within the Programmes of Study. As part of this, the Government should review how the Programmes of Study refer to individual activities (such as dance, swimming, and outdoor activity), including whether they are sufficiently specific to support quality teaching.
- Distinguishes clearly between mandatory core PE and qualification pathways, and develops distinct terminology for each. This can be achieved by renaming GCSE PE, and considering whether any content changes are required to ensure it retains a focus on sports science. The content of Key Stage 4 mandatory non-assessed PE should be revised to ensure that it focuses primarily on physical activity.
- Reviews the current GCSE PE activity list to consider ways in which it could be made more inclusive for all students, especially for students with SEND.

Dance

- Dance is part of the statutory PE Programmes of Study from Key Stages 1 to 4.
- At Key Stage 4, the statutory entitlement to study an arts subject includes Dance, as a standalone subject separate from PE. GCSE Dance take-up was 2% in 2015/16 and 1% in 2024/25. Take-up of the Dance pathway within the Performing Arts Technical Award has been 1% since 2015/16.

- In 2024/25, 15% of state-funded schools entered students for the GCSE and 12% for the Technical Award. Overall, 26% of schools offer Dance qualifications.
- At A Level, Dance is reported as part of Performing/Expressive Arts, which typically has very small number of entries each year.²⁹³

The current curriculum content for Dance within the PE Programmes of Study was last updated in 2013 and came into effect from 2014. Consultation responses at that time were mixed as to whether the PE curriculum should include more or less specificity on Dance.²⁹⁴

Following reform to GCSEs, AS qualifications and A Levels in 2015, the current GCSE Dance, the AS qualification and A Level Dance have been taught from 2016.²⁹⁵ GCSE Dance is a low-entry subject, and entries have fallen from an already low base.²⁹⁶

Within the PE Key Stage 1 to 4 Programmes of Study, Dance is primarily a physical discipline, focused on movement and performance; other elements, such as choreography and appreciation, are absent. At Key Stage 4, Dance qualifications are treated as a performing art. This is often reflected in how schools plan and teach Dance: it is often taught by PE departments up to (and including) Key Stage 3 and by performing arts departments at Key Stage 4.

We have heard that Dance is a popular activity with children and young people. However, in the Review's sector roundtables, both Dance and PE stakeholders called for the curriculum to support teachers to better teach Dance through a clearer PE Programme of Study that sets out the subject knowledge required for a basic understanding of it. Through the Call for Evidence, we heard that access to GCSE Dance is often limited to students who have undertaken extra-curricular or external tuition, even in schools with specialist Dance teachers. This is because of such limited curriculum provision at Key Stages 1 to 3.

Ofsted's 2023 subject report on PE found that many schools do not match the ambition of the national curriculum for Dance: in two thirds of the schools visited, Dance was not taught to all pupils or was not well organised.²⁹⁷ There is also some evidence that non-specialist and generalist PE teachers are not confident in teaching Dance. A quarter

²⁹³ Joint Council for Qualifications JCQ (2025) - [Examination results](#) – there were 906 entries in Performing/Expressive Arts from 18-year-olds in England in 2024/25

²⁹⁴ DfE (2013) - [Department for Education consultation response](#)

²⁹⁵ DfE (2015) - [GCSE dance](#); Ofqual (2015) - [GCSE, AS and A Level Dance: Decisions on Conditions and Guidance](#)

²⁹⁶ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Call for Evidence](#): (Curriculum subject trends over time); DfE (2025) - [Pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 2024/25](#); DfE (2025) - [Subject entries 2024/25](#)

²⁹⁷ Ofsted (2023) - [Levelling the playing field: the physical education subject report](#)

(26%) of primary teachers did not feel confident in teaching the ‘performance of simple dances’ at Key Stage 1, while more than a third (36%) did not feel confident in teaching ‘dances using a range of movement patterns’ at Key Stage 2.²⁹⁸

Through the Call for Evidence, we heard that the current lack of detail in the PE Programmes of Study inhibits many schools from developing a clear curriculum, and this means that intended outcomes for students in Dance by the end of Key Stage 3 are not clear. We therefore recommend some additional specificity is added to the PE Programmes of Study to clarify expectations for Dance, support breadth within the PE curriculum, and improve progression to GCSE Dance. The focus on movement should be retained, but other aspects, such as choreography and performance, should also be considered.

Take-up of formal qualifications at Key Stage 4 represents a consistently small proportion of all qualifications taken for a number of reasons. Some of these reasons go beyond the Review’s remit (for example, the limited number of specialist teachers and the cost to schools of running courses with small cohorts). The decline in take-up of performing arts subjects at Key Stage 4 is also widely attributed to accountability and performance measures (such as the EBacc) constraining choice, although take-up of GCSE Dance has always been low.

Throughout our engagement, school-based experts generally agreed that the existing level 2 Performing Arts Technical Award works well, is liked by schools and students, and offers a good option for progression in Dance. Both the Call for Evidence and subsequent expert discussion highlighted concern, however, that GCSE Dance has too much emphasis on theoretical content and written evidence, especially in the written exam, and focuses insufficiently on practical performance. Respondents to the Call for Evidence also argued that significant elements of the current GCSE subject content and related assessment methods do not reflect Dance as a creative discipline, such as a set assessment involving students performing to a metronome beat. We therefore recommend review of the GCSE Dance subject content and assessment methods to reflect it better as a creative discipline that encompasses performance, choreography and appreciation.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Reviews how the PE Key Stage 1 to 4 Programmes of Study refer to Dance, including whether they are sufficiently specific to support high-quality teaching and students’ progression, including to further study.

²⁹⁸ DfE (2023) - [School and college panel: omnibus surveys for 2022 to 2023 – April 2023](#)

- Reviews the subject content, balance of assessment and assessment methods of GCSE Dance so that the qualification is inclusive, representative and better suited to the discipline.

Religious Education (RE)

- RE is a basic curriculum²⁹⁹ subject from Key Stages 1 to 4 and in school sixth forms.
- Take-up of the optional GCSE in Religious Studies was 28% in 2009/10 and 31% in 2024/25.
- In 2024/25, 70% of state-funded schools entered students for GCSE Religious Studies.
- A Level Religious Studies entries made up 2% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 2% in 2023/24.

Since 1944, RE has been a compulsory subject in schools in England in some form. Initially, this was ‘religious instruction’ and was limited only to Christianity. At the time of the 1988 Education Reform Act, the subject’s title changed to ‘Religious Education’ and encompassed the other main world religions represented in Great Britain in addition to Christianity. Local Authority Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACREs) became mandatory, and RE became part of a school’s basic curriculum for all pupils and students between the age of 5 and 18. The legislative requirements for RE in relation to maintained schools have since been mirrored in funding agreements for academies.

The RE stakeholder context is diverse, including different faith bodies, secular groups and experts from teaching and the education sector more widely. Stakeholders’ responses to our Call for Evidence showed there was a strong consensus about the subject’s importance and its essential place in a school’s curriculum, stressing its important role in children and young people’s intellectual, personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.³⁰⁰ RE is a place where they encounter differing beliefs, sometimes for the first time, understand the tenets of major faiths, and learn how to reason and wrestle with existential questions. Understanding the tenets of Christianity also unlocks a wider understanding of British culture in terms of Christianity’s historic

²⁹⁹ A ‘basic curriculum’ subject is not on the national curriculum but must be provided by schools. Parents or carers have the right to withdraw their child from these subjects, though different conditions may apply between subjects: GOV.UK (2025) - [The national curriculum: Overview](#)

³⁰⁰ The National Archives (2025) - [Education Act 2002](#)

influence and how it has shaped modern-day Britain. We have heard that RE provides a space for pupils to learn about human mutuality and reciprocity, that it develops their capacity to understand one another, and that it supports strong, secure, and confident communities with good relationships. Given the role that religion, belief and values play in local, national, and international events, it continues to be vital for children and young people to have access to high-quality RE.

Given RE's status as a basic rather than national curriculum subject, its content is not nationally defined, and no specified national standard exists against which to benchmark the quality of compulsory RE at Key Stages 1 to 4. While there are undoubtedly pockets of excellent practice in both faith and non-faith schools, the evidence suggests that provision for RE in many schools is not good enough and does not prepare pupils adequately for life beyond school.³⁰¹

Syllabi for RE are locally determined by an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC). SACREs then advise local authorities on their delivery; they also advise local authorities on all matters relating to RE. Some SACREs support high-quality regional practice, but many no longer have the resources or reach to provide such support, resulting in increasing fragmentation.³⁰² Financial constraints have led to squeezed support in many areas, meaning that producing new agreed syllabi is often done with a 'very tight budget' and is 'increasingly reliant on voluntary support'.³⁰³ The 2018 Commission on RE concluded that the structures and systems supporting RE have not kept pace with changes in the wider education sector, including greater academisation, a move towards a school-led system, and a world in which children and young people encounter a broader range of world views, including, for example, Humanism.³⁰⁴

All this is further exacerbated by the complex legislative framework underpinning RE, which hasn't changed in substance since 1944, apart from some minor updates in 1988. Curriculum requirements depend on school type and may differ between academies and maintained schools, as well as between schools with a religious designation and those without. As Ofsted has concluded, the quality of RE is not necessarily determined by the type of school, but the differing requirements seemingly contribute to a lack of parity across the sector.³⁰⁵ Moreover, the Review has heard that, in practice, the dated legislation has invited 'workarounds', including regarding the ongoing requirement to teach RE to the age of 18 in schools. Throughout our engagement with sector experts and during the Call for Evidence, we have heard that this static statutory backdrop, with

³⁰¹ Ofsted (2024) - [Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report](#); Religious Education Council (2018) - [Religion And Worldviews Approach to RE: Resource Page](#)

³⁰² A report from the National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on RE (NASACRE) found that the majority of SACREs in England were not receiving a sufficient share of the central school services block (CSSB) which would reasonably be expected so that they could meet their statutory functions, including the provision of a clerk. NASACRE (2023) – NASACRE's Second Report.

³⁰³ Smalley, P. (2019) - [A critical policy analysis of local religious education in England](#)

³⁰⁴ Religious Education Council (2018) - [Religion And Worldviews Approach to RE: Resource Page](#)

³⁰⁵ Ofsted (2024) - [Deep and meaningful? The religious education subject report](#)

complex and fraying local support arrangements, has led to uneven provision and tokenistic practice in some areas.

Some work to improve and standardise a curriculum offer for RE has been done, most notably by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales (REC), which published its National Content Standard for RE in England in 2023.³⁰⁶ This has received consensus from across the sector and laid strong foundations for change. We believe it has potential as a catalyst for more substantial reform.

RE can be controversial and contentious. Different sector and faith organisations have different beliefs and different interests in the present arrangements. We have therefore engaged widely on this subject during the Review, seeking as many views as possible and aiming to identify points of consensus as well as areas of debate. Having evaluated the evidence, we are of the view that RE's importance is not currently reflected in its standing in the curriculum. The Review believes that RE should be moved to the national curriculum to improve access to high-quality provision and to prevent further diminishment. However, we are conscious of the sensitivities and complexities involved, including the legislative implications and the wider considerations relating to voluntary-aided schools with a religious character. It is important that these issues are accounted for in our recommendations.

The Review ultimately wishes to see RE in the national curriculum, but it recognises that it is unrealistic for this to be achieved immediately. We therefore believe that a staged approach to reform is the most appropriate way forward. To this end, we recommend that the Government invites the sector to establish an independent task and finish group made up of representatives from faith bodies, secular groups and experts from the teaching and wider education sector, to develop a draft RE curriculum. This group should be consultative, continuing the work of the Review in liaising with relevant external parties (including faith groups and communities, secular groups and faith and non-faith schools) and should seek to build on the REC's National Content Standard. The group should also consider whether there would be benefit in changing the name of Religious Education.

The process of producing a draft RE curriculum will be important in establishing whether a core of RE content can be agreed on across the sector to facilitate any move of RE to the national curriculum. Most stakeholders agree that all pupils, regardless of the type of school they attend, should have an entitlement to high-quality RE and that the most effective way to do this is by moving it to the national curriculum. However, if this desired quality and consistency are to be achieved, there will be trade-offs, and all parties will have to make compromises to achieve consensus.

³⁰⁶ Religious Education Council (2023) - [National Content Standard for RE in England – 1st Edition – 2023](#)

We recognise that making RE a national curriculum subject is not a panacea that will automatically improve the quality and quantity of compulsory RE. Other mechanisms would also be needed, including reviewing the DfE's non-statutory guidance for RE (which has not been updated since it was published in 2010) and the wider framework (which includes SACREs, for example). Following any changes, attention may also need to be given to the subject content of the optional GCSE in Religious Studies.

Finally, the Review has carefully considered the requirement that learners study RE between the age of 16 and 18. Currently, this requirement applies only to learners attending school sixth forms and does not extend to other 16-19 providers, such as sixth form colleges and further education colleges. The Review considers that, by age 16, students should have a secure grounding in RE, and one that should be strengthened if the recommendation about the national curriculum is taken forward. We also consider the compulsory study of RE to 18 to be inconsistent with 16-19 study's aim of prioritising learners' choices and subject specialisms. As such, we recommend removing the statutory requirement that learners in school sixth forms study RE: the Government should consider this as part of its review of the wider legislation in which RE sits. We believe this will better reflect actual practice and foster parity across 16-19 settings. We recognise that some schools will want to continue providing RE up to 18, and they would be free to do so. If learners wish to continue to study RE at 16-19, level 3 qualifications are available for them to do so.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Adds RE to the national curriculum in due course. A staged approach should be taken, in line with the following steps:

Stage 1:

Representatives from faith groups, secular groups and the wider teaching and education sector that we heard from during the Review should build on the constructive and collaborative work they have been doing through the course of the Review. DfE should invite the sector to form a task and finish group, convened and led by an expert Chair who is independent of any particular secular or faith group interest or representation. The review recommends that, given her leadership of this strand of the Review's work (based on her expertise), Dr Vanessa Ogden CBE should undertake this role, ensuring momentum in the successful convening she has established. This group should liaise with relevant external parties and, building on the existing National Content Standard for RE in England, engage with faith and non-faith schools, as well as RE organisations and faith communities, to co-create a draft RE curriculum.

Whilst this work should be sector-led, the DfE should welcome efforts the sector makes to reach a consensus and support and facilitate this group where necessary.

Alongside this, the DfE should consider the legislative framework for RE, including, for example, what any changes to its status in the curriculum would mean for functions such as SACREs. A long-term plan for implementing potential changes to legislation should be drafted.

As part of this review, the DfE should consider removing the statutory requirement for learners in school sixth forms to study RE.

In parallel, the DfE should review the non-statutory guidance for RE, which has not been updated since 2010, to establish whether beneficial changes to subject content could be made in the short term that do not pre-empt the wider work the Review is recommending.

Stage 2:

If consensus on a draft RE curriculum can be reached, the DfE should conduct a formal consultation on the detailed content.

Alongside this, the DfE should consult on proposed changes to the legislative framework, including any proposal to repeal the requirement to teach RE in school sixth forms.

Science

- Science is a statutory core curriculum subject from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 4.
- GCSE Combined Science take-up was 63% in 2009/10 and 66% in 2024/25.
- GCSE Biology take-up was 18% in 2009/10 and 24% in 2024/25.
- GCSE Chemistry take-up was 18% in 2009/10 and 23% in 2024/25.
- GCSE Physics take-up was 18% in 2009/10 and 23% in 2024/25.³⁰⁷
- In 2024/25, 91% of state-funded schools entered students for Combined Science; 87% for Biology and 82% for Chemistry and Physics.
- A Level Biology entries made up 7% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 8% in 2023/24.
- A Level Chemistry entries made up 5% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 7% in 2023/24.

³⁰⁷ Students may decide to take a single science GCSE alongside their Combined Science GCSE. Therefore, there may be differences in the proportion of take up across the single sciences.

- A Level Physics entries made up 4% of A Level entries in 2009/10 and 5% in 2023/24.

The Science curriculum aims to provide a foundation for understanding the world through the specific disciplines of Biology, Chemistry and Physics. During the last curriculum review, curriculum aims for Science saw a strong shift towards scientific knowledge and understanding of nature, processes, and methods of science. The Review believes that it is important to retain and enhance the knowledge-rich focus that has been developed.

England's pupils perform reasonably well against international benchmarks in Science in both primary and secondary.³⁰⁸ However, our international performance has not improved in recent years and performance of 15-year-olds has seen a gradual decline since 2012.³⁰⁹ A number of factors that influence Science performance, such as challenges in recruiting specialist Science teachers,³¹⁰ fall outside the scope of this Review. However, we have identified several areas that could be strengthened to support our ambition of achieving high standards for all.

Primary Science education faces several structural and systemic challenges that hinder pupils' progression and engagement. Over the past decade, it has been the subject of numerous systematic and narrative reviews.³¹¹ In 2009, national tests in Science at the end of Key Stage 2 were removed, amid concerns they promoted a 'teach to the test' culture. This aimed to give teachers greater freedom to teach creative and engaging Science lessons rather than focusing primarily on assessment.³¹² However, stakeholders have expressed concern that the primary Science curriculum is not taught consistently. A lack of curriculum cohesion and curriculum time for it in some schools means pupils are not able to master the content. The result is difficulties during the transition to Science at secondary school.³¹³ Subject experts argued that the primary Science curriculum is unevenly distributed across the disciplines of Biology, Chemistry and Physics. Stakeholders also highlighted missed opportunities to create cross-curricular links between Science and other subjects, and between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 Science, resulting in unnecessary repetition of topics at later key stages and limiting opportunities for students to build on and apply prior knowledge.³¹⁴

³⁰⁸ DfE (2023) - [PISA 2022: national report for England](#); DfE (2025) - [Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study 2023: England](#)

³⁰⁹ DfE (2023) - [PISA 2022: national report for England](#)

³¹⁰ DfE (2025) - [Initial Teacher Training Census, Academic year 2024/25](#)

³¹¹ University of Manchester & The Ogden Trust (2021) - [The 10 Key Issues with Children's Learning in Primary Science in England](#); EEF (2023) – [A systematic review of approaches to primary science in teaching](#); Wellcome Trust (2020) - [State of the nation' report of UK primary science education](#)

³¹² Harlen, W. (2018) - [The Teaching of Science in Primary Schools](#)

³¹³ Ofsted (2023) - [Finding the optimum: the science subject report - GOV.UK](#)

³¹⁴ United Learning (2024) - [Curriculum and Assessment Review Call for Evidence: United Learning response](#) ('For example, the water cycle appears in both Key Stage 2 Science and Geography, and again in 'hydrology' in Key Stage 3 Geography, without clear progression in how pupils' understanding of this

The Review recommends a more coherent and structured approach to curriculum design across key stages, with clearer guidance on what content should be taught at what depth at different ages, to ensure smooth transitions between key stages and phases, especially from primary to secondary. Redrafting should add clarity to the Key Stage 1 and 2 Programmes of Study, in particular to establish a clear foundation of essential knowledge and skills that all pupils can draw on to inform their scientific thinking. This could include a rationale for activity at each stage, outlining for example the essential experiences pupils should have exposure to, so that abstract scientific ideas are grounded in real life. The primary Science curriculum should also ensure that all pupils become familiar with using scientific evidence, concepts and language. In tandem, it should also support teachers to ensure an appropriate balance across the three science disciplines at primary, and to promote the cross-curricular links between Science and other subjects.

Feedback from our Call for Evidence respondents, alongside insights from Science curriculum experts and Learned Societies, has highlighted a clear need to streamline and update the Science curriculum across all key stages. Concerns were raised that the current structure hinders pupils' ability to develop deep understanding and mastery of key concepts. In particular, we heard that the volume of content at GCSE level often results in Science being taught as a list of facts to memorise rather than as a subject grounded in fundamental principles. A Teacher Tapp survey found that four in five (80%) of Science teachers supported reducing the volume of content at Key Stage 4, frequently citing outdated or unnecessary topics. The survey also found that 31% wanted Space to be reintroduced to GCSE Combined Science, while Using Resources, Electrolysis and Electromagnetism were the most commonly suggested topics for removal.³¹⁵

We therefore recommend that content across all key stages should be refined and re-sequenced in line with the fundamental concepts of each scientific discipline.³¹⁶ This should help pupils build progressively on foundational knowledge, supporting deep and lasting scientific understanding and scientific literacy. We recommend detailed mapping of topic progression from Key Stages 1 to 4, ensuring that key concepts are revisited meaningfully and streamlining overly broad topics that have excessive examples. Once this foundational work is complete, we recommend considering the inclusion of new or reintroduced content where evidence suggests it could enhance students' engagement with, understanding of and progression in Science. This should be done without compromising the knowledge-rich coherence and rigour established in the Science curriculum to date.

The Review has heard concerns that a lack of representation of the diversity of scientists and their work can have a negative impact on pupils' engagement and reinforce the

should develop across subjects and key stages'); University of Manchester & The Ogden Trust (2021) - [The 10 Key Issues with Children's Learning in Primary Science in England](#).

³¹⁵ Teacher Tapp (2023) - [Science: We Want More Space!](#)

³¹⁶ Association for Science Education (2010) - [Principles and Big Ideas of Science Education](#); Institute of Physics (2024) - [The fundamentals of 11 to 19 physics](#)

perception that Science, and scientific careers, are not for them.³¹⁷ The Review considers that the Science curriculum must be firmly grounded in scientific knowledge and concepts, rather than focusing on individuals. Nevertheless, we want to ensure the curriculum empowers teachers to illustrate the Science curriculum with inclusive examples of individuals working in and contributing to science,³¹⁸ so that all pupils feel engaged by Science; in turn supporting their futures as informed citizens and securing the pipeline for the economically important Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) workforce.³¹⁹ Resources from Oak National Academy and other organisations should be used to support this.

Many respondents to the Call for Evidence argued for clearer, more coherently sequenced opportunities to develop key skills and experiences through practical science. Evidence suggests that the overall frequency of practical work³²⁰ in schools has reduced since 2016, with a further reduction in hands-on practical work since 2019, and the most common medium of exposure to practical being video.³²¹ The role and usefulness of practical work in Science education have long been debated.³²² Despite high-quality practical work being an essential element of the Science curriculum and wider scientific study, it is often delivered without a clearly established purpose linked to curriculum aims or to the methods, objects and phenomena studied by scientists.³²³ This has meant that practical work is not always effective and can detract from already limited teaching time.

We therefore recommend that practical science activity - focused on high-quality teacher demonstration and hands on work by pupils - be underpinned by clearly defined purposes in the Programmes of Study and GCSE subject content. Practical work should serve meaningful goals, such as building students' procedural confidence with scientific equipment, reinforcing key scientific concepts and fostering curiosity and engagement. This should be supported by additional guidance and mapping that identifies which topics lend themselves to specific types of practical work and outlines the relevant skills and procedural knowledge to be acquired.

As set out previously, climate change is a significant challenge that affects many aspects of modern life, and young people have been clear in their desire to see an explicit focus

³¹⁷ Archer, L., Moote, J., MacLeod, E., Francis, B., & DeWitt, J. (2020) [ASPIRES 2: Young people's science and career aspirations, age 10-19](#). London: UCL Institute of Education; A key finding from the British Science Association (BSA) (2023) - [Youth Insights Data: Science's service to young people and our society](#) was that only 8% of young people can think of a scientist who looks like them.

³¹⁸ Additionally, the curriculum should acknowledge the broader historical context of science and scientific discovery across the 18th and 19th centuries, to enable open discussions about the historical limitations of diversity in scientific fields.

³¹⁹ Archer, L. & DeWitt, J. (2016) - [Understanding Young People's Science Aspirations | How students form ideas about 'becoming a scientist'](#)

³²⁰ Which can mean student hands-on practicals, teacher demonstrations, or video demonstrations.

³²¹ Royal Society (2019) - [Science Education Tracker 2019](#); Royal Society (2023) - [Science Education Tracker 2023](#)

³²² Nuffield Foundation (2025) - [Purposeful and effective practical work in primary school science](#); Gatsby (2017) - [Good Practical Science](#); Millar, R. (2004) - [The role of practical work in the teaching and learning of science](#)

³²³ Ofsted (2023) - [Finding the optimum: the science subject report](#)

on [climate education](#).³²⁴ Climate science is also critical to supporting the wider economy, with the growth of the green economy expected to double the number of STEM jobs in the UK.³²⁵ The Science curriculum currently makes only limited reference to climate science and scientific work to combat climate change, and some content in the Programme of Study is outdated. This should be addressed. Giving appropriate attention to climate science should empower young people to understand the scientific causes of, consequences of, and potential solutions to climate change. Achieving this requires a coordinated approach across scientific disciplines, ensuring that environmental and climate-related content is integrated meaningfully and coherently rather than only being presented as a standalone topic.

Finally, our engagement has underscored the importance of ensuring that the Science curriculum supports young people to deal with misinformation and other challenges. See [media literacy](#). It is vital that the Science curriculum equips children and young people, across all key stages, with the skills to evaluate scientific claims critically, assess evidence from multiple sources and understand how science operates in everyday life.³²⁶

Triple Science

There is a single national curriculum for Science up to Key Stage 4. However, the GCSE subject content divides the subject into two distinct routes. Combined Science refers to taking the equivalent of two GCSEs in Science, covering equal shares of Biology, Chemistry and Physics (resulting in two GCSE grades which are not assigned to individual disciplines). Triple Science (often referred to as ‘separate Sciences’) refers to taking three individual GCSEs, one each in Biology, Chemistry and Physics, with a grade awarded for each one. Since its introduction, there has been a general positive trend in the uptake of Triple Science, from 16% in 2009/10 to 27% in 2018/19; it has fallen slightly in recent years, with 23% of state-funded pupils taking Triple Science in 2024/25.³²⁷

Science education and further progression into STEM-related careers are unequivocally important for economic growth and driving important societal change.³²⁸ These careers are also comparatively well paid.³²⁹ Students who take Triple Science, rather than Combined Science, are significantly more likely to study Science subjects at A Level and degree level, even when controlling for variables such as prior attainment. Specifically,

³²⁴ Royal Society (2023) - [Science Education Tracker 2023](#); British Science Association (2023) - [Youth Insights Data: Topics of importance to young people](#)

³²⁵ UK Parliament (2025) - [UK STEM skills pipeline](#). The report notes that, with a current national shortfall of 173,000 skilled STEM workers already, it is crucial that young people receive a suitable education in climate science so they can secure these future opportunities.

³²⁶ Godec, S., King, H. & Archer, L. (2017) - *The Science Capital Teaching Approach: engaging students with science, promoting social justice*. London: University College London. UCL Institute of Education (2017) - [The Science Capital Teaching Approach](#)

³²⁷ Science and technology Select Committee (2012) - [Supplementary written evidence submitted by the Department for Education](#); DfE (2025) - [Key stage 4 performance, Academic year 2024/25](#)

³²⁸ FFT Education Datalab (2023) - [The long-term outcomes associated with Key Stage 4 science options](#); UK Parliament (2025) - [UK STEM skills pipeline](#); British Science Association (2025) - [Science education vital for UK growth and fighting misinformation, British Science Week survey shows](#)

³²⁹ DfE (2018) - [Undergraduate degrees: labour market returns](#)

students who take Triple Science rather than Combined Science are 3.9 times more likely to go on to take at least one science subject at A Level,³³⁰ while students who take Triple Science are 1.8 times more likely to go on to study a science subject at degree level.³³¹ When controlling for prior attainment and student characteristics, students who achieved at least one grade A/7 in Triple Science had slightly higher lifetime earnings than those who achieved at least one A/7 in Combined Science. Furthermore, the lifetime earnings return from achieving at least one C/4 in Triple Science is substantially higher than achieving at least one C/4 grade in Combined Science.³³²

Despite these clear benefits, issues of equity surrounding access to Triple Science have been raised both through this Review and wider research. Around 9% of state-funded mainstream secondary schools do not currently offer Triple Science.³³³ Even in schools where it is available, internal practices often direct some young people to Combined Science rather than Triple Science.³³⁴ These patterns reflect social and geographic inequalities. A DfE survey shows that 8% of students surveyed in Year 10 and 11 were discouraged from taking Triple Science and 5% did not have a choice. Regional disparities were also evident: 4% of secondary students in the North West would have liked to have taken Triple Science but were unable to, compared to just 1% in London and the South East.³³⁵ Socio-economic factors have also been shown to reflect the type of Science GCSE pathway students follow, with schools that have a higher proportion of disadvantaged students being less likely to enter students for Triple Science.³³⁶ Currently, only 13% of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds take Triple Science, compared to 28% of those not disadvantaged.³³⁷

The Review acknowledges the system-wide and school-level barriers that limit access to Triple Science, many of which fall outside the scope of this Review. They include a lack of specialist teachers and timetabling challenges because of the increased teaching time required. Nonetheless, it is both important and fair that all students should be entitled to study Triple Science if they wish to. We therefore recommend that the Government introduces a student entitlement to Triple Science so that any student who wants to study

³³⁰ The likelihood of a student going on to take A Level Chemistry was 4.4 times higher than for a Combined Science student; for Biology it was 3.6 times higher and for Physics 2.9 times higher. FFT Education Datalab (2023) - [The long-term outcomes associated with Key Stage 4 science options](#)

³³¹ FFT Education Datalab (2023) - [The long-term outcomes associated with Key Stage 4 science options](#); Francis, B., Henderson, M., Godec, S., Watson, E., Archer, L. & Moote, J. (2023) - [An exploration of the impact of science stratification in the English school curriculum: the relationship between 'Double' and 'Triple' Science pathways and pupils' further study of science](#)

³³² DfE (2021) - [GCSE attainment and lifetime earnings](#)

³³³ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

³³⁴ Francis, B., Henderson, M., Godec, S., Watson, E., Archer, L. & Moote, J. (2023) - [An exploration of the impact of science stratification in the English school curriculum: the relationship between 'Double' and 'Triple' Science pathways and pupils' further study of science](#)

³³⁵ DfE (2023) - [Parent, pupil and learner panel omnibus surveys for 2022 to 2023: April and May Wave](#)

³³⁶ STEM Learning (2022) - [Disadvantage, gender & ethnicity in STEM - and how we're rising to the challenge](#)

³³⁷ DfE (2025) - [Key Stage 4 performance, Academic year 2024/25](#)

it can do so. This should eventually be statutory, with the intention to allow preparatory time and support for schools that do not currently offer it. The DfE should also conduct further analytical work as part of planning for wider implementation of this gradual change, including taking account of workforce considerations, and consulting with key stakeholders further.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Ensures more cohesion and consistency across the primary Science curriculum, including clearer guidance on what should be taught, to what depth, at each stage.
- At all key stages, bases the Science curriculum on the fundamental concepts of each individual discipline so that students develop deep scientific and disciplinary knowledge and skills. In light of this, the Government should consider where content can be streamlined, especially at GCSE, without affecting rigour or the subject's knowledge-rich focus.
- Ensures that the curriculum more clearly articulates the purpose and expectations of high-quality practical work in supporting the building of substantive knowledge and the development of important skills and procedural knowledge.
- Ensures that, in relevant areas, the Science curriculum explicitly develops students' understanding of the scientific principles that explain climate change and sustainability and the global efforts to tackle them.
- Introduces an entitlement to Triple Science at GCSE, so that any student who wants to study Triple Science has the opportunity to do so.

Key Stage 4 Technical Awards

Technical Awards are level 1 or 2 qualifications at Key Stage 4, designed to support progression to further study but with a more vocational focus compared to GCSEs.³³⁸ They are typically taken alongside GCSEs. Technical Awards across 18 subjects³³⁹ are included in the 2025 secondary performance tables.³⁴⁰ They cover a diverse range of subjects, some of which overlap with GCSE subject areas (including Performing Arts, Music and PE) and many that do not (including Travel and Tourism, Animal Care and Hair and Personal Care). The most popular subjects assessed in 2023/24 were PE, Health and Social Care and Business.³⁴¹ Given the large number of Technical Awards, this section considers them collectively.

Technical Awards play an important role in offering a broad curriculum that accommodates diverse interests and supports progression to different 16-19 pathways. Like GCSEs, Technical Awards have a limited number of guided learning hours (a minimum of 120),³⁴² which allows for fair comparisons within Progress 8.

A significant proportion of schools offer Technical Awards. In 2024/25, 45% of students in state-funded schools took at least one Technical Award,³⁴³ with 84% of state-funded schools and 91% of state-funded mainstream schools offering them.³⁴⁴ In summer 2025, 6% of Key Stage 4 grades were for a Technical Award.³⁴⁵

Evidence shows that, for most students, Technical Awards are taken as part of a broader qualification portfolio, primarily consisting of GCSEs. Typically, students take one Technical Award alongside around eight GCSEs. The data also shows that disadvantaged students (50%) are disproportionately more likely to enter Technical Awards than their non-disadvantaged peers (43%).³⁴⁶

These qualifications contribute to school accountability measures, forming part of the 'open' group of subjects within Progress 8. Although up to three Technical Awards can be counted, only around 3% of students take three or more.³⁴⁷ This pattern reflects the reforms introduced following the Wolf Review, which aimed to ensure that vocational

³³⁸ A vocational qualification is aligned to a sector and is usually taught and assessed in an applied way. A technical qualification meanwhile has a direct alignment with an occupational standard. Despite the name 'Technical Awards', these qualifications are therefore vocational rather than technical.

³³⁹ There are some repeated offerings in the same subject by different awarding bodies (e.g. Pearson BTEC and WJEC Health and Social Care are counted separately) and different syllabus codes for the same qualification (e.g. performing arts with a 'dance' approach and a 'production' approach are counted separately).

³⁴⁰ DfE (2025) - [Key Stage 4 qualifications and discount codes: 2014 to 2027 performance tables](#)

³⁴¹ DfE (2025) - [Key stage 4 performance, Academic year 2024/25](#)

³⁴² DfE (2024) - [14 to 16 qualifications technical guide: 2024 performance tables](#)

³⁴³ DfE (2025) - [Key stage 4 performance, Academic year 2024/25](#)

³⁴⁴ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

³⁴⁵ Ofqual (2025) - [Qualification results in England: summer 2025](#)

³⁴⁶ DfE (2025) - 'Subject pupil level characteristic data', divided by total number of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 'All state-funded pupil characteristics and geography data' from 'Key stage 4 performance'

³⁴⁷ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

qualifications are rigorous and purposeful, as well as ensuring all young people access a broad and balanced qualifications portfolio.³⁴⁸

Schools face practical challenges in delivering Technical Awards, including managing non-exam assessment and access to specialist teachers. Despite these challenges, many school leaders we spoke to during the Review noted that the content and approach of Technical Awards are appealing to students. Research indicates that students taking Technical Awards tend to have lower absence and exclusion rates compared to similar students who do not take Technical Awards.³⁴⁹ This was reflected in a recent DfE survey where school leaders said that they offered Technical Awards because of the appeal of the assessment methods (48%), because they support students' engagement with school (42%) and because their content was more interesting or relevant to students than GCSEs (40%). Additionally, two-thirds (69%) of leaders said that they offer Technical Awards because they perceive these qualifications prepare students better for their 16-19 pathways compared to GCSEs.³⁵⁰

Historically, Technical Awards have faced criticism for being perceived as an 'easy' option compared to GCSEs, a perception shaped by earlier, less standardised vocational qualifications.³⁵¹ They underwent significant reform in 2020 that aimed to respond to this criticism by introducing greater rigour and by making Technical Awards more comparable with GCSEs. The reformed qualifications are still being embedded in the system, with 2025 marking only the second year of awarding. As such, most evidence relates to the pre-reformed qualifications. Data on progression outcomes for learners who have taken the current suite of Technical Awards is particularly lacking, limiting the extent to which we can draw firm conclusions about their long-term impact.

Technical Awards are designed to align with a broad sector or occupational group (for example, health and social care, animal care or engineering), but they are not intended to provide direct progression into a specific occupation or technical or vocational pathway. Instead, their purpose is to provide students with a broad introduction to an industry and/or vocational field and to support progression into related 16-19 pathways, including technical and academic qualifications at level 3, level 2 and apprenticeships. To ensure that all learners at level 3 have high-quality opportunities, the Review recommends that a third, vocational, 16-19 pathway is introduced alongside technical (T Levels) and academic (A Levels) pathways (see [V Levels](#)). This 'V Level' pathway would provide a strengthened vocational offer for 16 to 19-year-olds. This may mean that changes need to be made to the content of Technical Awards to support progression to this new vocational pathway.

³⁴⁸ DfE (2014) - [Review of vocational education: the Wolf report](#)

³⁴⁹ DfE (2019) - [Non-GCSE qualifications in England: key stage 4 entries and absence and exclusions outcomes](#)

³⁵⁰ DfE (2025) - [School and college voice: November 2024](#)

³⁵¹ DfE (2014) - [Review of vocational education: the Wolf report](#)

Recommendations

Given that Technical Awards were reformed only recently and that limited data exists on the reformed suite of Technical Awards, we do not suggest initiating significant reform at this stage. A period of stability will enable the DfE to monitor the relevance and quality of the current suite of Technical Awards. However, we think scope exists for some evolutionary changes within the current structures to build on the progress made so far with these qualifications.

We recommend that the Government:

- Allows the reformed Key Stage 4 Technical Awards to embed fully in the system before the DfE considers implementing further significant reforms.
- Should prepare to review the reformed Technical Awards from 2027 with attention given to:
 - Attainment and completion rates, functioning of assessments, stakeholders' views and other relevant data.
 - How content supports progression to 16-19 pathways, including those which will have been reformed.
 - Whether the structural requirements defined in the technical guidance, including assessment requirements, supports the broader purpose of Technical Awards whilst ensuring they remain rigorous and reliable.
- Should encourage awarding organisations to update Key Stage 4 Technical Awards to improve progression to the updated 16-19 pathways, if the 16-19 'third pathway' of V Levels is developed and linked to occupational standards.
- Maintains the current moratorium on new Technical Awards to ensure stability and effective monitoring, except where evidence of demand for a new qualification or substantive feedback on existing qualifications is exceptionally compelling (for example, this Review's recommendation relating to the [Technical Award for Music](#)).

Accountability, performance measures and assessment

Accountability and performance measures

Accountability measures are designed to inform evaluation of schools and colleges, using their students' and learners' outcomes. They are typically used to measure attainment and/or progress across the primary, secondary and 16-19 phases.

In this section, we focus on the measures which affect the curriculum and related behaviours at secondary level, specifically the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) and Progress 8 (alongside Attainment 8). While we have considered accountability measures across all phases, we propose that changes are particularly needed at this level. We support the continued focus of primary accountability measures on the core subjects of Maths and English, which remain essential and should be maintained.

In this section, we also consider the inclusivity of performance measures, being especially mindful of the increasing number of students with SEND in the education system.

English Baccalaureate (EBacc)

The EBacc, introduced in 2010, refers to a specific combination of GCSE subjects. Performance measures report the percentage of students entering and achieving the EBacc. The combination of subjects reflects a specific academic portfolio comprised of Maths, English (Language and Literature), Sciences, a Modern or Ancient Language, and History or Geography.³⁵² The purpose of the EBacc was to:

- Ensure that students pursue a broad range of academic subjects up to age 16
- Break the link between students' backgrounds and their GCSE choices
- Reverse the trend of falling GCSE entries in History, Geography and MFL seen at the time.

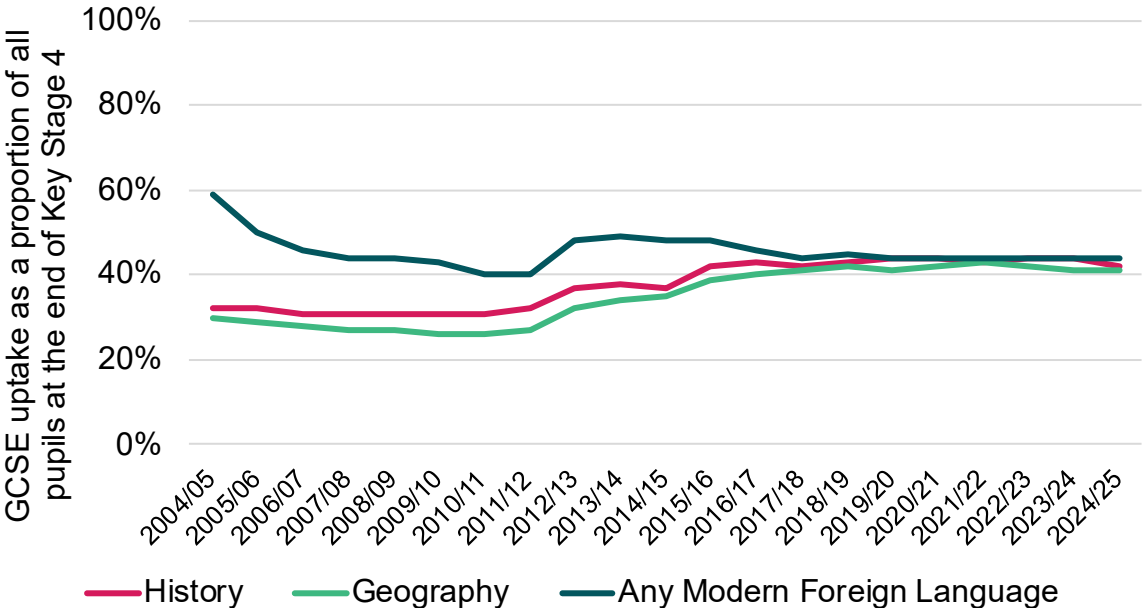
Students' choices can unintentionally limit future study options, particularly for those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The EBacc subjects reflect those the Russell Group of universities has previously referred to as 'facilitating subjects' at A Level. So, studying them at GCSE was seen to support progress to the A Levels that 'high tariff' universities valued more highly. However, the Russell Group never intended for facilitating subjects to be the 'only subjects pupils should consider to get into a Russell Group university'³⁵³ and have since stopped the publication of the list of 'facilitating subjects' when they launched their Informed Choices website.

³⁵² DfE (2019) - [English Baccalaureate \(EBacc\)](#)

³⁵³ [Frequently asked questions | Informed Choices](#)

The EBacc was therefore well intentioned and has had some successes. Before the introduction of the EBacc performance measures, take-up of MFL and Geography was declining and History take-up stood at just over 30% of students.³⁵⁴ Following their introduction, the proportions of learners taking Geography, History and any language at GCSE all saw increased uptake of at least five percentage points between 2011/12 and 2012/13. Figure 7. Proportion of Key Stage 4 students taking GCSE History, GCSE Geography, and GCSEs in at least one Modern Foreign Language shows that for MFL, this fell between 2013/14 and 2017/18, before remaining stable from 2017/18 onwards, with 44% of students taking a language GCSE in 2024/25 (Figure 7).³⁵⁵

Figure 7. Proportion of Key Stage 4 students taking GCSE History, GCSE Geography, and GCSEs in at least one Modern Foreign Language³⁵⁶



However, increases in the uptake of EBacc subjects have not translated into increased study of them at 16-19. While uptake in GCSE History and GCSE Geography rose by over 10% points between 2009/10 and 2024/25, entries for A Level History and A Level Geography remain relatively consistent as a proportion of all A Level entries since 2010.³⁵⁷ In addition, language A Level entries as a percentage of all A Level entries fell slightly from 4% to 3% between 2009/10 and 2023/24, despite a modest rise at GCSE level.³⁵⁸

Among students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, EBacc uptake has increased since 2010/11. In 2024/25, 29% of them took the full suite of EBacc

³⁵⁴ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#)
³⁵⁵ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#)
³⁵⁶ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#)
³⁵⁷ DfE (2025) - [A level and other 16-18 results, Academic year 2023/24](#)
³⁵⁸ DfE (2025) - [Key stage 4 performance, Academic year 2024/25](#)

subjects compared with 9% in 2011. However, their EBacc uptake still remains lower than for non-disadvantaged students. In that group, EBacc uptake increased from 26% to 45% over the same period.³⁵⁹

The EBacc has also led to students being entered for GCSEs in which they are unlikely to perform well, and this is disproportionately true for those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. This is evidenced by the growing gap in EBacc attainment, where the gap between disadvantaged students and their peers in the proportion of the students taking and achieving the EBacc has grown from 18 percentage points in 2012/13³⁶⁰ to 21 percentage points in 2024/25.³⁶¹ While promoting the importance of academic subjects and less advantaged young people's access to them is laudable, this is not valuable if it results in more young people failing in those subjects, rather than succeeding in others - and the increased EBacc attainment gap suggests that this is happening.

Evidence suggests that studying a portfolio of academic subjects aids access to A Levels and to university and that achieving the EBacc correlates with a student applying to and attending university. However, the evidence does not suggest that taking the EBacc combination of subjects increases the likelihood that students attend Russell Group universities.³⁶²

Responses to the Call for Evidence argued that the EBacc measures have served to unnecessarily constrain subject choice for some students (and, consequently, have affected students' engagement, their achievement or both). For those that take the EBacc combination, it has resulted in little choice about what subjects they study at Key Stage 4. Given its structure, to be eligible for the EBacc a student taking nine subjects (the national average) at Key Stage 4 would have seven subjects pre-selected (with a choice between History or Geography), or eight subjects if taking Triple Science rather than Combined Science (two GCSEs).³⁶³ In addition, students in schools with a religious designation are often mandated to enter GCSE Religious Studies. All this leaves little space for them to choose Computing, arts and vocational subjects. Schools and organisations representing the arts and other non-EBacc subjects have strongly

³⁵⁹ DfE (2016) - [Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2014 to 2015](#); DfE (2025) - [Key stage 4 performance, Academic year 2024/25](#)

³⁶⁰ DfE (2016) - [Revised GCSE and equivalent results in England: 2014 to 2015](#) (see Characteristics national tables) - 67% of non-disadvantaged students who entered the EBacc achieved grade 4 or above in the EBacc, compared to 49% for socio-economically disadvantaged students

³⁶¹ DfE (2025) - ['National characteristics data' from 'Key stage 4 performance'](#) - 68% of non-disadvantaged students who entered the EBacc achieved grade 4 or above in the EBacc, compared to 47% for socio-economically disadvantaged students

³⁶² Anders, J., Henderson, M., Moulton, V. & Sullivan, A. (2018) - [Incentivising Specific Combinations of Subjects – Does It Make Any Difference to University Access? | National Institute Economic Review | Cambridge Core](#)

³⁶³ To conform to EBacc, a student would take: Maths, English language and English literature, three single Sciences or Combined Science, a Modern or Ancient Language and either History or Geography, making seven GCSEs (eight if the student takes triple science rather than combined science which counts for two GCSEs).

expressed their concerns about the EBacc's constraining effects. In considering these views in relation to falls in GCSE uptake in different arts subjects we have been cautious in ascribing cause, given different issues at play (such as teacher supply, social trends etc). Nevertheless, it is notable that all arts subjects bar Art and Design have seen decline in uptake since the introduction of the EBacc.

The Review is clear that schools should promote a curriculum at Key Stage 4 that is appropriately broad and balanced, enabling young people to pursue their interests and passions whilst ensuring uptake of the subjects that are most likely to support life chances and the needs of our society and economy. This should include a strong academic core for all. We do not consider that the EBacc performance measures aid this goal. They unnecessarily constrain subject choice, have led to an increased attainment gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students in EBacc subjects, and have not aided access to Russell Group universities as intended. Prioritising certain subjects across an extensive portfolio has created necessary trade-offs between them³⁶⁴ (for example, students taking Combined instead of Triple Science).

Although the EBacc may have contributed to halting the declining take-up of Languages (noting again that causality is difficult to prove), it has not been successful in its aim of significantly increasing the proportion studying Languages.³⁶⁵ The initial target that 75% of Year 10 students in state-funded mainstream schools would be studying the EBacc combination of subjects by 2022 was not met; neither was the 2025 ambition that 90% enter the EBacc, with full EBacc entry standing at just 41% in 2024/25.³⁶⁶ This stalling of progress on EBacc entry progress suggests that the policy is no longer working as intended.

Given the above, our view is that the EBacc headline and associated measures should be removed from school accountability measures.

Progress 8

Progress 8 aims to capture the progress that students make from the end of Key Stage 2 to the end of Key Stage 4. It is a type of value-added measure: their results are compared with those of others nationally with similar prior attainment. Students who have higher Attainment 8 scores compared to those with similar prior attainment will contribute positively to their school's Progress 8 score.

³⁶⁴ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#) (Polling of Key Stage 4 and 16-19 learners and parents)

³⁶⁵ UK Parliament (2011) - [The English Baccalaureate: Government response to the Committee's Fifth Report](#)

³⁶⁶ DfE (2025) - [Key stage 4 performance, Academic year 2024/25](#)

While Progress 8 seeks to incentivise the uptake of EBacc subjects, it does not require the full suite of subjects to be taken. Instead, it measures students' progress across eight qualifications grouped into three 'buckets':

- The first bucket contains English and Maths (double-weighted)
- The second bucket (the 'EBacc' bucket) contains three EBacc subjects (the sciences, languages and humanities)
- The third bucket contains three 'open' slots, which can include additional EBacc subjects, non-EBacc subjects and other approved qualifications such as Technical Awards.

The combination of the Maths and English bucket, plus the existing EBacc bucket, ensures that, in practice, young people must take English (taking English Language *and* Literature is incentivised), Maths and (at least Combined) Science, which are mandatory subjects, plus one other EBacc subject, such as History, Geography or a Language. Students are then able to select any other approved qualification. Typically, this will be a further three subjects if the student is taking nine qualifications, the most common number at Key Stage 4. We think that this represents a desirable balance between breadth and choice, securing both the academic core that is so important for young people's life chances but also the flexibility they need to support and reflect their diverse interests and desired pathways.

As we stated in our [Interim Report](#), we are strongly committed to the Progress 8 measure. Our view remains that it supports both students' progress and curriculum breadth. We therefore recommend making no changes to the structure of Progress 8 or the composition of the 'buckets'. We recommend only that the 'EBacc' bucket is renamed 'Academic Breadth'.

Inclusivity within performance measures

Supporting the needs and abilities of all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) must be underpinned by an accountability system that captures and celebrates the progress of all of them and so incentivises schools to provide an inclusive curriculum.

We have heard that the pressure exerted by accountability and performance measures for schools to perform well in standardised assessments can act as a disincentive for them to admit or retain pupils with SEND, or can lead them to narrow the range of qualification pathways they offer, ultimately preventing access to subjects that may allow them to achieve and thrive.

While we believe that Progress 8 is working well and should remain unchanged, we are aware of some criticisms that the measure is not fully inclusive. The only

contextualisation within Progress 8 is prior attainment; other factors beyond a school's control are not taken into account, such as the proportion of students receiving free school meals or the proportion with SEND. Initiatives introduced by previous Governments that took account of such factors include the Contextual Value Added (CVA)³⁶⁷ measure and Performance Scales (P Scales).³⁶⁸ CVA was withdrawn in 2010/11 and P Scales underwent a phased removal from 2018/19 onwards (and was replaced by pre-key stage standards and the engagement model).³⁶⁹

The Review has heard concerns that there remains no clear way to recognise the progress or achievements of those with the highest levels of need. In addition, some concerns have been expressed that taking eight GCSE subjects is unrealistically challenging for some students and that Progress 8 inhibits flexibility in this respect.

Despite feedback regarding inclusivity in Progress 8, we consider that its focus on progress for all students irrespective of prior attainment, and its incentivising of curriculum breadth for every young person irrespective of background, remain laudable aims, supporting social justice and high standards for all.

Nevertheless, we have explored additional and alternative measures that might be implemented alongside Progress and Attainment 8. Our high-level appraisals of these can be found below. However, at present, we do not feel confident in recommending any other measures.

Instead, noting the Government's response to its consultation on school accountability reform, we welcome its commitment to developing a digital service that enables schools to benchmark and compare themselves with other, similar schools. We hope that this will foster more effective collaboration between schools, particularly those with similar intakes, and facilitate school to school improvement. In its development, we encourage the Department to draw on previous initiatives in this space such as the EEF's 'families of schools' tool when considering levels of contextualisation within this digital service – with an especial focus on inclusivity and pupil demographics.

We strongly endorse the development and piloting of this service, for both primary and secondary schools.

³⁶⁷ CVA was a progress measure that reported pupil progress based on prior attainment as well as such things like special educational needs and/or disabilities, gender, first language, ethnicity, FSM status, and whether they were in care.

³⁶⁸ P Scales were a set of performance descriptors used to assess the progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities who were working below the national curriculum level.

³⁶⁹ Pre-key stage standards are a set of teacher assessment frameworks for pupils working below national curriculum assessment standards, but who are engaged in subject-specific study. The engagement model is a statutory assessment framework for pupils working below national curriculum assessment standards, but who are not engaged in subject-specific study.

The other options that we considered were:

- **An exemption from Progress 8:** we explored the possibility of recommending adjustments to the existing accountability framework to allow certain students to be exempt from the Progress 8 measure. Overall, we concluded that exemption-based options were not viable. They are unlikely to meaningfully impact a school's Progress 8 score unless an unreasonably large proportion of the cohort qualifies for exemption and each option presents significant challenges in terms of implementation and monitoring. There is also a risk that such approaches could exacerbate existing inequalities within the system, incentivising some schools to manipulate the process to improve their position in performance tables.
- **A new, flexible measure:** others have suggested introducing an alternative progress measure, such as Progress 6 (measuring progress for fewer subjects) which adjusts how attainment is measured so that students with SEND can contribute more positively to a school's Progress 8 score. However, such alternatives risk compromising breadth of subject choice for those with SEND (potentially consigning some students to the study of just English, Maths, Science and one other subject), and we have therefore rejected such options.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Removes the EBacc performance measure and the associated EBacc entry and attainment headline accountability measures.
- Retains Progress 8 (and Attainment 8) with no changes to its structure or subject composition but renames the current EBacc bucket to 'Academic Breadth' bucket.
- Continues to develop initiatives related to similar schools, with a particular emphasis on supporting inclusive approaches within accountability measures.

Primary assessment

As we observed in our [Interim Report](#), the primary assessment system is broadly working well. The Review Panel believes that these assessments rightly focus on the key foundational skills of reading, writing, and Maths, which are essential to enable children and young people to succeed throughout their education and their lives.

Statutory assessments are important in holding schools to account for their pupils' progress and attainment and, alongside other national curriculum assessments taken in the earlier years, they help to ascertain how well pupils have learned the content of the

national curriculum. Responses to the Call for Evidence emphasised the importance of identifying gaps (as well as where pupils have progressed), and the Review Panel is keen to ensure that the information from these assessments is used effectively to aid this and enable these pupils to be well supported.

Key Stage 1

At Key Stage 1, the Phonics Screening Check (PSC) focuses on assessing pupils' phonic knowledge and skill, and the extent to which they can apply these successfully to decode phonics. The effectiveness of phonics is well evidenced,³⁷⁰ and, given the importance of children's security in reading for their educational progress, we consider it important that the check remains.

Some pupils cannot undertake the PSC, as the format requires them to decode aloud to the listening adult conducting the check. This means that there is no consistent way to assess pre- and non-verbal pupils on their decoding and where they need further support. Given the importance of a strong grounding in phonics, we recommend that the DfE and the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) explore ways that schools can assess non- and pre-verbal pupils' decoding and ensure greater scrutiny of their progress at this critical stage. We recommend that any alternative arrangements are administered in the school setting, and (as now) not included in published accountability measures. This will help to maintain the integrity of the PSC and ensure pupils who can undertake it continue to do so, while also making sure that those who cannot are still checked.

Optional national curriculum assessments (commonly referred to as SATs)³⁷¹ at the end of Key Stage 1 cover the English and Maths curricula. Schools can use these assessments to identify where pupils need support in reading, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and Maths as they move into Key Stage 2. These assessments have been optional at Key Stage 1 since 2023/24 and the DfE does not collect data on how many pupils take them. However, evidence from a 2024 Teacher Tapp survey suggests that many schools continue to use them, with 60% of the teachers surveyed indicating they would be administering them.³⁷² We support the decision of the DfE and the STA to continue to provide these optional assessments and recommend that they consider how best to encourage schools to make greater use of them.

Key Stage 2

Key Stage 2 statutory assessments include the Multiplication Tables Check (MTC), taken in Year 4 to assess pupils' mastery of times tables, and the end of Key Stage 2 national curriculum assessments (commonly referred to as SATs) in Maths, English reading and

³⁷⁰ EEF (2021) - [Phonics](#)

³⁷¹ National assessments taken in key stages 1-3 are officially called 'national curriculum assessments'. They are commonly referred to as 'SATs' by the sector, parents and the public.

³⁷² Schools Week (2025) - [SATs: Primaries fail to opt out but won't be testing](#)

grammar, punctuation and spelling (GPS), alongside teacher assessments in English writing and Science.

The results help to assess whether pupils have learned the national curriculum content in English and Maths, but these assessments play a role in important accountability measures since they are used to determine Progress 8 scores in secondary schools. Over half (54%) of parents and carers of Key Stage 3 students found that the results from the Key Stage 2 assessments were useful in informing them about their child's progress, particularly parents and carers of children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.³⁷³ Primary schools can access pupils' detailed results, including their responses to each question, as can secondary schools for incoming Year 7 students. We support the DfE and the STA's provision of this data to pupils' primary and future secondary schools, and recommend that they explore how to encourage schools to further use this information further to best support transition to Key Stage 3, including using it to inform curriculum planning. This could include providing schools with guidance and support to enable them to interpret the data and reviewing its format to enable efficient analysis.

We consider that the Key Stage 2 assessments are generally performing well, but the Review Panel sees scope to improve some of them. We are convinced it is essential that all pupils benefit from knowledge of multiplication tables, and that fluency is important in mathematical understanding. However, we have heard that some pupils with SEND have specific needs (such as processing difficulties) which makes the MTC inaccessible. As with our recommendation on the PSC, we encourage the STA to investigate if access arrangements can be refined for pupils with these specific needs so that schools can identify knowledge gaps in multiplication tables and offer relevant support.

We indicated in our [Interim Report](#) that we would explore how to improve the writing assessment and the GPS test, with a view to better evaluation of and support for developing pupils' writing. Our recommendations on changes to the English curriculum will be an important lever in supporting improvements in this area (see [English](#)). We note the DfE's new writing framework which aims to support teachers through a common approach to teaching writing. However, as we acknowledged in the [Interim Report](#), assessment of the curriculum also influences what and how pupils are taught.

The significant impact of assessments on teaching and learning was emphasised in responses to the Call for Evidence, with particular focus on the GPS test. The national curriculum requires pupils to understand the grammatical terminology set out in the Programme of Study, and the GPS test is designed to assess this.³⁷⁴ The Review Panel

³⁷³ DfE (2025) - [Parent, pupil and learner voice: December 2024](#). 54% of parents of Key Stage 3 pupils found Key Stage 2 assessments useful in informing them about their children's progress (42% did not). 62% of parents of children eligible for free school meals found Key Stage 2 results useful in informing them about their children's progress.

³⁷⁴ Note that the assessment of grammar, punctuation and spelling is not entirely separate from teacher-assessed writing, as the teacher assessment framework evaluates pupils on their ability to employ these features correctly.

believes that grammar, punctuation and spelling are crucial to a strong foundation in literacy. However, although the current GPS test reliably assesses pupils' grammatical knowledge, it is not primarily designed to assess their use of grammar in their own writing. A frequent theme raised in the Call for Evidence was that the test has led to a disproportionate amount of classroom time being spent on teaching grammatical constructs in isolation, often at the expense of a more integrated approach.

We have explored a range of options to incentivise the teaching of grammar in a way that supports its application in writing, whilst also ensuring that pupils build a strong foundation of important content. We recommend replacing the existing GPS test with an amended version. This should retain those elements of the current test that encourage effective teaching and a separate spelling element, and it should integrate short composition tasks. This should encourage a more proportionate and applied approach to learning grammar, punctuation and spelling whilst developing good writing capabilities that use grammatical constructs effectively. By reducing overly theoretical grammatical terminology in the curriculum, we aim to ensure that the new test does not increase the volume of assessment.

Teacher-assessed writing should be retained, alongside the new GPS test, but with improvements. Contributions to the Call for Evidence showed support for teacher assessment and noted its benefits as an opportunity to assess pupils' authentic writing holistically across the year and for them to show their capabilities outside a timed test. The moderation process for teacher assessment also has benefits as it supports teachers' professional development and provides an opportunity for them to engage with peers, although stakeholders have indicated that moderation can be time-consuming.

We have also heard that the teacher assessment framework could be improved to support the teaching of effective writing. There is evidence that the framework lacks clarity and is open to misinterpretation, which can lead to inconsistent judgements.³⁷⁵ This can contribute to distorted teaching, with significant time spent on asking pupils to repeatedly redraft a piece of writing until it meets all the criteria listed in the assessment framework. The teacher assessment framework would also need to be updated to reflect the revised English curriculum and its greater focus on fluency.

We believe that the benefits of teacher assessment can be maximised by strengthening the teacher assessment framework, to clarify requirements and improve the moderation process. The enhancements could support consistent, high-quality moderation, even in years where schools are not selected for external moderation and contribute to the reliability and consistency of externally moderated results. To improve the moderation system, the STA should explore options such as the feasibility of different models of external moderation (which could include using a national or external provider), strengthening peer moderation and providing greater guidance and materials to schools and local authorities. Any initiatives should be ambitious but mindful of resource pressures and teachers' workloads.

³⁷⁵ Clarkson, R. (2024) - ['It's missing the heart of what writing is about': teachers' interpretations of writing assessment criteria.](#)

Recommendations

Key Stage 1

We recommend that the Government:

- Ensures that the STA works with the DfE to find ways to encourage take-up of optional Key Stage 1 assessments.
- Ensures that the STA works with DfE to explore approaches for assessing progress for the small minority of pupils with certain SEND needs that make the Phonics Screening Check inaccessible. This assessment should be administered in the school setting.

Key Stage 2

We recommend that the Government:

- Ensures that the STA works with DfE to explore if access arrangements can be refined for pupils with certain SEND that make the Multiplication Tables Check inaccessible. This assessment should continue to be administered in a school setting.
- Develops an improved teacher assessment framework to provide teachers with clarity and include a greater focus on writing fluency.
- Reviews external moderation processes and looks to strengthen peer moderation between schools, with the aim of embedding good practice to improve moderation in years where schools are not selected for external moderation and improving consistency between external judgements.
- Replaces the current GPS test with an amended test, which retains some elements of the current GPS test but with new tasks to better assess composition and application of grammar and punctuation.
 - Once the new test is established in schools, the DfE may wish to consider whether the role of the test in accountability should remain as stands, or whether any changes, such as including the new test in headline measures, should be explored.

Secondary assessment

Key Stage 3

As set out in [‘our view of the key stages’](#), evidence suggests that Key Stage 3 faces three broad and significant challenges:

- limited progress by students.
- poor curriculum continuity from Key Stage 2.
- its lower priority relative to Key Stage 4.

Our subject-level recommendations seek to remedy issues with curriculum coherence at Key Stage 3 to ensure better sequencing between primary and secondary schools. They also seek to deal with the volume of content at Key Stage 4, which contributes to curtailing the Key Stage 3 curriculum so that teaching GCSE content can begin early.³⁷⁶

Since Key Stage 3 assessments were cancelled in 2008, schools have developed and administered their own assessments.³⁷⁷ However, we know that in a context of school resource challenges and given the high-stakes nature of Key Stage 4, Key Stage 3 receives less attention in a number of areas, including assessment. Ofsted's 2015 review found that systems and procedures to assess and monitor students' progress are not as well developed as at Key Stage 4 and beyond.³⁷⁸ Whilst the absence of national assessment data at Key Stage 3 makes it difficult to monitor the impact of this on attainment, there is evidence that progress at Key Stage 3 is often slower than at Key Stage 2, particularly in core subjects such as English and Maths.³⁷⁹

Moving through key stages without a secure grasp of these subjects is having a detrimental effect on outcomes. For example, only 20% of students with low Key Stage 2 prior attainment went on to achieve grade 4 or above in both English and Maths GCSEs, compared to 72% of middle prior attainers and 96% of high prior attainers.³⁸⁰ Four in 10 (40%) students do not achieve level 2 in one or both of English and Maths by the end of Key Stage 4 (see 16-19 Maths and English), without which they are less likely to progress to a sustained education, apprenticeship or employment destination after 16-19 study.³⁸¹

Before GCSEs, the last formal assessment of progress in these foundational subjects is at the end of Key Stage 2. Given evidence that students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are at particular risk of falling behind their more affluent peers and making slower progress during Key Stage 3, it is critical that we examine all the levers to narrow this gap.³⁸² We therefore see an opportunity to support schools to identify key gaps in core English and Maths knowledge through diagnostic assessment

³⁷⁶ UK Parliament (2023) - [Requires improvement: urgent change for 11–16 education](#)

³⁷⁷ Teacher Tapp (2025) - [Assessments in schools today](#)

³⁷⁸ Ofsted (2015) - [Key stage 3: the wasted years?](#)

³⁷⁹ DfE (2011) - [How do pupils progress during key stages 2 and 3?](#); EPI (2024) - [Star Assessments Benchmarking Report 2022/23](#)

³⁸⁰ [DfE \(2025\) - Key Stage 4 performance](#) – based on 2023/24 data as pupils who were at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2024/25 did not take Key Stage 2 assessments due to the pandemic. Therefore, Key Stage 2 prior attainment data is not available for this cohort

³⁸¹ DfE (2025) - [16-18 destination measures, Academic year 2023/24](#)

³⁸² Crawford, C., Macmillan, L. & Vignoles, A. (2016) - [When and Why do Initially High Attaining Poor Children Fall Behind](#); FFT education datalab (2024) - [School outcomes of “bright” 5-year-olds from poor backgrounds](#)

and to use this information to better support students to secure these foundations before they move into Key Stage 4.

We believe that diagnostic assessments in English and Maths, focusing on the key elements of the Key Stage 3 curriculum needed for success at GCSE in these subjects, could help teachers to assess their students' strengths and weaknesses, and address any gaps in their understanding. These assessments should be tightly focused to avoid the need for annualisation of the Key Stage 3 curriculum, and to avoid any perception that what is assessed comprises all the Key Stage 3 content or completes Key Stage 3 study in these two subjects.

This is a new approach for this key stage, and we would expect that, once developed, this assessment would be trialled to ensure it fulfils its intended purpose and does not have unintended consequences. If shown to be effective, we would recommend it becomes mandatory, but that it is not included in published school-level data, so that all students benefit without schools facing undue pressure. Finally, this assessment should take place in Year 8, partway through Key Stage 3. This would give schools sufficient time to plan and implement support for students with gaps in their knowledge and ensure that they are well prepared to progress into Key Stage 4. This should also help to ensure that Year 9 focuses intensively on closing gaps in knowledge and skills, alongside teaching new content, so that students begin GCSE courses in Year 10 with secure foundations.

Key Stage 4

The current Key Stage 4 assessment system has notable strengths that contribute to high standards and seek to ensure fairness for young people. Externally set and marked exams provide a fair and reliable indicator of what students know, understand and can do. They assess them in a standardised way and scripts are anonymous, reducing the risk that students' protected characteristics or socio-economic background affect how their performance is assessed. They also help to mitigate the risks of malpractice in completing assessments, an increasingly important consideration given the rise of generative AI. Written exams reduce the burden on teachers compared with other forms of assessment, such as coursework, and help limit the overall volume of assessment for students.

Polling undertaken for the Review showed that young people themselves value exams as they feel they are fair and give them the opportunity to demonstrate everything they have learned.³⁸³ In addition, annual surveys conducted by Ofqual show that general qualifications (including GCSEs and A Levels) are valued by a range of stakeholders, including employers, teachers and head teachers, the general public, young people and universities. The latest wave of this data showed that GCSEs are a trusted qualification

³⁸³ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#) (Polling of Key Stage 4 and 16-19 learners and parents)

(76%), that they are well understood (72%) and that they are regarded as good preparation for further study (71%).³⁸⁴

Our recommendations focus on general qualifications (especially GCSEs), with vocational qualifications addressed in other sections (see [Technical Awards](#)). In addition, we have focused on change at Key Stage 4, given we heard very little concern regarding A Levels in our Call for Evidence and our sector engagement, in contrast to the significant concern we heard about Key Stage 4 (see Academic Pathway: A Levels, on pg 150). However, where relevant, the Government will need to consider coherence between general qualifications, including AS qualifications and A Levels, in the light of any changes to GCSEs.

Volume of exam assessment

The Review has identified a number of areas for improvement. As set out in our [Interim Report](#), the amount of time spent on exam assessment at Key Stage 4 is excessive. This was a key theme raised in responses to our Call for Evidence and our wider stakeholder engagement.³⁸⁵ Based on the five most popular combinations of subjects (and accounting for variation between exam boards), students in England typically sit between 24 and 31 hours of external exams, typically taking between eight to 10 subjects in Year 11.³⁸⁶ Exact figures will depend on a number of factors and may be higher for students who are eligible for extra time, but some estimates are higher still. For example, OCR estimates this to be 31.5 hours.³⁸⁷ Whilst these estimates are comparable with Singapore (up to 31.5 hours), they are significantly higher than the time spent sitting exams in other high-performing jurisdictions such as Ireland (16 hours), New Zealand (18 hours) and Canada (Alberta) (10 hours).³⁸⁸ Given the impact on teaching time in Year 11 and England's outlier status in this context, we are determined to resolve it.

We have heard from our Call for Evidence and our polling that the volume of exams at the end of Key Stage 4 can exacerbate the pressure that students feel. Our polling found that whilst around half (52%) of students felt that the number of exams allowed them to demonstrate their knowledge and ability, over a third (37%) felt that there were too many (and just 5% felt there were too few).³⁸⁹ In addition, half of those who completed their

³⁸⁴ Ofqual (2024) - [Perceptions of A levels, GCSEs and other qualifications: wave 22](#)

³⁸⁵ E.g. Social Market Foundation (2024) - [Testing patience: Reducing the burden of the English school curriculum](#); OCR (2024) - [Striking the Balance: A review of 11 – 16 curriculum and assessment in England](#)

³⁸⁶ The figure on exam times is illustrative and based on the five most popular combinations of eight GCSE subjects in 2018 (eight was the average number of GCSEs taken). It accounts for variation between different exam boards' specifications and subjects taken. Exact figures will vary depending on the number of GCSEs taken, in which subjects, and which exam board specifications are included. Figures do not include non-exam assessment (NEA) which varies in duration considerably across subjects. Note that some countries do not assess all subjects studied (some assessing as few as four) and some will have higher volumes of other forms of assessment, such as coursework, alongside exam assessment.

³⁸⁷ OCR (2024) - [Striking the Balance: A review of 11 – 16 curriculum and assessment in England](#)

³⁸⁸ OCR (2024) - [Striking the Balance: A review of 11 – 16 curriculum and assessment in England](#) See alongside footnote 374 ('the figure on exam times is illustrative....')

³⁸⁹ [Curriculum and Assessment Review interim report – Key Stage 4 and 16–19 polling](#)

Key Stage 4 exams or assessments in summer 2024 found it difficult (41%) or very difficult (10%) to cope with stress during the exam period.³⁹⁰ However, this should be balanced with the fact that evidence suggesting a causal link between exams and poor wellbeing is contested. Analysis has found that, when accounting for age, the causal link between mental ill-health and exams is weak.³⁹¹ Nonetheless, we have considered students' experience of exams in developing our recommendations.

It is important to note that the volume, structure and nature of subject content play a key role in the volume of assessment and we address this through our recommendations on curriculum subjects (see [curriculum recommendations by subject](#)). The number of subjects that students study also has a bearing on the number of exams they sit and therefore the overall volume of exam assessment. There is no fixed number of subjects that students should study at Key Stage 4. Most commonly, they take nine qualifications, with Progress 8 incentivising eight of these.³⁹² However, the latest data shows that 26% of students take 10 or more Key Stage 4 qualifications.³⁹³ We encourage schools to support students in making choices about the number of subjects they take to ensure that the volume of content and assessment in Key Stage 4 is manageable.

However, the Review is clear that assessment design choices (such as the number of components, the number of questions or tasks and the type of tasks set in assessments) will play a key role in reducing the burden of exam assessment, and it is a priority that we address the volume of exams. In analysis submitted to the Review, Ofqual considered that a reduction of 10% is feasible with current content levels.³⁹⁴ In combination with our recommendations on curriculum content, we believe that it may be possible to go further than this. We are therefore proposing that the DfE and Ofqual seek to reduce overall GCSE exam volume by at least 10% using assessment levers. This can and must be done while maintaining high levels of reliability and without a negative impact on fairness, system resilience, students' experience, and teaching and learning.

We are aware that reducing exam time while maintaining high levels of reliability will be more straightforward to achieve in some subjects than others. Considerations should be made on a subject-by-subject basis. We propose that Ofqual introduces a new principle which places consideration of the volume of exam assessment at the heart of assessment design. Finally, acknowledging the importance of students having more than one opportunity to demonstrate what they can do, and to mitigate the risk that poor performance on the day of an exam determines an individual's entire grade, we recommend that at least two assessment components remain for each subject.

³⁹⁰ [Curriculum and Assessment Review interim report – Key Stage 4 and 16–19 polling](#)

³⁹¹ Institute for Public Policy Research IPPR (2023) - [Balancing act: Navigating the tensions in our school system](#); Jerrim, J. (2021) - [The mental health of adolescents in England: How does it vary during their time at school?](#); Steare, T., Gutiérrez-Muñoz C, Sullivan, A., Lewis, G. (2023) - [The association between academic pressure and adolescent mental health problems: A systematic review](#)

³⁹² [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

³⁹³ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

³⁹⁴ This analysis is based on a combination of 8-9 GCSEs.

Method of assessment

Externally set and marked exams remain the fairest and most reliable method of assessment, particularly in safeguarding disadvantaged students from systemic biases that can arise in coursework-based evaluation.³⁹⁵ Generative artificial intelligence (AI) has further heightened concerns around the authenticity of some forms of non-exam assessment, making it increasingly difficult to ensure that submitted work is the student's own. It is right, therefore, that exams remain the principal form of assessment.

GCSEs include content which is authentic to subject disciplines, such as performance or creation of outputs, and which is vital for progression. Decisions on assessment methods for each qualification are based on the nature and structure of its subject content, some of which cannot be validly assessed through written exams alone. The Review Panel is clear that subjects should reflect the authentic nature of each discipline, especially in areas where the influence of generative AI is minimal or non-existent. For example, we should ensure that performance-based components, such as devised pieces or choreography, should remain central to Drama and Dance. Similarly, students should have the opportunity to perform as part of their Music assessment.

To ensure assessments are fit for purpose, a subject-by-subject approach should be taken to ensure that the content, and therefore the assessment, reflects what young people should learn, as set out in our subject-level recommendations. We recognise the risks posed by generative AI to non-exam assessment, and therefore there should not be any expansion of written coursework. However, AI risks must be balanced with the need for assessment methods that are most valid for a subject discipline. We encourage the DfE and Ofqual to continue working together to explore the range of assessment methods available whilst balancing the risks presented by AI.

On-screen assessment methods are used in limited parts of the assessment system. Calls for greater integration of technology in assessment was a theme in responses to our Call for Evidence. There may be benefits from wider integration in the future, including improving the accessibility of exams for students with SEND, the potential for adaptive testing and the opportunity to validly assess a broader set of knowledge and skills. We recognise that evidence of the potential for wider implementation, including adaptive testing,³⁹⁶ is still limited and that wider implementation would have considerable delivery implications for schools and colleges. In addition, evidence of the impact of school closures in the pandemic, where students had to learn remotely, highlighted stark disparities in their access to IT at home.³⁹⁷ The Review Panel is therefore mindful of the potential equity risks of moving to a digital system if some students are more familiar with

³⁹⁵ Wyness, G. (2021), [Should we abolish GCSEs?](#), No 14, CEPEO Briefing Note Series, UCL Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities

³⁹⁶ Ydesen, C. (2022) - [New national tests for the Danish public school system – Tensions between renewal and orthodoxy before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

³⁹⁷ For example, The Sutton Trust (2021) - [Remote Learning: the Digital Divide](#); NFER and Nuffield Trust (2023) - [Schools Responses to Covid-19: Pupil Engagement in Remote Learning](#)

technology than others. We welcome the ongoing work being conducted by the DfE and Ofqual to explore and innovate with digital assessment while balancing these considerations, and we encourage them to consider opportunities to improve accessibility for students with SEND.

Accessibility of assessment for students with SEND

Awarding organisations design and develop assessments that are as accessible as possible, in line with their requirement to have due regard to equalities legislation, including the Equality Act 2010.³⁹⁸ As the regulator for awarding organisations, Ofqual publishes requirements regarding this duty.³⁹⁹ Where accessibility requirements cannot be fully met through assessment design alone, disabled students are legally entitled to reasonable adjustments (a form of access arrangement). Reasonable adjustments are intended to support them to demonstrate their knowledge and skills at the level required by the qualification. Another type of access arrangement is a special consideration, for which students who are not disabled can also apply, for example, in the case of injury or temporary illness.

A common theme from Call for Evidence responses was concern about the accessibility of assessments for students with SEND. Many concerns stem from the subject content, including the volume of memorising required. Given the interdependency between subject content and assessment design it is important that accessibility is considered and built in from the outset. We also recognise that different organisations hold different responsibilities in relation to the accessibility of qualifications and their assessments. Ofqual, the DfE and awarding organisations should continue to work collaboratively when developing updated specifications for GCSEs. This joint approach should ensure that qualifications are as accessible as possible and that the relevant organisations have a holistic view of the interaction between subject content, assessment, and the impact on teaching and learning.

Provision of formulae and equations in exams

The subject content documents for subjects such as Physics, Combined Science and Maths indicate which formulae students must memorise and therefore not be provided with in exams. In 2022, in response to the pandemic's impact on learning, the expectation that students should memorise these formulae was disapplied, thus removing the requirement for students to recall these formulae but retaining the expectation that they should understand and use them. Ofqual consulted on the provision of these formulae and equations in 2024 to inform its onward approach. Stakeholders identified a range of benefits, including enabling a greater focus on applying formulae

³⁹⁸ The National Archives (2017) - [The Equality Act 2010 \(General Qualifications Bodies\) \(Appropriate Regulator and Relevant Qualifications\) \(Amendment\) \(England\) Regulations 2017 - Explanatory Memorandum](#)

³⁹⁹ Ofqual (2017) - [Specifications in relation to the reasonable adjustment of general qualifications](#)

and decreasing the stress associated with the exams, as well as some concerns, such as the format and accessibility of the equations and formulae provided, and the belief that memorising formulae and equations is important for understanding them. Ofqual's consultation did not identify significant assessment issues relating to providing these formulae.⁴⁰⁰ Following this, the DfE extended the provision of these sheets to 2027, with the approach in subsequent years to be informed by the outcome of this Review.⁴⁰¹

There is evidence that transferring knowledge to long-term memory can reduce cognitive load and supports the learning of new, related concepts, and recalling this knowledge is also shown to benefit learning.⁴⁰² Alongside the benefits of formulae sheets identified by stakeholders in Ofqual's consultation, the Review Panel believes that decisions on the future of this arrangement should be informed by careful consideration of what students should know and learn and of the benefits of memorising concepts. We therefore recommend that, as part of subject-level work conducted by the DfE following the Review, subject content experts consider which formulae students should be required to memorise and recall and which they should be able to apply when they are provided.

Recommendations

Key Stage 3

We recommend that the Government:

- Introduces diagnostic assessment for key components of Maths and English to be taken during Year 8 to support teachers to address students' needs and ensure that they are well prepared to progress into Key Stage 4.
- Commissions the design and trialling of the test, with a view to making it mandatory if the pilots demonstrate that this is an effective approach.

Key Stage 4

Volume of assessment

We recommend that the Government:

- Works with Ofqual, seeking to reduce overall exam time by at least 10%, focusing on assessment design choices to deliver this reduction, and going further than this where possible. This should be considered on a subject-by-

⁴⁰⁰ Ofqual (2023) - [Proposed changes to the assessment of mathematics, physics and combined science GCSEs in 2024](#)

⁴⁰¹ DfE, Ofqual & The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP (2024) - [Additional support materials for GCSE exams](#)

⁴⁰² Racsmány, M., Szöllősi, Á., & Bencze, D. (2018) - [Retrieval Practice Makes Procedure From Remembering: An Automatization Account of the Testing Effect](#); Hultberg, P., Calonge, D. & Lee, A. (2018) - [Promoting Long-lasting Learning Through Instructional Design](#); Cognitive science approaches in the classroom: A review of the evidence (summary): EEF (2021) - [Cognitive science approaches in the classroom](#)

subject basis, ensuring minimal impact on reliability, fairness and teaching and learning.

- Works with Ofqual to introduce a design principle that considers the volume of exam assessment as a priority. The DfE and Ofqual should explore a range of options within each subject to seek to minimise exam length whilst ensuring minimal negative impact on reliability, fairness, teaching and learning, and system resilience.
- Ensures that in implementing the above recommendations, each subject retains at least two assessment components.

Method of assessment

We recommend that the Government:

- Continues to employ the principle that non-exam assessment should be used only when it is the only valid way to assess essential elements of a subject.
- Ensures that assessment approaches continue to be derived from the nature and structure of subject content, ensuring that what is assessed reflects what is most important for students to learn and do. Changes to the balance of assessment should only be made where this reflects changes to the content.
- Ensures that the DfE and Ofqual work closely with the wider education sector to explore how core aspects of subject content can be retained and assessed whilst managing and mitigating the risk of generative AI.
- Ensures that the DfE and Ofqual continue to consider the full range of options for assessment methods, including non-exam assessment, where it would be necessary to mitigate the risks posed by generative AI.
- Ensures that the DfE and Ofqual continue to work together to explore potential for innovation in on-screen assessment in GCSE, AS and A Level qualifications, particularly where this could further support accessibility for students with SEND and where this could reduce exam volume in the future. We recommend they continue to review the evidence and carefully consider risks and benefits.

Accessibility for students with SEND

We recommend that the Government:

- Ensures that Ofqual, awarding organisations and the DfE work together to consider how awarding organisations can build accessibility into the design of new specifications for GCSEs, AS and A Levels.

Provision of formulae and equations in exams

We recommend that the Government:

- Ensures that, when updating the Maths and Science GCSEs, subject experts evaluate each formula and equation to determine whether students should be required to memorise and recall it, or whether assessment should focus on their ability to apply it when provided.

16-19 education

16-19 study marks an important transition point for learners as they progress to further education and specialise in areas that align with their progression aspirations and prior attainment. The 16-19 cohort is diverse and learners study across a range of academic, technical, vocational and mixed pathways at levels 3, 2, 1 and entry level. In addition to their core qualifications at 16-19, all learners should have access to broader non-qualification opportunities to set them up for work or study and to thrive as adults.

The Review looked across the full range of pathways and levels of study, focusing on the areas that we heard need most attention. The section below therefore opens with level 3 study. It focuses on vocational level 3 pathways before moving on to address academic and technical pathways and then covers level 2, level 1 and entry level. The report discusses level 2 Maths and English study at 16-19 and touches on non-qualification activity.

Level 3

Level 3 programmes remain the most popular choice for 16-19 learners, with 62% of 16-year-olds studying at level 3 (increasing to 66% for 17-year-olds) across a range of academic, technical and vocational programmes. Among 16-year-olds in England in 2024:

- 34% were studying A Levels or AS qualifications only (an academic pathway).
- 3% were studying T Levels only (a technical pathway which is expected to grow as T Levels mature).
- 25% were studying vocational or mixed pathways comprising either A Levels or AS qualifications and Applied General Qualifications (AGQs) (10%) or other level 3 qualifications only (16%).⁴⁰³

The Review Panel thinks it is important that as many learners as possible who have achieved level 2 (five GCSEs at grade 4 or above or the equivalent) should be supported to study at level 3. This is because those who study qualifications at level 3 are, on average, more likely to progress into sustained education or employment than those studying at level 2.⁴⁰⁴ Completing level 3 programmes also has a positive impact on a learner's future earnings. Evidence suggests that completing level 3 qualifications provides a significant wage premium, even after controlling for other factors.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰³ DfE (2025) – [Participation in education and training and employment](#) 'Other level 3 qualifications' includes AGQs and Tech Levels, in addition to other qualifications that are not eligible for inclusion in 16-18 school and college performance tables.

⁴⁰⁴ DfE (2025) - [16-18 destination measures, Academic year 2023/24](#)

⁴⁰⁵ Battiston, A., Gavan, C., Hedges, S. & Patrignani, P. (2019) - [The value of progression in further education](#)

Existing level 3 pathways: the case for a third pathway

Reforms under the previous Government sought to streamline level 3 study into technical or academic qualifications, with no space for vocational qualifications.⁴⁰⁶ To meet the needs of learners not exclusively taking A Levels or T Levels, it also announced the introduction of Alternative Academic Qualifications (AAQs) and Technical Occupation Qualifications (TOQs),⁴⁰⁷ sitting in the academic and technical pathways respectively and replacing existing AGQs, Tech Levels, and other applied/vocational qualifications.

We have heard clearly that moving the level 3 system towards two main pathways (academic and technical) does not serve all sectors and occupations well and may disadvantage some learners. Currently, 25% of 16-year-olds studying at level 3 take programmes that do not contain either an A Level or a T Level.⁴⁰⁸ We know that the characteristics of these learners are different from those taking A Levels and T Levels. A higher proportion of them have special educational needs (SEN) (10% compared to 6% for A Levels and 9% for T Levels), a higher proportion come from disadvantaged backgrounds (24% compared to 14% for A Levels and 23% for T Levels) and a lower proportion have achieved Maths and English GCSE grade 4 by the end of Key Stage 4 (79% compared to 97% for A Levels and 92% for T Levels).⁴⁰⁹

Given the characteristics of this cohort, and the importance of level 3 study to life chances, it is important that the profile of prior GCSE attainment of the current cohort of level 3 learners maps across to the future system so that as many of them as possible are supported to access high-quality level 3 pathways. This includes those studying programmes where achieving GCSE grade 4 in Maths and English at Key Stage 4 is not necessary to start level 3.

Although some learners studying vocational qualifications, such as AGQs and Tech Levels, share broadly similar characteristics with those taking T Levels,⁴¹⁰ we should not assume that all learners studying vocational qualifications have the same aspirations or interests. T Levels are focused on specific occupations and thus require learners to choose a specific occupation at age 16, which is positive for those learners who know what career pathway they want to pursue. However, for learners who do not know, or who do not want to take T Levels, we think there is benefit in giving them the opportunity to study broader vocational and applied/creative qualifications, and to pursue routes and occupations not currently served by T Levels.

⁴⁰⁶ This is in addition to apprenticeships, which are outside the scope of the Review.

⁴⁰⁷ Ofqual (2023) - [Alternative Academic Qualifications and Technical Occupation Qualifications Qualification Level Conditions](#)

⁴⁰⁸ DfE (2025) - ['Participation Institutions and Qualifications' from 'Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18'](#)

⁴⁰⁹ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex) - A Level learners refer to A Level and AS qualification learners.

⁴¹⁰ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

Additionally, providers told us that the applied nature of the teaching and assessment methods of existing vocational qualifications makes them more suitable for a broader range of learners and improves accessibility and engagement. We have not heard sufficient evidence that these applied approaches will continue under the existing plans for level 3 across A Levels, T Levels, AAQs or TOQs.

AAQs and TOQs, introduced in August 2025, have been designed to sit in the academic and technical pathways respectively and complement A Levels and T Levels. However, the Review has heard concerns from stakeholders about their introduction, notably that they are intended to be available only in a small number of subject areas. There is also a lack of clarity about how these qualifications could be combined to create cohesive study programmes and, while AAQs are intended to sit in the academic pathway, their branding makes it unclear whether they are applied or academic in nature. We were concerned to hear from providers that the presence of some AAQ subject areas (for example, Human Biology) which have strong links to A Level alternatives (such as Biology) is confusing learners about which qualification to study. We are concerned that some young people might not understand the implications of their choices between these subjects for university admission and/or pathways beyond level 3.

Whilst the evidence shows the importance of offering a vocational pathway, we also heard through wider engagement that some qualifications in the current level 3 vocational pathway vary in quality, with some (particularly those excluded from performance tables) recording sustained positive destination rates as low as 28%.⁴¹¹ Research from the Nuffield Foundation also found that, even after controlling for differences between students, those studying just (the unreformed) BTEC qualifications were less likely to perform well at university compared to those on A Level only programmes.⁴¹² However, research in this field remains complex and contested. For example, research had also shown that holding level 3 vocational qualifications were associated with positive labour market outcomes and that BTEC qualifications often act as a stepping stone for further study and education.⁴¹³

As research from the National Education Opportunities Network shows, for the learners who do succeed in higher education, BTECs and other AGQs may have played an important role in widening participation and access.⁴¹⁴ However, existing vocational offers are complex and hard to navigate. In 2024/25 there were 1,981 qualifications funded for

⁴¹¹ DfE (2022) - [Detailed destinations of 16 to 18-year-olds in Further Education, Academic year 2018/19](#)

⁴¹² Nuffield Foundation (2022) - [Educational choices at 16–19 and adverse outcomes at university](#). This study reported on outcomes before Applied General Qualifications were introduced, which brought new criteria to improve consistency and rigour across vocational level 3 qualifications (such as the BTEC National offered by Pearson).

⁴¹³ Patrignani, P., Conlon, G. & Hedges, S. (2017) - [The earnings differentials associated with vocational education and training using the Longitudinal Education Outcomes data](#); Patrignani, P., Hedges, S. & Conlon, G. (2018) - [Further analysis of the earnings differentials associated with BTECs](#); Patrignani, P., Battiston, A. & Conlon, G. (2019) - [BTECs, higher education and labour market outcomes using the Longitudinal Education Outcome \(LEO\) dataset](#)

⁴¹⁴ NEON (2021) - [Will abolishing BTECs mean reversing widening access to higher education?](#)

level 3 study across 14 different qualification types.⁴¹⁵ The Review heard that awarding organisations do not have uniform expectations about the content of current vocational qualifications and that, to resolve this, content must be clear at a national level. We heard of varied grading structures between different qualifications and a lack of clear Information, Advice and Guidance. This makes the system confusing for learners, their parents and carers, employers and FE/HE providers and undermines the credibility and currency of these qualifications. Polling conducted by the DfE among young people who received their 16-19 results in summer 2024 revealed that approximately 1 in 5 learners (19%) felt they lacked sufficient information and guidance to make well-informed subject choices.⁴¹⁶ Additionally, Ofqual's research shows that 14% of employers report having 'no understanding at all' and a further 38% have 'little or not very good understanding' of vocational and technical qualifications in their sector.⁴¹⁷

Size of qualifications

The size of a qualification is defined by its guided learning hours (GLH). Providers told us that having a range of qualifications of different sizes can make the system more complex to understand but also ensures appropriate and flexible options for all learners.⁴¹⁸

We heard that small qualifications (fewer than 360 GLH) offer providers flexibility in tailoring study programmes to learners' needs and aspirations. For example, we heard positive examples of small vocational qualifications being combined, including with A Levels or with continued study of level 2 Maths and/or English, where necessary, to form a coherent level 3 study programme. The option to combine multiple small qualifications can be beneficial. However, we also heard that, in practice, many providers discourage such study programmes because of the risk of incoherence and lack of clear progression destinations.

Similarly, whilst the option remains for learners to take two small qualifications alongside level 2 Maths and/or English, the Review would be concerned if this was recommended as a full study programme (except for learners with specific requirements and/or high levels of need). The Review heard that for small vocational subjects to have value they would need to be offered in a sufficiently broad range of subjects and would need to be occupationally sector-based. This would prevent learners from taking qualifications in subject areas that are too specialised for building comprehensive study programmes, or from which meaningful progression could be facilitated.

The Review heard mixed evidence on medium-size qualifications (between 361 and 720 GLH). Medium qualifications are either 'nested' as part of an overall large qualification

⁴¹⁵ DfE (2025) - [Qualification Downloads - List of Qualifications approved for funding](#)

⁴¹⁶ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#) (Polling of Key Stage 4 and 16-19 learners and parents); DfE (2021) - [Young people's experiences of careers Information, Advice and Guidance](#)

⁴¹⁷ Ofqual (2025) - [Perceptions of Vocational and Technical Qualifications in England - wave 7](#)

⁴¹⁸ Including, facilitating continued study of level 2 Maths and English when needed.

(where learners study a core medium qualification which they can top up by completing additional units) or are standalone qualifications. In 2023/24, 61,000 16-year-olds were enrolled on medium qualifications. Students taking medium qualifications are less likely to have achieved full level 2 and less likely to have achieved level 2 in both English and Maths compared to students taking large qualifications, but there is relatively little difference between medium and large applied qualifications in the proportions of students eligible for FSM or SEND.⁴¹⁹

The Review heard positive examples of ‘nested’ medium qualifications. Providers gave examples of where medium qualifications have facilitated a pathway for some young people to build up to a large qualification, whilst also ensuring that those unable to do so leave with a recognisable qualification which has been banked. Anecdotally, we heard that this may include learners with SEND or those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The above data somewhat supports this, but the Review did not hear clear-enough evidence on the demographics of the cohort of learners taking these qualifications to judge fully whether they act as a pathway to widen participation.

The Review also took evidence on standalone medium qualifications. Stakeholders, notably providers, told the Review that these qualifications can be used in combination with a small qualification or continued study of level 2 Maths and/or English. The Review did not hear clear enough evidence either way to suggest that outcomes for learners who combine existing standalone medium qualifications with a small qualification are better or worse than those for learners taking either a large programme or three small qualifications.

In addition to the need for small qualifications, providers shared their strong views that existing large qualifications (more than 721 GLH) bring unique benefits for learners studying some subjects, with calls for similar programmes to be retained in any new vocational pathway. In 2023/24, there were 83,000 16-year-old enrolments on large qualifications.⁴²⁰ In some subject areas, the key benefits presented to the Review of these large qualifications included the following:

- Large technical or vocational qualifications can carry weight with employers, FE and HE providers, allowing learners to demonstrate the breadth and depth of their knowledge which can be benchmarked consistently against that of other learners taking the same large qualification (compared to a combination of different small qualifications).
- Large qualifications allow learners to study a qualification within an occupational sector, with a holistic design and appropriately sequenced content. This allows

⁴¹⁹ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

⁴²⁰ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex). To note, individual learners may be enrolled on multiple qualifications. Figures include T Levels where in 2023/24 almost 12,000 16-year-olds took T Levels DfE (2025) - '[Participation Institutions and Qualifications](#)' from '[Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18](#)'

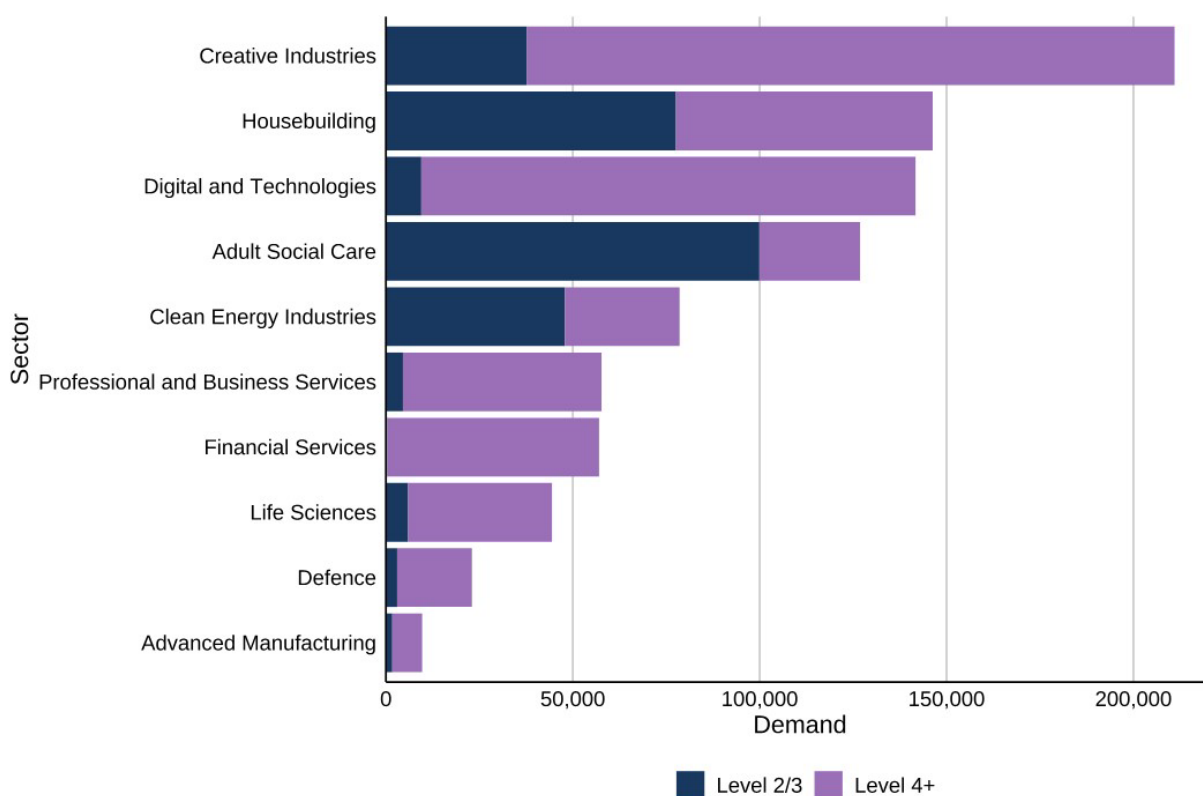
qualifications to provide them with both high-level and detailed content, and to avoid content repetition, which would not be possible in a system offering only small qualifications.

- For learners who know which sector they are interested in, large qualifications can be especially motivating as they can develop a depth of knowledge and skills, and they trust that their programme's components are coherent.
- Learners taking T Levels have the opportunity to develop technical skills based on content aligned to occupational standards, covering sector-level (route) content and content for the occupational specialism.
- Learners have the opportunity to reap the benefits of large qualifications in sector areas where a T Level does not currently exist.

Subject areas

The Review also took evidence about the subject areas that could be especially important in a vocational route. Data on skills gaps presented to the Review shows that a strengthened vocational pathway will support filling skills gaps in the future. The four priority occupations with the largest projected additional employment between 2025 and 2030 for level 2 and level 3 are Adult Social Care, House Building, Clean Energy and Creative Industries, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Additional employment in priority occupations between 2025 and 2030 by expected education level⁴²¹



Similarly, the recently published Industrial Strategy lists eight sectors with the ‘highest potential’: Advanced Manufacturing, Clean Energy Industries, Creative Industries, Defence, Digital and Technologies, Financial Services, Life Sciences, and Professional and Business Services.⁴²² Not all these sectors are fully served by A Levels or T Levels, although many are. Further qualifications that exist may not cover the specific sectors and so alternative qualifications in vocational pathways may be beneficial, particularly for matching learners’ aspirations with skills needs.

Last, the Review is concerned about the recent rise in numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET)⁴²³ and wants to ensure suitable pathways are available for all learners. A strengthened and clearly defined vocational pathway should ensure that learners who need a broad vocational or mixed pathway have high-quality opportunities whilst also supporting future skills pipelines. Taking this evidence together, the Review is convinced that a credible and meaningful vocational pathway must remain at level 3 which provides valuable progression opportunities, assessed by methods that support the applied nature of the content. However, we are clear that learners and employers are not currently provided with a high-quality, coherent vocational offer

⁴²¹ Skills England (2025) - [Assessment of priority skills to 2030](#)

⁴²² Department for Business and Trade (2025) - [Industrial Strategy](#)

⁴²³ Office for National Statistics (2025) - [Young people not in education, employment or training \(NEET\), UK](#); OECD (2025) - [Education at a Glance 2025: United Kingdom](#)

that reflects the aspirations and confidence in strong outcomes that such qualifications should serve.

Vocational pathway: V Levels

We therefore propose a revised pathway, which provides aspirational, coherent, recognised and respected vocational and applied qualifications, to sit alongside A Levels and T Levels. These qualifications, which we recommend calling ‘V Levels’, should be broad, sector-based, and applied, and support learners’ effective progress to a wide range of destinations, including related work-based training or apprenticeships, related further/higher education, or employment. Given their anticipated sector focus, the content for V Levels should be clearly defined, up to date, of proven relevance to the workplace and to the economy and delivered consistently across different awarding organisations.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Introduces a revised third pathway at level 3 to sit alongside the academic and technical pathways. This pathway should be based on new qualifications, which we recommend calling V Levels:
 - V Levels should provide high-quality qualifications for those young people that want a broader or mixed level 3 pathway with applied components. They should sit alongside A Levels and T Levels as a coherent third pathway at level 3. V Levels should have employer, further/higher education credibility, and be designed for longevity. To ensure this, V Levels should be regulated by Ofqual and content should be linked to occupational standards at a broad, sector level.
 - V Levels should meet a range of ambitious quality criteria that ensure that they provide the knowledge and skills required for learners to successfully progress to related employment or further study at a higher level. Destination outcomes should be key among these. Providers should also seek to develop appropriate employer encounters and work experience as part of learners’ overall study programme, as per current practice.
- Considers learners who have SEND or face other barriers to education to ensure that V Levels are inclusive by design.

Recommendations on the design of V Levels

- To deliver quality and breadth effectively, we recommend that content is nationally set and broadly linked to sector-level occupational standards. The Government should explore basing the content on part of one standard, or parts of multiple standards, recognising that the qualifications are not designed to achieve occupational entry competence, but to support the ambitions of young people and sector-level jobs growth outlined by Skills England.

Size

- We recommend that a majority of V Level qualifications should be small (e.g. 360 GLH, aligning them with A Levels). This will give learners the opportunity to combine multiple V Levels into a single study programme, or to combine V Levels with A Levels or with continued study towards level 2 in Maths and/or English as required.
- In addition to small qualifications, we also see the need for V Levels in large qualification sizes in some vocational and creative areas where there are no T Levels. The Government should consult on subject areas and on the need for these qualifications in particular sectors. Including, on opportunities to offer 'partial recognition' for learners who complete the first year of their studies but are unable to progress to the second year.
- The Review's position is therefore that medium (nested or standalone) qualifications are unlikely to be needed in the future landscape. However, given the scale of the present offer and the apparent use for access, we recommend that the Government carefully considers the landscape and models impacts before any removal.

Subject areas

- We recommend that the Government consult on the principles by which subjects will be determined. This should consider employer needs and benefits to learners and could include criteria such as subjects in priority areas for skills demand. Our expectation is that to fulfil the purpose of building sector-based pathways, V Levels should be available in a wide range of subject areas (broader than the existing/planned AAQ and TOQ subjects) and suggest that the number of subject areas should be broadly comparable to the number of subjects offered as A Levels. To ensure that providers can build strong and coherent study programmes for learners, we recommend that the Government works with the sector to model potential subject combinations that would lead to particular progression outcomes and to look at rules of combination.

Assessment and grading

- V Levels should be assessed in ways which are appropriate to the (applied) nature of the content of these qualifications. Achievement should be consistently evidenced in well understood ways, and therefore the Government should work with Ofqual to design V Level assessments with consistent grading language, recognising there will be a necessary period of transition.

Transition and existing qualifications

- The Review has heard substantial evidence about the volume of change in the sector. We have therefore sought to avoid unnecessary upheaval, and we recommend that the Government carefully consider how the transition to V Levels can be implemented without causing unnecessary disruption. The Government should consult on the best way to introduce V Levels, including opportunities for awarding organisations to build on existing high-performing qualifications that work well now and deliver strong destination outcomes, when submitting V Level qualifications for approval, so that the benefits of strong existing offers can be maintained. Until V Levels are introduced, we recommend that existing qualifications with strong destination outcomes remain in the system to minimise disruption.

In addition to its work on a strengthened vocational pathway at level 3, the Review has identified opportunities to strengthen further the academic and technical pathways at level 3.

Academic pathway: A Levels

A Levels remain a popular choice. In 2024, 34% of 16-year-olds in England were studying only A Level or AS qualifications.⁴²⁴ The Review has heard that A Levels are well-respected and widely recognised academic qualifications that have strong progression outcomes. We have heard from subject associations and Learned Societies that A Levels offer a wide portfolio of valuable academic subjects that support higher learning and the economy. In the academic year 2022/23, 82% of learners in state-funded schools who took A Levels (and including AS qualifications) progressed to higher education by age 19.⁴²⁵ We heard very little concern about A Levels through the Call for Evidence and our sector engagement. Therefore, we do not recommend significant changes to them, but where necessary the Government should update A Level content in line with GCSE subject content changes as the Review recommends (see [curriculum recommendations by subject](#)).

⁴²⁴ DfE (2025) - [Participation in education, training and employment age 16 to 18, Calendar year 2024](#)

⁴²⁵ DfE (2024) - [Widening participation in higher education, Academic year 2022/23](#)

Following reforms to A Levels in 2018, a small number of learners continue to study AS qualifications as standalone qualifications, although these currently make up around 7% of the total A Level and AS qualification entries by students in state-funded schools.⁴²⁶ The Review heard that increased breadth during academic 16-19 study could be achieved by encouraging learners to study for an AS qualification in their first year of 16-19 study. However, others raised concerns about the volume of resource needed to provide this and the disruption it would cause and questioned how necessary the additional qualifications are to support learners' progression. Given this and the lack of evidence that problems about breadth are currently hindering progression and outcomes, we are not making any formal recommendations in this area, but we encourage the Government to keep AS qualifications under review.

Technical pathway: T Levels

T Levels continue to establish themselves as large technical qualifications. In 2024, 3% of 16-year-olds in England were studying T Levels.⁴²⁷ Although this is a small proportion of the overall cohort, the Review was encouraged to see the growth from previous years as T Levels continue to be rolled out and embedded. The Review heard from stakeholders that they provide high-quality opportunities for their learners. Employers particularly value the level of co-creation in designing them, whilst learners speak highly of the industry placement opportunities. These beneficial and distinctive features are helping to establish T Levels as a strong brand. We support the DfE's continuing work to improve the accessibility of T Levels for learners and delivery for employers and providers, whilst protecting their quality.

However, aspects of T Levels may need further attention. The most significant challenge highlighted during the Review was the content, volume, and complexity of assessment. Providers reported challenges about the volume of assessment required, particularly as more T Levels are being offered and the number of learners taking them increases. This is especially acute in assessing the occupational specialism component. The Review was encouraged to hear about the recently announced changes to content and the volume of assessment in the Digital, Health and Science, and Education and Childcare T Levels.⁴²⁸ The Government should continue to review and amend assessment practice across all T Level routes.

We heard substantial positive evidence about industry placements, from both learners and employers. As numbers have grown, it is encouraging to see a steady proportion of industry placement completions each year. However, providers raised concerns about sourcing the necessary volume and quality to support scaled-up provision. The Association of Colleges noted that providers report restricting the number of students

⁴²⁶ DfE (2025) - ['Entries and Results - A level and AS by subject and student characteristics \(single academic year\)' from 'A level and other 16-18 results'](#).

⁴²⁷ DfE (2025) - [Participation in education, training and employment age 16-18, Calendar year 2024](#)

⁴²⁸ GOV.UK (2025) - [T Level update March 2025 – T Levels support for schools and colleges](#)

that they can admit onto T Level programmes because of the challenges in finding more industry placements.⁴²⁹ Additionally, we heard from employers that they feel hampered to engage by bureaucracy and lack of information and would value additional support in these matters. The Review was encouraged to see the tangible steps that the DfE has taken to improve industry placements, such as introducing more flexible delivery approaches and re-introducing financial support for employers offering placements.⁴³⁰ However, additional employer engagement and sector support will be needed to ensure that the distinctive nature and benefits of industry placements remain as T Levels grow.

The Review wants to avoid a situation where, to facilitate the scaling-up of provision, providers are either forced to source lower-quality placements or the Government is obliged to introduce policy changes to industry placements, thus diluting the offer. The Review also heard broader calls from providers who want more opportunities for all learners to have experience with employers, including those not studying a T Level. To deliver this, additional engagement to support the full 16-19 sector will be needed.

T Levels were initially designed to facilitate direct routes to industry and further technical study. We were encouraged to see that many HE institutions now accept T Level learners onto programmes, but we also heard confusion about which universities accept T Levels and for which courses. Given that a significant proportion of T Level learners wish to use these qualifications to access university, it is important to make sure high-quality Information, Advice and Guidance is available about the qualification routes available to learners, and which are most suitable for their desired pathways. The Government should continue to promote awareness and understanding of T Levels to the HE sector.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Continues to work closely with awarding organisations to reduce the assessment burden of T Levels in the context of scale up.
- Increases its work with Skills England to support and drive forward employers' engagement with 16-19 education, particularly from employers involved in designing T Levels, with a view to increasing the number of industry placement and work encounter opportunities for learners.
- Considers, in relation to the above, a robust and creative approach to incentivising employers and linking employers more closely into the skills system.

⁴²⁹ Association of Colleges (2024) - [Submissions](#)

⁴³⁰ DfE (2025) - [T Level industry placements delivery guidance - GOV.UK](#); National Council for Further Education (2025) - [New T Level industry placement delivery approaches](#)

- Continues work with providers and HE to ensure that young people are advised well on the implications of study choices for their futures and to promote understanding of T Levels by HE providers.
- Ensures that the content for T Levels remains up to date and that the amount of content can be delivered within the time available, and that it should seek opportunities to review and reduce content where necessary.

Level 2

Around 1 in 5 learners aged 16 studies at level 2.⁴³¹ Level 2 qualifications provide an important pathway into many level 2 occupations and support progression to study at level 3 and above.

The 16 to 19-year-old learners studying at level 2 have different characteristics from their level 3 peers and are more likely to face additional barriers:

- 28% of level 2 learners have SEN (compared with 8% of level 3 learners).
- 26% of level 2 learners are eligible for free school meals (compared with 11% of level 3 learners).⁴³²

In addition to the qualifications they are studying for, level 2 learners are required to continue studying Maths and/or English if they have not reached grade 4 at GCSE by the end of Key Stage 4. Just 10% of 16-year-olds at level 2 achieved grade 4 in these subjects at GCSE, compared to 83% of level 3 learners. This reflects the fact that providers commonly set GCSE grade 4 in Maths and English as an entry requirement for many level 3 programmes.

Given the diverse needs and aspirations of the cohort, including the need for continued study of Maths and English, it is important that level 2 pathways are tailored to individual learners' progression aims. High-quality qualifications with a clear purpose are a vital element of level 2 study programmes, providing the foundation for progression and helping to engage and motivate learners in their desired subject or vocational area.

Most, but not all, 16-year-old learners studying at level 2 progress to level 3. In 2022/23, 63% of 16-year-olds with level 2 core aims progressed to a level 3 qualification or apprenticeship by age 18.⁴³³ Currently, level 2 pathways must therefore be flexible enough to support both learners who want to progress to level 3 study and those who want to progress to a level 2 occupation.

⁴³¹ DfE (2025) - ['Participation Institutions and Qualifications' from 'Participation in education, training and employment age 16-18', Permanent data table](#)

⁴³² [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#) (Analytical annex)

⁴³³ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

However, providers report that many level 2 qualifications are designed to serve multiple purposes and therefore lack a clear overall focus. This can mean that learners and their parents and carers find it difficult to understand which courses are most appropriate. For learners intending to progress to employment or apprenticeships from level 2 study, the Review heard concerns that current pathways do not always provide high-quality preparation. This creates challenges for providers in offering clear Information, Advice and Guidance, yet this is needed to help learners navigate through possible progression opportunities in the sectors they are considering studying for.

Current provision may also not support learners sufficiently who want to progress to level 3 programmes. Providers told us that they often design their own level 2 to level 3 programmes. These are not standardised and, anecdotally, we understand that progression to level 3 varies. The T Level Foundation Year (TLFY) is marketed as a programme to prepare learners to progress to T Levels, yet just 8% of those who complete the programme actually progress to a T Level.⁴³⁴ We understand that the TLFY is often used to build broader skills and confidence for a wider cohort of learners, and it has therefore been more effective in enabling more generalised progression. For instance, progression from the TLFY to level 3 is 51%. But nevertheless, this indicates that almost half the learners taking it do not progress to level 3.⁴³⁵

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Introduces two separate pathways at level 2 (an occupational pathway and a pathway to level 3), each serving different purposes and designed specifically to meet these purposes and improve learner outcomes. These should be focused and ambitious pathways to ensure that all level 2 offers are valuable and high quality.
- Whilst a new pathway to level 3 is being developed, we recommend that the TLFY is strengthened by:
 - Exploring whether all learners should be expected to take an existing qualification as part of the TLFY.
 - Renaming the TLFY as soon as possible to make clear that the programme supports progression to broader level 3 pathways and not only to T Levels.

⁴³⁴ UK Parliament (2025) - [Introducing T Levels](#)

⁴³⁵ DfE (2024) - [T Level action plan](#); [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex)

The two pathways the Review recommends are:

- An '**occupational pathway**' which should serve learners who want to move **directly into employment**, including apprenticeships, rather than progressing to higher level study. They should still be able to progress, however, to continued study at level 3 if that is the right option.
- A '**pathway to level 3**' which should serve learners who want to progress onto **continued study at level 3** because they are aiming to enter a level 3 occupation, higher education or an apprenticeship. It should therefore support progression to all level 3 options (academic, technical and vocational). It should strengthen and build on aspects of good practice from the TLFY and the Academic Progression Programme pilot, and other good practice examples.

Providing good Information, Advice and Guidance and diagnostic activities at the start of the programme should ensure that learners are enrolled on the right level 2 pathway to meet their needs. For learners with SEND and other barriers, this may be additional support to the offer available for all learners. These pathways must be deliverable for providers; therefore, there may be aspects across both programmes that can be combined as part of a flexible approach. We also expect that learners would be able to move between the two pathways where needed.

Occupational pathway

Purpose

- This pathway should prepare learners for level 2 occupations, including progression to level 3 apprenticeships, where appropriate, and should be designed with this in mind. The Government should consider opportunities to develop it from sector-based content drawn from occupational standards and ensure that broad introductory content is a key feature. It should align qualifications to occupational standards, so they provide the necessary technical content.

Design

- This pathway should be a two-year pathway to give sufficient opportunity for the content to align with occupational standards and, where needed, with any specific requirements for a 'licence to practise' to allow smooth entry to work. We anticipate that some learners may leave the programme after one year to progress to an apprenticeship or other work-based training, to move from this pathway to the 'pathway to level 3', or to enter level 3 study directly. Learners with SEND or other barriers to learning may need to take the programme over a longer period of time and the DfE should explore with providers how this could be delivered.

- The core occupational pathway should be delivered in addition to other elements of the study programme, ensuring eligible learners can continue to study Maths and/or English qualifications as needed, but also opportunities for pastoral and life skills support. The pathway should include content tailored to prepare learners specifically for employment, balancing each learner's prior attainment and career aspirations, and include employer encounters so that they engage with them directly.

Assessment and grading

- In designing the qualification element of the pathway, the DfE should work with awarding organisations so that assessment of the occupational components is deliverable and the assessment burden is not unmanageable for providers.
- Lastly, the DfE should explore grading all qualifications in this pathway with a recognisable structure and making sure that grading language is consistent. This is important to allow comparison and evaluation so that learners and employers can identify qualification grades.

Pathway to level 3

Purpose

- This pathway should prepare learners for progression onto level 3 pathways and should support learners who are sure of their desired progression direction, but also those who have some idea of the subjects or sector area into which they intend to progress at level 3 but may be unclear about whether they want to study an academic, technical or vocational pathway at level 3.

Design

- This pathway should be a one-year study programme. However, as with the occupational pathway, learners with SEND or other barriers to learning may need to take the programme over a longer period of time.
- This pathway should have a strong focus on preparation for level 3. It should develop the learners' capabilities and transferable skills, provide exposure to level 3 study and build confidence and resilience so that learners are ready to take the step to level 3. It should include academic study and academic study skills, as well as a strong focus on Maths and English so learners are supported achieve the grades to access their level 3 option.
- A relevant subject-specific qualification should be included to develop foundational knowledge and skills for level 3 study, be broad enough not to narrow options and allow learners to evaluate their interest and aptitude in the subject(s) they want to study at level 3.

Assessment and grading

- The pathway to level 3 qualification should be graded with a single, recognisable structure. This is important to allow relative comparison and evaluation and to ensure that qualification grades can be clearly identified by learners and employers.

Level 1 and entry level

A relatively small proportion of the overall 16-year-old cohort studies at level 1 (3%) and entry level (1%), but it is a highly diverse cohort. Learners have a wide range of needs, aims and motivations.⁴³⁶ Learners with identified SEND or those eligible for free school meals are over-represented and only around 9% of the cohort at level 1 and entry level have achieved both GCSE Maths and English by age 16.⁴³⁷ Learners studying at level 1 and entry level are also much less likely to be in sustained employment or education after 16-19 study compared with their peers who study at higher levels.⁴³⁸

In planning study programmes at level 1 and entry level, providers are encouraged to identify learners' needs and progression ambitions to plan provision and appropriate support. Providers told us that level 1 and entry level study programmes are most effective when they are tailored to the needs of individual learners, giving them the opportunity to engage in their learning and make progress.

Qualifications at level 1 and entry level serve a wide range of purposes, including:

- Qualifications delivering vocationally related or pre-technical skills
- Functional Skills qualifications (FSQs) supporting learners to develop literacy, numeracy and digital skills
- Personal, Social and Employability (PSE) qualifications, to support self-development and preparation for work or independent living
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

The Review has not identified specific issues with the range of provision at level 1 and entry level, but we heard through the Call for Evidence and our engagement with 16-19 providers that there is no 'one size fits all' at level 1 and entry level. The range of purposes of study and needs of the cohort require a more nuanced approach.

We are not making specific recommendations about level 1 and entry level, but we encourage the Government to ensure progression pathways through these levels are clear and coherent, including alignment with the recommendations for level 2 pathways

⁴³⁶ DfE (2025) - [Participation in education, training and employment age 16-18, Calendar year 2024](#)

⁴³⁷ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Final Report](#) (Analytical annex); [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#) (Analytical annex)

⁴³⁸ DfE (2025) - [16-18 destination measures, Academic year 2023/24](#)

outlined above. We are particularly mindful of the needs of learners who may not be progressing to higher levels of study, including learners working to build core personal, social and employability skills to support success in employment and independent living. We encourage the Government to ensure PSE qualifications are high quality and lead to positive outcomes, supporting learners to engage in their education and make progress as they prepare for life and work.

16-19 Maths and English

Higher levels of attainment in Maths and English are strongly linked to positive social and economic outcomes, including higher earnings, better employment opportunities, improved health and life satisfaction and greater civic engagement and trust.⁴³⁹

Achieving level 2 in Maths and English (equivalent to a grade 4 or above in GCSE Maths and GCSE English) is particularly important since it is commonly used as an entry requirement for many jobs and for progression to level 3 qualifications. This is reflected in the data: learners who achieve level 2 in Maths and English at Key Stage 4 are more likely to progress to a sustained education, apprenticeship or employment destination after 16-19 study (85%) than those who do not (63%).⁴⁴⁰ However, with the exception of years where grades were affected by COVID-19 related adjustments, around 40% of learners each year finish Key Stage 4 without achieving level 2 in both Maths and English.⁴⁴¹

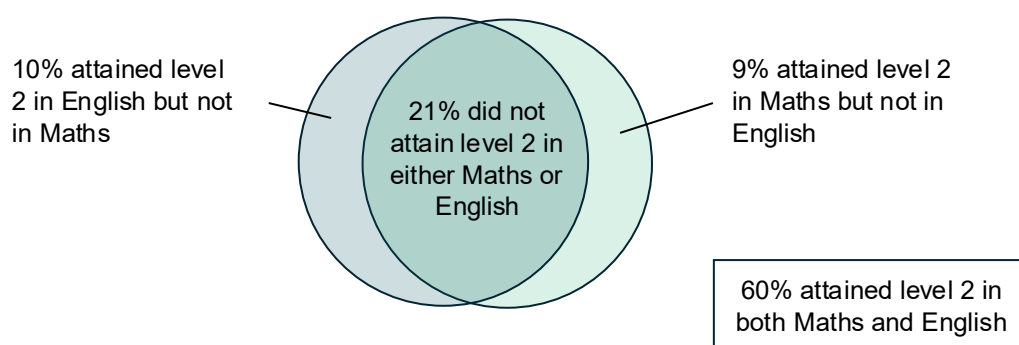
For the 2018/19 cohort (the latest cohort of learners whose Key Stage 4 and 16-19 qualification grading were not affected by COVID-19 adjustments), 9% achieved level 2 in Maths but not English, 10% in English but not Maths and 21% did not achieve level 2 in either, as Figure 9 shows.

⁴³⁹ DfE (2021) - [GCSE attainment and lifetime earnings](#); OECD (2024) - [Do Adults Have the Skills They Need to Thrive in a Changing World?](#); Kerr, M. (2021), [Paying the price: The cost of very poor adult literacy](#); Parsons, S. & Bynner, J. (2005) - [Does Numeracy Matter More](#); Gutierrez, O., Vignoles, A. & de Coulon, A. (2007) - [The Value of Basic Skills in the British Labour Market](#)

⁴⁴⁰ DfE (2025) - [16-18 destination measures, academic year 2023/24](#)

⁴⁴¹ DfE (2025) - [Attainment by characteristics - ages 16-25](#)

Figure 9. Attainment of level 2 Maths and English by age 16 for the 2018/19 cohort⁴⁴²



This highlights the continuing challenges schools face in supporting students to reach the expected standard in Maths and English by age 16, and it is important that we do not view this solely as a 16-19 problem, since 80% of learners with low prior attainment at Key Stage 2 do not reach level 2 in Maths and English by age 16.⁴⁴³ The Review has identified several specific issues in relation to the curriculum and assessment for Maths and English from Key Stages 1 to 4 and recommends changes (see [curriculum recommendations by subject](#)). In addition, it is important to recognise that demographic change in the population and the effects of lost learning during the COVID-19 pandemic on younger cohorts mean that the scale and complexity of the challenge in supporting learners to reach level 2 in Maths and English is likely to grow in the future.⁴⁴⁴

Learners who do not reach level 2 by the age of 16 are required to continue to study towards level 2 by the end of 16-19 study, a condition of funding, introduced by the DfE from 2014/15 onwards. The majority (71%) of these 16-19 learners are enrolled on GCSEs in Maths and English Language. A smaller proportion (22%) are entered for Functional Skills qualifications; 6% study other courses.⁴⁴⁵

However, of the 2018/19 cohort who continued to study under the condition of funding policy, 71% did not reach level 2 in Maths and English by age 19.⁴⁴⁶ There are differences between the subjects: a third (34%) of those studying English reached level 2 by age 19 and only a quarter (25%) studying Maths.⁴⁴⁷ Of most concern, however, is that a large proportion of learners made no grade progress at all. For example, in 2018/19, 62% did not improve in English and 64% in Maths.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴² DfE (2025) - [Attainment in level 2 English and Maths by age 16](#), figures may not sum due to rounding.

⁴⁴³ DfE (2025) - ['Key Stage 2 to 4 transition matrices KS4 measures' from 'Key Stage 4 performance'](#)

⁴⁴⁴ EEF (2022) - [Best evidence on impact of COVID-19 on pupil attainment](#); DfE (2025) - [Participation in education, training and employment age 16-18, Calendar year 2024](#)

⁴⁴⁵ DfE (2025) - ['English and Maths - below level 3 entries by student characteristics' from 'A level and other 16-18 results'](#)

⁴⁴⁶ The latest cohort of learners whose Key Stage 4 and 16-19 qualification grading were not affected by COVID-19 adjustments.

⁴⁴⁷ DfE (2025) - [Attainment by characteristics - ages 16-25](#)

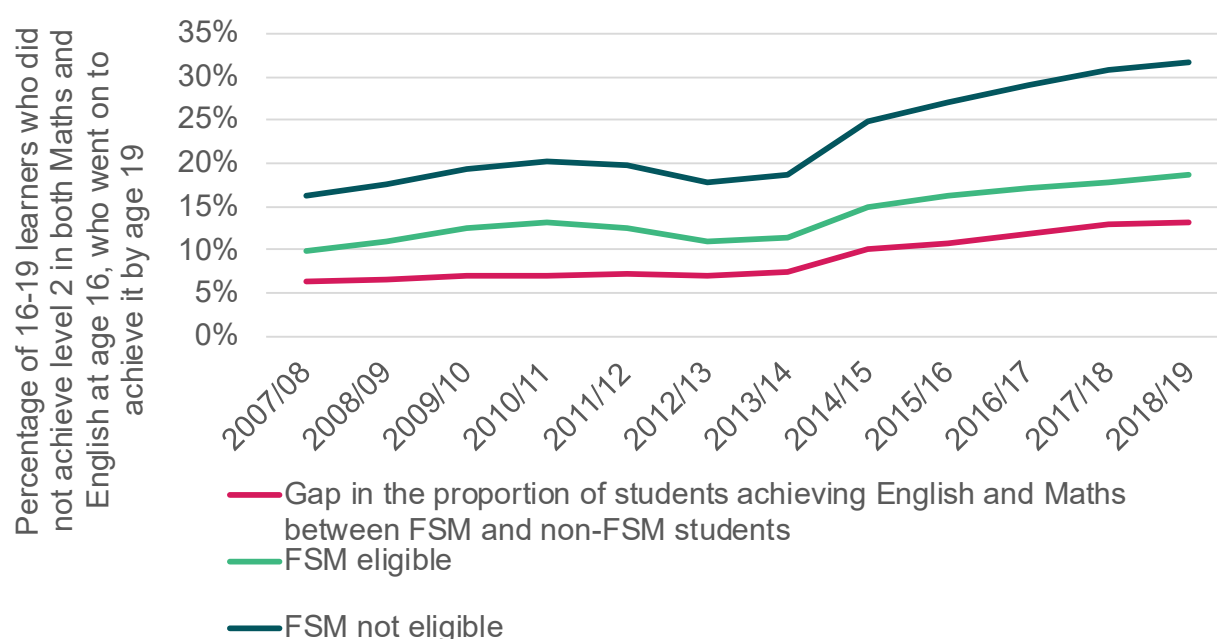
⁴⁴⁸ DfE (2025) - [English and maths progress](#)

The characteristics of these learners also show significant differences. Of the 2018/19 cohort:

- 20% of learners who were from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds went on to achieve level 2 by age 19, compared with 35% of learners who were not.
- 15% of learners with SEN went on to achieve level 2 by age 19 compared with 34% of learners with no identified SEN.⁴⁴⁹

Figure 10 below shows that the proportion of learners who had not achieved level 2 in Maths and/or English age 16 but went on to achieve level 2 in both by age 19 had been steadily improving between 2012/13 and 2018/19. The improvement has been greater for learners who are not eligible for free school meals (FSM) than for learners who were eligible.⁴⁵⁰

Figure 10. Percentage of 16-19 learners who did not achieve level 2 in Maths and English by age 16 who achieved it by age 19, by free school meal status⁴⁵¹



Learners who achieved a grade 3 at Key Stage 4 are much more likely to achieve level 2 by the end of 16-19 study than those who achieved grades 1 or 2. Nearly half of learners who achieved a grade 3 at Key Stage 4 went on to achieve level 2 by the end of 16-19 study (48% for English and 44% for Maths) (Figure 10). This more positive outcome

⁴⁴⁹ DfE (2025) - [Attainment by characteristics - ages 16-25](#)

⁴⁵⁰ DfE (2025) - [Attainment by characteristics](#)

⁴⁵¹ DfE (2025) - [Attainment by characteristics](#); DfE (2025) - [English and Maths level 2 attainment by age 19 given lack of attainment at age 16 FSM gap](#)

suggests that continuing with GCSEs can be effective for some learners in achieving level 2.

However, for learners with lower prior attainment (below a GCSE grade 3), the proportion reaching level 2 during 16-19 is substantially lower. Only 21% of those with a grade 2 in English and 13% with a grade 2 in Maths by age 16 achieved level 2 by age 19; for those with a grade 1, the figures drop to around 5% for both subjects. Some learners who do not achieve level 2 still make grade progress, but many do not.⁴⁵²

We have heard consistently from teachers and other experts that learners with the lowest GCSE attainment (particularly grades 1 or 2) have fundamental knowledge gaps that extend to earlier key stages. As these learners have progressed through school, these gaps have been compounded, leading to cumulative disfluency. This makes it increasingly difficult for them to engage with the curriculum and leaves them underprepared for the demands of study at GCSE level. As they enter further education, they are typically re-enrolled onto GCSE courses, with additional teaching time and support for Maths and English. Providers' success rates vary, and the quality of teaching and teaching time are important factors. However, it is also clear that part of the reason why many of them struggle to make progress is that the approach required to teach the GCSE curriculum in the time available does not allow sufficient opportunity to revisit and deal with their more fundamental gaps in knowledge.

As an alternative to GCSEs, providers can choose to provide FSQs in Maths and English at level 2, level 1 and entry levels 3, 2 and 1. These are applied qualifications, designed to support learners in developing their practical skills in literacy, numeracy and IT so that they can move on to further technical education, progress into employment or develop life skills. They are widely used in adult education and assess learners' ability to apply knowledge and skills in different real-world contexts relevant to the workplace. They are approximately half the size of a GCSE and are assessed on a pass-fail basis.⁴⁵³

Through our engagement work with further education teachers and leaders, we heard some positive uses of FSQs to help re-engage learners with studying Maths and English. FSQs have a different focus to GCSEs offering learners a fresh start, with the opportunity to take assessment in-year on demand and thereby make progress. However, although this may serve some learners well, we heard overwhelmingly from providers that, for the majority of learners, FSQs do not currently serve as an appropriate pathway for them to reach level 2. This is reflected in the data, which show that take-up of FSQs remains very low in comparison to GCSEs at 16-19 (22% of 16 to 19-year-olds take FSQs across level 2, level 1 and entry level compared to 71% taking GCSEs). Providers gave a range of reasons for this, including:

⁴⁵² DfE (2025) - [English and maths progress](#)

⁴⁵³ Ofqual (2022) - [Functional Skills qualifications: requirements and guidance](#); Ofqual (2015) [Improving functional skills qualifications](#)

- **Content:** The contextualisation of content to real-world and workplace scenarios is better suited to adult learners who have more experience of life and employment. Learners at 16-19, however, are faced with the added cognitive load involved in carrying out and applying mathematical calculations to a workplace scenario with which they are unfamiliar.
- **Grading:** The FSQ pass-fail grading system creates high-stakes pressure for the learner and for providers, with no option to recognise partial progress. Learners who narrowly miss the pass mark may complete a year of study with no formal recognition, contributing further to a lack of motivation and engagement.
- **Recognition:** FSQs are typically less well-understood and less widely recognised by parents and carers, employers and HE providers than GCSEs and therefore have less currency as a qualification. When surveyed, 44% of employers reported having limited or not very good understanding of FSQs; 28% said they had no understanding at all.⁴⁵⁴

As noted above, providers' success rates vary in supporting 16-19 learners to make progress and to reach level 2 in Maths and English. Our engagement with providers and experts suggests that, whilst there are many variables, providers with strong Maths and English outcomes typically prioritise these subjects strategically across the institution. For example, this can include joined up approaches to knowledge sharing and staff networks that help to foster a sense of a collective organisational responsibility for Maths and English results.⁴⁵⁵

However, providers also reported that certain aspects of performance and accountability arrangements may be inadvertently contributing to the practice and culture of repeated resits, including pressure to enter learners for exams prematurely. For example, we heard that the main driver of annual exam entry is the structure of one-year study programmes. This creates pressure to record achievement within that timeframe, especially when it is uncertain whether learners will return the following year. As our [Interim Report](#) highlighted, evidence presented by Ofqual shows that entering learners into exams prematurely is rarely successful. Of the 3,400 17-year-olds with grade 2 in GCSE Maths from June 2024 who were re-entered by their provider in November 2024, only around 50 of them achieved a grade 4; the vast majority achieved another grade 2.⁴⁵⁶

A more nuanced approach to Maths and English at 16-19

We have heard evidence from a wide range of stakeholders about the need for a different and more nuanced approach to supporting learners to engage with and make progress in Maths and English, particularly those with lower prior attainment in the form of a grade 1 or 2 at GCSE.

⁴⁵⁴ Ofqual (2023) - [Perceptions of Vocational and Technical Qualifications in England - wave 6](#)

⁴⁵⁵ EPI (2025) - [English and Maths Resits: Drivers of Success](#)

⁴⁵⁶ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Interim Report](#) (Analytical annex)

Some stakeholders have called for the present expectation for continued study of Maths and English to be removed because of the detrimental impact of resits on morale. However, we consider that the importance for life chances of securing Maths and English means that it should remain. The urgent challenge is to improve efficacy so that more young people are supported to make progress and fewer of them reach 16-19 study without having secured level 2 (see [curriculum recommendations by subject](#)).

As many stakeholders have emphasised, we think a key priority should be to ensure that learners are supported to master the fundamentals, tackling earlier gaps so that they gain a sufficient level of proficiency to progress to higher levels of study or employment. We are also attuned to calls for more modular and flexible assessment that recognises what learners can do and not what they cannot.

In line with current practice, we think that all learners who do not reach level 2 by the end of Key Stage 4, regardless of the grade they achieved, should have the option to resit the GCSE. We particularly think the expectation should remain that learners with a grade 3, who may have narrowly missed out on a grade 4, should study towards the GCSE. However, there is a strong case for an alternative option at 16-19 for those with a GCSE grade 2 or below to support study towards and achievement of level 2.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Strengthens the accountability system and explores opportunities to incentivise effective practice across 16-19 providers.
- Introduces new level 1 stepped qualifications for Maths and English Language at 16-19, to enable learners to make progress towards achieving level 2 in these GCSEs during 16-19 study. The Review Panel recommends these qualifications are:
 - One-year, level 1 qualifications for 16 to 19-year-olds with prior attainment of a grade 1 or 2 at GCSE.
 - Designed to focus teaching on mastery of the fundamentals, addressing knowledge gaps from earlier key stages in steps and enabling learners to build confidence in all areas of the GCSE up to the equivalent of grade 3.
 - Assessed in a modular way to allow learners to build up and 'bank' their progress, giving accreditation for modules learners have passed.
 - Graded to the equivalent of a strong GCSE grade 3, thereby putting learners who have achieved this level 1 qualification in a strong position to resit the GCSE the following year and achieve level 2 during 16-19 study.

The Review Panel recommends that the Government strengthens the accountability system to incentivise positive behaviours and the spreading of best practice. In particular, the Government should explore changes to encourage a greater recognition of the progress learners make, including ways to recognise progress below a grade 4, and to ensure learners are given sufficient time to consolidate knowledge before being entered for exams, with greater clarification of expectations around who should be entered for resits.

The Government should do this in close collaboration with the sector, exploring opportunities to encourage more dynamic and visible spreading of best practice in progressing learners with lower prior attainment.

We recommend that the Government introduces new, one-year, stepped qualifications at level 1 for Maths and English Language at 16-19. This qualification should focus teaching on mastery of the fundamentals, addressing knowledge gaps from earlier key stages and enabling learners to build confidence in areas of the GCSE up to and including the equivalent of a strong grade 3. This would give learners a strong foundation for success in resitting the full GCSE and achieving level 2 during 16-19 study.

A second key purpose of this new qualification would be to better engage and motivate learners. We recommend that the Government and Ofqual consider how these qualifications can be assessed in a modular ('stepped') way that enables learners to build up and 'bank' progress over time and to receive accreditation for the modules they have passed. For many learners, this may be the first time they achieve something tangible in Maths and English. This approach would shift the focus from failure to progress, helping to build confidence and momentum.

These qualifications should be targeted towards learners with prior attainment of a grade 2 or below at GCSE. The current expectation should remain that learners with a grade 3 continue to study towards reaching level 2 by retaking the GCSE.

Non-qualification activity within 16-19 study programmes

As part of their study programme, all 16 to 19-year-old learners are expected to undertake meaningful non-qualification activity to complement their substantive qualifications, Maths and English (where required) and work experience. The DfE's guidance for 16-19 study programmes says that non-qualification activity should be designed 'to develop students' character, broader skills, attitudes and confidence and support progression'.⁴⁵⁷

It is vital that all young people are supported to leave education well prepared for life and work. However, stakeholders have told us that, too often, young people are leaving

⁴⁵⁷ DfE (2025) - [16–19 study programmes guidance: 2025/26 academic year](#)

education lacking critical skills in oracy and other transferable skills, applied knowledge such as digital, media and financial literacy, and knowledge needed for citizenship such as understanding political and democratic processes (see [Preparing learners for a changing world](#)).

We heard about the wide range of enrichment, employment and pastoral activities provided by schools and colleges as part of the non-qualification element of study programmes. This included group work, student-led social action projects and campaigns, one-to-one support and tutoring, peer mentoring, life skills sessions and activities promoting physical and mental health and wellbeing. They also included volunteering and community activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. These activities serve multiple purposes, including complementing learners' substantive qualifications, developing study and employability skills, and developing learners' social and cultural capital.⁴⁵⁸

The broad range of activities partly reflects national variations in learners' needs, as well as individual providers' resources, capacities, and local contexts. The DfE's expectations in its guidance are deliberately broad, allowing for a range of interpretation. However, we have heard from providers that, whilst a degree of flexibility is beneficial to accommodate local contexts, the current level of ambiguity is unhelpful. A lack of clarity has led to significant variation in interpretation and implementation of the guidance, with inconsistency in the types of activities and variation in the quality of students' experiences.

Through our engagement, we heard calls for clearer guidance to promote more effective practice in delivering high-quality enrichment, employment, and pastoral support. We heard many examples of best practice that should be encouraged, including:

- Continuing assessment and monitoring throughout 16-19 education, giving learners a clear record of what they have achieved and helping them to identify and tackle gaps in their knowledge and skills to support their aspirations for study and progression.
- Strong relationships and information-sharing between schools and 16-19 providers so that the latter have a good understanding of learners' social and personal development needs and can plan accordingly to adjust support.
- Whole organisation prioritising of enrichment, employment and pastoral activities, with clear support and messaging from senior leadership teams and a focus on where key skills are embedded in learners' study programmes.

⁴⁵⁸ Association of Colleges (2023) - [The Valuing Enrichment Project](#)

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Strengthens guidance for 16-19 study programmes to promote effective practice in delivering non-qualification activity and to clarify expectations about the types of activities that should be core to the enrichment offer. The focus should be on applied knowledge and transferable skills that will enable learners to step confidently into adulthood.
- Considers whether certain elements of non-qualification activity should be made mandatory so that learners' access to opportunities is more consistent.

Future curriculum reviews

Our [Terms of Reference](#) invite us to make recommendations about how future updates to the curriculum and assessment system should be approached.⁴⁵⁹ This is the fifth review of the national curriculum since it was introduced into schools in 1989. These reviews have all differed significantly in terms of their methodology and scope. The time between reviews has also varied considerably, ranging from two years to over a decade.

In formulating our approach, and in order to make evidence-based recommendations for how future curriculum reviews should be conducted, we have taken input from experts and drawn on research and international analysis. It should be acknowledged that this is an area in which evidence is notably underdeveloped, with research largely limited to comparative work with other international jurisdictions; and even this tends to be somewhat superficial and selective in scope. Due to the very different socio-political contexts of different countries and the ways in which these contribute to differing education system arrangements and features,⁴⁶⁰ international evidence on curriculum arrangements must be treated as an informative aide for comparative reflection on our own system, rather than a direct source of transferable policies.⁴⁶¹ Nevertheless, our recommendations reflect our appraisal of the evidence available.

The approaches taken to curriculum reform in other nations - including among high-performing jurisdictions - vary widely. Some undergo curriculum reform on a planned cyclical basis, while others do not.⁴⁶² And while arrangements and Reviews are precipitated by Governments, there is also wide variation in the governance arrangements for curriculum reform.⁴⁶³

National curriculum content must be kept up to date, fit for purpose and reflective of the needs of wider society. Periodic holistic reviews of the national curriculum are therefore essential for ensuring these aims are achieved, as well as for maintaining overall curriculum coherence. Reviews are also a valuable mechanism for addressing curriculum shape in the round. Reviews can evaluate whether the breadth and depth of different subjects and their content remains appropriate, as well as determining the overarching aims of schooling and the time needed for the different activities required to meet these aims. Reviews can also address the build-up of content in particular areas to ensure that the curriculum remains deliverable for teachers and ambitious for students.

⁴⁵⁹ [Curriculum and Assessment Review: Set-up](#)

⁴⁶⁰ Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (2023) - [How Political Contexts Influence Education Systems: Patterns, Constraints, Entry Points](#)

⁴⁶¹ Deng, Z. & Gopinathan, S. (2016) - [PISA and high-performing education systems: explaining Singapore's education success](#)

⁴⁶² EPI (2021) - [How leading education nations develop and reform their curriculum systems](#)

⁴⁶³ OECD (2020) - [Curriculum reform](#)

If reviews are not holistic (that is, if they review and update individual subjects or key stages in silos), a potential negative consequence can be the introduction of significant volumes of additional content without due regard to the wider shape or deliverability of the curriculum as a whole. If new content is added to the national curriculum but some existing content is not removed, this inevitably puts pressure on already tight teaching time. There are always compelling arguments for new content to be added to the curriculum, but the fact that teaching time is limited means that decisions must be made about what content to prioritise. Holistic reviews are well suited to ensuring that a balance is struck between the volume of content and the time to teach it.

The timing of holistic reviews also requires careful consideration. If reviews are undertaken too frequently, this can have a disruptive impact on the education sector, which must constantly adapt to the new direction and requirements of a changed curriculum.⁴⁶⁴ However, if reviews are too infrequent, the curriculum and assessment system risks becoming dated and unfit for purpose. We recommend that holistic reviews should be undertaken at 10-year intervals, in keeping with the (limited) international evidence.⁴⁶⁵ This allows time for the changes that follow each review to ‘bed-in’ and ensures that the whole sector benefits from stability.⁴⁶⁶

However, we live in a rapidly changing world where significant social, technological and environmental changes are presenting young people with both opportunities and challenges. Some areas of the curriculum therefore may need more regular updates than others,⁴⁶⁷ and this is particularly the case for disciplines affected by rapidly evolving digital technologies. In such areas, there are benefits in not leaving any necessary amendments until the next holistic review (which could be up to a decade away). In addition to holistic reviews, we therefore recommend a rolling programme of light-touch minimalist updates of different elements of the national curriculum and its Programmes of Study, conducted by the DfE with support from relevant agencies. These should have a threefold aim of ensuring that the national curriculum remains up to date, addressing any specific issues that arise, and ensuring that the volume of content remains appropriate and deliverable. These light-touch reviews should avoid adding content wherever possible and, instead, focus on refreshing any that is outdated.⁴⁶⁸

Given the different international approaches to curriculum reviews and the diverse approaches that have been adopted in England, there are several models which future holistic reviews might adopt.⁴⁶⁹ Future reviews should set clear aims and principles at the outset, with public consultation then focused on how to achieve those aims. An evidence-led approach is crucial and should use a variety of different types of evidence, such as

⁴⁶⁴ OECD (2020) - [Curriculum Overload](#); Edpol (2020) - [Curriculum roundtable: Change process blueprint](#)

⁴⁶⁵ OECD (2020) - [Curriculum reform](#); Edpol (2020) - [Curriculum roundtable: Change process blueprint](#)

⁴⁶⁶ Edpol (2020) - [Curriculum roundtable: Change process blueprint](#)

⁴⁶⁷ Education Select Committee (2025) - [6 May 2025 - Curriculum and Assessment Review - Oral evidence](#)

⁴⁶⁸ Edpol (2020) - [Curriculum roundtable: Change process blueprint](#)

⁴⁶⁹ EPI (2021) - [How leading education nations develop and reform their curriculum systems](#)

robust longitudinal data, public consultation, and engagement with the sector. A suitable balance between external expert input and central coordination is also necessary. This is to avoid the risks of large committees neutralising the efficacy of proposals through consensus-seeking rather than using evidence to steer recommendations, or alternatively recommending additional content without due regard to successful implementation (or the impact on time available for other subject areas).

The impact of reforms should always be carefully evaluated, including those that follow this Review. It is also essential that future reviews pay due attention to the capacity and workload of professionals and educational institutions, with piloting used where feasible to inform plans for significant change. This report sets out separately our principles for reviewing and refreshing the curriculum Programmes of Study effectively (see [curriculum principles](#)), which we recommend to future reviews as a means of effectively reforming the national curriculum.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Limits the intervals between holistic curriculum reviews to approximately a decade.
- Supplements holistic reviews with a rolling programme of light-touch minimalist updates (conducted by the DfE with support from its agencies) of the national curriculum and its Programmes of Study, with a threefold aim of:
 - Ensuring the national curriculum remains up to date;⁴⁷⁰
 - Addressing any specific issues arising; and
 - Ensuring that the volume of content remains appropriate and deliverable.
- Ensures that future reviews set clear objectives at the outset, adopt a rigorous evidence-led approach and undertake public consultation. The Government should also ensure that future reviews strike an appropriate balance between external expert input and central coordination and that it evaluates the likely impact of any proposed changes, including considering the capacity and workload of professionals and educational institutions.

⁴⁷⁰ Including addressing ongoing changes in content and role of digital technology.

Next steps and implementation of the Review's recommendations

The publication of this report marks the start of the next phase of work to ensure findings are translated into meaningful change across a range of short, medium and longer term priorities. It will be the Government's responsibility, alongside key stakeholders, to engage with our recommendations and ensure they are implemented across the system. This process will begin with the Government's formal response to the Reviews findings and recommendations, which is due to be published alongside this report.

In addition, work will continue to identify and engage experienced drafters to enact the changes we have outlined to the Programmes of Study and subject content for each of the individual subjects. This process will be led by the Government and take place from late 2025 onwards. Throughout this process, there will be opportunities for draft content to be tested with stakeholders through the statutory consultation process in 2026, to ensure it balances delivery of the Review's recommendations with offering the right level of depth and breadth.

The Government should monitor the impact of these reforms, and trends in participation, attainment, engagement and progress. This is especially important where we have identified disparities related to particular groups of children and young people. There is a clear need to ensure that such gaps narrow, and to secure high standards for all.

Conclusion

The Review has highlighted many strengths in our curriculum and assessment system that are made possible by the dedication and expertise of those who work in education. Much of the existing framework is effective and should therefore remain in place. However, our work has identified clear areas where improvement is needed.

Robust and diverse evidence underpins our recommendations. This evidence, which has been drawn from system data, responses to our Call for Evidence, polling, expert consultation, academic research and international comparisons, has been invaluable in guiding the Review's evaluation of options and our consideration of risk and reward.

This report sets out an ambitious but achievable set of recommendations. We urge the Government to take a careful, staged approach to implementation that takes into account the wider context in the education system, and wider challenges currently facing the sector that fall outside the remit of this review.

We believe that our vision for a world-leading curriculum and assessment system in England, and the recommendations we set out to achieve it, have the potential to bring about important and lasting change that improves the educational experiences and outcomes of children and young people. We have sought to capitalise on what is working well in our system, and to address what is not, to ensure that more children and young people have access to a high-quality curriculum and assessment system and are supported to achieve and thrive.

Finally, we would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody who has engaged with the Review throughout this process and who will be involved in implementing the reforms that we recommend.

Annex 1: Accountability measures in England's primary, secondary and 16-18 education system, 2024/25

Figure 11. List of headline accountability measures in primary,⁴⁷¹ secondary⁴⁷² and 16-18 education⁴⁷³ in England, academic year 2024/25

Performance measure and Description
Primary
Percentage of pupils achieving the 'expected standard' in English reading, English writing and Maths at the end of Key Stage 2
Pupils' average scaled score in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English reading at the end of Key Stage 2 Maths at the end of Key Stage 2
Percentage of pupils who achieve at a higher standard ⁴⁷⁴ in English reading, English writing and Maths
Key Stage 1-2 progress measures *
Secondary
Attainment 8: measures students' attainment across eight qualifications including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maths (double weighted) and English (double weighted, if both English Language and English Literature are sat) Three qualifications that count in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) measures Three further qualifications that can be GCSE qualifications (including EBacc subjects) or technical awards from the DfE approved list of qualifications
Progress 8 **: aims to capture the progress that students in a school make from the end of primary school to the end of Key Stage 4. It is a type of value-added measure, which means that students' results are compared to other students nationally with similar prior attainment
Attainment in English and Maths (Key Stage 4): these measures show the proportion of students achieving a grade 5 and above in GCSE English (either Literature or Language) and Maths (a headline measure) and the proportion of students achieving a grade 4 and above in these subjects
EBacc entry: reports the percentage of students entered for the EBacc. To enter the EBacc, students must take up to eight GCSEs across five subject 'pillars' shown by Figure 12. Structure of the EBacc
EBacc APS: Students' point scores across the five pillars of the EBacc: English, Maths, Science, Language and Humanities

⁴⁷¹ DfE (2025) - [Primary school accountability in 2025: technical guide](#)

⁴⁷² DfE (2025) - [Secondary accountability measures \(including Progress 8 and Attainment 8\)](#)

⁴⁷³ DfE (2025) - [16 to 18 accountability headline measures](#)

⁴⁷⁴ To be counted towards the measure, a pupil must have a 'high scaled score' of 110 or more in reading and maths; and have been teacher assessed in writing as 'working at greater depth'.

Pupil destinations: percentage of students continuing to a sustained education, employment, or training destination in the year after completing Key Stage 4 study (after Year 11)

16-18

16-18 value added (progress) measures: these measures show how well students did in their qualifications compared to other students with similar prior attainment nationally

Attainment measures: the headline attainment measures show the average point score (APS) per entry, also expressed as an average grade

Retention measures: the headline retention measures show the percentage of students retained to the end of the core aim⁴⁷⁵ of their study programme

Destination measures: the headline destination measure shows the percentage of students that progress to a sustained education, training or employment destination after 16-18 study

English and Maths progress measures ***: these measures showed, for students that did not achieve a grade 4 or above in GCSE English or Maths at Key Stage 4, how much progress learners make between their Key Stage 4 GCSE result and any re-takes they do in GCSE English or GCSE Maths or equivalent at 16-18

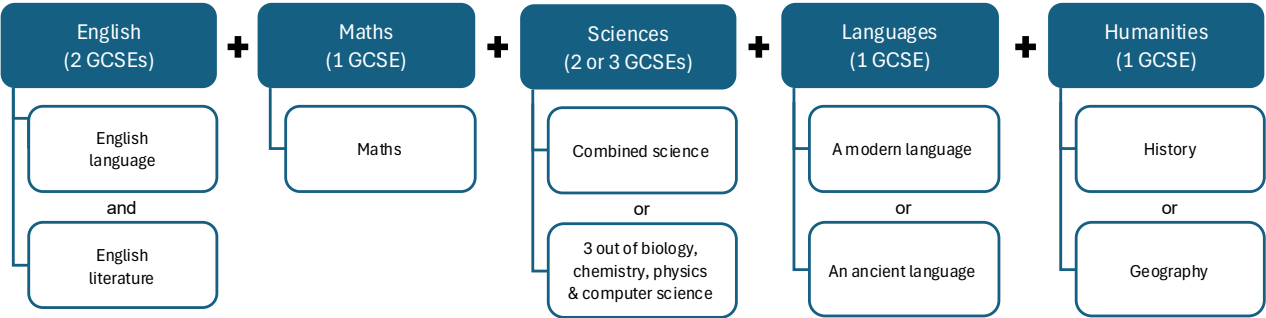
* Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 progress measure will not be published for the 2023/24 and 2024/25 academic years as Key Stage 2 pupils in these years did not have Key Stage 1 assessments due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It will be possible to return to producing Key Stage 1-2 progress measures in 2025/26 and 2026/27. For the cohort reaching the end of Key Stage 2 in 2027/28, baseline data available to calculate progress will be from the Reception Baseline Assessment taken in 2021/22.

** As primary tests and assessments were cancelled in the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21 due to COVID-19 disruption, there will be no Key Stage 2 prior attainment data available to calculate Progress 8 when the relevant cohorts reach the end of Key Stage 4 in the academic years 2024/25 and 2025/26. For these years, the most recent available Progress 8 scores (2023/24 and 2022/23) will be provided.

*** The DfE will not produce and publish a 16-18 English and Maths progress measure for students completing 16-18 study in the 2023/24 academic year. The earliest point at which the DfE will return to producing the English and Maths progress measure is for the 2024/25 academic year.

⁴⁷⁵ The core aim is the principal or 'core' activity in a student's programme. All 16–19 study programmes have a core aim. Core aims are tailored to the needs of the individual and typically includes a substantial qualification (academic or technical) or preparation for employment.

Figure 12. Structure of the EBacc



Annex 2: Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement and consultation

The Review has been undertaken in close consultation with education professionals and other experts, parents and carers, children and young people, and stakeholders such as employers, universities, and trade unions. We are enormously grateful to all of those that have given their time to support and advise the Review. We wish to express our deepest thanks to everyone that engaged, including those that made time to respond to the Call for Evidence and those who attended the Review's public events.

Regional public events

Location	Date	Attendee Numbers for open public event
South West - Exeter	Monday 21 October 2024	97
East of England - Cambridge	Wednesday 23 October 2024	114
East Midlands - Northampton	Thursday 24 October 2024	122
London	Monday 4 November 2024	150
Online Webinar	Tuesday 5 November 2024	1250
West Midlands - West Bromwich	Monday 11 November 2024	118
South East - Folkestone	Tuesday 19 November 2024	148
Yorkshire and Humber - Doncaster	Thursday 21 November 2024	106
North East - Darlington	Tuesday 26 November 2024	200
North West - Oldham	Wednesday 27 November 2024	150
Online Webinar	Thursday 28 November 2024	1233
Total	-	3688

Each of these regional events also incorporated a school or College visit where the Review's Chair and Review team members held roundtables with groups of students and teachers to seek their views on a wide range of topics.

Further school and college visits

Members of the Review Panel and/or the Review Chair met with students and teachers to discuss their views on the current curriculum and assessment mechanisms.

School or College	Location	Date
Greenwood Academy	Birmingham	Wednesday 25 September 2024
Exeter College	Exeter	Monday 21 October 2024
Cambourne Village College	Cambridge	Wednesday 23 October 2024
Matthew Arnold Academy	Northampton	Thursday 24 October 2024
Westminster Kingsway College	London	Monday 4 November 2024
Ormiston George Salter Academy	West Bromwich	Monday 11 November 2024
Folkestone Academy	Folkestone	Tuesday 19 November 2024
Doncaster College	Doncaster	Thursday 21 November 2024
Wyvern Academy	Darlington	Tuesday 26 November 2024
The Oldham Academy North	Oldham	Wednesday 27 November 2024
Nottingham Girls Academy	Nottingham	Monday 9 December 2024
Starbank School	Birmingham	Tuesday 18 March 2025
Outwood Primary Academy Woodlands and Outwood Academy Danum	Doncaster	Tuesday 22 April 2025
West Thames College	London	Thursday 1 May 2025
London Design and Engineering UTC	London	Wednesday 21 May 2025

Roundtables and oral evidence sessions

Members of the Review Panel sought views and evidence from particular stakeholder groups and/or explored topics and subjects via a series of evidence sessions and roundtables over the period of the Review.

Roundtables

Focus	Date
Children's Commissioner Youth Ambassador roundtable	Thursday 31 October 2024
English and Maths Requirements 16-19 (Resits)	Tuesday 5 November 2024
Awarding Organisations	Monday 18 November 2024
Employer Representative Organisations	Wednesday 11 December 2024
Religious Education	Monday 16 December 2024
Roundtable with the Students Organising for Sustainability UK (SOS UK) 'The Youth Shadow Review Panel' attended by Expert panel members	Monday 16 December 2024
Employers	Thursday 30 January 2025
PE / Sports	Tuesday 4 February 2025
Arts / Cultural industries	Tuesday 11 February 2025
Subject Associations	Tuesday 1 July 2025
Awarding Organisations	Wednesday 2 July 2025
Arts Subjects	Tuesday 15 July 2025
Employers	Tuesday 22 July 2025

Oral evidence sessions

Focus	Date
SEND	Tuesday 3 December 2024
Socio-economic disadvantage and intersectionality	Wednesday 4 December 2024

Subject meetings

Expert subject specialists were also consulted as part of the Review's work focusing on curriculum subjects pre-16 during February to September 2025. These discussions included teachers, subject experts such as Subject Associations, other subject organisations and academic subject advisors and specialists. These discussions helped the Review Panel conduct further detailed analysis of the issues, enabling more specific analysis of to be considered, implications to be discussed and options and recommendations to be formulated and agreed.

International engagement

The Review team spoke with devolved administrations and governments internationally to understand how their curricula operate, how they approached their reviews or reforms, to hear lessons learned and to access evidence.

Government	Date
Scotland	Thursday 12 September 2024; Thursday 31 October 2024
Netherlands	Thursday 19 September 2024
France	Wednesday 22 January 2025
Northern Ireland	Monday 10 February 2025; Tuesday 15 April 2025; Wednesday 16 July 2025
Wales	Thursday 17 October 2024; Friday 18 July 2025
Belgium	Wednesday 25 June 2025
Ireland	Monday 30 June 2025
Hong Kong	Thursday 28 August
Singapore	Friday 29 August

Wider stakeholder engagement and consultation

Aside from the activity mentioned above the Review Chair, members of the Review Panel and members of the Review team had meetings with many stakeholders - both individuals and organisations. These included meetings with key sector organisations and individuals, attendance at external events and conferences. The Review Chair and members of the Review Panel have also given conference presentations and addressed key sector events.

Annex 3: List of all recommendations

Overarching recommendations

Towards a world leading curriculum

We recommend that the Government:

- Introduces an oracy framework to support practice and to complement the existing frameworks for Reading and Writing.

Curriculum Principles recommendations

We recommend that the Government adopts the following curriculum principles when drafting Programmes of Study for the refreshed national curriculum.

- The refreshed national curriculum must be an aspirational, engaging and demanding offer that reflects the high expectations and excellence our young people deserve, irrespective of background.
- The refreshed national curriculum should retain a knowledge-rich approach, ensuring skills are developed in conjunction with knowledge in ways that are appropriate for each subject discipline.
- The national curriculum should be constructed so that it supports children and young people to master core concepts, ensuring sufficient space for them to build their knowledge and deepen their understanding.
- Curriculum coherence should be an organising principle for curriculum drafters and support the selection and prioritisation of content. Where appropriate, vertical core concepts on which subjects have been constructed should be clearly presented, and horizontal coherence should be ensured.
- Foundation subject content should specify the essential substantive knowledge and skills which should be taught to enable children and young people to meet expectations at the end of each key stage.
- The refreshed national curriculum should ensure the professional autonomy of teachers is maintained, making sure that greater specificity does not substantially restrict teachers' flexibility to choose lesson content and how to teach it.
- The national curriculum is for all our children and young people. As such, it should reflect our diverse society and the contributions of people of all backgrounds to our knowledge and culture.

We recommend that the Government:

- Reviews and updates all Programmes of Study – and, where appropriate, the corresponding GCSE Subject Content – to include stronger representation of the diversity that makes up our modern society, allowing more children to see themselves in the curriculum.
- Develops the national curriculum as a digital product that can support teachers to navigate content easily and to see and make connections across key stages and disciplines.
- Develops a programme of work to provide evidence-led guidance on curriculum and pedagogical adaptation (as well as exemplification) for children and young people with SEND, including those in specialist provision, who experience various barriers to accessing the curriculum.
- Involves teachers in the testing and design of Programmes of Study as part of the drafting process. This must take into consideration the curriculum time that is available, ensuring the national curriculum is ambitious but teachable within a typical school timetable.

Pre-16 subject recommendations

Art and Design recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Makes limited revisions to the Key Stage 1 to 3 Art and Design Programmes of Study to clarify and exemplify the knowledge and skills pupils should develop, including through their own creative practice, reflection and critical engagement.
- Works with Ofqual and awarding organisations to clarify the volume and range of coursework students are expected to produce for GCSE Art and Design.

Citizenship recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Introduces a statutory measure to ensure that all pupils are taught a core body of essential Citizenship content at primary (including elements of financial and media literacy, and climate change and sustainability).
- Improves the efficacy of primary Citizenship by clarifying the purpose and content of the Key Stage 1 and 2 curriculum and removes any content that duplicates the new Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) Programme of Study.

- Updates the secondary Programmes of Study for Citizenship to clarify their purpose, improve specificity and improve progression from Key Stage 3 to 4 or to the optional GCSE (including a renewed focus on financial literacy, media literacy, climate and sustainability, equality duties and challenging discrimination, and democracy and government).

Computing recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Provides greater clarity in the Computing curriculum about what students should be taught at each key stage so that they build the essential digital literacy required for future life and work.
- Replaces GCSE Computer Science with a Computing GCSE which reflects the full breadth of the Computing curriculum and supports students to develop the digital skills they need.
- Reviews where digital skills and technologies have become an integral part of subject disciplines other than Computing. Where this is the case, it should determine whether to include this specific digital content in those subjects' Programmes of Study, sequenced and aligned with the Computing curriculum.

Design and Technology (D&T) recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Rewrites the D&T subject aims to be more aspirational, and clarifies the purpose of study to focus on the subject's distinct body of knowledge and capabilities, with a particular focus on Key Stage 3.
- Refines the D&T curriculum and GCSE subject content to:
 - Explicitly include how to achieve sustainable resolutions to design challenges.
 - Embed the teaching of social responsibility and inclusive design explicitly within the curriculum, as appropriate to the key stage, throughout the design process.
 - Support the development of critical decision-making skills about material selection.
 - Ensure that realising designs remains integral to pupils' experience of D&T.

Cooking and Nutrition recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Renames the subject 'Food and Nutrition' and ensures it has its own aims and purpose of study that better reflect what it covers and its discrete identity within D&T.
- Ensures that sufficient detail in the curriculum sets clear expectations about what should be taught at each key stage to reflect the fact that the subject develops skills for life as well as progression to further study.
- Reviews the level 3 vocational options for food science to determine the best means of ensuring that the needs of learners are met and that there is a strong 'pipeline' into higher education and careers.

English recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Ensures that the English curriculum sets out a clearer purpose, with more clarity and specificity at each key stage, including clarifying the distinction between English and literacy. This should include more clearly drawing out curriculum requirements for speaking and listening, as well as Drama. In particular, more clarity and specificity at Key Stage 3 should improve coherence between primary and secondary.
 - To support this, we recommend that the Government introduce an oracy framework to support practice and to complement the existing frameworks for reading and writing.⁴⁷⁶
- Reviews grammatical content to determine what content should be re-sequenced to later key stages, and what content should be removed entirely at Key Stage 2 to enable a greater focus on grammar in use rather than grammar in theory.
- Replaces the current grammar, punctuation and spelling (GPS) test with an amended test, which retains some elements of the current GPS test but with new tasks to better assess composition and application of grammar and punctuation.
 - Once the new test is established in schools, the DfE may wish to consider whether the role of the test in accountability should remain as stands, or whether any changes, such as including the new test in headline measures, should be explored.

⁴⁷⁶ DfE (2023) - [The reading framework](#); DfE (2025) - [The writing framework](#)

- Introduces a diagnostic test in English, to be taken in Year 8, with the aim of supporting teachers to identify and address any areas of weakness before gaps widen further.
- Makes significant changes to the Key Stage 4 English Programme of Study and the GCSE English Language subject content, introducing greater clarity of purpose to focus English Language more clearly on the nature and expression of language, and to support critical analysis of a wider variety of text types and genres, including multi-modal and ephemeral text types.
- Reviews the genres specified in the English Key Stage 4 Programme of Study and GCSE English Literature subject content to ensure that students continue to study texts drawn from the recognised body of English literature (including the expectation of at least one play by Shakespeare, a selection of poetry, fiction or drama from the British Isles from 1914 onwards, and at least one 19th century novel), and that they also benefit from studying texts drawn from the full breadth of our literary heritage, including more diverse and representative texts. This should not increase the volume of content.

Drama recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Updates the Key Stage 3 English Programme of Study to include a discrete section on Drama. This should include more detail to provide greater clarity about expectations for performing, creating and responding to dramatic works. Greater specificity about Drama should be added to the Key Stage 1 and 2 English Programmes of Study, aiming to build solid foundations and support transition to Key Stage 3
- Reviews the subject content for GCSE Drama, assessment methods and the balance of assessment to ensure that the qualification is up to date, suited to the discipline and enables progression to further study and careers in drama and theatre.

Geography recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Makes minor refinements to the Geography Programmes of Study and GCSE subject content to respond to the issues identified, including by:
 - Refining content to support progression better to further study, deepen children and young people's understanding of key geographical concepts, make

content more relevant and inclusive, and remove unnecessary repetition across topics.

- Embedding disciplinary knowledge more explicitly at Key Stage 3, such as geographical enquiry, spatial reasoning, use of digital tools, human geography and use of evidence, to ensure all children and young people have access to high-quality geographical education.
- Clarifying and reinforcing requirements for fieldwork to demonstrate its role more effectively in supporting content and the developing of disciplinary knowledge, ensuring changes remain proportionate and inclusive.
- Embeds climate change and sustainability more explicitly across different key stages, including across the physical geography, geographical applications and human geography sections of the curriculum, ensuring early, coherent and more detailed engagement with climate education. This should be done without risking curriculum overload.

History recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Adjusts the History Programmes of Study to:
 - Improve the understanding and application of disciplinary knowledge and skills through additions and amendments to the disciplinary terms used.
 - Clarify the statutory and non-statutory content requirements to better support teachers in recognising and understanding the optionality that exists across Key Stages 1 to 3.
 - Support the wider teaching of History's inherent diversity, including through the analysis of a wide range of sources and, where appropriate, local history.
- Reviews GCSE History subject content and assessment (including assessment objectives) to:
 - Ensure understanding of disciplinary knowledge is advanced and concerns about overload are tackled.
 - Ensure that assessment is fit for purpose and aligned with the aims of the GCSE.

Languages recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Updates the Key Stage 2 Languages Programme of Study to include a clearly defined minimum core content for French, German and Spanish to standardise expectations about what 'substantial progress in one language' looks like.
- Should not make immediate changes to the new content of the GCSEs in French, German and Spanish but that the DfE should review the impact of these following the first exams in 2026.

We recommend that local authorities, multi-academy trusts and schools:

- Should explore the potential benefits of a coordinated approach in their local areas to the main language taught from Key Stage 2 through to Key Stage 4, taking account of their local context and priorities. The Government should look to encourage this activity where appropriate.

Maths recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Retains the amount and type of content in the Key Stage 1 to 3 curriculum, but re-sequences it so that topics are introduced in such a way that pupils can master them deeply, with opportunities for more complex problem-solving in each area, and reduce repetition in later years.
- Ensures that Maths should be the subject in which pupils are exposed to mathematical concepts for the first time and the curriculum is sequenced as such. These concepts should then be applied in different contexts, where appropriate, in other subjects - for example, aspects of financial education in Citizenship.⁴⁷⁷
- Ensures that the Standards and Testing Agency (STA) works with DfE to refine the current non-statutory Maths test at Key Stage 1 to reflect any updates to the Maths curriculum. Alongside this, the DfE should consider ways in which it can encourage more schools to use it.
- Ensures that the STA works with the DfE to redesign Key Stage 2 assessments minimally to reflect a re-sequenced curriculum and include a stronger focus on mental arithmetic and reasoning.

⁴⁷⁷ For example: a student should not be exposed to compound interest during their financial education in Citizenship without first having been introduced to in Maths.

- Introduces a diagnostic test in Maths, to be taken in Year 8, with the aim of supporting teachers to identify and deal with any weakness before students progress to Key Stage 4.

Music recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Revises the content of the Programmes of Study for Key Stages 1 to 3 to ensure a curriculum pathway which gives all pupils a rigorous foundation in musical understanding and enables broader access to further study at Key Stage 4. This could be achieved by:
 - Revisiting the purpose and aims, ensuring that they better reflect intended outcomes.
 - Adding some further specificity, without increasing volume, to clarify how pupils should progress in the three pillars of musical understanding (technical, constructive and expressive), and to ensure that a range of genres and repertoires can be covered.
- Reviews the Music GCSE and Technical Award concurrently to ensure their purposes are both clear and distinct and that qualification content and assessment meet these aims. As part of this, the Government should consider:
 - GCSE assessment objectives, modes and requirements, and whether these are suited to the discipline.
 - The extent to which the most recent reforms to Technical Awards have effectively changed the purpose and suitability of the Music Technical Award, and whether this qualification is still fit for purpose or requires further adjustments.
- Explores ways to better optimise its investment in Music education to support the teaching and learning of musical instruments and the reading of music to ensure equitable access to, and progression in, Music education.

Physical Education (PE) recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Redrafts the purpose of study for PE, retaining the importance of competitive sports, but clarifying the significance of providing all pupils with opportunities to learn in a physical environment and emphasising its physical, social, cognitive and emotional benefits that complement and enhance overall academic performance and general wellbeing.

- Redrafts the aims of PE so that they are clearer and more coherent at each key stage.
- Introduces a concise, scaffolded approach to the attainment targets and key stage subject content within the Programmes of Study. As part of this, the Government should review how the Programmes of Study refer to individual activities (such as dance, swimming and outdoor activity), including whether they are sufficiently specific to support quality teaching.
- Distinguishes clearly between mandatory core PE and qualification pathways, and develops distinct terminology for each. This can be achieved by renaming GCSE PE, and considering whether any content changes are required to ensure it retains a focus on sports science. The content of Key Stage 4 mandatory non-assessed PE should be revised to ensure that it focuses primarily on physical activity
- Reviews the current GCSE PE activity list to consider ways in which it could be made more inclusive for all students, especially for students with SEND.

Dance recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Reviews how the PE Key Stage 1 to 4 Programmes of Study refer to Dance, including whether they are sufficiently specific to support high-quality teaching and students' progression, including to further study.
- Reviews the subject content, balance of assessment and assessment methods of GCSE Dance so that the qualification is inclusive, representative and better suited to the discipline.

Religious Education (RE) recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Adds RE to the national curriculum in due course. A staged approach should be taken, in line with the following steps:
 - **Stage 1:**

Representatives from faith groups, secular groups and the wider teaching and education sector that we heard from during the Review should build on the constructive and collaborative work they have been doing through the course of the Review. DfE should invite the sector to form a task and finish group, convened and led by an expert Chair who is independent of any particular secular or faith group interest or representation. The Review recommends that, given her leadership of this strand of the Review's work (based on her expertise), Dr Vanessa Ogden CBE should undertake this

role, ensuring momentum in the successful convening she has established. This group should liaise with relevant external parties and, building on the existing National Content Standard for RE in England, engage with faith and non-faith schools, as well as RE organisations and faith communities, to co-create a draft RE curriculum.

Whilst this work should be sector-led, the DfE should welcome efforts the sector makes to reach a consensus and support and facilitate this group where necessary.

Alongside this, the DfE should consider the legislative framework for RE, including, for example, what any changes to its status in the curriculum would mean for functions such as Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACREs). A long-term plan for implementing potential changes to legislation should be drafted.

As part of this review, the DfE should consider removing the statutory requirement for learners in school sixth forms to study RE.

In parallel, the DfE should review the non-statutory guidance for RE, which has not been updated since 2010, to establish whether beneficial changes to subject content could be made in the short term that do not pre-empt the wider work the Review is recommending.

- **Stage 2:**

If consensus on a draft RE curriculum can be reached, the DfE should conduct a formal consultation on the detailed content.

Alongside this, the DfE should consult on proposed changes to the legislative framework, including any proposal to repeal the requirement to teach RE in school sixth forms.

Science recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Ensures more cohesion and consistency across the primary Science curriculum, including clearer guidance on what should be taught, to what depth, at each stage.
- At all key stages, bases the Science curriculum on the fundamental concepts of each individual discipline so that students develop deep scientific and disciplinary knowledge and skills. In light of this, the Government should consider where content can be streamlined, especially at GCSE, without affecting rigour or the subject's knowledge-rich focus.

- Ensures that the curriculum more clearly articulates the purpose and expectations of high-quality practical work in supporting the building of substantive knowledge and the development of important skills and procedural knowledge.
- Ensures that, in relevant areas, the Science curriculum explicitly develops students' understanding of the scientific principles that explain climate change and sustainability and the global efforts to tackle them.
- Introduces an entitlement to Triple Science at GCSE, so that any student who wants to study Triple Science has the opportunity to do so.

Key Stage 4 Technical Awards recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Allows the reformed Key Stage 4 Technical Awards to embed fully in the system before the DfE considers implementing further significant reforms.
- Should prepare to review the reformed Technical Awards from 2027 with attention given to:
 - Attainment and completion rates, functioning of assessments, stakeholders' views and other relevant data.
 - How content supports progression to 16-19 pathways, including those which will have been reformed.
 - Whether the structural requirements defined in the technical guidance, including assessment requirements, supports the broader purpose of Technical Awards whilst ensuring they remain rigorous and reliable.
- Should encourage awarding organisations to update Key Stage 4 Technical Awards to improve progression to the updated 16-19 pathways, if the 16-19 'third pathway' of V Levels is developed and linked to occupational standards.
- Maintains the current moratorium on new Technical Awards to ensure stability and effective monitoring, except where evidence of demand for a new qualification or substantive feedback on existing qualifications is exceptionally compelling (for example, this Review's recommendation relating to the [Technical Award for Music](#)).

Accountability, performance measures and assessment

Accountability recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Removes the EBacc performance measures and the associated EBacc entry and attainment headline accountability measures.
- Retains Progress 8 (and Attainment 8) with no changes to its structure or subject composition, but renames the current EBacc bucket to 'Academic Breadth' bucket.
- Continues to develop initiatives related to similar schools, with a particular emphasis on supporting inclusive approaches within accountability measures.

Primary assessment recommendations

Key Stage 1

We recommend that the Government:

- Ensures that the STA works with the DfE to find ways to encourage take-up of optional Key Stage 1 assessments.
- Ensures that the STA works with DfE to explore approaches for assessing progress for the small minority of pupils with certain SEND needs that make the Phonics Screening Check inaccessible. This assessment should be administered in the school setting.

Key Stage 2

We recommend that the Government:

- Ensures that the STA works with DfE to explore if access arrangements can be refined for pupils with certain SEND that make the Multiplication Tables Check inaccessible. This assessment should continue to be administered in a school setting.
- Develops an improved teacher assessment framework to provide teachers with clarity and include a greater focus on writing fluency.
- Reviews external moderation processes and look to strengthen peer moderation between schools, with the aim of embedding good practice to improve moderation in years where schools are not selected for external moderation and improving consistency between external judgements.

- Replaces the current grammar, punctuation and spelling (GPS) test with an amended test, which retains some elements of the current GPS test but with new tasks to better assess composition and application of grammar and punctuation.
 - Once the new test is established in schools, the DfE may wish to consider whether the role of the test in accountability remain as stands, or whether any changes, such as including the new test in headline measures, should be explored.

Secondary assessment recommendations

Key Stage 3

We recommend that the Government:

- Introduces diagnostic assessment for key components of Maths and English to be taken during Year 8 to support teachers to address students' needs and ensure that they are well prepared to progress into Key Stage 4.
- Commissions the design and trialling of the test, with a view to making it mandatory if the pilots demonstrate that this is an effective approach.

Key Stage 4

Volume of assessment

We recommend that the Government:

- Works with Ofqual, seeking to reduce overall exam time by at least 10%, focusing on assessment design choices to deliver this reduction, and going further than this where possible. This should be considered on a subject-by-subject basis, ensuring minimal impact on reliability, fairness and teaching and learning.
- Works with Ofqual to introduce a design principle that considers of the volume of exam assessment as a priority. The DfE and Ofqual should explore a range of options within each subject to seek to minimise exam length whilst ensuring minimal negative impact on reliability, fairness, teaching and learning and system resilience.
- Ensures that, in implementing the above recommendations, each subject retains at least two assessment components.

Method of assessment

We recommend that the Government:

- Continues to employ the principle that non-exam assessment should be used only when it is the only valid way to assess essential elements of a subject.
- Ensures that assessment approaches continue to be derived from the nature and structure of subject content, ensuring that what is assessed reflects what is most important for students to learn and do. Changes to the balance of assessment should only be made where this reflects changes to the content.
- Ensures that the DfE and Ofqual work closely with the wider education sector to explore how core aspects of subject content can be retained and assessed whilst managing and mitigating the risk of generative AI.
- Ensures that the DfE and Ofqual continue to consider the full range of options for assessment methods, including non-exam assessment, where it would be necessary to mitigate the risks posed by generative AI.
- Ensures that the DfE and Ofqual continue to work together to explore potential for innovation in on-screen assessment in GCSE, AS and A Level qualifications, particularly where this could further support accessibility for students with SEND and where this could reduce exam volume in the future. We recommend they continue to review the evidence and carefully consider risks and benefits.

Accessibility for students with SEND

We recommend that the Government:

- Ensures that Ofqual, awarding organisations and the DfE work together to consider how awarding organisations can build accessibility into the design of new specifications for GCSEs, AS and A Levels.

Provision of formulae and equations in exams

We recommend that the Government:

- Ensures that, when updating the Maths and Science GCSEs, subject experts evaluate each formula and equation to determine whether students should be required to memorise and recall it, or whether assessment should focus on their ability to apply it when provided.

16-19 education

16-19 level 3 pathways recommendations

V Levels recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Introduces a revised third pathway at level 3 to sit alongside the academic and technical pathways. This pathway should be based on new qualifications, which we recommend calling V Levels.
 - V Levels should provide high-quality qualifications for those young people that want a broader or mixed level 3 pathway with applied components. They should sit alongside A Levels and T Levels as a coherent third pathway at level 3. V Levels should have employer, further/higher education credibility and be designed for longevity. To ensure this, V Levels should be regulated by Ofqual and content should be linked to occupational standards at a broad, sector level.
 - V Levels should meet a range of ambitious quality criteria that ensure that they provide the knowledge and skills required for learners to successfully progress to related employment or further study at a higher level. Destination outcomes should be key among these. Providers should also seek to develop appropriate employer encounters and work experience as part of learners' overall study programme, as per current practice.
- Considers learners who have SEND or face other barriers to education to ensure that the qualifications are inclusive by design.

(We also make more detailed [recommendations for the design and implementation of V Levels](#), including on qualification size, subject areas, assessment and grading, and transition).

T Levels recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Continues to work closely with awarding organisations to reduce the assessment burden of T Level assessment in the context of scale up.
- Increases its work with Skills England to support and drive forward employer engagement with 16-19 education, particularly from employers involved in the design of T Levels, with a view to growing the number of industry placement and work encounter opportunities for learners.

- Considers, in relation to the above, a robust and creative approach to incentivising employers and linking employers more closely into the skills system.
- Continues work with providers and HEIs to ensure that young people are well advised on the implications of study choices for their futures and to promote understanding of T Levels by HE providers.
- Ensures that the content for T Levels remains up to date and that the amount of content can be delivered within the time available, and that it should seek opportunities to review and reduce content where necessary.

16-19 level 2 pathways recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Introduces two separate pathways at level 2 (an occupational pathway and a pathway to level 3), each serving different purposes and designed specifically to meet these purposes and improve student outcomes. These should be focused and ambitious pathways to ensure that all level 2 offers are valuable and high-quality.
- Whilst a new pathway to level 3 is being developed, we recommend that the TLFY is strengthened by:
 - Exploring whether all students should be expected to take an existing qualification as part of the TLFY.
 - Renaming the TLFY as soon as possible to make clear that the programme supports broader progression to level 3 pathways, not only T Levels.

16-19 Maths and English recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Strengthens the accountability system and explores opportunities to better incentivise effective practice across the sector.
- Introduces new level 1 stepped qualifications for Maths and English Language at 16-19, to enable learners to make progress towards achieving level 2 in these GCSEs during 16-19 study. The Review Panel recommends these qualifications are:
 - One-year, level 1 qualifications for 16 to 19-year-olds with prior attainment of a grade 1 or 2 at GCSE.
 - Designed to focus teaching on mastery of the fundamentals, addressing knowledge gaps from earlier key stages in steps and enabling learners to build confidence in all areas of the GCSE up to the equivalent of grade 3.

- Assessed in a modular way to allow learners to build up and ‘bank’ their progress, giving accreditation for modules learners have passed.
- Graded up to the equivalent of a strong GCSE grade 3, thereby putting learners who have achieved this level 1 qualification in a strong position to resit the GCSE the following year and thereby achieve level 2 during 16-19 study.

Non-qualification activity recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Strengthens guidance for 16-19 study programmes to promote effective practice in delivering non-qualification activity and to clarify expectations about the types of activities that should be core to the enrichment offer. The focus should be on applied knowledge and transferable skills that will enable learners to step confidently into adulthood.
- Considers whether certain elements of non-qualification activity should be made mandatory so that learners’ access to opportunities is more consistent.

Future curriculum reviews recommendations

We recommend that the Government:

- Limits the intervals between holistic curriculum reviews to approximately a decade.
- Supplements holistic reviews with a rolling programme of light-touch minimalist updates (conducted by the DfE with support from its agencies) of the national curriculum and its Programmes of Study, with a threefold aim of:
 - Ensuring the national curriculum remains up to date;⁴⁷⁸
 - Addressing any specific issues arising; and
 - Ensuring that the volume of content remains appropriate and deliverable.
- Ensures that future reviews set clear objectives at the outset, adopt a rigorous evidence-led approach and undertake public consultation. The Government should also ensure that future reviews strike an appropriate balance between external expert input and central coordination and that it evaluates the likely impact of any proposed changes, including considering the capacity and workload of professionals and educational institutions.

⁴⁷⁸ Including addressing ongoing changes in content and role of digital technology.

Curriculum and Assessment Review

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NASACRE statement on the Curriculum and Assessment Review report, *Building a world-class curriculum for all*

The NASACRE Chairs welcome the publication of the Curriculum and Assessment Review report, *Building a world-class curriculum for all*, and are pleased that RE has been given due attention in the review. We wish to thank in particular Dr Vanessa Ogden who led on the 'Deep Dives' into RE.

NASACRE is pleased that the report recognises, *"Some SACREs support high-quality regional practice."* There is great work that many SACREs do in supporting high quality RE and we are reassured that there will be support for SACREs to continue this work in the future.

We are glad to see that the report notes that, *"Stakeholders' responses to our Call for Evidence showed there was a strong consensus about the subject's importance and its essential place in a school's curriculum, stressing its important role in children and young people's intellectual, personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. RE is a place where they encounter differing beliefs, sometimes for the first time, understand the tenets of major faiths, and learn how to reason and wrestle with existential questions."*

The report continues to highlight that fact that, *"RE provides a space for pupils to learn about human mutuality and reciprocity, that it develops their capacity to understand one another, and that it supports strong, secure, and confident communities with good relationships. Given the role that religion, belief and values play in local, national, and international events, it continues to be vital for children and young people to have access to high-quality RE."*

The report notes that there is considerable inconsistency in quality of RE as well as compliance at both primary and secondary levels. We know that with 80% of secondaries now being academies and therefore do not need to follow an Agreed Syllabus, this has led to many Academies not understanding that they must still provide RE for all pupils. We note that the proposal is for RE post-16 to become non-statutory for all pupils. *"We believe this will better reflect actual practice and foster parity across 16-19 settings. We recognise that some schools will want to continue providing RE up to 18, and they would be free to do so. If learners wish to continue to study RE at 16-19, level 3 qualifications are available for them to do so"* We see this as a pragmatic decision given the levels of non-compliance outside of sixth forms with a religious character and that 6th Form and FE colleges do not have to provide RE.

We note that, *"The Review ultimately wishes to see RE in the national curriculum, but it recognises that it is unrealistic for this to be achieved immediately. We therefore believe that a staged approach to reform is the most appropriate way forward."*

Whilst opinion is divided, many SACRE members will be pleased that the *"The Review believes that RE should be moved to the national curriculum to improve access to high-quality provision and to prevent further diminishment"*, and we welcome that a staged process for this is proposed, with the involvement of a range of parties from the RE community, of which NASACRE will be an active participant. The REC National Content Standard will be a good starting point for these discussions.

Going forward in the sector, NASACRE looks forward to fully engaging with this process which will create a curriculum written by RE experts, whilst maintaining the voice of religion and belief communities. We look forward to seeing how the legislation is framed to limit potential future outside influence on the RE curriculum. It is important that there are significant opportunities for local RE to continue and for RE to include the lived experience of members of religion and belief communities. The report celebrates both of these aspects of RE.

We are encouraged that the report suggests a way forward for RE that will prepare pupils for life in a multi-faith, multi-secular, local, national and global society. We hope that the government and the RE community will respond to these proposals positively for the benefit of pupils, teachers, schools and society as a whole.

Bill Moore, Chair

Claire Clinton, Vice Chair

Denise Chaplin, Executive Assistant to the Chair

Paul Smalley, Executive Officer

5th November 2025

Advice for SACREs about Local Government Reorganisation

The government has announced that it will facilitate a programme of local government reorganisation for two-tier areas and for those unitary councils where there is evidence of failure or where their size or boundaries may be hindering their ability to deliver sustainable and high-quality services for their residents. This has potential to significantly affect 42 SACREs

On 5 February 2025, Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution Jim McMahon, wrote to all councils in two-tier areas and small neighbouring unitary authorities to formally invite proposals for local government reorganisation (LGR).

Areas submitted interim plans by 21 March, and full proposals will follow later in the year at the end of November. The Government will follow the established assessment and decision-making process, with a view to undertake elections in May 2027 ahead of the establishment of new local authorities in April 2028.

Surrey, and those areas on the Devolution Priority Programme (DPP), will move at greater speed. These are the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, East Sussex, West Sussex, Essex, Hampshire, and the authorities within them.

Final proposals are currently subject to public consultation in Surrey, with a view to undertaking elections for the new authorities in May 2026 ahead of go live in April 2027.

Areas on the DPP will submit final proposals by the end of September, with a view to undertaking elections for the new authorities in May 2027 ahead of go live in April 2028.

	Final proposals	Consultation	Decision	Legislation laid	Shadow council elections	Go live
Surrey	May 2025	Closes 5 August 2025	October 2025	Early 2026	7 May 2026	1 April 2027
DPP	26 Sept 2025	November 2025	March 2026	Autumn 2026	6 May 2027	1 April 2028
Non-DPP	28 Nov 2025	Early 2026	Before summer recess 2026	Autumn 2026	6 May 2027	1 April 2028

On the date when the new Authority 'goes live' the old LA will cease to exist and the new LA(s) will come into being. From that date the new Authority will have a statutory duty to:

- Establish and support a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE), including appropriate membership, governance, and resourcing.
- Convene an Agreed Syllabus Conference (ASC) to determine the local Agreed Syllabus for RE and review it at least every five years.
- Provide maintained schools with clear guidance and access to the current Agreed Syllabus for RE and arrangements for collective worship, including determinations.
- take note of, and respond to, advice from the SACRE.

NASACRE advises those affected SACREs to work with your LA and plan ahead. It may be wise for those SACREs who have a syllabus due for revision to set up an ASC to renew the existing syllabus, rather than undertake a full scale revision, until the new Authority is in existence.

There may be scope for Authorities to collaborate and set up a single SACRE over a number of Authorities, as has happened in Cumberland and Westmorland with the Cumbrian SACRE.

Alternatively, with more evenly sized LAs there may be potential for the Agreed Syllabus to be a more accurate reflection of the locality.

(Thanks to LGA for much of the information <https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/devolution/devolution-hub/local-government-reorganisation-lgr>)

The affected LAs and therefore SACREs are:

Local Authority	Type	LGR phase
Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council	Unitary Authority	Third wave – Nov 2025
Blackpool Council	Unitary Authority	Third wave – Nov 2025
Brighton & Hove City Council	Unitary Authority	DPP - Sep 2025
Cambridgeshire County Council	County Council	Third wave – Nov 2025
Derby City Council	Unitary Authority	Third wave – Nov 2025
Derbyshire County Council	County Council	Third wave – Nov 2025
Devon County Council	County Council	Third wave – Nov 2025
East Sussex County Council	County Council	DPP – Sep 2025
Essex County Council	County Council	Devolution Priority Programme – Sept 2025
Gloucestershire County Council	County Council	Third wave – Nov 2025
Hampshire County Council	County Council	Devolution Priority Programme – Sept 2025
Hertfordshire County Council	County Council	Third wave – Nov 2025
Isle of Wight Council	Unitary Authority	Devolution Priority Programme – Sept 2025
Kent County Council	County Council	Third wave – Nov 2025
Lancashire County Council	County Council	Third wave – Nov 2025
Leicester City Council	Unitary Authority	Third wave – Nov 2025
Leicestershire County Council	County Council	Third wave – Nov 2025
Lincolnshire County Council	County Council	Third wave – Nov 2025
Medway Council	Unitary Authority	Third wave – Nov 2025
Norfolk County Council	County Council	Devolution Priority Programme – Sept 2025
North East Lincolnshire Council	Unitary Authority	Third wave – Nov 2025
North Lincolnshire Council	Unitary Authority	Third wave – Nov 2025
Nottingham City Council	Unitary Authority	Third wave – Nov 2025
Nottinghamshire County Council	County Council	Third wave – Nov 2025

Oxfordshire County Council	County Council	Third wave – Nov 2025
Peterborough City Council	Unitary Authority	Third wave – Nov 2025
Plymouth City Council	Unitary Authority	Third wave – Nov 2025
Portsmouth City Council	Unitary Authority	Devolution Priority Programme – Sept 2025
Reading Borough Council	Unitary Authority	Third wave – Nov 2025 Reading isn't formally part of the programme so aren't subject to a deadline
Rutland County Council	Unitary Authority	Third wave – Nov 2025
Southampton City Council	Unitary Authority	Devolution Priority Programme – Sept 2025
Southend-on-Sea City Council	Unitary Authority	Devolution Priority Programme – Sept 2025
Staffordshire County Council	County Council	Third wave – Nov 2025
Stoke-on-Trent City Council	Unitary Authority	Third wave – Nov 2025
Suffolk County Council	County Council	Devolution Priority Programme – Sept 2025
Surrey County Council	County Council	First wave
Thurrock Council	Unitary Authority	Devolution Priority Programme – Sept 2025
Torbay Council	Unitary Authority	Third wave – Nov 2025
Warwickshire County Council	County Council	Third wave – Nov 2025
West Berkshire Council	Unitary Authority	West Berks aren't formally part of the programme so there's no deadline as such, though if they go in with South Oxfordshire then they will submit in November
West Sussex County Council	County Council	DPP - Sep 2025
Worcestershire County Council	County Council	Third wave – Nov 2025

October 2025