



GOVERNMENT WHIPS' OFFICE
HOUSE OF LORDS
LONDON SW1A 0PW

BARONESS TWYLCROSS
GOVERNMENT WHIP &
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY
OF STATE FOR DCMS
020 7219 1922

Telephone 020-7219 3131
www.lordswhips.org.uk
holgovernmentwhips@parliament.uk

21 August 2024

Dear Baroness Barran,

I am writing to you following the debate on Friday 26 July, concerning the Committee Report of the Education for 11- to 16-year-olds.

In the debate, you said:

“Finally, I turn to the new Government’s curriculum review, which talks about addressing

“the ceilings to achievement ... built into Key Stages 4 and 5”.

I would be grateful if the Minister could elaborate on what is meant by this.”

Let me clarify that the Curriculum and Assessment Review will look at whether the current curriculum, assessment and qualifications systems create or contribute to any of the factors that might put a ceiling on pupils’ achievement at Key Stages 4 and 5. This is in accordance with the terms of reference, which I attach alongside this letter, for your ease of reference. There will be a call for evidence in the autumn which will ask for evidence on the specific areas the Review will focus on.

I am copying this letter to all those who contributed and will place a copy in the House library.

With my very best wishes,

BARONESS TWYLCROSS



Department
for Education

Curriculum and Assessment Review: Review Aims, Terms of Reference and Working Principles

Review Aims

The Curriculum and Assessment Review Group will undertake a review of the existing national curriculum and statutory assessment system, including qualification pathways. The Review will seek to refresh the curriculum to ensure it is cutting edge, fit for purpose and meeting the needs of children and young people to support their future life and work. The Review will ensure that the curriculum appropriately balances ambition, excellence, relevance, flexibility and inclusivity for all our children and young people, and it will ensure meaningful, rigorous and high-value pathways for all at 16-19. The Review will contribute to the Government's missions to break down the barriers to opportunity for every child and young person, at every stage, as well as to the Government's mission on growth. The Review will develop a cutting-edge curriculum, equipping children and young people with the essential knowledge and skills which will enable them to adapt and thrive in the world and workplace of the future. The Review will build on the hard work of teachers and staff across the system who have brought their subjects alive with knowledge-rich syllabuses, to deliver a curriculum which is rich and broad, inclusive, and innovative. In seeking to achieve these aims, the Review Group will work in line with the *Working Principles*.

The Review will build on the Government's commitment to high standards in the curriculum in England, whilst ensuring greater attention to breadth and flexibility and that no child or young person is left behind. The Review will ensure that the assessment system captures children and young people's knowledge and abilities and consider the overall volume of assessment. The Review will also ensure that the curriculum and assessment system are aligned and operate together in a coherent manner.

The Review will seek to address the key problems and hard barriers to achievement in the curriculum and assessment system from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 5. The Review will work backwards through young people's educational journey, commencing with detailed consideration of the ceilings to achievement currently built into Key Stages 4 and 5, and then working backwards through the earlier Key Stages to ensure that learning is effectively sequenced and that barriers to achievement are also removed in Key Stages 3, 2 and 1.

Specifically, the Review will seek to deliver:

- An excellent foundation in core subjects of reading, writing and maths.
- A broader curriculum, so that children and young people do not miss out on subjects such as music, art, sport and drama, as well as vocational subjects.

- A curriculum that ensures children and young people leave compulsory education ready for life and ready for work, building the knowledge, skills and attributes young people need to thrive. This includes embedding digital, oracy and life skills in their learning.
- A curriculum that reflects the issues and diversities of our society, ensuring all children and young people are represented.
- An assessment system that captures the strengths of every child and young person and the breadth of curriculum, with the right balance of assessment methods whilst maintaining the important role of examinations.

The Review will take place in the context of an education system facing considerable challenges and staff shortages. The Review will recognise and seek to account for these issues and the inevitable trade-offs that will be faced in delivering high and rising standards and a broad and balanced curriculum. The Review will seek to ensure that the curriculum and assessment system does not place undue burdens on education staff and, wherever possible, supports manageable and sustainable workloads for teachers, lecturers, support staff and leaders. Unfocused reform risks exacerbating the pressure on education staff which is damaging to the education system and outcomes for pupils.

The Review will support the innovation and professionalism of teachers, enabling them to adapt how they teach the curriculum to their students' lives and life experiences. The Review will work to support legislative change so that all state schools, including academies, will be required to teach the national curriculum. This will support the Government's ambition that every child receives a rich and broad curriculum, taught by excellent teachers wherever they are in the country, to set them up with the knowledge and skills to thrive in the future.

In addition, curriculum and assessment are inextricably linked to accountability. The Review may therefore offer commentary on the impact of accountability on the curriculum and assessment system and may wish to recommend how changes to curriculum and assessment should interact with accountability measures. To embed the approach outlined here for the long term, the Review may also make recommendations on how future updates to the curriculum and assessment system should be approached.

The Government will also consider any changes it wishes to make to support the aim of delivering a rich and broad curriculum for every child whilst the Review is conducted.

To achieve these ends, the Secretary of State has appointed the Chair of the Review who will convene the Review Group in consultation with the Secretary of State.

Terms of Reference

1. It is essential that our education system enables children and young people to develop the knowledge and skills required to thrive as citizens, in work and throughout life. The Review Group is therefore invited to consider how the curriculum and assessment system can best ensure that every young person develops the requisite knowledge and

skills at each stage of compulsory education. The Review Group is invited to make recommendations accordingly.

2. The Review Group will consider the broad ambition for what every young person should be expected to achieve by age 18 and review the existing curriculum and assessment mechanisms to determine the best means of achieving this, reflecting the *Review Aims*. The Review Group is invited to make recommendations accordingly.
3. To this end, the Review Group should review the curriculum and mechanisms for assessment at each Key Stage, assessing what is and is not working well, mindful of the Review Group *Working Principles*.
4. The Review will consider children and young people's education and experiences from the beginning of Key Stage 1 through to Key Stage 5, ensuring that children build on their learning and development in the early years. The Review will ensure that the curriculum reflects the issues and diversities of our society and that every child and young person is represented and has access to a broad range of subjects. The Review will pay particular attention to the ceilings to achievement which exist in curriculum and assessment at Key Stages 4 and 5. To ensure that the building blocks and mechanisms for assessing progress over children and young people's educational journey to Key Stages 4 and 5 are fit for purpose, the Review Group should also seek evidence on the condition of the curriculum and assessment at Key Stages 1 to 3. The Review should be clear on expectations for every child's achievement by the end of primary school, recognising the importance of this for later learning and attainment.
5. The Government is looking for progress over time towards:
 - a. Ensuring high and rising standards and a broad, balanced, aspirational and motivating curriculum for all which equips young people to thrive in the world and workplace of the future.
 - b. Remediating 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 socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, have a special educational need or disability and/or are otherwise vulnerable.
 - c. Ensuring optimal structure and content of full-time vocational programmes at ages 16-19, continuing to align with labour market needs and deliver positive outcomes for learners.
 - d. Improving the coherence and flexibility of qualification pathways.
 - e. Ensuring that the assessment system fully captures children and young people's knowledge and abilities, with consideration given to the overall volume of assessment, whilst continuing to recognise the progressive benefits of public examinations.
6. The Review Group is invited to appraise present assessment stages and mechanisms, including reviewing existing performance measures and the behaviours and outcomes they incentivise in relation to the provision of curriculum depth and breadth.
7. In considering these areas, the Review Group should propose any amendments or alternatives to existing performance measures and curriculum frameworks or qualifications, in line with the *Working Principles*, and is invited to undertake initial scoping to this end.

8. The Review Group is invited to take and commission evidence in order to achieve these ends.
9. The Review Group will work to ensure coherence with future decision-making on post-16 education strategy.
10. The Review Group will not make recommendations directly in relation to core schools funding or workforce supply issues. These will be considered in the round by the Government at the next Spending Review.
11. The Review will commence with a call for evidence, setting out the areas where the Review Group would particularly welcome evidence and input from the sector and stakeholders. The Review will publish an interim report early in 2025 setting out their interim findings and confirming the key areas for further work. We plan to publish the final review with recommendations in Autumn 2025.

Working Principles

- The Review will be rigorously evidence and data informed. The Review will not be distracted by myths, assumed 'truths' or behaviours in other national systems without evidence of need and/or benefit.
- The Review will seek evolution not revolution. The Review will recognise the hard work and successes of those working in education. The Review will build on the existing relative strengths of a system with finite resources and will not seek to fix things that are not broken.
- The Review will be alive to trade-offs, with attention paid to the practicalities of implementation and to the avoidance of unintended consequences and additional workload for education staff.
- The Review will seek to identify and focus on addressing the most significant and pressing issues facing curriculum and assessment without destabilising the system. The Review will recognise that reforms to curriculum and assessment necessarily impact the education sector and, if undertaken in an unfocused manner, risk creating significant additional work for education staff and incurring high opportunity costs. The Review will recognise that it is unable to address every issue facing the education system and that changes to the curriculum and assessment system cannot address every issue facing children and young people, or wider society.
- The Review will maintain our country's longstanding commitment to a high-quality comprehensive curriculum for all to 16.
- The Review will identify those elements of our existing system that can lead to barriers to accessing quality provision and/or to particular pathways. The Review will identify these and develop solutions.
- The Review will be undertaken in close consultation with education professionals and other experts, parents, children and young people, and stakeholders such as employers, colleges, universities and trade unions.

These principles will permeate all aspects of the Review and the work of the sub-groups and inform the respective *Terms of Reference*.