

A CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

INTRODUCTION

1. The Government intends to introduce legislation this autumn to provide for a national curriculum in maintained schools in England and Wales. This document sets out the reasons for this decision, describes what the legislation will contain, and indicates what other steps the Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for Wales intend to take so that the national curriculum can begin to be introduced in schools as soon as possible.

2. Comments are invited on the proposed content of the legislation and on the other arrangements. Comments about the legislation should be sent to Mr N Harris, Schools Branch 3, Department of Education and Science, Elizabeth House, York Road, London SE1 7PH as soon as possible, and no later than 30 September 1987 so that account may be taken of them before the legislation is introduced in Parliament. Discussion about other aspects of the proposals and their implementation can usefully continue alongside the consideration of the legislation. Comments from individuals and organisations in Wales should be sent to Mr R W Farrington, Schools Division, Welsh Office, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF1 3NQ.

3. The document sets out

- (a) the reasons why the Government has decided to establish a national curriculum and clear assessment arrangements which support it;
- (b) what it is proposed that the national curriculum and assessment arrangements should comprise, and how they will work in practice;

- (c) what is to be in legislation - on the curriculum, assessment and testing, the provision of information, monitoring and inspection, and the machinery needed to underpin the operation, namely a National Curriculum Council (in England) and a School Examinations and Assessment Council;
- (d) non-statutory arrangements which will help to secure implementation of the national curriculum;
- (e) resource implications;
- (f) the timetable for implementation.

A. THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL CURRICULUM

4. Since Sir James Callaghan's speech as Prime Minister at Ruskin College in 1976, successive Secretaries of State have aimed to achieve agreement with their partners in the education service on policies for the school curriculum which will develop the potential of all pupils and equip them for the responsibilities of citizenship and for the challenges of employment in tomorrow's world. A substantial measure of agreement has already been achieved, and there is now widespread support for the aims of education which were set out clearly in the White Paper "Better Schools". (Cmd - 9469. 1985).

5. Many LEAs and schools have made important advances towards achieving a good curriculum for pupils aged 5-16, which offers progression, continuity and coherence between its different stages. There is much agreement too about the subjects which should be included in the secular curriculum for 5-16 year olds; and valuable progress has been made towards securing agreement about the objectives and content of particular subjects.

6. But progress has been variable, uncertain and often slow. Improvements have been made, some standards of attainment have risen. But some improvement is not enough. We must raise

standards consistently, and at least as quickly as they are rising in competitor countries.

7. The Government now wishes to move ahead at a faster pace to ensure that this happens and to secure for all pupils in maintained schools a curriculum which equips them with the knowledge, skills and understanding that they need for adult life and employment. Some schools already offer such a curriculum, but not for all their pupils. Many schools offer something far less good. The Government does not find this acceptable. Nor do parents and others in the community. Pupils should be entitled to the same opportunities wherever they go to school, and standards of attainment must be raised throughout England and Wales.

8. A national curriculum backed by clear assessment arrangements will help to raise standards of attainment by

- (i) ensuring that all pupils study a broad and balanced range of subjects throughout their compulsory schooling and do not drop too early studies which may stand them in good stead later, and which will help to develop their capacity to adapt and respond flexibly to a changing world;
- (ii) setting clear objectives for what children over the full range of ability should be able to achieve - which the pupils themselves and their teachers, supported by parents and others, can work towards with confidence. This will help schools to challenge each child to develop his or her potential. HM Inspectorate has consistently reported in its national surveys and in many reports on individual schools that a weakness far too frequently apparent in the present system is under-expectation by teachers of what their pupils can achieve. Far from deflating expectations, the national curriculum is intended to help teachers to set their expectations at a realistic but challenging level for each child, according to his or her ability;

- (iii) ensuring that all pupils, regardless of sex, ethnic origin and geographical location, have access to broadly the same good and relevant curriculum and programmes of study which include the key content, skills and processes which they need to learn and which ensure that the content and teaching of the various elements of the national curriculum bring out their relevance to and links with pupils' own experiences and their practical applications and continuing value to adult and working life;
- (iv) checking on progress towards those objectives and performance achieved at various stages, so that pupils can be stretched further when they are doing well and given more help when they are not.

9. In addition to thus raising standards, a national curriculum will:-

- (i) secure that the curriculum offered in all maintained schools has sufficient in common to enable children to move from one area of the country to another with minimum disruption to their education. It will also help children's progression within and between primary and secondary education (and on to further and higher education) and will help to secure the continuity and coherence which is too often lacking in what they are taught.
- (ii) enable schools to be more accountable for the education they offer to their pupils, individually and collectively. The governing body, headteacher and the teachers of every school will be better able to undertake the essential process of regular evaluation because they will be able to consider their school, taking account of its particular circumstances, against the local and national picture as a whole. It will

help alert teachers to problems experienced by individual children so they can be given special attention. Parents will be able to judge their children's progress against agreed national targets for attainment and will also be able to judge the effectiveness of their school. LEAs will be better placed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the schools they maintain by considering their performance in relation to each other, and to the country at large, taking due account of relevant socio-economic factors; and the Secretaries of State will be better able to undertake a similar process nationally. Employers too will have a better idea of what a school-leaver will have studied and learnt at school, irrespective of where he or she went to school.

10. The Government has concluded that these advantages and consistent improvement in standards can be guaranteed only within a national framework for the secular curriculum. To be effective, that must be backed by law - but law which provides a framework not a straitjacket. Legislation alone will not raise standards. The imaginative application of professional skills at all levels of the education service, within a statutory framework which sets clear objectives, will raise standards.

B. THE COMPONENTS OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS

11. This section sets out the Secretaries of State's thinking about the main elements of the national curriculum and how they will operate in practice. Section C sets out what will be included in legislation. What is required by statute - including the regulations that will be made over a period of time to secure full implementation of the national curriculum - will be determined by a process of discussion and development of the ideas in this document.

12. The non-statutory subject working groups which the Secretaries of State are appointing will play a key part in this process. They will make recommendations about attainment targets and programmes of work for each of the foundation subjects, which will be the basis for consultations about what is eventually set out in regulations about the curriculum.

(a) Foundation subjects

13. Maths, English and science will form the core of the curriculum, and first priority will be given to these subjects. They and other foundation subjects are to be followed by all pupils during compulsory schooling. The Government has proposed that, in addition to English, maths and science, the foundation subjects should comprise a modern foreign language, technology, history, geography, art, music and physical education. The degree of definition in the requirements set out for each of these subjects will vary considerably, and will be greatest for the three core subjects. The place of Welsh in the national curriculum in Wales is dealt with below.

14. It is not proposed that a modern foreign language should be included in the foundation subjects for primary school children. The majority of curriculum time at primary level should be devoted to the core subjects.

15. During compulsory secondary schooling, it is proposed that all pupils should continue with some study of all the the foundation subjects. As the table below shows, between 30-40% of curriculum time should still be devoted to the three core subjects. Not all foundation subjects will necessarily be taken to examination level - though the Secretaries of State expect that most pupils should be able to take GCSEs covering seven or eight of the foundation subject areas, and all the core subjects should be taken. Pupils in the fourth and fifth years should be able to opt to study either combined sciences as a single subject

or sciences leading to a double GCSE award; and to pursue a combined course covering art, music, drama and design. This should leave adequate time in the curriculum for choice of other examination subjects which are not among the foundation subjects. The table illustrates how this might be organised in England:-

SECONDARY PHASE - YEARS 4 AND 5

ALLOCATIONS OF CURRICULUM TIME

<u>Foundation subjects</u>		<u>Additional subjects</u> <u>eg for GCSE might include:-</u>	
	%		
English	10	Science)
)
Maths	10	Second Modern)
		Foreign Language)
)
Combined Sciences	10-20	Classics)
)
Technology	10	Home Economics)
)
Modern Foreign		History)
Language	10)
		Geography)
History/Geography or) 10%
History <u>or</u> Geography	10	Business Studies)
)
Art/Music/Drama/Design	10	Art)
)
Physical Education	5	Music)
)
		Drama)
)
		Religious Studies)

16. The Secretaries of State do not intend to prescribe in legislation how much time should be allocated to each subject

area. But the foundation subjects commonly take up 80-90% of the curriculum in schools where there is good practice. The Secretaries of State will take that as their starting point in issuing non-statutory guidance (separately for England and for Wales) about how much time should normally be spent on learning related to each subject at each phase of education, and the subject working groups will base their recommendations about programmes of study on this guidance.

17. Religious education is already required by statute, and must continue to form an essential part of the curriculum. There will be time available beyond that required for the foundation subjects for religious education, and also for other popular subjects, such as home economics, which are taught by many schools and will continue to be a valuable part of the curriculum for many pupils in the secondary as well as primary phase. LEAs and governing bodies of schools will determine the subjects to be taught additional to the foundation subjects.

18. In addition, there are a number of subjects or themes such as health education and use of information technology, which can be taught through other subjects. For example, biology can contribute to learning about health education, and the health theme will give an added dimension to teaching about biology. It is proposed that such subjects or themes should be taught through the foundation subjects, so that they can be accommodated within the curriculum but without crowding out the essential subjects.

SPECIAL POSITION OF WELSH

19. The Welsh language is a part of the curriculum of most children in Wales. The Government's policy, set out in "Welsh in Schools" (July 1981), is that some experience of the language is an important component of a broadly balanced curriculum for pupils in Wales; that in English-speaking areas all pupils should be given the opportunity of acquiring a sufficient command of Welsh to allow for communication in Welsh, while bilingual education should be available to pupils whose parents desire it for them.

20. In some counties of Wales it would be appropriate - and in line with existing practice in schools - for Welsh to be made a foundation subject. But the linguistic pattern in Wales is varied, and in some areas the Secretary of State would expect that it would not at present be appropriate to require the study of Welsh throughout the period of compulsory education for pupils who study through the medium of English. At the least, the legislation will need to provide for attainment targets, programmes of study and assessment arrangements to be prescribed for Welsh wherever it is taught.

21. For pupils taught through the medium of Welsh, all ten subjects listed in paragraph 13, together with Welsh, will be foundation subjects. The Secretary of State for Wales may issue separate non-statutory guidance for Welsh medium education about the time to be spent on each subject.

22. The Secretaries of State believe it to be important that schools should also have flexibility about how they organise their teaching. The description of the national curriculum in terms of foundation subjects is not a description of how the school day should be organised and the curriculum delivered. The clear objectives for what pupils should be able to know, do and understand will be framed in subject terms. Schools will be able to organise their teaching in a variety of ways. This flexibility, together with the time available outside the foundation curriculum, ought to enable schools, while meeting the requirements of the national curriculum, to give special emphasis to particular subjects, such as science and technology in City Technology Colleges.

(b) Attainment targets

23. Attainment targets will be set for all three core subjects of Maths, English and science. These will establish what children should normally be expected to know, understand and be able to do at around the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16, and will

enable the progress of each child to be measured against established national standards. They will reflect what pupils must achieve to progress in their education and to become thinking and informed people. The range of attainment targets should cater for the full ability range and be sufficiently challenging at all levels to raise expectations, particularly of pupils of middling achievement who frequently are not challenged enough, as well as stretching and stimulating the most able. This is a proven and essential way towards raising standards of achievement. Targets must be sufficiently specific for pupils, teachers, parents and others to have a clear idea of what is expected, and to provide a sound basis for assessment.

24. There will also be attainment targets for other foundation subjects where appropriate, in Wales for the study of Welsh, and for the other themes and skills taught through each of the foundation subjects. For art, music and physical education there will be guidelines rather than specific attainment targets.

25. Attainment targets for age 16 can be expected to take account of GCSE criteria. But not all GCSE criteria are sufficiently specific, and not all pupils will study all foundation subjects for public examination, so there will be other attainment targets to build on what they have learnt up to age 14.

(c) Programmes of study

26. The programmes of study will also be based on recommendations from the subject working groups. They will reflect the attainment targets, and set out the overall content, knowledge, skills and processes relevant to today's needs which pupils should be taught in order to achieve them. They should also specify in more detail a minimum of common content, which all pupils should be taught, and set out any areas of learning in other subjects or themes that should be covered in each stage. Some GCSE syllabuses will have to be revised in due course to reflect the national curriculum attainment targets and programmes of study for age 16.

27. Within the programmes of study teachers will be free to determine the detail of what should be taught in order to ensure that pupils achieve appropriate levels of attainment. How teaching is organised and the teaching approaches used will be also for schools to determine. It is proposed that schools should set out schemes of work for teaching at various stages to improve coordination. The Government intends that legislation should leave full scope for professional judgment and for schools to organise how the curriculum is delivered in the way best suited to the ages, circumstances, needs and abilities of the children in each classroom. This will for example allow curriculum development programmes such as the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) to build on the framework offered by the national curriculum and to take forward its objectives. There must be space to accommodate the enterprise of teachers, offering them sufficient flexibility in the choice of content to adapt what they teach to the needs of the individual pupil, to try out and develop new approaches, and to develop in pupils those personal qualities which cannot be written into a programme of study or attainment target.

(d) Assessment and examinations

28. The attainment targets will provide standards against which pupils' progress and performance can be assessed. The main purpose of such assessment will be to show what a pupil has learnt and mastered and to enable teachers and parents to ensure that he or she is making adequate progress. Where such progress is not made, it will be up to schools to make suitable arrangements to help the pupil.

29. The Secretaries of State envisage that much of the assessment at ages 7 (or thereabouts) 11 and 14, and at 16 in non-examined subjects, will be done by teachers as an integral part of normal classroom work. But at the heart of the assessment process there will be nationally prescribed tests done by all pupils to supplement the individual teachers' assessments. Teachers will administer and mark these, but their marking - and their assessments overall - will be externally moderated.

30. The Secretaries of State hope that the moderation of teachers' assessments and whatever arrangements are needed for administering nationally set tests will be undertaken by the five GCSE examining groups, under contract from a School Examinations and Assessment Council (see paras 53 below). The Department will be undertaking detailed discussion of this proposal, and of the kind of administrative and moderation arrangements needed, with the examining groups and others. The actual tests and other forms of assessment will be developed and piloted by various organisations on behalf of the Government.

31. The precise basis for recording assessments will be considered by an expert Task Group on Assessment and Testing which the Secretaries of State will appoint shortly. It will make recommendations on the common elements of an assessment strategy to be used across all subjects and will be asked to report by Christmas.

32. The Government aims to set in place by 1990 national arrangements for the introduction of records of achievement for school leavers. Such records, which are at present being piloted in a number of areas and on which an interim report will be made this autumn by the National Steering Committee, will have an important role in recording performance and profiling a pupil's achievements across and beyond the national curriculum.

33. At age 16, GCSE and other qualifications at equivalent level will provide the main means of assessment through examinations. But in order to ensure that the qualifications offered to pupils support or form part of the national curriculum's attainment targets and programmes of study, the Government proposes to take powers to specify what qualifications may be offered to pupils during compulsory schooling. It also proposes to put onto a statutory footing the approval of syllabuses or courses leading to these qualifications, which is presently done by the non-statutory Secondary Examinations Council for GCE and GCSE examinations.