

Petitions Committee

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: Black history and cultural diversity in the curriculum, HC 893

Thursday 25 February 2021

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Members present:

Petitions Committee: Catherine McKinnell (Chair); Elliot Colburn; Chris Evans.

Women and Equalities Committee: Caroline Nokes, Chair; Elliot Colburn; Angela Crawley; Bell Ribeiro-Addy; Nicola Richards.

Education Committee: Apsana Begum.

Questions 1-38

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon. Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for School Standards, Department for Education, and Andrew McCully, Director General for Early Years and Schools Group, Department for Education.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Rt Hon. Nick Gibb MP and Andrew McCully.

Q1 Chair: Thank you for joining us for today's session on Black history and cultural diversity in the curriculum, which we are holding because hundreds of thousands of people have signed petitions calling on the Government to diversify and decolonise the curriculum.

This is the third session that the Petitions and the Women and Equalities Committees, joined by a guest from the Education Committee, have held on this subject. Previously, we spoke to people who have started petitions on the subject, representatives of schools and students, academics, and organisations seeking to promote cultural diversity in the curriculum.

We scheduled today's session so that we could present directly to Government the views of petitioners and the evidence that we have already heard. We are very grateful to the Minister and members of his Department for joining us at this busy and important time. We look forward to hearing what they have to say in response to the petitioners' concerns. Before we start, I ask our two witnesses to introduce themselves.

Nick Gibb: I am Nick Gibb, the Minister of State for School Standards.

Andrew McCully: My name is Andrew McCully. I am the director general for early years and schools in the Department for Education.

Q2 Chair: Thank you again, both of you, for being with us today.

The petitions that prompted these sessions have called for the specific inclusion of Britain's colonial past, Black, Asian and minority ethnic history, diversity and racism in the national curriculum. The Government, however, have said in their response that they do not feel that such action is needed, that the option to teach those areas already exists and that teachers therefore have the freedom and the flexibility to teach them. Do the Government feel that those are essential issues to teach as part of the national curriculum? If they are essential, why are they optional?

Nick Gibb: The reformed national curriculum ensures that all children can acquire the essential knowledge in key subjects. It does not represent everything that a school should teach, and teachers have flexibility within the national curriculum to go further. The curriculum does not set out how subjects or topics within subjects should be taught, because we believe that teachers should use their own knowledge and expertise to determine how to teach their pupils, and to make the choices of what they wish to teach.

Having said that, if you go to parts of the national curriculum, you'll see that the, with the national curriculum in history key stage 3, the statutory part is for pupils to be taught about "ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain 1745 to 1901". The first non-statutory example given is to



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teach about “the Enlightenment in Europe and Britain, with links back to 17th-Century thinkers and scientists and the founding of the Royal Society”, which we think is important. The second bullet point is “Britain’s transatlantic slave trade: its effects and its eventual abolition”. If you go to the citizenship curriculum key stage 4, it says in one of the bullet points that pupils should be taught about “diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding.”

In our schools, there is a proud history under not just this Government but previous Governments of ensuring that there is mutual respect for children from all backgrounds in our schools. This Government believe strongly in high standards of behaviour in our schools, particularly to eliminate bullying, for whatever reason that children are being bullied.

I will stop in a second but, again, let us go through the different stages. At key stage 1, for example, the statutory requirement is for key historical events within or beyond living memory to be taught. The examples include historical figures such as Mary Seacole, Rosa Parks and so on.

At key stage 2, there is a requirement to study a non-European society. One of the examples—a contrast with British history—is Benin, in west Africa, from AD 900 AD to 1,300. I could go on. There are lots of examples that we give in the national curriculum where teachers can bring in a culturally diverse curriculum to teach to children. I believe very strongly in a knowledge-rich curriculum, where children are taught as much as possible about Britain, the world and how Britain became the Britain it is today.

Chair: Thank you, Minister. That was a very thorough response. I guess the challenge lies in between what is possible, what the reality is and the evidence that we have heard as part of this inquiry. We hope we will be able to present a bit more of that to you today.

Q3 **Caroline Nokes:** As part of our work, we have carried out a survey of teachers to get a better understanding of how they felt about the freedoms that you have quite rightly identified they have. Sixty-nine per cent. of them said that they disagreed or strongly disagreed that the curriculum gave children an appropriate understanding of Britain’s diverse history when they were at the age of leaving primary school. Why do you think it is that teachers don’t feel they have the freedoms that they would like to teach about our diverse history, or why do you think they are not taking them up?

Nick Gibb: We trust our professionals to deliver the curriculum and use their professional judgment in teaching the curriculum that they feel they want to teach, within the parameters of the national curriculum. Actually, they can teach beyond the national curriculum; the national curriculum doesn’t take up the whole school day. I always distinguish between the national curriculum and the school curriculum. So, there is certainly scope.

The other question is: are we providing enough support? One thing that



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we are doing, in reforming teacher training, is that we are reforming the early years of a teacher's career, through what we call the early career framework. So, there is more support for newly qualified teachers when they start in the profession about how to manage a curriculum, how to manage pupil behaviour in schools, and so on.

There is certainly the flexibility within the national curriculum for teachers to teach a very diverse curriculum, and there are plenty of organisations that will be able to supply high-quality materials to help teachers to do that.

- Q4 **Caroline Nokes:** The petitioners we heard from came and gave some very compelling evidence that they felt that in their education background they simply hadn't had an adequately diverse teaching of history, among other subjects. What more do you think needs to be done, so that we don't have young people leaving school feeling that way and feeling as if their history has been excluded from the teaching that they have received?

Nick Gibb: I read an interview by Katharine Birbalsingh, the very well-known and esteemed headteacher. She said: "I have never met a history teacher who did not teach colonialism and slavery. It is a very odd accusation. How much they teach it and how well they teach it are different issues...At our school, we certainly teach about slavery, about the Amritsar Massacre as part of Indian history, about Gandhi, about the Irish famine." What is interesting about that quote is that that is a school that teaches a very rich knowledge curriculum.

When we were in opposition, I read about the E. D. Hirsch curriculum in the United States, and it is a packed curriculum. It will have the history of China in there, the history of India, the history of America and the history of Europe. If you can teach a very rich curriculum, you can cover—maybe not always in depth, but you can certainly cover—a wide variety of a knowledge curriculum. That way, children do get the knowledge of culture—not just their own culture but culture from around the world—and that is what I believe in very strongly.

- Q5 **Caroline Nokes:** Katharine Birbalsingh is certainly an outstanding headteacher and sets a brilliant example, but part of the quote that you read out indicated that how well they teach it is a different matter. Do you think the DFE is doing enough to make sure that every school is teaching about slavery and colonialism well enough?

Nick Gibb: It is certainly in the national curriculum. As I read out before, at key stage 3 there is a requirement to teach about ideas, political power, industry and empire, 1745 to 1901.

What we have been trying to do since 2010 is to improve the quality of the curriculum and to have a greater focus on curriculum in schools. The new inspection framework, introduced by the current chief inspector at Ofsted, Amanda Spielman, puts a greater emphasis on curriculum and curriculum development in schools. Sometimes in the past, the quality of what is taught has not been given the right attention, and that is now happening.



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We are trying to improve the level of knowledge. We reformed the GCSEs when we came into office. We reformed the national curriculum to give it added content, so there is more knowledge that is being taught.

Also, there are the reforms that we are introducing to teacher training, as I touched on before, in the early career framework and the core content framework for teacher training in the universities. It is also very important that teachers are taught how to develop the curriculum and what the evidence says is the best approach to teaching that curriculum. You make an important point that we need to do everything we can to support the profession, so that it is an evidence-led profession and so that young teachers get the best start to their career.

Q6 Caroline Nokes: If we are finding that schools aren't teaching it enough or aren't teaching it well enough, should the DFE simply look to make it a statutory element of the curriculum?

Nick Gibb: There is a national curriculum. It is statutory. It is framed in the way I described, in broader terms, certainly for subjects like history, geography, science and music, at key stage 3. At key stage 4, of course, it becomes more prescriptive because it is driven by the specifications of the exam boards, which in turn are driven by the subject content that comes from the Department.

I think there is a case for looking at the key stage 3 curriculum to make sure that it is as rigorous as it can be. Key stage 3 was criticised by Michael Wilshaw, the former HMCI. If you look at the curriculum in maths, English and science for primary, you'll see that it is quite detailed. It is less detailed for history and geography.

There is always a balance to be struck about the professional autonomy of teachers. The more prescriptive you make the curriculum, the less professional autonomy you are giving to teachers. It is a careful balance. As Katharine Birbalsingh says, I don't think you will find many history teachers around the country who don't want to teach a diverse curriculum.

Q7 Nicola Richards: Minister, we have heard from many that they feel that Black History Month should be not just reserved for a month but embedded throughout the curriculum all year round. Do you agree with that? What is your role in making sure that that happens?

Nick Gibb: These cultural months are very important in highlighting cultures. We do the same for LGBT. These are important movements, but when you are talking about the curriculum, the more prescriptive you make it, the less discretion you are giving to professional teachers in what and how they teach it. As I have said, there is ample scope within the structure of the curriculum, certainly in history, to enable young people to be taught about the contribution that Black people have made to Britain and to other countries around the world. I gave examples before about significant figures from the Black community and the contribution that they have made. I think that is important to be taught.

Q8 Nicola Richards: Some have also commented on the suggestion that



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Black history is different from British history. Obviously, they are not separate things. Do you think it is important that the contribution of Black Britons and other ethnic minorities is highlighted not just in the teaching of history, but in other subjects such as literature?

Nick Gibb: I do. I think it is important that young people are taught everything about our history and all those people who have made a contribution to the Britain that we are today. The Government has established the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities to address issues in four areas—education, employment, health and the criminal justice system—so that includes education. We do want young people to understand how Britain became the Britain that it is today. I think that Britain is a wonderful country, and the contribution of the people of this country today, how they came to be here—all of us—is very important. I think that applies to history.

I think it is important that young people are taught a wide range of literature. One of the things we introduced in the English curriculum was the requirement to read widely. I was always disappointed in the past by how few books generally that young people had been introduced to. My own view is that that needs to be as broad based as possible. I am just trying to find some examples of the literature that we want young people to be able to read. I will let Andrew come in, but “Refugee Boy” by Benjamin Zephaniah is on there, as is “Noughts & Crosses” by Malorie Blackman. There is some very good literature for children that I hope children will be introduced to. I will let Andrew come in as well.

Andrew McCully: I was just going to give examples such as those, because, as well as encouraging a very broad range of reading at every level—primary and secondary—those specific examples that the Minister has given were actually from the selection of texts chosen by exam boards. So, not only is it encouragement to read widely; it is a test of the achievement of students. Authors such as those are really important to English literature.

Q9 **Nicola Richards:** Thank you. We have heard in evidence that, particularly at secondary level, schools don’t have enough time to teach beyond the exam content, which restricts their ability to add on to the core curriculum. If the Government won’t amend the curriculum, will it work with exam boards and review the non-statutory guidance, to encourage them to diversify their content, beyond what you have just said, to the options currently available?

Nick Gibb: I think that is what Andrew McCully was saying. Some of the exam boards—Pearson Edexcel in particular, for example—have added to their curriculum. For example, on the requirement to teach authors post-’14, their post-’14 selection of texts in the English literature GCSE includes the play “Refugee Boy” by Benjamin Zephaniah, which was adapted for the stage by Lemn Sissay, and the novel “Boys Don’t Cry” by Malorie Blackman. AQA and OCR have also included works by authors from diverse backgrounds, such as “Anita and Me” and “Never Let Me Go”. So, there are examples of authors in the exam specifications, and I think the exam



boards do have some discretion, provided they fit within those categories of post-1914 novels or poetry since 1789. They will be sensitive to the issues that are being debated by this Committee and they will want to have a diverse range of texts for students to study.

- Q10 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** One of the petitioner's own surveys showed that nearly half of respondents had experienced racism within school and over 70% had witnessed it. Other surveys have also highlighted that this is a widespread problem, with 95% of young Black people who responded to one report saying they had witnessed racism in school. Could I ask Ministers what the Government is doing to tackle this?

Nick Gibb: There is absolutely no place for racism in our society at all. As I said earlier, Governments of this hue but also previous Governments have gone to great lengths to drive out any racism in our schools. There is always more to do, but I think it has been something of a success in our schools. However, that does not mean to say that there are no examples of racism—we are talking about human beings—and it does need to be eradicated.

As I said, it is within the citizenship curriculum that children are taught about the need for mutual respect and understanding of diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom. In the RSHE curriculum—the new curriculum that became statutory in September—in the primary element, about respectful relationships, it talks about “the importance of respecting others, even when they are very different from them (for example, physically, in character, personality or backgrounds), or...have different preferences or beliefs.” That is in the primary school curriculum, and then in secondary, under the section on respectful relationships, it talks about how pupils should know “how stereotypes, in particular stereotypes based on sex, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or disability, can cause damage (e.g. how they might normalise non-consensual behaviour or encourage prejudice).”

We are very explicit about these issues in the new RSHE curriculum, but teachers and schools addressing this is not new to the RHSE curriculum. It predates that: it is in the citizenship curriculum, as I have said, and I do not think I have met a teacher who is not determined that any signs of racism in their school will be wiped out. The other thing I would say is that this Government have a great focus on behaviour in schools, and making sure that bullying of all kinds is not tolerated in our school system. We want schools to be calm, safe, happy places for young people to flourish. They can only really learn if they are in that kind of environment.

- Q11 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** Thank you. I completely agree. However, just following on from that, do you think that that is enough, when many pupils may experience or witness racism before they reach key stage 4?

Nick Gibb: It is an ongoing battle, and the extent to which it still exists is the extent to which we need to continue to do more. It is something that we feel very strongly about. We give grants to a number of anti-bullying organisations so that they can come into schools and use their teaching



methods to demonstrate how harmful racist bullying is in schools and, indeed, bullying based on other protected characteristics as well.

- Q12 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** On protected characteristics and rights, in November 2020, the Equality and Human Rights Commission published a report, "Exploring human rights education in Great Britain", which highlighted a number of benefits, such as creating a more integrated student population, helping pupils to see the relevance of racism and racial inequalities in everyday life, and having pupils identify, question and tackle racial injustices. That report included several recommendations for the Government, and I was wondering whether your Department had had any engagement with that particular report, or considered the merits of adopting human rights education as part of the curriculum.

Nick Gibb: It is certainly something that schools are free to do, and I have been to schools that have had a United Nations rights of the child approach to the curriculum, which has been very successful. I wonder whether Andrew wanted to come in on this issue as well.

Andrew McCully: Of course, we work in the Department with the Children's Commissioner, and the UN convention on the rights of the child is fundamental to her role, as well. I met the Children's Commissioner only yesterday, in fact, about some of these matters, so it is a part of the fabric of schools. The actual report you are talking about also raised the question of the nature of the curriculum, including the history curriculum. As the Minister set out a few moments ago, the importance of the curriculum is that it is knowledge-rich and provides a framework for teachers to use their own discretion. In responding to the commission's report, those are the points about the curriculum that we made clear. The curriculum remains flexible precisely to incorporate the sort of things that the Children's Commissioner, for instance, feels passionately about.

- Q13 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** Thank you. I have a question about the citizenship curriculum. In 2007, Sir Keith Ajegbo's report on the citizenship curriculum made a series of recommendations, including on explicit links between programmes of study for history and citizenship education, but they were not implemented. Does the Department recognise the value of teaching a more diverse history curriculum and how that impacts on tackling racism in schools and wider society, as well as on looking at children as citizens?

Nick Gibb: In terms of citizenship, we reviewed the curriculum when we came to office in 2010. What the citizenship curriculum seeks to do is equip young people to be able to navigate our political system, which as everyone in this Committee knows is not the easiest or simplest of systems. That is why we think they should be taught. They are taught about how our political system developed, how our democratic Government works, the role of citizens, the role of Parliament and the monarch, and the operation of Parliament—I have been here 23 years and some of our rules still baffle me, but they are there for a reason. We teach those rules in citizenship, in addition to voting in elections, the role of political parties, how our liberties and so on arose, how the police



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work, how the courts work, the judicial system, how laws are made and so on.

I think that is an important part of citizenship, as well as all the other issues that I talked about, in terms of understanding the diverse nature of our country. We are teaching children to respect that diversity, but it is also important that they are taught about the realities of our political system so they can become informed citizens able to contribute to political life and political debate.

It is in history as well. I said earlier that what we need is a knowledge-rich curriculum, so they have learned about the history of India, China, Europe, America and Britain. That takes up a lot of time. In opposition, I was saddened by the fact that so many young people were dropping history at the end of key stage 3. If you then shorten key stage 3 to two years, which was happening in some schools, you could have children studying only two years of history in secondary and very little history in primary. We have tried to change that so that young people are introduced to a much broader range of British and world history. I think that is an important change.

Q14 Angela Crawley: Minister, this inquiry has inevitably touched on the attainment levels of Black pupils, and the Education Committee is currently looking at left behind White pupils. A key theme of those sessions is that socioeconomic status can influence attainment. Many experts have argued that socioeconomic status and ethnicity intersect to influence school outcomes. What, if any, plans does the Government have for assessing how ethnicity intersects with other factors affecting education outcomes, including attainment?

Nick Gibb: That is something that the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities will be looking at. As I said, they are looking at four areas, one of which is education. We are looking forward to seeing very shortly the outcome of that important work.

In terms of the attainment of Black students, one of the things that I think is very important for social mobility is the English baccalaureate—the EBacc. It is a controversial performance measure that we introduced in 2011. It measures the proportion of young people who are taking those core academic subjects: English, maths, at least two sciences, a humanity—history or geography—and a modern language. I am just trying to find the figure, but we have managed to increase the proportion taking that combination—the figure is never in front of you when you want it. In 2018-19, 46% of Black pupils were entered for all components of the English baccalaureate, and that has increased. I am just trying to find the baseline figure; maybe Andrew has it to hand.

Andrew McCully: The answer in my head is that, in 2011, only a fifth of key stage 4 ethnic minority pupils were entered for the baccalaureate, and in the most recent figures it is almost half. The rise from a fifth to a half is, for me, evidence of how much the key academic parts of the curriculum are now a key part of school life.



Nick Gibb: Thank you, Andrew. And if you look at some of the other standards, the gap between Black pupils and White pupils is not there, really. For example, the proportion reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and maths at the end of key stage 2 in 2019 was 64% for White pupils and 64% for Black pupils. In terms of the phonics decoding test taken at the end of year 1, in 2019 82% of White pupils reached the expected standard and 83% of Black pupils reached that standard. So there is no real difference between the two groups, and that is something that's very welcome.

Q15 **Angela Crawley:** Many petitioners told us simply that they did not see themselves reflected in what they learned at school and they became disengaged with their studies as a result. Do you accept that students may not thrive or reach their full potential if they don't learn about people they identify with?

Nick Gibb: I don't disagree with that, and that's why we do have the discretion, the flexibility in the curriculum. I don't want to go over territory we have already been through, but as I said, there is scope and requirements in the curriculum to teach quite a diverse and broad curriculum.

I think it's also important that all young people in Britain are taught a common curriculum, so that we all understand our history and we are all introduced to the key literature that unites us all as a nation. That can be literature from all backgrounds—I am just trying to find some more examples. I enjoyed reading Monica Ali's "Brick Lane". I enjoyed reading Zadie Smith's "White Teeth". These are all part of modern British culture, and I hope that young people will be introduced to literature like that, as well as other literature that is part of modern culture today. That's really what wider reading is about. But I think you make a good point. I think a diverse curriculum that reflects the different journeys that families living in this country have made is important.

Andrew McCully: If I may add to what the Minister has said, one of the, I think, important developments, is not just in schools but in much of the study of areas that, in our conceptions, may have been seen to be monocultural—our conception of Tudors, for instance, might be, "Surely that is Britain and it is a White Britain," and yet so many schools now are able to access materials, such as the brilliant book by Miranda Kaufmann, "Black Tudors", that illustrate the contribution of Black Tudors. Many schools I have been to have the picture of John Blanke, the trumpeter for Henry VIII and Henry VII. There is a realisation that our conceptions of history start to break down when that evidence is put before us. That is happening in many of the schools that I visit.

Q16 **Chair:** I just want to pick up on that and link it to something that you responded to earlier, Minister. These petitions have come from young people who have been educated under this Government's curriculum, and they say they do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum that they have been taught. They have conducted a survey and the evidence is all there. While you reflect on what you would "hope" has happened—you



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have used that word—and you “hope” people will have a diverse curriculum and a diverse education experience, the reality that has been presented to us by many young people is that they do not see themselves reflected. You have said that it is a requirement, so it would be helpful to understand in what way is it an absolute requirement within the curriculum, or is it still entirely optional? Why do these young people not see themselves reflected? The issue is that they then feel they are switched off from their education because they do not see themselves reflected in the people that they are learning about, and that affects their outcomes. So, to what extent is it a requirement? To what extent is it still optional?

You also mentioned that you would hope that the area where there would be the room to insert more of this optional curriculum is key stage 3, but why wouldn't that be the case at key stage 2? The earlier you can ensure that young people see themselves reflected and understand the broader and diverse society that we live in before they get to high school would surely be better. Why isn't there more focus on key stage 2?

Nick Gibb: We do want there to be better teaching of what I call the general knowledge subjects at key stage 2: history, geography, science and music. That is something we continue to work on. Our priority has been making sure that children are reading effectively from early years and into key stage 1. From that they build up their fluency and learn to read for pleasure, developing that speed and fluency of reading, and then it's about making sure they read widely. That has been an important objective of the Government, and we have achieved some success. I have said the proportion getting through the phonics check has gone from 58% in 2012 to 82% now. There is more to go; there is the remaining 18%. And we are rising through the ranks of the PIRLS international league tables. We did very well in the last published test of nine-year-olds, achieving our highest ever figure, but there is more to do.

There is more to do to improve maths teaching, which has also been a focus in primary schools. I believe very strongly in a broad and balanced curriculum at key stages 1 and 2 because that helps with reading. We know that good readers have a wide vocabulary, and you get a wide vocabulary from being taught not just English, but history, geography and science, because that is where a lot of the words and the knowledge behind those words come from. That is our objective at key stage 2. The more knowledge-rich the curriculum is, the more you can teach a diverse curriculum.

I mentioned the core knowledge curriculum, which is immense. It covers a huge area. The children who are lucky enough to be taught that curriculum will learn about the history of countries around the world, and will certainly learn about the cultural diversity of the United States. We want to see in this country a diverse curriculum, a rich curriculum, so that children are taught about modern history: things that have happened in the last 50 years in this country and things that have happened in the dim and distant past that have created the modern nation that we have today. With wider reading, I hope that young people will be introduced of course

to the classics—the Jane Austens and Charles Dickens—and also to a more diverse range of literature.

Chair: Thank you. In your response, Minister, you have again talked about hope. A thing that has emerged from this inquiry is that this is probably something we should not be hoping but ensuring happens.

- Q17 **Apsana Begum:** I have a supplementary question. Minister, I think I have seen you twice this month—once on the Education Committee and now here. It was International Mother Language Day on 21 February, and there has been a lot of research about communities—migrant children in particular—having access to their heritage. One way in which that happens is through speaking, reading and writing in their own language. Could you say something about what work the DFE has done in this area to make opportunities available in our education system so that young individuals can access the richness of their cultural history and heritage? The evidence shows that that really grounds them.

In terms of reform of GCSE and A levels, many would say there is a narrowing of the curriculum. There are definitely subjects in foreign languages still available at GCSE and A level since the reforms announced in 2015, but how much of that is widely available? Is the DFE looking at that continuously?

Nick Gibb: I am not sure I totally follow all that. I think modern languages are important, so we go to great efforts to try to encourage the take-up of modern languages. I would say we have been moderately successful in increasing the proportion taking a foreign language.

We also encourage the taking of community languages at GCSE. I think in 2017 one of the exam boards wanted to end some of those community language GCSEs because of the low entry numbers to those subjects, but we managed to ensure that they continued. But I think learning a foreign language is hugely important.

I remember visiting some Polish Saturday schools—one was in Wimbledon—a couple of years ago where there was that very view. They wanted to preserve the culture. They wanted their children to continue to learn Polish and to continue to be introduced to Polish literature and history—and those schools have been around since the 1960s. I think that is very important, and I hope that happens with all community languages—even if they are not taught in school, there is somewhere the grammar rules and so on can be taught and then ultimately they can be taken at GCSE.

Apsana Begum: I think you are right that in 2017 Ofqual and others met and decided that these subjects would be available, but in practice they are not widely available, and many schools decide not to offer them. I think there is a gap between what is stipulated, what is policy and what happens in practice. Thank you for your answer.

Chair: Apsana, did you have any further questions to ask about education?



Q18 Apsana Begum: Yes. My first question is around educational content. The Government's responses to the petitions generally highlight the freedom of schools and show a reluctance to be overly prescriptive. However, the Equalities Minister made statements in the Black History Month debate, which the Committee have looked at closely, about what schools should not teach. Is there not a case for more detailed direction from the Government particularly around how race and identity should be taught?

Nick Gibb: These are matters that professional teachers are very well equipped to deal with in their own schools. I feel really that teachers and schools have a history of understanding these issues within their own schools, and we trust the professionalism of teachers to do that. I am not sure I fully understood the question, but if you want to—

Q19 Apsana Begum: Maybe I will ask this differently. In our survey, many teachers said that they now avoid discussions around race due to a lack of confidence. Do the Government accept that using what one witness called "threatening language" to describe what can and cannot be taught is making teachers' jobs more difficult?

Nick Gibb: I think you are referring to the statements about not using resources produced by organisations that take an extreme political stance.

Q20 Apsana Begum: Those are the comments of the Equalities Minister, and specifically critical race theory was mentioned in her statements.

Nick Gibb: The key thing here is that whenever schools are teaching something that is political, it needs to be taught in a balanced way. That is a long-standing legislative requirement in our school system, because children need a balanced approach to the teaching of sensitive and controversial subject. I think that is what the Equalities Minister was referring to. I don't know whether Andrew wants to come in on this as well.

Andrew McCully: The guidance that the Minister was referring to was recognising that of course schools have always and would want to examine some difficult issues. That is part of debate in history and citizenship, but the guidance set out that when doing that, they should avoid using materials from organisations that take extreme positions. The guidance included a number of examples of what those extreme positions might be. I think most people reading the guidance would recognise that they are extreme positions. We would be disturbed if our children were not receiving a balanced education when they are dealing with issues about democracy, the rule of law, harassment of individuals and those sorts of questions, which the guidance reflected.

Q21 Apsana Begum: The new relationship and sex education guidance produced in the autumn also contained strong warnings to teachers that "Schools should not under any circumstances use resources produced by organisations that take extreme political stances on matters." Less than 10% of the secondary teachers we surveyed found that guidance to be helpful in planning their lessons. Do you accept that there needs to be



more clarification, and even examples of approved organisations?

Nick Gibb: That is one part of the guidance. This is the implementation guidance that came with the introduction of the new RSHE curriculum. I cited before the two examples from the primary and secondary curriculum about relationships, and about teaching about stereotypes and how harmful they can be. The implementation guidance does say—your quote is directly from that guidance—that examples of extreme political stances include “a publicly stated desire to abolish or overthrow democracy, capitalism, or to end free and fair elections”. I think most parents would agree with that. They would not want their children taught using material from those kinds of organisations, or those organisations that are opposed to the “right of freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of assembly or freedom of religion and conscience”, or any organisation that endorses “racist, including antisemitic, language or communications”, or any organisation that encourages or endorses illegal activity. That is how we define those kinds of organisations, and we just want to make sure that schools are not using materials from those kinds of organisations.

This is not meant to be a teacher training guide. We have produced teacher training manuals. We have produced 15 slide packs to help teachers to teach some of the more sensitive issues in RSHE, and there are some very sensitive matters in that statutory guidance, which schools are now required to teach, and we are providing as much support as we can to teachers in covering those areas. It is those that are designed to be helpful, not necessarily the implementation guidance on extremist organisations. It is not a training manual.

Q22 **Apsana Begum:** I appreciate that, Minister. I think the survey points to, in terms of the views of teachers, a number of questions. For example, could a citizenship teacher arrange a talk by someone who supports the Black Lives Matter movement? Would a local MP who openly supports the movement be an inappropriate speaker? Can an MP go to speak about capitalism, or is that against the guidance, and what would be the repercussions?

Nick Gibb: There is nothing at all to prevent schools teaching about the Black Lives Matter movement. All I would say is that it is a political movement and it therefore needs to be taught in accordance with the guidelines about teaching politics. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. It is an important movement in today’s society, and teachers are perfectly free to teach it.

Of course, any MP is perfectly able to ask to speak at a school, again, taking into account and making sure that there is political balance at some point, so that we do not always have just Conservative MPs or just Labour MPs speaking, and that there is a balance at some point over time in that school. They can talk about those people who are opposed to capitalism; they can teach about Karl Marx. I remember being taught the 1848 manifesto by Karl Marx in my history curriculum. I do not agree with it, obviously, but it is perfectly right to teach it.



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What we are talking about is organisations that are committed to the overthrow of freedom of speech, democracy and free enterprise—all the things that make up the fundamental British values of this society. That is what we are talking about; we are not talking about banning discussion of the ideas floating around academia.

- Q23 **Apsana Begum:** I think you have stated two things there. Do you think there is a contradiction in the messaging saying that the Government are against the teaching of contested political ideas as though they are accepted facts—I remember my own sociology lessons, and when we were taught Marxism, it was about overthrowing capitalism—and banning schools from working with groups that oppose capitalism? I am using that specific example to ask whether it comes across as a contradiction. Do you recognise that it might be seen as contradictory by some?

Nick Gibb: No, not really. It is about the nature of those organisations. That is very different from saying that schools should not be teaching contested political ideas unless they are taught in a balanced way that puts the other side of argument, because children are easily influenced and we need to ensure that they hear both sides of the argument. That is very different from how adults are taught at university and beyond, when there can be more challenge. Pupils, however, need a balanced approach to the teaching of these political ideas.

- Q24 **Apsana Begum:** Thank you, Minister. I will conclude by saying that Shout Out UK and Schools Week wrote to the Secretary of State requesting further clarification about this particular guidance, but none has been provided. Maybe that is something that you, as Minister, could take away and follow up on with DFE officials.

Nick Gibb: We do look at the wording of guidance, and as it happens, we are looking at the wording of the guidance that you quoted, to make sure that it is right. I stand by the notion that we cannot have extremist organisations involved in our children's education.

- Q25 **Chris Evans:** I was interested to hear you talk about the fall-off in the interest in history in schools, Minister. There are two questions that I want to put to you. First, when Black history is framed in media and television, it is from the American experience. Looking at my bookshelf, there are books on Muhammad Ali, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, but there is nothing on Mary Seacole or others who were involved in Black history in this country. How do we address that imbalance and start teaching history through the prism of a British perspective?

My second point is that, when organisations have made history interesting—through interactive things or making films—there is not the time to teach that in classes, especially in the wake of covid-19 and shutting down the schools and things like that. What are the Government doing to ensure that those interactive things that organisations are pumping into schools are accessible to schoolchildren?

Nick Gibb: I am a bit old-fashioned on these things; I quite like children to read. I think that has a lot of advantages beyond just acquiring the



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knowledge of that subject. It is a quicker way of absorbing information, and I think it helps children's cognitive development to be able to read, so I encourage more reading, not just of fiction but also of textbooks and history books.

The Oak National Academy, which was established over Easter last year by 40 teachers, has over the last year developed thousands of very high-quality video lessons. We gave them about £4.5 million to help to develop that. I hope and expect that organisation to go from strength to strength in helping schools to deliver the curriculum in all subjects in the most interesting way possible. I have listened to some of the lessons that Oak has produced and they are very high quality. There is always a case for improving the quality of teaching, and in helping teachers to find the most attractive and effective resources to teach subjects effectively. Is that a pupil of the future you have in front of you?

- Q26 **Chris Evans:** Yes, although you will be pleased to know that she will be going into the Welsh system. Going back to the idea of finding time to teach, a lot of teachers said that, within the teacher training system, there is not the time to develop those skills to teach equality, diversity and equity in the curriculum. How are the Government addressing this issue, which again basically comes down to time and trying to fit that in so that, when teachers come to the end of their training period, they are fully versed in these things?

Nick Gibb: We revised the teachers' standards in 2011 when we came in. It is a relatively short document, and it applies to all teachers at every stage of their careers, obviously reflecting how much experience they have, but the principles are the same throughout. No. 1 says that teachers should "Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils" and "set goals that stretch and challenge pupils of all backgrounds, abilities and dispositions", so the teacher training system should help teachers to be able to do that.

What we are trying to do with our reforms to teacher training is to make sure that teachers are able to understand the principles behind a high-quality curriculum, based on all the evidence of what a high-quality curriculum is. If they can learn how to do that, they are then able to bring in the kind of curriculum that you are talking about—a more diverse, richer curriculum that covers more knowledge, and will therefore cover the kind of issues we have been debating today.

- Q27 **Chris Evans:** I am an Opposition MP, but I will congratulate you, because you have been in the post a long time; it is unusual in Government to stay in the same job for a long time. I was looking at something that I did in 2011. I cannot believe it is 10 years ago now. Will you be looking at those teachers' standards again? What are the plans for professional development as well, so that those who have already trained can start adding to their skills?

Nick Gibb: I am comfortable that the teachers' standards have stood the test of time. A lot of effort and work went into them. There are eight key



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standards, each with subheadings, and then in part 2 is the ethics element, on personal and professional conduct, which again shows that teachers need to show tolerance and respect for the rights of others and should not undermine fundamental British values of the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. We have incorporated those issues into this fundamental document about what makes a good teacher. What we are doing now, in terms of reforming the training of teachers, is helping teachers in their first years at school. I have felt, for a long time, that we put a lot of pressure on those new graduates coming into teaching. They have just got themselves a flat, they are starting their first job and they are no longer at university or at home, and then we say, "Oh, by the way, develop a curriculum." We have to help them in those first years. That is why we get quite a lot of people leaving the profession in the first five years.

With our early career framework, we are providing much more professional support and mentoring for those young people in the first years of their career. That will help them, they will learn how to develop a curriculum in the most effective, evidence-based way and they will learn how to manage behaviour in the classroom. That is what we are trying to do with teacher training. That is the next stage of reform, which we are now absolutely in the middle of.

Q28 Chris Evans: One last question, as other people want to come in. I have spoken about history, but I want to touch on literature, which is extremely important in terms of the diversity experience. In terms of creating the reading lists, you have already spoken about your love of books, but how often do you look at those reading lists? What are the criteria for adding to those reading lists and those recommendations? I am interested in how that process goes on.

Nick Gibb: It is quite a controversial issue. We tend not to have a DFE reading list. I don't think the Gavin Williamson/Nick Gibb reading list would go down well, or the Michael Gove reading list. We set the parameters of post-1914 and post-1789 poetry, and then we leave it to the exam boards to come up with the actual texts that are examined.

I think there ought to be reading lists available to schools, just as a pointer to what is good and to what children will enjoy and at what ages. There are other organisations, such as the National Literacy Trust and the Reading Agency, that can and do produce reading lists that children should use. I encourage that, and I have often thought about trying to do more to highlight those lists to schools. When I go to some really good schools, there are lists for children, and they are expected to read 10 classics a year, in their own time. I think that is a very good thing to do.

In that way, they should be introduced. David Walliams is a great children's author, and Michael Morpurgo, but children also ought to be introduced to Malorie Blackman and to a whole range of other authors as they get older—to some of the well-known Black authors, as well.



Q29 Chris Evans: I have just one last question, which goes back to the idea that we will read Steinbeck and “Catcher in the Rye.” We will read those American authors, even Maya Angelou’s “I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings,” but then we don’t read Trollope, Wilkie Collins or those types of people. Are you concerned that there is a disconnect between British literature—obviously, America is so dominant—and American literature coming in, which isn’t really our past experience?

Nick Gibb: I love American literature.

Chris Evans: So do I.

Nick Gibb: I have to confess that up front. I wish they would read beyond “Of Mice and Men.” There are some other books written by John Steinbeck that are also good, but there are also other great American authors that I hope children will be encouraged to read. But you are right: I hope they will be encouraged to read great English authors—modern and 19th century English authors. We need to do more to encourage that.

Reading, generally, is so important. That is why we put wider reading in the curriculum. It is so important for cognitive and vocabulary development for children. Fiction teaches you quite a lot about life, as well.

Chris Evans: Thank you. No further questions, Chair.

Q30 Elliot Colburn: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister. Minister, may I begin by asking about the diversity of teaching staff? We have received evidence, as part of these sessions, that ethnic minorities are under-represented in the teaching profession and that that has led to problems in diversifying the curriculum. Some subjects qualify for bursary funding, for example, but history specifically does not. We have been told that this is a barrier to greater diversity of teaching staff. Has the Government considered targeting bursaries to help improve that diversity, where other funding doesn’t apply?

Nick Gibb: Having a diverse profession is important. There is some good news on that front. In November 2019, for example, 14.7% of the teaching workforce was from an ethnic minority background, compared with 20% of England’s population identifying as an ethnic minority—so, good, but more to do. If you look at the most recent initial teacher training census, ethnic minority trainees made up 19% of all trainees, so that is a welcome sign.

On the bursaries, we have not used them to target particular backgrounds to come into teaching; we have used the bursaries to incentivise subjects where we struggle to get the numbers that we need in our school system. That is why there is no bursary for history, because we had a lot of history graduates applying to be history teachers—in fact, we exceeded our target. Where we struggle is in subjects like physics, maths and modern languages. That is why those bursaries are targeted. We review that every year to see what success there has been in recruiting.



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Q31 Elliot Colburn: One of my questions was going to be whether you monitor the diversity of the workforce and what action you are taking. You have answered that question, so I will move on.

Obviously, the DFE has been successful in reaching its targets with history teachers, but there is still a problem with the diversity of the teachers themselves. According to some of the evidence we have received, that is because fewer ethnic minority students choose to take this subject themselves at GCSE and beyond and go on to become teachers. Is there a recognition at the DFE that the curriculum might be a cause of that? Is there something that the DFE could do—perhaps not through the bursary system, as you outlined, but earlier on, at GCSE and beyond—to encourage a more diverse range of pupils to take up the subject?

Nick Gibb: My view of that is that we want more young people to take those core academic subjects that widen opportunities. I regard the English baccalaureate combination of GCSEs as a social mobility performance measure, because they are the subjects that keep the wider opportunities open for all young people. Whatever they want to go on to do after the age of 16, if they take that combination, more doors are open to them.

One of the challenges that we face at the university level with social mobility is that some children from some disadvantaged backgrounds have not chosen the right A-levels to get into the most selective universities and, often, the choice of A-levels has been restricted by the choice at GCSE. We try to do both things. I think Apsana talked about narrowing the curriculum by encouraging more entry into the EBacc, but we are talking about science, English, maths, foreign languages and the humanities, and that is very broad. There is still room beyond the EBacc to take other subjects, such as music and art.

I am quite pleased by the increase we have seen in the proportion of pupils from ethnic minorities taking the EBacc. In 2011, it was 21.2%, but rising to nearly a half by 2019. Those are great successes. If you look at history itself, the proportion of pupils entering the humanities EBacc pillar—history or geography—has increased from 48% in 2010 to 82% in 2020. That is a staggeringly high figure. If you break that down into history and geography, history has gone from 31% in 2010 to 44% in 2020.

I think that the performance measure of the EBacc is a very important way of encouraging more young people from all backgrounds to take those academic subjects. We have more to do, and we will continue.

Q32 Elliot Colburn: That number is very encouraging indeed. I want to move to a set of concluding questions for this session, and I will begin by talking about the petitions that the Committee has received. Obviously, the Chair outlined the sheer volume of petitions and, indeed, the number of signatories to the various petitions that we have received. Clearly, there is a lot of interest in this issue, and it is important to many. What



advice would you give to young people who may feel that the curriculum that they are being taught doesn't reflect the breadth of British history and the contribution of all its citizens, and who are not lucky enough to be in an area or a school that is prioritising this? What avenues are open to them to take?

Nick Gibb: There are organisations, like the Runnymede Trust, that have resources that can be accessed by schools and, I assume, therefore, by pupils. The Historical Association will have a lot of materials as well. If the school itself is not providing the curriculum that young people want, they can always raise these issues with the school, the teacher or the headteacher. But as I said, there are organisations, like the Runnymede Trust, that have resources that are accessible to young people.

Q33 **Elliot Colburn:** Thank you for that, Minister. I think we have touched on this next point throughout all the questions, but perhaps a summing up of the viewpoint of the Government would be helpful here. Again, we have heard in the evidence that we have received of the various barriers in terms of diversifying the curriculum, training, resources and the need to devote most teacher time to exam content. The Government has said that it does not want to mandate from above when it comes to this, and it has made it fairly clear that what is currently in the national curriculum gives the scope to teach a more diverse curriculum. Is that a fair assessment? Would you say that it is not wanting to take a top-down approach here and that it is really calling on schools to put in the effort themselves and to try to diversify, where the curriculum allows?

Nick Gibb: I think that is right. The philosophy behind our reforms to education is to unleash the professionalism of very able people in the teaching profession. Of course, we want certain things from our education system. We want children to be able to read and write, and we want them to have a strong general knowledge, but the more prescriptive you are, the less professional autonomy you are unleashing.

The rise in standards that we have seen since 2010 is multifaceted, but I believe that one aspect is that we are encouraging professional autonomy. That is through the curriculum, but it is also through the academies programme and the free schools programme.

There is always a reluctance to pile more requirements on to schools. We do it—we require schools to teach the RSHE curriculum. That applies to academies, and it applies to schools. There is a requirement for universal infant free school meals, which applies to maintained schools and to academies. We have, on occasion, breached that principle. Looking at the primary curriculum, we require phonics to be taught and so on. But every time you do that, you chip away at that professional autonomy.

Certainly, for a subject such as history, which is so all-encompassing, we have set the requirements that I have set out—what is in key stage 3 and so on—which require schools to teach Britain's colonial history. Outside those specific requirements, there is scope for teachers to teach the kind



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of curriculum that the young people who are signing your petition want to see taught in their schools.

So that is a principle that we are loth to breach on too many occasions, because the danger is that it detracts from that professional autonomy, and it is that professional autonomy that is driving up standards.

- Q34 **Elliot Colburn:** Thank you, Minister, that was very clear. In our evidence sessions we have asked participants to tell us what they think the Government could do. Many witnesses alluded to this, but one witness used the term “fund what works.” Is there scope for the DFE to consider making funding available to ensure that the resources and training that are available—we have heard many good examples of resources and training available out there—are more easily accessible and available to those schools that would like to diversify their curriculum?

Nick Gibb: I suppose I would say that the funding we give to schools is not inconsiderable—we had a three-year settlement that is the best increase that schools have had for a decade—and that is also meant to encompass funds for curriculum materials. We established the Education Endowment Foundation to evaluate effective curricula and teaching practices, particularly skewed towards how we improve the life chances of children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. There is an evidence base emerging from the work that the EEF has done. There are organisations such as the Runnymede Trust and the Historical Association, which have very high-quality curriculum materials that are available to schools.

What I am hoping we will see in the next few years is a greater focus on the curriculum and curriculum content in schools, driven by both the early career framework for teacher training and the inspection framework from Ofsted, which now requires schools to focus a little bit more on the curriculum than they may have done in the past. That will all help to ensure that we have a very knowledge-rich curriculum in our schools. That then does give scope and time to teach a wider general knowledge curriculum, encompassing the subject areas that the petitioners are campaigning about.

- Q35 **Chair:** Minister, listening to the evidence you have given today, we all recognise the challenges that the Department for Education has been under throughout this pandemic and understand the challenges at the moment of undertaking a major review of the national curriculum. However, I think that many people watching this session will be very disappointed by the answers that you have given today, and will feel that the Government do not recognise the level of dissatisfaction that there is with the current curriculum and how it is being taught. You have talked a lot about not being prescriptive and allowing that freedom of choice, but the evidence that we have seen, and the questions that have been put to you today, demonstrate that sometimes it doesn't come down to choice for schools; sometimes they just don't have the resources and they don't have the room within the curriculum to insert diversity within it themselves, even though they would want to. What would you say to



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those who say that the Government are prescriptive where they have prioritised, and that therefore this just isn't a priority for the Government?

Nick Gibb: I wouldn't agree with that. When it comes to the curriculum, what we are trying to do is encourage a greater focus on it and to make sure that it is knowledge-rich. If you have a knowledge-rich curriculum, you can bring in a lot more material. In history, you can cover greater periods. You can cover greater geographical spread. I hark back again—I am sorry to go on—to the core knowledge curriculum, which is vast in the areas that it covers. I don't want to talk about a competence-based curriculum versus a knowledge-based curriculum, but if you move away from a competence-based curriculum and you move to a knowledge-rich curriculum, that very richness means that there is scope and there is time to teach children more than they are normally taught.

My heart would sink when we were in opposition and I saw history confined to the Tudors and the Nazis, and nothing else really—nothing about the Glorious Revolution, and that is just in our country. Knowledge-rich curriculums look at the history of China, India, Africa and so on. That gives you greater scope to look at more modern developments in British history, such as the Windrush generation. If you have a knowledge-rich curriculum, you have time to cover the kinds of issues that Katharine Birbalsingh was talking about in her school—the Amritsar massacre, Gandhi and the different waves of immigration into this country throughout our history, going right back to centuries and centuries ago. That is a complicated, long answer to your concern.

Q36 **Chair:** It also has a big "if" in it—if you have access to a knowledge-rich curriculum. That is the big concern. The young people who have petitioned us, and the people we have spoken to and taken evidence from obviously haven't had access to that curriculum. Without something changing, the chances are that too many young people still won't. What is the Government going to do about that?

Nick Gibb: The thing about being an Education Minister is that one of the first things you discover when you get into the Sanctuary Buildings is that when you move the lever, it is not always made of solid steel; there is a bit of rubber in there. You can't just pass a law and see everything change. It is about hearts and minds. It is about making the case and persuasion. I think we have made the case increasingly about the importance of a knowledge-rich curriculum.

It is very easy to say, "Let's just change a regulation, change a law, require this, require that," but the danger is that you undermine this notion of professional autonomy. What we are trying to do is make the case for why a knowledge-rich curriculum is important. It is important for a whole raft of reasons to do with cognitive development and vocabulary development, but also general knowledge—it makes you a better educated person.



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There is this debate about whether you should teach critical thinking, creativity and problem solving. Those are all really important skills to have, but you don't get them by teaching them directly; you get them by learning about physics, having a very sophisticated maths knowledge and ability; you get them by having a lot of knowledge of the history and geography of the world, the complexity of our history, the complexity of the battles between Church and state, and the Executive and Parliament, and how Britain became the Britain that it is today—different movements of people around the world have come to Britain and have led us to where we are today. If you can teach a complicated, knowledge-rich curriculum in history, you can then create the time to teach those things.

I take the point, and of course Rome wasn't built in a day. It takes persuasion to change what is taught in our schools, but the answer isn't simply to change a regulation and—hey presto!—everything is as you want it. That was a long answer again. Sorry.

- Q37 **Chair:** Yes, and it still doesn't really answer the question, which is: what are the Government going to do about ensuring that we have a more diverse curriculum? Or do the Government say that we don't need a diverse curriculum—it's not an issue? It is not clear from your answers whether you disagree with the petitioners and think that this doesn't need to be changed. Can you be clear about what the Government are going to do about it? That is what the petitioners would like an answer to. They would like to see a more diverse curriculum, and they would like to know how the Government are going to deliver that.

Nick Gibb: My answer is that we want a knowledge-rich curriculum, and by having a knowledge-rich curriculum, you have time and scope for a more diverse curriculum.

- Q38 **Chair:** Okay, so how are the Government going to deliver a knowledge-rich curriculum? That is the question.

Nick Gibb: It is not easy. It is about persuasion. It is about making the curriculum itself an important element of teacher training. We are doing a lot of work on the curriculum itself. I will give you one example: the model music curriculum that we have been working on for over a year, with Veronica Wadley chairing a group of very able musicians. Ed Watkins—a teacher from the West London Free School—Julian Lloyd Webber and others are on that committee. It is a wonderful piece of work, and I am looking forward to it being published when it is ready.

If you look at that, it is very knowledge-rich. It is not a requirement for a curriculum, it is not the national curriculum; it is just a model curriculum produced by these people with lots of experience in schools. It teaches them the staves, notation and vocabulary of music, and it also has lists of music that children really should have been introduced to. It is a very diverse range of music. There is a lot of classical Western tradition in there; there is some more popular music; there is jazz; and there is music from around the world. That is an example of the kind of thing: if you look at that list, you will see a very diverse range of music that those children



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will be introduced to, but you do it because you have this very knowledge-rich curriculum that is then introduced into schools.

A lot of work has gone into that, and that is the philosophy behind what I am saying: that if you can have that kind of curriculum, there is then scope and time. That curriculum is well sequenced. That is the other thing about a curriculum: it needs to be well sequenced and organised, so that time is not wasted and something builds upon something else. These are not things you can just deliver overnight into a school system, I am afraid, but that is the answer to your petitioners' question. That is how we deliver the objectives that are set out by the petitioners.

Chair: Thank you for the evidence you have given today. I think that petitioners will still be concerned that they are not clear on exactly how this is going to be delivered, so I do hope the Department will reflect further on the evidence we have taken and how Black and cultural diversity can be fully reflected in everybody's curriculum—not just the fortunate few, as you have referred to today—in the light of the petitions that have been started on this issue and the overwhelming response we have had to our survey from schools staff, who also want to teach a diverse curriculum and to be empowered, enabled and supported to do that within the framework they are working to.

Also, when schools reopen, we will be holding some deliberative sessions with students to help us better understand their experiences and what changes they feel they need to see in order to enable a diversified and decolonised curriculum. We will continue to feed that back in and inform this debate in Parliament, and reflect the views of petitioners and those who we know are following this debate very keenly. Thank you for your evidence today, Minister, and I think this discussion will continue, so continue to work with us.

Nick Gibb: Thank you very much. I look forward to reading your conclusions and participating in the debate further.

Chair: Thank you.