



Education Committee

22 July 2025

Professor Becky Francis CBE
By email

Subject: Curriculum and Assessment Review

Dear Professor Francis,

Thank you once again for giving evidence to our inquiry into the Curriculum and Assessment Review. As you begin drafting your final report for the Government, we wanted to share our reflections on the evidence we have heard and highlight the key themes that emerged from our sessions. We hope these insights will support your work and help shape a curriculum that is inclusive, future-facing, and fit for purpose.

We are aware that public and political discourse often conflates the national curriculum with the full educational experience. Tim Oates, Group Director of Assessment Research and Development at Cambridge University Press and Assessment and former Chair of the national curriculum review in 2010, emphasised to us that the national curriculum was not a curriculum in the traditional sense, but rather a succinct list of learning outcomes or goals: “it does not prescribe pedagogy, time allocation, or sequencing—those are left to schools and teachers”.¹ It is crucial that your Review sets out this clear distinction, as we recognise teachers and school leaders play a vital role in translating national goals into vital, lived experiences for pupils.²

In this light, the curriculum and assessment review assumes critical importance, not merely for its formal recommendations, but because it fundamentally shapes how schools interpret, prioritise, and operationalise the national curriculum. Without careful alignment and support, there is a significant risk that the intended aims of the curriculum will not be realised in practice.

Curriculum Overload and the Need for Breadth

We have heard that the presence of a well-constructed curriculum alone does not guarantee effective implementation in the classroom. The extent to which the curriculum is enacted depends on a range of additional factors, including accountability measures, assessment

¹ [Q4](#)

² [Q4](#)



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frameworks, inspection regimes, and performance targets. These elements significantly influence the priorities and decision-making of teachers and school leaders in their specific educational contexts and should be considered in any discussion on curriculum overload.

A consistent message we heard from witnesses was that the current curriculum is overcrowded.³ Darren Northcott, NASUWT cautioned, “the solution is not just taking the curriculum we have and chopping bits out of it here and there. It requires something a bit more fundamental.”⁴

There was strong support for a curriculum that makes space for the development of vital broader skills. For example:

- Natspec emphasised the importance of a curriculum that values “independence skills, social skills and becoming an active citizen.”⁵
- The Edge Foundation highlighted the need for flexibility pre-16 to allow exposure to vocational and technical subjects, such as design and technology, which foster problem-solving, resilience, and teamwork.⁶
- The British Chambers of Commerce explained that “rapid transformation in the skills landscape is not all about the tech, but about technical capability, human skills, communication, adaptability and problem-solving.”⁷
- You mentioned the importance of oracy in your evidence to the Committee, and we are pleased this is an area you are looking at closely.⁸

We recognise that the development of such skills will require the creation of space within the curriculum. However, we are persuaded that this is necessary to ensure the curriculum serves all learners and prepares them for a rapidly changing world, ensuring that young people can thrive in our modern economy.

Preparing for Future Skills Needs

We heard that employers increasingly require “emerging skills” – those not needed today but likely to be essential tomorrow.⁹ The curriculum must therefore equip young people with adaptable knowledge and transferable skills, rather than focusing solely on content that may become obsolete.

³ [Q10](#)

⁴ [Q11](#)

⁵ [Q76](#)

⁶ [Q1](#)

⁷ [Q31](#)

⁸ [Q302](#)

⁹ [Q39](#)



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A Curriculum for All Learners

We heard that the current curriculum does not work for every child. NASUWT told us it was “too rigid, too inflexible and does not allow for that tailoring and personalisation” needed for many children with SEND.¹⁰ Reflecting on the new requirement for every school to teach the curriculum to every pupil under law, ACSL noted that a vital test for any changes would be “Will that curriculum work for every young person?”.¹¹

We urge the Review to ensure that the proposed curriculum and assessment framework is inclusive by design and capable of meeting the needs of learners across the range of all abilities.

Assessment: Rigor Without Burden

While views varied on whether England has the most assessed system globally, there was broad agreement that the current burden of exams and assessments is problematic. Witnesses noted that students who struggle at GCSE often show signs of difficulty much earlier.⁷

Jill Duffy of OCR, explained that exam burden at GCSE was significantly higher than other competitive nations, with a student taking an average of 30 hours of exams.¹² We encourage the Review to advise Government on how to retain rigour while reducing unnecessary pressure on pupils and staff, particularly at GCSE. Assessment should serve learning, not distort it.

Rethinking English and Maths Resits

We heard repeatedly that the current approach to English and maths resits is not working for all pupils. Tom Middlehurst, ASCL, explained that “we have a system at the moment where if you do not achieve a grade 4 in English and maths, you are required to resit it endlessly until you might get to that grade 4 post-16”.¹³ Another witness put it: “We are in a constant loop.”¹⁴

We support high aspirations for all young people, but believe there must be more effective, supportive pathways to help them succeed in these essential subjects. GCSE grade 4 in English and mathematics remains a critical benchmark for progression in education and access to many employment opportunities. During our inquiry, particular concern was raised about the experience of students who miss this threshold. While some may be capable of achieving a pass with further support, others face repeated resits with little realistic prospect of success. For these students, the cycle of resits can be demoralising and counterproductive.

¹⁰ [Q20](#)

¹¹ [Q20](#)

¹² [Q8](#)

¹³ [Q17](#)

¹⁴ [Q76](#)



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Recent data from the Department for Education shows that a significant proportion of students continue to struggle with post-16 resits. In 2024, only 22.7% of students in England who retook GCSE English or maths post-16 achieved a grade 4 or above.¹⁵ This highlights the urgent need to reconsider the current approach.

We therefore urge consideration of more practical and applied alternatives in mathematics for students unlikely to reach Grade 4. Embedding applied English and Maths content within the curriculum for some vocational courses, combined with the development of qualifications with curriculum with a stronger emphasis on financial literacy and real-world numeracy could provide these learners with more relevant and empowering skills, better aligned with their future education, employment, and life needs.

Broad range of post-16 qualifications

The clear message that has come through our work on level 3 qualification reform and our Further Education and Skills inquiry is that students benefit from the availability of a broad and diverse range of post-16 qualifications. We know that the Curriculum and Assessment Review is looking carefully at post-16 pathways, but there remains uncertainty for students, colleges and providers around the long-term availability of level 3 qualifications that overlap with T Levels and that had previously been earmarked for defunding. Despite a temporary extension of funding until 2027, the sector remains in limbo, without the clarity it needs to plan ahead. We strongly recommend that the three-route qualification model (academic, applied and technical) should be retained. Alternatives to both A Levels and T Levels—including Applied General Qualifications—should remain a long-term option and students should be supported if they wish to take a combination of academic and vocational courses.

Teacher Agency and Curriculum Implementation

Tim Oates distinguished between the national curriculum and the school curriculum, arguing that teachers should be “curriculum makers.”¹⁶ However, he also noted that accountability, assessment, and inspection shape how teachers prioritise and deliver content.¹⁷ We believe that successful curriculum reform must be accompanied by investment in initial and continuous teacher training and support. As one witness put it: “We could have the best curriculum in the world, but if we do not have teachers that can teach it, quite frankly, there is no point.”¹⁸ Moreover, future-proofing the curriculum is not only a content issue but a pedagogical one. Teachers must be equipped to deliver knowledge and skills that may not yet exist.¹⁹

¹⁵ [Infographics for GCSE results, 2024 \(accessible\) - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁶ [Q4](#)

¹⁷ [Q4](#)

¹⁸ [Q3](#)

¹⁹ [Q253](#)



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Finally, we urge the Review to consider how to reduce the influence of high-stakes exams on curriculum content. Our evidence emphasised that tests should not determine the content of the curriculum, or limit children's access to learning and knowledge.

We wish you the very best as you finalise your report and look forward to reading your recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Helen Hayes".

Helen Hayes
Chair, Education Committee