

1. Curriculum reform

Disapplication of the National Curriculum from September 2013

This is a suspension of the content of the National Curriculum, not the subjects themselves, pending the introduction of a new curriculum framework. Whilst schools will still have to teach all national curriculum subjects, what they cover will be up to them. The intention is to help teachers to manage the transition from the old national curriculum to the new one.

Revised National Curriculum for Key Stages 1-3

The Government announced the structure of the new National Curriculum in September. The elements that require statutory force will come into effect for the majority of year groups from September 2014. For pupils in year 2 and year 6 the new English, mathematics and science programmes of study will be introduced from September 2015.

Key features:

- The national curriculum only applies to maintained schools - it does not apply to Academies and Free Schools.
- Schools should remember that the school curriculum comprises all learning and other experiences that each school plans for its pupils. The national curriculum forms just one part of the school curriculum.
- Schools are free to choose how they organise their school day, as long as the content of national curriculum programmes of study is taught to their pupils.
- Teachers should develop pupils' numeracy and mathematical reasoning in all subjects so that they understand and appreciate the importance of mathematics.
- Teachers should develop pupils' spoken language, reading, writing and vocabulary as integral aspects of the teaching of every subject.
- There is a heavy emphasis on the use of phonics in the early teaching of reading when children start school.

- By the end of each key stage, pupils are expected to know, apply and understand the matters, skills and processes specified in the relevant programme of study.
- All schools are also required to set out their school curriculum for English, mathematics and science on a year-by-year basis and make this information available online.

National Curriculum assessment:

- National curriculum levels will be removed and not replaced.
- Instead the new NC PoS set out what pupils should be taught by the end of each key stage.
- There will be no prescribed system for ongoing assessment and reporting. Schools will create or choose their own.
- There will be baseline testing, probably for five year olds but possibly at the end of KS1. A decision on this is still to be made.
- SATs at KS1 and KS2 will continue, but will be more demanding. The new versions will be used from summer 2016.

Further information at

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/249416/Curriculum_and_assessment_information_sheet.pdf

2. Qualifications reform

Changes to GCSEs

On 1 November 2013 Ofqual and DfE confirmed reforms to assessment and content for new GCSEs for first teaching in September 2015, with first exams in summer 2017 in the following subjects:

- English Language
- English Literature
- Maths

Key structural features of the new GCSEs include:

- A new grading scale that uses the numbers 1–9 to identify levels of performance, (with 9 being the top level). Where performance is below the minimum required to pass a GCSE, students will get a U.
- Tiering used only for subjects ‘where untiered papers will not allow students at the lower end of the ability range to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, or will not stretch the most able’. English literature and English language will be untiered. Maths will be tiered

with an 'improved overlapping tiers model', with a foundation tier covering grades 1-5 and a higher tier covering grades 4–9.

- Linear GCSEs, with assessment to be taken at the end of the course in the Summer. Re-sit opportunities in November for English language and maths only.
- Assessment by external exam only, except where non exam assessment is the only way to provide valid assessment of the skills required. Maths, English literature and English language to be externally assessed. English language to have a speaking assessment that will be reported separately.

The content of new GCSEs will include:

- A much larger, more 'challenging' GCSE in maths with more emphasis on solving problems which require multi-step solutions. There will be new topics such as ratio and proportions. Students will be expected to learn key mathematical formulae by heart.
- Students of the new GCSE in English language will be expected to read 'a wide range of texts' (there will be no set texts). There will be greater emphasis on accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- English literature, which is no longer compulsory, focuses on four areas of 'classic literature'. Unseen texts will be a new requirement.

The first assessment of new two-year GCSE courses that start in September 2015 will be in June 2017. New GCSEs in the sciences, history and geography, as well as languages, are scheduled for first teaching in September 2016 with first assessment in 2018. The content for these subjects is due to be published in 2014.

Further information at

<http://ofqual.gov.uk/news/design-details-of-new-gcses-in-england/>

AS and A levels

From September 2013, students will no longer be able to sit AS and A level exams in January. There will be no January exams in 2014 for students whether they are in their first or second year of A level studies. A new style of A level has been announced which, like the new GCSE, will be more exam-focused. The new A level will be linear, with all assessment at the end of two years of study. Although the AS level will be retained, it will be redesigned as a stand-alone qualification as opposed to a means of progression to A2.

The first of the new A levels will be introduced for teaching in schools from September 2015, with first exams being sat in 2017.

Ofqual is currently consulting on these proposals until 17 January 2014.

Further information at

<http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/a-level-regulatory-requirements-october-2013/>

3. School accountability measures

Primary assessment and accountability

The government carried out a consultation on primary assessment and accountability which finished on 11 October 2013. This follows publication of the new national curriculum programmes of study, and the announcement that the current system of levels will be removed and not replaced. The consultation sought views on how attainment in national curriculum tests should be measured and reported, how to create a baseline to measure pupils' progress, and proposals for how schools should be held to account, including through floor standards. The responses are currently being analysed.

Further information at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/new-national-curriculum-primary-assessment-and-accountability>

Reforming the accountability system for secondary schools

In October 2013 the government published its response to the consultation carried out earlier in the year. They announced a series of changes. From now on, there will be 4 key measures which must be published:

- pupils' progress across 8 subjects. So, a parent will see whether pupils at a school typically achieve 1 grade more than expected, or 1 grade less
- the average grade a pupil achieves in these same 'best 8' subjects. This will show, for example, that pupils in a particular school average a high B grade or a low D grade in their GCSEs
- the percentage of pupils achieving a C grade in English and maths
- the proportion of pupils gaining the EBacc, which will continue in its current form.

There will be a new way of measuring floor standards – a pupil's key stage 2 results, achieved at the end of primary school, will be used to set a reasonable expectation of what they should achieve at GCSE. There are also plans to include a destination measure to show the percentage of pupils who move on to further study or employment - including further training.

Further information at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/reforming-the-accountability-system-for-secondary-schools>

4. Implications; things to think about

NatSIP affiliates need to remain alert to these changes as this will be essential in whatever settings they work. The potential impact of the curriculum changes cannot be under-estimated especially through the increased emphasis on a knowledge-based curriculum and the removal of level descriptors. Whilst many children and young people with sensory impairments might benefit from certain aspects of these changes others will be more problematic for them and it is important to be aware of these and try to mitigate the effects wherever possible. Equality Impact assessments are always carried out on such proposals and many of them highlight possible disadvantages to certain groups. It is important that awareness of this is raised and that a strong voice is heard on behalf of candidates with sensory impairment. NatSIP affiliates are encouraged to respond to all these consultations and, where appropriate, contribute to responses made by NatSIP and specialist organisations such as BATOD and RNIB.

In response to potential disadvantages highlighted by impact assessments the Government often responds that reasonable adjustments such as rest breaks and extra time should be used. This is not always an adequate response and underlines the need for continuing dialogue with the Joint Council for Qualifications and Ofqual, undertaken regularly by some NatSIP affiliate organisations, such as RNIB and BATOD, to try to ensure that candidates for examinations with sensory impairment are not unfairly penalised by these changes.