

The GA's response to the Curriculum Reform Consultation

The secretary of state has asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to manage a public consultation on important changes to the [national curriculum](#).

This is a collaborative response by members of the Geographical Association. Members of the GA that have contributed include teachers, headteachers, lecturers, GA staff and consultants, LA representatives and members of the wider education authority.

Section 1: How the curriculum is organised

The Geographical Association agrees that the proposed curriculum organised into areas of learning will enable children to make links across the curriculum. Geography has always been used as a driver subject for a topic based approach, as the strength of the enquiry approach leads a learner led, question orientated focus to a topic. The terminology 'enquiry' should be found in more instances across this curriculum, advocating the discovery of answers stemming from the curiosity of the learner.

The Geographical Association already supports primary teachers through a strong CPD package, however all subject associations will need time and capacity to support their members in the roll out of this curriculum. All classroom teachers will need training and accessible forms of support in order to design and make the new curriculum: some of this should be whole school, so that teachers and school leaders are given broadly consistent messages. Schools need time to develop their planning and to have local experts to support them and engage in dialogue about their own curriculum. As the subjects are still split, but in a different way than the current curriculum, teachers still need to have support to bring the subjects together. ITT must provide training for new teachers to learn how to develop their own curriculum. This training and support must be sustained and high quality, in a similar way to the roll out of the Assessing Pupil Progress training taking place across counties at the present time: during this training Headteachers received the same training, then class teachers have had two initial days of hands on training, to be followed by county intervention throughout the first year of their new assessment strategy. This policy of local support, same messaging and extended training is vital to ensure that standards in all subjects are raised and not lowered. The subject associations may have a crucial role to play in supporting high quality, subject informed, localised curriculum making.

Schools require a wide range of curriculum models with which they can experiment with their own new curriculum. They require time, support and the freedom to experiment, utilising the encouragement and skills of local experts in curriculum design to ensure subject rigour and high standards.

Section 2: Essentials for learning and Life

This section does not look at the individual child and reverses the impact of personalised learning. The sections relating to Personal and emotional skills; and Social Skills are written

with one type of child in mind; not a child with ADHD, is Looked After, or find behaviour challenging. Although schools should obviously have high expectations of behaviour, morals and emotional wellbeing, this document should look at every child as an individual. Learning outside, working with maps, ICT, collaborating with groups, communities and friends can provide the opportunities for children to all thrive and succeed, and therefore more emphasis should be placed on these.

The language that is to be used in the final version of the 'Essentials for learning and life' should also be found within the Areas of Learning, so that practitioners start to see the essentials underpinning the whole curriculum. For example, 'work collaboratively towards common goals' should appear in the key skills section of the area of learning.

Many children learn best when they are active and learning outside. The essentials must therefore be well placed to develop all learners in order to be a more inclusive document. Schools must be encouraged to see their outdoor learning environment as a mirror of the indoor learning environment. Kinaesthetic learners need an active engaging curriculum to motivate their learning. Fieldwork and Outdoor learning should have a richer and deeper development within the essentials and the area of learning, including references to risk taking, collaboration, free play and residential experiences.

Good and Outstanding Schools use Geography to provide a subject base, reason and interest for children to use Literacy, Numeracy and ICT skills. Geography is a living subject, which is changing all of the time, involving the children in the changes that are taking place. Schools should be using real life local and global examples to lead their Literacy, Numeracy and ICT work, particularly in light of APP and the need for children to develop and show their skills independently.

Section 3: Areas of learning

The title of this area of learning 'Historical, Geographical and Social Understanding' is useful by noting the subjects incorporated within it.

The GA supports the three phases of learning. The Early Phase links well with the EYFS. However, there are parts of the early phase that need to be more challenging.

Explanatory texts are found to be useful however the language used must be carefully chosen. The choice of words to exemplify is vital to supporting teachers, for example, the use of the words digital mapping instead of GIS, this is more supportive of all teachers and makes this much more accessible to all. Map making, the use of maps and 'graphicacy' should be emphasised throughout, as essential elements to a high quality, challenging and relevant geography curriculum.

Sir Jim Rose has advocated throughout this review process that the curriculum should be relevant to the learners in their own area, and coming from their own personal curiosities. However, this is not emphasised in the area of learning, particularly in section E3- 'about the links between their locality and other places in the UK and beyond.' This section needs to

have a strong emphasis on the choice of place being relevant to the learners, cultures, religions, languages of the learners within the school. The curriculum advice should ensure the balance of localities to make sure that a range of different localities are explored.

The use of the word 'poverty' is not appropriate; and 'inequality and difference' should be used instead. Poverty provides too negative an approach to local and global issues and in this present form denotes financial poverty. 'Inequality and Difference' opens up a much more thorough and inclusive debate.

The focus of possible futures of the learners needs far more emphasis. Children should be learning from the present and thinking about possible futures for themselves and for other communities locally and globally. In a changing world, where climate will impact on the futures of the children learning within this proposed curriculum, environmental understanding and sustainability should play a pivotal and emphasised part in their learning. There should be no chance that this could possibly be missed by an inexperienced teacher.

CPD support will be required to help teachers understand and exemplify sections of the proposed curriculum that are complex and subject specific, for example, M8 'appreciate the relationship between the physical, built and economic environments.' The Geographical Association is ready to contribute to such professional support of primary teachers.

This area of learning requires awe and wonder to be an integral part of its design; many elements need to be more enticing to the teacher and to the learner. Terminology such as 'children should be taught' and 'find out' do not emphasise the excitement of a curriculum that can be evoked by the children 'discovering', 'exploring', 'investigating' and 'enquiring'. These words denote open ended approaches, enquiry and question based methods to curriculum development, which a thorough curriculum should emphasise.

To fully support this new area of learning many more cross curricular examples are required, including some across several areas of learning with emphasis on the connections between the subjects.

Section 5: Learners' needs and transition

Schools should be encouraged to work across years 6 and 7 in a collaborative way. Secondary schools must realise the breadth of titles that will have been encountered through the primary years. The Geographical Association's 'Making Geography Happen' project, to be launched on the web in 2009, may be developed in a manner that explicitly supports transition work.

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