

**Aims, Values and the Curriculum:
Initial Report on the meeting held at the House of Commons on 19th November 2024**



Fabian Education Policy Group

Abstract

This is an initial report on the meeting held at the House of Commons to discuss the aims and values that should underpin a revised curriculum for young people in England. It focuses on the outcomes of the discussion and debate on the evening of the event. The meeting was hosted by Catherine Atkinson MP and organised by the Fabian Education Policy Group. A full report that includes a summary of the inputs of the panel members will be included in Volume 1, Issue 2 of the FEFG Review.

The session was chaired by Professor Brian Hudson and the panel was made up of the following speakers: Mick Waters, Former Director of Curriculum at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA); Valerie Bossman-Quarshie, Vice-chair of Islington's Children's Scrutiny Committee and teacher; Dr. Tony Breslin, Director of Breslin Public Policy; Brian Matthews, teacher and lecturer at Goldsmiths and Kings College and Professor Sarah Younie, Chair of the International Council for the Education of Teachers (ICET) and MESHGuides representative on the UNESCO International Teacher Task Force panel.

There were over 150 attendees who applied to join the meeting and with written comments being received by around 80 people. There was a very positive feeling to the meeting which was lively and inclusive. There was a buzz in the room where it was evident participants were engaged in and thinking about the issues. The structure of the session involved brief presentations from the panel, followed by time for the participants to discuss their ideas and to record comments and feedback for the final report. This approach was very very well received by the participants.

Key points from speakers and the floor: The speakers and contributions from the floor addressed the issues from a wide variety of perspectives. There was considerable agreement although the terminology varied.

- 1)The present National Curriculum of England is content led with an emphasis on discrete subjects and norm-based assessment. It is leading to a significant proportion of pupils feeling an increased level of anxiety and fear of failure.
- 2)It is important that the National Curriculum has a clear set of aims. Ultimately, we need a curriculum that engenders and develops democracy and compassion. It should recognise all aptitudes and abilities. Assessment should be in line with the aims and involve more criteria referenced approaches.
- 3)Pupils should have a richer personal and social development programme including the development of the skills of collaboration, communication, critical thinking and creativity (the 4Cs). Also, ITE is hamstrung by Ofsted and can do little to address such learning. Pupil voice is important and should be valued more.
- 4)There should be a breadth of learning that values the arts and vocational learning with appropriate value placed on cognition and understanding rather than on just learning 'about'.
- 5)There is a lack of women's representation in elements of the current National Curriculum.
- 6)All pupils should engage with aspects of vocational, technical and professional learning.
- 7)The role of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) is important, but they are finding it difficult to help schools because of funding and the structure of education provision, especially for SEND. The involvement of LEAs is imperative in creating a cohesive and locally responsive education system with a curriculum that also reflects local concerns and needs.

8) There is a need to focus on the needs of Afro-Caribbean and White working-class boys with a curriculum that is relevant for them. The workforce needs to reflect the diverse nature of UK society with greater inclusion of black and ethnic minorities and genders.

9) Education is political because the National Curriculum does not support pupils developing the social skills necessary for a democracy, while reinforcing right-wing values.

10) Parents' partnerships are needed with school connectedness and a sense of belonging.

Recommendations:

1) Move to an aims-based curriculum with pupil-development and democracy at its heart. Look at the Labour NC of 2010 as a model. The curriculum should educate learners to become empathetic citizens.

2) Relationship building should be at the centre of the aims for the curriculum and be integral, not bolt-on. Include compassion and acceptance of diversity.

3) Learning to be based on social cognitive/constructivist learning theory, incorporating activities such as problem solving and investigations.

4) Introduce a curriculum that includes Arts and vocational aspects. Cross-curricular lessons, which would also include some Maths and English.

5) Wide range of types of assessment, including criterion referenced, to be used. All abilities and aptitudes need to be recognised.

6) Set up a *Qualifications and Curriculum Authority* type organisation.

7) Change ITE to prepare professional teachers, not deliverers, be reflective practitioners, critical reflectors, be evidence-based. Consider making teaching a Masters profession as in other countries and in line with Labour values under the previous Labour administration.

8) Trust teachers and educators to develop their practice so they are not denied the chance to use their professional judgement, their knowledge of their learners and their context to inspire learners rather than instruct using a prescribed set of lessons.

9) Introduce a Sure Start type intervention that works with pupils and parents.

10) Redesign accountability models to allow for positive reform and development of Ofsted and the promotion of creativity. Schools need to be bastions of democratic thinking

11) Understand all the elements that support ideas to introduce policies, processes, structures and curricula that defend democracy.

12) It is vital that there is large-scale change under Labour over a period time.

See Appendix for the views of the Fabian Education Policy Group.

Please contact any members of the organising team to share ideas and expertise.

Appendix

The Fabian Education Policy Group recommend that the principles and purpose of the curriculum can be clearly stated in relation to four areas:

Firstly, a clear statement of what our country sees as a good childhood and youth is vital. Within this statement we would expect there to be a strong commitment to well-being in the context of secure, free, responsible, happy individuals and communities.

Secondly, we recommend that the seven principles emphasized by Education Scotland in 2016 (<https://education.gov.scot/media/minlboum/cfe-statement.pdf>) should provide an overarching commitment to what the curriculum should be characterized by: i.e., challenge and enjoyment; breadth; progression; depth; personalization and choice; coherence; and, relevance.

Thirdly, we recommend that there should be an acceptance of the importance of the three main drivers of curriculum (i.e., the development of understanding across areas of knowledge; an objective led approach which allows for matters to do with citizenship, social justice, the economy and other matters to be fulfilled; and a commitment to child development which allows for personal growth).

Fourthly, we recommend establishing a curriculum that will enhance for all cognitive, affective, creative and practical knowledge, understanding, skills and dispositions. It will be vital to embrace the valuable approaches taken by others including the OECD who have called for an emphasis to be placed on the 4 Cs (i.e., critical thinking; collaboration; creativity and communication).

Finally, we recommend the establishment of a representative and authoritative body to oversee these developments in the future with a stature that is comparable with the former Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).