

Dear Professor Francis and members of the Review Panel,

**Call for a separate review of the Curriculum and Assessment in primary education**

We, as organizations and individuals associated with Primary Umbrella Group (PUG), with an interest and expertise in young children's education and the primary curriculum in particular, are very concerned at several aspects of the Curriculum and Assessment Review. PUG is a national forum for those concerned with primary and early years education. Currently some twenty-five organizations are represented, reflecting a very wide range of expertise in terms of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. PUG does not issue policy statements as a group, but co-ordinates responses such as these.

Put simply, the Interim Report seems to suggest that the current curriculum and assessment arrangements are working well in primary settings and therefore do not require significant change. We believe that this is not the case. On the contrary, we consider that, unless our concerns are addressed, this will prove to be a serious missed opportunity.

Key points that we wish to raise are that:

- the primary school curriculum is too narrow and prescriptive, especially in terms of how children are taught to read, and the tests that determine pupil progress focus too tightly on a very limited set of skills. The resulting undue emphasis on test preparation leaves little room for vital areas such as oracy, storytelling, the humanities, the arts, and Physical Education;
- the current emphasis on a 'knowledge-rich curriculum' is inappropriate for young children who need to develop a wide range of practical/procedural and personal/ interpersonal knowledge, skills and dispositions during their first years in school. This helps to support their social and emotional as well as cognitive development and lay the foundations for later success;
- a curriculum structured on discrete subjects neglects these issues. Young children learn best through a curriculum based on 'areas of learning' with relatively fluid boundaries, where knowledge, ways of working and understanding associated with different disciplines can be acquired in an integrated way;
- the overuse of mastery learning as the key metaphor for understanding how children learn too often maroons lower attaining learners in a 'catch-up' curriculum that prevents them from experiencing success through a broad, balanced and engaging curriculum. This is a social justice issue;
- the combination of high stakes assessment and an Inspection Framework based on subject deep dives creates downward pressure especially in Key Stage 1, leading teachers to teach in didactic ways that are not age appropriate, rather than build on the successful pedagogies associated with the Early Years Foundation Stage. In Key Stage 2, the curriculum often narrows significantly in order to prepare for SATs and other statutory assessments;

- the amount of content to be covered in the primary curriculum needs to be significantly reduced and some content updated to be more inclusive and future-focused.

We all want children to be literate and numerate but primary education is not just about preparation for secondary education. We need to be much more ambitious. We believe that an inclusive curriculum should be based on a set of aims which enable and encourage all children to thrive and develop a sense of agency, recognizing and seeking to minimize the barriers which children from disadvantaged groups face. The primary curriculum must be enjoyable and engaging, enabling children to be confident, curious and well-rounded individuals. This will help to provide a secure foundation for their future development as responsible, flexible and caring citizens of a democratic society.

Such an aim implies that the curriculum should be balanced and broadly-based, reflecting how young children learn best, through active experience in meaningful contexts. It must also be enabling for teachers so that they can exercise their professional judgement. We believe this will not lead to a decline in standards of attainment but will help to engage children with the fascination and joy of learning and to address some of the serious concerns about children's wellbeing. This is important not only in its own right but will prove cost-effective in the longer term, for instance by improving children's physical and mental health, making teaching and learning more inclusive and helping to motivate teachers and so increase teacher retention.

The fact that these issues have not yet been addressed in the Curriculum and Assessment Review seems largely to be the result of the terms of reference, the emphasis on the post-primary phases and the limited experience of primary education amongst members of the Review Panel. We believe that a detailed and specific review of the primary curriculum, based on wide consultation, is needed. We urge the Review Panel in the Final Report to recognize these concerns and to include a recommendation that the primary curriculum should be reviewed separately and in greater detail than has been possible in this Review.

We have listed below the organizations and individuals who support this statement, with links to their more detailed responses where appropriate. We would be happy to provide further evidence to support the views expressed here, either in person or in writing. For this, please contact Dr Tony Eaude, Chair of PUG on [tony@edperspectives.org.uk](mailto:tony@edperspectives.org.uk) or Robert Young, Secretary of PUG on [rmyoung1942@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:rmyoung1942@yahoo.co.uk)

7<sup>th</sup> August 2025

Signed by:

### **Organisations**

John Galloway, on behalf of the **Campaign for State Education (CASE)**.

Anjali Patel, Lead Advisory Teacher, on behalf of **Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE)**.

<https://clpe.org.uk/news/clpes-response-curriculum-and-assessment-review>

Melian Mansfield, Chair, on behalf of the **Early Childhood Forum**.

**Helen Hamlyn Centre for Pedagogy** (0 to 11 Years) ([HHCP](#)).

Dr. Tony Eaude, on behalf of **Humanities 20:20**.

[Submission to the Curriculum and Assessment Review from Humanities 20:20](#)

Dr. Andy Kemp, Chair of Council, and Sandi Atkinson, Chief Executive Officer, on behalf of **The Mathematical Association**.

*the joint Primary Group response of the Association of Teachers of Mathematics and Mathematical Association can be [found here](#).*

Jess Edwards, Chair, on behalf of **More Than A Score**.

Deborah Annetts, CEO, on behalf of the **Independent Society of Musicians**.

Mike Aylen and Robert Young, Chair and Secretary, on behalf of the **National Association for Primary Education**.

John Tierney, Director, on behalf of the **National Association for Therapeutic Education**.

[www.n-a-t-e.co.uk](http://www.n-a-t-e.co.uk)

Daniel Kebede, General Secretary, on behalf of the **National Education Union**.

Michele Gregson, General Secretary/CEO, on behalf of the **National Society for Education in Art & Design**.

Peter Cansell, on behalf of the **Oxford School of Thought**.

Dr. Viki Veale, Chair, and Wendy Scott OBE, Honorary President, **TACTYC, (Together And Committed To Young Children)**, the association for professional development in the Early Years.

[Rethinking the Primary Curriculum – A Call for Change](#)

Jo Tregenza, President, on behalf of **UK Literacy Association** and David Reedy, Past President and Trustee of UK Literacy Association.

### **Individuals (in a personal capacity)**

Dr. Sue Gifford, Emeritus Fellow, University of Roehampton.

Paul Latham, Independent Primary Education Adviser.

Gemma Moss, Professor of Literacy, Department of Leadership and Learning, UCL Institute of Education

Andrew Pollard, Emeritus Professor, Institute of Education, University College London.

Dr. Aimee Quickfall, Head of School – School of Education, Leeds Trinity University.

Alison Willmott, Education Consultant.