



Department  
for Education

**Consultation Response Form**

**Consultation closing date: 16 April 2013**  
**Your comments must reach us by that date.**

# **Reform of the National Curriculum in England**

## **Consultation Response Form**

**THIS FORM IS NOT INTERACTIVE. If you wish to respond electronically please use the online response facility available on the Department for Education e-consultation website (<http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations>).**

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes, primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

If you want all, or any part, of your response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it to be confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

The Department will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

**Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.**

Reason for confidentiality:

Names **Professor Robin Alexander**  
**Professor Neil Mercer**  
**Sir Jim Rose**

Organisation (if applicable)

Address: c/o University of Cambridge Faculty of Education  
184 Hills Road  
Cambridge CB2 8PQ

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the Public Communications Unit by e-mail: [consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk) or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the Department's ['Contact Us'](#) page.

Please tick one category that best describes you as a respondent

<input type="checkbox"/> Primary School	<input type="checkbox"/> Secondary School	<input type="checkbox"/> Special School
<input type="checkbox"/> Organisation representing school teachers	<input type="checkbox"/> Subject Association	<input type="checkbox"/> Parent
<input type="checkbox"/> Young Person	<input type="checkbox"/> Higher Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Further Education
<input type="checkbox"/> Academy	<input type="checkbox"/> Employer/Business Sector	<input type="checkbox"/> Local Authority
<input type="checkbox"/> Teacher	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other	

Please Specify:

Two of us work in universities. One of us an education consultant, formerly of HMI and Ofsted. Another is chair of a non-for-profit educational company.

Are you answering this consultation in response to particular subjects? Please tick all those that apply.

<input type="checkbox"/> English	<input type="checkbox"/> mathematics	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> art & design	<input type="checkbox"/> citizenship	<input type="checkbox"/> computing
<input type="checkbox"/> design & technology	<input type="checkbox"/> geography	<input type="checkbox"/> history
<input type="checkbox"/> languages	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> physical education
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not applicable		

**1 Do you have any comments on the proposed aims for the National Curriculum as a whole as set out in the framework document?**

Comments:

**2 Do you agree that instead of detailed subject-level aims we should free teachers to shape their own curriculum aims based on the content in the programmes of study?**

Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

### 3 Do you have any comments on the content set out in the draft programmes of study?

Comments:

In this submission we comment on one issue only: the treatment of spoken language in English and across the curriculum, a matter on which we have made several previous representations and about which we have been involved in discussions with ministers and DfE officials over several years.

Our concerns about the handling of spoken language in the proposals are summarised in a letter that we are sending to the Secretary of State at the same time as making this submission. The letter appears below. It will be noted that it refers to an earlier letter to the Secretary of State (14 August 2012) and to a keynote paper for a DfE seminar (20 February 2012). Members of DfE's National Curriculum Review team have copies of both documents, which should be treated as part of this submission.

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14 April 2013

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
Department for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London SW1P 3BT

Dear Secretary of State,

#### **Spoken language in the National Curriculum**

Individually and/or collectively, we have written to you several times during the past two years about the urgent need to improve the handling of spoken language in the National Curriculum and in schools generally.<sup>1</sup> Research evidence consistently shows that spoken language does not have the profile in English maintained schools that it requires or that it enjoys in many jurisdictions with which Britain competes; nor, all too frequently, is it used with the rigour necessary to realise its potential to maximise children's communicative capacities and raise their standards of attainment both in literacy and across the curriculum.

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<sup>1</sup> Robin Alexander to Secretary of State, 30.9.11; Secretary of State to Robin Alexander, 30.11.11; Robin Alexander to Secretary of State, 7.12.11; Robin Alexander to Minister of State for Schools, 23.2.12; Robin Alexander to Minister of State for Schools, 8.9.12; Robin Alexander, Neil Mercer and Jim Rose to Secretary of State, 14.8.12; Secretary of State to Robin Alexander, Neil Mercer and Jim Rose, 4.10.12.

As a result of our representations and the many contingent discussions with ministers and officials there have been two major developments. First, on 20 February 2012, DfE hosted an in-house seminar on Oracy, the National Curriculum and Educational Standards which was attended by the three of us, the previous Schools Minister and several others, with a videolink to one of the leading US researchers in this field. Second, we were invited to work with officials on the June 2012 pre-consultation draft of the National Curriculum to try to secure the improvements we believed were needed. At that stage, as we indicated in our letter to you of 14 August 2012, we were deeply concerned about the decision to drop spoken language as a separate programme of study within English and about the failure to show how high quality talk can and should permeate the teaching of both literacy and other subjects. The issue, quite simply, was standards, and because the need to raise standards was high on your own list of priorities we were optimistic that the long-standing and conclusive record of research would at last be heeded and acted upon.

In this matter we have had some success, and we wish to record our appreciation of the efforts of your officials to accommodate our concerns during the preparation of the National Curriculum proposals on which public consultation ends on 16 April.

However, we regret to tell you that the modifications do not go nearly far enough. Although there is a general statement about the importance of spoken language across the curriculum, this is followed through to a significant degree only in English, while in relation to the non-core subjects it receives very little if any attention at all. Even more serious, our recommendation to reinstate and upgrade spoken language as a distinctive strand in the programme of study for English has not been acted on. We see this removal as a retrograde step which will frustrate two of the government's key aims: (i) to raise standards and (ii) to close the gap between disadvantaged children and the rest.

It is generally acknowledged that many children do not grow up in homes where the effective use of spoken English, for a range of purposes, is appreciated, demonstrated or encouraged. This is not confined to children for whom English is a second language. For all such children, school may be their only hope for developing a suitable repertoire of spoken language skills. Effective ways of teaching those skills have been developed, and their value for developing children's ability to use talk confidently to think, learn, reason, discuss, debate, present, explain and work with others in solving problems has been clearly demonstrated. These are the skills that employers regularly say they wish to find in new recruits and that are given high value and prominence in Britain's public schools and universities. But employers and universities also regularly claim that many state-educated recruits are inarticulate and lack the ability to use the various spoken language registers which are essential for effective study and employment.

By removing the clear imperative for the teaching of spoken language from the English curriculum, the government is implicitly telling teachers that they do not need to teach children how to develop and use spoken language and that its importance resides exclusively in its contribution to reading and writing. The government's decision also sends the unfortunate signal to employers and universities that their recurrent concerns on this matter require no response. We readily acknowledge, of course, that spoken language is the bedrock on which reading and writing are founded, including crucial aspects such as building phonological awareness and sounding out and blending phonemes. Further, it is irrefutable that building vocabulary through the discussion of reading, and by reading widely, are essential if pupils are to achieve the looked-for standards of literacy. But, as we argued in our letter of 14 August 2012, the knowledge, understanding and skill that will enable pupils to use spoken English with the fluency and flexibility needed for learning, employment and life require that schools should also attend to talk in its own terms.

As that letter also emphasised, we are not arguing for what a previous minister called 'idle chatter' and we neither assert nor believe that any talk will do. On the contrary, we argue for a content-based,

purposive and structured approach to teaching children how to use spoken English to increase their knowledge, understanding and skill in relation to worthwhile curricular content. For that reason, we have sometimes had to defend our position against those who claim that what we advocate is an insult to working class culture and an unwarranted imposition of middle class values. Our rejoinder is that such teaching may represent some children's only hope for social mobility and full participation in a democratic society. Further, as the evidence summarised at the DfE February 2012 seminar showed, the link between high quality talk and tested standards in literacy, numeracy and science is irrefutable. We hope that both messages, and our own position in relation to them, are absolutely clear.

This matter is of supreme importance for the quality and standards of public education. We wish to see spoken language reinstated within English and for its profile in all other subjects to be greatly enhanced. However, if in spite of the representations of ourselves and others on this matter – for we understand that many responses to your National Curriculum proposals have expressed similar concern – you are unwilling to accept the changes we believe are needed, then we have indicated to your officials that we are prepared to work with them to produce a third appendix, to accompany those already published on spelling and grammar/punctuation, which would deal with spoken language. The spoken language appendix, which we would prefer to have statutory force but which could conceivably be non-statutory, would aim to pull together in a coherent way the essentials of what is required at each key stage to guide and support schools and teacher educators to raise the standards of spoken language, and hence of pupil engagement and attainment.

For the additional information that they provide, we enclose our letter of 14 August 2012 and the keynote paper for the February 2012 DfE seminar, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



pp Professor Robin Alexander, Professor Neil Mercer and Sir Jim Rose

cc Elizabeth Truss MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Education and Childcare  
Jane Hough, Jim Magee, Stefano Pozzi and Jacquie Spatcher, DfE

**4 Does the content set out in the draft programmes of study represent a sufficiently ambitious level of challenge for pupils at each key stage?**

Sufficiently ambitious

Not sufficiently ambitious

Not sure

Comments:

**5 Do you have any comments on the proposed wording of the attainment targets?**

Comments:

**6 Do you agree that the draft programmes of study provide for effective progression between the key stages?**

Agree

Disagree

Not sure



Comments:

**7 Do you agree that we should change the subject information and communication technology to computing, to reflect the content of the new programmes of study?**

Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

**8 Does the new National Curriculum embody an expectation of higher standards for all children?**

Yes

No

Not sure

Comments:

**9 What impact - either positive or negative - will our proposals have on the 'protected characteristic' groups?**

Comments:

**10 To what extent will the new National Curriculum make clear to parents what their children should be learning at each stage of their education?**

Comments:

**11 What key factors will affect schools' ability to implement the new National Curriculum successfully from September 2014?**

Comments:

**12 Who is best placed to support schools and/or develop resources that schools will need to teach the new National Curriculum?**

Comments:

**13 Do you agree that we should amend the legislation to disapply the National Curriculum programmes of study, attainment targets and statutory assessment arrangements, as set out in section 12 of the consultation document?**

Agree

Disagree

Not sure

Comments:

**14 Do you have any other comments you would like to make about the proposals in this consultation?**

Comments:

**15 Please let us have your views on responding to this consultation (e.g. the number and type of questions, whether it was easy to find, understand, complete etc.)**

Comments:

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

**Please acknowledge this reply**

**E-mail address for acknowledgement:** rja40@cam.ac.uk

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Here at the Department for Education we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
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All DfE public consultations are required to meet the Cabinet Office [Principles on Consultation](#)

The key Consultation Principles are:

- departments will follow a range of timescales rather than defaulting to a 12-week period, particularly where extensive engagement has occurred before
- departments will need to give more thought to how they engage with and consult with those who are affected
- consultation should be 'digital by default', but other forms should be used where these are needed to reach the groups affected by a policy; and
- the principles of the Compact between government and the voluntary and community sector will continue to be respected.

Responses should be completed on-line or emailed to the relevant consultation email box. However, if you have any comments on how DfE consultations are conducted, please contact Carole Edge, DfE Consultation Coordinator, tel: 0370 000 2288 / email: [carole.edge@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:carole.edge@education.gsi.gov.uk)

**Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.**

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 16 April 2013

Send by post to:

Consultation Unit,  
Area 1c,  
Castle View House,  
East Lane,  
Runcorn,  
Cheshire,  
WA7 2GJ.

Send by e-mail to: [NationalCurriculum.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:NationalCurriculum.CONULTATION@education.gsi.gov.uk)