Response ID ANON-B1Q8-JJAC-M

Submitted to Curriculum and Assessment Review
Submitted on 2024-11-22 14:58:46

Foreword from the Review Chair

Background to the Review

Why does the Review matter?

What is in scope of the Review?

About this call for evidence

Who is this call for evidence for?

Section 1: About you

1 Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

Section 1: About you

3 If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, which of the below best describes which part of the sector your organisation represents? [If more than one applies, please select the one that you think is most important to understanding your consultation response.]

Other (please describe)

Please describe:
British Council

4 What is the name of your organisation?

Organisation name:
British Council

5 What is your role within the organisation?

Job role:

School Adviser/lead for Languages in the UK

Section 1: About you

6 What is your name?

Name:
Vicky Gough

7 What is your email address?[Please note: If you are willing to be contacted about your submission, please provide your email address. You do not have to give your email address, and your views will be considered whether or not you provide this.]

Email address:
vicky.gough@britishcouncil.org

8 Are you happy to be contacted directly about your response?[Please note: The Review may wish to contact you directly about your responses to help our understanding of the issues. If we do, we will use the email address you have given above.]

Yes

9 Would you like us to keep your responses confidential?

No

Reason for confidentiality:

Definitions

Section 2: General views on curriculum, assessment, and qualifications pathways

10 What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways are working well to support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

What is working well?:

11 What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways should be targeted for improvements to better support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

What should be improved?:

1 - Modern Foreign Languages including:

Perceived harsh grading for languages

Availability of learning opportunities and qualifications of Home, Heritage and Community languages

Transitions between primary, secondary and further/tertiary education and work

2 – the status of international opportunities and experiences across the curriculum including digital and face to face opportunities to engage with peers from other countries.

Harsh grading for languages at GCSE and A Level

Despite the adjustments made in intercomparability for French and German in 2019, there is still empirical evidence that languages are more harshly graded than other subjects. FFT Education data lab used 2023 Key Stage 4 data from the National Pupil Database related to pupils in state-funded mainstream schools.

Pupils' results in French, German and Spanish were compared with their results in English language and mathematics. Most pupils who enter a GCSE in languages also entered a GCSE in English and mathematics. There were 117,000 entries in French, 31,000 in German and 111,000 in Spanish.

The graph retrieved from FFT education datalab illustrates the index of grade severity comparing grades achieved in French, German and Spanish to the average grade of the same set of pupils in English language and mathematics. It analyses the mean GCSE grades from the cohorts of 2019 and 2023.

https://ffteducationdatalab.org.uk/2024/04/languages-are-still-harshly-graded-at-gcse/

While harsh grading continues, attitudes towards languages from pupils and their parents will discourage increased uptake.

Further evidence of harsh grading through rigorous longitudinal analysis by David Blow, former executive head of The Ashcombe School, a Language College and ALL Fellow can be found here:

https://all-london.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Languages-Today-severe-grading-article-Winter-23-extra-for-sharing.pdf

Expressive Arts

The expressive arts support a broad and balanced curriculum. They:

teach children to work, alone and together with others, to investigate, develop, interpret and communicate their ideas and understandings

offer a wide range of genres, media and platforms to learn about the world, the diverse peoples who call England their home and the relationships between people and other living things provide a pathway through schooling which can lead to further education and work.

Additionally, arts learning has a range of additional benefits which include self-belief, voice and agency, self-discipline, belonging, wellbeing, collaboration and team work. Large-scale studies also point strongly to the arts, and arts subjects, supporting active civic engagement.

Supporting Evidence: https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/evidence-bank/

Earlier this year, UNESCO published a Framework for Culture and Arts Education that stresses: The critical need to enable all learners to fully benefit from the opportunities of culture and education through inclusive access to quality education, respecting and engaging with the diversity of peoples and cultures as a positive and transformative force, and expanding sustainable lifestyles

Across the four nations of the UK, through a recent British Council research report to be published in December 2024, we heard from arts and cultural organisations who are enabling young people to develop their creative selves, and have a stake in their cultural lives, despite the ongoing effects of austerity. Alongside equality of access, organisations and young people told us that they are dealing with significant mental health issues (including after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic), a sense of helplessness in the face of seemingly never-ending national and global crises, and a need to equip themselves for a rapidly shifting workforce of the future.

The innovative and effective practice that we saw had several common features:

Placing creativity at the centre – enabling multiple ways for young people to be creative, individually and collaboratively

Co-creating with young people – expert facilitators and artists worked with and alongside young people in designing projects and processes

Being flexible and responsive to young people's needs – understanding the multiple ways that young people's lives can be complex and responding creatively to that

Establishing mutual trust and respect – recognising young people's agency as learners, artists and citizens (all at the same time)

Enabling appropriate development – recognising that each young person's potential and progression journeys are unique and supporting them in these individual journeys

International working could enhance young people's motivation to use artistic and creative interventions as a form of activism. While in some cases this often has a local focus, there is scope to develop a global perspective that could influence the motivation and practice of young people through international connections.

UK funders indicated that they could see an interesting role for British Council to support and develop comparative frameworks for cultural education provision that could enable young people themselves to connect and exchange experiences and ideas. This could help to develop practice across countries, connect into existing and developing frameworks (e.g., the recent UNESCO arts education framework).

Enabling young people and the organisations who support them to connect in this way will likely aid understanding of cultural specificity and difference, as well as shared experience in how creativity and culture is being used to support young people to articulate and deal with issues that affect them.

Alongside more policy-focused discussions on cultural education, there is a need for organisations and practitioners to be supported to come together and share their educational practice.

This new British Council research presents a fraction of the innovative practice currently taking place across the UK, and there is a need for strategic bodies to provide further forums for people to share their practice in safe and supportive ways. It was clearly stated that this would be welcomed within and across the four UK nations, as well as with international stakeholders and peers.

UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education
https://www.unesco.org/en/wccae2024-framework-consultation#:~:text=The%20UNESCO%20Framework%20on%20Culture,development%20of%20individuals%20

Section 3: Social justice and inclusion

12 In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation (class ceilings) for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage?

Barriers for socioeconomically disadvantaged:

From the Language Trends England 2024 research data set

https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/language-trends-england-2024 we can see differences in access and participation for languages between schools with pupils from varying social backgrounds:

Secondary schools in Quintile 5 (i.e., with a Free School Meals indicator of 35% and above), are twice as likely compared to Quintile 1 school (i.e., with a Free School Meals indicator of 12.5% or less) to report that fewer pupils are taking a language for GCSE than before.

Secondary Schools in Quintile 5 are more likely to devote less than two hours per week to language learning in Year 7 whereas school in Quintile 1 are more likely to devote more than two hours per week to language learning, with a significant majority devoting more than three hours per week.

Many children from lower socio-economic backgrounds go on to Further Education. The British Academy report (link below) provides good evidence that progression pathways involving languages in the vocational space are not available in England:
https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/languages-provision-in-uk-further-education

Investment and incentives to language learning are needed to reverse this trend. For example, an expansion of the Language Hubs programme with Hubs focused on schools with high disadvantage, accountability measures that support language learning.

Motivation for languages through international work including through assistants, partnerships and visits

Pupils need intrinsic motivation for language learning, this might come from good teaching enabling good progress, but they also need to develop a love of languages. A powerful way of doing this is through providing authentic experiences to use and to hear languages.

Visits, exchanges and contacts with native speakers can be very motivating and inspire young people to fall in love with languages. In a survey carried out by the British Council among university language students, almost two thirds (62%) said an international exchange influenced their decision to do a language degree. https://www.britishcouncil.org/contact/press/british-council-says-bring-back-school-exchanges

Visits specifically can also have other important outcomes for pupils

“A school exchange programme may have a number of potential benefits, including expanding the intercultural awareness of pupils and supporting their engagement with the curriculum … Teachers and pupils reported an increase in pupils’ intercultural outlook, confidence with and tolerance of other cultures, and resilience.” Full evaluation report here:
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/international-school-exchanges

Having international assistants from another country in the classroom is a powerful way to bring an international aspect to the education of young people and support language learning and appreciation of other cultures. The Language Assistants programme has been running for 120 years across the 4 countries of the UK with 250,000 children benefitting each year. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints – in particular in schools with higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage, the number of schools taking on an assistant is declining. For example, only independent schools in Scotland have a language assistant and there are challenges in the other three countries of the UK.
https://www.britishcouncil.org/school-resources/employ-language-assistant

The review of schools hosting a Language Assistant in 23/24 showed;

97% of MLA host institutions in England have rated the performance of their language assistant(s) so far as Excellent or Good and have stated that their assistant(s) meet their expectations in terms of their level of English, motivation, previous experience and teaching ability.

“MLA 1 has personal traits which lend themselves to making her a good teacher, she is kind, empathetic, enthusiastic and encouraging. Her subject knowledge is excellent and her expectations of the students abilities and efforts are in line with expectation - she encourages them and supports them when they find the tasks challenging and does not just expect them to know things and to get on with it. The students have built very positive relationships with her, they are respectful and see her as a valued member of the team, with whom they can learn a lot and build their language confidence.”

“MLA 2 is very quick to take the initiative. She finds solutions to problems and deals with them effectively. She is confident when working with groups of

children and is pro-active when planning for them. She also identifies misconceptions and reacts to them appropriately."

"MLA 3 has been a key support to both the students and the staff in the department. Students always feel more confident after they have practised their speaking skills with David in lessons and he always gives them both verbal and written feedback in the same format the exam board mark speaking exams. He's learnt to assess students with accuracy and is confident with giving feedback. He always goes over and beyond to help the team and the students. Here are just some of the extra tasks he has carried out with such enthusiasm and passion: - designed a 10-page Spanish newsletter both in Spanish and English - made several target language classroom displays - produced a very interesting Spanish/Latin American men's and women's football display for the corridor - supported students during the revision sessions run during the half-term holidays - designed and produced keyring rewards for students - he's in charge of the 'Students of the Month' rewards and sends postcards home on behalf of the teachers. He's always on time and very reliable and always keen to do more. He's supported the school hugely in building cultural capital. He's a real asset to the department and school and we wish we could keep him long-term."

"MLA 4 is amazing! She has fitted in really well and she has built a good relationship with both staff and students. She is adaptable and keen to take on whatever task we need."

Unfortunately, these kinds of experiences are in decline. From Language Trends 24 we can see that primary schools' international engagement has declined with 46 % of schools reporting no international activity in 2018 and 66% reporting no international activity in 2024. (For secondary schools the numbers with no international engagement have increased from 11% in 2018 to 36% in 2024)

This adversely affects disadvantaged young people, who may not have access to overseas visits or native speakers outside of school.

Solutions

1 - continue and develop the Turing programme – especially the reciprocal links for inward visits to the UK,

2 - consider rejoining the EU Etwinning https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/etwinning programme that allows teachers and pupils to connect digitally through a safe platform.

3 - Consider subsidising the costs of having a language assistant in a school – in particular in schools with higher levels of social-economic disadvantage.

4 – re-consider incentives and the status of languages in accountability measures

5 - Messages to heads and senior leaders around importance of authentic experiences in language learning for motivation, progress and cultural experiences.

Languages at A Level

In Language Trends https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/language-trends-england-2024 teachers consistently report that post-16 languages provision being discouraged by school finances setting minimum group sizes. The data show that there are less than ten pupils in Years 12 and 13 in over half of responding state secondary schools with post-16 provision. Classes do not run in nearly two-fifths of state schools when only a few pupils wish to study a language post-16. A practical solution might be to build National Consortia able to offer live language teaching and learning and core content online n a range of languages, that can be wholly delivered online and/or supported online by a professional with teachers in school (who might teach a different language) providing in class support.

There are examples of places that have used remote teaching. For example, Ceibal en Inglés is a programme designed to teach English to children in state schools in Uruguay. The British Council has collaborated in this innovative initiative with Ceibal since 2012, playing a crucial role in transforming the educational landscape in Uruguay over the past decade.

With a positive impact on over 280,000 children in state schools, the programme has effectively addressed the shortage of English teachers in the country through video conferencing.

P10 Remote language teaching has the potential to create a positive impact on education, especially in contexts where there is a shortage of teachers. Although there is little evidence to suggest that remote language teaching per se leads to improvements in learning outcomes when compared to face-to-face classroom teaching, it is, however, a powerful enabler of learning.

https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Innovations%20in%20Education%20-%20Remote%20Teaching-V8_1-164_WEB.pdf

Plan Ceibal - Remote Teaching into Uruguayan public schools | British Council

Higher Education working in partnership with Academies to provide A Level solutions

The Reach Academy in Hounslow has developed a partnership with Royal Holloway University to provide a 'languages for all' solution to overcome the difficulty of small groups becoming unviable for schools to continue the offer of languages at A-Level. It also provides access to a wider range of languages. Groups of learners from different schools work online supported by the University to complete their A-level studies.
https://www.royalholloway.ac.uk/about-us/news/languages-for-all-scheme-to-encourage-school-pupils-to-take-up-a-level-languages/

13 In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation which may disproportionately impact pupils based on other characteristics (e.g. disability, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion or belief etc.)

Barriers based on protected characteristics:

(NB the protected characteristic referred to in the question is sex, rather than gender)

Controlling for a range of factors including disadvantage and prior attainment, girls are more than twice (2.17 times) as likely as boys to enter and achieve at least a grade 4 in a language GCSE according to an EPI/British Council report. This was a stronger predictor than whether or not the pupil was identified as disadvantaged in terms of their eligibility for free school meals. A pupil who was not identified as disadvantaged is 1.75 times as likely as a disadvantaged pupil to achieve a grade 4. There is a substantial and persistent gender gap in EBacc language entry of between ten and twelve percentage points. This is in clear contrast with the other four EBacc subject areas where gender gaps are negligible in terms of entry.

https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/boys-language-gcse

Expressive Arts

At an international level The UN Pact for the Future focuses on meaningful youth participation, stating explicitly that: We can only meet the needs and aspirations of all young people if we systematically listen to them, work with them and provide them with meaningful opportunities to shape the future. The Pact recognises that the decisions made today will directly impact younger generations and those yet to be born. This approach sets a framework for institutionalising youth engagement in policy-making at both national and global levels. The Declaration on Future Generations highlights this intergenerational responsibility to ensure future generations inherit a just, peaceful, and sustainable world. This builds from ongoing multilateral commitments to enhance and support cultural participation and freedom of expression for all, particularly those at risk of marginalisation and exclusion such as the UNESCO-MONDIACULT 2022 Declaration

In the Report Card, CLA has analysed the difference in arts access between state and independent schools with data / evidence of an 'enrichment gap,' with young people from wealthier backgrounds having far greater participation in the expressive arts – in and out of school – compared to their peers from lower-income backgrounds. The commonplace arts prerogative within the independent sector makes the arts offer within state schools a social justice entitlement issue.

As a recent Institute of Fiscal Studies report on private schools and inequality states, 'The greatest schooling inequality by a very long distance lies in the resources gap between the private (fee-paying) and state sectors. With access limited by ability to pay, there exists a stark socio-economic segmentation of pupils between the sectors, yielding in effect a two-tier system.'

Sutton Trust analysis (presented in the CLA Report Card) shows that A-Level results in 2023 reveal a worsening attainment gap and widening regional inequalities.

The consequences of disadvantage: Evidence from FFT Education Datalab shows that one in five disadvantaged pupils are suspended, the majority in Years 8, 9 and 10. Expressive arts opportunities and experiences might offer ways of to make school a better experience for some of these children.

Wellbeing: The expressive arts can be a way to address the social and emotional health of students. CLA Report Card highlights the need for all schools to

be resourced to ensure access to high-quality Arts and cultural enrichment as a universal entitlement.

Maintaining and expanding the arts pathway in schools is crucial for diversity in the creative workforce. School arts curriculum and qualification frameworks matter for industry and employers – in and beyond the creative sector – as well as for young people.

Supporting Evidence

Cultural Learning Alliance Report Card 2024 culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/CLA-2024-Annual-Report-Card.pdf

14 In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers in continuing to improve attainment, progress, access or participation for learners with SEND?

Barriers based on SEND:

15 In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any enablers that support attainment, progress, access or participation for the groups listed above? [e.g. socioeconomically disadvantaged young people, pupils with SEND, pupils who are otherwise vulnerable, and young people with protected characteristics]

Enablers:

Section 4: Ensuring an excellent foundation in maths and English

16 To what extent does the content of the national curriculum at primary level (key stages 1 and 2) enable pupils to gain an excellent foundation in a) English and b) maths? Are there ways in which the content could change to better support this aim? [Please note, we invite views specifically on transitions between key stages in section 9.]

English and maths - primary content:

17 To what extent do the English and maths primary assessments* support pupils to gain an excellent foundation in these key subjects? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support this aim? *These include SATs at the end of key stage 2, the phonics screening check and the multiplication tables check.

English and maths - primary assessment:

18 To what extent does the content of the a) English and b) maths national curriculum at secondary level (key stages 3 and 4) equip pupils with the knowledge and skills they need for life and further study? Are there ways in which the content could change to better support this aim?

English and maths - secondary content:

19 To what extent do the current maths and English qualifications at a) pre-16 and b) 16-19 support pupils and learners to gain, and adequately demonstrate that they have achieved, the skills and knowledge they need? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support these outcomes?

English and maths - qualifications:

20 How can we better support learners who do not achieve level 2 in English and maths by 16 to learn what they need to thrive as citizens in work and life? In particular, do we have the right qualifications at level 2 for these 16-19 learners (including the maths and English study requirement)?

Support for learners who do not achieve level 2 by 16:

21 Are there any particular challenges with regard to the English and maths a) curricula and b) assessment for learners in need of additional support (e.g. learners with SEND, socioeconomic disadvantage, English as an additional language (EAL))? Are there any changes you would suggest to overcome these challenges?

Challenges with curricula and assessment - changes to overcome these:

Section 5: Curriculum and qualification content

22 Are there particular curriculum or qualifications subjects* where: a) there is too much content; not enough content; or content is missing; b) the content is out-of-date; c) the content is unhelpfully sequenced (for example to support good curriculum design or pedagogy);d) there is a need for greater flexibility (for example to provide the space for teachers to develop and adapt content)?Please provide detail on specific key stages where appropriate.*This includes both qualifications where the government sets content nationally, and anywhere the content is currently set by awarding organisations.

Subject content:

23 Are there particular changes that could be made to ensure the curriculum (including qualification content) is more diverse and representative of society?

Changes to ensure curriculum is more diverse and representative of society:

24 To what extent does the current curriculum (including qualification content) support students to positively engage with, be knowledgeable about, and respect, others? Are there elements that could be improved?

Respect for others:

25 In which ways does the current primary curriculum support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for life and further study, and what could we change to better support this?

Primary - skills and knowledge needed for life and further study:

26 In which ways do the current secondary curriculum and qualification pathways support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work, and what could we change to better support this?

Secondary - skills and knowledge for life and further study:

27 In which ways do the current qualification pathways and content at 16-19 support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work, and what could we change to better support this?

16-19 - skills and knowledge for life and further study:

In Language Trends https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-insight/language-trends-england-2024 teachers consistently report that post-16 languages provision being discouraged by school finances setting minimum group sizes. The data show that there are less than ten pupils in Years 12 and 13 in over half of responding state secondary schools with post-16 provision. Classes do not run in nearly two-fifths of state schools when only a few pupils wish to study a language post-16. A practical solution might be to build National Consortia able to offer core content online in a range of languages, that can be supported by teachers in school (who might teach a different language)

There are examples of places that have used remote teaching. For example, Ceibal en Inglés is a programme designed to teach English to children in state schools in Uruguay. The British Council has collaborated in this innovative initiative with Ceibal since 2012, playing a crucial role in transforming the educational landscape in Uruguay over the past decade.

With a positive impact on over 280,000 children in state schools, the programme has effectively addressed the shortage of English teachers in the country through video conferencing.

P10 Remote language teaching has the potential to create a positive impact on education, especially in contexts where there is a shortage of teachers. Although there is little evidence to suggest that remote language teaching per se leads to improvements in learning outcomes when compared to face-to-face classroom teaching, it is, however, a powerful enabler of learning.

https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/Innovations%20in%20Education%20-%20Remote%20Teaching-V8_1-164_WEB.pdf

https://www.britishcouncil.uy/en/programmes/education/ceibal-en-ingles

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

28 To what extent does the current primary curriculum support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?

primary - broad and balanced:

29 To what extent do the current secondary curriculum and, qualifications pathways support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?

secondary - broad and balanced:

Motivation for languages through international work including through assistants, partnerships and visits

Pupils need intrinsic motivation for language learning, this might come from good teaching enabling good progress, but they also need to develop a love of languages. A powerful way of doing this is through providing authentic experiences to use and to hear languages.

Visits, exchanges and contacts with native speakers can be very motivating and inspire young people to fall in love with languages. In a survey carried out by the British Council among university language students, almost two thirds (62%) said an international exchange influenced their decision to do a language degree. https://www.britishcouncil.org/contact/press/british-council-says-bring-back-school-exchanges

Visits specifically can also have other important outcomes for pupils

“A school exchange programme may have a number of potential benefits, including expanding the intercultural awareness of pupils and supporting their engagement with the curriculum … Teachers and pupils reported an increase in pupils’ intercultural outlook, confidence with and tolerance of other cultures, and resilience.” Full evaluation report here:
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/international-school-exchanges

Having international assistants from another country in the classroom is a long and powerful way to bring an international aspect to the education of young people and support language learning and appreciation of other cultures. The Language Assistants programme has been running for 120 years across the 4 countries of the UK with 250,000 children benefitting each year. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints – in particular in schools with higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage, the number of schools taking on an assistant is declining. For example, only independent schools in Scotland have a language assistant and there are challenges in the other three countries of the UK.
https://www.britishcouncil.org/school-resources/employ-language-assistant

The review of schools hosting a Language Assistant in 23/24 showed;

97% of MLA host institutions in England have rated the performance of their language assistant(s) so far as Excellent or Good and have stated that their assistant(s) meet their expectations in terms of their level of English, motivation, previous experience and teaching ability.

“MLA 1 has personal traits which lend themselves to making her a good teacher, she is kind, empathetic, enthusiastic and encouraging. Her subject knowledge is excellent and her expectations of the students abilities and efforts are in line with expectation - she encourages them and supports them when they find the tasks challenging and does not just expect them to know things and to get on with it. The students have built very positive relationships with her, they are respectful and see her as a valued member of the team, with whom they can learn a lot and build their language confidence.”

“MLA 2 is very quick to take the initiative. She finds solutions to problems and deals with them effectively. She is confident when working with groups of children and is pro-active when planning for them. She also identifies misconceptions and reacts to them appropriately.”

“MLA 3 has been a key support to both the students and the staff in the department. Students always feel more confident after they have practised their speaking skills with David in lessons and he always gives them both verbal and written feedback in the same format the exam board mark speaking exams. He’s learnt to assess students with accuracy and is confident with giving feedback. He always goes over and beyond to help the team and the students. Here are just some of the extra tasks he has carried out with such enthusiasm and passion: - designed a 10-page Spanish newsletter both in Spanish and English - made several target language classroom displays - produced a very interesting Spanish/Latin American men’s and women’s football display for the corridor - supported students during the revision sessions run during the half-term holidays - designed and produced keyring rewards for students - he’s in charge of the ‘Students of the Month’ rewards and sends postcards home on behalf of the teachers. He’s always on time and very reliable and always keen to do more. He’s supported the school hugely in building cultural capital. He’s a real asset to the department and school and we wish we could keep him long-term.”

“MLA 4 is amazing! She has fitted in really well and she has built a good relationship with both staff and students. She is adaptable and keen to take on whatever task we need.”

Unfortunately, these kinds of experiences are in decline. From Language Trends 24 we can see that primary schools’ international engagement has declined with 46 % of schools reporting no international activity in 2018 and 66% reporting no international activity in 2024. (For secondary schools the numbers with no international engagement has increased from 11% in 2018 to 36% in 2024)

This adversely affects disadvantaged young people, who may not have access to overseas visits or native speakers outside of school.

Solutions

1 - continue and develop the Turing programme – especially the reciprocal links for inward visits to the UK,

2 - consider rejoining the EU Etwinning https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/etwinning programme that allows teachers and pupils to connect digitally through a safe, bilateral platform.

3 - Consider subsidising the costs of having a language assistant in a school – in particular in schools with higher levels of social-economic disadvantage.

4 – re-consider incentives and the status of languages in accountability measures

5 - Messages to heads and senior leaders around importance of authentic experiences in language learning for motivation, progress and cultural experiences.

30 To what extent do the current qualifications pathways at 16-19 support learners to study a broad curriculum which gives them the right knowledge and skills to progress? Should anything change to better support this?

16-19 - broad and balanced:

31 To what extent do the current curriculum (at primary and secondary) and qualifications pathways (at secondary and 16-19) ensure that pupils and learners are able to develop creative skills and have access to creative subjects?

support for creative skills and access to creative subjects:

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

32 Do you have any explanations for the trends outlined in the analysis and/or suggestions to address any that might be of concern?

Explanations of trends or suggestions to address:

Expressive Arts

Enrolments in secondary arts subjects are falling – as set out in the CLA Report Card. Arts subjects have been eroded as mainstream subjects and we can no longer assume that all schools will offer these subjects to age 16.

Evidence tells us that this is due to a lack of availability and choice, not a lack of interest among learners. When the EBacc was first proposed there was an immediate and significant impact on what children studied at secondary school – an early Ipsos Mori poll revealed that 27% of schools cut courses as a direct result of its implementation.

Analysis from CLA in 2013 revealed that this disproportionately affected arts courses – in particular for pupils in disadvantaged areas. The impact of the EBacc was reinforced by the introduction of the Progress 8 accountability measure in 2016.

Evidence from the NFER suggests that students are increasingly selecting a narrow range of subject options and do not feel free to select across different curriculum areas – too often selecting more than one expressive arts subject is discouraged. Expressive arts subjects need parity with other curriculum areas and to be scaffolded throughout curriculum and across all key stages.

Supporting Evidence https://www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/CLA-2024-Annual-Report-Card.pdf

Languages in decline:

Non-mandatory nature of languages

Exams – perceptions of harsh grading and difficult exams discourage pupils from selecting and some schools suggesting that students continue to study

Teacher supply

Timetabling

Transition from primary to secondary and across key stages

Lack of positive national discourse about the positive impact of language on career and well being

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

33 To what extent and how do pupils benefit from being able to take vocational or applied qualifications in secondary schools alongside more academically focused GCSEs?

secondary - benefit from vocational qualifications:

34 To what extent does the current pre-16 vocational offer equip pupils with the necessary knowledge and skills and prepare them for further study options, including 16-19 technical pathways and/or A levels? Could the pre-16 vocational offer be improved?

vocational offer - equip for further study and improvement suggestions:

The British Academy report (link below) provides good evidence that progression pathways involving languages in the vocational space are not available in England: https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/languages-provision-in-uk-further-education

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

35 Is the volume of statutory assessment at key stage 1 and 2 right for the purposes set out above?

volume of assessment at key stage 1 and 2:

36 Are there any changes that could be made to improve efficacy without having a negative impact on pupils' learning or the wider education system?

key stage 1 and 2 assessment improvements:

37 Are there other changes to the statutory assessment system at key stages 1 and 2 that could be made to improve pupils' experience of assessment, without having a negative impact on either pupils' learning or the wider education system?

key stage 1 and 2 assessment improvements to experience:

38 What can we do to ensure the assessment system at key stages 1 and 2 works well for all learners, including learners in need of additional support in their education (for example SEND, disadvantage, EAL)?

key stage 1 and 2 assessment works for ALL learners:

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

39 Is the volume of assessment required for GCSEs right for the purposes set out above? Are there any changes that could be made without having a negative impact on either pupils' learning or the wider education system?

volume of assessment at GCSEs:

40 What more can we do to ensure that: a) the assessment requirements for GCSEs capture and support the development of knowledge and skills of every young person; and b) young people's wellbeing is effectively considered when assessments are developed, giving pupils the best chance to show what they can do to support their progression?

GCSE assessments - support development of knowledge and skills and considers wellbeing:

41 Are there particular GCSE subjects where changes could be made to the qualification content and/or assessment that would be beneficial for pupils' learning?

changes to GCSE qualification content or assessment:

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

42 Are there ways in which we could support improvement in pupil progress and outcomes at key stage 3?

support pupil progress and outcomes at key stage 3:

43 Are there ways in which we could support pupils who do not meet the expected standard at key stage 2?

support pupils who do not meet expected standard at key stage 2:

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

44 To what extent, and in what ways, does the accountability system influence curriculum and assessment decisions in schools and colleges?

accountability system influence curriculum and assessment decisions:

45 How well does the current accountability system support and recognise progress for all pupils and learners? What works well and what could be improved?

accountability system support and recognise progress for ALL pupils:

46 Should there be any changes to the current accountability system in order to better support progress and incentivise inclusion for young people with SEND and/or from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds? If so, what should those changes be?

accountability system changes to support SEND or socio-economically disadvantaged:

Section 8: Qualification pathways 16-19

47 To what extent does the range of programmes and qualifications on offer at each level meet the needs and aspirations of learners?a) Level 3 b) Level 2c) Level 1 and entry level

extent to which programmes and qualifications meet needs and aspirations of learners:

48 Are there particular changes that could be made to the following programmes and qualifications, and/or their assessment that would be beneficial to learners:a) AS/A level qualificationsb) T Level and T Level Foundation Year programmesc) Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 3d) Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 2 and below

changes to programmes and qualifications:

49 How can we improve learners' understanding of how the different programmes and qualifications on offer will prepare them for university, employment (including apprenticeships) and/or further technical study?

improve understanding on how programmes and qualificatoins will prepare them for future:

50 To what extent is there enough scope and flexibility in the system to support learners who may need to change course?

scope and flexibility to support learners changing course:

51 Are there additional skills, subjects, or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19 education, regardless of their chosen programmes and qualifications, to support them to be prepared for life and work?

skills, subjects or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19:

Motivation for languages through international work including through assistants, partnerships and visits

Pupils need intrinsic motivation for language learning, this might come from good teaching enabling good progress, but they also need to develop a love of languages. A powerful way of doing this is through providing authentic experiences to use and to hear languages.

Visits, exchanges and contacts with native speakers can be very motivating and inspire young people to fall in love with languages. In a survey carried out by the British Council among university language students, almost two thirds (62%) said an international exchange influenced their decision to do a language degree. https://www.britishcouncil.org/contact/press/british-council-says-bring-back-school-exchanges

Visits specifically can also have other important outcomes for pupils

"A school exchange programme may have a number of potential benefits, including expanding the intercultural awareness of pupils and supporting their engagement with the curriculum … Teachers and pupils reported an increase in pupils' intercultural outlook, confidence with and tolerance of other cultures, and resilience." Full evaluation report here:
https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/international-school-exchanges

Having international assistants from another country in the classroom is a long and powerful way to bring an international aspect to the education of young people and support language learning and appreciation of other cultures. The Language Assistants programme has been running for 120 years across the 4 countries of the UK with 250,000 children benefitting each year. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints – in particular in schools with higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage, the number of schools taking on an assistant is declining. For example, only independent schools in Scotland have a language assistant and there are challenges in otoehr other three countries of the UK.
https://www.britishcouncil.org/school-resources/employ-language-assistant

Unfortunately, these kinds of experiences are in decline. From Language Trends 24 we can see that primary schools' international engagement has declined with 46 % of schools reporting no international activity in 2018 and 66% reporting no international activity in 2024. (For secondary schools the numbers with no international engagement has increased from 11% in 2018 to 36% in 2024)

This adversely affects disadvantaged young people, who may not have access to overseas visits outside of school.

Solutions

1 - continue and develop the Turing programme

2 - consider rejoining the EU Etwinning https://school-education.ec.europa.eu/en/etwinning programme that allows teachers and pupils to connect digitally through a safe, bilateral platform.

3 - Consider subsidising the costs of having a language assistant in a school – in particular in schools with higher levels of social-economic disadvantage.

4 – re-consider incentives and the status of languages in accountability measures e.g. Progress 8

5 - Messages to heads and senior leaders around importance of authentic experiences in language learning for motivation, progress and cultural experiences.

.

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

52 How can the curriculum, assessment and wraparound support better enable transitions between key stages to ensure continuous learning and support attainment?

wraparound support enabling transitions between key stages:

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

53 How could technology be used to improve how we deliver the curriculum, assessment and qualifications in England?

how can technology be used to improve delivery of curriculum, assessment and qualifications :

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

54 Do you have any further views on anything else associated with the Curriculum and Assessment Review not covered in the questions throughout the call for evidence?

Any further views:

As part of the Cross Government languages group, the British Council agrees with GCHQ that the UK's languages capability requires government intervention (even if only a school accountability measure) to assure the pipeline of skills and knowledge into workplaces in all sectors. The British Council's Language Trends survey has repeatedly shown that the decline in languages continues, and this is now feeding through to a lack of homegrown language teachers and the closure of university languages departments and reduction in the number of foreign language literate graduates entering the workforce. We are aware that language skills are needed across a large number of domestic and international facing Government departments. There are large numbers of multilingual young people whose language skills could be more effectively recognised and used to benefit national prosperity, security and diplomacy.

From our new British Council arts and young people's practice report (December 2024) highlighted

Sharing practice (UK and international) – Most organisations indicated that they would like more opportunities to share their practice with peers and funders. This was especially the case across the four nations of the UK, and in international contexts.

Making connections and exchange (UK and international) – As with practice sharing, respondents saw clear value in building networks with like-minded professionals across the UK and internationally.

Youth voice and representation – The practices described in the research relating to enabling youth voice, participation and representation were especially seen as having value to be shared nationally and internationally, where good practice can be shared and organisations can be informed by models that exist elsewhere.