EA response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review call for evidence

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A working group made up of EA members, led by Professor Robert Eaglestone, the EA's lead for cross-sector educational policy, put together a response to the government's Curriculum and Assessment Review call for evidence. In addition to responding to a selection of the 54 detailed questions that made up the call for evidence, the EA also submitted the covering letter below to the Review team.

With thanks to Professor Katherine Baxter, Dr Kirstie Hewett, Dr Jo Hill, Dr Andrea Macrae, Dr Rachel Roberts, Dr Lorna Smith, Dr Richard Stacey, and Professor Jo Tregenza, as well as to Chris Brown and Megan Dixon for their comments.

Dear Secretary of State,

We write on behalf of the English Association, enclosing our detailed response to the call Curriculum and Assessment Review.

The English Association is the national subject association for English literature, language, and creative writing across primary, secondary, further and higher education. Founded in 1906, we bring together individuals and organisations from all sectors and all areas of English studies. Through our publications, events, and networks, we initiate dialogue, distribute and enhance knowledge, and celebrate and strengthen the discipline. We have an engaged membership of over 2,000 education experts, ranging from primary and early years through secondary and further education to higher education; our publications reach tens of thousands of readers in schools, libraries, and universities all over the world. We are proud to work alongside other subject associations such as the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE), the UK Literacy Association (UKLA), and the Council for Language in Education.

Having convened a working group and liaised with our members, our detailed response covers areas relevant to the mission of the EA in primary secondary and further education.

In this covering letter, we note some general issues of special concern.

- GCSE English Literature and English Language. It is widely accepted across the subject, and instantiated in a range of reports, that neither GCSE is fit for purpose and both need urgent reform. We include detailed and widely agreed-upon recommendations for change below, focussing on diversity, content, range of text choice, methods of teaching and assessment, fit to discipline and to purpose.

- A Levels in English Literature and English Language work relatively well.
- We note the significance of the study of English Literature and Language in teaching core skills and dispositions for the world of work: communication, collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving, creativity, independence and adaptability.
- Literacy and oracy are of prime importance to the English subject community but should not be understood as the core of the subject of English: delivering literacy and oracy should not fall exclusively on English teachers at secondary level. As the National Curriculum makes clear, literacy and oracy are cross curricular matters which require 'whole school' intervention. We support the broad thrust of the Oracy Commission's report.
- Creativity is crucial for the future of UK economic growth and needs to be foregrounded throughout the teaching of English. We support increasing the explicit emphasis on creative and original writing of fiction, non-fiction, drama and poetry at primary, secondary and further level; the return of creative and original writing to GCSE English; the return and re-development of a Creative Writing A-level.
- We support investigating the idea of Functional Skills Award and/or functional skills qualification pathways for reading, writing and speaking. While we oppose a 'two tier' education system and, as above, argue that English is a subject that encourages high aspiration, we also recognise the importance of life skills in communication.
- We express concerns about literacy and learners with SEND, and note that course work is constructive for SEND pupils.
- We support more autonomy for teachers.
- We support a reduction in national assessment in KS 1-3 and reduction in national 'high stake' assessment.
- We ask for better sequenced grammar over the curriculum; and writing tasks to be made relevant to students' lives. We support the removal of the phonics check and the removal of the grammar test.
- Across all stages we support more opportunities to teach sustainability and climate change, and to reflect diversity.
- We support a broader primary curriculum.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Rebecca Fisher, CEO, English Association

Professor Robert Eaglestone, Professor of Contemporary Literature and Thought, Royal Holloway University of London; Policy Lead on Cross Sector Education Policy, English Association.