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TOWARDS A 21ST CENTURY CURRICULUM

YOUNG FABIANS

Foreword by **Kate Green MP**, edited by **Amy Dwyer**,
James Flynn, **Emma Stevenson** and **Tom Hunter**

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Towards a 21st Century Curriculum

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KATE GREEN MP

FOREWORD

I want every child to enjoy their time in education, learning and playing with their friends while developing the knowledge and skills they need to live a rewarding and enriching life. Education must ensure that children leave school ready for work and ready for life, skilled to face the challenges of the future.

However, we know that for too many young people the education system is not delivering on that ambition. Forty percent of young people leave school without essential qualifications, many feel that school does not equip them with the practical skills they need as an adult, nor the skills our country will need to face the urgent challenges we face such as climate change or the digital revolution, while for many, opportunities for life enriching activities are out of reach.

At the same time, employers tell me they are crying out for well-rounded young people, who can communicate and work in a team, and who are skilled in life. Ninety-four percent of employers say that life skills are at least as important as

academic results for success, but nearly seventy percent report that school leavers do not have the required skills for the workplace.

It's time for an education fit for the future. Labour wants to see children leave school as well-rounded young adults, skilled and ready for work and for life.

That is why Labour's Children's Recovery Plan calls for the introduction of free extracurricular activities for every child, and why we have set out an ambition that by the age of ten every child has experienced ten enriching activities including team sports, playing an instrument, taking part in drama and performing arts, and visiting the seaside. Fun, enjoyable activities for every child but also activities which support their social development, communication and teamwork, skills they'll need for the future.


It is why we are committed to giving every school access to a professional careers advisor one day a week and re-instating two weeks of compulsory work experience, and it is why we want to see life

and digital skills embedded across the curriculum; ensuring children leave school with the vital skills they need.

Young people starting out in the workplace now will still be working into the 2070s. As the rate of technological change increases and the jobs of the future are created, our education system must be able to keep pace.

I am therefore especially pleased to introduce this collection of essays from the Young Fabians Education Network on the case for

a curriculum for the 21st century. From the need for quality careers advice, through to tackling sexism in schools, this collection of essays gives policy-makers like me a wealth of ideas to consider for designing a modern education curriculum that will enable young people to fulfil their potential and our country to succeed.

I congratulate the Young Fabians Education Network in delivering a valuable contribution to this live debate. 

Kate Green is the Labour MP for Stretford and Urmston. She has served as the Shadow Secretary of State for Education since June 2020.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our education system underpins and highlights values. Values that our society believes are crucial for young people to understand at an early age. At present, the values that are reflected throughout our education system are outdated and do not reflect our society and where we want it to be heading. This pamphlet looks to explore a variety of areas where the curriculum could be improved, from substantial reforms into language learning to the decolonisation of the curriculum. These reforms are vital in modernising the curriculum but also in ensuring that our education system really prepares young people for life and work in modern society. A society that is perhaps world's away from the society that the current curriculum prepares students for. Students who leave our education system are doing so without the basic skills and information to make informed choices about their lives, career choices, pensions, relationships and so much more. As a group of young people interested in policy, who have come together to produce this pamphlet, we are

able to recognise the omissions in our own education and how we think, on reflection, our curriculum could have better prepared us for life.

Education plays a big part in who we are and how we see the world. If our curriculum is not as inclusive and forward-looking as it can be, it is ultimately shaping students to see the world in a more parochial way, limiting their abilities and aspirations. Some of these chapters will cover glaringly obvious omissions from our curriculum, such as personal finance education or mental health education. Not educating students on pensions, under the assumption that young people will be taught about this at home, reflects a woefully misinformed view of our society. Many adults do not understand pensions and a lack of understanding, at such a wide societal-level, can only be resolved by substantial and rigorous coverage of this within the national curriculum. Mental health has recently begun to receive the attention that it has always deserved in society and given the high rates of suicide,

mental health issues and eating disorders among young people, it is imperative that it is covered in real detail in the curriculum. Similarly, sex education in its current form is shockingly bad. Young people are not taught how to recognise abusive relationships, how to properly look after themselves or where support is available, should they need it. Additionally, sex and relationship education needs to be inclusive and cover the broad spectrum of relationships that exist. Real reform here is needed and this will involve considerable engagement with young people themselves, who are too often forgotten about in this discussion.

Many of the chapters we discuss in this pamphlet are already part of our curriculum, such as languages and history. What we are arguing here is that it is the fundamental nature of how this is taught and the assumptions behind this that need to change. Languages have long been seen as a chore, been neglected and under-funded, yet learning a second language can provide major boosts to career prospects. History has long been a core part of the national curriculum. However, the content covered conveys a narrow, western-centric narrative of world history and the view that the government wants citizens to have of our own history. We spend a huge amount of our

history lessons learning about the Tudors and the world wars, yet very little, if at all, is said on the war on terror, Afghanistan and Iraq, which have a much more profound impact on our lives. Thus, we argue for a re-evaluation of the priorities of our history curriculum. This pamphlet should not be understood as a prescriptive list of new subjects, we recognise that students already face immense pressures from heavy syllabuses, rather this is an examination of the way we teach subjects and the content that is prioritised in this teaching.

Our curriculum is one way that we can become a global forward-looking leader. We can ensure that young people leave our education system equipped for life and fulfillment in our society. Careers advice is a clear example of how we need to instigate real reform into how we are advising and supporting young people for their future. From my own experiences, and I was lucky in that my school had a careers advisor, we had one session a year and it was incredibly unhelpful. I was simply told to Google the career that I wanted and learn about what this actually meant. That was the extent of my career advice at school. When we compare this provision of career support in state schools, to the networking opportunities that are often afforded to those in private schools and with

connections, it is no wonder that we see a lack of social mobility.

Calls from the Conservatives to reintroduce Latin into the national curriculum demonstrate just how out-of-touch they are when it comes to curriculum reform. This line of thinking relates to a very traditional view of the curriculum to teach traditional subjects such as history, geography, English, maths and science and essentially leave the rest to young people to guess or learn along the way. It is clear that this is not working. When a government thinks that we need to

be learning Latin over the climate crisis, there is a real problem. We don't need to be learning a dead language that is now used only by the elite. We need to be taught about the climate crisis. We need to re-prioritise arts and humanities. We need to teach young people to recognise fake news and misinformation. We need a curriculum that is inclusive, does not reinforce sexism and is relevant to modern society. We need substantial and real reform to support young people in every aspect of life.



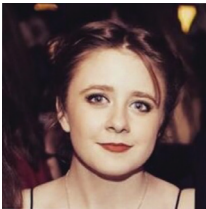
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The University of Manchester

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REFORMING CAREERS ADVICE

James Flynn

Introduction

Young people have been under-served by careers advice under successive governments. Since Connexions ceased to be a national service, the National Careers Service and Careers Hubs have offered new platforms for support - but failed to fill the gap.

Young people rely on parents for guidance on their future, but changes to tertiary and technical education, including the introduction of T-Levels and degree-apprenticeships, have left parents unsure about which route is best. Meanwhile schools are judged on Ofsted and exam results - meaning teachers are not best placed to offer advice either.

It is clear that young people need advice. A lack of high-quality information leads many to close off options for further study before they even sit their GCSEs. But there is a strong case for this to start at primary school, to dispel myths about the careers young people can and cannot do.

This chapter recommends a new generation of careers advisers who offer tailored and structured advice to young people throughout school and Level 3 study. This is an under-appreciated and un-

der utilised part of a young person's journey through education and it is time young people were provided high-quality support to make informed choices about their future.

Replacing Connexions

Labour introduced a national careers advice service - Connexions - in 2000, following the Learning and Skills Act. Connexions, replacing the Careers Service, was provided by national government and provided advice and guidance to young people in all parts of the country in line with national standards. In 2008, responsibility for providing Connexions was devolved to local government along with other youth services.

That devolution in 2008 saw careers advice for young people subject to large-scale change, with some local authorities simply taking it in-house, and others commissioning services externally. As a result, while Connexions does exist in various capacities, to different standards, in different parts of the country, it no longer provides the same standard of advice to all young people. Its immediate replacement - the National Careers Service - simply rolled U19s into adult careers advice programmes, where they are not considered a 'priority group' for support.¹

In 2018 the government launched 'Careers Hubs', which group up to 40 schools and provides links with businesses and community organisations to support young people.² While a welcome step forward, the Local Government Association has raised concerns that Hubs only reach a fraction of young people, so cannot provide the same reach as the old Connexions service.³ Indeed, the government's own figures show the Hubs offer barely half of students with placements or work experience - though they are outperforming the Gatsby Good Career Guidance benchmarks.⁴

Meanwhile, schools say the Department for Education (DfE) funding for careers advice is insufficient. Research by Careers England, the National Association of Head Teachers and the Worth Less? campaign found only 10 percent of schools believe they receive adequate funding for careers advice services, and around a fifth of secondary schools receive less than £2,000 in funding per annum - around £2 per student.⁵

Parental guidance

While the services providing careers advice and guidance to young people has changed, reduced or fragmented, this has been coupled with wide-ranging changes in education. While the route to university via A-Levels has remained largely unchanged since the 1950s, there have been major changes to technical education. The most recent of these - T-Levels - saw its first students enrol in 2020.⁶

This means that - while young people may rely on mum for careers advice, what subjects to study, and understand the importance of work experience - parents are not best placed to provide advice to their children over what subjects to take, how to get to the job they want, or what qualifications are even available. The range of options on offer are very different to the options they had when they went through school.

Indeed, parental guidance is clearly influenced by the real-world experience of the parent. Students with a parent or carer in farming are nearly 20 times more likely to study veterinary science or agriculture-related subjects. Those with a medical practitioner parent are eight times more likely to study medicine or dentistry. Meanwhile, those with an artist parent are over three times more likely to study the arts.⁷

The evidence therefore suggests that parents are far more comfortable (or simply more convincing) at explaining educational routes they themselves took - though the impact of a close role model making a success of that career path in their own home must not be understated.

There is also evidence of parents not understanding new routes of education. Research by UCAS in 2021, focusing on degree-level apprenticeships (another new initiative launched in 2015), found nearly 30 percent of parents did not know you could study an apprenticeship at degree level, and one third of parents were unaware you could apply for a degree apprenticeship as well as applying for a university undergraduate course.⁸

Meanwhile, around 65 percent of parents of BTEC and Scottish Highers students who were not thinking about apprenticeships said they did not know where to look for information, and 40 per cent said they did not know anything about them. More than a quarter (27 per cent) thought the career prospects of an apprenticeship did not match up to a traditional university degree. These three factors were also largely equal amongst parents of A-Level students (at around 44 per cent).⁹

Why not teachers?

But if parents are not best-placed to offer advice, then who is? The answer could be in schools - even if they do not get sufficient funding, 84 percent of schools “strongly agree” or “agree” that careers provision in their schools is a high priority.¹⁰

But this would only serve to place an even greater burden on already overworked teachers. After all, schools are (rightly) not judged on getting young people into work. They are judged by Ofsted and their exam results.

Research by UNISON shows the effect of adding careers advice - a metric schools are not judged on - into the workloads of teachers. Cheshire was one of the first areas where the local Connexions services closed, and many of the schools in the area adopted a model where

teachers operated with a secondary role as careers advisers. Unison representatives observed some alarming patterns.

For example, many young people were not made aware of opportunities at local colleges and apprenticeships, and were instead advised to progress to their school sixth-forms. They were not given proper educational guidance, causing many to enrol on advanced programs when alternatives such as BTECs would have been more appropriate.¹¹

In addition, UNISON found much more “preventable NEET” across the whole area because the quality of guidance provided was so poor and not in any way tailored to the needs of young people.¹²

Do young people want more advice?

However, all of this is academic if young people do not feel they would benefit from more advice. Fortunately, research by UCAS suggests that more informed careers advice would be both beneficial and useful to young people. 50 percent of young people applying

to university want more information on apprenticeships - suggesting they have not received the information from their schools or parents.¹³ There is clearly a need when half of young people at the stage of applying to university do not feel they fully know their options.

Further research by UCAS suggests that one in five students could not study certain degrees (such as medicine, languages or maths) because they did not study the right subjects at Level 3 to progress.¹⁴ These students have unintentionally blocked - or at least delayed - themselves from degree choices, and therefore careers, as a result of poor advice earlier in their educational journey.

Two in five students at university say they would have made better choices if they had better access to higher quality information and advice in school - including different GCSE/National 5 choices - now they know what their degree course involves. Around a third would choose different post-16 op-

tions.¹⁵

Meanwhile, almost a third of young people say they did not receive any information at all about apprenticeships from their school - showing that more needs to be done to promote parity across these routes.¹⁶

This blocking from degree courses is not only restricted to subjects - simply choosing a BTEC (any BTEC) can severely restrict your later educational prospects. While 49 per cent of English 18 year olds with vocational qualifications enter higher education, they are significantly less likely to attend higher tariff providers than those with A-Levels (entry rate of 3 per cent vs. 27 per cent).¹⁷

This is not likely to change in the fu-



ture as research by Tes showed that some members of the elite Russell Group of universities will not recognise the new T-Level qualifications - even though they carry the same number of UCAS points as three A-Levels, allow a prospective stu-

How early should this start?

Certain degrees require specific A-Levels to study, certain A-Levels require specific GCSEs, and GCSEs are selected mid-way through secondary school. Meanwhile, technical qualifications offer young people a very different and more specialised form of learning - though this will restrict their future Higher Educational opportunities (if indeed this is a route they want to pursue). The question then comes to how early careers advice should begin.

While the case for careers advice starting at secondary school is clear, the case for primary school is compelling. Research by Education for Employers involving more than 10,000 primary school children found that access to role models from the world of work can inspire young people through career-related learning. These activities reduce stereotypes, enhance confidence, foster a positive attitude towards school, and improve attainment.¹⁹

Education for Employers measured the impact of their Primary Futures programme, which linked primary

student to study one subject in-depth, and gain in-work experience.¹⁸ Clear advice and understanding for young people is therefore essential to ensure young people make the right choices.

schools with a wide range of guest speakers who ran workshops or hosted Q&As about the jobs they do. Primary school level pupils are of course too young to be thinking about university, T-Levels, or apprenticeships. But they can be inspired to become archaeologists, Arctic explorers or zoologists (all professions which were linked to primary schools by Education for Employers).²⁰

Education for Employers found that 82 percent of children agreed that “I now understand how learning Maths/English/Science can be useful in many jobs”. 84 percent agreed that boys and girls can do the same jobs. For the most economically disadvantaged pupils, 78 per cent said “I now know there are lots of jobs available to me when I grow up” and 74 per cent said “I feel more confident in what I can do after today’s activity”. 80 per cent now agreed that “people like me” can be successful when they grow up.²¹

This shows the power of early interventionist work in careers advice

- providing a better understanding of the importance of learning, inspiring girls to pursue careers in STEM subjects, and for those

from disadvantaged backgrounds to recognise they can have a successful career.

What future careers advice should look like

The first point is a new careers advice service should not simply be Connexions. While those who had interacted with the service were generally positive about it, some young people were unclear about the role and function of Connexions.²² A replacement must be better.

It must also start early. At primary school, careers advice should barely be recognisable as “careers advice” - guest speakers and industry leaders looking to inspire primary-age pupils into thinking about their future and (perhaps more importantly) dispelling myths about what they can and cannot do.

At secondary level this should fo-

cus into what options young people may want to take, then - as they progress to their later years - whether their future would be better served by an apprenticeship, T-Levels or A-Levels.

While the National Curriculum only runs to the end of GCSEs, this does not mean careers advice should end at age 16. The years studying A-Levels or T-Levels are crucial as this is where students will typically decide whether to pursue a degree (and take on tens of thousands of pounds of student loan repayments) or look at other options. Ideally this would be provided by the same careers advisers who supported the young person earlier at secondary school - as the trust and



relationship is already built.

What this would need is a new generation of careers advisers, taking in the benefits of the old Connexions service (where the offer is consistent across the country) and the new Careers Hubs (which serve a network of both schools and colleges). Careers Advisers should also engage with parents - as young people turn to parents for support and guidance, but the huge changes in education over

recent years have left parents unsure about what advice they can give.

Careers advice is an underutilised but essential resource for young people, ensuring they fully understand the breadth and depth of qualifications and options open to them. The longer we wait for a truly effective service, the more young people will make the wrong choices, at a cost to their future.




James Flynn

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MISS, DID YOU KNOW THAT THERE ARE, LIKE, NO FAMOUS FEMALE CHEMISTS? NONE WHO'VE DONE ANYTHING IMPORTANT.



Why we must urgently embed gender equality education into the National Curriculum.

Katharine Roddy

Introduction

In the wake of Sarah Everard's murder, the UK was hit with yet more distressing evidence of gender inequality. At the time of writing, a growing number of allegations are being made of peer-on-peer sexual abuse and harassment in schools, as more students and teachers come forward to speak about their experiences. Education Secretary Gavin Williamson has described these allegations as 'shocking and abhorrent'.¹ And yet, 'the government still has no strategy for tackling sexism in schools'.²

Abhorrent, undeniably. Shocking? Perhaps not for the female population: an investigation by UN Women UK found that 97% of women aged 18-24 have been sexually harassed.³ Everyday sexism and gender inequality are prevalent in our society and in our education system: Over a third (37%) of female students at mixed-sex schools have personally experienced some form of sexual har-

assessment at school and 66% of female students and 37% of male students in mixed-sex sixth forms have experienced or witnessed the use of sexist language in school.⁴ The implications of this are enormous. According to Rosamund McNeil, assistant general secretary of the National Education Union, ‘there’s a direct line between sexist ideas and problematic behavior, then leading to violent behavior. These attitudes aren’t a joke, they aren’t going to go away. Young people don’t grow out of them, they grow

into them’.⁵

The government has so far failed to recognise the transformative role that education can play in challenging these problems and addressing the misogynistic attitudes which drive violence towards women and girls.

We therefore urgently need to embed gender equality education into the curriculum. This article will cover three key ways in which this can be done:

- 1. Achieving gender parity in the curriculum implicitly by addressing the gender data gap.**
- 2. Explicitly challenging incidents of gender inequality and everyday sexism.**
- 3. Embedding explicit gender equality education into the curriculum.**

Achieving gender parity in the curriculum implicitly by addressing the gender data gap.

‘Miss, did you know that there are, like, no famous female chemists? None who’ve done anything important.’

The gender inequalities in our education system exist on an academic as well as a social level. When a student made this comment, I started to think about the lack of diversity in the National Curriculum and consider ways to challenge this problematic statement and the issues that underlie it.

The first way is by introducing measures to achieve gender parity in the curriculum implicitly, by addressing the gender data gap. This refers to the ‘phenomenon whereby the vast majority of information that we have collected globally and continue to collect [...] have been collected on men’.⁶ This has implications for our education system due to the limited inclusion of women’s actions and achievements in many subject syllabuses.

We must ensure a balanced curriculum by including relevant examples of female achievements in different fields. Outlined in the National Curriculum for Science is the aim: ‘understand that scientific methods and theories develop as earlier explanations are modified to take account of new evidence and ideas [...]’.⁷ We now recognise the incredible contributions which a diverse range of women have made to science, so it stands to reason that the authors of this curriculum need to take their own advice on board.

Unfortunately, in the science curriculum as it stands, there is little scope to include women for several reasons. The curriculum is concept-driven rather than people-driven, therefore few scientists’ names are used at all. The curriculum does reference male scientists such as Mendeleev and Dalton, but no female names appear in this document.

Why does this matter? There is a big drive to encourage more women to pursue further education and careers in STEM subjects. Having female role models in these subjects is vital. Achieving gender parity in science education is not a catch-all solution, but it will go a fair way in helping to push the equality agenda in other areas of society.

It is important to note that this is not

only an issue in subjects stereotypically thought of as ‘male’ fields, such as science. Michael Gove’s 2013 National History Curriculum ‘was notable for its almost wholesale absence of women. [...] Key Stage 3 included only five women, four of whom were lumped together under the topic ‘The Changing Role of Women’; rather implying, not without reason, that the rest of the curriculum was only about men’.⁸

When considering how to increase the diversity of the curriculum, it is vital to think carefully about how to avoid tokenism. In history, for example, it would be all too easy to say that because a class has ‘done’ Elizabeth I or Florence Nightingale, they have ‘covered’ women. The challenge may be presented here that teachers only have limited lesson time. On average, a history teacher will see a Key Stage 3 class for two or three hours per fortnight. So surely it makes sense to teach the ‘main’ or ‘most important’ figures?

Yet this does not account for how historiography works, and young people must be shown how women’s place as subjects in the structure of our history books has been systematically denied. The patriarchal structures in our society have meant that women often haven’t been viewed as workers outside of their traditional roles as wives

and mothers. This, combined with historically dominant approaches to history, has meant that women's stories have regularly not been recorded as the key parts of our history that they are. Clearly, no-one would dispute that Henry VIII should have his place in the curriculum. But what about Margaret Pole, Bess of Hardwick, or Margaret Beaufort? Strong and powerful people can be role models regardless of gender. These women exist: we now need to give them visibility in the curriculum.

In a similar vein, it is important to recognise that 'women' are not one homogenous group and that intersectionality is vital when it comes to their inclusion in the curriculum. Women of colour, LGBT+ women, disabled women, working class women and other marginalised

Explicitly challenging incidents of gender inequality and everyday sexism.

The 2021 United Nations Commission on the Status of Women highlighted the need to 'address negative social norms and gender stereotypes in education systems'.⁹ As such, the second way to work towards a solution is by explicitly challenging incidents of gender inequality and sexism in schools.

On an academic level, when students make comments such as the one about female chemists, it is important that teachers feel able to

groups should all have their place.

A curriculum that is fit for purpose is flexible. Curriculum here is to be defined in holistic terms, as everything that a young person learns while they are in school: from assessed exam content, to the things that they pick up in conversations in the corridor. The more diverse the curriculum, the better prepared they are for life beyond school. As such, this curriculum needs to be flexible to respond to the world they live in. Teachers need the freedom to adapt to current events, including those concerning gender inequality: young people must have the opportunity to deconstruct and discuss. Training is key: teachers need the knowledge and confidence to effectively guide their students.

adapt their lesson to address this misconception. They need to have the confidence and adequate training to do so. They could do this by showing examples of female chemists of note, and, more importantly, asking students to consider why they are not necessarily household names and what barriers prevented them from entering their textbooks. In a similar vein, young people should also be encouraged to think critically about the famous

figures included in their syllabuses more widely: who decides which works are included in the literary 'canon', for example, and why may women have been excluded from this?

When it comes to Relationships and Sex Education, it cannot be assumed that young people know what a healthy relationship looks like. Gender equality in education is part of a wider national picture and school is just one part of a young person's life. Schools can be the heart of our communities, but we must also concern ourselves with what is going on outside of them. Parental engagement is key here to ensure that young people receive consistent messages. Schools can provide a safe space for young people and their parents and guardians to talk and be listened to. Parents and guardians, too, need confidence and guidance on how to address issues such as healthy relationships.

More broadly, a national strategy is urgently needed to ensure consistency when schools tackle sexist incidents. Incidents of everyday

sexism and misogyny must be taken seriously and challenged. It is important that young people understand that what they may have intended as a joke is actually trivialising and normalising misogynistic attitudes. Tackling these head-on must be the basis of how schools work to eliminate sexual harassment in education, a part of their core safeguarding activity. Once again, education professionals must be provided with training and support to feel confident in doing this.

Diversity matters at every stage. It goes without saying that teachers serve as role models for young people. The government needs to look closely at teacher recruitment and retention. 63% of secondary school teachers are female, compared with only 38% of headteachers.¹⁰ The subliminal messages that this disparity sends to young people cannot be overlooked. Once again, this is not about box-ticking, it is about harnessing the talent already present in our education system: much more must be done to support women to take on leadership positions.

Embedding explicit gender equality education into the curriculum. How can we stop children treating 'feminism' as a 'dirty' word?

The third solution is to provide explicit gender equality education lessons, embedded into the framework of lessons in the PSHE curricu-

ulum.

When we hear students refer to 'feminists' in the same horrified tone of voice as one might describe

a hardened criminal, it is vital that we teach our young people what feminism really means. Patriarchal systems have detrimental impacts on boys and men too, and it is only by starting the conversation that we can start to challenge this.

The concept of a lesson on gender equality brings with it certain expectations and preconceptions, both from teachers' and pupils' perspectives. From my own experiences working in a boys' school, I recognise how vital it is that young men don't feel attacked or alienated when starting these conversations.

Schools don't exist in a vacuum, and there is no way that young men aren't impacted by national conversations on women. In the current climate, where discussions on ending gender-based violence have once again leapt to the fore, we must work to reframe the conversation so that young men do not feel blamed when discussing women's issues. By seizing the opportunity early on to empower young men, education has the power to drive their attitudes.

We now need to work with young people to identify the issues that block action and engagement. This is all about building trust and facilitating a two-way dialogue. Many young men refer to their fear of being seen as effeminate or being

bullied if they speak up in favour of feminism or to condemn a sexist comment. Young people want to fit in, and challenging the status quo is intimidating. Education professionals must support them by modelling respectful behaviour and empowered language. Young men must be supported to get past this fear and shown how the patriarchy and conventional masculinities affect them as well. Schools must be safe places to hold these discussions. Our young people need to know that it is entirely acceptable to show vulnerability. It is vital that we talk about issues openly and directly, rather than feeling that they are tricky and need to be side-stepped.

Once again, training to ensure that teachers feel confident to discuss these issues is key. Students should learn about what the term 'feminism' means, and the importance and benefits of promoting gender equality in society. We need to have more explicit discussions of what gender equality is and what gender gaps exist in society, and students need to see their teachers as role models, who call out everyday sexism. Many teachers, schools and external organisations are already doing wonderful work with young people to address these issues. It is now time to build on this.

Conclusion

Clearly, there is work to be done on gender inequality in our society. Our schools should be at the forefront of this. Policy must now recognise the transformative role that education can play in challenging gender inequality and misogyny.

As a society, we must recognise that academic success and teaching young people the tools they need to be socially responsible are not two separate issues. It is crucial

that none of this is simply shoe-horned into a PSHE lesson on International Women's Day and that schools are then allowed to conclude that the 'box' has been ticked for another year. For the sake of all our young people, gender equality education must be successfully embedded into the everyday curriculum.

Policy Recommendations

- A national framework to be set out for gender equality education.
- The DfE implements a diversity audit of the National Curriculum, ensuring that intersectional gender parity is achieved when students study key figures in a particular subject.
- Specific gender equality education forms a compulsory part of PSHE lessons: students know what key terms such as ‘feminism’ and ‘patriarchy’ mean and recognise the benefits of gender equality for all.
- Teacher training, including Initial Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development, includes equipping teachers with the skills to tackle incidents of sexism in their classrooms, and the necessary subject knowledge to discuss topics related to gender equality.
- Relationships and Sex Education lessons have a renewed focus on respect, consent, and healthy relationships. Teachers to be provided with adequate training and support to deliver these confidently.
- How schools tackle sexism and teach students about gender equality to be recognised as a part of their core activity. School inspections to measure the effectiveness of the delivery and outcomes of this.
- A coherent workforce strategy is implemented, with a clear focus on increasing diversity within school senior leadership teams.



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Citizenship in 2001-2021

Whilst the work of creating a new Citizenship subject had begun much earlier, the year in which it was finally introduced highlighted its need. The 2001 general election boasts the unfortunate record of having the lowest turnout since 1918. Though some downplay this as the consequence of a content electorate, British democracy was facing a participatory crisis.

The seminal Crick Report in 1998 made clear in its recommendations what citizenship education should look like, stressing the requirement to address the country's historic deficit in civic education in schools, and emphasising that, in addition to knowledge, there would also need to “develop values, skills and understanding”¹. Crick outlined a provision that would entitle all pupils to leave school with the capacity to “participate in society effectively as

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POLITICAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS: THE CASE FOR CITIZENSHIP

Maggie Browning and Robert Lennox

active, informed, critical and responsible citizens”.² The introduction of Citizenship as a compulsory part of the school curriculum in 2001 by the then Secretary of State for Education, David Blunkett, was seen as an historic first step in establishing a new foundation for civic and political literacy education in England.³

In 2007, the Ajegbo report on Diversity and Citizenship reviewed the progress that was being made in establishing Citizenship as part of the school curriculum. Some of the issues highlighted, such as the lack of subject specialists and the variation in amount and quality of provision across schools, would later contribute to the subject’s marginalisation under subsequent governments.⁴ However, on this occasion, the report’s recommendations of more initial teacher training places and the development of a full GCSE in Citizenship were duly followed.⁵

By the time Labour left government in 2010, there was clear evidence of both the positive impact of Citizenship education and of best practice in how to deliver it. Whilst the DfE’s longitudinal report outlined how Citizenship education increased political and civic participation, its findings also identified a clear correlation between the size and strength of that increase and the quality of provision. The

highest increases in positive attitudes towards civic and political participation were found in schools where Citizenship was a discrete subject and when it was formally examined (i.e. as part of a GCSE in Citizenship).⁶

A hindrance to previous efforts to introduce civic and political literacy education into English schools had been a lack of consensus around approach and definition of ‘citizenship’.⁷ Sadly, this problem emerged once again with the actions of the subsequent Coalition and Conservative governments. However, while evidence indicates Citizenship as a subject area was strengthening year on year, it is worth pointing out that across the majority of schools in England it was not yet fully embedded.

The Coalition government’s education reforms significantly undermined Citizenship education in schools. Firstly, the review of the national curriculum in 2013 introduced a much thinner conception of citizenship, moving away from encouraging community engagement and political participation to instead developing character. This watering down of the subject reduced the need for schools to have it as a discrete subject area; they could instead continue to bundle it in with PSHE lessons. This had a particularly negative impact on the political literacy aspect of the

subject area. Secondly, the academisation of the majority of English schools further added to the decline of Citizenship teaching as Academy schools are not required to follow the national curriculum. Finally, the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) created a two-tier system of subjects, with a set of core academic subjects, in which Citizenship was not included, being viewed as inferior to EBacc core subjects.⁸

The consequences of these policy agendas have led to Citizenship becoming a subject area on life sup-

The case for Citizenship

Speak to any Citizenship teacher in England and they will tell you of the uphill battle they face to maintain the subject. The removal of Citizenship from one or more Key Stages (KS), its relegation to form time, and a general feeling that it is constantly undermined and undervalued is sadly part and parcel of many Citizenship teachers' experiences. Yet this seems at odds with the calls from the parents, commentators, and the wider public for more, rather than less, political education in schools.

Why, then, is there such a disconnect? Part of the problem is that Citizenship is seen by many as a 'soft subject', a reputation built up over many years of being taught

port. Whilst all the evidence suggests that in order for it to have the biggest impact it must be taught as a discrete subject with some form of formal examination, today only 3% of English pupils take Citizenship GCSE.⁹ In 1998 the Crick report bemoaned the pre-Citizenship landscape in which political literacy and civic education in schools consisted of "uncoordinated local initiatives, which vary greatly in... content and method".¹⁰ Unfortunately, due to the marginalisation of Citizenship, we have largely returned to this landscape.

by non-specialists without proper curriculum time. It would be interesting to see how other humanities subjects would be viewed in terms of quality if they were relegated to one hour a week and taught by teachers with no specialist subject knowledge. Much like Politics A-Level, Citizenship at KS3 and KS4 can and should be seen as a rigorous academic subject that requires breadth and depth of knowledge and strong conceptual understanding. How laws are made, how elections work, the ideologies of different political parties, the foundations of our criminal justice system, the media and media literacy, human rights - what is soft or unnecessary about any of that?

The role of the Gove reforms and the introduction of the English Baccalaureate ten years ago have, as ever, a lot to answer for. They have led to the widespread marginalization of the arts, with music, art and Design and Technology under attack across secondary schools, while Citizenship and Religious Studies have also suffered. An abolition of the Ebacc is essential if vital non-Ebacc subjects like Citizenship are to survive.

Politics since the 2008 financial crash has become an arena of conflict, upheaval and division. Since then, we've seen: four general elections within ten years; Brexit and all its consequences; the rise and fall of President Trump; and the spiralling climate crisis. It has become a cliché to say that we live in unprecedented times. The continued evolution of social media and so-called 'fake news' has meant there is a moral impetus on schools to ensure students know how to spot misinformation and research a current affairs topic from reliable sources. Media literacy is already part of the Citizenship curriculum. Why not make the subject compulsory at KS3 (along with introductory lessons at primary) and ensure every child leaves secondary school with at least a foundational understanding in this crucial subject?

Increasingly, the focus has been on character education as opposed to Citizenship; a narrow and inadequate substitute. It focuses on preparing young people "in an individual capacity to confront the demands of the global economy".¹¹ There's no harm in schools preparing students for the world of work, but character education in no way meets the goals that Citizenship as a subject was originally created for. Citizenship education "is far more likely to strengthen British democracy by enabling young people to engage in civic and political activities" and maintaining it as part of the core curriculum is essential in creating informed, engaged citizens fully able to participate in the democratic process.¹²

There is a further moral imperative in the promotion and maintenance of Citizenship education. Disadvantaged young people are the least likely to participate in politics, including voting. Therefore, schools must play a vital role in galvanising political participation amongst all young people.¹³ Our media, our politics, and our judiciary are overwhelmingly dominated by the wealthy and the privileged. To make these professions more representative and accessible is a policy minefield but high quality Citizenship education for all is surely an important part of the puzzle.

A final point on what Citizenship education might and should look like: there is some discussion about whether “education through Citizenship” is a sufficient underpinning to becoming an active member of a democratic society.¹⁴ “Political activities can indeed have a positive and independent effect on electoral and expressive political engagement among young people”.¹⁵ Opportunities like taking part in a mock election or participating in a student council are crucial ways to educate young people

about politics and indeed are used too infrequently. However, they are no substitute for being taught powerful knowledge about our political systems and wider society within a classroom setting by a subject specialist. In the same way that we would not expect English Literature to be taught through an after school reading club and the attending of a play on a school trip, a trip to the House of Commons and a school debate club will not suffice for comprehensive Citizenship education in the classroom.

How could a Labour government revitalise citizenship education?

Citizenship has already been on the national curriculum for two decades. However, its marginalisation means that many commentators are unaware of its existence altogether or misunderstand the nature of the subject.

A future Labour government should relaunch the subject. This should include widespread investment in resources and training, including for school leaders, local authorities and MATs, as well for teachers themselves. Clarity on where Citizenship should sit in the curriculum, ideally within the Humanities rather than being relegated to form time, is also essential. Some commentators have advocated for a change in name of the subject, perhaps to

‘Civics’ (as it is called in many other countries) or ‘Politics’. This could be part of a discussion with key stakeholders.

What is clear is that a new subject should not be launched as a rival to Citizenship. Rather, the expertise and high quality teaching that already exists should be built on and expanded. The English Baccalaureate continues to provide a stumbling block to a broad and balanced curriculum. Abolishing it altogether would require careful thought, but it cannot continue in its current format where Citizenship, Religious Studies, and creative subjects like Art, Drama and Music are all sidelined.

Regulation

An important lever available to a future Labour government is the use of the regulatory institutions of the Department for Education. Just as the the Coalition government introduced the requirement to promote

British values in a school's social, moral, cultural and spiritual education; a future Labour government would be able to utilise a similar strategy to promote the teaching of Citizenship.¹⁶

Reinvestment

Finally, an unfortunate result of Citizenship being undermined by this current government is that the training provision for Citizenship teachers is becoming increasing-

ly sparse when compared to other subject areas. For prospective teachers, training solely as a Citizenship teacher is potentially risky.

Policy Recommendations

A key part of a future Labour government's recommitment to Citizenship would be a significant reinvestment in the subject, this would involve:

- Investment in Citizenship teacher training routes, especially Citizenship PGCEs.
- Introducing a bursary for Citizenship teacher training.
- Remove academies' ability to opt out of the National Curriculum and therefore not teach Citizenship.
- Include in any new Ofsted criteria the requirement for significant political literacy education that would incentivise schools to teach Citizenship as a discrete subject.
- Use the existing requirement to promote British values to ensure that teaching Citizenship is necessary to promote the rule of law and democracy.

Conclusion

Twenty years from its initial introduction, we have set out here the case for Citizenship, its vital importance, and a route to its reestablishment at the centre of our education system. We have only just begun to grapple with what Citizenship

could look like in the future and how the subject might evolve over time to make it suited for 2021 and beyond. What is clear is that there is both an appetite and a need for this underutilised subject to grow and flourish.



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MOVING PAST MONOLINGUALISM: A NEW MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

Ben Murphy

Introduction

The importance of teaching and learning second, third, or even fourth languages is a central feature of school curriculums across most of the world. For children in relatively homogenous countries, learning a second language provides opportunities for personal development in the spheres of employment and in culture. In more diverse societies, learning additional languages allows children to communicate effectively with everyone in their country, allowing them to develop a more rounded sense of citizenship. Across most of the world, these twin forces establish second language education as a subject equal in value to more traditional science or humanities subjects. However, the rise of English as the global *lingua franca* has meant that in the English-speaking world, second language education is often the poor relation of primary and secondary education curriculums.

This has manifested itself

in many ways. Unlike in many other countries, second language education is not a required part of the curriculum at all levels in England; only children aged between seven and fourteen are required to be offered language classes. The curriculum that is in place is often vague and unclear, leading to drastically different approaches to teaching second languages between schools; in some places, students receive just forty-five minutes of second language education per week, while other schools dedicate more than two hours per week to the subject.¹ These problems are compounded by greater structural issues, including a lack of adequate funding for second language education and a persistent shortage of language teachers and assistants in many schools across England.² The current situation for second language

competency in England compares unfavourably with similar European nations. Approximately one-third of British citizens can only speak English, and just one-third of young Britons self-report that they are able to read and write in a foreign language.³ A far smaller number are able to fluently converse in a second language. In contrast, up to 90 percent of young people in European Union countries are able to speak at least one additional language, effectively all of whom are able to have a full conversation in English.⁴

Encouraging younger people to learn additional languages has many clear benefits. Aside from the cultural enrichment and cross-border understanding that second languages can generate, a bilingual or multilingual population can pro-



vide key economic benefits, and further establish England and the whole United Kingdom as a center for international trade and business post-Brexit. Ironically, British withdrawal from the European Union can strengthen the argument in favour of higher quality second language education in England. As we have discussed, improving the current situation goes far beyond simple cosmetic changes to the

curriculum, and requires substantial changes to the allocation of resources in schools, and to the level of importance placed on learning a second language in the country at large.

There are several questions and considerations that must be addressed in developing an effective languages curriculum for England:

- 1. The age at which second language education is required, and the amount of time dedicated to it per week.**
- 2. The resources available for second language education, including the number of language teachers and assistants, support provided for students, and any extracurricular/excursion activities.**
- 3. Which second language is taught, and ensuring students are able to develop the same language throughout their education, rather than having to start learning a fresh language aged eleven.**
- 4. The cultural dimension, including the importance placed on learning a second language across the country at large and the access students have to foreign language media outside of the classroom.**

Lessons from abroad

In answering these questions, we can find answers in the approach to second language education in some of the many countries that achieve greater outcomes in this regard. Canada presents an interesting case for comparison as an English-speaking country that shares many political, cultural and economic similarities to England. The country is officially bilingual

and incredibly diverse, and this has helped to establish the importance of second language education as a tool of civic inclusion. Nearly one-fifth of Canadians are able to confidently speak both English and French, while a further one-in-eight Canadians can speak one of the official languages alongside a non-official mother tongue.^{5 6} This means that 29.4% of Canadians are able

to converse confidently in more than one language. This success in teaching Canadians of various backgrounds a second language can provide lessons to other English-speaking countries that often do not emphasise the importance of second language education to their young people.

Education is the responsibility of the provincial governments in Canada but there are several features that are common across the English-speaking provinces. Children in the province of Ontario, for example, are required to learn French as a second language from kindergarten until the age of fourteen.⁷ Requiring children to learn French as a second language from such a young age assists in the development of conversational skills; children are far more able to learn new languages than adults.⁸ From the age of 9 to the age of 14, children in Ontario have one French lesson each day, which is far in excess of the 45 minutes of second language education per week some children in England receive.⁹ In addition, children are able to opt for an *Immersion French* model, whereby all of their subjects are taught through the medium of French from kindergarten to the age of eight, gradually reducing to 50 percent of instruction being in French by the age of 14. This model was designed for the French-speaking minority

of the province, but is increasingly popular with children from English-speaking backgrounds, providing children with the confidence to use French conversationally, in the workplace, and in academic settings. For decades, academic research has shown that children are most able to learn second languages when they are taught it on a regular basis and from a young age¹⁰; daily French classes or the option of immersive French education are clearly likely to replicate these findings in practice.

The success of French language education in Ontario, and Canada more broadly, is not solely due to the number of hours dedicated to French classes per week. Teachers in Ontario are encouraged to view a child's competency in French as a duty of all teachers, not just French language teachers, similarly to how the fundamental skills of literacy and numeracy are taught across most classes. Interestingly, language classes in Ontario tend to focus less on grammar and sentence structure, and more on providing children with the skills they need to use the language conversationally, in the knowledge that the rules of French grammar will be unconsciously learned the more children are able to speak the language.¹¹ Many French classes in Ontario have also moved beyond simply teaching words and

adverbs; teachers have reported incorporating lessons about the culture and history of Quebec and France in their French classes.¹² In these cases, children were visibly more enthused to participate in the lesson than they were with more orthodox language classes.

There are three main points of divergence between second language education in Ontario and in England that should be considered when developing a new languages curriculum. The first is that children in Ontario start French classes earlier than their English counterparts, and have French classes more often than their English counterparts. The second is that French language education is woven across the curriculum and included in many different subjects. Even if this is only done in small ways - for example, encouraging children to sometimes use French numbers in maths classes - it can have a substantial impact on the ease with which children are able to use a second language. The third and

final lesson is, unsurprisingly, that children are more engaged with French classes when they are made more interesting, focusing more on conversational French and the history and culture of Quebec and France, rather than on the rules of grammar. These points of divergence refer only to the differences within schools. It may be difficult to replicate the broader cultural emphasis placed on learning French in Canada given this is driven, in large part, by the existence of a substantial French-speaking minority in the country. While developing a culture of bilingualism in England is certainly less straightforward than in Canada, it is possible. Introducing an education curriculum that centers the ability to speak a second language as a key skill, and producing a generation of children that are proficient in at least one language other than English, are essential first steps towards developing a culture of multilingualism.

What language?

One of the major roadblocks to second language education in England - and the English-speaking world more broadly - is that there is no clear choice for what language students should be taught. English is the global lingua franca, meaning that in most European countries, it

seems obvious that children should be taught to speak English. In more linguistically diverse countries, English is often taught as a more 'neutral' bridge language between the various language communities. Canada, which has been presented throughout this piece as an exem-

plar of second language education for English-speaking countries, has a substantial French-speaking minority, making French the obvious second language for children to learn. Since it clearly does not make sense to teach English as a second language in England, this raises a problem. What language should be taught?

This lack of clarity on what second language - or languages - should be taught in schools harms English children and their education. Schools can choose from thousands of different languages, with no clear guidance from the government on what languages should be selected. This means that a student could spend their Primary School years being taught Spanish, only to go to Secondary School and find that they can only learn French or German. Abandoning the work that has been done by students in their prime language-learning years is hardly an effective basis for a truly multilingual society. Therefore,

an effective languages curriculum should select a small number of modern languages - perhaps two or three - that every primary and secondary school would be required to teach effectively.

Exactly what languages these should be depends on the motivation for teaching children in England additional languages in the first place. If the primary ambition of language education is to produce a generation of children able to speak the language of trade and benefit from economic globalization, then teaching Mandarin, Spanish, or Portuguese seems the obvious outcome. There is also a strong case for the "traditional" languages that have been taught in most schools across the country for decades. French, Spanish, and German provide great utility for English travellers and tourists, while still being useful in an economic context given the scale of trade between the United Kingdom and its European neighbours. Language edu-



cation can also be a useful tool in the construction and maintenance of national identities and in encouraging cultural exchange. English is not the only language spoken in the United Kingdom - Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, Ulster Scots and Cornish, alongside languages such as Polish, Punjabi, Bengali, and British Sign Language - reflect the diversity of modern Britain. Why should a child in England not be able to

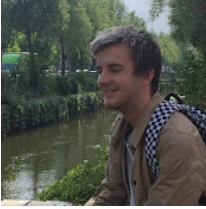
learn the second-most spoken language in their country?

Ultimately, the language or languages that are taught in schools across England are less important than the structure of language education. Whatever languages are chosen, an effective curriculum must identify a small number of languages to be taught in every single school at all levels.

Policy Recommendations

Second language education in England is failing its students and the country. It is increasingly important that children across the country are able to successfully live in a globalising world, and the creation of a multilingual society is a key step in maintaining competitive advantage, and encouraging cultural appreciation and understanding. In order to reflect the needs of this new world, a twenty-first century curriculum should:

- Ensure all children are taught a second language from the age of four to the age of sixteen, thereby requiring students to take a *modern foreign language* GCSE.
- Dedicate a set number of hours per week to second language education, with classes preferably held on a daily basis.
- Ensure all primary and secondary schools are equipped to effectively teach a small group of two-to-three 'core' languages.
- Encourage cooperation between secondary schools and their feeder primary schools to ensure students do not repeat or miss content between Years 6 and 7.
- Move beyond the repetitive teaching of abstract grammar and sentence structures, and develop a curriculum that studies the history and culture of countries of origin through the medium of their spoken language.
- Require students to graduate with an A*-C GCSE grade in a modern foreign language, similarly to existing expectations for English and Maths, in order to overcome the perception that second language education is unimportant.



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LOOKING AT THE STARS: THINKING PRACTICALLY ABOUT REDUCING INEQUALITIES IN STEM EDUCATION

Conrad Fallon

The Coronavirus pandemic has shown the importance of a national science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) workforce. The success of vaccine development at Oxford University demonstrates the critical role of STEM to a society's welfare and economy. Accordingly, as societies become increasingly defined by scientific concepts, such as artificial intelligence and climate change, ensuring the welfare and success of the UK will depend on our ability to lead in STEM research and industry.

However, in 2018, STEM Learning identified a shortfall of 173,000 workers in STEM businesses, a gap which could be filled by encouraging more young people to pursue careers in STEM.¹ This gap will cause the UK to fall behind in research output and struggle to attract the best researchers from abroad, and will cost an estimated £1.5 billion per year in recruitment, training and inflated salaries.² One key barrier to recruitment is the lack of

diversity in STEM education, which deters many potentially great scientists from entering the field in the first place.³ This chapter will

Science GCSE Structure

The most common structure for science education in England is through compulsory science GCSEs, divided into double and triple award qualifications, which differ in the difficulty and amount of content covered from the three core sciences (biology, chemistry, and physics). Typically, students are assigned to a double or triple award according to their ability, as assessed by their teachers, sometimes with input from the students themselves. Triple science is often a prerequisite for continuing science

explore the reasons for students leaving STEM education in more detail, and will review the potential solutions to this important problem.

subjects at A-level, which are normally required for studying STEM subjects at university or in industry.⁴ ^{5 6} The curriculum itself covers various subjects, from basic concepts to advanced technologies and their societal impact, sometimes accompanied by practical exercises, understanding of which is tested by written examination. As we shall see, the way in which the courses and their content are structured contributes directly to the lack of diversity in STEM.

Sources of inequality in STEM education

Many of the shortfalls of the current STEM education system in retaining students of all backgrounds were identified in two broad reviews of science education: the Wellcome Trust's Science Education Tracker and the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Diversity and Inclusion in STEM's Inquiry on equity in STEM education.^{7 8} Broad-

ly, these studies identify five factors that determine students' engagement with STEM education: perception of difficulty, personal relevance, practical experience, career relevance, and teaching resources. To encourage greater participation in STEM, these factors will need to be addressed.

Perception of difficulty

The perception of science as being too difficult puts many students off science education. According to the Wellcome's Science Education Tracker, 44% of year 9 students were discouraged from science because of its perceived difficulty, and 32% of students taking double award GCSEs cited there being too much to learn as their reason for not doing triple award. However, evidence shows these views disproportionately affect different groups of students, and often depend on a student's own confidence. For example, girls predicted to achieve at least grade 7 in physics GCSEs cite low ability for not continuing the subjects at A-level more often than boys.⁹ By gender, this disparity in confidence contributes to differing subject choices after GCSE: 46% of male year 10-13 students rate themselves as good at physics compared to 28% among females, while male post-16 physics students outnumber females roughly 3:1.¹⁰ The lowest levels of confidence in science occur in students eligible for

Personal relevance

When choosing to continue with science education, understanding how it is relevant to society and having a connection with the subject personally are important factors; relevance to real life was one of the most commonly cited moti-

free school meals (FSM), those with few family science connections (relatives working in science careers), and those with low attainment as judged by test scores and teacher-assessment; groups that all see low levels of participation in STEM.

As part of a bigger picture, confidence in one's own ability is a key factor in continuing STEM education, but is subject to factors beyond innate ability that disproportionately affect students of different backgrounds. For example, teachers – often unconsciously – call on boys more often than girls in science lessons and black Caribbean pupils are more often misallocated to lower sets.^{11,12} This is likely to reinforce a lack of confidence in pupils and discourage them from science. To increase STEM participation, an effort must be made to prevent this occurring in STEM education and encourage all students to take a positive view of their own ability in science.

inations for students learning science.¹³ However, only 40% of year 10-13 students agreed that science was relevant to their everyday lives.¹⁴ These figures were especially low among students without family science connections, with

only 26% agreeing. This reflects decreased uptake of triple science among students who scored low for family science connections – defined by how many people they knew in science related jobs, parental interest in science and whether they knew people they could talk to about science outside of school: 26% compared to 52% of students with more science connections. The personal connection to science is likely to affect whether students see it as relevant to them. Another reason for students

Practical experience

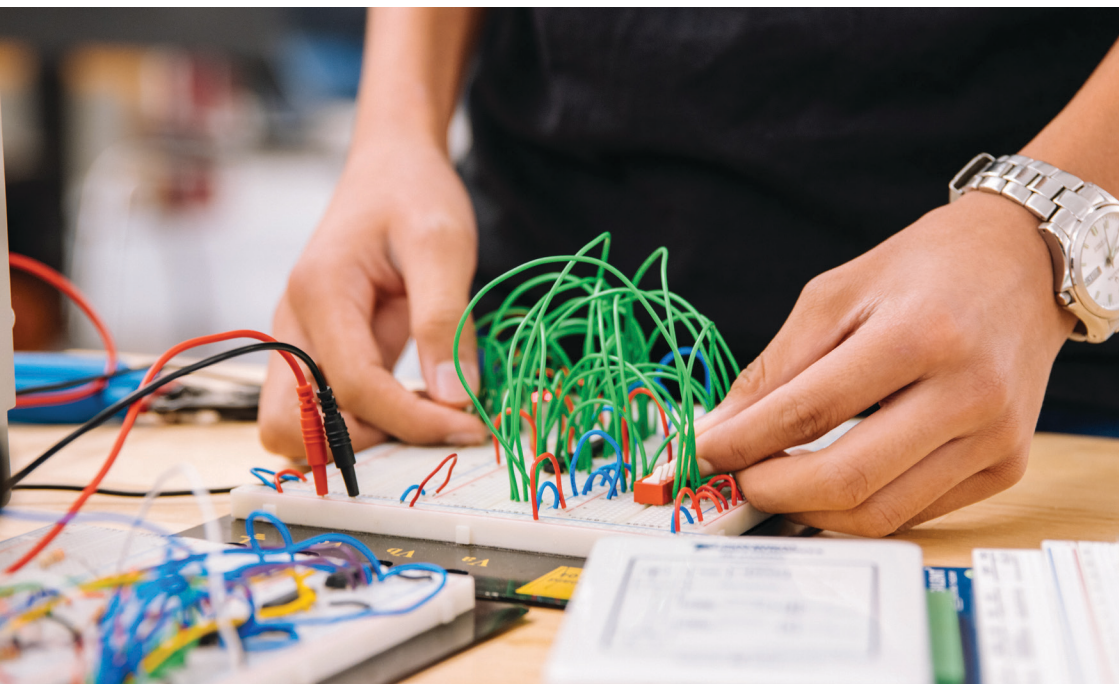
Practical work is a unique feature of science classes that reinforces scientific concepts by connecting theory with practice and is a key motivator in science education. ‘Practicals’ were a motivating factor for learning science for 55% and 32% of year 7-9 and 10-13 students respectively. Illustrating the deficit in practical work, 62% of students said they wanted to do more practical work in science classes. That a reduction in practical work is a barrier to equity in science education was demonstrated by the fact that groups that wanted to do more practical work were those least likely to continue science education, namely, those with low attain-

ment, taking double award GCSE and from households with higher levels of deprivation.¹⁶ Furthermore, although regional inequality in the frequency of practical lessons was found to be relatively low, this was only achieved by a reduction in the number of practicals in affluent regions since 2016. As practical work is important for motivating students least interested in science to continue science education and promotes better understanding of scientific concepts and the scientific method, changes to the curriculum should increase the importance placed on practical work.

Career relevance

According to the Wellcome Trust, 34% of those in years 10-13 aspired to any STEM career, with common reasons for pursuing STEM careers being enjoyment of science, the variety of careers and the perception of good pay.¹⁷ When choosing a career, students are largely influenced by the careers guidance available to them, from parents, teachers, friends and school careers advisors. However, access to careers advice varies significantly in different groups. Archer and Moote found that females, those from minority ethnic backgrounds, low attaining and economically disadvantaged students were all less likely to have received careers advice at school.¹⁸ This trend extends to other sources of information,

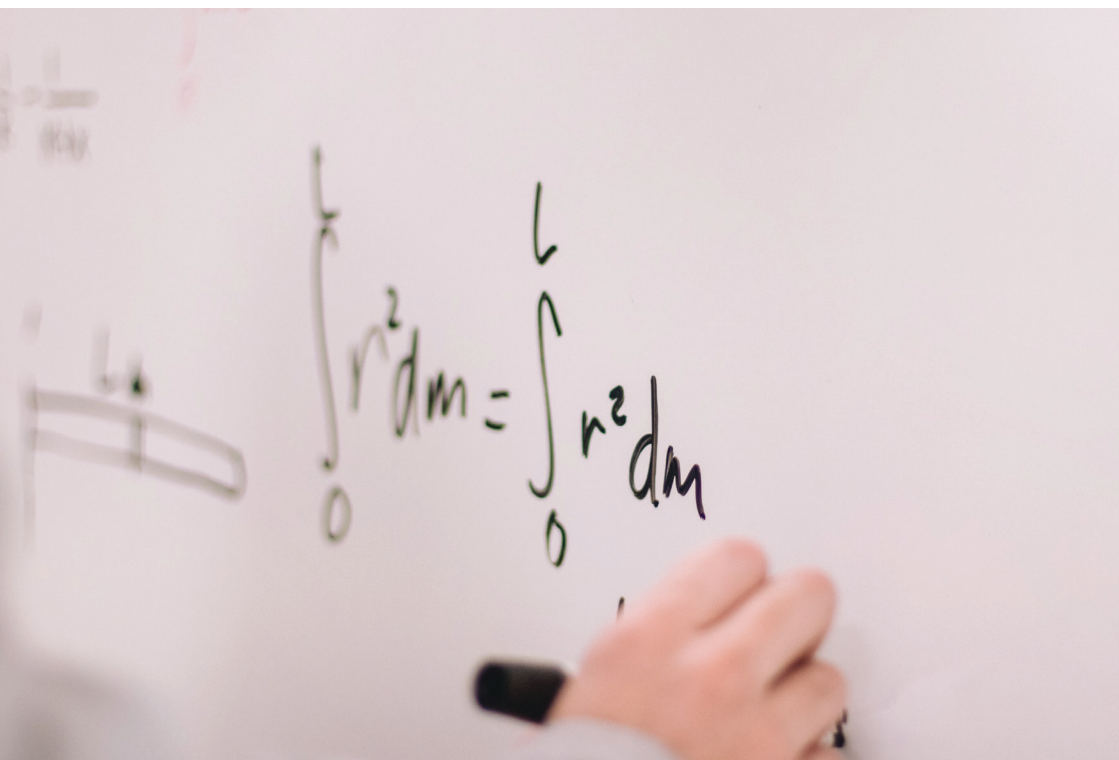
with students with few family science connections, and those eligible for free school meals less likely to consult their families and careers advisors for career advice.¹⁹ Similarly, career awareness is limited among these groups by difficulties in finding STEM work experience. Here, family science connections are crucial: while 22% of year 10-13 students with family connections have had some STEM work experience, it drops to 9% for students without them.²⁰ From this it's clear that an effort needs to be made to improve access to careers advice and increase the number of opportunities for students to find STEM work experience at schools, especially for students without family science connections.



Resources and teaching

Exacerbating the problems of inequalities in student engagement is the pressure on resources put on teachers. As schools have to manage limited resources, they are forced to prioritise different groups. Most importantly, this limits how schools are able to recruit specialist teachers with a relevant science degree, run practical sessions, and sometimes to offer certain qualifications at all, notably computer sciences GCSEs.²¹ This pressure filters down to students' engagement with science. As well as resulting in being unable to run engaging practical classes, the lack of specialist teachers undermines science education as the ability of specialist

teachers to explain things well and be enthusiastic about their subject are both vital for students' enjoyment of science. Furthermore, having a good teacher is cited by a third of students as a motivation for learning science. This pressure usually hits hardest the students already struggling with science; double award classes typically receive fewer specialist teachers and discipline experts.^{22 23 24} For any reforms to the science curriculum to produce lasting improvement to inequity, they must be supported by better provision of resources to schools and provide for students who need the most help.



SOME PROMISING PROGRAMMES

Having explored the major sources of inequity in science education, the Labour Party needs to address these with meaningful changes to the curriculum. While inequality is present at all levels of society,

including in the field of science, a number of programmes show promise in closing the attainment and engagement gaps between different groups.

Ferndown Upper School

Students at Ferndown Upper School in Dorset achieve some of the highest science outcomes at GCSE and A-Level in the country. None of them take double award science. As we have seen, students often take double award science because of their perceived inability, their lack of enjoyment and based on their teacher's assessment. None of these necessarily reflect a student's innate ability to understand scientific concepts and are often influenced by underlying inequalities. Since they started putting all students through triple science, Ferndown Upper School has seen increased engagement,

behaviour, motivation, and aspiration for science careers, especially among girls. Meanwhile, low attainment students who would have done double award progress more quickly doing triple science.²⁵ This approach is not without challenges. Notably, Ferndown Upper receives higher resources than average, and is able to retain specialist teachers, discipline experts and provide extra foundation lessons for low attaining students. Given the resources, a nationwide model would likely see higher achievement and participation in sciences for all groups.

STEM Ambassadors

STEM Learning is an institution providing science education and careers support, including resources for classes, teacher development and contact with science industries. Uniquely, they organise STEM ambassadorships, whereby people working in science make contact with schools and can run work-

shops, give talks, organise workplace visits and offer mentorships. Given that limited personal connections, unawareness of science careers and lack of representation in role models are significant barriers to engaging with science, incorporating STEM Learning initiatives into the curriculum could provide

a path to solving multiple problems. Schools participating in the schemes have reported better engagement from girls and students on pupil premium and STEM ambassadors providing schools with better resources for STEM teaching.²⁶ This impacts on many of the problems described above: after two years, 36% of girls from schools on the programme saw themselves as potential scientists compared to 30% at the start, 90% of pupil premium students met age-related

CREST Awards

CREST is a programme by the British Science Association offering qualifications for completing self-directed science projects. Like practicals, CREST awards get students to perform practical activities to reinforce scientific concepts. Going further, however, CREST students devise their own projects and find ways to solve problems scientifically over several months. This offers students greater control of their learning and allows them to pursue their own interests in science. The positive effect of CREST on STEM participation and achievement is

expectations compared to 80% at the start, and more teachers felt confident in embedding careers information and real-world contexts into their teaching.²⁷ Incorporating similar programmes into the national curriculum and increasing students' exposure to science in real life settings will not only help them to understand science theory, but encourage them to think about science careers and picture themselves doing them.

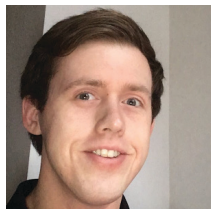
evident in the 'Quantifying CREST' study (2019).²⁸ This found that FSM students completing CREST Silver awards (GCSE level), were more likely to take up at least one STEM subject at AS level by around a third and received GCSE grades two thirds higher than their non-CREST counterparts. These results demonstrate the potential for self-led projects to improve engagement and achievement in science among underrepresented groups and respond to students' desire for more practical classes.

Conclusion

Taken together, these studies reveal the key sources of inequity that need to be addressed in science education, and the programmes outlined above provide examples of effective means to do so. Broadly, they improve self-belief in students, make it easier to get to grips with the practical side of science, and give them a clearer understanding of the relevance of science and the career's available to them, and hopefully picture themselves in those careers in the future.

1. Make triple science the standard route for science GCSEs: Allocating students to double awards science is often based on underlying inequalities and turns many students away from science for the belief that they're not good enough. Providing the support for every student to take triple science improves results and enjoyment of science.
2. Incorporate links with industry into the curriculum: Students' awareness of science as a career and its relevance to them is often distributed unequally in the population and acts a barrier to pursuing science. By incorporating real encounters with science into the curriculum – such as with STEM ambassadors – students will benefit with better understanding of science, particularly those who lack family science connections.
3. Include self-directed project work as a core part of assessment. Practical work is an important motivator for students engaging with science who are currently underrepresented, reinforces scientific concepts and teaches students the practical nature of science. Coursework based on self-directed projects will encourage students to engage with science and exercise control of their learning and might even be fun.

Underlying all of this is the continued need for better resources and support for teaching staff, on whom the success of every student depends. Given the resources to implement these policies, science can be more accessible to all, and with it, science careers. As society becomes more technologically dependent, and jobs become more specialist, the increases in STEM workers will be essential to fill the jobs of the future and keep the UK as a competitive centre of science industry and research. What's more, the journey of a science career is personally enriching for those who choose to pursue it. Everyone should have that choice.



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DEFENDING THE HUMANITIES

Daniel Wood

‘The global economy is changing’. At this point, such an observation might run the risk of appearing trite. Yet at the same time, the magnitude of the change we are confronting, and the speed with which it is coming, cannot be overstated. New technology will revolutionise the workplace, upending traditional manufacturing and industrial practices. The pace of this change and its ramifications have led some to label the time we now live in as a ‘Fourth Industrial Revolution’¹.

One needs only to look at the development of smart electronics over the past ten or twenty years (and how quickly they have been accepted as a given) to get some idea of how radical this change may prove to be. This is a change which will impact everything from global networks and national economies, right down to the individual.

Prophecy is a mug’s game. However, it doesn’t require much foresight to recognise that our econ-

omy will have to evolve and adapt in order for us to keep up with the rest of the world. What should be debated is how to ensure our econ-

Current approach

Promoting and expanding STEM education is often presented as the fast track to accomplish this – a way to resolve the anxieties about the UK’s ability to keep up. The government has placed a great focus on STEM. Earlier this year, the government announced its intention ‘to allocate more funding to courses which aligned to the “priorities of the nation”’. Namely, this meant STEM subjects. The Education Secretary Gavin Williamson was explicit in saying that this would come at the expense of less funding for what he deemed as ‘softer’ subjects, such as media studies.²

There are risks to this approach. In the rush to upskill younger people for the challenges of tomorrow through a tighter focus on STEM, we risk the decline and even loss of our humanities sector. It might be tempting to view this all as a new trend, part of this government’s desire to ramp up battles in the culture war and thereby be seen as representing the silent majority against the dictates and ivory towers of a high-minded, condescending liberal establishment. The desire in the Conservative Party, as Robert Shrimmsley observes, to not

omy is diverse and flexible enough to respond to the different needs and challenges of the future.

leave culture issues, and therefore social trends, in the hands of progressives.³ After all, Dominic Cummings, former advisor to the Prime Minister now turned foe, holds a well-known dislike for the humanities and the minds it produces (he himself having studied history at Oxford). In his now (in)famous blog post, Cummings specifically called for data scientists and ‘weirdos’ to come work in Whitehall.⁴

Yet to focus solely on this government’s actions is to overlook the change that was already taking place in the education sector. For example, at the University of Sunderland it was announced last year that jobs and even whole courses would be scrapped in history, modern foreign languages, and politics. The university’s focus would be re-directed to courses such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy.⁵

The shift away from the humanities has long been in the making. The STEM Review (published in 2009) argued that: ‘Like many other developed countries, our young people are increasingly disengaged from STEM which manifests itself in reducing enrolments in courses



in those STEM subjects which will be critical to our future economic growth.⁶ Fair enough, perhaps. But the review gives little in the way of how to *balance* the education system to ensure the *differing* needs of the future economy are met.

Moreover, a mindset of education being solely for the purpose of maxing out the economic potential of students goes back even further. A government green paper on higher education published in 1985 posited that the purpose of higher education was to serve the economy. In the same year Keith Joseph, Mrs Thatcher's Education Secretary, and one of her key political inspirations, expressed such sentiments. In the House of Commons, he said it was the Thatcher government's 'belie[f] that it is vital for our higher education to contribute more effectively to the improvement of the performance of the economy.'⁷ He added that while the government did not 'place a low value on the general cultural benefits of education and research or on study of the humanities ... unless the country's economic perfor-

mance improves, we shall be even less able than now to afford many of the things we value most.'⁸

It is important that education policy be approached with some strategic vision of future need. However, it appears that the scene was being set, particularly regarding higher education, for the country focusing primarily, in Joseph's words, on being 'more responsive to changing industrial and commercial circumstances'. Or rather, the education system should aim to maximise student's effectiveness in certain areas depending on (potentially unpredictable) changes in the economy. The irony being that the great industrial and commercial change taking place at the time was precisely away from the sort of knowledge and skills that a STEM education would be most effective for, given the steep relative decline in the UK's manufacturing base as a proportion of GDP in the 1990s and 2000s.⁹

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The value of humanities

None of this is to suggest that the humanities should take precedence over STEM subjects. That would be counterproductive. A 'humanities first' approach would no more meet the challenges of tomorrow or the social needs of today than were we to only encourage the teaching of maths. Rather, the emphasis should be on promoting balance. We should ensure that all the skills we need are available in the workforce and economy to ensure vibrancy and stability of society at large. Or as Victoria Peters, the Editorial Director of Humanities at Palgrave Macmillan, describes it: 'we need a range of subjects and approaches to make discoveries, interpret the world around us, make sound decisions and communicate effectively.'¹⁰

The humanities bring maturity into cognitive skills and inquiry. Subjects such as history, English literature, philosophy, art, and the modern languages teach vital skills. As Daniela Dumitru notes, research suggests that a strong humanities education can help students develop their skills in critical thinking. In studies, students from countries with a stronger emphasis on the humanities performed better on objective measures for critical thinking than students from countries with a lesser focus.¹¹

The humanities can prepare students for a variety of roles. For example, in the US the biggest group of humanities students (15%) go on to management positions. 14% are in office and administrative positions, and 10% are in business and finance.¹² In the UK, 56% of employers surveyed said their staff lacked essential teamwork skills. 46% said their employees struggled with handling their feelings.¹³

Once again, the purpose of this article isn't to suggest a 'one size fits all' approach to education. Only that, even following the logic of 'education solely for the economy', to neglect the humanities would be setting ourselves up for future failure. It would be endeavouring to create a technically competent workforce lacking in the other skills required to drive change, efficiency, and the development of strong personal networks.

If we are going to have an education system fit for the needs of the 21st Century then a rigorous, expansive humanities sector must be part of it.

It might be easy for the Government or an inept Education Secretary to seek cheap laughs at the expense of 'soft' subjects like 'media studies' or universities outside the Russell Group. But the teaching of

the humanities is in serious trouble in this country. This bodes poorly for our social and cultural life. As Richard J. Evans, former regius professor of history at the University of Cambridge, has said, core subjects such as history and English are 'under threat in some of the modern universities'.¹⁴

In May 2021, a number of academics, including Professor Kate Williams, warned against the diminishing of the humanities.¹⁵ In an education sector already under pressure, left to fend for itself under COVID, subjects such as history could end up 'only for the elite'. Ring-fenced in the Russell Group universities, themselves already oversubscribed and overburdened, humanities programmes could slowly wither away, before finally being discarded as money is moved away on the needs of greater *technical practicality*.

What is happening in higher education provides the starkest illustration of some of our problems. Yet these issues are as pertinent for primary and secondary educa-

Looking Forward

There needs to be a serious, extensive rethink about education in this country. Part of that should include the place of the humanities in the modern curriculum.

tion. Ensuring that students get an early start in the subject which will teach them key skills is vital. Teaching children how to think critically through, for example, a rigorous and questioning approach to historical sources is as important as it has ever been. Such skills can be applied elsewhere: whether evaluating the results of their science classes or critically interrogating the news they read.

Moreover, it is important that these skills be learnt early in order to ensure they are prepared for our technological future. In the words of two top executives at Microsoft: 'As computers behave more like humans, the social sciences and humanities will become even more important. Languages, art, history, economics, ethics, philosophy, psychology and human development courses can teach critical, philosophical and ethics-based skills that will be instrumental in the development and management of AI solutions'.¹⁶

We need to think about not only the trend in global economic and technological change but also where it is heading. What's more, what sort of skills will we need to get there.



Is the job market of tomorrow going to be awash with roles for data scientists and ‘weirdos’? Or will we need skills also suited for business development, communications and marketing, building international networks, advice and consultancy, as well as, of course, teaching the next generation? We should look to balance education, not stifle some areas at the expense of others. Studying the humanities should require an examination of values. It should question what it means to be socially responsible and ask students to consider what is of value in our society. In doing so, it provides an opportunity to develop a coherent cultural identity while also having students employ those qualities which can help them thrive as fully rounded individuals.

What’s more, this country’s cultural heritage is one of our greatest assets. In arts and culture, we make our impact felt across the world. We often hear that this country should punch above its weight. The ability

to do this and not be immediately knocked out relies on our being able to bring some strength and skill into the ring. Where else other than in literature, music, film and elsewhere is this potential not more dramatically illustrated? Having a strong humanities curriculum is not the guarantee for a strong cultural sector. But to imagine you can downgrade the former and not have an impact on the precious quality of the latter is misguided.

We need to defend the humanities in UK education to ensure that younger people are prepared for the future. We need to ensure that students receive a rounded education so that they are equipped with all the skills they need for the future. If we’re serious about ensuring that the education we are providing younger people is going to meet all of our economic needs, sacrificing the humanities isn’t going to accomplish this.

Conclusion

The UK needs to embrace a more holistic vision of education, in which all areas of the curriculum are seen to be contributing to a final goal: well-rounded students with strong competencies in many areas who have the freedom to choose which subjects they want to pursue in the future. And if we want to ensure

an active and impactful culture sector then we do need to take steps to ensure that the next generation appreciates its importance. That through a humanities and arts education, the importance of our shared heritage is shared and passed on.

Policy Recommendations

- **Protect the humanities in higher education:** stop shifting the burden of teaching critical skills and knowledge onto already overburdened Russell Group universities.
- **A balanced approach:** from an early-stage students should be supported in receiving an education which provides them with all the tools they need for their future development and careers.
- **A focused curriculum:** teaching should include and encourage subjects and skills which will provide knowledge while fostering skills suited for our future needs. The future economy, even with increased technology, will not demand a single stream of students and workers. We need different skills.
- **An awareness of culture:** our cultural sector is precious but fragile. It provides a lot but requires a lot too. In order to ensure its survival, talent and resources must be protected.

An education system fit for purpose must entail providing students with the multiple skills needed to face their and our country's future. A strong humanities education must be a part of this.



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INTEGRATING MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING INTO UK SECONDARY EDUCATION

Stephen Naulls

Content warning: Contains discussion of suicide, self-harm, minority stress, and discrimination.

Background

There is clear evidence of a mental health crisis amongst children and adolescents in the United Kingdom. There is an urgent need to improve the mental health literacy of the nation, and reform of the secondary education curriculum provides an invaluable opportunity to shape this.

Recent data suggests 50% of mental health problems are established by age 14, and 75% by age 24.¹ Young people are being referred onto Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) at a rate far quicker than recruitment into vacancies in this area.² For young people who continue onto Higher Education, Government initiatives such as the Education Transitions Network were launched as part of efforts to better understand the unique transition from post-16 (but pre-university) education to higher education – in recognition of the importance of an individual's experiences in compulsory education

in shaping their outcomes from a mental health perspective in adulthood.

The argument for improvement is therefore two-fold: 1) educating on ways to prevent – or minimise – disruption to wellbeing that may exacerbate pre-existing risk factors

The current picture in schools

There is a mixed picture in secondary education currently with regards to coverage of mental health, and how well-equipped schools are to deal with mental illness amongst their students. In a survey of members of the National Education Union in 2019, fewer than half said

Education on causes

Historically, schools have focused on improving the resilience of their students. Certainly, the need to be resilient is an important skill to embed in young people in an increasingly challenging time with specific pressures in terms of housing, health, the climate, amongst many others, that no previous generation has faced. However, there has been an insidious shift in recent years towards attributing the cause of mental illness to a perceived lack of resilience, with proponents of this narrative in the media often referring to younger generations as ‘snowflakes’. Much of this criticism fails to acknowledge the unique pressures young people in

leading to poor mental health and 2) creating a more mental health literate society, which is empowered to act upon the first signs of mental illness and support their peers who are living with them.

their school had a counsellor; three out of 10 (30%) had been able to access external specialist support; fewer than 30% had a school nurse and only 12% had a ‘mental health first aider’ as favoured by the Government.³

2021 encounter.

Whilst accountability of the media is outside of the remit of this pamphlet, there is a strong case to make that schools themselves should take greater responsibility for educating young people on the ways in which their social setting, namely the social determinants of health, can affect their mental health and wellbeing.⁴

Understanding the links between poverty and deprivation and poor mental health is the first step towards better holistic understanding for students of mental health. It should be one of the first things integrated into the curriculum -

with ample opportunity to explore these topics across virtually every subject covered in the curriculum, and previous research indicating its effectiveness both in secondary schools, and more prominently in undergraduate higher education.⁵

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Resilience can only get you so far if you live in a system which exacerbates poor wellbeing for the most vulnerable. Neglecting to educate students on this can make them feel like they have failed if they encounter mental illness in adolescence or adulthood.

Moreover, it follows that specific education of the links between

Education on consequences and adaptations

On a more granular level, efforts to improve direct education on mental health – including mental health crises – are welcome and should be made more prominent within the curriculum. Universities have encountered successes when implementing suicide prevention initiatives by introducing mental health first aid courses and creating champions for mental health amongst members of their communities.¹⁰ Schools should continue to roll out such training amongst their teachers and pupils. For the latter in particular, normalising conversations surrounding mental health and wellbeing will help to reduce stigma and perhaps provide addi-

high levels of minority stress and poor mental health – for those possessing protected characteristics – should be emphasised alongside social determinants of health.^{8,9}

The 21st century curriculum provides an invaluable opportunity to normalise conversations about race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and how these intersect. Overall, reducing the focus on blaming individuals' perceived lack of resilience, and instead focusing on the large-scale picture of mental health and its contributors, should be a key tenet of the modernised 21st century curriculum.

tional routes to accessing support, although one must be cognisant of concerns about 'rogue counselling' and safeguarding issues associated with peer-to-peer support of this nature.

On mental health, in particular when we discuss the ways in which wellbeing can link to mental health, we often focus narrowly on mood disorders (e.g. depression) or anxiety. Although the prevalence of depression and anxiety is alarmingly high amongst teenagers, the 21st century curriculum should provide renewed focus on some less prevalent conditions with high morbidity.¹¹ Many individuals will have their first episode of psychosis whilst

they are a teenager – and prompt referral onto early interventions services (EIS) has been shown to improve outcomes.¹² Similarly, for those developing eating disorders, the first manifestation of symptoms can come in adolescence, and prompt referral to CAMHS is associated with better outcomes.¹³ Improved coverage of these topics in the curriculum ostensibly leads to quicker recognition of these symptoms in young people; the reduced stigma makes their seeking help more likely. Whilst these two examples in particular focus on ways students may be referred outwards to access additional support, there is also an argument for better coverage on a broader range of mental health conditions to improve support inside schools.

For neurodiverse students, an increasingly mental health-literate 21st century classroom would be a more welcoming place to study. Individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) have often encountered discrimination from peers in education settings, and indeed some educational institutions may require additional training to enable them to better support young people with ASD.¹⁴ Whilst it may prove controversial to discuss ASD within the broader context of mental health and mental illness, given it is classified as a developmental disorder, it is still the case

that many mental illnesses are comorbid in individuals living with ASD – and poor understanding of neurodiversity places a significant amount of strain on the wellbeing of this cohort of young people.¹⁵ Meanwhile, many individuals go throughout adolescence, higher education, and much of their adult life without receiving a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).¹⁶ Those with ADHD who understand their conditions – and whose peers understand their condition – are likely to be able to better adapt and thrive in the classroom and achieve their potential younger.

The 21st century curriculum on mental health also needs to be equipped to educate students on the new challenges to mental health in a digitally connected society. Social media platforms are a controversial area of debate within the mental health community: some point to platforms that have the power to create community and make people feel safe and included, while others point to the potential for bullying, ‘fear of missing out’ (FOMO), and insecurity brought about by other platforms.¹⁷

In addition, with the benefits of increased dialogues about mental health in the mainstream, greater coverage in the media has followed. Popular television shows and movies, often based in sec-



ondary schools (or their international equivalent), have shone a light on mental health in a uniquely accessible way. While the efforts to do this deserve plaudits, critics have sometimes opposed the methods used – and their poten-

Improving access

With a more mental health literate society, and reduced stigma, more people will be willing to reach out when they need support with their mental health. It is important, therefore, that schools continue to provide information on resources for help – and indeed that schools remain an essential component of support provided for young people with mental health conditions.

Dovetailed to this, mental health services need to be given the funding they require to create more ro-

tial to cause harm or add to stigma – and schools should ensure that in their coverage of mental health they acknowledge the glorification of mental illness that can sometimes take place in these media.

bust systems able to cope with the increasing demands from a population with soaring diagnoses of mental illness. All of the above initiatives to reduce stigma and encourage a more literate society in terms of mental health are redundant if students – and teachers – cannot access support and lose faith in the system. Young people are understandably frustrated at variation in the waiting times across the UK for access to CAMHS, and funding should be provided to address regional differences in waiting times.

Conclusion

The alarming increase in prevalence of MH conditions amongst young people mounts a powerful argument for better coverage of this important topic in the secondary school curriculum. Schools should embed MH into the curriculum and adapt existing subjects to take account of emerging threats to student wellbeing. There should be a greater emphasis on a broader range of mental health conditions as part of this.

Meanwhile, it is impossible to discount the importance of the social determinants of health in informing mental health – and therefore ed-

ucation on this matter should seek to better educate students on this vital component of mental health and wellbeing. In particular, greater attention should be drawn to minority stress and the additional difficulties faced by individuals with protected characteristics by virtue of long-standing inequities in society.

Finally, the aim of generating a more mental health literate society is redundant unless waiting times and patient experience within mental health service is improved as a priority.



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INVESTING IN THE FUTURE: LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD THROUGH IMPROVED PROVISION OF FINANCIAL EDUCATION FOR ALL

Ewan Greenwood

‘Why didn’t they teach us this stuff in school?’. It’s a question often uttered following an individual’s first encounter with setting up a mortgage, wrapping their head around the various ISA options or simply making any sense of what is going on in their first (or even thirtieth) pay slip. Whilst well equipped with knowledge of the intricacies of volcanoes, circle theorems and stanzas, many of us are left lacking in day-to-day life skills when our time in school comes to an end, and financial literacy is no exception. 69% of young people report being worried about money, whilst 82% wished to receive more financial education.¹ With many people turning to online resources like Martin Lewis’ Money Saving Expert whilst scrambling to fill this vacuum of prior knowledge, we can be left wondering why we must largely teach *ourselves* this information which seems a near universal necessity for functioning in adult life. The time has come to improve financial education

in schools and raise the stakes for its comprehension.

After a decade of austerity, and now the pandemic, the economic fallout has disproportionately impacted young people. Youth unemployment in the UK is on course to triple, whilst 18–29-year-olds have seen an 80% rise in poor mental health caused by economic insecurity compared to a year ago - the biggest increase of any age group.²

More broadly, 11.5 million people in the UK today have less than £100 in savings.³ Money problems are a constant burden for Britons, and a shocking 63% do not feel in control of what happens in their lives when it comes to money. The cyclical nature of poor mental health and financial woes is no secret either.

It's also harder than ever before to form good money habits. Contactless payments and online banking have led to an often-dangerous dissociation between our financial decisions and the money we own. Meanwhile, our young people are glued to their phones, using social media platforms that make their money through targeted advertisements designed by the most talented psychologists to get those

young people to part with their cash. A targeted advertisement stimulates a demand that otherwise wasn't there, they click through and find they don't have enough money for the item. With the arrival of Klarna and other 'buy now, pay later' credit services, the exchange does not end there and so goes the vicious cycle of spending today. We have the smartest minds in the world finding ways to make people spend and, without high quality financial education, we are literally sending our young people unarmed into the consumerist colosseum to face the money-hungry lions. Improving financial education will equip future stakeholders in society with the tools necessary to understand their circumstances. The wealthiest in society stand to benefit from financial illiteracy; those who are unknowingly ready and willing to dispense with their hard-earned cash through consumerism, gambling and expensive credit are exactly the types of people that those in power feed off. The UK has some of the lowest financial literacy rates in the OECD, and the consequences of this are clear, but what exactly is being done to address this problem?⁴

The state of financial education today

In what should have been a watershed moment, financial education was made compulsory in the UK curriculum in 2014. Provision is now made through Citizenship, PSHE and Mathematics. Students are now supposed to be exposed to such topics as financial calculations, and day-to-day money management.⁶ In a mark of relative success, 64% of young people reported having received financial education in 2019, compared to 29% in 2015.⁷

However, slow progress since financial education was made a part of the curriculum has led Martin Lewis to label it a 'pariah victory'.⁸ By 2019, a mere 8% of young people reported getting most of their financial education from school.⁹ 17% reported being mostly self-taught in this area, a figure of concern due to the potential for misinformation around personal finance that may be being accessed online by young people. Of equal issue was the fact that three quarters of students reported that they receive the lion's share of their financial education from their parents, carers, or family members. This is problematic because not only may this lead to misinformation, but also the passing down of poor money habits. In this regard, we might assume that economic inequality is worsened or at least facilitated by the

current lack of universal access to high quality financial education in schools. We can no longer leave the teaching of financial literacy to the dice roll of which family one is born into. It is necessary to improve statutory provision of the subject for high quality universal access.

As for how financial education is currently taught, the most common delivery of the subject is in Mathematics at 76%, followed by PSHE at 57%, Business at 48% and Citizenship at 16%.¹⁰ Business Studies is an optional subject at GCSE whilst Citizenship is only compulsory in local authority-maintained schools, which with the advent of academisation, constitute less than 30% of all secondary schools.¹¹ Therefore, most students are only likely to receive financial education through Maths and PSHE. Even still, provision of financial education is patchy: only 18% of students reported having been taught about finance in the last month, whilst 15% said it had been more than a year ago.¹²

In Maths the extent to which financial education is provided is questionable. Indeed, students are taught how to tackle basic money problems and how to calculate interest, but here lies the issue. Teaching calculations has its uses but lacks the underpinnings to



give proper and valuable context for students. In the technological age, nearly everyone walks around with a calculator and the internet in their pocket to quickly work out calculations. Unless teachers go out of their way to make clear the real-life context and situation behind these calculations, it is left for the students to make these connections themselves, and that is by no means guaranteed to happen for many. Take interest for instance. For GCSE Maths, students are taught how to work out simple and compound interest. However, it is not compulsory to teach exactly how these are used in real life, nor the benefits that concepts like compound interest bring to long term saving. This is a potentially key lesson that many children may be missing, and therefore be una-

ble to fully comprehend why they ought to choose to save rather than spend.

As for PSHE, this is perhaps understandably viewed by many as low-stakes, seeing as there is no resultant GCSE qualification to be gained and whilst it is a statutory requirement, provision is not widely made to a high standard. Teachers are rarely specialists in taught content, and timetabled provision is minimal.¹³

All the above relate to subjects taught in secondary schools only. There is no statutory guidance of financial education for provision in primary schools, even though there is strong evidence that the earlier the intervention the better in terms of building good money habits and behaviour.^{14 15}

Improving financial education

Mathematics being the primary stream of financial education provision means that this is the subject where we can most easily improve the quality of that provision. Research suggests strong benefits from combining mathematics and financial education, not only because the subjects complement each other, but because mathematics teachers have been found to be more capable of delivering high quality financial education than other subject teachers.¹⁶ Within the subject there needs to be more practical applications of mathematics to financial situations. GCSE questions could pose a situation around particular budgets and best practice for allocations given a context, which savings or investment option to choose given financial goals and debt management. It is fair to say Mathematics is generally taken more seriously than Citizenship and PSHE by schools, parents and students alike. If we increase the provision of financial education in this subject, and so raise the stakes to gaining financial literacy through contributing more to a GCSE maths grade, more students may leave school with a solid foundation of knowledge around personal finance. Many students who take GCSE maths will see algebra and geometry dominate the questions that determine

their grade, with questions linked to financial education accounting for only a small portion. Many will never, or very rarely, use geometry or algebra again in later life. All will engage with personal finance decisions that would lean on taught skills around budgeting, debt management or saving amongst others. There is precedent for how this might be approached too. The recently developed post GCSE Core Mathematics qualification focuses on the application of mathematics to real life situations that will be encountered by students. Maths for personal finance is included as part of this, and students are exposed to questions around calculating student debt repayments, mortgage repayments, investment decisions involving savings accounts or stocks and shares, loan comparisons and income tax amongst many others.¹⁷

Continuing with the trend of low hanging fruit, the Government should make the teaching of financial education statutory within the subject of PSHE. It should be a non-negotiable for all schools to ensure each child leaves with an agreed upon degree of financial literacy. This should be assessed, and a qualification provided to each student to hold students accountable for their understanding. The importance of this comes in

the sense that PSHE offers a powerful medium through which some of the more emotional and social aspects of financial education can be taught that might not be wholly appropriate to teach within mathematics. Students need to be taught about the potential stress that can come through personal finance and ways to deal with this, as well as to hold frank discussions around money that might not be taking place in the students' home.

Another way the provision of financial education needs to be improved is to review how the content is taught. Many of the key lessons that students can learn involve changes to behaviour and habits. These kinds of lessons are not so easily taught in the same way as more conventional subjects. Instead, students must learn about personal finance through doing and hands on experiences.¹⁸ In this regard Robert Kiyosaki proposes teaching financial education through simulations, be that through games not too dissimilar to monopoly, or through more extravagant school currency models.¹⁹ In the latter, students would be exposed to a day-to-day simulation in their schools where they

earn currency for certain actions and are able to spend this on certain luxuries or save. Such a system could provide a myriad of experiential lessons around how to budget, how to manage debt and how to spend wisely. To shape behaviour, we must allow students to learn through experience. It is not good enough simply telling students to save - they need to understand for themselves why. In a simulation, students will no doubt make mistakes, but it is better to do so in the safe environment of the school than do so in the real environment of adult life.

Furthermore, given that many key aims of financial education might pertain to behavioural changes, which are best made at an earlier age, the Government should aim to improve financial education in primary schools. Of course, there is the argument that certain knowledge will be inapplicable at such a young age and so potentially redundant, but the basics around forming good money habits, learning to curb desires and distinguishing between wants and needs, are best instilled at an early age before bad habits have the time to become fully fledged.²⁰

Policy Recommendations

- Expanding the mandatory taught and GCSE assessed element of financial education within the Mathematics curriculum. This will naturally raise the stakes for gaining financial literacy and improve the seriousness with which schools' approach financial education. This can follow the model used by the Core Mathematics curriculum.
- Conducting a review into the merits of creating localised school economies to promote good money habits in a simulation type format, and assess the cognitive benefits of this learning-by-doing method for habit formation.
- Providing greater guidance and training to educators, providing the resources to allow educators to effectively teach. Ensure that these resources and training are such that financial education is hands-on and interactive, reflecting the importance of behavioural changes (more so than knowledge acquisition, as in other subjects).
- Encouraging schools to bring in external experts and professionals relevant to financial education to offer real-life exposure to these issues which might be missing if provision is made just through existing teachers.
- Developing a robust curriculum of just-in-time knowledge as well as appropriate changes as children get older (for example: first job, pocket money, leaving for university etc.)
- Conducting a review into the merits of teaching early years and primary school students' good money habits.
- Ensuring that each school has a designated financial education lead, to coordinate efforts and ensure each school is in receipt of updated best practice in a fast-changing world of personal finance.



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RE-IMAGINING RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION: A ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE

Shohaib Ali

Content warning: Contains discussion of abusive relationships, sexual harassment and online bullying.

The teaching of relationships and sexual education in the UK has historically focused on biological reproduction, failing to cover the broader issues including healthy relationships and its role in developing a fairer society. Relationship education across the UK is grossly inadequate. In 2013 an Ofsted reported found that 42% of primary and 38% of secondary schools inspected in England required improvement to their sexual and relationship education.¹ Important topics such as domestic violence were not covered by a large number of schools.

Education is a devolved issue, and relationship and sex education (RSE) is treated differently across the four nations. Relationship education has been a policy priority for successive governments. The recent the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019, made Relationships Education compulsory for all pupils in England re-

ceiving primary education, and RSE compulsory for all pupils receiving secondary education. This signals a huge leap forward in delivering RSE in schools. However there are a number of areas that require further development for the future.

WHY IS RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION NEEDED?

Reducing levels of abuse

A 2015 study by the Children's Commissioner found that over a quarter of adult survivors of child sexual abuse did not know they were being abused at the time. In addition a survey of teachers in English schools found a 1/3 thought that children did not know enough about sexual abuse.²

A child's rights based approach has been called for by a number of international organisations. It is felt that teaching children about the rights in relation to their body could reduce child sexual abuse. They allow children to recognise inappropriate behaviour, improve knowledge and allow children to adopt protective behaviours.³

Furthermore, students interact with a digital world in ways that never existed before our lifetimes. As

This article will explore evolving areas of relationship education that have yet to be fully addressed and how policies should be designed to make RSE more effective.

such, equipping students with the tools to stay safe in these spaces has never been more needed. The issues of revenge porn, sharing nude photos to peers, and blackmail are unique challenges that children growing up today have to navigate. For instance a 2017 survey of 20,000 girls, 27% felt that sharing nude pictures were a normal part of a relationship, with 16% feeling pressured to send them.⁴

RSE is ideally suited as the avenue to discuss these topics in schools. Reviews have found that that RSE increases children's ability to recognise inappropriate behaviour, increase self-protective behaviours and increase disclosure of sexual abuse.⁵ Its role in improving digital awareness is yet to be researched.

Intimate partner violence

Partner abuse affects all genders and sexualities. However, girls are at a heightened risk of violence from male partners: and attitudes about gender inequality influence violent behaviour.

Evidence suggests that there is a lack of knowledge among young people about abusive relationships and consent.⁶ A 2015 European survey of 4,500 young people aged 14-17 years found that in England 41% of girls and 14% of boys experienced some form of

sexual violence from partners.⁷ Furthermore 22% of boys had pressured girls into unwanted sexual behaviour.

Teaching around consent is inconsistent in school RSE programmes. There has been an increasing drive to incorporate this in the national curriculum. It is crucial to ensure that these topics happen early in a child's schooling, and across all types of schools.

Inequalities

The prevalence of sexual abuse and adverse health outcomes disproportionately affects certain groups. For instance, those with special education needs (SEN) are at greater risk of sexual exploitation and online sexual harassment.⁸ Furthermore those from socioeconomically deprived groups experience higher rates of teenage pregnancy and child sexual abuse.

Another group that has proven to be a strike rod during the discussion surrounding relationship education, are students who identi-

fy as LGBTQIA+. They have been shown to be at greater risk of sexual violence, physical violence, poor mental health, teenage pregnancy and STI incidence.^{9 10} This group is often deliberately side-stepped in the discussion surrounding relationship education as it is seen as a contentious issue. Recent guidance to introduce LGBTQIA+ relationship education in a 'timely manner' is deliberately vague and non-committal. RSE can be seen as one possible tool in reducing this level of inequality.



FOCUSES GOING FORWARD

Funding evidence-based research

As relationship education becomes more embedded in the national curriculum, the evidence base regarding the effectiveness of these outcomes needs to be always questioned to ensure that these changes have the desired outcome. Relationship education research has been very limited in the UK.¹⁰ In addition, relationship education has historically focussed on impacts related to public health measures, such as teen pregnancy

and STI incidence. As the remit of relationship education expands, we must also measure the expanded range of outcomes that it seeks to address. Relationship outcomes are multifactorial, and often quite hard to define. Defining these outcomes, and the role of increased diverse relationship education on these, would help to clarify the utility of relationship education in schools.

Teacher training

Teacher training for RSE should not be overlooked. Health and wellbeing typically forms less than 5% of teacher training course content, and may be inadequate. Recent government pledges have included funding and increased resour-

es for teacher training.¹¹ Having a clear strategy from implementing health and wellbeing education in teacher training to teachers already in school, is required to ensure that the workforce is equipped to deal with future challenges.

LGBTQIA+

This group are often excluded from RSE, as traditional models have focussed on heterosexual relationships and narrow gender identities. Making RSE more inclusive may promote healthier sexual behaviours among LGBTQIA+ community. Teachers and parents alike often lack the necessary skills to approach this topic area. Homophobic and transphobic language is sadly common amongst UK staff and students, with 36% of teachers reporting having heard such lan-

guage from other school staff.¹²

There is still a clear lack of direction or focus on how to best incorporate LGBTQIA+ RSE across all types of schools. Recent guidelines recommending an introduction in a ‘timely manner’ is deliberately vague and non-committal. Having a clearer implementation policy across all school types would ensure that this education is delivered to all children regardless of where they go to school.

Effective RSE

Although seemingly obvious, discussions about RSE education often fail to assess effectiveness when delivered in schools. Although research is needed on the impact that this has on a wider range of outcome measures as already discussed, there remains key lessons that should always be applied.

RSE has the most impact when delivered before the young person experiences the situations in real life. Age-appropriate teaching on puberty and sexual intercourse before a young person experiences them is recommended by both Ofsted and UNESCO.^{13 14} Relationship education has now been extended to primary schools, however early introduction of sex education may

also be indicated.

In addition, it is important that key stakeholders are consulted when designing what should be included in RSE. Research has shown that 47% of young people feel that lessons don’t cover what they need to know about sex, and 72% want schools to listen to them about what should be taught. Ensuring that the young person’s voice is at the centre of policy making and research will ensure that these goals align.¹⁵

Another set of stakeholders who should also be explored are local community and health services. Effective RSE may lead to increased disclosures of abuse, and an increase of use of local services.¹⁶ RSE that signposts local servic-

es would allow young people the chance to access these services and allow expansion of services to meet the unmet service needs.

Furthermore, it is important that RSE is not taught in a silo. Successful RSE is embedded into the regular curriculum, and happens often. Normalising this aspect of teaching will prevent stigma and othering of an important topic area. The lessons and topics addressed in RSE should also be taught in a school wide approach. Effective RSE can

be undermined if young people are exposed to norms, such as sexual harassment or homophobia in other areas of school life.¹⁷ A school-wide set of RSE values that are embedded into wider school policy could be one way to address this.

To summarise, RSE is most effective when taught by trained professionals in regular sessions; and when it is inclusive, embedded, and involves the input of young people.

Policy Recommendations

1. Research strategy, and funding plan for RSE research that is UK focussed and covers a diverse set of outcome and outcomes measures.
2. Clear commitments to include LGBTQIA+ people and experiences in RSE across all types of schools early on in the curriculum.
3. Investment in teacher training to equip teachers to deliver RSE.
4. Ensure young people are included in the design of RSE.

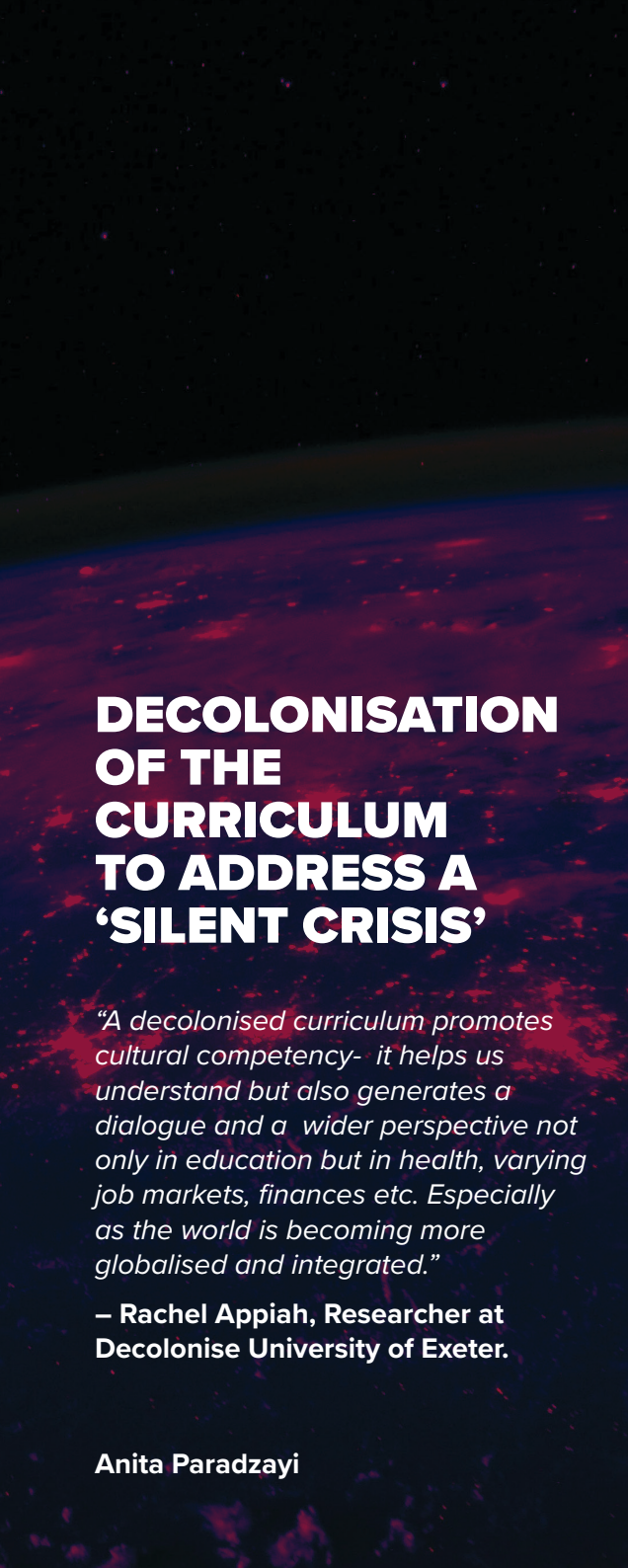


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DECOLONISATION OF THE CURRICULUM TO ADDRESS A 'SILENT CRISIS'

"A decolonised curriculum promotes cultural competency- it helps us understand but also generates a dialogue and a wider perspective not only in education but in health, varying job markets, finances etc. Especially as the world is becoming more globalised and integrated."

**– Rachel Appiah, Researcher at
Decolonise University of Exeter.**

Anita Paradzayi

There is one problem with decolonizing the curriculum. Many do not understand what it means or what it entails which often leads to misconceptions that specifically relate to the erasure of British history. But it is more about enhancing and building on British history by fostering and appreciating the coexistence of various viewpoints from the global south. The fight for a decolonized curriculum is spread far and wide, most notably in South America and South Africa. It is nothing new: scholars such as Antonio Sergio Guimaraes have added to this dialogue over the past 20 years. But it is a difficult conversation to have in the aim of positively changing our education system.

When we compare other generations to Gen Z and Millennials, we observe a generational change which has resulted in a better awareness of societal concerns. This has been amplified more by social movements such as Black Lives Matter and Rhodes Must Fall. These

revelations are underpinned by decades of failed liberal policies which have been ineffective in reducing inequality. For example, institutions are under pressure to modernise their curriculum in order to close the attainment gap between white students and students from black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. Data collected by the OfS over the last five years reveals significant differences in how universities in England accept, retain, and issue degrees to students based on their gender, economic background, and race. At 96 of the 97 universities studied, black students were less likely than white students to graduate with a first or upper second-class degree. Though there has been improvements with overall gap in attainment closing from 24.7 percentage points in 2015-16 to 18.3 percentage points in 2019-20 - the 'silent crisis' remains!¹²

The campaigns to decolonize the curriculum continuously highlight that the British education system is rooted in colonial epistemology which upholds the British empire. It exacerbates the empire's 'success' and its 'great' legacy. However, we live in a multicultural society, so, it is important to question the view-

point in which history is told. We need the 'other side' of the story that does not paint minorities as inferior but rather acknowledges and embraces their rich histories and contributions to art, music, technology, literature and more to British culture. A colonized curriculum somewhat encourages a sense of superiority (whether consciously or unconsciously) in the face of minorities, as the colonial viewpoint undermines their existence outside of slavery, colonialism, racism and more. It also frames the experience of ethnic minorities in a way that is synonymous with 'deficit' or 'victimhood'; this perpetuates the imbalance of power but also shapes public discourse and dictates the norm thereby encouraging a Eurocentric view of other countries which directly erases and suppresses their perspectives.

This article will explain how these factors seep through (from education) into jobs, finances, health and more. A decolonized curriculum broadens perspectives: it is not intended to 'point the finger' or guilt trip but open a wider truth and challenge the institutional hierarchy and monopoly on knowledge.

Brief context

The questions that might come into mind are how does the curriculum perpetuate racism? How does it affect society, and to what extent?

This section briefly discusses the contextual elements of a colonized curriculum brought forth in the beginning of this article.

First, we must look at the varying forms in which education is perceived and how it leads us to understanding how either conscious or unconscious racism, bias or prejudice from a colonized curriculum can affect aspects outside of education.

In discussion with Chatham House on “Understanding Decolonization in the 21st Century” Dr Meera Sabaratnam proposed four ways in which education is perceived:

1. The conservative view – education is perceived as the preserver, transmitter of knowledge and traditions
2. The liberal view – education is used as an innovator in which critical thinking is used to pick up and tear down received ‘wisdom’
3. The neo-liberal view – education is used as a tool for training workers to actively enhance the economy
4. The justice-oriented view – education is used as a tool for social component to achieve social justice on varying levels.³

Let us consider all four perspectives in which education is used; this demands an awareness of the timeframe in which research for



certain subjects were conducted, as this assists in drawing conclusions that contribute to literature that 'explains' today's society. In example, Sofia Akel states that 'Subjects such as anthropology, the study of human societies and their culture, were inextricably linked to the colonial project.⁴ Anthropologists would voyeuristically study the 'subjects' in former colonies, providing highly sought-after insights about the peoples Britain wished to rule over. The surveillance of communities enabled the plunderers to strategically plan invasions, divide, conquer and quell insubordination.^{5 6}

Through the example given by Sofia we can clearly see the colonial undertones that are in certain subjects which are passed down and taught in educational institutions. The research done was often inhumane and the information 'found' and recorded undermined some thriving cultures, perspective, and civilisations. Effectively, the information has been passed down from generation to generation and created both conscious and unconscious racial undertones towards Black, Asian, and other minorities. The empire can be used as a clear example, as the countries and the people that were colonised were perceived as inferior, uneducated etc. This has its links to education, work, finances, health and other

areas of life. For example, myths created in America in the 1800's about physical racial differences were used to justify slavery — and are some still believed by doctors today as medical students across the world are still being taught such myths along with other racial lies.⁷ This leads to patients not being believed when they are in pain or experiencing racial bias in the health care system that costs their lives. Perfect examples of these were highlighted by the injustices that POC faced during the Coronavirus pandemic.⁸

The Black Lives Matter movement last year opened many doors and opportunities for Black, Asians and other Minority backgrounds. However, work still needs to be done: especially in reforming our education system, as it is the backbone of our society. Decolonising the curriculum creates variety in the education system. This is done by introducing theories, perspectives, and overall academia outside of the west which enables the ability to critically understand varying viewpoints and also create a global conscience when going into the world outside of education.

Opening a dialogue

To facilitate this change, it is critical to promote conversation. Universities have long been places where ideas may be discussed thoroughly and critically. They must take the initiative and claim this territory at this critical and exciting juncture of change. Education has undoubtedly been one of the most essential engines of colonialist appropriation.⁹ As a result, it has the potential to play a critical role in building a diverse narrative by opening a discussion on decolonizing the curriculum. This will help people understand what it is and why it is essential; especially for those individuals who have misconceptions or negative perceptions about the process. The process in doing so can be made exciting and engaging through – resources (blogs), round tables, debates, societies or even having stands at university events.

When in conversation with Rachel Appiah, she stated that some lecturers were not keen on the movement and preferred the current curriculum. This implies that because it does not impact them, they are unconcerned about the problem at hand. In an open access repository of Middlesex University Begum and Saini voiced that when ethnic minority academics who frequently pointed out sexism, racism,

homophobia, or class-based discrimination were often viewed as problematic by colleagues would not have suffered such prejudice.¹⁰ This is often reflected in the media, who actively perpetuate the online abuse towards ethnic minorities through misleading and exaggerated claims. ‘When Lola Olufemi raised the issue of the shortage of BME academics on the Cambridge University English curriculum, the headlines implied that she intended to remove all White academics from the reading lists and replace them with Black writers.’¹¹

Similarly, Dr Priyamvada Gopal was targeted with online sexist and racist abuse after calling out neo-imperialism in Haiti.¹² These are examples that are echoed in classrooms with lecturers that are not open to the idea of a decolonized curriculum. Essentially, this brings up the issue of power plays and often there are inadequacies in existing policies and procedures for exposing and addressing these issues. Dean and Associate Professor, University of Cape Town Suellen Shay suggests that lectures are usually unaware of the damage they are doing to student by rejecting their pleas of a diverse curriculum – it leads to nullifying everything that is being worked for.[13]

ACTIVELY FACING THE CHALLENGES

Representation

According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (2017), institutions are more likely to recruit Black workers as cleaners, receptionists, or porters rather than as lecturers or professors, which is a barrier that must be addressed.¹⁴ Women, particularly women of colour in academia, are less likely than males to hold high positions as heads of school or departments.¹⁵ This shows that there is a lack of representation in universities, an aspect that is essential in giving minorities a sense of validations that allows them to freely voice their opinions. This fosters a great climate in which ideas and opinions are diverse, and everyone feels appreciated. Decolonizing the curriculum is reliant on academics

who have also faced discrimination and have a clear understanding of what needs to happen to tackle the issue. In saying this the strategy is also dependent on who to hire and promote, educating teachers and researchers from a variety of backgrounds to help 'reshape the academic canon, pedagogical practices, and create new institutional norms. There is a lack of 'suitable mentors' which has (at times) led to strained communication amongst teachers and students of colour. Mentorship, allies, and support from POC established academics to the early career community may go a long way toward improving our feeling of belonging and career trajectory.¹⁶

"White, middle-class types of capital are prevalent in the academic world – cultural knowledge and skills – are disproportionately valued over others. These forms of capital not only ignore the resilience POC have accrued in navigating obstacles to achieve a space within academia, but they also deliberately undervalue the sorts of knowledge and critical reflexivity academics within marginal spaces can bring to the table."¹⁷



Dismissing the deficit model

Once students have reached university there is often a clear view that has been sociologically ingrained in them in relation to ethnic minorities. For example, the overall identity of 'Black people' is based in a position of deficit. They are usually described by other students as 'disadvantaged individuals' due to what they have learnt at A-level or GCSE in subjects such as History or Sociology. Though this is somewhat true it erases their history outside of this view. Lecturers such as Dr Yaa Asare have heard a student state that they were "lucky

enough to have been born White" as a result. She exclaimed that "The idea of Black disadvantage had taken root in her consciousness to the extent that she interpreted white privilege as indicative of her own good fortune".¹⁸ This suggests that this deficit model needs to be 'debunked' and replaced initially by a curriculum that acknowledges both positive and negative aspects of black or other ethnical groups history. This works best by introducing a transformative approach based on critical cultural education.

"The transformative approach (of critical multicultural education) changes the basic assumptions of the existing curriculum and aims to help students understand concepts and issues from different ethnic and cultural perspectives ... to become aware that knowledge is not culture-free but rather constructed through the perspectives of those who have power. In the transformative approach, students learn the dominant narratives but also alternative narratives. In the end it is hoped that students will be able to think critically about whose narratives are used and the consequences of this, changing the basic assumptions of the existing curriculum." - Arphattananon^{19 20}

Conclusion

These challenges fit appropriately on the “decolonising the curriculum” agenda. Once these challenges have been pinpointed a strategy needs to be created, acknowledged, and implemented, not just by one university but by all. Universities need to work collaboratively with other student organisations like the National University of Students, and with politicians, to champion a decolonised curricu-

lum. This process creates a general understanding and consensus among institutions on how to deal with this ‘silent issue’. The process will require different strategies, different kinds of resources and expertise, different lines of responsibility and accountability. The risk of not having a clear strategy is that the curriculum will look no different in the future.

Policy Recommendations

- Actively opening a dialogue which will not only raise awareness but encourage an understanding into the topic.
- A collaborative strategy between universities, organisations, and politicians to champion a diverse curriculum.
- Debunking the deficit model, and actively changing to a curriculum that both reflects on the atrocities of cultures but also highlights their contribution to wider society.

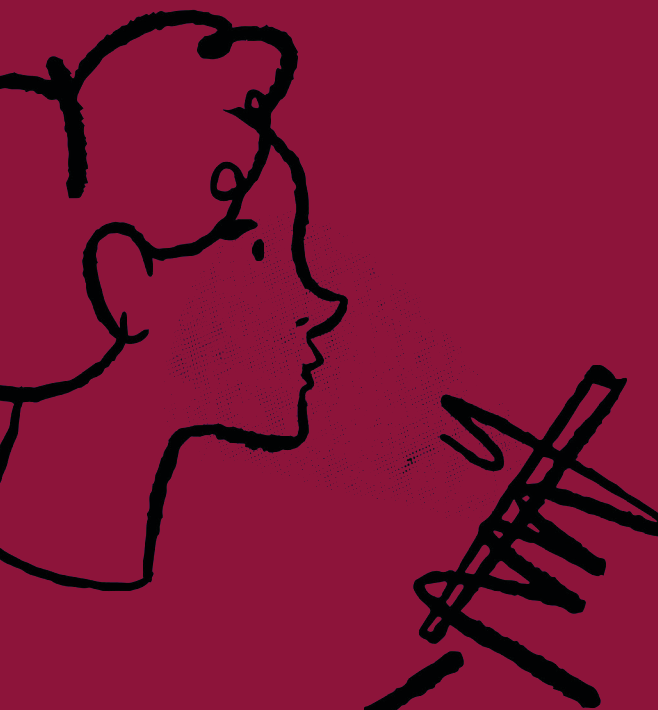


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ENVISIONING A PAN-CURRICULUM STRATEGY FOR CRITICAL LITERACY AND EDUCATING ABOUT MISINFORMATION

Emma Stevenson

What is critical literacy?

From a critical literacy perspective the world is seen as a socially constructed text that can be read. [...] Texts are socially constructed and created or designed from particular perspectives. As such, they work to have us think about and believe certain things in specific ways. Just as texts are never neutral, the ways we read text are also never neutral. Each time we read, write, or create, we draw from our past experiences and understanding about how the world works.¹

The National Literacy Trust defines critical literacy as “a whole-school, cross-curricular approach towards the teaching of literacy that encourages readers to be active participants in the reading process as opposed to passive absorbers of information.”² Dr Arlene Holmes-Henderson, Research Fellow in Classics Education at the University of Oxford, distils this down into specific applications by identifying critical literacy as an essen-

tial tool to enable young learners “to deconstruct and construct arguments, as well as knowledge and techniques to help them to make informed and ethical judgements.”³ Anderson and Irvine similarly promote the ‘active’ nature of critical literacy by positioning readers and learners as ‘border crossers’ who explore the personal, sociopolitical, economic and intellectual border identities of the texts they read and the information they absorb.⁴ They assume an inherent politics to our reading, which mirrors or blurs that of what we read.

Across all these definitions, we can perceive a common thread: that critical literacy encourages readers to challenge what they read, and by developing the skills they need to ask critical questions enables them to position themselves as active readers, engaging directly with

Misinform-ed

The term ‘fake news’ was popularised by former US President Donald Trump when he described domestic media outlets as ‘The Fake News Media’ and ‘the true enemy of the people’.⁵ The Digital, Culture, Media & Sport Committee have long argued that the term ‘fake news’ is a misleading one and has a polarising effect, as it is often utilised by a reader to describe a text they dislike or disagree with, and reduces the common ground for reasoned debate. Instead, the

the different ideas, people, and perspectives of those texts and indeed drawing on our own experiences understanding to colour that engagement. Conversely, we can draw the conclusion that without the deliberate development of critical literacy skills, our reading is likely to be passive and perceived as falsely ‘neutral’, when in fact what we read and absorb is anything but. In an era of the proliferation of media and the constant bombardment of information which, more often than not, we experience online, we are left open to attack from potentially malicious texts or false sources of information. It is little wonder, therefore, that there are growing concerns about the ability of young people to confidently and effectively navigate the world around them.

Committee have encouraged the UK Government to adopt the terms ‘misinformation’ – the inadvertent sharing of false information – and ‘disinformation’ – the deliberate creation and sharing of false/and or manipulated information intended to deceive and mislead audiences – which they have since done.⁶

⁷ I will follow the Committee’s lead in the article that follows, as this is more in keeping with the methodology of the critical literacy practices I aim to promote.

Towards critical literacy in a 21st century curriculum

The answer to how we better-embed critical literacy within the curriculum does not lie with designating it as a topic or unit to be studied – a conclusion drawn and shared by many of the contributions exploring reforming the curriculum in this pamphlet – rather, it should be looked at as a “lens, frame or perspective” for teaching throughout the day and across the curriculum.⁸ Indeed, in relation to ‘literacy’ in general, the Department for Education and Ofsted have long-promoted the idea that the development of young learner’s literacy is a “shared responsibility” of all teachers across all subjects.⁹ Such a strategy requires critical literacy learning to be made available to young people from the outset of their schooling career in primary school, until they exit full-time education.

Why does this matter? A 2018 study conducted by the Commission on Fake News and the Teaching of Critical Literacy in Schools, a joint-venture launched by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Literacy and the National Literacy Trust, found that 54% teachers believe the national curriculum does not equip students well enough to spot fake news, whilst half of the

children surveyed said they were worried about whether they can identify fake news.¹⁰ ¹¹ Shockingly, the Commission’s report estimates that from it’s findings, only two percent of children have the critical literacy skills to enable them to discern fake news.¹²

It is important to stress that the impact of misinformation and disinformation, and young people’s ability to discern it, can have far-reaching impacts. Aside from the obviously dangerous consequences of misinforming and disinforming, and indeed exposing young people to harmful materials, educators are becoming increasingly concerned about fake news creating anxiety among students, with as many as 61 percent of teachers reporting they are worried about fake news affecting children’s wellbeing.¹³

However, any efforts to develop and deepen children’s critical literacy skills, and their confidence and conviction in applying them, cannot solely place the onus of responsibility upon teachers. A ‘whole-school’ approach should ensure that teachers across all subjects feel confident and supported in their delivery of critical literacy skills.



Recognising the limits of the classroom

In a survey carried out by the UK's National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) 35 percent felt that critical literacy was not taught in a way that was transferable to the outside world.¹⁴ Furthermore, Elizabeth Bishop has stressed that whilst classroom practices can support critical literacy, there are significant challenges and limitations to conducting critical literacy learning inside school spaces. Bishop cites research by Behrman, whose review of the research on classroom practices that support critical literacy, found that the goals of critical literacy – namely, promoting social justice – are not reflected in the hierarchical relations through the classroom traditionally functions.¹⁵

This is not least the cause because of additional barriers children from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and those from marginalised groups, already face in the traditional hierarchical classroom. Bishop, therefore, suggests 'youth organizing' as an exemplar alternative space for critical literacy to be enacted, by which she means spaces that 'support youth engagement in activism as a process', such as youth development, youth leadership and community organising.¹⁶

Whilst I take Bishop's and Behrman's view that schools are not always the best settings for all children to hone their critical literacy skills, when we consider the untapped potential within the curriculum to adapt to the needs of

students, rather than enforce un-fit patterns of learning on them, I believe schools to be an essential arena for this development. The library, for instance, now a forgotten relic in many schools, could be revived to provide students with a safe space in which to be inquisitive, and to cultivate and apply critical literacy and thinking skills. Dr Holmes-Henderson cites the example of Australia, in their efforts to prioritise critical skills in education over the last 40 years, which for the last 15 years has served as an international model of good practice in critical literacy education. At Scotch College, a Melbourne Secondary School, the library is staffed by ‘teacher librarians’, who “as well as teaching a subject, are also attached to a form and lead a cross-curricular unit each semester.”¹⁷ These units include a focus on critical literacy through social justice themes such as poverty, famine and sustainability, with titles such as ‘Geographies of human wellbeing’ and ‘Water for life’. Dr Holmes-Henderson notes that the resources students are provided with are designed to empower them to explore their thinking around an issue before having to articulate it. Students are taught a number of ‘thinking templates’ which promote problem-solving skills including:

- P.O.O.CH. (Problems, options, outcomes, choice)
- S.W.O.T. (Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats), brainstorming and tree diagrams

These thinking skills are then reinforced across the curriculum, as ‘core skills’¹⁸

‘Teacher librarians’ lead sessions on digital literacy which aim to enable students to better understand that the information they encounter online may not always be reliable. They also collaborate with other teachers. For example, they lead critical literacy activities in English lessons, such as cover and picture analysis of graphic novels, and discussions about whether the blurb did a good job of summarising the key premise and themes of a book. At Scotch, the librarians lead and support the development of critical literacy, and the college provides opportunities for teachers’ professional and learning development, including opportunities for ‘collaborative learning’.¹⁹ This innovative approach recognises the limits of the traditional classroom, but rather than abandoning classrooms altogether works with them to better embed the teachings of critical literacy learning in a meaningful and collaborative way.

Conclusion

We should view the acquisition of critical literacy skills not as a nice-to-have, or even simply as a need, but as a right. Indeed, this does not lie only with children and young people. As our world continues to evolve, both through globalisation and online, adults must seek to keep up. Reforming the curriculum

for the 21st Century, and making the acquisition of critical literacy skills an integral part of a pan-curriculum whole-school approach to learning, will be essential if we want to mitigate the risks posed by misinformation and disinformation, and, crucially, in being responsible citizens.



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CLIMATE CRISIS EDUCATION

Amy Dwyer

The climate crisis is perhaps the most serious threat facing our generation. However, beyond the very simplified basics that we are taught in our science classes, there is very little that we understand about it. Students might be taught about climate change during a specific environment week, alongside many other issues. This is not enough: we need sustained and regular content provided to students to instill in young people the importance of climate change. Given that it has the potential to destroy all life on Earth, it deserves a more central place in our curriculum. We need to set time aside for teachers and students to explore the causes of climate change, the potential impact if left unchecked, and robust action that we can take to ensure that it is not left unchecked. This would do much to ensure that the overwhelming majority of the public are on-board and committed to the green agenda. Only then can we hope to pressure big business to change.

The background

Beyond the obvious complete ecological breakdown and eradication of human life from Earth, much discourse has focused around the reality of the situation and the monumental task of mitigation that lies ahead. Although there is much pessimism that can be dwelled on, we must look to the positive action that has taken place. The solutions are at least as important as the problem, and it is important to remain focused on these rather than doom-scrolling through social media at the worsening climate emergencies around the world. Ed Miliband, Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, speaking at a SERA rally at the Labour Conference, echoed these sentiments, emphasising that we must always be looking forward to the solutions: and that there is hope for the future if we all take action. Recent research has shown that if only 16% of high school students in high- and middle-income countries were to receive climate change education, ‘we could see nearly a 19 gigaton reduction of carbon dioxide by 2050’.¹ This demonstrates the significant benefits of educating even just a small proportion of young people about climate change. We have so much to gain and very little to lose from this.

As Laura Cunliffe-Hall stated in her article for the Young Fabians’ *Climate Change Accountability* pamphlet, there has been increased momentum recently among young people.² We’ve seen school climate strikes and a more activist generation of young people speaking out about the crisis and hosting international rallies. Nonetheless, more is clearly needed in the form of specific allocated time to educate all young people about the importance of climate change, what can be done to stop it and where the pressure can be applied. Not all young people have access to climate change information and there is a risk that climate change activism could become elitist. We need climate change information and activism to be accessible to everyone. Our cause is a shared one. All young people should be able to put pressure on those who are responsible for worsening the climate crisis, and make changes to their consumer behaviour to reflect their increased awareness.

The green agenda faces serious opposition in the form of big businesses with deep pockets and an attachment to the status quo. Thus, this immense task of persuading everyone to take the climate crisis seriously and modify their behaviour to prevent ecological disaster, is made even more difficult if

nobody really understands how serious this crisis is. The more that everyone is clued up on the dangers and, more importantly, the potential solutions, the more likely we are to be able to avoid disaster and reduce our carbon emissions. This means that we should also be putting pressure on exam boards

Global governance efforts

It is clearly important for global governance institutions such as the UN to support the green agenda and have an unwavering stance on climate change. However, the effectiveness of these stances are questionable. I would argue that young people take in what is being taught to them in the classroom far more than what the UN is saying about an issue. Although there is little the UN can do on the ground in classrooms (beyond the work of the UN Association UK), more focus is needed on ensuring all young people across the world have access to climate education. Institutions such as the UN need to be prepared to call member states out on the international stage, who are failing to educate their populations on this crisis.

The United Nations stated that 'education is key to addressing the climate crisis'. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

who do not include climate change in exam syllabuses. At present, research has shown that Edexcel makes the most reference to climate change across GCSE and A-Level.³ Pressure can be put on all exam boards to ensure that they all make robust and equal efforts to include climate change material.

(UNFCCC) stated that each member state should make the effort to raise public awareness around climate change and ensure accessibility of information on the issue.⁴ However, too much information communicated down from global governance institutions and governments themselves focuses on individual action. While undoubtedly individual action is important and will aid in efforts to reduce emissions and our carbon footprint, we will never be able to limit global warming to 1.5°C without big business and fossil fuel companies taking heed too. This narrative of individual action alone being able to prevent climate breakdown is dangerous, and more rigorous education on the problem at school would prevent this from taking hold. Without clear understanding of the real players and polluters, it is impossible for the public to get to grips with how climate change can actually be mitigated.



The reality for teachers

I want to make it clear that this is not an attempt to place more work on teachers. This is speaking not to the failure of teachers, but the failure of governments around the world. Teachers undoubtedly want the best for their pupils and often go above and beyond to ensure that their students are best prepared for life. This is demonstrated by the fact that 66% of teachers feel that they should be teaching students on the climate crisis.⁵ Yet 76% feel that they haven't received adequate training to be able to introduce lessons on the climate crisis.⁶ Clearly, we are facing a problem here with a recognised omission in the curriculum that requires urgent attention. Without climate education and the necessary training for teachers, it is difficult to

imagine a society where everyone understands the importance of mitigating this crisis. Research from the University of Bristol found that more than half of teachers in England support 'teaching children to take direct action against climate change'.⁷ This demonstrates that teachers understand the importance of the climate crisis and want to instill this in their students, but are currently unable to do so.

Teach the Future is a great example of how change can be achieved through schools. It provides a youth-led campaign to re-focus the curriculum around the climate crisis, alongside a teacher network which supports teachers who are taking action and bringing in content on the climate crisis. They argue that there is a real need

for more vocational courses to be designed around green jobs.⁸ This is one of the important benefits of a green transition, yet it is rarely communicated effectively. We hear all about the fossil fuel jobs that are being lost, but very little about the many more green jobs that will be created. One interesting point raised is that climate education

Current provision

Shockingly, given its importance on human survival, climate change is mentioned only a handful of times on the Gov.uk website for the national science curriculum. Even worse, this is the context in which it is mentioned on one occasion ‘evidence, and uncertainties in evidence, for additional anthropogenic causes of climate change’.¹⁰ Thus, the only mention of climate change, the only provision for climate change education within the science curriculum is around the evidence for climate change. Clearly, our curriculum is obscenely out-of-date if we are still asking young people to debate the responsibility of humans in the climate crisis. We should have moved beyond this some time ago. If young people are still being taught that it is worthwhile in debating whether or not humans are to blame for the climate crisis, there is little to compel them to change their behaviour and pressure companies to do the

must also apply to independent schools, who are not usually bound by the national curriculum.⁹ It is important that nobody is left behind, so we cannot leave it solely to families to educate young people. Society must take responsibility and ensure that everyone understands the importance of avoiding disaster.

same. Moreover, students are encouraged to discuss the ‘**potential** effects’ of increased carbon dioxide on the climate!¹¹ This understates the certainties of the problems to be caused by runaway climate change, and means young people are being misled by our own curriculum. Nowhere in the three core aims of the science curriculum, is climate education mentioned. Until climate education becomes a core element of the science curriculum, we are failing to take it seriously.

We see the same important omissions in the geography curriculum, where none of the six core elements that students must be taught are related to climate change. Climate change should form a substantial part of any geography curriculum: anything less means we are letting young people down. However, this has not stopped individual teachers taking action. As discussed throughout this article teachers across the country have

taken it upon themselves to provide content on climate change. This work is vital and makes a real difference to young people - but

Looking forward

We need a re-prioritisation of the current national curriculum to assess where climate change can be introduced and this should be across a variety of subjects rather than limited only to science or geography. Introducing climate change into various aspects of the curriculum provides the opportunity for the UK to become a climate leader. COP26 does not just mark a year of climate leadership, but the beginning of a decade of action: and measures such as this could form a central part of our commitment to the green agenda.

In the absence of steering from the government and global governance organisations, action is being taken on the ground already. Leeds Development Education Centre has produced a sample climate crisis curriculum, outlining what students need to know at the end of each key milestone in a pupil's education (the first of these milestones is at Year 2). Climate education must begin as early as possible so that young people, from an early age, understand that this is a serious problem. The information for this milestone is not too stretching either: it is simply about basic

ultimately it is not enough, and we need provision to change at a mass-scale.

understandings of, for example, the difference between the weather and the climate and that trees help us to breathe and cool the world down.¹² Climate education does not need to and should not frighten young children, but education this early ensures that when it comes to the more serious aspects of climate change and what could happen if we don't act, they already understand the basics.

A geography teacher from Morpeth School has put together a guide on how teachers can declare a climate emergency at school.¹³ They draw upon their experiences of having done this at their school. This school formed an eco-council made up of students from across the key stages and teachers, to engage students on measures that can be taken to mitigate the impact of climate change. Included in this guide is a recommendation of action that could be taken including departmental reviews for how to integrate the climate crisis into different lessons. Action such as this, is essential to ensure that students are really engaging with the issue and that it is seen as a well-rounded issue, not one that just affects

one area. Similarly, forming a student-led eco-council in schools would make students familiar with holding people to account and taking action on climate change. This

Conclusion

This discussion has shown that climate change can be incorporated into the national curriculum. The potential for reduction in emissions is significant if we can ensure that young people have access to substantial education on the climate crisis, what it really means, the potential impacts, and how disaster can be avoided. Engaging stu-

could also push students to make ambitious climate commitments for the school, relating to teaching, energy, or even suppliers.

dents in this issue is the first step and once this has been done, we must ensure that students remain engaged through curriculum provision. Teachers in many places are taking action without national curriculum support and are introducing content on the climate crisis. This is critical work and needs further government-led support.

Policy Recommendations

- Introduce climate change into the curriculum for a wider range of subjects, to ensure that students understand that climate change is an issue that impacts all areas of life and society
- Encourage schools to establish eco councils, to engage students with the climate crisis and make the familiar with making climate change commitments and holding people/bodies to account
- Environment Week and COP should be a regular series of events for schools, where events/sessions are timetabled to ensure that students are engaging with this issue. Holding a COP summit in schools, similar to a Model UN, could help students to understand which states are holding up the green agenda and how climate change is impacting different parts of the world
- Train teachers on the climate crisis so that they feel confident in teaching students this important topic
- Put pressure on exam boards to introduce more climate-related content into syllabuses for exams at GCSE and A-Levels




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THE END OF HISTORY, AS IT IS CURRENTLY TAUGHT

George Fairhurst

History as a subject at school, according to a 2017 survey, is sharply declining at A Level! This study found that less than 20% of incoming A Level students from non-selective state schools were choosing to study history. The cause of this has been the subject of significant debate, with this particular report from the Historical Association attributing it to the decoupling of AS and A Levels: meaning that history is no longer taken as a fourth subject that is carried on due to enjoyment of the content.

What this means is that more often now, as a country, our engagement with history at an educational level ends in high school. This places more importance than ever on the content taught at Key Stage 3 and GCSE, which has been seeing an uptake due to the increasing effects of the controversial English Baccalaureate, which was introduced more broadly in 2017.

History teaching has been a political football

for decades now, The Conservatives were attacked for ending its mandatory teaching beyond 14 in the 90's, whilst the 2010 election saw the Tories attack Labour for overseeing a drop in GCSE history participation.² In recent years, Michael Gove lost a battle to implement controversial reforms to use the history curriculum to reinforce a nationalist narrative of an "Island Story".³ This curriculum would have seen history taught as a story of how Britain became a beacon of hope for liberalism, not allowing students of history to come away with their own impressions.

History matters. Josh Tosh describes how active citizenship in a deliberative democracy "stands in much greater need of critical historical knowledge than is generally recognised."⁴ We need to be teaching young people that it is good to critically analyse existing historical knowledge and engage with primary and secondary sources. It, therefore, matters what is taught in school; when history is taught poor-

Hitler and the Henrys

In 2009, Ofsted reported that there had been a deep decline in the number of secondary school students studying history at GCSE. At the time, it was argued that this was a result of overexposure to subject areas: Tudor England and Nazi Germany.⁶

ly, people will be expected to participate in our democracy without the understanding that history and facts are both agreed knowledge and an ever-developing debate of interpretation. We see this in action today with the "Culture Wars"; many being drawn in by arguments that expanding the curriculum is a "woke" view that is trying to "cancel" historical figures by teaching the full, complex story of historical figures.⁵

As a lover of history, there is nothing I want less than the subject to become an ideological tool to advocate a rose-tinted view of any one country or historical event. It insults the intelligence of those who participate in it. We are lucky that despite the current administration, a nationalist teaching of history has not become part of secondary school teaching. But what the subject currently is stuck in, is a legacy issue that goes back at least a decade: the mire of "Hitler and the Henrys".

What causes this overexposure to England five hundred years ago and Germany eighty years ago is "the Hitler and Henry cycle".⁷ Teachers develop knowledge on the periods they have resources for, they develop expertise on these periods and how to answer

the exam questions their students will face. The exam boards come along every few years to ask teachers what periods they should offer as part of exam syllabuses, the teachers recommend subjects that they know; the exam boards offer modules based on these topics and the schools buy another batch of resources for these topics. Thus, there has been a generation of history teaching where this cycle has favoured Tudor England and 1918-1945.

As a result, even in 2020, 45% of students were taking a module on Nazi Germany and two different late Tudor period modules were being taken by 20% of students apiece. It is likely that despite efforts to get this to change, our schools are going to see these two

eras continue to dominate module selections due to this entrenched cycle of teaching.

The damage is already done for many people: a survey of 56,000 people found that 86% of people learned about the Tudors but less than 8% learnt about the colonisation of Africa.⁸ It is not difficult to see which is likely to be of more use to contemporary society. Our current history curriculum, therefore, leaves people in the dark of our own history and how this impacts society now. Anyone learning about these issues would either have to pursue higher education or educate themselves in their own time, which isn't good enough, as the people who would pursue this are already clearly passionate about the subject.



Patchy and detached from the world

A glaring issue with the dominance of ‘Hitler and the Henrys’ topics is that they come at the expense of not just world history, but local history. The Welsh education inspectorate, Estyn, found that Welsh Pupils had “little knowledge” of historical events that have shaped their local area and “do not make connections” between individuals and events in Welsh and World History.⁹ Their report made for grim reading, pointing out that most pupils were unaware of famous historical Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals and the contributions of BAME communities to Wales. Despite this report focusing on Welsh schools, it is, unfortunately, a story echoed in English schools as well.

A lack of understanding of black history and the events that have defined black communities, linked with the often ignored period between 1500-1900, may be down to confidence in teaching. Teachers have been found, through research, to feel uncomfortable when discussing “sensitive” or “difficult” issues such as slavery and the Empire.¹⁰ This perhaps has contributed to the current dynamic of roughly 11% of GCSE students studying modules that reference the British Empire in a meaningful way.¹¹ What’s more, a much smaller amount of last year’s GCSE cohort engaged with a module on history set outside of

the US/West. Furthermore, there is a stark lack of content that teaches students about the War on Terror, Afghanistan or Iraq; clearly, these events have a profound impact on contemporary society and omitting them from the curriculum leaves us unable to engage with current affairs. While OCR has introduced a GCSE module that addresses terrorism and the Iraq War, we need to see this on a much wider scale and as something that is taught as compulsory content.

Another issue with historical education of this period is that when black history is taught, it is often only in relation to the slave trade. This is problematic for a number of reasons, especially that this is focused on black people as victims and previously was taught through insensitive measures, such as “role-playing being a slave”.¹² Historically, teachers have also only really discussed black history through modules on the Windrush generation, which again relates to a narrative of victimhood, in this case with a highly racialised narrative of “poor colonials” invited to come to Britain.¹³

With these factors in place, it’s not hard to understand why Estyn found that pupils have a limited understanding of the connections between the past and the pres-

ent. A jump between four hundred years of history from the Tudors to the 20th century sees a lot of quite crucial history jumped over, whilst exam boards like Edexcel lack modules that even mention the role of BAME people. Students are being let down by the availability of modules that inform them how

There is hope

Despite this situation that historical education finds itself in, the way out is actually already being proposed by educational boards. As well, the circumstances surrounding history teaching are ideal for curriculum reform.

In July of this year, Ofsted published its key historical concepts that must be taught using repeated, specific examples.¹⁴ What stuck out was the freedom in curriculum design it recommended, the need to develop an understanding of “substantive topics” such as what “socialist” would have meant to different people in different countries at the same point in history, and reinforcing prior knowledge to help students learn new material more easily. Essentially, students should understand history beyond memorising dates: learning by engaging meaningfully with attitudes and actions to understand why this happened, not just what happened and how it happened. This approach gives students the skills

their local area developed, how the world around them came to be and what Britain’s role in it all was beyond winning the world wars and being magnanimous in victory by allowing immigration to take place.

to understand complex motives and different worldviews: which is crucial since history (when properly taught) is always morally ambiguous and requires us to look beyond our own understanding of the world. This certainly would not be the case if Michael Gove had gotten his way and history was taught with the agenda of making Britain unambiguously a highly moral actor.

These Ofsted recommendations were largely ignored at the time and still have attracted little attention from the academic world, but these aims are not impossible to meet. As the Historical Association report made plain, 70% of all schools are complying either closely or broadly in line with the curriculum recommended in Key Stage 3.¹⁵ Whilst academies and free schools have the freedom to explore their own curriculums, they appear to not be taking advantage of this. This may be due to a “Hitler and Henry” effect, or a worry for funding at Key

Stage 3 level teaching.

The previously quoted Estyn report was also at pains to make clear that whilst Welsh pupils didn't know BAME history, they were keen to learn more: responding as interested to learn about Martin Luther King for example.¹⁶ The Labour-led Welsh Government has responded to this by making Black History a mandatory part of the curriculum: which Kerina Hanson (president of school leaders union NAHT Cymru) has lauded for addressing "the wider context" of Welsh history.¹⁷ If it is possible for Wales to do this, it is possible for England and the rest of the UK to follow.

As previously mentioned, an OCR unit for GCSE called "A New Age 1948-2005" offers an interesting development on modern history, particularly the section on the Iraq War and the War on Terror.¹⁸ Resources for this offer students the chance to assess the Iraq War and its legality through the eyes of the

Chilcot Enquiry, asking teachers to get students to consider their top five questions for investigation. Also included were resources to Oxfam to reassure teachers through what is quite a controversial topic. This seems to offer a promising solution to the previously identified issue of teachers feeling uncomfortable around difficult issues.¹⁹

The circumstances of historical education, therefore, are simple: there is greater demand in secondary schools for the subject, with students actively wanting to engage in history that goes beyond Nazis and monarchs. Furthermore, Ofsted has recommended that teaching history ensures that students can develop an understanding of complex societal subjects. We also know that despite many schools having the freedom to move from it, the National Curriculum is largely adhered to. This leaves us with plenty of scope for effective reform of the history curriculum.

Policy Recommendations

- Key Stage 3 pupils to be given a national curriculum module that teaches a historical event that directly affects our modern-day world (the 9/11 attacks, Arab Spring, the troubles).
- Key Stage 4 modules to expand the availability of black history subjects, with a focus to continue a move away from conventional favourites.
- Increased funding for the availability of resources to teach new modules, including the introduction of a bursary for secondary school teachers to spend part of the summer months learning new module topics.
- The pursuit of Black History Month topics that go beyond slavery and immigration in the 1940s, highlighting cultural contributions to Britain.
- The expansion of widely available support materials to give teachers the confidence to discuss topics that they are not an expert in, or feel uncomfortable discussing due to controversy.
- The development of local history topics at Key Stage 3 level, with the aim of giving students awareness of how the world they've grown up in developed.
- The further expansion of the 2021 Ofsted recommendations on the aims of historical education.



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NEURODIVERSITY IN EDUCATION

Panny Antoniou

Neurodiversity is one of the most misunderstood factors that has the potential to impact educational outcomes for children. With hundreds of portrayals of ADHD and autism in the media, there are a number of misconceptions about how these conditions affect young people and the ways in which they learn. In order to better understand neurodiversity in education, we must first understand what it is. According to the Neurodiversity Association, “Neurodiversity is an umbrella term covering a number of neurodevelopmental conditions” these include autism, ADHD, and dyspraxia.¹

Understanding neurodiverse conditions

Autism as a condition is especially misunderstood. Most neurotypical people’s understanding coming from films which are, at best, flawed and at worst actively ableist with a “plethora of ... stereotypes appear[ing] in literary depictions of people on the spectrum”.² The reality of autism and autism diagnosis is that is

an incredibly diverse condition with multiple indicators, not all of which are present in all autistic people. Indeed, there is “no single behaviour that is always typical of autism or any of the autistic spectrum disorders”.³ Some behavioural characteristics can include “qualitative impairments in social interaction, communication, and restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviours [sic], interests, and activities”.⁴ As autism and autistic spectrum disorders can be so broad and varied, it makes them important to understand so that educators can improve the outcomes for students with varied additional needs and requirements.

Another common neurodiverse condition, which is often misunderstood, is dyslexia which can also vary in both form and severity. Generally, dyslexia is defined as “a specific language-based disorder of constitutional origin characterized by difficulties in single word decoding, usually reflecting insufficient phonological processing”.⁵ In learning, this manifests itself with difficulty in reading, writing and spelling. According to the NHS, it is estimated that approximately one in ten people has “some degree of dyslexia” making it an incredibly common condition, which educators have to be aware of and make accommodations for, in the classroom.⁶

One commonly misunderstood neurodiverse condition affecting learning and classroom development is Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Defined by inattentiveness, hyper fixation, and impulsivity, ADHD can also have the effect of hyper-focus on topics which an individual with ADHD finds interesting or rewarding.⁷ This, much like other neurodiverse conditions is one which is most commonly diagnosed in children assigned male at birth, with between nine and six male diagnoses for every female one.⁸ This demonstrates the need for better diagnostic tools for ADHD and other neurodiverse conditions which are far more commonly diagnosed in people assigned male at birth, rather than people assigned female at birth. This diagnostic difference could have a profound effect on female students as it means that they are not getting the help and support they need. A more inclusive education system and curriculum could lead to earlier diagnoses for pupils, and contribute to improvements in educational attainment and satisfaction.

There are commonalities between these neurodiverse conditions, and others which have not been defined in such detail in this article (such as dysgraphia and dyspraxia), which result in young people with these conditions finding cer-

tain tasks more challenging than neurotypical students. This means that additional support is required to ensure these students reach their potential. When neurodiverse students do not get the support they need in a classroom setting, the effects can be disastrous. Indeed, children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities are over five times more likely to be

The way forward

One thing that will help is improved diagnostic tools, as many students slip through the gaps and are diagnosed much later in life, affecting their learning outcomes throughout school. This is especially the case with neurodiverse females, as symptoms often present differently and diagnoses are significantly later in their development as a result. As mentioned above, there are over six times as many male ADHD diagnoses than female ones. This difference in diagnoses between genders is partly due to different manifestation of symptoms between males and females, as “hyperactivity in females is more likely to manifest as hyper-talkativeness or emotional reactivity than excessive motor activity”.¹¹ In addition, according to Davidovich et al (2017) “ADHD still does not have biological markers for diagnosis and hence the diagnosis relies mostly on physicians’ education and practice”.¹² It is therefore essential for

permanently excluded from school, often permanently affecting educational outcomes.⁹ The fact that just 21.7% of autistic adults are in full or part-time employment reflects the result of our education system letting down neurodiverse young people.¹⁰

there to be a clear set of diagnostic criteria, which can be used in schools in order to ensure that no students slip through the gaps and that the differences in symptoms between males and females are understood and catered for. Earlier diagnosis for all young people with neurodiverse conditions would ensure that their learning experience can be tailored to meet their specific needs from an earlier age, which would lead to better outcomes later in life.

Autistic spectrum disorders are also far more commonly diagnosed in males than females, and in diagnostic settings females have found that “their difficulties are frequently mislabelled or missed entirely”.¹³ This gap in diagnoses severely affects learning outcomes and means that females are often not provided with the support which they need. There is also a diagnostic difference between economic

groups, with children from wealthier families more likely to receive a diagnosis, this may be due to better access to paediatric and developmental services.¹⁴ Differences in diagnosis in both gender and class show that much needs to be done in order to ensure that students get the best possible support and outcomes. Without this, we ensure that economic and gendered gaps in society persist, as we are letting down so many young people by not ensuring their specific needs are met. Testing and evaluation, as a matter of course, for all students in schools would ensure that far fewer fall through the gaps and that a higher proportion of students get the support that they need. Higher testing for autism results in a larger proportion of cases being picked up, as is clear from studies in California which found higher incidences of autism following increased testing for students.¹⁵

Having clear diagnostic criteria and regular testing is vital, due to the overlap between neurodiverse conditions and the co-occurrences between different neurodiverse conditions. Indeed, there are significant “shared characteristics among ASD, ADHD, and OCD ... as well as significant comorbidity among these disorders”.¹⁶ This means that it is of vital importance to have clear diagnostic criteria and regular testing for all young

people, so that there is a reduction in the number of misdiagnoses and so that all young people are able to reach their full potential. Indeed, changing diagnostic criteria has led to an increased number of autism diagnoses in some parts of the world, ensuring that neurodiverse students are able to better understand their own conditions, as well as ensuring they have the help they need in the classroom.¹⁷

Increased and comprehensive testing would prevent young people with neurodiverse conditions from being branded ‘troublemakers’ by teachers. Instead, they would be able to meet with support staff and receive an education that works for them. In order to support these students, it is important that all educational staff receive training. This would ensure that teachers understand that neurodiverse conditions should be understood as a complex combination of factors, such as “a three-dimensional syndrome including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization (or cynicism), and reduced personal accomplishment that develops in response to chronic occupational stress”.¹⁸ Therefore, in addition to increased testing for neurodiverse conditions and clearer diagnostic criteria, it is also important to provide the support which is needed following a diagnosis in order to minimise the risk of a student ‘burn out’. This can

include additional teaching assistants, an adapted curriculum, or different methods of assessment which better suit the individual needs of the student.¹⁹

These adaptations are one of the most vital ways of getting students learning and confident within a classroom environment. An individualised learning experience which caters to a child's individual needs is of vital importance. Smaller class sizes and more teaching assistants in classrooms benefit not just neurodiverse students but their neurotypical peers.²⁰ Increased assessment options also mean that young people are able to choose a method of assessment which suits them best rather than being forced into exams which are often no more than a memory test.

Another additional change to the curriculum which could be considered is mentoring for neurodivergent young people by neurodiver-

gent adults. Many neurodiverse children struggle adapting to classroom settings, indeed, studies have shown that students with ADHD often "more likely than their classmates to experience feelings of loneliness".²¹ Additionally, a study into people with autistic spectrum disorder found high levels of personal satisfaction in their academic outcomes and higher self esteem in those with access to a mentor with whom they had a strong relationship.²² All these factors mean that a curriculum change to allow more mentoring for neurodiverse students would have a positive outcome for their academic studies. Whilst many neurodiverse young people struggle with being different and having difficulty making friends, mentoring programmes, especially those led by other neurodiverse people have the effect of improving quality of life and willingness to study.



Policy Recommendations

- Clearer diagnostic criteria and regular testing to ensure that neurodiverse conditions are recognised as early as possible so that students don't fall behind
- Neurodiverse conditions and the impacts that they have should be covered as part of the curriculum
- Classroom adaptations to ensure they are able to learn
- Provision within careers education for discussing organisations that are inclusive of people with neurodiverse conditions
- Investment in teaching assistants and specialist SEN teachers
- Smaller classroom sizes
- Increased assessment options so that all students are given an opportunity to succeed
- Provision within the timetable for students with neurodiverse conditions to be mentored by neurodivergent staff members/adults



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A student with dark hair, wearing large black headphones, is focused on writing in a notebook. The scene is dimly lit, with a warm, reddish-pink glow. The student is wearing a dark blue or purple long-sleeved shirt. The background is out of focus, showing what appears to be a classroom or study area.

REASSESSING ASSESSMENT: THE CASE FOR FEWER EXAMS IN ENGLAND

Tom Hunter

Over the past 18 months, despite algorithm-related grading scandals and an estimated learning loss of three months for some pupils, the UK Government has consistently maintained that exams are the best way to assess our students. But now that we've seen what the alternative could look like, a question mark hangs over just how true this is.

In August this year, students across England received grades for exams they had never, in a formal sense, sat. The new system put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic meant that young people in their final years of GCSE and A Level study weren't required to scribble away in silence in a school gym, and instead received all final grades based primarily on teacher judgement.

Through the use of new centre-assessed grades (CAGs) we've seen that it is possible to test students' progression and knowledge without placing them into high-stress

environments. Of course, the approach to this year's exams were designed to mitigate the damage done and classroom time missed during the pandemic but, as with many areas of society, this once-in-a-lifetime event has highlighted ways in which we could do things differently.

Prior to the August 2021 results day, the then-interim chief inspector of Ofqual, Simon Lebus, defended the changes to this year's assessments, saying they provided "a much more accurate reflection" of what students can achieve.¹ Lebus also went on to explain how

Impact on students

For some time now, an argument has been emerging that schools are becoming 'exam factories' – merely training up young people to undertake a test of memory, rather than equipping them with the knowledge of a subject area, to then be applied alongside skills such as reasoning and problem-solving.³ There is also no evidence to suggest that traditional exams contribute toward narrowing the attainment gap between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers – an issue which requires urgent attention after this gap has widened again during the pandemic.⁴

Further to this, research has indicated that exams create additional

the new system was a truer test of young people's overall abilities, arguing exams were "a bit like a snapshot, a photograph - you capture an instant. Whereas teacher assessment allows teachers to observe student performance over a much longer period, taking into account lots of different pieces of work and arriving at a holistic judgement."² This form of assessment also removes the problem with learning to retain information and exams becoming essentially a test of memory rather than understanding.

stresses for pupils; particularly from the uncertainty of success, pressures from teachers and schools, and the implications of what the results could mean for their futures.⁵ The educational reforms brought in under Michael Gove, while reducing the number of exams that need to be taken, also removed opportunities for resits and module-level assessment, thus placing the fate of final grades a single exam series. Not only does this have implications for young people's mental wellbeing – something which is currently widely regarded to be in crisis – but it also raises the question of the impacts of test anxiety on overall in-test performance.⁶ This links to another issue of stu-

dent wellbeing not being included in OFSTED reports, which reflects the lack of importance currently placed on student wellbeing and mental health.

While students have the opportunity to build their grades based on coursework-style assessments later in life, exams still play a large role in the secondary education pathway. Within the current set-up at Level 2, coursework (or ‘controlled assessment’) can contribute anything from 10% to 60% of a pupil’s final grade, depending on the subject, although the number of options available for this will reduce with the planned defunding of BTECs. The Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) goes some way toward creating a more diverse range of assessment methods, but it’s yet to make its way into the mainstream of schools and is still only taken by around 30,000 students annually.

Looking forward

Globally, assessments are starting to be used to create a more holistic profile of pupils’ abilities. Examples of this from the USA and Australia are often the results of collaborations between universities, employers, schools and colleges – a similar approach the one currently undertaken by the UK Government in their skills and technical education reforms.⁹

There’s also a question of how well traditional exams prepare our students for the future. A 2015 report from the World Economic Forum identified 16 key ‘21st-Century Skills’ every student should attain from their pathway through education – ranging from ICT literacy, to cultural awareness and communication skills.⁷ A similar range of skills for lifelong learning have also been identified in a range of evidence-based research, each with several qualities in common.⁸ Some of these competencies – such as literacy and numeracy – have traditionally been tested using ‘snapshot’ assessments, and there is undoubtedly still a place for this in the assessment diet, to a degree. However the ‘soft’ qualities – such as collaboration, leadership and initiative – become slightly more difficult to identify from answers in an exam paper, even though they are highly sought-after by UK employers.

Of course, an increase in the use of teacher grading couldn’t take place without adding to their already large workload – something which we have this summer. However, it’s worth noting that teaching unions welcomed the move to CAGs this year, as they could see that it would give their students a fairer deal. Any future post-pandemic use of the assessment method would of

course require a great deal of consultation with the sector, as well as further investment in schools to reduce teachers' workload.

To paint a more holistic picture of our students' strengths, it's time to shift to a lesser weighting of formal exams on final grades. The use of CAGs this year has provided a blueprint for this and can be developed

further for a post-pandemic world. By moving away from the traditional exam halls, we can reduce stress on our young people, capture a greater sense of their abilities regardless of their background, and also ensure we're testing them for the skills they'll need for later life.

Policy Recommendations

- Shift to a lesser weighting of formal exams in assessment
- Increased use of CAGs to result in fairer outcomes for students
- Collaborate more with employers to identify skills gaps and adjust assessment accordingly to better assess a range of skills
- Promote the EPQ as a way for students to explore areas of interest beyond the curriculum and benefit from a broader assessment method.



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TOWARDS A 21ST CENTURY CURRICULUM



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