

Issues to explore re the Curriculum – response from the British Humanist Association

1. Do we still need a National Curriculum?

The BHA believes that the debate around the curriculum should be mindful of the broad knowledge and skills to which all pupils should, at a minimum, be entitled to. We believe that at the very least, a minimum entitlement should be established and then set out. It seems that this could be considered a basic National Curriculum, although others may not choose to label it as such.

2. If we do, should it apply to all state funded schools?

Again, we believe that any National Curriculum should, at the least, set out a minimum entitlement of knowledge and skills for all pupils, regardless of background or cultural upbringing.

In particular, we have concerns that religious Academies and Free Schools are currently able to teach biased curricula on subjects like science and sex and relationships education; and that pupils at all schools do not currently enjoy a broad enough entitlement in PSHE and RE, neither of which are on the national curriculum and both of which currently vary enormously between schools.

3. What is the proper place of political decision making, professional decision making at a national level and school/ teacher decision making about the curriculum?
4. Since 1988, the National Curriculum has been made up of programmes in particular subjects. Is this the best way to determine the content of the curriculum? If not, how else could it be done? For example, is it practical to derive a curriculum from a statement of overall aims?
5. Should all curriculum areas (however defined) be compulsory up to 14? If so, how much flexibility should there be for schools and how can a National Curriculum be designed which ensures that there is space for that?
6. How can a National Curriculum support the development of things like personal qualities and attitudes and dispositions? Or should the curriculum restrict itself to knowledge and skills?
7. How should the National Curriculum set out the material to be covered – ie what should programmes of study, attainment targets etc. look like. How detailed should they be – should some areas be more detailed than others?
8. Is there a case for changing the current key stage structure - e.g. the EY/ KS1 border, the Y4/5 border, the KS3/KS4 border?
9. What should be the required elements of a common curriculum at Key Stage 4?

The BHA has an interest in the subjects of RE, PSHE, citizenship and science. We do not pass comment on the desirability of other subjects forming part of the National Curriculum.

In our experience, when subjects are not on the National Curriculum, this makes for huge variation in quality of what is taught. We refer in particular to RE and PSHE. In both cases, we believe that this is a sufficient issue that the subjects should be added to the National Curriculum.

Therefore, we would like to see both RE and PSHE added to the National Curriculum, and for citizenship to remain there: if it were removed, we would be concerned that a similar drop in quality would ensue.

10. What kinds of vocational courses and qualifications are appropriate at Key Stage 4?
11. Is there a case for radical change of assessment at 16+? If so what might an alternative look like?
12. Given that parents and the wider public now expect to have a lot of information about schools, how can we measure what schools are achieving for their pupils without narrowing the curriculum through “teaching to the test”?
13. How do you react to the proposals from the government’s review panel in relation to:
 - The aims of the curriculum?
 - Its approach to assessment, reporting and progression?
 - Its redefinition of Programmes of Study and Attainment Targets?
14. Do you agree with the Secretary of State and HMCI that expectations for age 11 should be higher than at present?