



November 2024

Below is the response that UKLA has submitted to the government's Curriculum and Assessment review. It has been informed by responses to a survey of members, and by consultations with the UKLA National Council, and with other literacy charities.

GENERAL OVERVIEW QUESTIONS

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

UKLA's mission is to advance literacy education which enables all learners, regardless of background or context, to thrive as literate individuals. Our view of literacy is that it encompasses spoken language, reading and writing, including digital and multimodal texts. We strive to facilitate a rich dialogue between educators and researchers, fostering a deep understanding of evolving pedagogies and innovative teaching and learning strategies. Regrettably, too much of the current curriculum, assessment and qualification pathways are not working well in realising either the UKLA mission or the current government's aim to ensure educational progress for all young people. Our 'tail' of underachievement by disadvantaged groups has been well-documented over time and is at odds with the educational performance in other European countries (Ofsted, 2013), our high student absence rates compared with pre-pandemic rates (DfE 2024) and high levels of mental health issues (Newlove-Delgado et al, 2023) are strong indicators of the current curriculum's inability to meet individual learners' needs. There is an urgent need, therefore, for a more culturally relevant curriculum and a more meaningful assessment system to ensure both the educational and mental wellbeing of children young people, and economic prosperity and growth for the nation. We expand on our vision for a rich, effective and appropriate literacy curriculum and assessment system in our responses below.

DfE (2024) Pupil absence in schools in England. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/pupil-absence-in-schools-in-england>

Newlove-Delgado T, Marcheselli F, Williams T, Mandalia D, Dennes M, McManus S, Savic M, Treloar W, Croft K, Ford T. (2023) Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, 2023. NHS England. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2023-wave-4-follow-up#>

Ofsted (2013) Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on, www.ofsted.gov.uk/accessandachievement.

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

Through a survey of our members, joint consultation meetings with other literacy charities (for example, the English Association) and from our analysis of international research on literacy and learning, UKLA proposes five top priorities for change:

1. a **broad and balanced** literacy curriculum, fit for the needs of a diverse community of learners and the demands of being literate in the digital age;
2. recognising the **fundamental importance of spoken language** in literacy learning and personal, social and cultural development;
3. teaching reading using **pedagogical approaches which seek to create capable and lifelong readers**, and which recognise the richness and diversity of texts for children and young people. This requires a more balanced approach to phonics and greater attention to reading for pleasure, comprehension, fostering reader response, and critical reading.
4. a **more informed view of writing** which recognises that effective writing is more than mastery of writing conventions but is a means to communication and expression in diverse ways, including for the purpose of civic participation.
5. a literacy curriculum and assessment system which understands and addresses **the needs of all learners**, embracing the richness and diversity of our learners, and which can robustly address the way our current curriculum and assessment system privileges already advantaged groups.

Our call is for a **fair, just and inclusive curriculum** which is demonstrably effective for all learners.

In addition, we are keen to emphasise the importance of considering the impact of any curriculum or assessment changes on **teacher workload**, and the entitlement of teachers to **continuing professional development** to deepen their subject knowledge to meet the aspirations of a revised curriculum. Many of our members are classroom teachers, whose schools are already under budgetary pressure. The changes we recommend below would reduce teacher workload and free up curriculum time to focus on learning and assessing progress, rather on test preparation.

Social Justice and Inclusion

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

National data and numerous studies have repeatedly evidenced the relationship between socioeconomic disadvantage and educational outcomes (Floud et al., 1957; Halsey et al., 1980; Gorard & Siddiqui, 2019; Social Mobility Commission, 2020). And this relationship appears stubbornly resistant to change. Tahir (2022) shows that socially-disadvantaged children start behind their more advantaged peers and the gap increases as they progress through school, and that the gap in attainment at GCSE has hardly changed over 15 years. In 2022, responding to an EEF report which showed that, post-pandemic, the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students has increased, Becky Francis said: *‘the findings add to a heavy body of evidence telling us that socio-economic inequality in education – already entrenched before the pandemic – has grown.’* The latest report (EEF, 2024), published this month, shows that this gap remains. The National Audit Office (2024) reports that the attainment gap between learning experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage has widened in recent years, and is now again at the same level as in 2011-13. These analyses of patterns and trends in attainment by socio-economic background invariably use literacy measures (usually reading, or GCSE English) as a key measure,

signalling the **fundamental importance of literacy**. Improving the curriculum and assessment for English is not simply a matter of outcomes in spoken language, reading and writing, but, given the impact of literacy on learning in all curriculum subjects, it is a priority for the success of the whole curriculum.

Addressing this disadvantage requires systemic change, wider social investment and strategic reform, and cannot simply be restricted to curriculum, assessment and qualifications. However, there are many specific barriers which relate to literacy and language learning which, if addressed, would equip learners with literacy skills which benefit their own lifelong journeys, enable them to become fulfilled and empowered citizens, and to cope with the demands of the workplace. Some of the key barriers to progress in literacy are outlined below:

Barriers to foundational learning for literacy. Literacy learning and development are founded on spoken language, but we know that learners from socially disadvantaged backgrounds come to school differently positioned in terms of their oracy skills to cope with the expectations of school (Bercow, 2008). This acts as a barrier to literacy development and perpetuates differential trajectories of literacy learning for learners from different backgrounds: *‘The educational consequences of social disadvantage are compounded by children’s difficulties in oral development and communication; and that talk can be an effective means of re-engaging the disengaged and closing the overlapping gaps of equity and attainment’* (Alexander, 2020, p. 19). We know that the nature of talk experiences in the home before learners’ start school is critical (Stanley, 2012). Ramirez et al. (2020) have shown that children of parents who were coached to speak to them using motherese, developed vocabulary at twice the rate of the control group children. The brain of a child whose phonological development has been accelerated by ‘baby talk’ will also find it much easier to learn to read, partly because of their wider vocabulary, but also because reading involves the process of matching groups of letters on a page with phonological representations of words or parts of words in their head, and their brain has been making that meaning from words and parts of words since birth. By contrast, children who have underdeveloped phonological awareness (either because of pre-birth issues or a lack of normal post-birth language development) will not only find it difficult to learn to read, they might also be unable to learn from phonics teaching, since it is their phonological awareness that enables them to then develop phonemic awareness- the ability to connect the letters on the page to the phonemes, syllables and words that make up a text. There can be little doubt, therefore, that infants whose life experience has not given them opportunities for this kind of talk, are likely to struggle once in the school system. Yet there is little curriculum emphasis in KS1 on the importance of talk.

Barriers to Reading: Evidence from multiple sources indicates that learners from low SES contexts often have limited access to books in the home, or through local libraries (Siraj & Mayo, 2014; Neuman & Moland, 2019), cannot always see themselves represented in the books shared in school (CLPE, 2023; Elliot et al., 2021; Ramdarshan Bold, 2022) and are likely to be offered limited support to develop the habit of reading (Hempel Jorgensen et al, 2018). The report commissioned for the Great School Library campaign (BMG, 2023) showed that in England, schools with a high percentage of children eligible for free school meals (FSM) were the least likely to have access to a library space or dedicated librarian. Yet, as outlined in a recent literature review by the National Literacy Trust (Cole et al., 2023), there is a wealth of evidence to support the impact that school libraries can have on children and young people’s academic achievement and literacy outcomes, and a further analysis of data from 6,624 children and young people receiving FSM, showed significant additional impact for these learners. They found that *‘their enjoyment of both reading and writing, their confidence in their own abilities, and the frequency with which they read or wrote for pleasure outside of school was significantly higher for those pupils eligible for FSM who used their school libraries relative to both those who did not use their school libraries and those who had no*

school library' (Wood et al., 2020) The OECD PIRLS and PISA surveys show that engagement in reading is associated with increased confidence in reading, enhanced reading proficiency and better learning outcomes (Mullis et al. 2017, 2023; OECD 2011, 2019). They also recognise it is a mediator of gender and socio-economic status and argue that it can help leverage social change (OECD 2021, p. 28) and thus help to redress intersectional educational inequalities. So, to reduce barriers to improving attainment, the curriculum needs to: retain a high profile for reading for pleasure, ensure access to books, including those that reflect diverse realities, and offer appropriate motivational and sustained support (Cremin et al., 2014; 2022; Ivey and Johnston, 2023)) particularly to those who experience socioeconomic disadvantage and who are 'reading for pleasure disadvantaged'.

The 'digital divide': despite the ubiquitous presence of digital technology in contemporary lives, learners from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds do not have equal access to digital tools for learning. One consequence of the Covid-19 crisis is that it made visible pre-existing digital inequalities. School closures during the COVID-19 crisis had a disproportionate impact on socially disadvantaged students, because most schools had to rely on digital technologies in order to continue teaching, and this magnified the effect of existing inequalities. Students in poorer homes generally lacked ready access to digital devices, had poorer Internet bandwidth, faced competing digital needs from other family members (including siblings attending the same school), and often lacked access to an adequate learning environment in their home (OECD, 2023). This link between social background and digital access is also evidenced in Europe: Engzell et al. (2020) reported that students from disadvantaged homes in the Netherlands had learning losses more than 50% greater than those of the general student population, and the EC Joint Research Committee (JRC) analysis of data from five EU states (Carretero et al, 2021) reported that children with a migrant background (particularly ethnic minorities or refugees) were particularly at risk, as were those in rural areas, where Internet coverage was poor. It is important that revisions to the curriculum and assessment system take this into account and seek to address the divide.

However, these barriers to progress in literacy can only be addressed if they are accompanied by system-wide shifts in attitudes to those who under-achieve due to their socio-economic status. US research has challenged deficit models of the language resources that students bring into school, and has argued that rather than developing a curriculum designed to fill perceived gaps, the curriculum should build bridges from home to the educational setting that will promote learning, rather than exclude (Dyson, 2018). Likewise, research focused on the British context has repeatedly emphasised that we should not try to make all students conform to white middle-class expectations, but to acknowledge and build on the rich range of perspectives, attitudes and experiences all learners bring to school (Gewirtz, 2001; Reay, 2018; Elliot Major & Machin, 2018; Cushing, 2023). Reporting on a successful literacy intervention with pre-school children's parents, Hannon argues that *'disadvantage does not inhere in individuals; it is about the relationship between individuals, society and, particularly in the context of this paper, the institution of schooling'* (2020, p.311). Therefore, to successfully address disadvantage through literacy and in literacy, it is important that the literacy curriculum embeds the four principles below (Myhill et al, 2022):

1. Promote high-quality teaching, first and foremost: there are no quick fixes, and no simple solutions or silver bullets;
2. Avoid deficit descriptions of disadvantaged students and low expectations of what they can achieve; instead recognising the understanding and perspectives they bring to their learning;
3. Establish a challenging, diverse, inclusive and culturally and linguistically sustainable English curriculum within a rich literacy environment;
4. Acknowledge, value and draw on students' backgrounds and experiences, and getting to know each student as a unique individual.

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13. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation which may disproportionately impact pupils based on other protected characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity)?

Whilst recognising the many and diverse barriers which exist for students with protected characteristics, there are three areas which have particularly relevance to literacy learning. We recommend:

Positive recognition of the language diversity in our schools: our current curriculum does not recognise the needs and strengths of children with different home languages, tending to position 'EAL' as a problem needing to be overcome. Our classrooms are increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse, as evidenced by the DfE's latest release of data for 2023/24 which shows that there are now 20.8% of students with a home language other than English, compared with 19.5% in 2019/20 (DfE, 2024). Nationally, we lag behind the global trend where multilingualism is the norm, and the capacity to speak more than one language is an educational and economic asset. The Norwegian core curriculum, for example, mandates that students should *'shall experience that being proficient in a number of languages is a resource, both in school and society at large'* (Norwegian Directorate, 2017, p. 6). The Council of Europe (2022) has issued a recommendation on the importance of plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture which emphasises *'the cognitive, linguistic and social benefits of learning several languages, demonstrating the ways in which plurilingual and intercultural competences contribute to educational success, to societal integration and to understanding, assessing and formulating the arguments and opinions that are essential to democracy'*. Research from the National Literacy Trust shows that pupils who are exposed to different languages at home are more likely to enjoy reading and engage in reading for pleasure than those who are not, and that they wish their schools were more aware of their language skills and heritage languages (Teravainen-Goff, Clark and Little, 2021). Learners' home languages are an asset in developing literacy in English (Hutchinson, 2008) bringing linguistic understanding of more than one language, and a cognitive advantage (Backer et al. 2021): the curriculum needs to recognise this and build on it. The Bell Foundation report (2018) highlights that using average attainment data for students with EAL is profoundly misleading; that better assessment of EAL learners' needs is required; that the full range of EAL needs are not met; and that we have no policy for the development of specialist EAL teachers. At the moment, teachers feel unprepared to work with multilingual pupils from an asset perspective (Cunningham and Little, 2023), this needs to change if we wish to build on the economic and social advantages that the country's language diversity offers. A comprehensive understanding of ways to support translanguaging (Wei, 2018) and language awareness as two ways to build multilingualism into the curriculum will be an important step towards this.

The need for the reading curriculum to include a broader range of texts: UKLA believes that learners have the right to access the best texts - in print, digital and multimodal forms - written for children and young people, reflecting diverse interests and cultures. Yet, despite the strength and quality of children's publishing in the UK, and the rich breadth of literature, both nationally and internationally, our current curriculum represents a narrow and impoverished reading experience. Many learners do not encounter stories and texts in school which reflect the diversity of the student population, with the consequence that many readers do not see themselves represented in what they read (Elliott et al, 2021; Picton & Clark, 2022). According to the CLPE report (2021), although recent years have seen a steady increase in publication of books which represent ethnic minorities, there is still a significant gap: whilst 33.8% of primary students are from an ethnic minority, only 14% of published books feature a main character who is from an ethnic minority. Extending reading to include a greater range of texts benefits *all* learners, fostering understanding of social and cultural perspectives which differ from students' own: *'A wider cultural representation of authors not only benefits those who then see*

themselves in the texts before them, but also society as a whole, providing for a more empathetic and balanced understanding of the people who make up the population' (Nelson-Addy et al, 2019. P.199). Thus, UKLA believe it is a critical priority for the English curriculum to emphasise the need for access to a diverse range of texts at every key stage.

Recognition of the way socioeconomic and protected characteristics intersect: we noted in our answer to Q12 the danger of deficit discourses regarding literacy in socially disadvantaged learners. Many research studies also highlight that socio-economic and protected characteristics frequently intersect with each other (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; Lareau, 2018; Richardson et al, 2020); and moreover, that using data which homogenises a particular category, such as social disadvantage or ethnic minority often masks very significant within-group differences. For example, whilst ethnic minority students overall do not achieve the same results as ethnic majority students, some ethnic groups outperform the ethnic majority, whilst others significantly underperform (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; DfE, 2020; Strand 2021). Similarly, with the ethnic majority group, white working-class students significantly underperform (HCEC, 2021); and the very generalised term 'EAL' is too broad to capture the fact that some EAL students outperform the average whilst others struggle to succeed. This tendency to over-interpret from generalised group data leads to student stereotyping and unconscious bias, and means that their actual literacy needs may be overlooked. This reinforces UKLA's priority, stated in Q11 that there is a pressing need for a literacy curriculum and assessment system which understands and addresses **the needs of all learners**, embracing the richness and diversity of our learners, and which can robustly address the way our current curriculum and assessment system privileges already advantaged groups.

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

The inclusion of reading enjoyment in the curriculum (DfE, 2014) and the encouragement to create school-wide reading cultures in the Reading Framework (DfE, 2023) have the potential to support children and young people's educational progress. International research evidence recognises the reciprocal relationship between the will and the skills of reading (e.g., Brozo, Shiel, and Topping 2008; Cheema 2018; Malanchini et al., 2017; McGrane et al. 2017; OECD, 2019; Lindorff et al., 2023). However, UKLA perceives the over-emphasis on phonics and KS2 assessments sideline the development of the habit of reading in childhood, through adolescence into life, so more time needs to be afforded motivating and sustaining readers who not only can, but do choose to read and read frequently.

- Brozo, W., Shiel, G., and Topping, K. (2007). Engagement in Reading: Lessons Learned from Three PISA Countries." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 51(4). 304-315.
- Cheema, J. R. (2018). Adolescents' Enjoyment of Reading as a Predictor of Reading Achievement: New Evidence from a Cross-Country Survey *Journal of Research in Reading* 41 (S1): S149-S162.
- Malanchini, M., Wang, Z., Voronin, I., Schenker, V. J., Plomin, R., Petrill, S. A., & Kovas, Y. (2017). Reading Self-Perceived Ability, Enjoyment and Achievement: A Genetically Informative Study of Their Reciprocal Links Over Time. *Developmental Psychology* 53(4). 698–712.
- McGrane, J., Stiff, J., Baird, J. Lenkeit, J. & Hopfenbeck, T. (2017). *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS): National Report for England*. UK: Department for Education. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pirls-2016-reading-literacy-performance-in-england>
- Lindorff, A., Stiff, J. & Kayton, H. (2023). PIRLS 2021: *National Report for England Research Report*, London: Department for Education <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pirls-2021-reading-literacy-performance-in-england>
- OECD. (2019). *PISA 2018 Results (Volume II): Where All Students Can Succeed*. Paris, France: OECD Publishing.

Ensuring an excellent foundation in English and Maths

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

UKLA's most critical concerns relate to the English assessments at KS2 and we believe that reform of these assessments is vital to ensure more ambitious expectations of students' outcomes in English, and to ensure learners' are well-prepared for both personal well-being and employment. In our membership survey, changes to the primary assessment was the strongest response, with respondents consistently reporting that the current assessments were not supporting learning and progress in literacy. Below we outline the key changes we recommend:

Removal of the phonics screening check: from its introduction the phonics screening check has been controversial, and its efficacy questioned. UKLA members noted in particular the unhelpfulness of the pseudo-words and the one-size-fits-all nature of the point in time assessment, which is unambitious for high-attaining readers and inappropriate for lower-attaining writers. A recent report by the Education Policy Institute (2024) has found no evidence that the screening check has narrowed attainment gaps by the end of primary school. The report concludes that PIRLS results do not provide any indication that the Phonics Screening Check has positively impacted the reading skills of children in England. There has been no significant rise in children's reading scores in PIRLS among those who have taken the Phonics Screening Check – though there was a rise before it was introduced. Moreover, the previous government's use of PIRLS 2021 data as evidence of the impact of phonics on students misrepresents the data as evidencing the positive impact of phonics teaching. The PIRLS evidence indeed positions England 4th in the ranking but the actual result is no better than previously and the improved ranking is due to other countries submitting data early during COVID. The DfE report on the PIRLS results (Lindorff et al, 2024) makes this clear, noting that '*direct statistical comparisons to some education systems are not possible to make in this cycle of PIRLS, 6 because of the complexities introduced by comparing across different ages of pupils and varying impact of COVID-19* (p.5); and that the 2022 results are '*not*

significantly different to England's scores in most previous PIRLS cycles. England's average overall reading performance has not changed significantly compared to most previous PIRLS cycles, including PIRLS 2016' (p.6). The DfE report also notes that *'Fewer pupils in England reported that they enjoy reading than in previous cycles'* (p.7). Removing the phonics test will free up teachers' time to teach reading, develop readers who choose to read and enjoy reading rather than preparing students for the test, and will allow for a richer reading curriculum, as we outline in our response to Q19.

Removal of the Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation (GPS) test: there is no evidence for the efficacy of the GPS test, neither in terms of its capacity to improve learners' spelling, punctuation and use of grammar, nor in its capacity to improve writing. It is not used in any national measures, and it is not used by teachers to inform their understanding of students' writing development or attainment. However, teaching for the test frequently occupies a disproportionate amount of curriculum time – its removal will reduce teacher workload and make more quality teaching time available for teaching writing.

Revision of the assessment criteria for writing at KS2:

Whilst teachers and the UKLA membership are generally happy with the principles of teacher assessment of writing at KS2, there is considerable concern about the criteria used to assess writing. Clarkson (2024) reports teachers' views that *'the criteria did not entirely capture all relevant aspects of writing and were thus inadequate for capturing writing achievement. While some features of writing valued by teachers were reflected in the criteria, there were concerns about their generality, lack of specificity and potential for vagueness'* (p.154). Research has also indicated that the effect of these criteria, and their exemplification, is to distort the teaching of writing in preparation for KS2 test success, with students being encouraged to 'put in' certain language features in order to gain higher marks (Myhill & Newman, 2016; Barrs, 2019; Hardman & Bell, 2019)

Barrs, M. (2019). Teaching bad writing. *English in Education*, 53(1), 18–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/04250494.2018.15578>.

Clarkson, R. (2024). 'It's missing the heart of what writing is about': teachers' interpretations of writing assessment criteria. *British Educational Research Journal*, 50, 134–161. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3916>

Lindorff, A., Stiff, J. & Kayton, H. (2023). PIRLS 2021: [National Report for England Research Report](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pirls-2021-reading-literacy-performance-in-england), London: Department for Education
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pirls-2021-reading-literacy-performance-in-england>

EPI (2024). What can quantitative analyses tell us about the national impact of the phonics screening check? <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/what-can-quantitative-analyses-tell-us-about-the-national-impact-of-the-phonics-screening-check/>

Hardman, W. & Bell, H. 2019. 'More Fronted Adverbials than Ever Before'. Writing Feedback Practices and Grammatical Metalanguage in an English Primary School. *Language and Education* 33 (1): 35–50. doi:10.1080/09500782.2018.1488864.

Myhill, D.A. & Newman, R. (2016). Metatalk: Enabling Metalinguistic Discussion about Writing. *International Journal of Education Research*. 80 (177–187).

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

A key issue to consider in relation to the secondary content for English is the relationship between curriculum/examination content and students' engagement with English. There has been a worrying and significant drop over recent years in the number of students progressing to take A level English, (as evidenced in the Curriculum Trends over Time analysis). The Carroll and Gill report (2023) shows that only 6% of students who took GCSE Literature went onto English A level, which is significantly lower than progression in Maths and Science. This decline in uptake of A level English Literature is mirrored in Higher Education where numbers applying to take an English Literature degree has also fallen. It is worth noting that these graduates are the pool of potential recruits into teacher education as future teachers of English.

This decline in progression to higher-level English study relates to students' experiences at GCSE where there is a heavy emphasis on canonical texts and too much content to cover. This has had a doubly negative effect because the texts they are required to read often do not interest them, and because the teaching they receive is strongly examination-oriented (Goodwyn, 2020; NATE, 2020). Many schools begin covering the GCSE literature content in year 9 because teachers feel pressured by what needs to be covered, with the outcome that KS3 becomes a very narrowed experience of English. There needs to be a broader understanding of what it means to respond to literary texts, rather than over-emphasising context, as at present. Higher-level reading is a complex inter-relationship between the reader and their own context, the text and its context, and the writer. There also needs to be time and space to develop students' personal responses to texts and how these texts relate to their own lives and experiences. Moreover, because students' reading of literature is assessed wholly through examination, a further consequence is that students' experience of the writing curriculum is dominated by writing literary critical essays. Just as writing in primary schools has become narrowed to reproducing texts with particular textual features in them, writing during the GCSE programme is characterised by formulaic constraints such as using PEE (or similar acronym variations) paragraphs, which do not enable students to become confident and proficient writers (Gibbons, 2019; McKnight, 2020). Students have very limited opportunity for creative writing or for a broader range of purposes – indeed, there is no use of the word 'creative' anywhere in the English Programmes of Study (Myhill & Clarkson, 2021, p.158). The current GCSE English is having the unintended consequence of putting learners off subject English, rather than enthusing and engaging them with the multiple ways in which English is intrinsically concerned with our past, our present and possibilities for the future.

Linked to the above, there is also a problem with the parameters of the two English GCSE's, Language and Literature, which do not really distinguish between literature and language study. In particular, there is a heavy literature component in GCSE language, which requires students to read texts from the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries, compounding the over-emphasis on literature referred to above. A more explicit focus on language study in the KS3 curriculum and in GCSE Language and a recognition that language has its own body of knowledge, would give students' the opportunity to develop their own speaking, reading and writing skills in more depth, and to use the study of language to explore varieties of English, and to develop critical skills to analyse bias and misinformation in the texts, particularly social media, which they use.

We recommend:

- ❑ **Broadening the range and diversity of texts read in KS3 and KS4 and for the GCSE examination:** This would include texts from the English literary heritage, but would also include texts written in English by non-English authors, and texts which represent the diverse backgrounds, cultures, heritages and individual needs and interests of students. To achieve, this teachers should be given more freedom to select appropriate texts *'with a greater degree of agency over their text*

choices for both KS3 and KS4; this would enable them to help their pupils understand society as well as to achieve good examination outcomes’ (Perry, 2022, p. 295).

- ❑ **Making a clear distinction between literature study for GCSE English Literature and language study for GCSE Language:** this means a stronger focus on language, spoken and written, in GCSE Language and the removal of the requirement to study literary texts in GCSE Language. This would give greater attention to knowledge about language as worth studying in its own right, would reduce the coverage issues raised by a high number of literature texts to be studied, and would better prepare students with the critical literacy skills needed to recognise misinformation and bias.
- ❑ **Ensure that the writing curriculum is rich and varied:** this would include reducing the dominance of literary critical responses in GCSE writing and considering other ways to assess literary response. Assessment of understanding of literature ‘*can be reconceptualised, emphasising open-ended questions, in long or short essay form, that promote more expansive visions of literary sense-making, or critical-creative exercises that merge comprehension of the text with students’ own experiences*’ (Prezioso, 2023, p.145). Equally, students should be entitled to genuine opportunities to write in a range of forms, including the composition of multimodal texts.

Carroll, M. & Gill, T. (2023). Progression from GCSE to A Level, 2018 – 2020. <https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/674348-progression-from-gcse-to-a-level-2018-2020.pdf>

Gibbons, S. (2019). “Death by PEEL?” The teaching of writing in the secondary English classroom in England. *English in Education*, 53(1), 36–45.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/04250494.2019.1568832>

Goodwyn, A. (2020). The state of English: NATE’s annual survey. *Teaching English*, 24, 29–32. <https://app.sheepcrm.com/nate/publications/teaching-english/te-autumn-2020/>

McKnight, L. (2020). Since feeling is first: the art of teaching to write paragraphs. *English in Education*, 55(1), 37–52.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/04250494.2020.1768069>

National Association for the Teaching of English [NATE]. (2020). The decline in student choice of A level English. *Teaching English*, 24, 24–28.

Perry, J. (2022). ‘...to read people differently’: The purpose of English Literature in English secondary schools. *English in Education*, 56(3), 287–299.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/04250494.2022.2090924>

Prezioso, M. (2023). From knowledge to understanding: a reorientation of English literature education. *English in Education*, 57(2), 135–147.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/04250494.2023.2186221>

Curriculum and Qualification Content

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

The current English curriculum needs revising to reduce test-driven content, to redress missing content, and to realign existing concepts with broader, richer and more challenging conceptualisations of what it means to be literate. It is also crucial to give teachers greater flexibility to develop, adapt and innovate within the broad scope of the curriculum, particularly to enable them to meet individual needs and to embrace the diversity of the student population.

We recommend:

A stronger emphasis on spoken language in the English curriculum: we welcome the statement on spoken language in the Purpose of Study section of the National Curriculum, particularly its recognition of the variety of language that learners hear, the importance of learners talking about their reading, and the inter-relationship of talk and thinking. However, the statement is somewhat unambitious in scope and is not realised in the Programmes of Study which follow. A greater emphasis on oracy was one of the top priorities of UKLA members surveyed, and UKLA believes that all learners have the right to engage in a rich range of spoken language activities, including drama, discussion, presentations and collaborative work. We note that the term ‘oracy’ is often not clearly defined and multiply-interpreted: we take oracy to encompass spoken communication and interaction, and to include presentational aspects of talk, such as debates and speeches; performance aspects, such as drama and Poetry by Heart; and group and peer discussion and collaboration. We also include within our understanding of oracy the use of dialogic talk for learning, with its capacity to give learners’ space for exploratory and open-ended talk about all aspects of language, including reading and writing (Alexander, 2020; Maine, 2024; Myhill et al, 2020). An emphasis on spoken language would enable greater attention to the multiple varieties of spoken English which are used in different contexts and groups, and for different purposes, and enable critical discussion about powerful varieties of English. This would counter the current curriculum’s monocultural emphasis on Standard English only (Cushing, 2023) and empower students to understand how and when to switch between different varieties of English for different purposes.

Rebalancing the emphasis on phonics within a rich reading curriculum: UKLA does not question, and has indeed supported, the role of phonics in the teaching of reading. UKLA concurs with EEF Chief Executive, Becky Francis, who argues that *‘robust evidence suggests that high-quality, structured phonics teaching can boost young pupils’ literacy development, when they are implemented carefully and as part of a wider literacy offering’* (Schools Week, 2022). We have consistently emphasised the need for a broad and balanced approach to the teaching of reading, where phonics is part of a reading curriculum which creates opportunities: for rich dialogic book talk (Maine, 2015) where learners share and discuss books together; for independent reading for pleasure (Cremin et al, 2022; Cremin & Scholes, 2024); for purposeful teaching of reading comprehension; for recognition of the significance of digital and multimodal texts (Dowdall & Burnett, 2021; Lim & Tan-Chia, 2024); and for access for all learners to a wide and diverse range of books and digital texts. The over-emphasis on phonics in the current curriculum has reduced teacher time for attention to these other critical aspects of teaching reading and developing readers. Yet the evidence on the effectiveness of phonics in supporting reading development is patchy and often partial. Cognitive scientist, Jeff Bowers, has analysed the research quality of the metaanalyses arguing for systematic phonics and argues that the *‘results have been mischaracterized by the authors themselves (summarizing the results in ways that mislead the reader), and in most cases, the design of the meta-analyses was not even designed to test the conclusions that were drawn by the authors’* (Bowers, 2020, p685). He concludes there is no evidence to support the impact of teaching phonics on students’ reading attainment. The recent EEF report (Molotsky et al, 2022) on the efficacy of the *ReadWrite Inc* and *Fresh Starts* schemes, developed by Ruth Miskin and used by 8000 schools, concludes that the emphasis on phonics has led to significant expense

but limited impact. We feel it is also important to note here long-expressed concerns about the inappropriacy of the previous government's advocacy of particular phonics programmes, and recent uncovering of serious conflict of interest in the group, which since 2019 has been advising the DFE on matters including schools' phonics provision. Mansell (2024) has revealed that 17 of the 23 teachers and consultants who have served on the English Hubs Council have direct or indirect links to the Read Write Inc (RWI) or Little Wandle (LW) phonics schemes, created by two companies which have been making millions of pounds from phonics provision.

Revising the writing curriculum: the current writing curriculum represents a view of writing which is narrow and overly-focused on accuracy, and is at odds with the way writing is addressed in many other countries (Jeffrey & Parr, 2021). Whilst it is axiomatic that writing should be accurate, accurate writing is not necessarily high-quality writing. The combined effect of the KS2 writing assessment criteria, the GPS test, and detailed specifications about grammar in the Programmes of Study has led to the teaching of writing focusing on compliance to a limited set of text features (Barrs, 2019; Hardman & Bell 2019), rather than fostering independence in shaping and composing texts with creativity, clarity and imagination. The way grammar is addressed in the current curriculum contributes to this over-focus on particular aspects of text: the Programmes of Study specify what aspects of grammar should be taught at what stage are not based on research evidence and lead to teaching which is poorly matched to learners' needs. For example, in Year 2, the PoS says students should be taught to use '*subordination (using when, if, that, or because) and co-ordination (using or, and, or but)*' with no consideration of whether learners can already use this subordination (which the vast majority can) or why this subordination helps to improve your writing. Understanding grammar is an important aspect of being a writer, but learners need support in developing understanding about how grammar is a resource for shaping and crafting writing (Jones et al, 2013; Myhill et al, 2018) - the grammar chosen as a focus for teaching should relate to learners' needs as writers and the language characteristics of the texts they are writing. The teaching of grammar should be embedded meaningfully within the teaching of writing (and, of course, can contribute to discussions about spoken language and reading texts). The curriculum should enable young people to become independent and agentic writers, not learners who simply reproduce texts in a set form. Research evidences the importance of direct instruction (Graham etc) but the goal of this instruction is to develop critical understanding of how texts work, how writing builds relationships with readers, and how as writers we communicate what we want to say. Teaching writing needs to be both text-oriented and writer-oriented (Myhill et al, 2021), and should support students in how to think about and make authorial decisions (Kellogg, 2008) and to understand the implications of the choices they make. The role of talk is crucial to developing 'writerly' decision-making, and students need opportunities to rehearse and share their ideas, and to explore and evaluate their language choices (Rojas-Drummond et al, 2020; Newman & Watson, 2020; Al-Adeimi & O'Connor, 2021). Writing is a complex multidimensional activity which is challenging to learn and which does not rest upon a set of hierarchical skills: a shift from a strong focus on textual features addressed in isolation to a more holistic approach to teaching writing will equip learners to write to express their own feelings and viewpoints, and to write confidently for different purposes across the curriculum, and ultimately in the workplace.

Including multimodal literacy: Multimodal texts are now ubiquitous in our contemporary lives, both in physical and digital formats: indeed, for many children and young people their dominant experiences of reading written texts are likely to be multimodal, whether that be through picture books and graphic novels, social media platforms, digital games and apps, or simply through their teacher's use of Powerpoint in lessons. Multimodality crosses the boundaries of spoken language, reading and writing and yet is not mentioned at all in the current curriculum. In this respect, we lag behind other countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Norway, who have included multimodal literacy in their curriculum. For example, recent guidance to teachers in New Zealand states that '*most texts in today's world*

are multimodal. To use these texts, students need the capacity to not only make meaning of words, images and sound, but to interpret how these modalities and their different elements are combined for certain purposes' (NMSSA, 2021). A strong aspect of this is developing critical literacy which empowers students to understand how meanings are communicated, and to interrogate bias, prejudice, misinformation or disinformation.

- Al-Adeimi, S. & O'Connor, C. (2021) Exploring the relationship between dialogic teacher talk and students' persuasive writing. *Learning and Instruction*, 71, 101388 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2020.101388>
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- Cremin, T., Hendry, H., Rodriguez Leon, L. & Kucirkova, N. (2022). (eds) *Reading Teachers: Nurturing Reading for Pleasure*. Routledge.
- Cremin, T. & Scholes, L. (2024). Reading for Pleasure: Scrutinizing the evidence base – benefits, tensions, recommendations. *Language and Education*. 38(4) 537-559. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2024.2324948>
- Dowdall, C. & Burnett, C. (2021). *Digital Literacies in Education: Teaching, Learning and Assessment in 21st Century Classrooms*. UKLA
- Jeffrey, J & J. Parr (2021), *International Perspectives on Writing Curricula and Development*. Routledge.
- Lim, V.F.& Tan-Chia, L. (2023). *Designing Learning for Multimodal Literacy: Teaching Viewing and Representing*. Routledge
- Jones, S.M. Myhill, D.A. & Bailey, T.C. (2013) Grammar for Writing? An investigation into the effect of Contextualised Grammar Teaching on Student Writing. *Reading and Writing* 26 (8) 1241-1263
- Maine, F. (2015). *Dialogic readers: Children talking and thinking together about visual texts*. Routledge
- Maine, F. (2024). The role of oral language in the dialogic primary classroom. *Education 3-13*, 52(7), 916–929. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2024.2357894>
- Mansell, W. (2024). A 'Closed Shop?' Education Uncovered. <https://www.educationuncovered.co.uk/news/171666/a-closed-shop-phonics-advisory-group-to-department-for-education-dominated-by-individuals-linked-to-products-offered-by-just-two-companies.shtml>
- Molotsky, A. Dias, P. & Nakamura, P. (2022). *Read Write Inc. Phonics and Fresh Start. Evaluation Report*. Education Endowment Foundation. <https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/projects/Read-Write-Inc-and-Fresh-Start-Final.pdf?v=1731752736>
- Myhill, D., Cremin, T., & Oliver, L. (2021). Writing as a craft: Re-considering teacher subject content knowledge for teaching writing. *Research Papers in Education*, 38(3), 403–425. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2021.1977376>
- Myhill, D. Newman, R. & Watson, A. (2020). Going Meta: Dialogic Talk in the Writing Classroom. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*. 43 (1) 5-16.
- Myhill, D, Jones, S & Lines, H. (2018). Supporting less-proficient writers through linguistically-aware teaching. *Language and Education* 32(4), 333-349. [10.1080/09500782.2018.1438468](https://doi.org/10.1080/09500782.2018.1438468)
- National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement [NMSSA] (2021). *English: Multimodal texts and critical literacy* Ministry for Education and Educational Assessment Research Unit. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/207608/NMSSA-English-2019-Multimodal.pdf
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- Rojas-Drummond, S., Olmedo, M. J. B., Cruz, I. H., & Espinosa, M. V. (2020). Dialogic interactions, coregulation and the appropriation of text composition abilities in primary school children. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 24, 100354. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2019.100354>

Schools Week. (2022). Long Awaited Phonics Study shows disappointing progress. <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/education-endowment-foundation-phonics-read-write-inc-fresh-start-study/>

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

The curriculum requires substantial radical transformation in order for it to be fully representative of our diverse society. 'Diversity' is taken in its broadest terms here, including, but not limited to, issues of race, class, disability, gender, neurodiversity, sexuality, and language. These are not isolated aspects of diversity, but are connected and intersectional (e.g. Bešić 2020). Various work has repeatedly demonstrated how the current national curriculum is dominated by narrow representations of modern society, with white, male, able-bodied, cisgender, standard English speaking authors and characters (e.g. Cushing 2023; Elliott 2020; Elliott & Courtney 2023; Snell & Cushing, 2023). The national curriculum is therefore a matter of access, and therefore a new curriculum should present opportunities for diverse pupils to see and hear themselves represented (Bishop, 1990) as well as opportunities to see and hear those that might be different from them represented in culturally sustaining ways. This entails not simply inserting, for example, literature by 'diverse' authors, but by designing a curriculum which builds on the understandings, identities, worldviews, and lived experiences of a diverse range of pupils – in all its forms (Paris & Alim 2017; Cushing & Govender, 2024). Such a curriculum is urgently needed to ensure a more diverse and representative version of our current society.

Our responses to earlier questions have stressed several aspects which relate to ensuring the curriculum is more diverse and representative:

- the importance of recognising the multilingual character of many schools, valuing the capacity to speak more than one language, and drawing on learners' knowledge of a home language to prompt thinking about English as a language;
- the need to ensure students have opportunities to read texts which represent the social and cultural diversity of our schools and society;
- the need to replace the singular emphasis on Standard English with a broader emphasis on varieties of English and critical discussion of how they are used.

Practical examples of what lessons might look like in such a curriculum already exist (see e.g. www.multilingualism-in-schools.net, <https://theworldoflanguages.co.uk/>), highlighting benefits to all pupils.

Alim, H. S. and Paris, D. (2017). What is culturally sustaining pedagogy and why does it matter?. In: D. Paris, H. S. Alim (Eds.) Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World. Teachers College Press, pp. 1–24.

Bešić, E. (2020). Intersectionality: A pathway towards inclusive education? Prospects 49: 111-122.

Bishop R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. Perspectives 6(3): ix–xi.

Cushing, I. (2023). The knowledge-rich project, coloniality, and the preservation of whiteness in schools: a raciolinguistic perspective. Educational Linguistics 2(1): 51-71.

Cushing, I., & Govender, N. (2024). An anti-racist English education. *English in Education*, 58(3), 240-257.

Elliott, V. (2020). Knowledge in English Canon, Curriculum and Cultural Literacy. Routledge.

Elliott, V., & Courtney, M. (2023). Teaching poems by authors of colour at Key Stage 3: categorising what is taught. *English in Education*, 57(2), 91-101.

Snell, J., & Cushing, I. (2022). "A lot of them write how they speak": policy, pedagogy and the policing of 'nonstandard' English. *Literacy*, 56(3), 199-211.

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

The very nature of English opens up rich possibilities for understanding, engaging with and respecting others, yet there is little evidence of this in the current curriculum. The Purpose of Study statement is promising, recognising English's '*pre-eminent place in education and in society*', and that reading gives learners the opportunity to '*develop culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually*'. But it is a restricted view of the significance of literacy in fostering mutual knowledge and understanding: it offers fertile opportunities for developing citizenship, critical literacy and intercultural understanding (Pesonen, 2019; Acevedo, 2016; García-González et al, 2019). Reading introduces us to different perspectives and worldviews, and helps us understand ourselves and others; writing allows learners to express their own ideas and feelings, but also to challenge and argue for change in their world; and dialogic talk, in particular, not only creates space for open-ended and exploratory talk, but also explicitly addresses how to listen to and respect others. Additionally, ensuring the curriculum explicitly signals the value of multilingualism, and varieties of English (as we recommend in Q12 and Q13) is likely to create '*favorable perceptions of and attitudes toward not just the languages and their diversity but also the speakers of the languages and their cultures*' (Candelier, 2017, p. 162).

We recommend that a revised curriculum for English:

- ☐ embeds citizenship, critical literacy and mutual understanding within the Programmes of Study for Spoken Language, Reading, and Writing;
- ☐ recognises the role of reading in opening up understanding of different perspectives and worldviews;
- ☐ embeds explicit attention to the value of multilingualism and varieties of English throughout the curriculum;
- ☐ ensures that spoken language is given a higher profile in the curriculum

Acevedo, M. V. (2016). Classroom Contexts That Support Young Children's Intercultural Understanding. *YC Young Children*, 71(3), 37–43.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/ycyoungchildren.71.3.37>

García-González, M., Véliz, S. and Matus, C. (2019) 'Think difference differently? Promote the use of a wider range of literature in all key stages: Knowing/becoming/doing with picturebooks', *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 28(4), 543–562. doi: 10.1080/14681366.2019.1667858.

Pesonen, J. (2019). Children's Stories Supporting the Development of Critical Literacy and Intercultural Understanding. In K. J. Kerry-Moran, & J.-A. Aerila (Eds.), *Story in Children's Lives: Contributions of the Narrative Mode to Early Childhood Development, Literacy, and Learning* (pp. 275-297). (Educating the Young Child: Advances in Theory, Implications for Practice; Vol. 16). Springer.

Candelier, M. (2017). "Awakening to Languages" and Educational Language Policy. In J. Cenoz, D. Gorter & S. May (Eds.), *Language Awareness and Multilingualism. Encyclopedia of Language and Education* (pp. 161-172). Springer.

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

Many of our previous comments address this but in summary, the narrowing of the current English curriculum to a restricted repertoire of reading and writing, the impact of inappropriate tests, and its failure to seriously address spoken language means that it is unambitious and backward-looking. In our recommendations in other questions we have noted the points below which all relate to the skills and knowledge for life:

- ☐ the need to give spoken language a central place in the English curriculum;
- ☐ the need to broaden the range of reading texts so they are more representative of our diverse society;
- ☐ the need to include digital and multimodal literacies within the curriculum;
- ☐ the need to embed critical literacy throughout the English curriculum

In addition, we would note the research which has identified that reading for pleasure in childhood is an enabler of cognitive advancement and psychological wellbeing. It is longitudinally associated with higher levels of cognitive development (Sun et al., 2023) and more strongly linked than parental education to cognitive progress in adolescence (Sullivan & Brown, 2015). Significantly, studies also show avid readers have better mental health; there are social, emotional and relational benefits to being a reader (Bozgun and Kösterelioglu Meltem 2020; Mak and Fancourt, 2020; Sun et al., 2023), so it deserves a clear place within the curriculum for all.

Bozgun, K. and [Akin-Kösterelioglu Meltem](#), (2020). Variables affecting social-emotional development, academic grit and subjective well-being of fourth-grade primary school students *Educational Research and Reviews* 15(7):417-425 DOI:[10.5897/ERR2020.4025](#)

Mak, H. W. and Fancourt, D. (2020). 'Longitudinal associations between reading for pleasure and child maladjustment: Results from a propensity score matching analysis'. *Social Science and Medicine*, 253, p. 112971. Doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.112971.

Sullivan, A. & Brown, M. (2015). Reading for pleasure and progress in vocabulary and mathematics. *British Educational Research Journal*, 41(6). 971-991. 10.1002/berj.3180.

Sun, Y-J., Sahakian, B. J., Langley, C., Yang, A., Jiang, Y., Jujiao K., Zhao, X., Li, C., Cheng, W. and Fen, J. (2023). Early initiated childhood reading for pleasure: associations with better cognitive performance, mental well-being and brain structure in young adolescence. *Psychological Medicine* 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291723001381>.

A broad and balanced curriculum:

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

The responses and suggestions outlined in this document highlight the imbalances in the current curriculum. This includes the tendency to over-emphasise literacy as a set of narrowly-defined technical skills, and therefore literateness and linguistic fluency as mostly performative through decontextualised assessment structures. Instead, the UKLA would like to advocate for a more nuanced and balanced approach to curriculum that draws on a wider breadth of research, spanning quantitative and qualitative work. We therefore outline the following principles as vital components of a curriculum that seeks to create the policy conditions for effective, empowering, and contextually relevant literacy and language education:

1. **Broadening the definition of literacy** – There needs to be an acknowledgement of the social and personal dimensions of literacy and language education. This includes explicit placement of play, dialogic discussion and informal book talk, emotion, relationships and interpersonal interactions, as well as reading and writing for pleasure throughout the curriculum. It also includes space for multimodal and digital literacies. Importantly, how and where these social and personal dimensions of literacy and language learning are interdependent with cognitive development needs to be clear, thus incorporating research which finds technical skill development and knowledge-building are enhanced when literacy education is culturally and contextually relevant and takes place in spaces where positive relationships are formed and sustained. Furthermore, a clearer articulation of the connections between and oftentimes interdependence of reading (and viewing), writing (and designing), speaking, and listening in literacy and language education is fundamental.
2. **Social justice and inclusion** – A balanced literacy and language education understands that social justice, equity, and inclusion are part of the foundations of effective teaching and learning. Therefore, explicit mentions of power, identity, culture, empathy and belonging, difference and diversity, as well as (inter)personal and social responsibility is necessary. A curriculum which fosters social justice and inclusion takes an asset-based approach throughout by making cultural and linguistic sustainability, critical literacy, reading and writing for pleasure, and contextual relevance central to social, personal, and cognitive development. Such as curriculum would acknowledge and support teachers' agency and expertise in developing contextually relevant pedagogies and materials that builds on and responds to children's needs and experiences in/out of formal educational settings. Furthermore, a balanced and inclusive curriculum acknowledges the role of literacy and language learning in equipping learners with the knowledge and skills to engage with the social realities and inequalities they and their families/communities may experience or witness, thus promoting anti-racism, gender equality, LGBTQIA+ inclusion, climate justice and environmental sustainability, linguistic justice, anti-poverty and class justice, and so on.
3. **Multimodal and digital literacies** – A broad and balanced curriculum represents the literacy and language needs and practices of the time. Given the ongoing and ever-increasing dominance of predominantly visual and multimodal media, social media and online/digital communications, the hypersalience of sensationalised global news, and the polarising effects of online 'echo chambers', children need access to the knowledge and skills that would help them make more informed choices when consuming, sharing, contributing to, and producing online or digital texts. Making multimodal and digital literacies explicit in the curriculum further ensures that the curriculum itself remains fits for purpose, enables teachers and learners to draw on their context and experiences with diverse texts and literacy practices to inform teaching and learning, and can work toward socially and culturally responsible online/digital practices. Offline multimodal practices (such as access to graphic novels, comics, film and visual media, museum and art exhibitions, place-based learning and public objects) are also relevant here as they promote learners' literate engagement with diverse spaces, places, texts, and objects that are relevant to their own lives and aspirations.
4. **Creativity, emotion, and cognition** – A broad and balanced curriculum understands that creativity and emotion are fundamental to cognitive development, particularly where children's chances of becoming socially and culturally conscious members of society are enhanced. Furthermore, creativity ensures that

children can play with language, literacy, and texts, contributing to problem-solving, perspective-taking and the development of empathy. These practices allow for deepened engagement with literacy and language learning.

5. **Teachers' workloads** – Streamlining the curriculum so that it is more contextually and culturally sustaining (i.e., it embeds broader definitions of literacy, integrates social justice and inclusion, and ensures diverse texts and text types are accessible to children) should work alongside reducing the current state of over-assessment of children. It also takes into consideration the fundamental role of early years practitioners and the educational career of children across primary and secondary education.

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

The worrying decline in progression to A level has been discussed earlier in response to Q18.

Assessment and Accountability

Primary and NC Assessment

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

We have already answered this question in detail in response to Q17. To reiterate in summary form, we recommend:

- ☐ Removal of the Phonics Screening Check in KS1
- ☐ Removal of the Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation test at KS2
- ☐ Revision of the assessment criteria for writing at KS2

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

Our current system is very heavily focused on summative assessment for reporting purposes. A stronger focus on formative assessment would have a stronger impact on student learning, allowing for assessment at appropriate points in time for learners. This would enable teachers to develop understanding of individual students' progress, and for adaptation of teaching to meet individual learners' needs. We recommend:

- ☐ A revised curriculum for English gives greater emphasis to formative assessment

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

A key principle to improve students' experience of assessment is to ensure that all assessment helps them understand where they are and how they need to improve. To achieve this, better and more widespread use of formative assessment, as described in our answer to Q36 would be an obvious way forward. However, there are barriers to this inherent in our current system. The link between statutory testing and teacher/school accountability distorts teaching and curriculum coverage

to focus on teaching for the test. The accountability of schools for the quality of teaching they provide is critically important, but there are alternative models to determine accountability which do not make the link between the assessment of student learning and accountability so direct.

The removal of the phonics screening check, and the Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation test, and the revision of the assessment criteria for writing to be less focused on the presence of certain textual features would reduce teacher workload, and free up teacher time for better formative assessment. The money saved by not needing test developers and markers for the statutory tests could be used to ensure all teachers have high quality professional development on assessing spoken language, reading and writing. Moderation of writing is quality time which should be a professional entitlement for all.

We recommend that:

- ☐ the direct link between test data and accountability is dismantled and replaced with a model which is fit for purpose
- ☐ the removal of the phonics screening check, and the Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation test, and the revision of the assessment criteria for writing; and the use of funding saved to support high quality professional development on assessing spoken language, reading and writing.

Secondary Assessment

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

See earlier response to Q18, which recommends:

- ☐ Broadening the range and diversity of texts read in KS3 and KS4 and for the GCSE examination;
- ☐ Making a clear distinction between literature study for GCSE English Literature and language study for GCSE Language;
- ☐ Ensure that the writing curriculum is rich and varied.

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

Studies indicate the value of deploying self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000; 2017) in education in relation to volitional reading, several indicate that supporting pupils' core psychological needs—their autonomy, competence, and relatedness- nurtures their development as readers. The value of pedagogy which explicitly addresses these needs has been shown to motivate readers with elementary-aged children (e.g., De Naeghel et al., 2012; Orkin et al., 2017) and with adolescents (e.g., De Naeghel, 2014; Neugebauer and Gilmour, 2020). In addition, using survey data and structural equation modelling, and connecting to SDT, Guay et al (2019) show that the relatedness shown by kindergarten teachers with their students, is predictive of their intrinsic motivation for reading one year later. Also, that the children's reading self-concept, 'positively mediates the relation between intrinsic motivation and reading achievement' (Guay et al., 2019, p.215). This suggests balance is needed. Developing more rounded autonomy supportive approaches to KS2 readers who do not meet the Expected Standard thus has potential: such approaches support the skill and the will to read.

- De Naeghel, J. Valcke, M., De Meyer, L., Warlop, N., van Braak, J. & Van Keer, H (2014). The role of teacher behavior in adolescents' intrinsic reading motivation. *Reading and Writing*. 27, 1547 – 1565. doi: 10.1007/s11145-014-9506-3.
- De Naeghel, J. Van Keer, H., Vansteenkiste, M. & Rosseel, Y. (2012). The relation between elementary students' recreational and academic reading motivation, reading frequency, engagement, and comprehension: a self-determination theory perspective. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(4), pp. 1006–1021.
- Neugebauer, S. R. & Gilmour, A. F. (2020). The Ups and Downs of Reading Across Content Areas: The Association Between Instruction and Fluctuations in Reading Motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 112 (2), 344 –363. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000373>.
- Orkin, M., Pott, M., Wolf, W., May, S. & Brand, E. (2017) Beyond Gold Stars: Improving the Skills and Engagement of Struggling Readers through Intrinsic Motivation. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, 34:3, 203 – 217, doi: 10.1080/10573569.2017.1387834.
- Ryan, R. M. and Deci, E. L. (2000). 'Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being.', *The American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78. doi: 10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68.
- Ryan, R. M. and Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. NThe Guilford Press

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

Many of our previous responses directly address this but we would also note the distortion of teaching and teaching to the test which is linked to the high-stakes assessment and their link to accountability. The current high accountability model narrows curriculum, focuses on performance rather than understanding, and frequently leads to teaching being dictated by distant managers such as academy leads or superheads. We do not believe the requirement to teach all lessons in the same way across an academy chain using a pre-prepared PPT is a good way to teach. Moreover, the current system makes teacher innovation too risky to attempt and reduces teacher professionalism.