

Curriculum and Assessment Call for Evidence SEC Response

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Introduction

About SEC

SEC is a membership organisation that comes together to protect and promote the rights of disabled children and young people and those with special educational needs (SEN). Our membership of 43 organisations includes the voluntary and community sector, parent carer groups, education providers, and professional associations. SEC believes that every child and young person is entitled to an education that allows them to fulfil their potential and achieve their aspirations.

SEC identifies areas of consensus across our membership and works with the Department for Education, Parliament, and other decision-makers when there are proposals for changes in policy, legislation, regulations and guidance that may affect disabled children and young people and those with SEN. Our membership includes nationally recognised experts on issues including assessment and curriculum, schools and high needs funding, workforce training, the SEN legal framework, exclusions, and alternative provision. This response therefore focuses on the SEN and disabilities aspects in particular.

Introduction

Any curriculum and assessment framework should promote love and enjoyment of learning for all pupils. All children and young people deserve a curriculum that ignites their curiosity and engages their interests. This means ensuring accessible and adapted materials that cater to individual needs. The framework should also enhance skills to enable young people to thrive in the future, developing their personal skills as well as the emphasis on entering further education and the workplace. We believe that the current curriculum for many pupils, especially disabled pupils and those with SEN, is not promoting a love of learning nor setting up young people to thrive in their future lives. This is evidenced by the increasing numbers of children and young people disengaging from education and a mental health crisis linked in part to stressful schooling environments, bullying, and needs not being met ([DfE, 2020](#); [Webster, 2022](#); [ONS, 2022](#); [Children's Commissioner, 2022](#), [Anti-Bullying Alliance, 2022](#); [Pearson, 2022](#)). Research also shows that disabled young people and adults, and those with SEN, are less likely to access work, or further education. They are more likely to experience loneliness, poorer mental and physical health outcomes in adult life ([Parsons and Platt, 2013](#); [LSE, 2019](#); [ONS, 2022](#)). We welcome this review and accept the need for a reimagining of the current National Curriculum framework to reengage children and young people in their learning and prepare

them effectively for the world beyond. We have drawn out our key points below as well as answering the questions in turn.

A curriculum for ‘all’?

The current National Curriculum framework is exclusionary to some groups of children and young people who are not likely to reach even the first tiers of content, or do not progress much beyond them (Ndaji and Tymms, 2009). It is not, therefore, a curriculum for ‘all’. SEC calls for a change to make the curricular framework flexible enough to accommodate all learners, with the necessary increase in teacher autonomy and changes to the accountability landscape. In addition, we call for a reformed curriculum to provide individualised accommodations for, and an explicit acknowledgement of, those who might require a more personalised curriculum. For this small group of learners, a reformed curriculum might include, for example, a move away from the linear, academic-focused approach towards a personalised, functional-focused one. Wherever possible, any adaptations or personalised curriculum will ideally be delivered alongside peers rather than in a separate classroom. To be clear, we are calling for specialist support; not curricular segregation, in line with the accommodations set out in Section 92 of the Education Act (2002) and the SEND Code of Practice (see below for more detail on the legislation).

SEC is disappointed to hear from one of our members, PRUsAP (National Association for Pupil Referral Units and Alternative Provision), who were told by the curriculum review panel that PRUs and APs are out of scope of the review as they do not need to follow the National Curriculum. As children and young people in PRUs and APs are already marginalised and let down in the wider education context, we feel this is a huge oversight. Firstly, with many of those children and young people attending PRUs and APs having not been able to access the National Curriculum, their voices are the most important ones to listen to and understand how to make it more inclusive. Secondly, according to the [2023 SEND and AP Improvement plan](#), PRUs and APs are intended to be “time-limited or transitional places” for pupils who need more intensive support. This means that they are not removed from the National Curriculum as many students may be attending both a PRU or AP and a mainstream or special school during their time in education. Many PRUs and APs do follow the National Curriculum in order to make transitions easier. Thirdly, there are plenty of excellent examples of adapted curricula within PRUs and APs that benefit disabled learners and those with SEN, which we may draw from in the curriculum review.

Our final point is around the approach of the review to gathering the voices of children and young people and their families. SEC is pleased to see that an easy-read version has now

been published to encourage children, young people and their families to engage in the call for evidence. We have circulated this among our networks of children and young people. We are, however, disappointed that this has been released much later than the initial call for evidence and the deadline remains the same, essentially shortening the time those accessing the easy read version will have to submit their response. SEC believes this sends a message that the voices of children, young people and their families are not the priority of this review. Throughout our response, we have endeavoured to incorporate personal testimonies from disabled children and young people and those with SEN. This can never be as powerful as the submissions coming directly from those children and young people who are directly impacted by the curriculum and from those voices who are so often marginalised.

SEC asks for the Government to:

- ***Create greater flexibility within the National Curriculum framework to ensure it can be individually adapted to those who may need a more personalised approach***
- ***Extend the easy read version deadline for submission***
- ***Make a public commitment to involving children and young people who attend PRUs and APs, their families, and the professionals who support them in the review***

The Law

We call for this Review to ensure that the legal requirements as set out in the Education Act 2002 (and the Academies Act, 2010) are upheld for *all* pupils to benefit from a curriculum that “(a) promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and (b) prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.”

This is also reflected in the [*SEN and Disability Code of Practice*](#) which states at paragraph 9.69 (*page 166*) that the plan “should specify any appropriate modifications to the application of the National Curriculum, where relevant..... any appropriate exclusions from the application of the National Curriculum or the course being studied in a post-16 setting, in detail, and the provision which it is proposed to substitute for any such exclusions in order to maintain a balanced and broadly based curriculum.”

In terms of those pupils who have an Education, Health and Care Plan,

"The special educational provision for any pupil specified in [an EHC plan maintained for the pupil] may include provision—

- (a) excluding the application of the National Curriculum for England, or
- (b) applying the National Curriculum for England with such modifications as may be specified in [the plan]."

The legislation under the Equality Act 2010, which requires schools to make reasonable adjustments for disabled children and young people, is critical to ensuring that they can access the curriculum. The curriculum and assessments must not be seen in isolation from the requirement to make reasonable adjustments and put in place anticipatory duties.

SEC is asking for the Government to have due regard of the legislation when reviewing the curriculum, to ensure it remains accessible and appropriate to learners, especially disabled pupils and those with SEN.

‘Hierarchy’ of subjects & ‘Mind the Gap’ narrative

A broad curriculum requires a wide range of subjects on offer but also a shift away from the hierarchy of core subjects e.g. maths, English, science, and a recognition of the importance of the arts and vocational subjects. This is particularly important for disabled learners and those with SEN, who in some cases, will be more likely to achieve in creative and practical subjects. The current rigidity of the curriculum framework means that many children and young people who are not able to meet age-related expectations (ARE) in core subjects feel like they are failing from the very first test they take. To be clear, SEC recognises the importance of literacy, numeracy, and digital and functional skills for adult life, regardless of whether a learner has a SEN or not. SEC advocates for a move away from measuring attainment according to ARE and, instead, a recognition of personalised learning progress being made.

This connects to our other point about the ‘mind the gap’ narrative that exists for learners with SEN ([Special Needs Jungle, 2024](#)). SEC remains clear that aspirations should always remain high for all children and young people, regardless of need. However, the narrative in research around academic achievement gap between disabled students and those with SEN and their typically developing peers reinforces that differences in levels of attainment are deficits ([Daniel, 2024](#)). For many students, especially those with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD) and Severe Learning Disabilities (SLD), this ‘gap’ will not close and is likely to widen throughout their educational journey. The only gap that should be measured is the amount of progress that a pupil is making. Most often disabled learners and those with SEN are making considerable progress in comparison to their non-disabled peers. We need a curriculum and assessment framework that enables us to measure this

progress effectively. Students should be empowered to establish their goals and aspirations guided by their teachers, recognise their progress towards those goals, and be rewarded for their achievements. The curriculum and assessment review should reflect this to enable all learners to grow their love and passion for learning.

SEC calls for:

- ***Greater value to be placed on non-core and vocational subjects and options to pursue these in further education***
- ***A curriculum and assessment framework that moves away from ARE and offers equal recognition and praise for learning progress made by all children and young people, regardless of need***

Curriculum, assessment and the wider education context

At the outset of our submission, we wish to be clear that curriculum and assessment must not be seen in isolation. A more inclusive curricular and assessment framework will not be brought about without significant investment in the teaching and support staff workforce. This includes but is not limited to:

- Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and Continuing Professional Development (CPD);
- affording more preparation and planning capacity for teachers and support staff;
- improved access to the specialist workforce (see SEC’s manifesto asks);
- sound inclusive pedagogy;
- crucially, a genuine cultural shift towards truly valuing and celebrating the diversity of our children and young people.

This curriculum and assessment review is an opportunity to begin this change; but in itself, and, without major improvements in the overall education and SEND systems, it will not suffice to ensure that all our children and young people are able to thrive. We explore this more in Questions 14 and 15 on barriers and enablers. We also ask that the curriculum review not be seen in isolation from, and both informs and is informed by, wider policy developments such as the proposals for inclusion criteria in the Ofsted inspection framework.

SEC is asking the Government to review the curriculum and assessment framework as part of the whole education picture, including ITT, approaches to pedagogy, and a shift towards a more inclusive ethos. For more information on SEC’s position on other elements of the education landscape, [see our consultation response page.](#)

Questions to definitely respond to:

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

Question 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?

Whilst there is plenty of evidence to show the current National Curriculum and assessment framework is not serving many of our disabled learners and those with SEN, there are pockets of good practice examples. Proof that a curriculum is fulfilling its intended purpose is that students feel it is worth studying and lessons are worth attending. A key element to this is making sure that pupils feel that learning is worthwhile and relevant. Indeed, “improving pupil interest/engagement in learning is the top improvement teachers believe would be seen as a result of making the curriculum more relevant and representative of today’s society” (Pearson, 2024). Chris, a young person receiving SEN support said in an [ONS report from 2022](#), what approaches worked for them: “Maybe like do tasks around the classroom. You can stick stuff up on the walls in like English and find the missing quote or something. It’ll be more fun for students to want to learn. Instead of just sat there for an hour, just looking at the board and writing down stuff, which, if I’m being honest, it doesn’t really get along well with me.”

Schools championing adaptive teaching with a wide range of learning materials, which cater to the different needs of their learners, are more likely to have better engagement with learning from their pupils, especially disabled learners and those with SEN. Crucially, “having greater flexibility within the curriculum to cater for different needs and preferences was seen as important, and some parent and carers felt this was better accommodated in special schools” ([ONS, 2022](#)). We would advocate for drawing on best practice examples

from special schools and alternative provision (AP) where there is greater flexibility in the curriculum and assessment requirements. We go into more detail on flexibility in question 15 on enablers, but we feel drawing on special schools' expertise and experience of adapting the National Curriculum to meet the needs of their learners would be an excellent way forward to creating a more inclusive and accessible curriculum. We are aware this is already happening in some areas; for example, in Sunderland, Sunningdale school, an [outstanding-rated Ofsted primary special school](#), has been supporting mainstream primary schools in the area to adapt the curriculum to be more inclusive of children with increasing levels of need.

Where there is also flexibility in curriculum and assessment structure is in further education (FE). These settings in general are better able to recognise the progress of the full breadth of the young people they serve, than is the case for schools. The broader range of options, availability of a wider range of levels in terms of programmes and qualifications, and greater freedom in curriculum design (without the constraints of a National Curriculum) are all contributory factors.

There are some specific features of the current 16-19 system that are particularly helpful in supporting and recognising progress for disabled learners and those with SEN in FE, including:

- freedom for disabled learners and those with SEN to follow a non-accredited route or to combine accredited and non-accredited learning so that the curriculum can be shaped around their needs, interests and aspirations
- the range of personal and social development/employability/independent living skills qualifications of different sizes and levels, with flexible rules of combination that can be used to underpin personalised programmes
- supported internships which can be flexibly designed within broad parameters to offer the learning experiences needed to help secure progression to employment

We conducted a session with some disabled young people from the FLARE group, the DfE's official SEND young people advisory group on curriculum. Whilst many of them had suggestions for how the curriculum could be improved, some of them had examples of positive experiences of learning. Analysis of the below examples demonstrates that flexibility in the curriculum and assessment structures, relevance to the young person, and valuing qualifications equally is important to the young people we spoke with:

- “Media studies coursework cross-curricular with English, creating a magazine cover article with images. Made an article about a fictional autistic author and took pictures around school and edited on Photoshop”
- “English Language GCSE – able to deliver a speech about being neurodiverse”
- “Chatting time and warm up conversations to get students excited about the lesson”
- “Horse Equine Assisted Qualifications – experiential and learner lead, not in a typical classroom. Life skills that allowed me to do what I do now.”
- “BSL (British Sign Language) as a lesson not just support. Improves understanding of other languages and cultures.”
- “Opportunities for independent research/extended writing projects.”
- “[HITZ programme](#) – work related sports activities. Fun, engaging, great staff.”
- “Research project about a disability chosen by teacher – researching and making a care plan. Really thought provoking and made me learn new things about the disability.”

Section summary:

- ***SEC calls for curriculum and assessment methods that are flexible, relevant to children and young people’s lives, and have been adapted effectively. These approaches are most likely to improve engagement from all pupils, but particularly disabled learners and those with SEN.***
- ***SEC suggests looking to special schools, alternative provision, specialist teaching services and FE to provide best practice examples of where a more flexible curriculum and assessment structure has benefited disabled pupils and those with SEN.***

Question 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?

Introduction

It is essential that disabled pupils and pupils with SEN are considered from the start in the revision of the National Curriculum. The current curriculum and assessment arrangements are not inclusive and act as a disincentive to include the significant numbers of children and young people who perform outside national expectations. The design of the educational system, as a whole, is predicated on a generalised assumption that all

children and young people are able to progress and achieve at a rate associated with age-related norms.

A child or young person should never be labelled as having SEND because of a poor-quality curriculum or ineffective teaching, or weaknesses in universal health or care services. This was something that we saw too frequently in 2010 and, worryingly, something we still too often find. (Ofsted (2021))

If we want to improve the outcomes for this group of pupils, we need to make sure that we have built a National Curriculum and assessment structure that is for all pupils.

Curriculum

SEC is keen that the redesign of the National Curriculum should support progress and high expectations for all pupils. Ofsted identifies low expectations as a significant factor holding back the progress of disabled pupils and those with SEN (Ofsted, 2021). The structure, content of, and progression within the National Curriculum must be designed to support the learning of children and young people and reward progress rather than constantly measure against ARE.

The review should herald a move away from an expectation that children and young people of the same age should achieve similar standards, which makes those who are described as ‘falling behind’ feel like failures. The language of assessments and how this is communicated with children is also detrimental to students’ confidence in their abilities. Teachers regularly report progress and attainment to parents (and pupils) as - “working below, at or above ARE”. It is also often colour coded so it is clear for children and young people to see groups of learners and further compound differences. There are some children and young people who will never reach ARE (Department for Education, 2023), and it is therefore damaging, unfair, and contrary to equality legislation to persist with a system which constantly positions them as ‘falling behind’. In any class, there will be a spread of cognitive ability, aptitude and application, which widens as pupils grow older.

The structure of the National Curriculum does not support an inclusive approach. With specific content for each year cohort, children and young people who have not met expected levels at the end of the previous key stage have no obvious curriculum entitlement as they move into the next key stage. Without proper links or clearly articulated pathways, these need to be constructed by schools and teachers. This makes it harder to tailor provision for each child and harder to teach inclusively.

We would like to see greater emphasis placed on supporting teachers and learning support assistants with the necessary training, resources, and trust to implement adaptive teaching to meet the needs of all learners in their classroom. Teachers report that in both primary and secondary the current curriculum is overloaded and, therefore, new content cannot be added unless existing content is removed ([OECD, 2020](#)). The review is a chance to see how it can be made more manageable and, therefore, support the improvement of teaching and learning, as well as the enjoyment and engagement of pupils in their learning.

We are currently judging children and young people's skills, abilities and worth through an academic lens. When there is talk of catch up and gaps, this reflects the National Curriculum – rather than a broader idea of education, skill development and life-long learning. The outcomes we would like to see achieved are to widen the scope for education, for example reinstating vocational and creative pathways, and a commitment to developing learning environments that focus on relationships and emotional wellbeing.

The access arrangements for those needing oral language modification (OLM) need to be reviewed, as the current thresholds are too restrictive, meaning many children and young people who require that extra assistance are not receiving it. We believe that universal screening materials could help standardise support for these students, as demonstrated by the positive results so far from the Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) programme. We also believe there should be greater emphasis on the importance of embedding speech, language and communication skills within every subject area. This will support children's overall language development and improve their ability to access and engage with the curriculum.

SEC is calling for more flexibility in the curriculum. This might be achieved by:

- Giving an outline of what should be covered in each subject and removing the restrictions caused by having detailed programmes of study
- Ruling out the idea that all children should be expected to reach the same standards at the same age and instead allow teachers to use their professionalism to decide what should be taught at any given age
- Enabling and supporting teachers effectively to decide the extent to which a topic-based approach will help learners to understand the connections between subjects
- Accepting that pupils learn in varying ways, and some will need a different approach in order to make subjects meaningful
- Realising that a small minority will have such individual needs that a bespoke curriculum may be the only way to engage them in learning

Assessment

Reform of the statutory assessment system is urgently required, as it does not meet the needs of all pupils, families or schools. With a heavy reliance on individualised testing, both at the primary and secondary level, this has a detrimental impact on pupils who consistently do not meet ARE and ‘fail’ their assessments and exams. As one of the members of [FLARE](#), the DfE’s young people SEND advisory group told us, “GCSEs can be quite black and white as pass or fail if you don’t get the grades but this does not necessarily represent your capabilities and other strengths”. Another member of FLARE recommends that “there needs to be more practical assessments showcasing practical skills.”

There is a close correlation between the impact of excessive testing and the mental health crisis we are seeing amongst our children and young people. For example, a survey conducted by the Association of School and College Leaders found that eight in ten leaders said that reformed GCSEs have created greater levels of stress and anxiety among their students. One of the most cited reasons for this was students having to memorise more content (85%), followed by students having to sit more exams (83%) ([ASCL, 2018](#)). Furthermore, eight in ten young people surveyed by Young Minds say that academic pressure has significantly impacted on their mental health ([Young Minds, 2019](#)).

Moreover, the language used in assessments must be made more accessible, as confusing language can be a significant barrier to understanding. The Joint Council of Qualifications guidelines should be emphasised. These facilitate access to qualifications for Augmentative and Assistive Communication based on exams students have already taken, ensuring fair recognition of their achievements. We propose the creation of robust assessment methods for speech, language and communication skills. We must ensure these assessments are integrated into the broader evaluation system to help track students' progress and support their readiness for work and further education.

Qualifications

The review should aim to ensure that all students have the opportunity to access and achieve meaningful qualifications across a full range of academic and vocational subjects, using a variety of assessment methods.

The basic features of secondary education are designed to facilitate the successful progression of the majority from GCSEs to A levels and into Higher Education. For the significant minority of learners for whom this is not their experience, or for whom this would be inappropriate, the system is not working well. The failure of these learners to achieve expected levels, whether as a result of an inappropriate curriculum, learning

environment, socio-economic circumstances, or SEND is often interpreted by the young people as evidence that they themselves are failures. This self-perception becomes yet another barrier to their success.

If we want to see improvements in our standing in international comparisons, we need a significant focus on the lowest performing 20% of the school population. Most notably, these children and young people are often those who are not attaining basic qualifications when they leave school. The proportion of pupils leaving school without a GCSE grade in English has nearly doubled since before the pandemic, prompting concerns about the “new normal” of teenagers left behind ([Whieldon, 2023](#)).

The current curriculum in Key Stage 4 (KS4) has a narrow focus which is focused upon the acquisition of knowledge to pass GCSE examinations. This presents barriers for disabled pupils and those with SEN who may be suited to a more vocational pathway. Disabled learners and those with SEN may benefit from an alternative means to assessment which does not focus on knowledge retrieval and the completion of timed assessment. The limited availability or use by schools of suitable vocational qualifications at KS4, which leads to disengagement of those who struggle academically. These students may have had the potential to succeed if a different approach were to be adopted. Currently many of these learners must wait until they progress into FE before they are able to follow a different approach, by which time some have already begun to see themselves as failures.

In any system reform, disabled learners and those with SEN would benefit in particular from:

- more emphasis on holistic programmes, which include qualifications where appropriate but also personal development, citizenship, readiness for employment
- more accessible qualifications, especially in terms of assessment approaches; qualifications need to be accessible by design and not over-reliant on special arrangements/reasonable adjustments
- a re-thinking of what constitutes ‘rigour’ in vocational qualifications or other alternatives to academic qualifications. These ‘alternatives’, e.g. Functional Skills rather than GCSEs or T levels rather than A levels, have defaulted to a very similar approach to assessment as that used in academic qualifications so they no longer provide a highly differentiated alternative in terms of teaching and learning experience or assessment approach
- greater recognition of the value of non-accredited learning for all, e.g. through making DfE Study Programme guidance more explicit about its suitability for disabled learners and those with SEN

- better Careers, Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) – especially routes which are appropriate for disabled learners and those with SEN who may be headed for part-time, supported or voluntary work and not just full-time paid work
- careers guidance counsellors and advisors receive appropriate training in SEND-awareness and supporting disabled young people and those with SEN to understand the choices available to them
- a re-thinking of the existing GCSE re-sit policy, which sees some disabled learners and those with SEN forced into repeat experiences of failure when they would benefit from access to a slimmer, more focused, adult alternative qualification
- more appropriate outcomes measures which measure a wider and more meaningful range of destinations and achievements than qualification attainment

Reforms proposed by the previous government (but not yet enacted) have the potential to:

- reduce choice of qualifications and a narrower offer, leaving some disabled learners and those with SEN with no suitable accredited option
- dismantle established progression routes through the loss of some or all elements of current frameworks of qualifications, like BTECs, where interlocking qualifications of different sizes and levels allows for incremental progress.

Section summary:

SEC calls for:

- ***A shift away from measuring progress according to ARE so that disabled learners and those with SEN do not feel like they are constantly failing from an early age***
- ***Offering greater flexibility in the curriculum and equipping teachers with the skills, time, and confidence to adapt their lessons to meet the needs of all learners***
- ***More appropriate outcomes measures which measure a wider and more meaningful range of destinations and achievements than qualification attainment***
- ***Alternative post-16 qualifications in English and maths with content relevant to students' adult and working lives***

Section 3: Social Justice and Inclusion

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

We have highlighted in Question 11 which parts of the curriculum, assessment system, and qualification pathways need to be targeted to better support disabled children and young people with SEN. We wish to be clear that curriculum and assessment cannot be divorced from the wider education system and other key factors inhibiting disabled children and young people and those with SEN to learn.

1. Lack of investment in specialist services

Diminished funding in local authorities (LAs) and education institutions has led to an erosion of LA support, a loss of specialism in attendance, and a significant reduction in early preventative work. For example, 96% of local authorities report difficulties with recruiting and retaining educational psychologists ([British Psychological Society, 2024](#)). This is the input which should support teachers and support staff to implement targeted interventions and relevant strategies to help children access the curriculum and their assessments. Indeed, research proves that these targeted interventions for disabled pupils and those with SEN can improve educational outcomes ([Van Herwegen et al., 2023](#))

SEC calls for strong investment in the education and specialist workforce as an important enabler for disabled pupils and those with SEN to access the curriculum.

2. Inadequate training on SEND in Initial Teacher Training and Continuing Professional Development

Only 46% of Early Career Teachers feel well prepared to teach disabled pupils and those with SEN ([UCL & IFF Research, 2023](#)). Further to that, supporting disabled pupils and those with SEN was the third biggest challenge for teachers ([Pearson, 2024](#)). Teachers who do not feel equipped with effective training and support will struggle to support those children and young people who require a more specialised approach to the curriculum. For example, despite its prevalence in every classroom, many teachers lack appropriate knowledge of dyslexia, which impacts on their ability to support these learners to improve attainment, progress, access and participation in parts of the curriculum ([Knight, 2018](#)). Those children and young people who do not feel their teachers are able to meet their needs are likely to disengage from learning.

SEC advocates for improvement on both SEND-related knowledge and training to promote inclusive practice in general terms for all teachers. More information about our key asks around ITT you can find in our consultation response [here](#).

3. Lack of support and understanding of pupils with complex neurological needs and physical disability

The content, style, and support for the delivery of the curriculum does not take account of specific barriers to learning experienced by children and young people with complex neurological, motor and physical disability, e.g. cerebral palsy, epilepsy. This can lead to a lack of effective inclusive practice across all areas of school life, underachievement, and poor outcomes. Educational progress of children with complex neurological, motor and physical needs can be affected by an inappropriate and under-stimulating curriculum and environment for learning, and poor expectations of progress. Furthermore, the resources required to support curriculum access for children with complex neurological, motor, and physical needs such as cerebral palsy. including equipment, communication aids and environmental adaptations. are often lacking, untimely in their provision, or insufficient to meet needs.

SEC calls for better training on complex neurological, motor and physical disability needs for teachers and support staff, and that the curriculum is designed for flexibility to support these children and young people and their needs.

4. Pedagogy as an essential element of the curriculum

We would like to see robust, evidence-based pedagogy underpinning the curriculum. In particular, those approaches that have been proven to support disabled children and young people, and those with SEN. EEF have, for example, highlighted the use of metacognitive approaches as being high value for money and an example of pedagogy which supports knowledge and skills transfer from the classroom to the social world and the world of work. The use of such approaches has also been proven to be particularly valuable as a foundation for the work of support staff ([MITA, 2024](#)). Other approaches recognised as effective foundations of inclusive practice might be considered, such as Universal Design for Learning ([European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education](#)) and Cooperative Learning ([EEF](#)), where pupils benefit from increased participation and experience social learning, with some evidence of efficacy. While pedagogy might fall outside of the scope of this review, we argue one cannot extricate one from the other.

5. Lack of accountability for inclusive practice

We explore this in more detail in question 46 but it is worth mentioning that underpinning much of the approach to curriculum and assessment, and another major barrier, is the accountability framework. Measures such as Progress 8 mean that schools are, in effect, discouraged from taking a genuinely inclusive approach to curriculum. A small number of “low achievers” can impact the results of the whole school. This incentivises schools to look for ways to ensure that pupils with SEN do not negatively affect their results, which can have an impact on individual learners who may not have the opportunity to study the range of subjects they would choose simply because they are unlikely to achieve the top grades.

Performance measures used in schools do not take account of any context such as SEN needs or socio-economic background, which may be a limiting factor in a young person’s achievement. Due to the way in which progress and achievement is measured and reported within schools, the progress that learners with SEN make is not evident to the learners or their parents as they are consistently recorded as “working towards” the key stage standard.

Accountability measures dictate practice that happens in schools. We call for an accountability system that values inclusion, championed by national and local government, which holds schools accountable for their inclusive practice above all. This has recently been acknowledged by Ofsted, and we welcome the suggested move to include an inclusion criterion in the inspection framework; an inclusive National Curriculum will ensure such proposals are meaningful.

6. Inaccessible assessment methodologies

Pupils with SEN will be disadvantaged by assessments, exams, and tests which do not have suitable accessibility tools in place to support them. This is especially relevant for vocational/technical qualifications where there is an overreliance of written assessment and exam conditions, which act as barriers to achievement for those who need more processing time, struggle with concentration, or suffer from anxiety. There have been concerns about how consistently access arrangements are applied in the UK and how assessments can be exclusionary, especially for autistic pupils ([Wood & Happé, 2020](#)).

7. Reliance on support staff for teaching disabled learners and those with SEN

SEC is also concerned by some of the data demonstrating a very heavy reliance on teaching assistants (TAs) by mainstream schools as a way of coping with the inclusion of disabled pupils and those with SEN ([Webster, 2022; Nuffield, 2017](#)). These pupils’ experiences may be heavily mediated by TAs who manage their work and their interactions

both with teachers and peers. It is suggested that where SEND policy has concentrated on diagnoses and mechanisms of individual support rather than prioritising a whole school approach to inclusion, it has given teachers “permission to withdraw...while aides get on with the task of inclusion” ([Slee, 2012](#)). When deployed in such ways, those who need the most expert support, receive the least direct contact time with the qualified teacher in the classroom.

SEC has spoken to a group of TAs convened with the support of the union Unison. They shared examples where they have been tasked with differentiating the curriculum for disabled children and those with SEN, at times requiring sophisticated curricular knowledge and undertaking tasks requiring deep understanding of pedagogy. They were aided by the intimate familiarity with the children, but all agreed that as a rule, TAs are not trained to carry out such work, and it does not generally feature in their job descriptions. A [2023 survey](#) by NEU set out some of the system challenges faced by support staff, including being asked to carry out tasks outside of their training and contract. This is further demonstrated in reports showing the widespread use of support staff as cover for teachers and overwhelming increases in workload ([UNISON, 2023](#)).

SEC calls for:

- Ensuring all support staff are adequately trained and supported to deliver the curriculum and necessary interventions required of them.
- In all classrooms, the teacher has the overall responsibility for all pupils, and, in particular, for adapting materials in the curriculum.
- The voices of support staff are carefully listened to as part of this Curriculum and Assessment Review and recognises their expertise and unique position, often knowing the most vulnerable children and young people best in a school or college.

Section summary:

- ***The curriculum and assessment framework cannot be seen in isolation from the wider education system, particularly when considering support for disabled pupils and those with SEN***
- ***Greater investment in specialist services and training for teachers and support staff on SEND is essential to see better outcomes for disabled learners and those with SEN***
- ***Accountability structures must be put in place to incentivise inclusion and teachers should be responsible for learners with SEN, not the sole responsibility of TAs***

- ***Accessibility methods of testing, assessments and exams should be reviewed to ensure disabled learners and those with SEN are not disadvantaged.***

Question 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? (Questions 12-14)

These are enablers relating to the barriers outlined above and, although it would be possible to find examples of these in practice within the current system, we would suggest that they need to be explicit in the curriculum guidance in order for them to be seen consistently across schools:

1. *Clear statement of values around inclusion in school enforced by senior management*

Disabled pupils and those with SEN are more likely to have a positive experience of accessing the curriculum in schools that possess an inclusive ethos, enforced by senior management. Senior leaders who prioritise inclusion emphasise the importance of making school a safe place where pupils really want to be, with the right ethos, a curriculum worth studying, and lessons that are worth attending. Making sure that pupils feel that learning is worthwhile is key. Those leaders prioritising inclusion have also worked on behaviour in lessons, anti-bullying measures, and the wider school culture as part of this. ([Ofsted, 2022](#)). There is also literature emerging around how to improve a sense of belonging in schools among pupils who are likely to be bullied and excluded, and these approaches are also characterised by a clear strand focused on inclusion of equity and anti-bias practices in curriculum ([NEU, 2020](#)).

2. *Flexibility in the curriculum to employ adaptive teaching*

Schools that champion adaptive teaching with a wide range of learning materials that cater to the different needs of their learners are more likely to have better engagement from their pupils, especially disabled learners and those with SEN. SEC believes that learning materials can be effectively adapted to meet the needs of all disabled learners and those with SEN, as long as the teacher and support staff have a good understanding of the level of development of learners in the classroom and are supported to adapt materials as needed.

Examples of adaptive teaching techniques that enable personalised learning could be:

- Reducing the burden on learners working memory. This might include using one integrated source of information, collaboration, gesturing, using worked examples (for novice learners), providing motivational cues, reducing environmental stimuli and reducing stress
- Multi-sensory learning involving multiple sensory systems being engaged ([IMSE, 2024](#))
- Looking specifically at resources provided by disability charities such as the Down's Syndrome Association for ideas on adapting materials. <https://www.downs-syndrome.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Planning-an-inclusive-curriculum-DSi-guidelines-extract.pdf>

Crucially, “having greater flexibility within the curriculum to cater for different needs and preferences was seen as important, and some parents and carers felt this was better accommodated in special schools” ([ONS, 2022](#)). We would advocate for drawing on best practice examples from special schools and alternative provision (AP) where there is greater flexibility in the curriculum and assessment requirements.

For example, many SEND and AP settings consider practical food education an integral part of the educational offer that supports health and wellbeing, personal development and independence. There is also much that mainstream settings can learn from specialist education about the benefits of an enquiry-based approach to delivering food education ([Adapt-ed, 2024](#)). Adequate funding must therefore be allocated to enable SEND settings to tailor the mainstream approach. Considerations for this should be integrated into the development of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) or similar frameworks.

3. Greater flexibility in qualifications and the ways they are funded

The following features benefit disabled learners and those with SEN:

- availability of frameworks of interlocking qualifications (e.g. BTECs, Gateway Qualifications Entry level suite, bite-sized English and maths qualifications), which allow disabled learners and those with SEN to make lateral and vertical progress in small steps at a pace suited to the individual/small group
- flexibilities in 16-19 study programme requirements permitted for disabled learners and those with SEN which enable providers to design personalised programmes based on individual needs, interests, and aspirations

- funding being linked to whole programmes rather than delivery of qualifications (as it has been in the past) which supports development of more holistic learning experiences and avoids tokenistic use of qualifications
4. *Confident and knowledgeable teachers and support staff with understanding of SEN and Disabilities*

As explained in the above section, there remains a lack of confidence among many teachers and support staff, particularly those working in mainstream, to support disabled pupils and those with SEN. Whilst currently positioned as a barrier, SEC also believes that once confidence and knowledge of teaching and support staff is improved, this will create an enabling environment for pupils with diverse learning needs. Indeed, according to young people in the ONS 2022 study, “when they felt teachers or support staff listened and understood their strategies to cope or self-regulate, this was seen to make a positive difference to their learning and well-being” ([ONS, 2022](#)). This can begin with the curriculum review, ensuring SEND and inclusive practice is layered throughout both the content and delivery. It also requires a deep commitment from the government to fully embed SEND training in ITT frameworks and CPD to ensure that the training offer aligns with a more inclusive curriculum and reflects the diversity of needs in classrooms.

5. *Adherence to Legal Framework*

SEC believes that applying the SEND legal framework effectively will support better engagement and access to the curriculum and assessments for these pupils. We call for this review to ensure that the legal requirements as set out in the Education Act 2002 (and the Academies Act, 2010) are upheld for *all* pupils to benefit from a curriculum that “(a)promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and (b)prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.”

This is also reflected in the [SEN and Disability Code of Practice](#) which states at paragraph 9.69 (*page 166*) that the plan “should specify any appropriate modifications to the application of the National Curriculum, where relevant..... any appropriate exclusions from the application of the National Curriculum or the course being studied in a post-16 setting, in detail, and the provision which it is proposed to substitute for any such exclusions in order to maintain a balanced and broadly based curriculum.”

In terms of those pupils who have an Education, Health and Care Plan,

"The special educational provision for any pupil specified in [an EHC plan maintained for the pupil] may include provision—

(a) excluding the application of the National Curriculum for England, or

(b) applying the National Curriculum for England with such modifications as may be specified in [the plan]."

The legislation under the Equality Act 2010 that requires schools to make reasonable adjustments for disabled children and young people is critical to ensuring that they can access the curriculum. The curriculum and assessments must not be seen in isolation from the requirement to make reasonable adjustments and put in place anticipatory duties.

6. Flexibility to access, and recognition of, the specialist curriculum for children and young people with vision impairment

It is vital that blind and partially sighted children and young people have access to the specialist vision impairment curriculum alongside, and integrated within, the National Curriculum. The [Curriculum Framework for Children and Young People with Vision Impairment](#) (CFVI) outlines best practice to support attainment, progress, access and participation, through the identification of specialist areas of learning. Every child or young person with vision impairment requires access to teaching on these specific skills by a qualified specialist in order for them to access the wider curriculum and world around them. The CFVI and the skills developed need to be reinforced and supported by all staff, including non-specialists.

It is essential that the review seeks to create a more inclusive environment in all settings. This must include recognition that this specialist vision impairment learning is as important as the wider curriculum. The National Curriculum needs to have better flexibility for this specialist curriculum to be accessed, and there must be better recognition of this skills development for young people.

This is why SEC is calling for the CFVI to be embedded in statutory policy ([Vision for VI Education: Building Blocks for Change - Thomas Pocklington Trust](#)).

7. Other national curricula

SEC suggests the government review other national curricula e.g. the Welsh curriculum, in an effort to move towards a more inclusive approach. This should include paying particular attention to the aims and purposes of the curriculum. For example, the Wales Curriculum

sets out four purposes that it says, “are the shared vision and aspiration for every child and young person”. These are articulated as:

- ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society

While we have concerns that these purposes are not framed in a way that includes all learners, we think that the approach is helpful in providing the rationale for the experiences, knowledge and skills that schools focus on when designing their curricula.

It should also be noted that there are significant concerns about the way in which the Wales curriculum has been introduced which has resulted in poorly planned reorganisation of school staffing structures, created huge workload burdens for teachers and leaders, and distracted them from focusing on meeting the needs of pupils. Further, the reforms have failed to recognise the need for coherence between reforms to the curriculum and reforms to qualifications frameworks. This highlights the importance of paying careful attention to implementation and to the relationship between curriculum reforms and the wider education system.

The approach of establishing aims and purposes that are inclusive to guide design of the curriculum is also extremely important because it will support longer term reform of the National Curriculum towards a curriculum that is more flexible and inclusive. This is particularly important given the National Curriculum’s current emphasis on knowledge and subjects, and the intention of the review that curriculum reform should be one of evolution rather than revolution. Further, establishing aims and purposes that are holistic and inclusive would provide recognition of the work being done in special schools and settings where it would not be appropriate for learners to follow subject-related aspects of the National Curriculum. The approach of using aims and purposes as a framework for inclusion would further recognise the contribution that special schools and settings could make to the curriculum in mainstream schools.

Section summary:

Enablers to a more inclusive curriculum include:

- ***Looking to other examples of curricula both in special schools, AP and in other jurisdictions e.g. Wales curriculum, curriculum framework for children and young people with vision impairments (CFVI)***

- ***Establishing a clear statement of inclusion that is enforced by senior leadership***
- ***Flexibility in the curriculum and assessment structure to adapt materials and personalise learning***
- ***Confident and knowledgeable teachers and support staff who understand SEND and are able to carry out the necessary adaptations***
- ***Strong understanding among senior leadership and teachers of the disability legal framework and consistent application of the law across all schools***

Section 4: Ensuring an excellent foundation in Maths and English

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

When answering this question, SEC is addressing the support put in place for disabled learners and those with SEN. SEC recognises the value of English and maths as the building blocks for learning and development. We would also like to see greater value being placed on other subjects e.g. vocational subjects and the arts to ensure the curriculum is truly a ‘broad’ one. We would also advocate for a system which allows for children and young people to pursue their career and further education interests and not be held back by challenges in accessing the English and Maths curriculum.

The breadth of content in the English and Maths GCSE is greater than is needed to function competently in life and work. A narrower, more focused adult alternative of essential literacy and numeracy would be more appropriate so that it can be more easily integrated into vocational and life skills learning.

English

1. Sole use of SSP for teaching early reading and spelling

A singular focus on teaching reading and spelling by decoding via systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) is not supported by research evidence. The SSP approach does not provide the right foundation for children with literacy difficulties or those with Speech and Language Difficulties, such as dyslexia, who fail to learn to read and spell when SSP is used as the sole method of teaching. Since teaching methods in the UK have followed a SSP first and only approach, improvements in reading by the end of KS1 have not been seen.

- Learning to read requires the contextualised teaching of reading, or balanced instruction.
- Learners with dyslexia have a specific difficulty learning to decode and to spell.
- Learning to spell requires orthographic and morphemic knowledge which children with dyslexia and other learning difficulties cannot acquire implicitly. Dyslexic children need to be explicitly taught spelling rules.
- Learners with dyslexia experience deficits in orthographic knowledge, phonological awareness and rapid automatized naming.

Children with literacy difficulties including dyslexia would benefit from the following changes:

- Explicit teaching of spelling rules to help develop their orthographic and morphemic knowledge
- Schools being given the flexibility to use other methods alongside SSP to teach reading and spelling, these would include, for example, syllabification and onset & rhyme.
- Opportunities for pre-teaching, overlearning, and repetition of reading and spelling including phonics and high frequency words to help overcome challenges they have in acquiring phoneme-grapheme correspondence which impacts their reading and spelling.

2. *Access to appropriate assistive technology improves educational outcomes*

Assistive technology such as screen readers and dictation software is integrated as a standard feature in most software applications and widely used in daily life and the workplace to improve spelling, punctuation and grammar and save time.

Learners with literacy difficulties including dyslexia would benefit from:

- The introduction of explicit teaching on how to use screen reading technology from KS2 to enable learners to read age-appropriate texts rather than being restricted to only those texts which they are able to decode, which may be far below their chronological age and intellectual ability and interest.
- Explicit teaching of dictation technology from KS2 as an alternative means of recording answers to remove a barrier for learners who struggle to get their ideas

down on paper, and those who also have difficulties with handwriting as a result of SEN or disability.

- Ability to use assistive technology in examinations to achieve Spelling and Grammar marks.

Maths

The current maths curriculum can be inaccessible for many learners, particularly those with dyscalculia. There is a tendency for maths to focus on rote learning so if a student struggles with working memory, they will have difficulties grasping the core principles. The maths curriculum often requires students to work at pace e.g. reciting times tables at speed, which can put many learners who require longer processing time at a disadvantage. The reading demands of the maths Functional Skills assessment papers make them inaccessible for some learners. There are also many barriers to young people pursuing their further education interests because they have not achieved a certain level of maths in exams.

Revision is needed to the post-16 condition of funding for English and maths. These vital skills are too important to students' future lives to be delivered only by re-sitting qualifications that have already failed to equip students with the skills and accreditation they need. Disabled students and those with SEN are disproportionately present in the resit cohort because of the low rate of achievement at grade 4 in year 11.

SEC asks for:

- The year 4 times tables test that is focused on speed and not understanding is removed for learners with maths difficulties/dyscalculia
- A removal of need for children with dyscalculia/maths difficulties to sit SATs
- Shifting the maths curriculum to more of a focus on useful skills in life and not just passing a test at speed e.g. budgeting, time management
- Reviewing policy that prevents young people accessing further education courses when they have not passed GCSE Maths
- Better support for post-16 maths support – currently the retake pass rate is only 21.2% ([FE Week, 2024](#))
- Robust training on dyscalculia for educators

Section summary:

- ***SEC asks that this review takes into account dyslexic learners, those with dyscalculia, and other types of SEN when setting out the maths and English requirements in the curriculum.***
- ***There should be a greater emphasis on preparing children and young people with the necessary literacy and numeracy skills needed for functional life skills and a move away from rote learning.***
- ***Young people should not be disadvantaged pursuing their career and FE interests in subjects such as the arts due to lower grades in English and maths.***

Section 5: Curriculum and qualification content

Question 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.

A) Too much content and content missing

SEC would agree with the recent [OCR 2024 report](#) that the overreliance on exams is exacerbated by a curriculum that is overloaded with content. This is both applicable at primary and secondary level, although arguably worse at secondary. The content of subject matter and examinations can and should be reduced, for the benefit of all pupils, but particularly disabled learners and those with SEN. The sheer volume that teachers must get through in terms of curriculum content means they do not have the space and time in the lessons to adapt materials and teaching approaches to the individual needs of their learners. With such a strong focus on exams, particularly towards KS4, disabled learners and those with SEN are often in an insurmountable position where they cannot keep up with the level of testing and exam preparation required.

At the same time, we would also argue that there is particular content missing that would better reflect the lives of children and young people. For example, 7 in 10 of all teachers would add mental health/wellbeing into a new, future-focused curriculum ([Pearson, 2024](#)). With a significant mental health crisis happening amongst our children and young people, we would agree that mental health should be a priority and weaved throughout all subjects

to reduce stigma around the topic and promote healthy strategies to support young people.

A reduction in curriculum content to allow more space for the development of speech, language and communication skills can help students acquire essential communication skills that underpin knowledge acquisition. We also recommend that there should be a greater focus on oracy with almost 370,000 children with a primary need of SLCN ([Oracy Education Committee, 2024](#)). Approaches to oracy education in a new curriculum should take into account children and young people with many other categories of SEN who communicate differently or require some additional support, such as autistic children, deaf children, and those with learning disabilities. There needs to be recognition of the diverse communication needs of all students, including those who use visual aids or technology as their main form of communication. As our FLARE members told us, “Every child should be required to engage in a literacy curriculum (not just a sensory one). Every child should be given the means to facilitate their choices. For example, schools could provide communication aids or altered ways of learning such as different coloured paper, or bigger text.” The curriculum must be as inclusive as possible to allow these students to access it.

Only one in 20 teachers say that education in schools reflects the diversity of pupils’ lives and pupils agree that more could be done to make it more relevant to their lives ([Pearson, 2022](#)). Any addition of content to the curriculum should be developed in close collaboration with children and young people, particularly those who in the past have found the curriculum exclusionary. This should include children and young people who are persistently absent from school, attending PRUs and APs, and accessing Education Other Than at School (EOTAS).

C) Unhelpful sequencing

Due to the linear nature of the National Curriculum, many learners are likely to fall behind and never be able to ‘catch up’ with their peers who are performing at the expected level. With specific content for each year cohort, children and young people who have not met expected levels at the end of the previous key stage have no obvious curriculum entitlement as they move into the next key stage. Without proper links or clearly articulated pathways, these need to be constructed by schools and teachers. As we have mentioned, due to excessive workload on teachers caused, in part, by cuts to support staff, rigidity of the curriculum, and lack of understanding around SEND, this is increasingly difficult for them to do. This unhelpfully sequenced approach means that many children and young people, particularly those with SEN, are not making the expected learning gains and this

negates any progress they do make with their learning that may not be reflected by the curriculum standards.

D) Need for greater flexibility

This question has been responded to in depth in question 15 on enablers. SEC recommends developing a flexible curriculum that enables teachers to measure progress of learning, so all children and young people have the opportunity to achieve. We also recommend that the curriculum equally values progress made by learners in key developmental, social and personal skills.

Section summary:

- ***SEC believes that the curriculum is overloaded with too heavy a focus on exams and assessment.***
- ***Missing from the curriculum is a greater focus on mental health and oracy.***
- ***We recommend that the curriculum is organised and sequenced in a flexible way that allows for all learners' progress to be recognised and championed.***

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

This Review is an opportunity to begin materialising the ambition set out in the 2023 SEND and AP Improvement Plan: *Creating a more inclusive society*. We must ask if, and in what ways, the curriculum and assessment framework supports this ambition. The first step must be to ensure that the voices of disabled children and young people, and those with SEN play a meaningful role in reviewing and changing the system. To that we would add that it is crucial to seek the voices of disabled teachers and support staff as well, who might offer invaluable insights into the experiences of disability both during their educational journey, and through transitions into the world of work and adulthood.

SEC calls for the incorporation of content throughout subject areas which increases the understanding of disability, as well as supporting children and young people to understand and locate disability rights in a historically contextualized way.

We have heard from young disabled people, that they wish to see positive representations of disability in the curriculum. This might be through a process (co-produced) where texts, resources and activities in the curriculum are revisited, and a conscious effort made to ensure visibility, and that this visibility is not tarnished by stereotypes and low expectations. In short, much in the way that similar curricular moves in respect of other

disadvantaged groups have been accepted as a step towards equity, we call for a process of recognising and challenging any ableist aspects of the National Curriculum, in a process led by disabled children, young people and professionals.

We would finally urge that in this process, due attention is given to intersecting aspects of disadvantage, recognising that disabled peoples' experiences are often shaped by different forms of disadvantage, and that identity is multi-faceted.

Section summary:

SEC calls for:

- ***Meaningful coproduction with disabled children, young people, and professionals and those with SEN to include positive representations of SEND in the curriculum***
- ***A recognition of intersecting aspects of disadvantage also represented in the curriculum.***

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

All 16-19 provision is based on a study programme model which allows for the incorporation of a broader set of skills than those covered by qualifications. However, there is not always space in the curriculum to incorporate these skills and they tend only to play a significant part in a learner's programme at lower levels where learners, many of whom are disabled or have SEN, are taking qualifications in personal, social and/or employability skills. The availability of an advisory curriculum covering these areas would increase the quality of provision. Earlier access to vocational pathways while at school would ensure a more positive KS4 experience for some learners and enable them to make more informed decisions about their post-16 options and future careers.

Disabled pupils and those with SEN currently benefit from:

- flexibility in study programme guidance for disabled learners and those with SEN which allows specialist colleges to design courses rich in content relating to skills for learning, life and work, including work placements
- availability of a wide range of qualifications covering skills for learning, life and work to recognise their achievements in these areas

Improvements to curriculum content and qualification pathways could be achieved through:

- An advisory personal, social, citizenship and employability skills curriculum setting out content in a broad range of areas across Entry 1 to level 3 developed in collaboration with the sector (with freedom for providers to develop their own programmes based on learner need/local priorities and for awarding organisations to develop qualifications in response to demand). This would strengthen the quality of provision and extend it beyond the lower levels to which explicit teaching of these skills is currently limited.
- DfE expectations that coverage of these skills should be part of a holistic programme, with funding at a level that permits taught sessions and extra-curricular/enrichment opportunities for developing and practising these skills to be built into learners' programmes.
- Better and earlier access to vocational pathways and functional skills qualifications as well as academic and technical subjects.
- Alternative vocational or functional skills pathways alongside, or in place of GCSE studies in KS4.
- Concluding the current reforms to vocational/technical pathways for 16 to 18-year-in a way that addresses sector by sector or subject by subject pathways, to provide clarity for students and other key stakeholders such as parents/carers, employers and schools.
- Alternative assessment options for those unable to access formal timed assessments.

Section summary:

SEC calls for an advisory personal, social, citizenship and employability skills curriculum setting out content in a broad range of areas across Entry 1 to level 3 developed in collaboration with the sector.

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

Question 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?

When considering how pupils may access a broad and balanced curriculum, it is necessary to define 'broad' and 'balanced'. SEC asked members of the FLARE group, the DfE's official young people SEND advisory board, to contribute their thoughts on these definitions. For 'broad', they fed back that this means to them covering a wide range of

subjects and options, with plenty to offer young people to enable them to pick subjects that they are committed to. It should offer varied academic experiences and a wider range of assessment methods. There should also be consideration of the ways subject relate to one another, for example, considering how art may be incorporated into maths lessons. The young people did not define ‘balanced’ explicitly, but for them, the curriculum should be fair for everyone, working toward everyone’s needs, and contain learning about varied life experiences.

Much like the young people in the FLARE group, we as SEC would define ‘broad’ and ‘balanced’ as a curriculum that caters to all learners, regardless of need, to enable them to achieve and make progress and find passion for learning. All children deserve a curriculum that ignites their curiosity and engages their interests. Offering opportunities to study a broad range of different subjects and pursue varied interests is essential. At the same time as not limiting pupils’ chances to succeed if they choose to focus on a smaller selection of subjects that they enjoy and will enable them to reach their educational and future development goals. There is wide recognition in the literature of curriculum overload (see above question) and this has resulted in a heavy emphasis on banking knowledge in what is seen as the ‘core’ subjects i.e. English, maths and science. Developing literacy and numeracy skills is vital for all learners, but the way that these subjects are taught in the curriculum means that the learning of these vital skills is currently not accessible to many children and young people who have learning disabilities.

Primary curriculum

The primary curriculum is overloaded and involves an unnecessary treadmill of testing, which is both stressful and not inclusive for many pupils, but particularly disabled learners and those with SEN. Research shows that excessive testing and monitoring of progress at primary level results in heavy workloads without useful information ([Sims, 2024](#)). Examples of primary-level assessments include:

- The Reception Baseline Assessment is carried out as soon as young pupils enter reception class to begin formal schooling. It was not brought in to benefit children, but to hold schools to account for the progress made by pupils at the end of their primary career.
- The Phonics Screening Check (PSC), which is based on the use of SSP, in particular, is not proven to be an effective reading assessment tool. Indeed, neither national data from the PIRLS study, previous research using the National Pupil Database,

nor a [2024 EPI report into the PSC](#), find a discernible positive impact of the PSC on the reading levels of primary aged children in England. It does not provide the right foundation for children with literacy difficulties or those with Speech and Language Difficulties such as dyslexia, who fail to learn to read and spell when phonics is used as the sole method.

- The Year 4 Multiplication Tables Check penalises those who need more than six seconds to process information and produce an answer. This is not helpful for those who need more time to process information or who may have maths-related difficulties.
- The Key Stage 2 SATs tests have, at best, a mixed reputation in measuring the performance of young people, as this [Civitas survey](#) suggests:
 - 90% of secondary school teachers surveyed have found the Key Stage 2 SATs results to be inconsistent with pupils' true abilities
 - 79% of secondary school teachers have found that up to a third of their Year 7-year group's abilities have been lower than their Key Stage 2 SATs results

Section summary:

SEC advocates for a shift away from a knowledge-heavy, assessment-based curriculum at primary level to one that inspires a passion for learning, and offers a broad range of subjects and experiential learning opportunities that are equally valued alongside core subjects.

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

At secondary level, the move – at last – to realising that academic and vocational courses are of equal value should continue, so that neither schools nor students feel they can only be successful if university is the aim.

Data on exclusion, attendance, and children missing education in their secondary phase of school all suggest there is a lack of engagement with the curriculum. There needs to be a re-think about the relevance the curriculum has to meaningful progression routes into the adult world and the world of employment. Once again, it is vital that this rethink involves the voices of young people, including disabled young people and those with SEN. For this purpose, a 'bottom-up' approach should be adopted, drawing on successful examples of practice locally.

The review is also an opportunity to align and ensure equal value between academic and vocational qualifications; it should be clear that attending university is not the only measure of ‘success’. It is equally important, of course, not to assume that disabled young people and those with SEN cannot succeed at university.

Section summary:

SEC calls for a ‘bottom-up’ approach, that is engaging directly with young people, on how the secondary curriculum may produce meaningful progression routes into the adult world and employment.

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

It is not helpful to think of the 16-19 curriculum solely as a series of qualification pathways. Instead, the focus should be on programmes of learning. In theory, study programmes should give all learners access to a broad curriculum regardless of the qualifications being pursued but the low number of funded hours, the requirement to deliver English and maths for many learners, and size and demand of some qualifications means that this is currently not the case for many young people.

Current vocational qualification pathways, in comparison to A levels, are predicated on learners having a clear idea at 16 of the career routes they want to pursue. This is an unrealistic expectation, particularly for more disadvantaged young people, including disabled pupils and those with SEN, who may have a very limited understanding of the full range of options open to them. More scope must be given for the ‘vocationally undecided’, including access to vocational taster qualifications at levels 2 and below.

Section summary:

SEC suggests providing a broader range of options, both in terms of subjects available to disabled learners and those with SEN at post-16, and opportunities to try vocational taster qualifications.

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

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

How GCSEs are structured and formatted can often disadvantage disabled learners in a range of ways:

- Current GCSE assessment focuses on information retrieval, requiring candidates to put their ideas onto paper in a concise manner to enable them to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.
- Difficulties with working memory and slower speed of processing may prevent young people with dyslexia and other Speech and Language Difficulties from being able to recall and articulate their knowledge within the timed exam.
- Stress and anxiety may exacerbate literacy difficulties and working memory required to answer exam questions under time pressure.
- Reading challenges may impact access to exam questions. Unknown words may present a barrier to understanding the full question or text. Poor comprehension may necessitate the need to read and re-read information, affecting timing; or may cause misinterpretation of a question or result in missing a vital requirement to gain full marks. These difficulties are not always fully mitigated by use of a human reader or screen reader.
- Spelling challenges experienced by dyslexic learners may hinder creativity, causing individuals to lose their train of thought, or lead to the use of “safe” spellable words. This can impact on expressive use of language, the inability to concisely describe things, or failure to use the correct terminology needed for the award of marks.
- The strong focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar and the specific marks awarded for these in many of the essay-based subjects prevent many students with SEN such as dyslexia from achieving the top grades, irrespective of how well they can demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the subject.

- While access arrangements may provide some mitigation, summative assessment disadvantages many learners who have a comparative weakness in written ability compared to their overall ability.

SEC recommends that disabled learners and those with SEN would benefit from:

- Alternative forms of assessment including, for example, open book exams which do not require ability to memorise and recall facts.
- Continuous assessment and untimed assessment.
- Removal of Spelling and Grammar marks – or ability to use assistive technology to gain these marks.
- Removal of the non-calculator paper in maths exams and provision of formula sheets.

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

SEC believes that the education system is failing disabled children and young people and those with SEN by not consistently providing them with the necessary support. We further call for a cultural shift towards an inclusive education system that prioritises the wellbeing and needs of children and young people. Underpinning this, is an accountability system which currently, we believe, does not support inclusive practice, and in practice, disincentivises inclusion, particularly in mainstream schools. In terms of the curriculum and assessment framework, this is driven by the following factors:

- A culture of accountability driven by ideas such as ‘performance’ and ‘raising standards’ which are conceptualised in a rigid, narrow way, adopting a competitive, relative and academic version of ‘success’. Accountability measures such as Progress 8, in practice act as a disincentive both for admission of disabled learners and those with SEN, and for offering them a broad curriculum. Post-16 outcome measures are similarly narrow and fail to recognise achievements across the four preparing for adulthood areas. In general terms, SEC calls for a significant reduction in assessment, particularly in the primary phase, in favour of teacher-led, formative assessment. The system should be designed so that schools are accountable for their inclusive practice; we are encouraged by indications that Ofsted are likely to

add an inclusion criterion to their inspection framework. We ask that both of the analyses of both of these consultations are not seen in isolation of one another.

- The current assessment framework relies heavily on one-off, high-stakes examinations. While many disabled children and young people and those with SEN will flourish within this system, for others this places a significant strain on them, feeding the mental health challenges evident in our schools. A one-dimensional approach and methodology of assessment also disadvantages, amongst others, those who have different learning styles, those who struggle under pressurised conditions, and those who take longer to process information. We believe that an inclusive assessment framework should combine quantitative and qualitative assessment methods. There is further evidence that the current conventions around assessment are not providing the information about our graduates, nor equipping them with the skills the workplace requires ([Rethinking Assessment, 2023](#)). There is, therefore, a convergence of the needs of some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people in the school system, and the utilitarian argument of what the future workplace, and employers need from an assessment framework.

The current accountability system works better for disabled learners and those with SEN in FE than in schools but there is still room for improvement:

- There is currently a separate judgement in Ofsted reports for high needs provision, but this is only a small part of general FE provision for disabled learners and those with SEN. An explicit reference in the new Ofsted report card to how well disabled learners and those with SEN are included across the college's provision would further incentivise inclusion, and recognise and celebrate where this is already happening. This should take into account learners' experience of feeling included and not just record the presence of disabled learners and those with SEN.
- 16-19 outcome measures are too limited to recognise the full range of positive outcomes that are meaningful for disabled learners and those with SEN. They need expanding beyond qualification attainment and achievement of paid employment. They should recognise the work done by colleges in helping learners increase autonomy, develop communication skills, make and sustain friendships and social connections, lead healthy lives, and become active citizens in their own communities.

Section summary:

SEC is encouraged by the indications that Ofsted are likely to include an inclusion criterion in their inspection framework and we ask that the curriculum review analysis feeds into the development of this new criteria. SEC calls for assessment structures to move away from one-dimensional approach that focuses solely on the needs of employers and the workplace, and instead an aspiration-led approach for our most vulnerable learners.

Section 8: Qualification pathways 16-19

Question 47 - To what extent does the range of programmes and qualifications on offer at each level meet the needs and aspirations of learners?

The current range of post-16 programmes and qualifications broadly speaking meets the needs and aspirations of most disabled learners and those with SEN. However, there is a significant risk that, if the previous government's level 3 and below reforms are taken forward, there will be a narrowing of options and reduced flexibility that will make it more difficult for some disabled learners and those with SEN to find a suitably accessible, relevant and enabling post-16 qualification.

a) Level 3

- Broadly speaking, the current range of level 3 vocational qualifications is sufficient to meet the needs of most disabled learners and those with SEN but the proposed de-funding of some of these would leave some without a suitable, accessible level 3 qualification.
- While the T level is a helpful offer for some learners, for disabled learners and those with SEN it is too large, too inflexible and too high stakes, with its all or nothing outcome. Alternatives must be available which offer different approaches in terms of size, flexibility and assessment methodology - and not just in subject areas where there is no T level.
- Many disabled learners and those with SEN who are capable of level 3 achievement need a stepped approach (currently offered by the award/certificate/diploma model used in qualification frameworks such as BTECs), which allows them to make incremental progress within and then through levels. This is particularly helpful for disabled learners and those with SEN as their potential is not always clear when they enter FE.
- Some disabled learners and those with SEN benefit, especially in their first year in FE, from a considerable proportion of their programme being spent on building confidence, addressing barriers to learning, developing independent living and study skills and, in the case of students with a visual impairment, establishing a

working medium. This means they need a smaller level 3 qualification that can be fitted into a wider curriculum.

- Government should not set any rules for combining level 3 qualifications of different types; particularly it should not be the case that applied general qualifications (or academic alternative qualifications) can only be taken in combination with A levels.

b) Level 2

- Learners benefit from level 2 (and level 1) qualifications that provide clear stepping stones to level 3. Many learners who achieve level 3 in FE settings do so having studied first at level 2 - and in some cases at level 1, too. Qualification frameworks, like the BTEC, provide this structure.
- Current proposals for personal, social and employability (PSE) skills qualifications exclude level 2, but there are learners, particularly those who have had a disrupted experience of key stage 4 including disabled learners and those with SEN, who would benefit from level 2 PSE qualifications as part of a re-engagement / motivational programme.
- Some learners enter FE with very little idea of their vocational options or where their strengths lie in relation to technical subjects. These learners would benefit from access to vocational taster qualifications that allow them to explore potential progression routes, wherever possible banking credits gained during this process and carrying them forward into a specific vocational qualification once they have made an informed choice of sector.

c) Level 1 and Entry level

- There is currently a reasonable mix and balance of qualifications at level 1 and Entry level. However, the proposals for personal, social development, and employability (PSE) skills qualifications from the last government would result in a more restrictive offer that would reduce options for many disabled learners and those with SEN.
- The proposed removal of Entry level employability skills qualifications would be particularly unhelpful in encouraging disabled young people and those with SEN, including those on supported internships, to aspire and progress to employment. Government must not lose sight of the fact that there are disabled learners and those with SEN successfully progressing into work having achieved at Entry and level 1 and that level 2 is not a baseline for work-readiness for all. There must be a qualification offer that supports these learners.
- Learners are currently well-served by frameworks of PSE qualifications with multiple sizes and levels across Entry 1 – level 1, and highly flexible rules of

combination. Despite the large number of qualifications, they are well understood by providers and do not appear to be confusing employers, who typically recruit for skills, attitudes and experiences at this level and do not set Entry or level 1 qualification requirements. No radical reform is required.

- Qualifications at Entry and level 1 typically have more meaning for the individual than for employers. They play a motivational role in recognising personal progress and achievement. Content and design, therefore, must be flexible enough to match this purpose, and should not be overly prescribed by employers or government.
- Qualifications are not an essential part of the curriculum for all learners working at Entry and level 1 where the acquisition of the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed to meet personal goals is paramount. Study programmes based on quality assured, unaccredited learning must remain available, particularly for disabled learners and those with SEN.

Section summary

SEC believes that, broadly speaking, the current range of post-16 qualifications meet the needs and aspirations of most disabled learners and those with SEN. We urge caution around implementing the previous government's level 3 and below reforms as this will result in reduced flexibility and reduce opportunities for disabled learners and those with SEN to access relevant post-16 qualifications.

Question 48 - Are there particular changes that could be made to the following programmes and qualifications and/or their assessment that would be beneficial to learners:

SEC recommends that in any reform of post-16 qualifications, government seeks to improve their accessibility for disabled learners and those with SEN. These improvements are likely to lead to a better learning experience for a wide range of learners for whom academic qualifications are not suitable.

- **a. AS/A level qualifications**
- **b. T Level and T Level Foundation Year programmes**
- **c. Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 3**
- **d. Other applied or vocational qualifications at level 2 and below**

b) The strict delineation of pathways within T levels with no option for mixing and matching units across pathways means some whole pathways are closed to learners with certain needs, despite their suitability for particular job roles in the future. This does not reflect the willingness of employers to adjust job roles - to accommodate a visual

impairment, for example. Pathways to careers for which they would be well suited should not be blocked for disabled learners and those with SEN in this way.

The DfE has already started a review of T Level content and assessment and this needs to continue as a priority. Even when they are reviewed, T Levels still won't meet the needs of many current Level 3 students. Lower levels of English and maths are barriers to progression to T Levels for students who transfer to college at 16 but have not achieved five GCSEs including English and maths at grade 4 and above. Disabled students and those with SEN are disproportionately represented in the cohort of students without grade 4s in these subjects, and therefore disproportionately likely to be affected by barriers to progression.

c) Greater differentiation in assessment methodology is needed between vocational qualifications and A levels, with less use for the former of written assessments and exam conditions and more practical assessment, external verification and opportunities for teamwork. The assessment load on T level courses is a concern – the volume reduces teaching time, and the mode of assessment is sometimes unsuitable for practical subjects, again disadvantaging many learners, including disabled students and those with SEN.

d) Some BTECs/other applied general qualifications would benefit from an updating of content (rather than de-funding).

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

SEC recommends that children are supported to find out about post-16 provision from a range of sources from Year 9 onwards and that provision within and beyond school sixth forms and academic options are equally covered and valued. They would benefit from a combination of comprehensive online information and face-to-face support.

Improved CEIAG for learners could include:

- a one-stop online portal on post-16 qualifications and programmes co-designed with young people (to include supported internships and study programmes for disabled learners and those with SEN, rather than expecting them to look elsewhere for provision suitable for them)
- more access to face-to-face advice and support

- greater clarity in the naming of qualification types (e.g. ‘alternative academic qualifications’ does not immediately convey that these are vocational qualifications)
- enforcement of the Provider Access Legislation legally requiring schools, including special schools, to allow colleges and training providers access to pupils in Years 8 to 13 to inform them about post-16 options other than school.
- Greater efforts to encourage compliance with the Gatsby Framework of benchmarks for CEIAG, including the Gatsby Foundation’s guidance on working with disabled learners and those with SEN.

The team at the National Development Team for Inclusion run the Preparing for Adulthood programme, which focuses on four key pathways to ensure disabled young people and those with SEN have improved life chances. The curriculum must be developed with the intention of supporting these pathways. As one of the pathways is health, the curriculum needs to facilitate the embedding of “what works” in terms of health and that young people need to be supported to eat healthily, understand (as far as they can) about healthy eating, support for their own mental health and exercise. Specific provision outlined in a young person’s health outcomes in their Education Health and Care plan (or SEN support plan) must be embedded in the curriculum as far as possible.

Section summary:

SEC recommends that CEIAG for disabled learners and those with SEN is reviewed to ensure we maintain high aspirations for these learners, and barriers are removed for them to pursue further interests.

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

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

Significant life changes, such as transitioning to a new school or setting, and changes to daily routines which are considered to be milder or temporary, such as unexpectedly having a supply teacher, may cause disabled learners and those with SEN to experience anxiety or distress ([Ledgerton, 2013](#); [Richler et al., 2010](#); [Wythe, 2022](#)). It is vital that education professionals support the children and young people in their care through transitions and prepare them for changes and unfamiliar experiences, to reduce anxiety in response to changes to routine.

For the education system to be truly inclusive it needs to be ‘child ready’; schools and settings need to adopt a celebratory approach to learning, development, and transitions,

with the flexibility to help every child to thrive. Disabled children and those with SEN, when supported with an inclusive curriculum and effective transitions, can thrive within mainstream schools.

At primary level, there needs to be less of a jump from the Early Years Foundation Framework (EYFS) to formal teaching, particularly as children in the UK start school at a younger age than is typical elsewhere. The social, behavioural and learning expectations of KS1 differ from the rules of the EYFS classroom, and there is quite a significant shift in expectations as children transition from learning through play to following a more formalised curriculum ([Fisher, 2010](#); [Sharp et al., 2006](#); [Whitebread & Bingham, 2014](#)). To ensure effective transitions from the early years, the curriculum should be one based on high quality early years education which recognises the unique pedagogies and values of early education. This should be the building blocks for curriculum across all stages of education, however, in our experience, the inconsistencies between the foundations of early years and those of the National Curriculum at KS1 cause barriers to the effectiveness and consistency of transition at this stage. SEC calls for the review to carefully consider the transition between the EYFS and the KS1 curriculum with disabled children and those with SEN in mind.

Another point of transition which can be challenging for disabled learners and those with SEN is from primary to secondary education. Characteristics including SEN, challenges with emotional regulation, low self-esteem, disengagement, and victimisation, all predict poorer transition experiences and difficulties with school adjustment ([Thackeray, 2014](#)). This is also applicable to the assessment structure between primary and secondary (KS2 and KS3), when schools see attainment drop ([OCR, 2024](#)). “Clearly there is a need to revisit diagnostic testing at that critical, sometimes perilous, moment of transition from primary to secondary education” ([OCR, 2024](#)). With the social and personal challenges that come from transitioning to primary and secondary, SEC calls for a review of the curriculum transition between KS2 and KS3 to maintain consistency and put in place support for any potential regression in learning progress made during these transition periods.

The third significant point of transition would be for disabled learners and those with SEN moving into post-16 education. We have provided some suggestions on how to prepare disabled learners and those with SEN effectively for this transition:

- SEC calls for enforcement of the Provider Access Legislation legally requiring schools, including special schools, to allow colleges and training providers access to pupils in Years 8 to 13. This would enable young people to make more informed choices about their post-16 learning, and hence better prepare for it.

- Learners at risk of not being able to find employment, education and further training post-school would benefit from funded summer transition programmes to keep them engaged in an enjoyable, confidence-boosting way, ahead of a September start in FE.
- KS4/5 disabled learners and those with SEN would benefit from ‘link provision’ whereby they attend college for a period of time during their last year of school, giving them the opportunity to adjust to the larger, busier environment and to try out different vocational areas, so that by the time they transition they feel confident and positive about their FE education.
- Schools must ensure that discussions about post-16 options are included in Annual Reviews for learners with EHCPs from Year 9 onwards, as required by the SEND Code of Practice.
- Local authorities must meet the 31 March statutory deadline for naming a post-school setting for learners with EHCPs. This will enable personalised transitions to be planned and implemented during their final term at school.
- More comprehensive transfer of data and transition protocols between schools and colleges for disabled learners and those with SEN but no EHCP would enable colleges to be better prepared to support learners appropriately from day one.

Section summary:

SEC calls for a careful review of the transition periods between Key Stages and particularly at the points where children and young people are moving from one education setting to another. We ask that:

- a) The transitions in learning content between key stages (e.g. EYFS and KS1) are reviewed so there is not such a cliff edge for learners***
- b) The curriculum sets out clear support for those learners whose progress may be affected by the transition period***

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

We have weaved our key points throughout our answers to the questions but we wanted to highlight a final few points:

The SEND and AP Improvement Plan set out an ambition not only to create a more inclusive school system but promote an inclusive society. We ask: what is the curriculum doing, and what might it do, to support this?

Disabled children and young people and those with SEN have told us that they would benefit from being represented in the curriculum, in ways that demonstrate agency, a sense of belonging in the social fabric and the possibility of a fulfilling life. This can be done by incorporating content throughout the curriculum and disability history, where we would encourage an emphasis on the emancipation of disabled people, an understanding of the history of the disability rights movement and a clear commitment to inclusion across all schools.

While not strictly speaking a curricular issue, we believe the above approach should be complemented and strengthened by teaching and learning methodologies which manifestly put into action the values of inclusion, such as cooperative learning.

To fulfil these objectives, we ask that all staff in schools and settings have the initial training – across the curriculum - and subsequent professional development they need to be able to identify and support disabled pupils and those with SEN. This includes training on disability duties in Equality Act 2010; expectations according to the Children and Families Act and accompanying SEND Code of Practice, and, supported by a flexible, inclusive curricular framework, how to adapt materials to personalise and individualise learning and progress measurement for all pupils in their care.

Questions to be considered from SEC

Section 3: Social Justice and Inclusion

- **Question 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?**
- **Question 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)?**

Section 4: Ensuring an excellent foundation in Maths and English

- **Question 16 - To what extent does the content of the National Curriculum at primary level (key stages 1 and 2) enable pupils to gain an excellent foundation in a) English and b) maths? Are there ways in which the content could change to**

better support this aim? Please note, we invite views specifically on transitions between key stages in section 9.

- Question 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?
- Question 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?
- Question 19 - To what extent do the current maths and English qualifications at a) pre-16 and b) 16-19 support pupils and learners to gain, and adequately demonstrate that they have achieved, the skills and knowledge they need? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support these outcomes?
- Question 20 - How can we better support learners who do not achieve level 2 in English and maths by 16 to learn what they need to thrive as citizens in work and life? In particular, do we have the right qualifications at level 2 for these 16-19 learners (including the maths and English study requirement)?

Section 5: Curriculum and qualification content

- Question 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?
- Question 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?
- Question 26 - In which ways do the current secondary curriculum and qualification pathways support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?
- Question 27 - In which ways do the current qualification pathways and content at 16-19 support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?

Section 6: A broad and balanced curriculum

- Question 31 - To what extent do the current curriculum (at primary and secondary) and qualifications pathways (at secondary and 16-19) ensure that pupils and learners are able to develop creative skills and have access to creative subjects?
- Question 32 - Do you have any explanations for the trends outlined in the analysis and/or suggestions to address any that might be of concern?

- **Question 33** - To what extent and how do pupils benefit from being able to take vocational or applied qualifications in secondary schools alongside more academically focused GCSEs?
- **Question 34** - To what extent does the current pre-16 vocational offer equip pupils with the necessary knowledge and skills and prepare them for further study options, including 16-19 technical pathways and/or A levels? Could the pre-16 vocational offer be improved?

Section 7: Assessment and accountability

- **Question 35** - Is the volume of statutory assessment at key stages 1 and 2 right for the purposes set out above?
- **Question 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?
- **Question 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?
- **Question 38** - What can we do to ensure the assessment system at key stages 1 and 2 works well for all learners, including learners in need of additional support in their education (for example SEND, disadvantage, EAL)?
- **Question 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?
- **Question 41** - Are there particular GCSE subjects where changes could be made to the qualification content and/or assessment that would be beneficial for pupils' learning? While pupils are currently not formally assessed at key stage 3, there are concerns and some evidence that some pupils make little progress in key areas at this key stage.
- **Question 42** - Are there ways in which we could support improvement in pupil progress and outcomes at key stage 3?
- **Question 43** - Are there ways in which we could support pupils who do not meet the expected standard at key stage 2?
- **Question 44** - To what extent, and in what ways, does the accountability system influence curriculum and assessment decisions in schools and colleges?
- **Question 45** - How well does the current accountability system support and recognise progress for all pupils and learners? What works well and what could be improved?

Section 8: Qualification pathways 16-19

- Question 50 - To what extent is there enough scope and flexibility in the system to support learners who may need to change course?
- Question 51 - Are there additional skills, subjects, or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19 education, regardless of their chosen programmes and qualifications, to support them to be prepared for life and work?

Section 9: Other issues on which we would welcome views

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

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