

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Future of farming review

Annex D: Review response to Department of Education 2014 curriculum consultation

Date: July 2013

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2014 Curriculum consultation response

Introduction

- 1.1 The Future of Farming Review Group was set up following the recommendations made in the Green Food Project, published July 2012¹, which examined the challenges of increasing food production and improving the environment to meet the global food security challenges that we will face in the future. The role of the Future of Farming Group, led by industry, is to explore the opportunities and barriers faced by new entrants selecting careers in agriculture either as employees or farmers on their own account. Ensuring we have the right number and calibre of enthusiastic and entrepreneurial people with the right skills is key if we are to deliver a productive, resilient and sustainable food system in the future.
- 1.2 The Future of Farming Review Group findings will not be published until July 2013, however we felt it important to submit an expression of interest at the consultation process of the National Curriculum, even at such an early stage in our investigations.

Submission

- 1.3 In 2002, the Government published the Report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food (The Curry Report). It had been established in August 2001, having been set up "to advise the Government on how we can create a sustainable, competitive and diverse farming and food sector which contributes to a thriving and sustainable rural economy, advances environmental, economic, health and animal welfare goals, and is consistent with the Government's aims for Common Agricultural Policy reform, enlargement of the EU and increased trade liberalisation."
- 1.4 One of its central themes was reconnection. The Commission said "We believe the real reason why the present situation is so dysfunctional is that farming has become detached from the rest of the economy and the environment. The key objective of public policy should be to reconnect our food and farming industry: to reconnect

¹ Report of the initial conclusions is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/green-food-project-conclusions>.

farming with its market and the rest of the food chain; to reconnect the food chain and the countryside; and to reconnect consumers with what they eat and how it is produced.”

- 1.5 The Future of Farming Review Group believes that the Curry Commission was correct to position ‘reconnection’ at the heart of its recommendations. To support this recommendation we would propose that the science of agriculture and other land-based industries are embedded within the schools and education at all levels. Education is a critical and essential part of reconnecting farming and land management to consumers. Land use, climate change and water are issues that are becoming increasingly important for society. Agriculture is at the centre of these issues. Everyday operations in farming and land management are deeply embedded in the core subjects of science, geography and mathematics.
- 1.6 This group recommends that in the updating of the National Curriculum, agriculture and land management plays a central role in all subjects. The practical operations, challenges and opportunities of agriculture and land management could be mainstreamed into the education of pupils at all levels via case studies, practical exercises and farm visits that all resonate with the existing biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics and geography curriculums.
- 1.7 By connecting teacher training, qualified teachers, and schools to primary agriculture (i.e. food production) and industries right across the whole food chain (including food processing, manufacturing and retailers), there is great potential to accelerate reconnection while more importantly, providing the means of bringing to life all of the sciences.
- 1.8 Farms, forestry and related activities can provide material and teaching experiences outside the classroom to support teachers and pupils in the learning process. It can be used to illustrate the sciences (biology, physics and chemistry), geography, technology, engineering and maths, at every level. The language and content of the draft curriculum currently out for consultation, such as requiring pupils to observe, describe and experience the whole range of the world of science, is very much in line with the resources and ability of farm, countryside and food based studies to deliver it. Other very significant benefits will include a much enhanced understanding of food, healthy eating, environmental responsibility, entrepreneurship and, ultimately, delivering a huge positive difference to the financial, mental and physical wellbeing of the Nation.
- 1.9 The agricultural industry is increasingly demonstrating its willingness to connect and educate the public through initiatives such as Open Farm Sunday. The industry is

also continually developing its communication skills and educational material through groups such as Access to Farms, of which FACE (Farming and Countryside Education) is a leading member. At the same time, most if not all of the agricultural shows and societies are refocusing their original charitable educational remits of up-skilling their farmer members towards the needs of the modern world. This includes the education of food consumers and their educators about modern agriculture and food production. The industry is thus following the Curry Report's central recommendation, but we believe that there is a much bigger prize to be won and its value beyond our current remit to estimate.

1.10 While we have not had time to develop our thinking in respect to all the individual subjects where agriculture is relevant as mentioned, we have made some comments in respect of the Geography curriculum as a way of illustrating what might be possible on a subject by subject basis. These are as follows:

- For the first time in many years there is explicit reference in the geography curriculum to learning about all the key environmental components that underpin farming – rocks and soils, hydrology, vegetation, weather and climate.
- There is also explicit requirement to learn about the availability and use of natural resources, land use, primary economic activity and specific mention of food (in terms of distribution).
- There is a requirement to understand how human and physical processes interact.
- There are requirements in several places for UK and international comparator studies.

1.11 But there is no specific mention of farming per se. So there seems to be an opportunity for:

1. A stronger reference to farming explicitly in the geography curriculum.
2. The potential for learning resources for teachers that use farming systems as one way of integrating and exemplifying these requirements.
3. The potential for farm-based studies for fieldwork and for exemplifying the use of rural areas in the 'UK studies of a local region'.
4. Putting in place, if well taught, the building blocks for studies at GCSE and A level that examine:
 - a. ecosystems – both natural and farmed/managed ones
 - b. food security - in a world with rapidly increasing population, a rise in extreme/unusual weather patterns and where other factors also affect the capacity to produce food, This would seem to fit with the development of integrated studies of people and environment and for the concept of 'change over time' to be major unifying concepts at GCSE as well as the inclusion of specific topic areas at GCSE as follows: ecosystems, food and farming;

- c. farming and international development
- d. environmental management and sustainable farming technologies

1.12 Our vision of placing agriculture at the heart of the nation's education is bold and looking very much to the longer term for its implementation and the benefits which it could generate. However it is very timely now, while the National Curriculum is being shaped for the future, to make sure that the opportunity is not lost to use agriculture as an important part of the study of the subjects mentioned above.

1.13 The 'Future of Farming' Review will report in July as mentioned above. We will be pleased to send a copy of this report then but hope that, in the meantime, this submission can be taken into account as the National Curriculum is considered.

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