



National College for  
Teaching & Leadership

# Implementing curriculum and qualifications reform

**Proposals from the 2013 Fellowship commission**

**Working in partnership with HTI**

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# Contents

<b>Executive summary.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. About the Fellowship commission .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. The challenge of reform.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Meeting the challenge: our recommendations .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Appendix 1: list of expert witnesses .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Appendix 2: list of Fellowship Programme participants, 2013.....</b>	<b>19</b>

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## Executive summary

The National College's Fellowship Programme brings together national leaders of education (NLEs) to consider key issues facing schools. This is the report of the 2013 Fellowship commission.

As a commission, we were asked to consider the challenge of implementing proposed reforms in curriculum and qualifications. We took evidence from a range of expert witnesses; we considered written material; and we examined how other organisations, nationally and internationally, have equipped their leaders to manage major change. We also brought our own experience as outstanding school leaders to the challenge.

Throughout our investigation, we were motivated by a simple objective: to determine how best to implement curriculum and qualifications reform in a way which enables more children to learn and achieve more, regardless of their background or family circumstances.

Curriculum and qualifications reform is complex. Section 2 of our report sets out what we see as the main challenges facing the system.

Section 3 focuses on our proposals for implementing reform successfully. They require no additional resources and do not need any new legislation or regulation.

Our proposals are set out under three key objectives:

1. to **engage and enthuse** staff, governors, parents and students in the project of curriculum reform.
2. to **build on the best** to create a culture of evidence-based practice within the teaching profession.
3. to **align the system** so that curriculum, accountability and qualifications frameworks are mutually supportive.

Our objective to '**engage and enthuse**' means building confidence and skills at school level to drive curriculum development. We must equip all staff to grasp the opportunity of curriculum freedoms. Students and parents should be able to see what makes their school distinctive and different in how the curriculum is tailored directly to them.

To achieve this, we recommend that:

- existing national support schools, teaching school alliances and multi-academy trusts lead the system on curriculum development and assessment. (Paragraph 3.3).
- each teaching school alliance designates specialist leaders of education (SLEs) across all phases with oversight for curriculum and assessment. (Paragraph 3.11).
- every school should promote their curriculum offer online to inform effective parental choice, publishing a 'curriculum impact statement'. (Paragraph 3.18).

To '**build on the best**', we want to promote a culture where the evidence about what works best is used by teachers as a matter of routine. To achieve this, we recommend:

- that the National College for Teaching and Leadership spearheads a drive towards an evidence based culture in the profession, with an initial focus on the teaching of maths, English, languages, computer science and science. (Paragraph 3.28).

By '**aligning the system**', our goal is to create the conditions for school leaders to implement successful reform. Specifically, we want to see greater fluency between curriculum development and the way in which it is measured. To achieve this we recommend:

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- formal involvement of school leaders with examination boards and Ofqual in the development of qualifications and assessment; and with the Department for Education on other accountability measures related to curriculum. (Paragraph 3.37).
  - that current progress level descriptors continue whilst more effective progress measures are trialled. (Paragraph 3.46).

Our recommendations are mutually supportive – and mutually dependent on each other. We will only succeed in winning the hearts and minds of staff, for example, if we are able to demonstrate that we also working to align the system at the same time.

Finally, curriculum and qualifications development is an iterative process – a journey rather than a destination. Fundamentally, our recommendations are about culture change in the teaching profession and the way in which every school and its community thinks about curriculum. Our recommendations are the first step.

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## 1. About the Fellowship commission

- 1.1 Each year, the National College's Fellowship Programme commission brings together outstanding primary, special and secondary headteachers to consider one key issue facing schools. In 2013, the commission was asked by the National College to consider the following question:

“How can the proposed curriculum and qualifications reforms be successfully implemented across all schools, within scarce resources?”
- 1.2 Every member of the Fellowship Programme commission is a national leader of education (NLE). All are outstanding headteachers or principals who, together with the staff in their schools or academies use their skills and experience to support schools in challenging circumstances. In addition to leading their own schools, NLEs work to increase the leadership capacity of other schools to raise standards.
- 1.3 The names of the NLEs who took part in the 2013 Fellowship Programme commission are provided in Appendix 2 of this report.
- 1.4 During the course of the commission, NLEs were provided with access to leading academics and policy makers to inform their own debate and discussions as a group. In addition, each commission member was given the opportunity to experience cutting-edge leadership and management theory and practice in another setting, working with leading business and management schools. NLEs were able to learn from the best of public and private sector leaders, both nationally and internationally, using that experience to bring further insight to the commission's discussion.

### The commission process

- 1.5 NLEs met three times over a period of three months to consider the commission question. The commission sessions were made up of two workshop sessions lasting one day each in January and February, and an intensive three-day session in March. During these workshops, NLEs heard from a series of expert witnesses who offered their perspective on the commission question. A list of the expert witnesses is provided at Appendix 1 of this report. The commission was also able to draw on a wide range of written material.
- 1.6 Throughout its deliberations, the commission was supported by an independent team provided by HTI (Heads, Teachers and Industry) – a not-for-profit organisation appointed by the National College. The HTI team provided facilitation, research, drafting, logistics and administrative support to the NLEs.
- 1.7 At the end of the commission session in March, NLEs presented their conclusions and recommendations to a panel made up individuals from of the Department for Education, National College and professional bodies.

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## 2. The challenge of reform

### Our starting point

2.1 We started our challenge with the question put to us:

“How can the proposed curriculum and qualifications reforms be successfully implemented across all schools, within scarce resources?”

2.2 This is perhaps the most wide-ranging question that has ever been posed to a Fellowship commission.

2.3 The question requires consideration of both curriculum **and** qualification reform **simultaneously**. This is a key issue which we returned to several times throughout our investigation.

2.4 The question demands a response which is practical and scalable. We welcomed the emphasis on implementation ‘across all schools’. We recognised that our recommendations should be relevant to all schools in all contexts, raising performance to match the best.

2.5 Finally, the question focuses on **successful** implementation. As school leaders, this reminded us to build on what we know about leading change successfully. More importantly, it underlined the most important success measure of all – the achievement and well being of all our children and young people, regardless of their background.

### Background

2.6 The Schools White Paper published in 2010, “The Importance of Teaching”<sup>1</sup>, set a clear goal for our system of curriculum, assessment and qualifications. Quite simply, they should match the best in the world.

2.7 The rationale for reform was set out clearly in the evidence provided to our commission by the Department for Education<sup>2</sup>.

As a country, we must learn from the world’s best-performing education systems so that we perform to our full potential.

— Within our schools, we must re-focus our efforts to close the gulf between education attainment of the rich and the poor which remains too wide.

— We must do more to equip our children and young people for a rapidly changing world which is both more international and more competitive than ever before.

Such a case for reform is compelling.

2.8 Equally compelling is the proposition that teachers should play a central role in designing as well as delivering a new school curriculum. The White Paper summarised it like this<sup>3</sup>:

“We envisage schools and teachers taking greater control over what is taught in schools, innovating in how they teach and developing new approaches to learning. We anticipate that in a school system where academy status is the norm and more and more schools are moving towards greater autonomy, there will be much greater scope for teachers to design courses of work which will inspire young minds.”

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1 Department for Education, The Importance of Teaching –The Schools White Paper 2010 (Cmnd 7980)

2 Oral evidence to the Commission by Hardip Begol, Director of Assessment, Curriculum and Qualifications Policy, 15 January 2013.

3 Department for Education, The Importance of Teaching –The Schools White Paper 2010 (Cmnd 7980), 2010:40.

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2.9 Launching the review of the National Curriculum in January 2011, the Secretary of State re-inforced the desire to enable greater curriculum freedom, highlighting the need to reform a system which had been “patronising towards teachers and (which) stifles innovation by being far too prescriptive about how to teach”<sup>4</sup>. The subsequent consultation document on the review of the National Curriculum issued by the Department for Education was equally clear. The aim of the review, it stated, was to ensure<sup>5</sup>:

“that the aspirations we set for our children match those in the highest-performing education jurisdictions, and giving teachers greater freedom over how to teach.”

2.10 Evidence offered to the Commission by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Elizabeth Truss MP, focused specifically on the “school curriculum”— of which the National Curriculum is an important part, but **only** a part. “What really matters,” she told us, “is that this is a new approach to education”<sup>6</sup>. Using a gardening metaphor, the Minister described it like this:

“Government has a part to play in setting out the trellises and marking out the footpaths. How the garden grows is for schools to decide. And in order for teachers to be able to give life to the garden, government has to give them freedom: freedom from excessively prescriptive top-down diktats and the freedom to innovate.

“There will be no new statutory document telling teachers how to do their job. No national strategies telling teachers everything that they have to do. No national roll out.”

2.11 As the Minister also reflected in her comments to the commission, “this is a huge cultural shift”.

## The challenge of implementation

2.12 More than once in our investigations, our expert witnesses returned to the challenge of bringing about cultural change across a system with over 20,000 autonomous schools, each with their own context and particular strengths and weaknesses.

2.13 Whilst the process of policy development can often excite considerable heat and light, the process of implementation usually attracts much less attention. Professor David Hargreaves suggested in evidence to the commission that the history of curriculum reform over several decades is littered with examples of initiatives which have struck the rocks of poor implementation<sup>7</sup>.

2.14 Professor Ben Levin, too, focused on implementation as the key to effective reform in his evidence to us. Professor Levin described the process of implementation as essentially one of behavior change, echoing the idea of cultural shift envisaged by the Minister, Elizabeth Truss MP. Such change, he suggested, requires both “will” and “skill”: the desire (or will) to grasp the opportunity of new curriculum freedoms along with the skills to be able to do so effectively<sup>8</sup>. We found this a useful shorthand for the challenge ahead.

2.15 When we invited our expert witnesses to consider the potential barriers to reform, our discussions returned repeatedly to a consistent range of issues. Drawing also on our own insights as outstanding school leaders, we summarised these issues into three challenges.

- First, reform requires **confident teachers** and schools, ready to grasp the advantage of curriculum freedom for the benefit of their children and young people.
- Second, reform requires a **culture of innovation** and creativity in teaching to ensure more children learn more, more of the time.

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4 Speech by Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Education, 20 January 2011, London

5 Department for Education, Reform of the National Curriculum in England, February 2013, page 2.

6 Speech to NLE Fellowship commission by Elizabeth Truss MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for Education, 18 March 2013, London.

7 Professor David Hargreaves, oral evidence to the Commission, 26 February 2013.

8 Professor Ben Levin, oral evidence to the commission, 18 March 2013.

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- Third, the **conditions for success** must be in place to enable genuine curriculum reform to take root and for change to be **sustainable**.

## Confident teachers

- 2.16 The majority of the current teaching workforce has only ever known the National Curriculum. The forthcoming freedoms will be unknown in their professional lives. For almost all it will be unfamiliar; for some it also will be unsettling. As a member of the expert panel for the National Curriculum Review, Professor Dylan Wiliam, told us: “The National Curriculum has stopped people thinking about what curriculum is”<sup>9</sup>.
- 2.17 There is a job to be done to build lost skills of curriculum design and development at local level. That, in turn, can build confidence and commitment in the reforms themselves. If a practitioner knows **how** to do something, they are more likely to **want** to do it too.
- 2.18 This resonates with evidence offered by more than one expert witness. Tim Leunig, Policy Adviser at the Department for Education, saw professional engagement with reform as a key challenge and encouraged teachers to “be braver”<sup>10</sup>. Russell Hobby, NAHT General Secretary, suggested that successful reform would be a curriculum which “gets the teacher in the classroom excited”<sup>11</sup>.

## Culture of innovation

- 2.19 In the end, any curriculum is only as effective as the teaching which delivers it. Indeed, if forced to choose, several expert witnesses prioritised teaching quality over curriculum content as the most important factor to enable children to succeed. This view was summed up most concisely by Dr Anthony Seldon who suggested to the commission that<sup>12</sup>: “It is not so much **what** is taught, but **how** it is taught”. It is a useful reminder for school leaders not to take their eye off the ball of ensuring high quality delivery in the classroom.
- 2.20 Innovative teaching is what makes a curriculum inspiring and ensures that every student has the chance to achieve and succeed, whatever their background.
- 2.21 Innovation involves rigour. Too little is recorded and shared about what works best in teaching. The culture of research is weak. Such evidence that does exist is used too infrequently.
- 2.22 At the same time, innovation often involves risk. If the systems that hold teachers to account are intolerant of risk of any kind, innovation will not happen. That brings us to our last key challenge.

## Conditions for success

- 2.23 It was clear to us from the evidence presented and from our own discussions that successful reform requires careful management of potentially conflicting tensions in the system.
- 2.25 Behaviours are driven by accountabilities. What gets measured gets done. If Ofsted and Department for Education performance measures remain the same, so will behaviour.
- 2.26 Equally, what gets assessed gets taught. Unless qualifications reform marches in step with curriculum reform, both are likely to stumble. The architect of the 1988 National Curriculum, Lord Baker, told us: “We need to break the idea that we set an exam and the structure fits under the exam”<sup>13</sup>.

9 Professor Dylan Wiliam, Institute of Education, oral evidence to commission, 18 March 2013.

10 Dr Tim Leunig, Policy Adviser, Department for Education, oral evidence to the Commission, 18 March 2013.

11 Russell Hobby, General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers, oral evidence to the Commission, 19 March 2013

12 Dr Anthony Seldon, Master, Wellington College, oral evidence to commission, 25 February 2013.

13 Lord Baker of Dorking, oral evidence to commission, 19 March 2013.



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As others have described it<sup>14</sup>, the qualifications ‘tail’ should not wag the curriculum ‘dog’.

- 2.27 Without addressing these wider system issues, no amount of freedom at school level will make a sustainable difference. Of course accountability and assessment must be independent and rigorous, but they must also be consistent with the wider aim of establishing a curriculum that matches the best in the world. That is why we have identified these issues as “conditions for success”.
- 2.28 In the next section of our report, we will turn to our proposals for overcoming these barriers.

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14 John Dunford, Optimus Education Website, September 2012, <http://www.optimus-education.com/despite-ebc-schools-can-continue-offer-rounded-education>

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## 3. Meeting the challenge: our recommendations

- 3.1 We have focused our recommendations into three key areas which we see as three essential pillars for successful long term reform. These address directly the challenges which we identified in the previous section of our report.
- First, we must **engage and enthuse** staff, governors, parents and students in the project of curriculum reform. This means building confidence and skills at school level to drive curriculum development. Students and parents should be able to see what makes their school distinctive and how the curriculum is tailored directly to them.
  - Second, we must **build on the best**. What counts is what works. We need a systematic approach to learn from effective practice to enable more children to achieve more.
  - Third, we must **align the system**. This means ensuring that curriculum, accountability and qualifications frameworks are mutually supportive.

We have specific recommendations in each of these areas.

### Engage and enthuse

- 3.2 Our challenge is to ensure that all schools engage with change, taking advantage of new freedoms for the benefit of their children and young people. The story of curriculum reform must not become a tale of two systems, in which strong schools grow stronger and the weak fall further behind. That is why our first recommendation is about building the skills (and desire) in all schools to work differently.
- 3.3 We recommend using existing national support schools, teaching school alliances and multi-academy trusts to lead the system on curriculum development and assessment.**
- 3.4 Research evidence tells us that professionals' behaviours change when we build competence at local level, where practitioners see what the best practice looks like and are able to practice new skills with support from others<sup>15</sup>. That is how we will create a flexible workforce, able to adapt to future (as well as current) change.
- 3.5 We do not need to create new structures or designations to do this – that would be wasteful and time consuming – but we do need to deploy existing expert networks to ensure the widest possible engagement of schools in the challenge of innovative curriculum development. We concur with the suggestion made by Professor Chris Husbands, Director of the Institute of Education at the University of London, that an effective model of reform is likely to be based on the concepts of “collaboration and professionalism”<sup>16</sup>.
- 3.6 National support schools, teaching school alliances, federations and multi-academy trusts have a responsibility to support excellence not just in their own schools but also in neighbouring schools. All have a role to play to ensure that collaborative networks reach every school in every part of the country.
- 3.7 Every school leader in the country should be able to identify a collaborative network relevant to their context which provides a practical forum for curriculum development. Networks should provide for all types of school, all stages of learning and for all learners across academic, vocational and applied curriculum areas. No school should be left behind.

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15 See systematic reviews from the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Coordinating Centre (EPPI) at the University of London Institute of Education. Relevant reviews include: What do teacher impact data tell us about collaborative CPD? EPPI; How do specialist inputs in CPD affect teachers, their learning and their pupils' learning? Cordingley, P et al, EPPI; How do collaborative and sustained CPD and sustained but not collaborative CPD affect teaching and learning? EPPI; How does collaborative CPD for teachers of the 5-16 age range affect teaching and learning? EPPI

16 Oral evidence to the commission by Professor Chris Husbands, Director of the Institute of Education, University of London, 19 March 2013.

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- 3.8 Networks should reach out beyond schools too. Universities, colleges, training providers and employers (amongst others) can all make a vital contribution to locally tailored curriculum development.

### **Effective collaborative networks**

#### **School Partnership Trust Academies**

A powerful example of providing collective support and development exists with School Partnership Trust Academies (SPTA), a multi-academy trust and sponsor operating 40 academies across Yorkshire and Humberside.

Each member academy contributes centrally to resource a full-time central curriculum support team, with team members permanently attached to an academy with their specialist phase. This model provides effective and consistent challenge and support for academy leaders and curriculum developers. It ensures that the very best of curriculum provision can be distributed and shared through collaborative events which take place regularly.

Furthermore, it promotes an innovative spirit by encouraging a risk taking culture in an atmosphere of mutual support. This, in turn, leads to the sharing of resources, including the deployment of specialist staffing bringing about economies of scale.

- 3.9 We recognise that some schools will require more support than others. Given finite resources, collective effort should focus on those in greatest need (as is currently the case with national support schools). Schools requiring particular support may be those identified by Ofsted as facing greatest challenge, schools with new headteachers or small rural schools coping with geographical isolation. It will be for network leaders to identify and support vulnerable members of the collaborative.
- 3.10 Leaders of local networks are likely to focus initially on those areas where teacher insecurity is highest. This will help create a strong 'pull factor' to collaborative networks, attracting weaker schools in particular and avoiding two-speed curriculum development. In the short term, questions of moderation and assessment may be the key rallying points for many local networks. That leads to our next recommendation.
- 3.11 We recommend that each teaching school alliance designates specialist leaders of education (SLEs) across phases with oversight for curriculum and assessment.**
- 3.12 By 2014/15 there will be around 5,000 SLEs across England, with an ambition to create 10,000 eventually<sup>17</sup>. SLEs are outstanding middle and senior leaders who have the skills to support individuals or teams in similar positions in other schools. They understand what outstanding leadership practice in their area of expertise looks like and are skilled in helping other leaders to achieve it in their own context. Together they will provide a significant resource for the whole school system.
- 3.13 We believe that SLEs can provide a consistent approach to curriculum and assessment support – available nationwide, organised locally through teaching school networks.
- 3.14 Every teaching school alliance should be required to designate and deploy SLEs with particular expertise in curriculum development, innovation and assessment across each school phase.
- 3.15 Their brief will be to encourage schools to grasp the opportunities of new curriculum freedoms, build practitioner confidence and overcome reluctance to try new approaches to the curriculum. Their approach will be rooted in effective local practice; their goal will be to accelerate improvement in standards.

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17 <http://www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege/index/support-for-schools/specialist-leaders-of-education-programme.htm>

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- 3.16 Designated SLEs will have a particular role to build expertise in assessment at school level. To be effective as curriculum developers, teachers must also be expert in assessing children's work. Reform brings opportunities to develop more sophisticated methods of assessment, learning from the best within the system already. Designated SLEs will be able to lead the drive to professionalise assessment, drawing on expertise in higher education and elsewhere to develop the best methods of measuring progress. (We will touch on this again in a later recommendation).

### **Curriculum conference**

#### **Beech Hill Primary School**

In the North East, twelve primary schools in the outer west of Newcastle (organised by NSS Beech Hill Primary) have linked together to create their own 'curriculum conference'. The group works collaboratively to plan for implementation of the National Curriculum, but is equally focused on developing their own local variations and sharing best practice between the schools.

The conference is working with Leading Learning and other educationalists to ensure planning is based on evidence wherever possible, and that new ideas are properly evaluated.

- 3.17 In our next recommendation, we look beyond the teaching profession to consider how we can engage a wider audience in how curriculum is developed.
- 3.18 We recommend that every school should promote their curriculum offer online to inform effective parental choice, publishing a 'curriculum impact statement'.**
- 3.19 We want to see the widest possible ownership of the school curriculum, rooted in local communities. That means making even greater effort to engage students and parents in the way curriculum is shaped. It means empowering parents to help children and young people make effective choices about curriculum alternatives.
- 3.20 To start this process, we would encourage every school and academy to publish detailed (and accessible) information about their curriculum models in detail on line. The information should enable parents to make informed choices both between and within individual schools.
- 3.21 To give students and parents a more rounded picture of how schools develop children as individuals, we would encourage every school and academy to provide a "curriculum impact statement" to describe the difference that they make to young people. This will complement existing measures of achievement and attainment to include curriculum benefits which are often overlooked, such as the social and emotional development of young people. Curriculum impact statements will show how schools are meeting the challenge to provide a broad and balanced curriculum which has depth.
- 3.22 Such transparency could have other benefits. Schools that have not grasped the opportunities of curriculum freedom will be more visible to local networks for targeted support. Transparency will also enable schools to learn from one another more easily. Schools will be able to compare their own curriculum with others, borrowing and adapting the best ideas to improve their own performance. That brings us to next recommendation.

### **Build on the best**

- 3.23 Our first three recommendations are about distributing effective practice. We recognise, however, that it is possible for poor practice to spread just as quickly as effective practice. If we aim to create a culture of innovation in curriculum development, we must also consider how we ensure quality. As we noted earlier, innovation involves rigour.

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- 3.24 We found merit in the advice offered by Ben Goldacre in his recent paper written for the Department for Education<sup>18</sup>. He wrote:
- “I think there is a huge prize waiting to be claimed by teachers. By collecting better evidence about what works best, and establishing a culture where this evidence is used as a matter of routine, we can improve outcomes for children, and increase professional independence”.
- 3.25 We agree. This requires a tangible change in the culture of the teaching profession, to truly embed evidence based learning. This should be at our core as practitioners.
- 3.26 We saw at first hand how a commitment to research evidence has been used to improve school outcomes in Singapore, one of the best performing education systems in the world<sup>19</sup>. In Singapore, school leaders describe an approach where “nothing is left to chance”. A powerful partnership between schools and the country’s National Institute of Education ensure that practitioners are equipped to undertake research. All schools have a research co-ordinator, charged with nurturing a culture in which research is the responsibility of all teachers as part of their professional practice. Research is seen as fundamental to improving outcomes for children, as well as the social and economic well being of the country.
- 3.27 The implementation of curriculum reform is an opportunity to accelerate towards evidence informed practice as our default position in England. That is the focus of our recommendation.
- 3.28 We recommend that the National College for Teaching and Leadership spearheads a drive towards an evidence based culture in the profession, with an initial focus on the teaching of maths, English, languages, computer science and science.**
- 3.29 We believe that evidence based practice is an issue for every leader in every school. In the best schools, of course, a culture of research and enquiry already exists and there is a clear focus on professional learning.
- At George Spencer Academy in Nottinghamshire, a commitment to ‘practitioner enquiry’ is linked explicitly into performance management, creating an expectation that every member of staff is involved in professional learning.
  - At the Harris Academy Chafford Hundred, timetabling is used creatively to create space for designated research time.
  - At Queens Park Academy in Bedford, the school week has been adapted to allow for focused whole school professional development for all staff. The school has used its freedoms as an Academy to develop an ‘alternative’ school day.
- 3.30 We want such practice to be more common in more schools, and for it to extend to make more creative use of technology – for example, education-based social media channels such as TeachMeet<sup>20</sup>.
- 3.31 Local collaborative networks have an important role to foster an evidence based culture. However, we believe that this work requires a national focal point (in the short term) to generate momentum. We believe this responsibility sits well with the remit of the newly formed National College of Teaching and Leadership.
- 3.32 Specifically, we suggest that the National College explores how best to:
- strengthen the emphasis on evidence based learning within Initial Teacher Training, so that future practitioners are confident users of research to inform their practice.
  - raise the profile of research and development in schools, for example through devices such as national award schemes.

18 Ben Goldacre, Building Evidence into Education, March 2013.

19 Building Educational Bridges Programme. Exchange visit to Singapore National Institute of Education by Fellowship commission members, February 2013.

20 <http://www.teachmeet.org.uk>

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- facilitate development of an online research and evidence library for practitioners, of the kind that are more common the health sector. This does not necessarily mean that the National College should become the provider of such a resource. We see its role initially as a ‘catalyst’, bringing together organisations from higher education, the not-for-profit sector and business to explore possible delivery models. As part of our investigation, we were struck how such a role has been played successfully by the Gates Foundation in the United States, acting as a catalyst for wider social change. (See panel).

### ‘Viral scaling’ – the power of networks

#### The Gates Foundation

The Gates Foundation facilitates state and district professional development networks in which teachers collaborate on curriculum design both face to face and through the use of technology. The modules of work created are published on the dedicated collaborative and/or “Teaching Channel” websites so that other teachers can adapt and use them.

New networks are formed through a process of ‘viral scaling’ led by teachers themselves. Critically, the process engages with **other** partners within and beyond education to stimulate innovation and generate momentum. This has had the impact of “catalyzing the market” and publishers are now approaching these networks with a view to producing teacher generated curriculum materials commercially.

## Align the system

- 3.33 To this point, our attention and recommendations have focused on proposed reforms of the **curriculum**. That is where the Commission spent the greater time in discussion. In this part of our report, we turn to the other aspect of the challenge set for us, that of **qualifications** reform.
- 3.34 Our recommendations in this area are designed to create the conditions for school leaders to lead change successfully. Our proposition is a simple one: successful reform requires alignment of **both** curriculum **and** qualifications reform.
- 3.35 No matter how effective our collaboration at local level, schools will be reluctant to develop a new curriculum in a vacuum. Specifically, they need to know how they will be held to account for the curriculum changes they may choose to make. That means accountability measures which are clear and complete. ‘Clear’ means transparency about school performance measures, qualifications and assessment frameworks. ‘Complete’ means having a full map of accountabilities at the outset of curriculum planning, not having to continual change direction as (say) new assessment proposals emerge.
- 3.36 The final recommendations in our report are designed to help achieve this alignment.
- 3.37 We recommend that school system leaders are formally involved with examination boards and Ofqual in the development of qualifications and assessment; and the Department on other accountability measures, to ensure alignment between curriculum development and outcome measurement.**
- 3.38 Effective, rigorous accountability is an essential component of high performing school systems. The evidence tells us that systems with a high degree of school autonomy (such as ours) work best for students when combined intelligently with effective accountability<sup>21</sup>. In making this recommendation, therefore, we are not questioning the **level** of accountability applied to schools, rather we want to make sure it is effective in measuring what curriculum reforms are designed to achieve.

21 School Autonomy and Accountability: Are They Related to Student Performance?, PISA In Focus, October 2011.

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- 3.39 Effective school leaders embrace accountability measures as a means of bringing about change. Their involvement in setting future accountability measures can help the Department and others to focus attention on the areas of curriculum development in greatest need of change.
- 3.40 Equally, school leaders (amongst others) can add considerable value to the development of qualifications to reflect developments in curriculum. Creativity and innovation in curriculum development and delivery must be matched with equally innovative thinking in how assessment and qualifications evolve.
- 3.41 We agree with the aspiration set out in the strategic plan of the regulator, Ofqual, that<sup>22</sup>:  
“If we (Ofqual) succeed in our plans, there will be greater coherence between what students learn, how they are taught and how they are assessed. Assessment should support and recognise learning, not drive it. The relationship between (Ofqual), awarding organisations and schools and colleges will change and develop, for the benefit of students, schools and colleges.”
- 3.42 We believe that relationship must develop quickly so that the pace of curriculum reform is not held back. Alignment of curriculum and qualifications reform will be mutually beneficial to both processes, leading to better changes in each area. Most important of all, alignment will better serve children’s learning.
- 3.43 That brings us to our final recommendation. It relates to assessment.
- 3.44 We support the move away from the current progress level descriptions in the current National Curriculum. The report of the expert panel sets out clear arguments for this change<sup>23</sup>.
- 3.45 Teachers need better ways of measuring the learning and progress of children. How, otherwise, will they know whether our new curriculum is working? We must do whatever it takes to find the best way to measure children’s progression – even if what it takes is time. For that reason, our final recommendation relates to current progress levels.
- 3.46 We recommend that current level descriptors continue whilst more effective progress measures are trialled.**
- 3.47 We recognise that there is an argument for removing existing progress levels quickly in order to force innovation to take place. Having created space, schools should rush in to fill the gap with their own, more inventive, progress measures. In a mature system of curriculum freedom or in one facing more limited curriculum changes overall, we could see merit in that argument. We do not think it is a realistic assessment of the current situation in schools, however.
- 3.48 Faced with the totality of curriculum change, many schools may simply replace current progress levels by re-inventing them in the same mould. The system will be no further forward. Even where new systems are introduced, it is far from certain that they will be based on any evidence of what works best.
- 3.49 In fact, there is considerable effective practice which could be used to inform the development of new progress measures. For example, we might look to borrow and adapt ideas developed in the best special schools which have already developed a range of innovative assessment practices to capture and measure progress. (See panel).

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22 Ofqual, Corporate Plan 2012-15, May 2012. Page 6.

23 The Framework for the National Curriculum: A Report by the Expert Panel for the National Curriculum Review, Department for Education, December 2011. Chapter 8.

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- 3.50 We would like to see a number of alternative progress measures developed and trialled, so that schools can make informed, evidence-based decisions about how best to measure pupil progress in their setting. If this means retaining current progress levels for a short period, we believe that would be the pragmatic step to take.

### **Progress and assessment in special schools**

#### **The Bridge School, London**

The current system of measuring progress has not always worked well for special schools. As a result many have been innovative in developing systems to demonstrate and measure progress in all areas of pupils learning.

The Bridge School in London reports the progress of its pupils in key subject areas using smaller measures, whilst not allowing these measures to drive the curriculum offer. They have also developed measures of self-esteem, confidence, well-being, improvements in challenging behaviour, etc. and designed a dashboard which displays these side by side, so that progress as a whole can be viewed and valued.



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## 4. Conclusion

- 4.1 The question of curriculum and qualifications reform has many facets. In the limited time available for our commission, we have not had chance to consider them all. We have focused our attention on those areas which we believed need the most urgent action. That is not to say, of course, that there are not many other important aspects of reform that we have not had time to consider in this report.
- 4.2 Our recommendations are presented as a package. They focus on three objectives: to build enthusiasm for reform; to build on the best evidence base; and to align the system behind a common purpose. These are mutually supportive – and mutually dependent on each other. We will only succeed in winning the hearts and minds of staff, for example, if we are able to demonstrate that we also working to align the system at the same time. Every school leader has a critical role to play at school level – but they need the conditions for success to be in place at national level.
- 4.3 Throughout our deliberations, we have been mindful of the need to address the commission question in the context of ‘scarce resources’. As school leaders running significant organisations we appreciate this more than most. Our approach has been to focus on the re-targeting of existing structures and resources wherever possible. We are confident that our recommendations can be met within existing plans and budgets, with appropriate re-prioritisation. None of our proposals require any new legislation or regulation.
- 4.4 Finally, we see our recommendations as simply the first stage of a much larger project. Curriculum and qualifications development is an iterative process – a journey rather than a destination. We must remain open to feedback and be ready to respond to concerns along the way. Success depends on our ability to carry as many people with us as possible.
- 4.5 Fundamentally, our recommendations are about culture change in the teaching profession and the way in which every school and its community thinks about curriculum. That will take time. It will require sustained effort, with an unflinching focus on the prize to be won:

“...a highly educated society in which opportunity is more equal for children and young people no matter what their background or family circumstances”<sup>24</sup>.

We hope that our recommendations are a first step.

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24 Department for Education vision statement, <http://www.education.gov.uk>

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## Appendix 1: list of expert witnesses

During the period of our commission, we spoke with the following expert witnesses:

Lord Baker of Dorking	Chair, Baker-Dearing Educational Trust
Hardip Begol	Director of Assessment, Curriculum and Qualifications Policy, Department for Education
Professor David Hargreaves	Wolfson College, Cambridge
Russell Hobby	General Secretary, National Association of Head Teachers
Professor Chris Husbands	Director of the Institute of Education, University of London
Dr Tim Leunig	Policy Adviser, Department for Education
Professor Ben Levin	University of Toronto
Brian Lightman	General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders
Conor Ryan	Director, Research and Communications, The Sutton Trust
Dr Anthony Seldon	Master, Wellington College
Ray Shostak CBE	Core Assets Group
Elizabeth Truss MP	Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for Education
Professor Dylan Wiliam	Institute of Education, University of London

We also received helpful advice from:

Professor Toby Salt, Chief Executive, Ormiston Academies Trust

Pat Smart, Executive Headteacher, Greet and Conway Primary Schools

Maggie Farrar, Executive Director, National College for Teaching and Leadership

Di Barnes, Acting Executive Director, National College for Teaching and Leadership

Toby Greany, Acting Executive Director–Leadership Development, National College for Teaching and Leadership

The 2013 Fellowship Commission was facilitated by the HTI team: Anne Evans OBE, Jane Creasy, Professor Geoff Southworth OBE, Peter Addison-Child, Deryn Harvey and Nicola McGuigan.

## Appendix 2: list of Fellowship Programme participants, 2013

Penny Barratt	The Bridge School
Vicky Beer	Ashton on Mersey School
Sandy Brown	Woolacombe School
Pam Butterfield	The Green School
Jo Cottrell	Halterworth Community Primary School
Sarah Creighton	The Hill Primary Academy
Cherry Edwards	Bourne Abbey CofE Primary Academy
Alex Green	Abington Academy
Gary Holden	Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School
Susan Jowett	George Spencer Academy and Technology College
Alan Lee	St Thomas More Catholic Upper School, Specialist Humanities and Leadership College
Anne McCormick	Queen's Park Academy
Ros McMullen	David Young Community Academy
Rebecca Meredith	Sneinton St Stephen's CofE Primary School
Nicola Nelson-Taylor	Beech Hill Primary School
Denis Oliver	Holmes Chapel Comprehensive
Keiran Osborne	Hayes School
Sarah Parker	Denbigh School
Debbie Rogan	The Wickford CofE School
Inderjit Sandhu	Launde Primary School
Chris Tomlinson	Harris Academy Chafford Hundred
Paul West	Garforth Academy

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