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Key points arising from the International Summit on Textbooks:

Textbooks, attainment and reducing inequalities

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Introduction

The Summit enabled a high-quality debate on international experiences of using textbooks, from countries that either routinely use textbooks or are interested in introducing them to improve education standards. The event, hosted by The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for School Standards, in collaboration with Cambridge Assessment and the Royal Society, provided a platform for the latest international evidence on textbook best practice, including insights from the USA, China, Singapore, Hong Kong, Germany, Portugal, Kazakhstan, Iceland, Latvia, Mexico, Denmark, Poland, Sweden, Finland, Estonia and the UK.

Issues explored at the Summit included changes in the development and use of textbooks, how teachers can use textbooks to reduce workload, and the incentives and barriers to promoting high-quality textbooks.

**Professor Tom McLeish, FRS, Chair of the Royal Society Education Committee,
United Kingdom**

McLeish welcomed delegates from the 16 countries and set out the aims of the Summit - to collaborate and learn how to create high-quality textbooks and ensure their use across varied education systems.

**The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for School Standards, Department for Education,
United Kingdom**

The Minister started by applauding the shared desire among delegates of all nationalities to reverse the trend which has seen textbooks become worryingly unfashionable, and spoke of the UK teachers who were bucking this trend by using high-quality textbooks instead of spending their time and school resources



creating their own worksheets. Shared data revealed that just 8% of teachers surveyed expect to be using textbooks – one of the best workload reduction tools available – in most or all of their lessons by 2020, working against the UK government’s and the profession’s desire to reduce teacher workload. It also showed that a reduction in the use of textbooks in schools was also an issue in other jurisdictions around the world, despite repeated evidence from high-performing jurisdictions pointing to the importance of systematic use of textbooks in educational quality and in improvement policies.

Citing the recent Policy Exchange report ‘[Completing the Revolution: Delivering on the promise of the 2014 National Curriculum](#)’ by John Blake, the Minister highlighted the report’s explanation of how textbooks can reduce workload and bridge the ‘final foot’ in converting the higher standards set in England’s revised National Curriculum into both expert teaching and the widespread use of high-quality resources. The Minister also referred to Tim Oates’ paper ‘[Why Textbooks Count](#)’, suggesting in which Oates clarified the stark difference in attitudes towards textbook use between the highest-performing jurisdictions for maths achievement and England, with the latter seeing only 10% of teachers use maths textbooks as the basis for their teaching compared to 70% in Singapore.

The Minister lamented the vast sums of money spent creating and reproducing bespoke curriculum materials suggested that textbooks only need to save teachers five minutes a day to be good value for money, a possibility made even more attractive given textbooks could save teachers around 18 minutes a day, according to research produced by the UK Publishers Association. He ended highlighting that the Summit is an important milestone in returning textbooks to the heart of England’s classrooms.

Read The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP’s full speech [here](#).



Overview: the issues, research and policy analysis

Tim Oates CBE, Director, Assessment Research and Development, Cambridge Assessment, United Kingdom

Oates offered a perplexing dichotomy, asking why, if we had a drug which had so many beneficial outcomes and no adverse side-effects we would prescribe it to everyone, so why, when the benefits of textbooks are well known and yet established over decades of trials, is their use declining? Positing a reason for the decline in the use of textbooks in UK schools, Oates suggested their reputation as a highly traditional instrument and being seen as somehow retrograde, as well as suspicions between the publishing industry and the education sector, were at play.

In reasserting the vital role of textbooks in system improvement, curriculum coherence and support for teachers, Oates was keen to make clear that publishers, experts and research are not seeking to establish that textbooks should be the sole materials used in schools but should represent an equitable part of a balanced ecosystem including linked online resources, and teacher-designed tasks and materials.

Positive attributes of textbooks highlighted by Oates included the glaring fact posited by Jane Mann at Cambridge University Press that they do not go 'ping' as digital devices do, and so aid concentration. Also that they are a physical representation of a subject, revealing, right from the beginning, the length and direction of the journey to mastery students will be taken on.

In response to teachers' fears that textbooks don't allow for personalised learning for students working at different speeds in one class, Oates pointed to the article '[How Asian teachers polish each lesson to perfection](#)' by Stigler and Stevenson, showing teachers how they can ensure each unique child with different learning needs can be serviced by a well-designed lesson.

'A Cambridge Approach to Textbooks' is published [here](#).



Professor Bill Schmidt, Michigan State University, USA

Schmidt argued that state or country-mandated textbooks contribute to the lessening of inequality as well as praising the coherent curriculums of high-performing jurisdictions, which communicate this coherence through textbooks – Japan especially. The Professor passionately responded to stories of teachers spending time and money at photocopiers and searching online for bespoke worksheets by stating that the single biggest threat to curriculum coherence lies in teachers making their own learning materials. He gave some comparisons between Japan, the USA and Slovenia to illustrate the importance of aligning national standards with curriculum programme content.

Professor Schmidt finished by warning that web-based curriculum materials were so often presented by individuals with a web-based focus (user experience designers etc.) rather than individuals with knowledge of the subject or an understanding of curriculum coherence, lessening the value of these digital materials.

Bill Schmidt's paper '[A Coherent Curriculum](#)'.



Textbooks and improving the teaching of knowledge-rich curricula

Professor Dr Eckhardt Fuchs, Director, Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, Germany

Professor Fuchs advised that a holistic approach, looking at the whole cycle of a textbook from inception to production through to use in the classroom, is more useful than being focused on just content. He shared Tim Oates' concerns about a rapid decline in textbook research and a lack of academic interest in the area, making the field incoherent and the variety of approaches to textbook development difficult to navigate.

Fuchs was positive about the potential of digital resources – Germany has seen a concerted political effort to digitise schools – but advocated moving away from the print vs digital debate and focusing on how new digital media can influence traditional textbooks.

Lee Fei Chen, Head of Publishing, Times Publishing Limited, Singapore

From her rich experience acting on the state's behalf in commissioning and approving textbooks, and now as a publisher, she shared Singapore's educational reform as a case study for the successful use of textbooks as a low-cost, country-wide tool to ensure reform was implemented uniformly in all schools. She explained the origins of Singapore Maths, the models underpinning it, and the crucial role of high-quality textbooks in communicating these models to teachers.

She warned of relying on digital resources in regions where internet access isn't uniform – textbooks may appear to be a longer route to change but they work everywhere, for everyone.

Lee declared that no teacher, no matter how passionate, has the stamina to teach an entire year's curriculum, mark, then go home and prepare lessons for the next day, every night; a workload issue she believes can be overcome by introducing textbooks as a supporting resource in the classroom.

Rickard Vinde, Managing Director, Swedish Association of Educational Publishers, Sweden

Vinde warned that the lack of textbooks has undermined the professional status of teachers in Sweden and contributed to the major shortage of teachers, which is one of the largest problems facing Swedish schools. The country's attitude to textbooks is still shaped by a government bill in 1976 in which the then Minister of Education stated that "textbooks seem to be limiting and conservative".

To combat this, Vinde urged that textbooks must be viewed as an integral part of a school's infrastructure, as much as the building itself and those within it, but in order for the reputation of textbooks to be restored, more dialogue involving educational publishers, researchers, the state and the educational system must be encouraged; something Stockholm has actioned with the Stockholm Textbook Policy and which Vinde and colleagues have addressed with the development of a quality policy and textbook checklist. Suspicions towards publishers from the education sector also need to be addressed by highlighting the number of ex-teachers and those from the education sector working to create textbooks.

He argued that a refocussing of governments' digital strategies is also required to clarify that it is not a case of choosing between digital and print curriculum resources, rather an understanding of how both types can be developed and used side by side to facilitate blended learning.

Read Rickard Vinde's full speech [here](#).

Supporting teachers to access, evaluate and use textbooks effectively

Dr Nuno Crato, Professor of Mathematics and Statistics, University of Lisbon, Portugal

Crato credited textbooks as playing a key role in Portugal's 2015 PISA and TIMSS results, which saw the country placed above Finland for maths. Dr Crato, as former Minister of Education, charted Portugal's history with textbook use (2011 - 2015), and from the 1930s to 1970s when only one textbook was available, chosen by the Ministry of Education; after which there was no systematic control and schools were given almost total freedom, with teachers choosing their own textbooks; to the year 2000 onwards.

Increasing attention was paid to attaining measurable results, with the emphasis on applying a good, knowledge-rich curriculum. Textbook quality improved greatly from 2008 due to the development of an evaluation and certification system involving subject expert groups.

Review Dr Crato's slides [here](#).

Dr Debbie Morgan, Director for Primary, National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics, United Kingdom and Dr Xingfeng Huang, Associate Professor, School of Education, Shanghai Normal University, China

The joint presentation described the very productive collaboration between Shanghai and England on the teaching of maths, including the use of textbooks. Dr Morgan went on to point out that personal teaching experience and more recent research showed that textbooks had received a negative reputation and were abandoned as they were not used well, and instead of supporting teaching were used to replace teaching, with children simply working through workbooks at their own pace.

The presenters suggested that education systems needed to explain that teachers shouldn't feel their professional creativity and ability to inspire a classroom is stifled by using a textbook, much like a well-written play doesn't take away from an actor's performance or creativity but will rather stimulate and inspire it; in essence, textbooks give teachers the 'what' clearly and effectively and it is still up to the teacher's expertise and personal knowledge of their students to deliver this and decide 'how' to ignite their students' imaginations. Dr Morgan also suggested that what was needed was increased professional understanding by teachers on how best to use textbooks.

Lawrence Foley, Director of Education, Future Academies, United Kingdom and Emma Lennard, Director of Core Knowledge, Civitas, United Kingdom

Foley focused on how the Future Academies Trust ensured consistency across its schools using textbooks. Having written their own textbooks on geography, history and English, after a few years it became necessary to produce teacher guides reflecting on the textbooks. The Trust then wanted teachers to annotate these guides themselves, scripting and crafting their own way to deliver on the knowledge in the book in the drive to improve their own teaching.



Lennard told of her early days in the classroom; with so much value being placed on bespoke teacher-made resources, she feared being seen as a lazy teacher, going so far as to hide her use of textbooks in the classroom to avoid colleagues deeming her pedagogical approach to be passive or dispassionate. Ms Lennard pointed out that, contrary to commonly held beliefs, her success was in a deprived area of the country, which indicated that the use of textbooks was not dependent upon the 'quality' of student. Indeed, she estimated that she had achieved more in a deprived area than might have been possible elsewhere. She finished by explaining the mission of the '[Core Knowledge Curriculum project](#)' which sees experts go into schools to support teachers in adopting textbooks in the classroom and integrating them into their curriculum planning.

Improving the use, development, production and supply of textbooks

Discussion was wide ranging in three key areas:

1. Two UK publishers present were clear that the sooner they were brought into discussions the more helpful they could be to the whole process. Jane Harley, the Chair of the Educational Publishers Council Board, added that publishers sought to achieve the highest quality standards and that this would be better achieved if they were brought into discussions at the beginning in order to work alongside those involved in curriculum change or specification development. Jane Mann of Cambridge reminded everybody that a textbook was not simply a textbook; it was a suite of resources which should include a teacher guide and potentially a student guide. Others in the room suggested a parent guide would be useful for home reinforcement.
2. Following on from this, David Weston of the UK Teacher Development Trust pointed out that training teachers in the use of textbooks and building that into the system was just as important as developing textbooks. Emma House from the UK Publishers Association asked whether publishers should offer to support the professional development of teachers in using textbooks, or possibly just give teachers the expertise to be 'smart shoppers'. Lee Fei Chen from Singapore emphasised that training for all teachers was

fundamental.

3. It became clear that there were many ways to run markets. Mexico works in partnership with publishers, encouraging a range of textbooks, bought centrally and made available to teachers free; teachers made the selection secure in the knowledge the books would be available. Finland works closely with commercial publishers. In the early 1990s Finland removed the approval system, and since then has relied on publishers' capability to produce curriculum-based learning materials. This has kept the quality of learning materials high and had a positive effect on development of learning. Iceland was clear on the significance of textbooks and was undertaking a strategic review focusing on improving attainment, good equity already being established. In 2001 Singapore had moved, when it had deemed publishers to be sufficiently improved, from a highly centralised approach to one of textbook authorisation, which had opened up the market. In Sweden, the drive for quality textbooks was being led by publishers, with the government joining it recently, having been convinced of the key role textbooks had to play in the system.

Conclusions

Tim Oates CBE, Director, Assessment Research and Development, Cambridge Assessment, United Kingdom

What the highly analytic and informed discussions of the Summit indicate is that any nation which ignores the benefits of high-quality textbooks and related online resources is foregoing powerful instruments for improvement and maintenance of educational quality. The Summit has clearly shown how textbook quality, patterns of use, approval processes and market arrangements need to be considered together, as different elements of coherent policy and practice. It is clear from the historical and current record that high-quality materials support the best teaching and reduce teacher workload. As the Swedish trade unionist Asa Fahlen put it recently: '...teachers are even more professional when they have a textbook...'. We need to get beyond the simplistic predictions of naïve futurologists who argue that 'print is dead', and in particular acknowledge that only by deeply understanding the ways in which textbooks have contributed to educational quality – remembering many things which have been taken for granted or ignored – that the materials of the future will build on the best and genuinely support educational improvement for all.

The Rt Hon Nick Gibb, Minister of State for School Standards, United Kingdom

The Minister closed proceedings on the promise that we are witnessing an emerging grassroots revolution against the negative textbook ethos among education professionals, before urging the international delegation to watch the UK for a sea change.

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List of delegates

We were delighted to be joined by leading education experts from around the world to share their insight and best practice in the design and application of textbooks.

Denmark

Cliff Hansen

Lise Nerlov

Alinea (Danish Education Publisher)

Alinea (Danish Education Publisher)

Estonia

Margus Tõnissaar

Foundation Innove, Education Ministry

Finland

Teuvo Sankila

Otava Publishing Company

Germany

Professor Dr Eckhardt Fuchs

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Iceland

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Latvia

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Zane Olina

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Nowa Era, Education Publisher
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Times Publishing Limited

Sweden

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Swedish National Agency for Education
Swedish Association of Educational Publishers

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Daisy Christodoulou
Christine Counsell
Charlotte Cutler
Susan Douglas
Lawrence Foley
Rt Hon Nick Gibb
Jane Harley
Annaliese Hendry
John Holman
Emma House
Paul Kett
Emma Lennard
Jane Mann
Tom Mcleish FRS
Lucie Meggitt
Rosalind Mist
Debbie Morgan
Tim Oates CBE
Stefano Pozzi
Sarah Robertson
Clare Sealy
Paul Smith
Amanda Speilman
David Weston
Victoria White
Elaine Wilson
Caroline Wright
Clive Wright

Policy Exchange
Reach Academy Feltham
Cambridge Assessment
No More Marking
Inspiration Trust
Department for Education
Eden Academy Trust
Future Academies
Department for Education
The Educational Publishers Council
The Little Consulting Company
The Wellcome Trust
Publishers Association
Department for Education
Civitas
Cambridge University Press (representing Cambridge Assessment)
The Royal Society
Department for Education
The Royal Society
National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics
Cambridge Assessment
Department for Education
The Royal Society
St Matthias Primary School
Future Academies Trust
Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
Teacher Development Trust
Department for Education
Department for Education
British Education Suppliers Association
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