

OXFORD UNIVERSITY NEWS RELEASE: Teachers should create National Curriculum

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Report says give teachers more say in the development of the national curriculum

Teachers need a bigger role in how the National Curriculum develops, according to the Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training. In a paper published today, the Review warns that the National Curriculum is currently too centrally prescriptive, and warns it will only develop successfully if teachers, not government or its agencies, become key players.

The author of the paper, Professor Richard Pring, from the Department of Education at Oxford University, says that teachers are best placed to know the social and cultural background of their school and the pupils, and that knowledge could feed into the way the national curriculum is taught. He suggests that teachers must be central players in curriculum development, critically scrutinising, and adapting to their contexts, any general principles which come from the centre.

Professor Pring said: 'To develop successfully, the national curriculum requires a knowledge of and a response to the social and cultural context of young learners – but in the light of the broader culture we have inherited. Only teachers are in the position to make the bridge between the two. For the 14-19 changes to work, there must be a transformation of teachers from 'curriculum deliverers' of someone else's curriculum, to 'curriculum creators'.

He added: 'Given the massive changes in society which affect all young people and given the problems which the Review has identified, is there not a need to reappraise, not just the details of the curriculum, but also the very nature of 'a national curriculum' and of 'whole curriculum planning'?'

The paper argues that the original aim of the National Curriculum, launched 20 years ago, was for the government and its agencies to take central control of what was taught in maintained schools up to the age of 16. However, the paper suggests the original model for the curriculum, which was intentionally detailed and prescriptive, needs to adapt to reflect changing times. It argues that 'one size will not fit all', and that a qualification-led curriculum gets in the way of more individually designed programmes.

The Review suggests that the government's current overhaul of 14-19 education, with the introduction of Diplomas and greater emphasis on work-based learning, provides an excellent opportunity to rethink the national curriculum.

The paper criticises the current target culture and its accompanying testing regime, something now eliminated in Wales. It argues that curriculum development must constantly revisit the question: 'What counts as an educated nineteen-year-old in this day and age?'. It concludes that the new Diplomas are 'rightly conceived' but will only succeed if they provide the flexible framework within which teachers can develop the curriculum, rather than be a set of prescriptions for the teacher.

For more information or to arrange an interview with Professor Richard Pring, please contact the University of Oxford Press Office on 01865 280534 or email press.office@admin.ox.ac.uk

Notes for Editors:

* The full *Issues Paper 7: The Whole Curriculum 14-19* is published online at www.nuffield14-19review.org.uk.

* The Nuffield Review, led by Professor Richard Pring, is an independent review of all aspects of 14-19 education and training: aims; quality of learning; curriculum; assessment; qualifications; progression to employment, training and higher education; providers; governance; policy. It has been funded for six years by the Nuffield Foundation, beginning in October 2003.

* The Nuffield Foundation is one of the UK's best-known charitable trusts and was established in 1943 by William Morris (Lord Nuffield), the founder of Morris Motors. Lord Nuffield wanted his Foundation to 'advance social well being', particularly through research and practical experiment. The Foundation aims to achieve this by supporting work which will bring about improvements in society, and which is founded on careful reflection and informed by objective and reliable evidence.

* For more information on the University of Oxford Department of Education, go to www.education.ox.ac.uk

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