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Curriculum roundtable:
Change process blueprint

Curriculum roundtable organised by EPI and edpol.net

November 26th, 2020

Comparing England with other jurisdictions, how might curriculum in England be best formulated and revised?

[Meeting report and edpol's conclusions and discussion points](#)

Attendees:

The Rt Hon David Laws, Executive Chairman, Education Policy Institute (chairing meeting)

John Blake, Head of Public Affairs and Engagement, Ark

Leora Cruddas, Chief Executive, Confederation of School Trusts

Professor Graham Donaldson, School of Education, Glasgow University

Dr Karen Edge, Reader in Education Leadership, UCL Institute of Education

Elizabeth Eppel, Senior Research Fellow, Victoria University of Wellington

Russell Hobby, Chief Executive, Teach First

Matt Hood, Principal, Oak National Academy

Peter Hyman, Co-Founder School 21, Co-Director, Big Education

Dr Bevil Luck, Senior Researcher, edpol

Laura McInerney, Co-Founder, Teacher Tapp

Tom Middlehurst, Curriculum and Inspection Specialist, ASCL

Bobbie Mills, Senior Researcher, School Systems and Performance, EPI

Hilary Spencer, Chief Executive, Ambition Institute

Patrick Wall, Founder, edpol.net

Supporting papers:

- *How leading education nations develop and reform their curriculum systems EPI*, November 2020 (see EPI and edpol.net)
- *A review and curriculum and assessment reform in England since 1987*, edpol, November 2020
- *Comparison of curriculum development in England and other countries (one pager)*, edpol, November 2020

DISCALIMER

The views and opinions below are largely attributed quotes (using initials) and paraphrasing of individual's comments: they reflect the discussion and therefore are not necessarily supported by all attendees. The conclusions have been drawn together by edpol to try and find areas of potential agreement, but there should be no inference of unanimity.

Method

This paper records large parts of the roundtable discussion, with many attributed quotes. The output has been reorganised into a process-related structure. The paper also refers to the supporting EPI

review, edpol's paper and edpol's stability presentation. The conclusions are an edpol attempt to find common ground.

Scope

This discussion is about curriculum formulation, content and revision. The principle concern is the process that determines the timing of reform, the contributors to this process and how they interact (e.g. relative authority, scope, contributions, relationships), the mechanisms to make this a repeatable and supported process and the use of research and evidence . Curriculum is taken to mean the specification of school and college activity, chiefly course content and sequencing. It does not refer to teaching pedagogy nor the extent to which curriculum is imposed or offers scope for discretion. It is acknowledged that both formative and summative assessment is closely tied to curriculum and it is hoped that a complete policy review process would take this into account.

Further work

The suggestions for discussion and research need far more work. This should include a more detailed study of how curriculum change is managed around the world.

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Conclusions from each section of this paper

Curriculum change and disruption in schools

- Curriculum change increases teacher workload and for a material period of time, lowers teacher productivity
- The frequency and extent of curriculum change should be at the minimum compatible with necessary change.

Primacy of political authority

- The primacy of political authority in education is acknowledged and it is not desirable to take education out of politics.
- This is particularly relevant when discussing the purpose of education.
- Politicians should not be involved in the detailed specification of curriculum content.

Periodic review

- Where curriculum change is necessary, it should be made on a consistent periodic basis. Once every ten years is a good candidate for consideration, with formal approval needed to introduce intra- period change (see below for rolling, incremental review and refinement)
- This would need cross party agreement (after the event there were two absenters from this conclusion: one that there should be a review every five years and one that there would be no need for a review, unless there was a change in subject matter evidence – for both see section 5.1.2)

Smaller changes

- Smaller stages of reform and error correction are helpful, if they are well supported and can delay wholesale change.
- Smaller changes need to be limited, to ensure that programmes of work do not need constant updating.

Wider considerations for implementation

- Curriculum change should consider teachers' existing implementation workload together with their capacity to absorb more change, plus, the ceiling created by the available teaching hours in the week.
- Curriculum change must be coordinated with other education policy, not only assessment and accountability, but all areas that will affect the running of the school or college.

Classroom considerations for implementation

- A protocol for curriculum change should be agreed with practitioners and include minimum preparation time before introduction; timely publication of support material and exemplification of curriculum changes (to assist rather than be mandated)

Use of expertise

- There must be a central role for subject matter expertise in curriculum development.

Consultation

- The importance of fostering practitioner buy-in should be recognised by mandatory consultation during curriculum reviews (at the same time, the ultimate decision-making authority of ministers must be recognised).
- Consensus seeking should be specifically ruled in or out as part of a process
- Practitioner expertise and experience should be channelled into the curriculum review process, including via practitioner representative bodies, sector and professional bodies
- A review framework should specify other stakeholder engagement.

Formalising process

- All main political parties should agree a process for curriculum review and reform.
- A replicable process has additional merits: it can be planned, prepared for and improved upon. Given the needs to have predictable change in curriculum, an agreed replicable process is desirable.

A coordinating body

- A statutory body should be set up with cross party agreement. It should be a scaled down version of the National Curriculum Council or Qualification and Curriculum Authority. Its terms of reference should be as narrow as possible, but sufficient to run an agreed long-term curriculum review process.

Further discussion and research

Periodic review/rolling reviews in stages

- The "Hong Kong approach" provides a mechanism to develop curriculum in stages, but does it threaten the coherence of the curriculum? How well has it worked in other countries and what exactly are the objections of its detractors?
- Is there evidence of countries reviewing curriculum by subject area? (This has been closer to the NZ experience since 2007 -EE)

Use of evidence

- It is agreed that evidence of many kinds is an important part of the curriculum review process. The requirements should be better codified by looking at home nation and other jurisdiction practice.
- The quality of evidence is variable, could the edpol's idea of a CEEP contribute to the solution?

Authority

- Part of the cross-party agreement should be to agree the hierarchical relationship between ministerial authority, disciplinary expertise, evidence, practitioner and wider input and consultation.
- Mechanisms that allow some local variation and experimentation should also be accommodated. This is an area for further research.

Implementation

- Curriculum change does not take place in a vacuum. Interdependencies abound including assessment, accountability and league tables. A full process needs to incorporate these areas into an implementation model.

Radical change and education's purpose

- The introduction of more radical change in the curriculum should be tied to a review of education's purpose.
- Review of purpose should be acknowledged as a fundamental exercise that starts with an agreed process. The process must be comprehensive enough to capture all relevant stakeholders, prioritise between competing objectives in the curriculum and to have impact, the process should have the respect and support of those with the authority to change the curriculum (now or in the future).

1. Background

1.1 Purpose of this paper

The roundtable discussion highlighted differences of opinions in many areas, '*Today we have heard the juxtaposition of good evidence versus bad evidence; local versus national; consensus versus quality; politics versus expertise*'(KE). This is helpful since these disagreements are also heard in the wider education community. This paper is an attempt to find the common ground.

1.2 Developing a framework

This paper suggests there could be a sensible framework to regulate curriculum reform. It would not mean "depoliticising curriculum management". Political control is maintained. It would mean taking a longer view and working to certain conventions or rules that regulate the formulation and review of curricula. This would require cross party agreement, without compromising a government's right to direct change. In most circumstances, change to curriculum would be gradual. However, a mechanism is suggested that could trigger more fundamental reform of the curriculum.

1.3 Benefits of a framework

The EPI reviews of country practice and the edpol papers layout how far England differs to other nations in its management of curriculum formulation and review. Where nearly all countries -work to a long-term plan, support reform with established institutions and consider research and evidence - the approach in England is inconstant and unpredictable. A good framework for curriculum review would provide for the necessary support, expertise and input. It would provide the best possible outcome, with the no subsequent churn and correction. It should get things right first time. Not only would this provide the best curriculum, it would save time and money and reduce teacher workload, by providing a settled and predictable environment to schools and colleges.

1.4 Curriculum change and the disruption in schools

The premise of the original edpol paper, "*The need for policy stability in education*" was that policy churn and change was disruptive to teachers. Consequently, the education system performance is sub-optimal. The disruptive impact of curriculum change was voiced in the roundtable by several contributors, particularly those who had been teachers.

First, there is increasing workload, '*The reason I was driven to look at stability in the curriculum is because of workload. Every time we change the curriculum, we have to redo lesson plans, timetables and re-write the lessons*'(LMc). This has had an impact on teacher retention. The 2017 DfE survey highlighted workload and changes in policy as the two main factors impacting teacher retention (see edpol, *The need for education policy stability*, pages 20 -22). With 30% of teachers leaving their work after five years, and with all of the expense of teacher education and training invested, there is a colossal waste of resource.

Second, for long periods of time in the classroom, teachers operate below their capability. '*For teacher development and professional expertise, swifter turnover of policy is a problem, it does not help teachers to develop mastery and expertise. With any new thing that is introduced, you spend a certain amount of time familiarising yourself, then you work out how you're going to do it and then you refine your practice over time*'(HS). This is incredibly important. The effectiveness of a new curriculum is dependent on its delivery by teachers and college lecturers (repeated studies show the

impact of teacher quality on student outcomes). Clearly, the curriculum product must be considered alongside the product's delivery. If not, *'Teachers can become a little bit like medicine balls, in a process where the ground is shifting because they are not doing whatever what people want them to do next'*(EE).

Conclusions

- Curriculum change increases teacher workload and for a material period, lowers teacher productivity.
- The frequency and extent of curriculum change should be at the minimum compatible with necessary change.

2. Recap on discussion

2.1 Primacy of political authority

There was general agreement that the primacy of political authority must be acknowledged when it came to management of the curriculum. *'Politics matters in this stuff and I get uncomfortable if we want to remove politicians from a process in which they were elected. It's also dangerous. Curriculum is not value neutral. It is laden with values'* (MH). The whole education agenda is infused with politics, and education is always a material subject in an election, *'Politics is contested, and you win based on a manifesto. It would be impossible to get this out of education'* (PH). Curriculum is inherently political because of the ability to drive fundamental change through the national curriculum *'It is right that there is a political dimension to the curriculum; it is innately political and philosophical. Where we place emphasis is inherently political and philosophical'*(HS)

This political authority is most evident when we discuss the purpose of education. Apparent in the recent reform of curriculum in Scotland and especially Wales, reviewing the purpose of education can lead to more fundamental reform. In both countries, this reform was authorised and improved by the national government.

There was dissent, or more nuanced positions, with respect to how far the political authority should be extended. Two types of concern were expressed, one, that while a minister may have legitimacy, he or she may not have the experience or knowledge to lead on detailed matters, and two, that where ministers are involved in the detailed specification of curriculum content, such as mandating certain text or books, their can be undesirable consequences. *'Should a minister be specifying the details of a good English literature program e.g. this particular book should be read. Should the minister determine what goes on in every school?'* (DL) and in particular it was said, *'the novels that Michael Gove liked shouldn't form the basis of the GCSE syllabus. There are many problems, for example, they are all white and we need diversity'* (PH).

So, while political authority might not be questioned, the wisdom of detailed involvement could be legitimately challenged.

Conclusions

- The primacy of political authority in education is acknowledged and it is not desirable to take education out of politics.
- This is particularly relevant when discussing the purpose of education.
- Politicians should not be involved in the detailed specification of curriculum content

2.2 Periodic review

In England, there have been many changes to the Primary, Secondary and FE curricula over the last thirty years (see edpol, 'A review...since 1987'). This contrasts with the five countries reviewed in the EPI paper (Japan, South Korea, Finland, Scotland and New Zealand)

*Most countries in this review either undergo curriculum reform on a planned cyclical basis, with each cycle spanning about ten years as in the case of Finland and Japan, or else they have followed a deliberately slow process of design and consultation. **Finland's** curriculum is renewed every ten years or so. The most recent design process commenced in earnest in 2012, although extensive planning preceded it, and was completed by 2017. **Japan**, like Finland, renews its curriculum ever ten years or so. Deliberations feeding into the most recent reforms spanned about two years (How leading education nations develop and reform their curriculum systems: EPI November 2020)*

Understandably, given England's frequent change, the unavoidable disruption and the markedly different approach of other 'successful countries', a number of people voiced support for limiting change to curriculum to every ten years, '*So, something like a 10 year stability plan is really important, but it shouldn't be a rewrite every 10 years*'. Also, '*Doing that [review] every ten years seems sensible and there may be tweaks to attitudes and so forth as governments change with a mandate to do certain things*'

However, given the five-year cycle of British Governments, is a review every ten years likely to be acceptable? Typically, every other government would be excluded from considering curriculum change. To allow ministers to initiate change within the ten-year period, perhaps it should be categorised as exceptional. A gated process could be instituted, requiring formal authorisation. For example, an intra-period curriculum review, might need formal agreement from a select committee and/or Parliament.

A reason for an intra-period review might be to explore education "purpose". This is a more fundamental call to reset all or particular parts of the curriculum. It is covered further at the end of this paper. There are other possible ways to manage flexibility with a ten-year periodic review (see below for cyclical-reviews and evolutionary change).

Conclusions

- Where curriculum change is necessary, it should be made on a consistent periodic basis. Once every ten years is a good candidate for consideration, with formal approval needed to introduce intra- period change.
- This would need cross party agreement.

2.3 Smaller changes

It would be helpful to be able to make smaller, evolutionary change, for example, when there is wide support for correcting an evident error. With experience from working in many different countries, it was noted that '*They have a smoother reform cycle and smoother, more gradual change. Small changes, they do not overhaul*' (KE). This suggested the idea of refining an existing curriculum. '*Is there a process of error correction, in curriculum design, so that we can gradually home in on what works?*' (RH). For example, '*There is a broad consensus that there is excessive grammar in the primary curriculum at the moment*' (RH).

There are potentially several challenges in *'tweaking'* the curriculum.

'First, is it possible to look at [these smaller changes] without opening the floodgates? Can we have error correction without ideological extreme going one way or the other' (RH) and one part of the curriculum is opened up for correction, *'how do you get that level of rational debate when elements of the curriculum are intensely ideological?' (RH)*. This ideological intensity can overpower formal committees and stakeholder groups. One contributor subsequently suggested that this sort of change might be handled at a local level or within a MAT. Another that the change could be managed through changes in assessment rather than in the curriculum.

Second, unless controlled, smaller changes could still create damage: *'A significant problem at the moment is the sense that it's all in flux all the time, when in fact much of the content doesn't change hugely, but it changes enough and often enough that teachers end up having to redo their programmes of work each year, rather than being able to focus on refining and honing their practice' (HS)*.

Third, there is a danger that every change creates a sense of anticipation and uncertainty. All change detracts from the preferred settled environment, *'The problem of evolution is the extension of uncertainty – you see this happening with the Ofsted framework, where there is a period of stasis in advance of a new Ofsted framework being published, while people wait to see what's in it and stop focussing on getting better at the things in the existing framework' (HS)*.

However, despite these qualifications, there was support for gradual change, rather than wholesale change. *'Process change for curriculum is always going to be imperfect, in some respects it will be wrong, but the big bang approach to reform has huge risks' (RH)*.

Conclusions

- Smaller stages of reform and error correction are helpful, if they are well supported and can delay wholesale change.
- Smaller changes need to be limited, to ensure that programmes of work do not need constant updating.

2.4 Wider considerations for implementation

Several contributors emphasised the danger of considering curriculum change in isolation. These points are quite distinct from the the need to coordinate curriculum and assessment (see introduction). It is concerned with three different areas: the capacity to absorb change; the limited number of hours in the school day and the likelihood that simultaneous policy changes create unintended consequences.

An appeal was made by one contributor to monitor teacher capacity, to measure existing change and anticipated change. *'Change relates to what is happening with the policy landscape of the time. Are we looking at teacher workload?' (HS)*. This point was also taken up in the edpol Stability paper and has been the focus on DfE work in the last three years. However, there is no evident coordination across the DfE to monitor the impact of multiple initiatives.

There is then the issue of curriculum content overload. The English curriculum reform of 1992 allowed disciplinary experts to independently construct their curricula, and collectively this was too much for schools to teach in the allotted time. It had to be re-written several years later. *'There is a capacity issue. Do we have a view on how much curriculum can be managed on a school day? What*

capacity does the system have? How much can we do at any point of time without overwhelming everyone? There is an amount of cognitive load in the system that we don't necessarily fully taken into account' (HS).

There are some sobering examples of curriculum reform crashing together with related but uncoordinated initiatives. Michael Gove's reforms were preceded by changes in assessment boundaries, then changes in GCSE grading, EBacc and Progress 8. During this, curriculum reform seemed like an impossible challenge for many schools. In New Zealand, when the 2007 reforms were being introduced, we heard that *'A new government came in and changed tac - they added high-stakes testing which threw things off. This completely threw the teachers and took away focus on the curriculum' (RH).*

Conclusions

- Curriculum change should consider teachers' existing implementation workload together with their capacity to absorb more change, plus, the ceiling created by the available teaching hours in the week.
- Curriculum change must be coordinated with other education policy, not only assessment and accountability, but all areas that will affect the running of the school or college.

2.5 Classroom considerations for implementation

The implementation load of curriculum change can be reduced through good preparation. Curriculum change is often notified too close to new academic years; there is insufficient alignment with assessment; support material is not available. The greatest challenge is to rewrite lesson plans and content from scratch, particularly daunting for an NQT. There is an opportunity to change this. *'Exemplification [could be] a real opportunity here. It just eliminates a huge amount of that work. It's not 'teach this' it's 'here's a starter for 10 for you' (MH).*

Conclusion

- A protocol for curriculum change should be agreed with practitioners and include minimum preparation time before introduction; timely publication of support material and exemplification of curriculum changes (to assist rather than be mandated)

2.6 Use of expertise

There are wide ranging views on curriculum content and therefore who is best placed to build the curriculum. The argument for disciplinary knowledge was well put, referencing many respected figures¹. There was a concern that committing to consensus could exclude the expertise that is necessary to build a knowledge orientated curriculum. This was all reflected in the group discussion.

¹ *'As Basil Bernstein writes, all disciplinary knowledge is a form of public knowledge through which society debates about itself and its future. The curriculum has a purpose beyond education. It is an entitlement and the first principle of social justice and we might be in danger of losing that point. Referencing Michael Young's concept of curriculum, the curriculum of powerful knowledge is concerned with epistemology and truth. History cannot be reduced to a convenient story in the serving the interest of any group, including the government of the day. It cuts both ways. Mountstevens said that we make our arguments in history on the basis of historical rigour. Or as Christine Counsell puts it, we must keep returning to the scholarship within our subjective domain in order to make good curriculum decisions.'*

Not all views are reconcilable, but careful consideration of people's positions helps to find common ground.

There is a concern that important principles are weakened as the impact of curriculum expertise is diluted, *'We need to care deeply about what children know and what they are able to do. There is a compelling social justice argument and it worries me that we might be in danger of privileging teacher agency over that issue'(LC)*. Similarly, that consensus building might favour practitioner design of the curriculum over expert knowledge, *'There is a strong argument to say that curriculum must be constructed by those with strong disciplinary knowledge within disciplinary communities and not through an arbitrary process of consensus building'(LC)*.

However, those that have been involved in recent curricula reviews, where there was high levels of consultation, also agreed that the input of expertise was an important ingredient. *'Wales moved from a ministerial approach to one that was much more collaborative - between the profession and the wider community. 200 Pioneer schools wrote the curriculum with academic input'(GD)*. In New Zealand, where there was also a highly consultative process (See EPI paper) this was also the case. Academics and subject experts played a key role. In fact, the EPI study showed how permanent committees in most countries maintained a long-standing tradition of knowledge.

So, the issue here is not whether there is a role for expertise in the curriculum development, but how to ensure it is protected. There is still otherwise a question of the balance of the curriculum and the relative importance of the subject knowledge. This is addressed below.

Conclusion

- There must be a central role for subject matter expertise in curriculum development.

2.7 Consultation

"Consultation" is generally used below to refer to the engagement of practitioner and other stakeholders (students, employers, parents, carers and so forth). Gathering "evidence" and using "expertise" above covers research, academic and non-teaching expertise. Consultation can take place to create buy-in, to capture opinions and knowledge and even to "co-construct" the curriculum.

Many contributors talked about the merit of consultation in order to gain practitioner buy-in, but there were also concerns that this could lead to "consensus building". Consensus building per se is not a bad thing. It is a matter of concern where consensus becomes the primary objective and other important principles are sacrificed or compromised. This might be called "consensus seeking". If consensus building is then a process to gain support and buy-in, without necessarily diluting important principles, and potentially having other benefits, then presumably it could be a good thing. Finally, consultation can take place without trying to create any type of consensus. It is not a necessary condition and can be explicitly ruled out. With all of this in mind, it would be helpful to consider the merits of consultation.

One strong argument for consultation is to get buy-in so people accept change. *It's about the conversation not the consensus, including all the people who live in the society. Parents and teachers. If you don't include them in the process, they are constantly re-litigating about what they want the schools to be doing'(RH)*. And again, with experience from many countries: *'What I observe in 'successful countries', is a high level of professional buy-in because they have used evidence gathering as much to get buy-in as for evidentiary support' (ME)*.

Another strong argument is that consultation and buy-in drives teacher and headteacher motivation. *'you can get buy-in, so headteachers and educationalist feel they have some ownership -and they have to implement it'* and *'Ownership by teachers is critical. If they don't believe in it, then it won't happen. If you want real change, rather than the illusion of change, you must engage those at the sharp end. If you impose it on teachers, then it is a pale shadow of what it should be'*(GD) An objection to this argument is that examples tend to come from smaller countries, where consultation can be widespread. However, Japan's curriculum reform deploys wide consultation. Handled in the right way, presumably practitioners see that their representative, sector and professional bodies have put their views forward.

There was also wide support to gain better practitioner knowledge of what works, what does not. *'I don't want complete consensus, but you do get better outcomes with more contributions. Expertise does not reside in one head. Wider input generally gives you a better product'*(HS).

An interesting question was raised about a tendency for the teaching profession to resist change: *'I wonder whether there is a fundamental resistance or conservatism in the teaching profession. Can you get good curriculum with collaboration and consent? There was a strong kickback against Kate Green saying they don't want change – but these people were probably saying the same thing ten years ago'*(RH). This may be a problem if the intention is to seek consensus, but it is not if the exercise of consultation is to help drive buy-in, to overcome what might be very real resistance to change.

In Wales teachers had a very strong influence on the curriculum. *'This created the curriculum for Wales, using co-construction. It's moved from the top-down accountability to lateral accountability. It is important to invest in professional learning. Practitioners need to be curriculum makers not just deliverers'*(GD). This would concern those that feel there may be insufficient leadership from subject matter experts. Is this concern merited? Perhaps, but the important point is the process has been consciously designed to consult in a certain manner. It is authorised by the minister who can then accept or reject the recommendations that come forward. Any amount of expertise could be involved in the process, alongside co-construction. The process defines the type of consultation.

There were several appeals to ensure that engagement is wide ranging. Again, this was to garner insight and knowledge, but also to make the process more efficient, to plan change and coordinate, rather than to respond piecemeal. *'We also need wider stakeholder engagement. Experience in the DfE is that we have sudden focus, like financial management after the 2008 recession. You get the same on me-too, climate safety. There is a need to think about how you bring in a wider view, so you know what is current, so that people with a legitimate interest can feed into the process. We do want to equip people to deal with the real world'*(HS).

Employer engagement was also widely supported but there was a dissenting voice *'Employers should train their own staff. Other nations spend far more money on training'*(JB). This is probably another of the false dichotomies that arose. There may well be a legitimate concern about the extent to which employers rely on the public sector to prepare and train their workforce, but it is surely a matter of degree. Where the dividing lines of responsibility lie presumably should be understood through discussion.

Conclusions

- The importance of fostering practitioner buy-in should be recognised by mandatory consultation during curriculum reviews (at the same time, the ultimate decision-making authority of ministers should be recognised).
- Practitioner representative bodies, sector and professional bodies should agree how they channel practitioner expertise and experience into the curriculum review process
- Consensus seeking should be specifically ruled in or out as part of a process
- A review framework should specify other stakeholder engagement

2.8 Formalising process

Process is the foundation of any operational improvement and whether the objective is to change or preserve the status quo, process can ensure that change is effective and efficient. Process is 'a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end'. The above conclusions could be enacted to create a formal process.

The roundtable discussion was difficult at times because process and product were assumed to be interdependent. Yes, the two are inevitably intertwined, but process is not fixed and can be set independently. On the one hand it was remarked that '*process was more important than product because they wanted to get buy-in*'(RH) and on the other, '*There is a problem of focusing on process and consensus and not the product - you detach curriculum in particular subjects from the scholarship. This stuff has to be done by experts*'(LC). From there it was not difficult to get to entrenched positions:

- *I am concerned over anything that values process over outcome.*
- *The process is not as important as the product.*

These concerns are no doubt well founded, because of the way certain processes have been enacted. However, this does not mean that process per se is a dangerous thing. It is not helped that process is also conflated with the '*consultation process*'. This need not be the case. Any sequence of events is a process.

Conclusions

- All parties should agree a process for curriculum review and reform.
- A replicable process has additional merits: it can be planned, prepared for and improved upon. Given the needs to have predictable change in curriculum, an agreed replicable process is desirable.

2.9 A coordinating body

Considering the roundtable output, the EPI review and the edpol papers, it is clear that curriculum management can take many forms. In England, the most helpful initiative would be to agree a repeatable process that can provide all of the necessary curriculum change, with the minimum amount of disruption in schools and colleges. Should that gain cross party agreement, the question arises as to who runs the process when it is called into play?

All countries covered in the EPI review maintained advisory bodies and standing committees or agencies to assist in a process of curriculum renewal. This provides an infrastructure to maintain momentum on a long-term plan, to gather evidence and to coordinate change with other bodies.

	Finland Type 1	South Korea Type 2	New Zealand Type 1	Japan Type 2	Scotland Type 1	England Type 2
Actors and Institutions	<p>WIDE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Agency (EDUFI) Advisory group 30 Working groups 	<p>WIDE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Education and Korean Institute for Curriculum and Evaluations (KICE) Advisory committee 	<p>WIDE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry of Education Advisory panel Writing panels 	<p>WIDE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Council for Education Special Committee for Promotion of Education Council for Education Rebuilding (ERC) Advisory Body 	<p>WIDE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scottish Qualification Agency Learning and Teaching Scotland HMIE 	<p>NARROW *</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Ministry of Education" - DfE

For more than two decades, England maintained some of this institutional structure, as outlined in the edpol curriculum paper. However, secondary support was ended in 2011/12 and all that remains is the Standards and Testing Agency, focused on reception to KS2.

The National Curriculum Council was disbanded just five years after its establishment in 1988. Its replacement in 1997, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, was marginalised by the National Strategies, then weakened as it was broken up into the NAA, QCDA and STA. It was finally scrapped in 2011, giving unconstrained power to the Secretary of State. (edpol paper 'A review..since 1987')

The NCC, QCA and QCDA were found to be necessary, even with the contribution of various reviews and commissions led by the likes of Dearing, Tomlinson and Rose. It seems hard to believe that coherent, planned review and reform can take place in the future, without the support of some institution. Political balance would be a concern, but can be managed through appointment mechanisms. These must be solvable problems.

There will also be a concern that any bureaucratic body will tend towards growth, increasing its remit over time. The terms of reference of the QCA are listed in the appendix. Some of these could be pared back, some reside with associated bodies (e.g. OFQUAL and STA); others might be added such as benchmarking against international practice, but preferably this would reside elsewhere. These matters can be addressed in an organisation's founding articles

Conclusion

- A statutory body should be set up with cross party agreement. It should be a scaled down version of the National Curriculum Council or Qualification and Curriculum Authority. Its terms of reference should be as narrow as possible, but sufficient to run an agreed long-term curriculum review process.

3. Further discussion and research

3.1 Periodic review in stages

A suggestion was made to look at the Hong Kong model with the benefit of avoiding the disruption caused by a 'big bang' across education stages. *'Hong Kong does it on a rolling basis, it starts with key stage one, then you start on key stage 2 and then 3, and then 4 - and then you come back to the beginning. You are thinking about particular groups and cohorts and what makes sense for them all the way through'* (LMC)

There was an objection to this approach in a discussion after the roundtable, that is, to ensure 'coherence' many things have to be brought into line together and quickly. This includes the curriculum across all stages, with all summative assessment and with the accountability framework.

Tim Oates was quoted as a person who has learnt this through experience, having been involved in Labour's Primary review and Michael Gove's wider review.

Another staged approach might be to work across subject matter areas. Most of the concern expressed about curriculum change was, in practice, largely restricted to just two areas: History and English. In most other areas, the changes are less significant and less controversial. Maths might sit somewhere between the two groups.

Further discussion and research

- The "Hong Kong approach" provides a mechanism to develop curriculum in stages, but does it threaten the coherence of the curriculum? How well has it worked in other countries and what exactly are the objections of its detractors?
- Is there evidence of countries reviewing curriculum by subject area?

3.2 Use of Evidence

There was agreement that evidence was critical in curriculum review. This might include subject expert input; comparative studies from overseas; formal feedback from previous changes to the curriculum; other teacher, student, parent and employer surveys; neuroscience and behavioural research.

	Finland Type 1	South Korea Type 2	New Zealand Type 1	Japan Type 2	Scotland Type 1	England Type 2
Use of evidence and expertise	HIGH • Finnish Education Evaluation Centre • Research, Evaluation Surveys	MEDIUM? • KICE Research • Monitoring and Evaluation of Policies	MEDIUM • International Surveys • Teacher Surveys • International Critiques • Evidence Synthesis	MEDIUM • National Assessment of Academic Ability • National Institute for Education Policy Research	LOW/MEDIUM • Criticised for Low Usage • 2017 Research Strategy	LOW

The use of research in the EPI review group (above) is generally helped by standing committees that draw together evidence for both policy makers and practitioners. These are large influential organisations that can maintain institutional memory and expertise. This addresses a concern made by a few contributors, questioning the quality of evidence: *'One can say they have evidence, but the standards of that evidence really matter and it's not easy to understand what that standard is'* (MH). As the EPI study concludes, a consistent approach is needed and in a contested area it would be helpful to have trust as well as expertise.

Taken together it is clear that use of evidence in policymaking requires deep understanding of the evidence and its limitations and interdependencies. This includes considering the theoretical and practical implications of a reform on other parts of the education system such as assessment. (How leading education nations develop and reform their curriculum systems EPI, November 2020)

In reality, there may actually be an incentive to use selective research and evidence, where objectivity is not preferred, *'The problem with expertise is getting good expertise. People tend to select the experts that agree with them'* (JB).

edpol has made a proposal to address the challenges of reliable research that is directed at policy makers rather than practitioners. It is called the Centre for Evidence in Education Policy and may be of help in this situation.

Further discussion and research

- It is agreed that evidence of many kinds is an important part of the curriculum review process. The requirements should be better codified by looking at home nation and other jurisdiction practice.
- Could the edpol's idea of a CEEP contribute to the solution?

3.3 Authority

The hierarchical relationship between ministerial authority, disciplinary expertise, evidence, practitioner and wider consultation, must be agreed. Given the acknowledgement of political authority, and the increasing acceptance of disciplinary knowledge (regardless of preferences over curriculum width, competencies etc), the above would be the natural order.

Political authority must be protected, but it can be qualified in various ways. For example, according to the agreed process, a minister may be expected to accept recommendations. There could be a relatively high hurdle to permit denial of a recommendation, for example, after substantiating the ministerial position in front of a select committee. However, as part of a cross-party agreement, this and other points would need to be settled by stakeholders.

There may also be arguments for local variation and experimentation. As one contributor remarked, *'It's good that people can disagree and come up with good outcomes. We have a scrappy system with less coherence, because we have different opinions, and this isn't a bad thing. The profession is better for hearing different views'*(MH). Similarly, it was said, *'National decisions taken by politicians leaves a gap in the expert area. But if you go into experts and national you miss out on the local context. You miss out on what local schools are doing - great things like school 21'* (LMc).

A process for this was referred to at the roundtable and has been expanded upon since: *'there would be local hubs - for instance, teaching schools or academy chains - who then decide which bits of the curriculum they will keep and which bits they want to change, to create their own local version of the curriculum which must be drawn from the national curriculum but could take into account variances suggested by the experts in their individual commentaries [of the national curriculum]'* (LMc).

There was another key point, that does lighten the load in some ways. It was pointed out that the most difficult parts of the curriculum debate *'is largely restricted to English and History'* (LMc) and that *'these are culturally referenceable in a way that other subject matter is not'* (LC)

Further discussion and research

- Part of the cross-party agreement should be to agree the hierarchical relationship between ministerial authority, disciplinary expertise, evidence, practitioner and wider consultation.
- Mechanisms that allow some local variation and experimentation should also be accommodated. This is an area for further research.

4. Radical change and education's purpose

Suggestions made in this paper could help establish a curriculum review process that manages incremental or stepwise change, with the benefit that desired change is achieved and there is minimum disruption in schools. However, the proposed framework is unlikely to support radical change, and this is a deficiency.

The last changes to the curriculum were quite radical (reversing a *'very dominant constructivist narrative within the system that permeated everything from ITT training through to the original academies programme'*(MH)), a good process will afford the same opportunity to others in the future. Otherwise, institutions and interests are locked into 'revolutionary constitutionalism'². This is exemplified by the termination of the QCDA in 2011/12, effectively removing a vehicle for future change. It was touched upon at the roundtable, *'I am concerned about the short-term interests of a government or a minister overriding any more fundamental debate about curriculum principles'*, - although this point also relates to the challenge of managing fundamental reform within the time frame of a single government.

There is certainly a desire for significant change. One round table contributor stated: *'School curriculum should be about knowledge, skills and attitudes (or attributes). A good curriculum covers all three. This is the view of nearly every other country other than England, as shown by the OECD and is completely uncontroversial. There are different blends in different countries and different emphasis, but when we talk so heavily about different disciplinary knowledge to the exclusion of all else, which has been the philosophy of the last 10 years, we are giving people only a part of their education'* (PH).

The means to trigger more fundamental change to the curriculum should be to re-examine education's purpose, and to do so under certain conditions. This is consistent with the recent Welsh experience, that was discussed at the roundtable. The review of purpose (and presumably the process) was agreed by the Welsh government. The obligation of the new curriculum change is that it meets this redefined purpose.

Curriculum change can become highly contested because protagonists often track back too quickly and easily to education's purpose, but then, do not justify or substantiate the amended purpose. Since the shift in purpose is likely to have a material effect on curriculum provision, it must be taken very seriously.

Further discussion and research

- The introduction of more radical change in the curriculum should be tied to a review and confirmation of education's purpose.
- Review of purpose should be acknowledged as a fundamental exercise that starts with an agreed process. The process must be comprehensive enough to capture all relevant stakeholders, prioritise between competing objectives in the curriculum and to have impact, the process should have the respect and support of those with the authority to change the curriculum (now or in the future).

5. Feedback and comments provided after the roundtable

There was a request for feedback with respect to the roundtable and the first draft of this paper. The following unattributed comments are included for interest:

² Revolutionary constitutionalism contains within itself certain paradoxes and practical problems that have their source in the combination of initial radical transition and subsequent resistance to further radical change that constitutionalisation brings – Stephen Gardbaum.

5.1 Who should participate in Curriculum development?

5.1.1 Broader contribution

- Future change should be made by a standing panel of experts from academia practice , policy and NGOs/corporates working together, having a regular process, at regular intervals.
- Amendments should be driven by students and teachers and experts. What has it been like to teach? Have students benefited? Have some students done well and the others not? What has not been covered because of the focus on grammar? What do experts from in class, schools, researchers, and policy feel would be an improvement?
- Central (in relation to expertise for curriculum development) implies commanding or pre-eminent. The subject matter experts should only be one of several perspectives on the art of the possible, that must be combined with practice, to get a desired outcome from schooling
- There should be a definition of what exactly politicians can and can't (or should and shouldn't) do in relation to curriculum
- Consensus seeking (to be ruled in or out in the consultation process) is a problematic idea in this and many other contexts. Full agreement might never be possible in a number of areas but perhaps it is possible to get all sides to agree sufficiently to not disagree.
- English and History are the two areas people seem to feel most strongly about the 'politicisation' of the curriculum. Would it therefore be possible to think about trying to make some progress on this type of approach with some other subjects, as a proof of concept? For example, could progress be made by defining core mathematics curriculum components – drawing in subject bodies, subject teachers, universities, and employers? If this style of approach can be seen to work in some subjects, it would increase demand for it in all other subjects over time.
- Polarisation will persist unless there are very concerted collective pan-party open discussions and commitments to create more regularised pathways for learning, from global contexts. These should identify 1) what can be done within and beyond education to truly address equity 2) what can be done to truly build a curriculum that is flexible enough to allow all students to succeed while addressing current and future needs 3) to strongly consider disconnecting curriculum and examinations

5.1.2. Narrow contribution

- Curriculum philosophy should be consistent with the evidence. Once this is established, curriculum only needs to change with the subject matter and this does not happen often. In this case, there is no need for scheduled change in the curriculum. Small changes can be made instinctively by those who deliver it.
- The setting up of a statutory body to run a process is not agreed and therefore should not be specified. A curriculum agency within government would be sensible, but the search for cross party agreement does not necessarily entail better outcomes.

5.2 Teacher workload and disruption

- The volume [of work] is very important. How much actual teaching time is available and can expectations fit within that time? How much of the available time is required for the national curriculum and how much is available for local discretion? As well as the time available to teach, the time needed to change (effectively) what is taught should be calculated. This will give some idea of the pace of the cycle of reform.
- A national curriculum framework also needs investment in teacher and school leader expertise (with a focus on curriculum design and curricular thinking) and exemplification. The latter helps with workload and quality.
- A distinction needs to be drawn between the official written curriculum; the taught curriculum; and the achieved curriculum (the outcomes or the assessed curriculum). Far too much time and effort is spent on the former to the exclusion of the latter and the teachers in the middle are too little attended to in terms of what they need by way of support to make the former into the latter.
- In NZ, comparison of the 1992 curriculum process with the 2007 process also evidences the extent to which giving pre-eminence of expertise over pedagogical practice leads to suboptimal outcomes in the longer run because teachers who do not feel they have had an adequate say continue to doubt the authority and efficacy of the curriculum produced
- A Principals' Advisory Councils to vet and discuss how policy will influence day-today in schools is just one strategy to protect against frequent policy change and political influence.
- Purposes and outcomes might be sought from 'schooling' as opposed to 'education' ; ie acknowledging that education continues beyond the formal curriculum and the school walls and the 15,000 hours

5.3 Curriculum review timing and rolling review

- The ten-year cycle for curriculum review is fairly restrictive for elected governments, given we are now working on five-year fixed term Parliaments, and for this reason is unlikely to secure meaningful cross-party support. As such, it would be more realistic – and therefore ultimately more useful - to introduce a five yearly review process. This would help reduce the sense of continuous 'tinkering' with the curriculum, that makes it harder for teachers to refine and hone their practice and would help develop a clear cycle and repeatable methodology for approaching curriculum reform.
- Rolling review (by key stages or subjects) mitigates the extremes: even a strong ideological position only gets to change a bit of the curriculum at a time.
- The problem of evolution is the extension of uncertainty – you see this happening with the Ofsted framework, where there is a period of stasis in advance of a new Ofsted framework being published, while people wait to see what's in it and stop focussing on getting better at the things in the existing framework. Signalling a more regular review, where evidence is sought, and experience helps shape the decisions about how structures can be established within a government would be very helpful.

- It is worth differentiating between different aspects of the curriculum – there is always an astonishing amount of airtime devoted to PSHE, which is in reality a tiny portion of students' and teachers' time and doesn't really have a dedicated professional teaching specialism. It gets posited as the solution to all ills – “teach financial management and how mortgages work”, “teach about sexual consent and it will stop rape and sexual assault”, “teach about the environment and the next generation will help stop global warming” and so gets used as some kind of catch-all subject, where very little is taught thoroughly or in depth.

Appendices

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority: Annual Report and Accounts 2009-10 © 2010

Extracts by edpol

Background: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) was established on 1 October 1997 as a statutory body under Section 21 of the Education Act 1997. In September 2007 the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families announced that the QCA regulatory functions would become statutorily independent (as Ofqual), and that the remaining functions of the QCA would be established as the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA).

This is the final Annual Report and Accounts for QCA. The remit of QCA until 31 March 2010 is detailed in sections 22–26 of the Education Act 1997 and is summarised below.

The role of QCA was to advance education and training in England, particularly with a view to promoting quality and coherence.

QCA's functions in relation to the curriculum and school examinations and assessment were to:

- keep all aspects under review and advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families;
- advise the Secretary of State on research and development;
- publish information;
- audit the quality of assessments;
- accredit schemes for the baseline assessment of five-year-old children;
- advise the Secretary of State on the approval of qualifications for use in schools. QCA's specific functions in relation to external qualifications were to:
 - keep all aspects under review and advise the Secretaries of State for Children, Schools and Families and Business, Innovation and Skills
 - advise the Secretaries of State on research and development;
 - publish information and provide support and advice to those providing courses leading to such qualifications;
 - develop and publish criteria for the accreditation of qualifications;
 - accredit qualifications and advise the Secretaries of State on their approval.

QCA Board

Period of office at QCA Committee member

Chairman Mr Christopher Trinick 1 November 2008 to 31 October 2011 Nominations (Chair) (from November 2008) Remuneration (from November 2008) Deputy Chairman (from December 2008)

Mr Mike Beasley 1 October 2003 to 31 March 2011 Remuneration (Chair) (from November 2008)

Risk (Chair) (from July 2009) Nominations

Professor Michael Arthur 1 December 2007 to 30 November 2010 Remuneration

Ms Rose Collinson 1 February 2009 to 31 January 2012

Mr Scott Dobbie 1 February 2009 to 31 January 2012 Audit (from March 2009) Risk (from July 2009)

Ms Maggie Galliers 1 December 2007 to 31 March 2010 Ofqual

Ms Cynthia Hall 1 June 2007 to 2 June 2009

Ms Susan Kirkham 1 October 2003 to 30 September 2009

Mr David Sherlock 1 October 2006 to 30 September 2009 Audit

Mr Maurice Smith 1 February 2009 to 31 January 2012 Audit (from May 2009)

Mr Nick Stuart 5 December 2002 to 30 September 2010 Audit (Chair) Nominations Remuneration (from November 2008)

Ms Kathleen Tattersall 2 April 2008 to 31 March 2010 Ofqual (Chair)

Sir David Watson 1 October 2003 to 30 September 2009 Remuneration Risk (from July 2009)

Elizabeth Reid 19 October 2009 to 31 October 2012

John Fairhurst 19 October 2009 to 31 October 2012

Roy Clare 19 October 2009 to 31 October 2012

Reconciling opposing views

Elements of curriculum development process	Position A	Position B	Opportunity for reconciliation
Extent of political primacy	Utmost importance down to right to specify authors and their work	Ministerial selection can be random; politicians have lost legitimacy; leave it to others	Politicians have ultimate authority, describe desired outcomes and accept or reject recommendations
Leadership	Ministerial	School/college level and lateral	As above
Extent of change	'Big-bang' to align key stages, syllabi, assessment and inspection (1992 and 2012)	Partial change to reduce disruption; improve on what exists; factor in feedback (1997, 2005?)	Hong Kong type rolling change to key stages, or rolling change of subjects and/or mechanism for partial modification where required
Writing curriculum	Academic and sector specialists, chosen and convened as required	Standing body of suitable experts; wider participation of stakeholders and practitioners; ground up, "lateral"	Academic and sector specialists convened according to planned change; provide early draft for later consultation (see below)
Use of evidence	Rigorous study of subject matter evidence; international learning;	Evidence provided by practitioner and stakeholder experience and requirements	Source and type of evidence to be agreed by ministers, academic and sector specialists and practitioner representation
Consultation	None	Foundation of process	Consultation always included to achieve buy-in and to receive feedback
Context for implementation	None considered – it will always be difficult	What else is impacting schools; where are the dependencies? May affect timing	Recognise interdependencies and plan accordingly
Final approval	Minister	Arm's length body	Arm's length body/convened experts recommends (alternatives?) to ministers
Form of implementation	National, binary switch over; total conformity	Local trials; more local latitude to interpret	National implementation with local trials of more radical/experimental change