



**Curriculum and
Assessment Review:
Summary and
Government Response**

The Department for Education's (DfE) Curriculum and Assessment Review (2025) provides a comprehensive analysis of England's education system, identifying strengths and areas for potential reform. Chaired by Professor Becky Francis CBE, the independent panel examined primary and secondary education, and the government has now published its response. This article outlines a summary of each chapter within the Review and the government's response, alongside expert commentary from the One Education team.

Towards a World-Leading Curriculum

What is going well and should be maintained

The Review finds that England's national curriculum is knowledge-rich and broadly effective. 10-year-olds in England perform well above the international average in reading, and 15-year-olds score above the OECD average in reading, maths and science. The curriculum's breadth is comparable to other high-performing countries, and national assessments (phonics check, KS2 tests, GCSEs) are in line with international practice.

Existing strengths that should be maintained include a core of academic subjects, high expectations, and teacher expertise. The Review suggests making minor refinements rather than major overhaul. For instance, ensuring all core subjects remain in place and clarifying curriculum content where needed. The Review mentions that the curriculum should give schools sufficient time to consolidate learning, as well as the space to provide the enrichment activities and life skills that prepare young people for life and work.

Government Response

Future curriculum programs will be updated: a revised national curriculum is due in 2027 (for teaching from 2028), and updated GCSE content will follow (for teaching from 2029). The government will use the Review's principles to ensure all pupils build on prior learning and enjoy a broad, balanced curriculum .

Expert Insight – Jo Gray, Head of Educational Development:

It is encouraging to see that the Review recognises the genuine strengths already present in England's education system. Maintaining high expectations and a broad academic core is essential, but so too is protecting time for pupils to consolidate learning and experience the enrichment and life skills that make education meaningful. It is important that this curriculum considers child development, next steps, and real-life learning context, ensuring that children have opportunities not only to achieve academically but also to express themselves, explore their interests, and fall in love with learning. As future updates to the curriculum are developed, the key will be preserving what works while refining areas that enable more inclusive practice, smoother progression, and a more balanced experience for all pupils.

“High Standards” Must Mean High Standards for All

The Review acknowledges that “a stubborn attainment gap remains” as pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs/disabilities (SEND) continue to lag behind their peers. Achieving high standards for all means steps must be taken to narrow these gaps.

In practice, this means all students are expected to meet core benchmarks (e.g. fluent reading and numeracy by age 11) and receive additional support where needed. The panel recommends strengthening support at every stage and delivering early help to underachieving groups. It calls for higher expectations and targeted interventions so every child can succeed.

Government Response

The government agrees that high standards and inclusion go hand in hand. It will reinforce high expectations for every pupil to boost early literacy and numeracy outcomes. For example, a National Year of Reading 2026 has been announced, along with expanded phonics programs to ensure 90% of Year 1 pupils meet the expected standard. Extra support for children with SEND is also planned (e.g. in phonics and Year 7 maths). Moreover, the DfE will develop resources and training so teachers can identify and support high-attaining pupils. For example, it will introduce new oracy frameworks and extension activities, ensuring bright students are continually challenged.

Expert Insight – Helen Marriott, Head of Inclusion:

We welcome the Review’s recognition that the sheer amount of content within the current curriculum acts as a barrier for some children to engage and excel in their studies. It is also heartening to read that sufficient space should be left over for enrichment activities and life skills. Additionally, many educators will welcome the proposal to remove the EBacc measure from performance indicators. It has long been felt that the EBacc measure narrowed the genuine choices available for pupils, leading them to take GCSEs in which they were less likely to do well.

It is powerful to read that young people have advocated for themselves in describing the detrimental experience of not seeing themselves reflected in the curriculum, or even seeing negative portrayals. The recommendation that any curriculum reform is guided by the principle that it reflects the diversity in our society can only be a positive thing to increase empathy and understanding within the next generation.

Overall, the tone and content are likely to be broadly welcomed in terms of the pedagogy behind creating an inclusive curriculum. However, it is difficult to see how this rhetoric will truly transform the curriculum in terms of being ‘inclusive for all’. The level of content reduction and alterations remains to be seen. It is unclear whether the recommendations will go far enough to provide the flexibility that many were hoping for to support the increasing number of pupils with SEND in mainstream settings.

Expert Insight – Jess Lane, Head of Safeguarding and Attendance:

It is positive to read the plans to remove existing barriers to progress and good outcomes for children who are from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, have SEND, or are otherwise vulnerable. Many professionals will be aware of the barriers that some children face in accessing their education, and it is important that a school’s commitment to social justice is embedded within their culture and ethos, rather than a ‘tick-box’ exercise. The attendance of children in receipt of free school meals and those with a social worker is significantly lower than their

peers, which is why a more inclusive curriculum will support engagement and ultimately improve outcomes for these children. We welcome these changes and hope it has the impact we need to see.

Expert Insight – Jeni Goodfellow-Pemsel, Head of Creative Psychotherapies in Education:

The Review's recognition that learning is influenced not only by academic content but by children's emotional readiness and relational capacity will be welcomed by practitioners across the sector. There is long-standing evidence from neuroscience and child development that play, creativity, and emotional regulation act as essential building blocks for effective learning. For many children, particularly those with SEMH needs, SEND profiles, or experiences of trauma, these foundations are not "optional extras" but prerequisites. While the Review gestures towards broader developmental considerations, it is not yet clear whether future reforms will create sufficient space for these approaches to be integrated meaningfully beyond the early years.

Creative Arts Therapies offer a useful lens through which to understand what a more relationally aware curriculum might look like and there is significant potential for these therapeutic and creative principles to inform a richer, more responsive curriculum design. It remains to be seen whether the proposed changes will provide the depth and flexibility required to embed emotional development, play, and relational capacity as core components of learning. We hope that further iterations will take these considerations into account, ensuring that the curriculum truly reflects what children need to engage, thrive, and learn.

Preparing Learners for a Changing World

The Review argues that the curriculum must adapt alongside the rapidly-evolving modern world. In addition to academic knowledge, schools should teach essential "life and career skills" to reflect ongoing technological advances, climate change, and shifting global contexts. The panel found strong demand for practical subjects like financial literacy, digital/media literacy, climate/sustainability education, and oracy. It recommends embedding these topics across subjects (e.g. financial concepts in maths, climate science in geography) and strengthening critical thinking and citizenship education. This will ensure young people are prepared for a changing economy and society.

Government Response

The DfE welcomes these recommendations. A new statutory requirement will make Citizenship a compulsory subject from KS1, so topics like personal finance, media and digital literacy, democracy and climate change can be introduced early. The curriculum for Maths and Citizenship will be revised so that key financial concepts (e.g. calculating interest) are taught in sequence. Additionally, the Computing curriculum will be updated to place an emphasis on coding, data and critical thinking, and new qualifications (e.g. at GCSE in Data Science/AI) are under consideration.

New oracy frameworks will help primary and secondary teachers ensure all pupils become confident speakers and listeners by age 11. Climate and sustainability education will also be enhanced in science, geography, and other subjects. Across the board, refreshed subject curricula will highlight critical and creative thinking skills and connect learning to real life. The DfE will work with employers to link curriculum content to future careers so students can see the relevance of what they learn.

Expert Insight – Alice Pepper, Education Consultant:

The recommendations on oracy highlight a national commitment to speaking, listening and communication that is long overdue. In a rapidly changing world, oracy can no longer be viewed as an optional enhancement: it is a necessity. Ensuring that all pupils develop into confident, fluent speakers is not just desirable, it is essential preparation for life and work. To achieve this, we hope oracy will be embedded meaningfully across the curriculum as well as being delivered as a standalone skill.

Maximising opportunities for speaking, listening and communication at all levels enriches students' experiences and makes learning more inclusive. The government's endorsement of drama and wider speaking-and-listening expectations within the English curriculum is therefore welcome, helping to ensure more consistent experiences for learners.

The Review also indicates the importance of teacher expertise in oracy to ensure its effectiveness. We believe teachers should be equipped to develop oracy across its three strands (learning to talk, through talk and about talk), as well as to use assessment and reflection to refine their practice. By foregrounding oracy, we enhance the curriculum for all learners, providing clarity, confidence and opportunity as they move into the next stages of their education. We welcome the recognition of oracy as a vital element within the new curriculum and look forward to seeing the new oracy framework.

Expert Insight – Dan Smith, Head of IT:

This is a strong step towards improving digital learning nationally. The Review's emphasis on a robust Computing curriculum is one that goes beyond basic digital literacy to include programming, computational thinking, and responsible technology use. This aligns closely with our own priorities in which we know safe and appropriate use of digital learning is essential for our future generations. We particularly welcome the Review's call to embed digital competence across all subjects, ensuring pupils can critically evaluate online content and engage confidently with emerging technologies, including AI. This approach reinforces our belief that digital capability is not an isolated skill set but a foundation for learning, life, and work in an increasingly digital-first world.

Expert Insight – Petra Pratt, Head of School Finance:

We are delighted to see that there will be a focus on financial education within the new curriculum. Financial education prepares learners for a constantly changing world by equipping them with practical money skills, digital financial literacy, and strong financial mindsets. Through hands-on learning, technology integration, and real-life applications, students gain the ability to make informed decisions, manage challenges, and build a stable financial future.

Curriculum Shape and Content

Our View of Key Stages & Structure

Both the Review and the government agree that the overall key stage structure (KS1 to KS4) should stay in place. Key Stages 1–2 (ages 5–11) provide a broad foundation in core skills and knowledge. The Review notes KS1–2 is inherently broad and nurturing, but warns that depth is sometimes lost. It suggests making

sure essential literacy/numeracy skills are mastered by age 11 and that subjects normally studied in KS3 are introduced smoothly. The panel recommends more clarity and continuity between phases. In addition, they suggest introducing a short diagnostic assessment (or literacy/numeracy check) in Year 8 to identify students who need extra support before GCSE years. Key Stage 3 (ages 11–14) is identified as a “bridge” stage where clear sequencing and diagnostic checks can help catch up any gaps.

Government Response

The government will keep the key stage structure intact. It will refine sequencing of the primary curriculum (especially in maths and English) and use diagnostics in KS3. Specifically, a new statutory reading fluency and comprehension test will be introduced in Year 8, and schools will assess Year 8 writing and maths using validated tools.

Revised curriculum content will be carefully sequenced so teachers see clear links between KS2, KS3 and KS4. To support this, the DfE is launching a RISE Key Stage 3 Alliance (Regional Improvement for Standards and Excellence) to promote best practice in KS3 teaching. It will also create online resources to help teachers adapt lessons (e.g. for mixed-ability classes or SEND pupils) so that every pupil “remediates where necessary” and builds confidence from Year 7 through to Year 9.

Expert Insight – Liz Dwarampudi, Education Consultant:

We welcome the way the Review recognises how learning should build coherently from early primary through to the end of secondary, and how varied assessment approaches, particularly formative assessment, can be used meaningfully to support teaching and learning rather than simply measure outcomes.

For leaders, the Review also raises several important questions and considerations around the progression of the curriculum, understanding of assessment purposes and approaches, including how these can support diverse and inclusive learning needs. We look forward to seeing if strategic support will be provided for school leaders within the curriculum and assessment reforms.

Curriculum Principles and the National Curriculum

The Review sets out principles for curriculum design: depth, coherence, progression, subject mastery, knowledge-building, and teacher autonomy. It views the National Curriculum as a framework (not a census of everything taught). The panel recommends that each subject’s Programmes of Study be refreshed with these principles in mind, specifying core knowledge and skills clearly, but leaving space for teacher creativity and local context. Curriculum principles include a strong role for disciplinary knowledge (e.g. mathematics fundamentals, scientific concepts), with clear sequencing so new topics build on prior learning. Teachers should retain autonomy within a coherent curriculum framework.

Government Response

The government will adopt the panel’s principles when rewriting the curriculum. The refreshed National Curriculum will emphasise coherence, subject mastery, and depth. This means every subject’s curriculum will be “grounded in relevant and important knowledge and disciplinary skills”. Teachers will see new guidance and a digital curriculum map showing connections between subjects. The DfE will support

educators with professional development (e.g. new training for reception teachers in phonics) so that teachers are ready for the updated curriculum.

Expert Insight – Jade Walwyn, Head of HR and Wellbeing Lead:

We are encouraged to see the Curriculum and Assessment Review explicitly acknowledge the importance of staff wellbeing, a long-overdue recognition that healthy, supported educators are essential to delivering meaningful reform. The commitment to reducing unnecessary workload and creating space for professional growth is a positive step. However, the real test will be implementation. Schools are already operating under intense pressure and it is vital that staff wellbeing is protected by ensuring that the required time is given, expectations are clear and there is a genuine investment in workload reduction as part of an overall strategy for staff wellbeing. The sector will need careful planning and sustained support to ensure these promises translate into tangible, sustainable improvements for staff.

Expert insight – Jo Gray, Head of Educational Development:

We welcome the promise to prioritise coherence, depth and clear progression, alongside a strong recognition of teacher expertise. Positioning the National Curriculum as a framework rather than an exhaustive script is particularly important: it sets out essential knowledge and disciplinary foundations while still enabling schools to shape learning around their pupils and communities. This gives schools opportunities to consider real-life, hands-on, enquiry-based learning rather than task-driven, route learning, supporting inclusive practice and child development needs.

The proposed digital curriculum map and enhanced subject guidance could genuinely strengthen teacher confidence and ensure smoother sequencing across phases. However, the success of this refreshed curriculum will depend on how well schools are supported to translate principles into practice. Teachers need time, high-quality professional development and manageable expectations if they are to embed subject mastery and thoughtful progression rather than feel overwhelmed by another wave of change. Ensuring that this reform enhances, not constrains, professional autonomy will be crucial to realising its ambition of a world-class, inclusive curriculum for all.

Subject-Specific Recommendations

The report makes targeted recommendations for each subject, affirming the importance of a broad curriculum. It is recommended that you explore these in detail within the original report but highlights include:

- **Art & Design:** Maintain the emphasis on creativity and practical skills. The government notes GCSE art entries remain high and will streamline assessment requirements (with Ofqual) to reduce workload.
- **Citizenship, RHE/PSHE:** The government is making citizenship compulsory in KS1–2 (building on existing PSHE and RSE guidance). Citizenship education will now be taught in every year group, covering media literacy, financial awareness, law and democracy.

- **Computing:** Recommendations include updating computing curricula to cover programming, data, and AI concepts. The DfE plans to overhaul computing education accordingly and is considering new qualifications (e.g. a combined Computer Science/Data Science GCSE).
- **Design & Technology (D&T, including Food):** The Review encourages an emphasis on practical design skills, which includes making cooking and nutrition a part of D&T. The government will ensure D&T teachers have guidance to deliver science and math concepts practically (e.g. in food tech).
- **English (including Drama):** Emphasis is placed on maintaining a rich literature and drama curriculum, whilst ensuring all pupils read widely and write fluently. In line with the Review's recommendations, the government will push early literacy and phonics (90% standard) and improve KS2 writing assessments.
- **Geography and History:** To strengthen national and world knowledge, the Review recommends clearer content (e.g. British history) to ensure coherent narratives. The government will revise these curricula to ensure students learn essential local and global contexts, supporting decision-making about society and environment.
- **Languages:** The panel notes that uptake of MFL at GCSE is declining and suggests incentives (like early qualifications before age 14). The government will consider options, including earlier language awards, to motivate pupils to continue languages beyond KS3.
- **Maths:** The Review supports deep mastery in primary maths and continued rigour. The government's response includes expanding the Year-7 "Securing Foundations" scheme and a Higher Level Maths program for disadvantaged pupils, aiming to boost attainment through GCSE.
- **Music, PE/Dance, RE:** The Review underlines that all creative and physical subjects should remain in the curriculum as powerful enablers of learning. The government will revitalise arts and music (creating a National Centre for Arts Education) and update PE (fundamental movement skills). It will also support stronger RE so pupils learn about diverse beliefs and community values.
- **Science:** The Review recommends increasing practical science learning and uptake of "triple science" to deepen understanding. The government had pledged to promote triple science and ensure lab work.

Government Response

Overall, ministers broadly welcome these subject recommendations. For example, Art & Design is generally agreed to be working well and GCSE assessment will be improved in that subject. The government also confirms the key proposals in Citizenship, Computing, Languages and others. In each case, curriculum content will be revised to incorporate the Review's advice, with supporting materials from Oak National Academy and subject hubs to support teacher workload.

Expert Insight – Laura Buczko, Literacy Team Leader:

The recommendations for English are significant, though not as ground-breaking as some would have liked. However, curriculum evolution is on the cards; indeed the renewed commitment to oracy and drama will undoubtedly have an impact right across the curriculum and so this is very much welcome. Of note is the recommendation to review the grammatical content at primary. Current expectations for grammar can result in schools focusing on de-contextualised teaching, which supports the GPaS test but does not develop pupils' writing. By moving some of the content to KS3 and focusing on fluency and "grammar in use," we should see pupils begin to understand grammar with real depth, translating their knowledge into independent writing.

These changes will be part of a renewed KS3 curriculum, which we hope will support schools to see the key stage as its own specific phase, rather than as preparation for KS4 and external assessments. This will also be supported by the recommended review of the KS4 curriculum, which appears to be far more wide-ranging, meaning both key stages should be more distinct.

The Review has the potential to kickstart the creation of a more coherent English curriculum that better prepares our children and young people for the world. We are looking forward to seeing how the programmes of study develop and are translated into practice.

Expert Insight – Adam Cooke, Head of Music:

With declining number of pupils progressing to further study in music at KS4, we welcome the Review's commitment to reversing this trend. This long-term decline has been a significant concern across the sector, and its impact on higher education and workforce development is already being felt. We support the Review's clear reiteration that music is a statutory requirement at Key Stages 1–3 and should remain an entitlement for all pupils at KS4, rather than an optional addition.

We particularly welcome the Review's acknowledgement of the detrimental effects that successive policy initiatives, including the EBacc, have had on arts and vocational subjects. Its recognition that "an understanding of human culture through the humanities, languages and arts" is fundamental to a rich and broad education is both timely and essential. Beyond formal qualifications, the Review highlights the vital role that music and the arts play in enriching school life more broadly. It is essential, however, that these aspirations are matched with sufficient resources and sustained investment.

The Review highlights the persistent disparities in access to musical opportunities across the country. Since 2012, the DfE's network of Music Hubs has been working to address these inequalities. As part of this programme, One Education Music is proud to work with partners across Manchester and beyond to ensure that every pupil can engage with and progress in music. We hope that the ambitions outlined in the Review - and the renewed curriculum that will follow - are underpinned by increased investment in music education. Music services and hubs stand ready to continue supporting every pupil to achieve their full potential in music, but it is crucial that this work is appropriately and sustainably funded.

Expert Insight – Dan Smith, Head of IT:

IT skills are no longer optional; they are fundamental for success in almost every career. By prioritising programming, computational thinking, and digital literacy, the Review ensures students will gain practical skills that go beyond using technology - they learn how to create, analyse, and innovate with it. We also welcome the recommendation to embed digital competence across all subjects. When students learn to critically evaluate online content, understand data, and use digital tools responsibly in different contexts, they become better prepared for higher education and employment.

However, there are some challenges to consider. One concern is the practical implementation - schools will need significant investment in infrastructure, teacher training, and ongoing support to deliver these changes effectively. Without this, the ambition of a world-class digital curriculum could create inequalities between well-resourced schools and those with limited budgets. Another issue is the risk of overloading the curriculum; adding more digital content without reducing other demands could lead to pressure on teachers and students. Finally, while the Review acknowledges AI and digital transformation, it could go further in providing clear guidance on ethical use of technology and safeguarding in a digital environment.

Overall, the Review sets a strong vision for improving learning through digital skills, but success will depend on careful planning, funding, and support to ensure these recommendations are achievable and inclusive.

Assessment, Accountability and Performance Measures

The Review assesses how tests and exams shape the curriculum. It generally supports national assessments but recommends minor improvements for fairness and balance, such as reconsidering Progress 8 to reward a broad subject mix (not just EBacc choices). It also flags that England's GCSE exam load is high (24–31 hours in Year 11, more than many countries) and suggests reducing it to cut pressure.

In primary, the system is “broadly working” but the writing assessment needs emphasis on fluency. In secondary, the panel backs a new diagnostic Year 8 reading test and richer Year 8 writing checks to ensure smooth progression. It also calls for more flexible accountability so that creative and technical subjects are valued, not crowded out.

Government Response

The DfE will improve KS2 assessments without radical overhaul. It will refine the KS2 writing test to focus on clear communication and grammar-in-context, and will support schools to moderate writing across year groups. At KS3, a statutory Year 8 reading fluency and comprehension test will be introduced, and schools will report on writing and maths progress in Year 8 using approved tools.

At KS4, ministers agree GCSEs should remain rigorous, but will cut exam time. Working with Ofqual, they will trim about 2.5–3 hours off the typical GCSE exam schedule by rebalancing papers. Non-exam assessments (coursework) will remain where essential, with safeguards against cheating by AI. For performance tables, the government will overhaul Progress 8 and Attainment 8 after consultation. It is removing the EBacc as a headline measure from 2026 and designing a new model that balances a strong core (English, maths, science) with broad subject choice. This includes fixed slots for science and creative/humanities/language subjects, ensuring arts and technology count fully towards school scores.

Expert Insight – Laura Buczko, Literacy Team Leader:

The recommendations to make access arrangements for the Phonics Screening Check and Multiplication Tables Check more inclusive go some way towards building an assessment system that is suitable for all. However, the sector is likely to be disappointed that the Review did not recommend more radical changes to assessment to support this.

Many will welcome changes to GPaS test, although some may feel that this risks the paper becoming a writing test by stealth. The proposed changes to the teacher assessment of Writing will hopefully ensure that the assessment of English becomes more coherent, with greater focus on fluency and composition. Making sure assessment is useful has the chance to positively impact pupils throughout their entire journey at school, not only at transition to KS3. Overall, the recommendations show positive progress for primary assessment, but their true impact will depend on how effectively they are implemented in practice.

As with the recommendations for primary, there has been some attempt to focus on the inclusivity of secondary assessment, which is very much welcome. For too long students have had to fit a generic assessment which does not necessarily support all to show their capability. Nevertheless, time will tell how far the access arrangements will go, and whether the resulting assessment system becomes fair for all.

The announcement that Year 8 pupils will sit a new reading test has brought a mixed response from the sector, however we are cautiously optimistic. In many secondary schools, the assessment of reading is not as specific as it needs to be to really impact students. Having a national benchmark for this, which will be rigorously trialled for its efficacy, could bring about meaningful change alongside the other recommendations for the KS3 curriculum. However, it will be key to unpick how the assessment is used in practice to improve targeted provision, if it is to succeed in the Review's aims.

At KS4, the recommendations are more wide-ranging, with a timely focus on reducing exam volume and reviewing assessment methods, both of which should support student wellbeing. Going forward, it will be crucial for any changes to non-exam assessment to consider the developing AI landscape whilst balancing this with these much-needed amendments.

Expert Insight – Aletia Daly, Educational Psychologist:

It has been found that 51% of students feel examinations narrow learning because of the focus on exam preparation. In light of this, the Review considers the cognitive demands placed in relation to memorising scientific and mathematical formulae and indicates the continued work on this. We believe this should also be considered in relation to English materials. This would enable teachers to devote more time to developing broader, transferable skills, rather than concentrating heavily on exam preparation (e.g., memorising quotations). Furthermore, as the prevalence of AI continues to grow, the importance of equipping students with strong media and digital literacy is evident. Examinations should therefore place a greater emphasis on critical thinking skills and reducing the reliance on rote learning associated with memorising core texts.

Historically, there has been limited use of student views to meaningfully inform educational policy and reform. It is therefore commendable that a modest, mixed sample of students with recent experience of assessments, alongside parents/carers, was enabled to provide evidence directly to the Review. Small and isolated consultations provide only a partial perspective and risk reinforcing simplified assumptions where evidence points to far greater complexity. Implementing routine, large-scale feedback mechanisms would generate more reliable and representative insights grounded within the student experience. Indeed, a regular channel for gathering and utilising student views aligns with UNCRC obligations to involve children in decisions that affect them.

16–19 Education and Qualifications

For post-16 education, the Review highlights the need for clearer pathways and parity of esteem between academic and vocational routes. A headline proposal is creating a third level-3 pathway: alongside A Levels

(academic) and T Levels (technical), the Review suggests introducing “V Levels” for vocational study. It also stresses the importance of achieving at least a grade 4 in English and Maths for all 16–19 students, given that this is linked to better life outcomes. Finally, it calls for enriched study programs (including work experience and personal development) and better tracking of students at risk of dropping out.

Government Response

The government will simplify post-16 qualifications by reducing the large number of small qualifications and establishing a clear framework of A Levels, T Levels and the proposed V Levels at Level 3. These options will be “high quality and respected,” giving young people academic, technical or vocational routes. The DfE is already piloting related reforms from its Post-16 White Paper.

In line with the Review, ministers reaffirm that all 16–19 students should aim for at least a grade 4 in English and Maths GCSE. They will introduce new Level-1 stepping-stone courses in these subjects, so students consolidate skills before retrying GCSE. Funding and accountability rules will also be adjusted (starting in 2026) to encourage colleges to support students up to grade 4. The government will continue funding maths/English teachers and programmes (e.g. Summer Schools) to boost achievement for lower-attaining 16–19 learners.

For enrichment, the DfE will require every school and college to offer a core enrichment programme covering arts, sports, outdoors and personal development. A national framework is being developed to support this. Additionally, government and local agencies will improve data sharing to help schools support vulnerable students’ transitions to post-16 study.

Expert Insight – Liz Dwarampudi, Education Consultant:

The introduction of a strengthened vocational pathway and a renewed commitment to real-world learning are positive steps. Many young people thrive when learning is applied, practical and connected to genuine workplace contexts. The emphasis on universal enrichment is also encouraging. Skills such as creativity, problem solving, digital literacy and communication cannot be developed through academic study alone. High-quality enrichment helps to build the confidence and adaptability that young people need for a rapidly changing world.

However, expanding provision, introducing new qualifications, and delivering meaningful enrichment all require sustained investment, specialist staffing and time within already pressured timetables. Without appropriate funding, there is a risk that opportunities become inconsistent or that enrichment loses depth and purpose.

We are particularly mindful of learners who find English or maths challenging. While aiming for every student to reach a grade 4 is understandable, repeated resits can damage confidence and mental health. A flexible approach that prioritises functional competency, reduces anxiety and acknowledges individual needs is essential. The direction of the Review is broadly positive and aligns with our commitment to inclusive, future-focused education. If implemented thoughtfully and resourced appropriately, these reforms could create pathways that genuinely support every young person to develop the skills, resilience and sense of purpose required for adulthood.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The Curriculum and Assessment Review marks a major blueprint for England's education system. It reaffirms that our national curriculum and assessment framework have many strengths, but calls for targeted reforms to raise standards, close gaps, and modernize learning. The government's response broadly welcomes the recommendations. As DfE ministers note, they will be "guided by the Review's principles" to make the curriculum world-leading and accessible to all.

Educators can expect significant updates over the next few years – a refreshed national curriculum (2027) and new exam specifications (2029), alongside new assessments and revised performance measures. Teachers and school leaders should prepare for these changes by engaging with consultations, participating in training, and sharing experiences. Our staff are already discussing the report's recommendations and will contribute feedback on how best to implement them.

Expert Insight – Jo Gray, Head of Educational Development:

The Curriculum and Assessment Review sets out an ambitious and future focused vision for a high-quality, coherent and inclusive education system. As an organisation committed to evidence-informed practice, we welcome the intention to blend strong subject knowledge with the personal, social, and digital competencies that children and young people need to succeed.

We strongly welcome the Review's emphasis on inclusion as a guiding principle. A curriculum that actively considers the needs of all learners is essential for equity. The proposals place value on early identification, coherent progression, and targeted support for pupils who may find literacy or numeracy more challenging. This inclusive stance reflects both national evidence and what we observe across our own settings.

We also welcome the focus on real-world competencies such as financial education, digital literacy and oracy. These areas align with international research, including the World Economic Forum's future skills agenda, and they reflect the changing demands of life, work, and citizenship.

Importantly, we welcome the acknowledgement within the Review that the way the curriculum is delivered matters as much as the content itself. Children learn most effectively when teaching is connected to real-life experiences and when learning is active, practical and meaningful. We are pleased to see space for more experiential, hands-on and enquiry-driven approaches, which support deeper understanding and higher engagement, particularly for pupils who do not thrive in task heavy or rote learning environments.

In summary, One Education welcomes the direction of the proposed changes. However, the scale of implementation should not be underestimated: careful planning, resourcing and sustained support from the government will be essential to ensure these reforms genuinely strengthen outcomes for all pupils, staff and school communities.