

Professor Andrew Pollard 8 Hyland Grove, Westbury-on-Trym Bristol, BS9 3NR	Professor Mary James Fengate House, Horse and Gate Street, Fen Drayton Cambridge, CB24 4SH
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The Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
Westminster
LONDON
SW1 3BT

10th October 2011

Dear Mr Gove,

We are writing to give notice that we wish to terminate our contracts as members of the Expert Panel which you established to advise your Department on its review of the National Curriculum.

We do so because we are concerned with the directions which the Department now appears to be taking. Some of these directions fly in the face of evidence from the UK and internationally and, in our judgement, cannot be justified educationally. We do not therefore believe that the review, if it continues on the course which now appears to be set, will provide the quality of education which pupils, parents, employers and other national stakeholders have a right to expect.

Our approach to the National Curriculum Review was set out in a letter from Mary James to the Minister of State for Schools (10th September 2010) and was applied in our Interim Report (August 2011) to the specific issues raised through the review process.

Progress has been made, in our view, on the following dimensions of the review:

The presentation of programmes of study and attainment targets: We have advised that programmes of study and attainment targets, and the roles that they fulfil, should be distinct – and we understand that this will now be implemented.

Pupil progression: The proposal that schools, particularly primary, should focus on maximising *all* pupils' mastery of the essential curriculum could significantly reduce underachievement in the long-term. We recognise that this is a significant change and commend the efforts being made within the Department to prepare specific proposals.

Structure of Key Stage 2: This four year stage covers a significant period of pupil development. National Curriculum requirements and school provision can be organised more appropriately if it is split into 'Upper' and 'Lower' Key Stages. We understand that this proposal has been accepted.

However, seven points are of particular concern to us:

1. Subject knowledge: The goal of identifying 'essential' and 'powerful forms' of knowledge and of seeking to present these in educationally sound ways within the National Curriculum is well founded. The Department has conducted an exercise in international comparison and is in a position to present this evidence in a public consultation. Consultation with subject experts in English, Mathematics and Science also took place during the Spring and early Summer, leading to the production of draft programmes of study. These have now been replaced by texts produced by Tim Oates and nominees

of the Minister for Schools. This process has by-passed the Expert Panel as a whole and we are therefore not in a position to endorse the outcomes.

2. Curricular breadth: Although both statute (Section 78 of the Education Act 2002) and evidence (international and OFSTED) support breadth, it appears possible that the status of Music and Art in the primary curriculum may be downgraded and that the lack of statutory breadth in the secondary curriculum to age 16 will continue. These possibilities concern us because one of the strongest findings from international comparison (again well evidenced by DfE work) is endorsement of a broad curriculum through primary school to age 16 or beyond.

The major challenge of the curriculum review is thus how to reduce over-loading whilst also maintaining breadth. We believe that the solution lies in the rigorous identification of 'essential knowledge' whilst leaving schools to decide how to introduce this to pupils. If this is done within each established foundation subject (including Music and Art), all pupils will be offered access to powerful ideas across a wide range of established subjects. This requires significant work in the next stages of the review, but is perfectly possible if a commitment in principle is made.

Our view is thus that Music and Art should be retained in the National Curriculum. Evidence on the quality of educational experiences that they bring, particularly to primary education, has been provided in the consultation exercise. We have also made a suggestion about how some essential elements of Music and Art might be preserved for all pupils within Key Stage 4, in recognition of the long term value of these creative subjects to individuals, communities and the economy.

3. Curricular constraint: Notwithstanding public commitments to free teachers to exercise more professional judgement, it now appears that the curriculum of core subjects may be specified year-on-year in primary rather than in key stages. In our view, this would be far too prescriptive for all schools and impractical to implement in small primary schools – of which there are many. In place of this, the logic of the commitment to greater school autonomy suggests that, within the new two-year key stage framework, specific annual schemes of work should be developed locally by schools for all subjects. We recognise that you may wish to consider the particular case for Mathematics to be specified year-on-year, but to go further is likely to be viewed as an echo of the National Strategies and as denoting a lack of trust in local adaption and professional judgement.

4. Oral language development: We have advised that oral language development should be a significant strand within the English programme of study though all key stages and should build, in particular, on the provision which has been recommended by Clare Tickell for the Foundation Stage. However, in the most recent programme of study for English the strand has been removed entirely. Further, despite the extent of evidence concerning the significance of oral language development across the curriculum and throughout schooling, practical work on this has not taken place. We have suggested that the Communication Champion, Jean Gross, could be asked to lead such work.

5. Transitions: The work of the Department's National Curriculum Review team has been almost exclusively focused on collating, analysing and representing elements of subject knowledge from other countries. Very little attention has been paid to how to achieve continuity of curricular and other learning experiences for pupils – in particular, for those progressing from the Early Years Foundation Stage into Key Stage 1. On the latter, your department has funded one of the world's most admired longitudinal programmes of educational research, the EPPE project, which has demonstrated the significance in countering disadvantage of provision of high quality learning settings. The EYFS review builds on secure evidence on necessary provision for young children and it is crucial that the new National Curriculum provides for a smooth transition into mainstream

schooling. You will be aware, of course, that most high performing countries begin their formal schooling somewhat later than we do (indeed, only 15% of all countries begin formal schooling by the age of 5). International practice thus suggests that we should consider how to extend good practice from the EYFS into Key Stage 1. We recommend that a specific departmental initiative is needed to consider how Key Stage 1 can bridge from EYFS to the more subject-based curriculum of Key Stage 2. An appropriate transition is essential to secure the foundations of literacy and numeracy and embed positive approaches to new learning. At this moment, the documentation shows very weak appreciation of this need and we fear a significant educational disjunction at the EYFS/KS1 transition.

6. Educational aims: As indicated above, Section 78 of the Education Act 2002 sets out a requirement on schools to provide a balanced and broadly based curriculum. The Expert Panel has recommended that curricular aims should be developed at more detailed levels to frame and structure constructive use of school autonomy. Schools would thus make transparent their own educational goals, within the guidance provided by statute. Following publication of proposals for a new OfSTED inspection framework, we are pleased to see that provision of curricular breadth and balance will be inspected – though concerned to understand that inspection may not be applied to some categories of school. We have also offered advice on how a requirement on schools to make explicit their educational aims could contribute constructively to a national framework for PSHE, and we hope that these ideas will be considered in the PSHE review. Clear specification of educational aims, if used appropriately, thus has a place in light-touch framing and accountability processes in a future education system in which schools are both more diverse and more autonomous. Such aims could underpin coherence between the national, basic and local elements of the school curriculum. If this potential is to be realised, further work on the structure, content and use of educational aims is now urgent.

7. Pace and legitimacy: The National Curriculum Review has been proceeding extremely quickly and has so far largely been an internal process managed by the Department. Given the complexity of the issues, it is perhaps not surprising that the NCR team has found it difficult to harvest, consider and synthesise all of the available expertise and knowledge. We have also been concerned that the insights from the consultation, to which thousands of stakeholders contributed, appear to be treated lightly. Significant influence has been exercised by the Minister for Schools. For whatever reason, our perception is that the use of evidence has been uneven and that progress at times has seemed erratic. In summary, we are concerned for the perceived legitimacy and quality of the review. We would certainly recommend processes of wider engagement before and during the formal consultation process. A defining characteristic of the impressive programme of curricular reform of the Hong Kong SAR Government has been the depth, breadth and quality of its consultation processes, which were vital to securing public and professional support for the radical changes proposed.

Almost all of these matters are discussed in the interim report of the Expert Panel.

The terms of our contracts require us to give 30 days notice of termination in writing and we would be grateful if you would take this letter as constituting such written notice. In such circumstances, the contract requires us to ‘provide such assistance and comply with such timetable as the Department may reasonably require for the purpose of ensuring an orderly transfer of responsibility’. We confirm that we will constructively seek to achieve this unless it is agreed with the Department that it would be more satisfactory for our work to end forthwith. We feel that a clean break would be preferable.

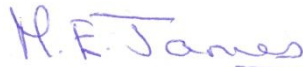
As is provided for in our contracts, we would like to request that that the Interim Report of the Expert Panel is placed in the public domain. However, through this resignation, we acknowledge that we do not wish our names to be associated with the final outcomes of the National Curriculum Review.

Finally, we recognise the seriousness of the issues we have raised and continue to be willing to discuss them with you if you would find it helpful. Whether we are involved or not, the issues will remain.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Pollard



Mary James