



Rt. Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

11 June 2012

Dear Secretary of State,

National Curriculum Review

As you know, ACME is keen to support the Department for Education in the review of the National Curriculum in England. It is clearly very important that the final output is of high quality, and we look forward to engaging in the next steps of the review.

ACME responded to the Expert Panel Report in March 2012 and it is with interest that we read the Government's response to this report today. We would like to comment on some of the aspects of that response, and express some concerns about the process for preparing the draft Programmes of Study:

Year-by-year curriculum at primary: It is disappointing that the current proposals include a year-by-year curriculum for mathematics rather than a Key Stage approach. The Expert Panel's report did not contain any evidence showing how this would benefit mathematics education. On the contrary, the panel argued persuasively that a year-by-year programme was not beneficial. We recognise the need for teachers to work to a year-by-year scheme, but at a national level the curriculum should be defined in key stages that are flexible enough to allow for local variation. A curriculum in key stages would encourage revisiting of topics to help develop secure foundations, and reflect the natural evolution of important connections between topics. A year-by-year specification will exacerbate the damaging effects of short-term teaching that have prevented progress and improvement in recent years.

Draft Programme of Study: We are not able to give a considered commentary on the draft content at this stage, as access to it has only just been provided. ACME will be preparing a full response to this draft and will be particularly interested in the following aspects:

- Whether the mathematical needs identified in several recent reports are accounted for, in terms of ensuring that all children will become able to learn and apply mathematics in all aspects of life, employment and future study in the 21st century and the digital age.
- How clearly progression is expressed.
- How links between related areas of content are articulated.
- The balance between content areas.
- The level of challenge for pupils and teachers.
- Whether the amount of curriculum time needed to teach the range of content described will allow pupils to develop the depth of understanding of key concepts that they need to make progress.
- What support will be required for successful implementation.

The development process of the National Curriculum: ACME has engaged with the review process and various Committee members have given their time freely during the past year to support the production of a draft Programme of Study, but the development process itself is an ongoing concern for the mathematics subject community. We understand that the Programme of Study has been drafted by different groups, subgroups and individuals, with other drafters working anonymously between meetings with civil servants who are not subject specialists. We understand that those involved have not always had a clear idea of where they fit in the process – what is happening to their work and who else is involved. This level of complexity, coupled with unnecessary confidentiality, has caused concern within the community. It has made it difficult to determine whether there is coherence in the process, and has prevented us from advising on any gaps in the expertise needed for the process to be effective.

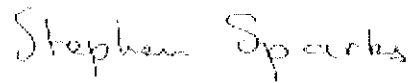
We would therefore urge you to take a more open and transparent approach in the next stage of the Review. In particular:

- The evidence on which officials have drawn and the names of any advisors consulted should be publicly available, with any potential commercial interests of individuals involved fully disclosed.
- Any further development of the National Curriculum should be informed by a range of individuals with appropriate expertise in mathematics and mathematics education. They should be interviewed and selected through a transparent process, with individuals chosen to represent a range of knowledge, experience and qualifications in mathematics curricula and pedagogy.
- The work should be adequately funded so that the selection of those who work on it can be made purely on merit rather than being restricted to those whose circumstances allow them to work unpaid.
- The process for commenting on the Programmes of Study should be well defined and the lines of communication between the Department of Education, the individuals involved in the drafting process and the various subject communities should be explicit.

ACME would like to work with you on these issues and we stand ready to ensure that the National Curriculum is the best it possibly can be. We, and others, urgently need clarity

about the next stages of development and we would advise a more open and measured approach in the coming months.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephen Sparks".

Professor Stephen Sparks CBE FRS
Chair, Advisory Committee on Mathematics Education

Cc: Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for Schools
Jacquie Spatcher, Department for Education
Stefano Pozzi, Department for Education