

# RGS-IBG consultation response

## ● Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum (IRPC) “The Rose Review”

### About Us

1. The Royal Geographical Society (with Institute of British Geographers), the learned society and professional body for geography, welcomes the opportunity to respond Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum (IRPC). We believe this is a timely review of the primary curriculum and we also note the recent publication of the Alexander Review of the primary curriculum.

### About the Review

2. Further details can be found at:  
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/primarycurriculumreview/>

### Our Response

3. The Society strongly supports the IRPC recommendation for the retention of the National Curriculum as an entitlement for all children.

4. It is through a statutory framework for the curriculum that society can properly debate and identify those areas of knowledge, skills and understanding that collectively we in England believe to be a fundamental entitlement for all children. In short, the curriculum, through all its subjects, dimensions and approaches, should help children understand the past, engage positively with the present and prepare for the future.

5. The Society particularly welcomes the following comments on the need for future curriculum review to be coherent, rather than out of sequence. Latterly the educational community has experience different phases of the curriculum review out of phase sequence and at different times, creating significant challenges for curriculum development for teachers and their pupils.

*i) “Review of the curriculum should take place at agreed intervals, rather than as separate phases reviewed out of sequence. So doing would impose a discipline on the process of review, avoid piecemeal change, and afford schools a period of stability in which to achieve agreed curricular goals.”*

6. The Society welcomes the need for a revised curriculum to be underpinned by a statement of aims and values. We believe a statement of aims should highlight opportunities for pupils to:

- Become curious about and engaged with the world around them, including opportunities for learning first hand outside the classroom.
- Explore an understanding of their roles as citizens at the local, national and global scales.

7. The Society strongly supports the IRPC recommendation that “*Schools should protect time when learning is best served by teaching subject content discretely and systematically*”.

8. It is the Society’s firm view that rigour is best achieved when rooted in a teacher’s sound understanding of a subject’s disciplinary framework and how its specific knowledge, skills and understanding can positively contribute to the primary classroom.

9. Subject disciplines provide a highly successful way of effectively shaping knowledge, skills and understanding, and of enabling progression in learning. Indeed, Ofsted has repeatedly shown that much of the widespread weakness in the teaching of geography in the primary classroom has been due to teacher’s lack of subject knowledge and understanding.

10. However, we also recognise, particularly in the first few years of primary, that some schools may choose to develop cross curricular approaches to the curriculum. The Society is content to support such approaches, but only where they meet the following criteria. Namely, that cross curricular approaches are based on a sound understanding of the different subject’s specific contribution to the chosen topic; where there is explicit rigour in the topic planning and where the outcomes can be tracked back to subject specialist input.



11. The Society notes the proposed six areas of understanding:

- Understanding English, communication and languages;
- Mathematical understanding;
- Scientific and technological understanding;
- Human, social and environmental understanding;
- Understanding physical health and well-being;
- Understanding the arts and design.

12. We believe that this provides some opportunities for a rebalancing of the primary curriculum, moving away from the current 'core' and 'foundation' model. The new proposals signal a clearer intent that pupils can gain a full entitlement to a 'broad and balanced' curriculum. However, in practice the extent to which that rebalancing and experience of a broad and balanced curriculum actually occurs will depend on teachers commitment, time and professional support allocated to each area and to the assessment and inspection frameworks. Sadly, for all too many pupils their access to the humanities and to creativity is severely limited at present owing to the dominance of literacy, numeracy and SATS. We encourage the review to address this issue.

**13. However, the Society strongly believes that the proposed title of the area of understanding "human, social and environmental understanding" should be changed to: "Geographical and historical understanding"**

14. The Society believes that this change is essential to provide clear provenance for this area of understanding with the subject disciplines that underpin it, and indeed upon which its success relies. The study of geography encompasses the environmental area of learning and thus these is no explicit need for this to be included in the title.

15. Indeed, four of the other areas of learning currently have explicit connection with their related subject disciplines:

- Understanding *English*, communication and languages;
- *Mathematical* understanding;
- *Scientific and technological* understanding;

- Human, social and environmental understanding;
- Understanding physical health and well-being;
- Understanding the *arts and design*.

16. Without such a change the Society believes that the positive contribution of geography at the primary phase, enabling essential learning about our world, will be further eroded.

**17. The Society is not able to support the IRPC's recommendation for the title for the area of understanding currently entitled 'human, social and environmental understanding'.**

18. Turning to the development of programmes of learning, the Society believes that these should clearly identify:

- The educational aims and purpose for each area of learning.
- The relevant 'subject specific' knowledge, skills and understanding that are being grouped within each area of understanding.
- Highlight, as the IRPC rightly does, the need for subject specific and also interdisciplinary teaching within an area of understanding (and indeed between areas of understanding) and the need for rigour across both approaches.

**19. The Society strongly believes that is it not the place of the programmes of learning to solely promote the up-front integration of subject disciplines within an area of learning.**

20. We are concerned that the positive and specific contributions of subject specialism will be lost if there is a drive to 'make the subjects fit' within the proposed areas of understanding. We are very concerned about the current direction of travel with regard to the programmes of learning.

21. We believe during the latter years of the primary phase, particularly years 5 & 6 there should be increasing opportunities for pupils to experience subject specific teaching and for teachers to be appropriately supported through subject specialist training and support. The impact of primary colleagues who hold the



Society's professional accreditation Chartered Geographer (Teacher) demonstrates how effectively their professional knowledge, skills and understanding can be drawn on to enhance their pupils' education.

22. The Society believes the following key geographical knowledge, skills and understanding should underpin pupils' progress through the primary curriculum:

- i) Geography's ability to connect pupils with an understanding of the differences, and the interaction between people, places and environments at a range of scales from the local to the global. And that these investigations should include first hand fieldwork based enquiries.
- ii) Geography's focus on the factors that bring about change in our surrounding - both built and natural - and the implications of future changes.
- iii) Geography's ability to connect children with different cultures and the citizenship dimension at the local, national and global scales.

23. In addition, the primary years should provide children with a geographical understanding of:

- i) The UK's geography, for example:
  - UK's constituent nations and their capitals,
  - Significant geographical features (e.g. rivers, mountains and urban areas).
  - The UK's proximity to mainland Europe and location on the globe
  - The ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of the UK's population.
  - The location of the pupil's local area within the geography of the UK
  - The geographical similarities and differences between their local area and other places studied in the UK.
- ii) The world's geography, for example:
  - The continents, North and South Poles, major oceans and key landscape features such as major deserts, deltas and mountain ranges, including why some of these features occur.
  - The location on a world map or globe of places from beyond the UK that have been studied.

- The location and basic understanding of different climatic and environmental zones e.g. tropical rainforest, desert or polar areas.
  - The study of places outside the UK that contrast with the pupils home locality
- iii) Geographical processes that explore, for example:
    - a. Weather and climate
    - b. Changes to our landscapes
    - c. Changes to our societies
  - iv) The interrelationship between people and their environment, for example:
    - a. How people have shaped Britain's rural and urban environments over time.
    - b. How the actions of pupils, and others, can help improve the environment of their school and local area.
    - c. The challenge of how best people can manage their environments, in both man made and 'natural' environments.
  - v) How to use key sources of geographical information, such as
    - a. Globes, atlases and maps including online 'earth browsers', GIS and Ordnance Survey map
    - b. First hand observation and fieldwork

24. Turning to the future a key issue will remain in terms how teachers should be supported to implement any revisions to the National Curriculum in a meaningful and coherent way for their pupils. In essence, a significant programme of support would be necessary for teachers to be able to:

- a. Recognise and understand what is new
- b. Be able to address subject specialism in specific lessons and through any integrated approaches
- c. Enhance pupils rigour in understanding
- d. Draw effectively on the local circumstances of the school's location, intake and environment to enhance their teaching of geography.

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