



Coalition for Language Education

CLE response to CAR Interim Report

Introduction

The Coalition for Language Education (CLE) is a grouping concerned with the development of language in education in its widest sense, throughout the educational pathway, across sectors, and across all relevant curriculum areas (www.coalitionforlanguageeducationuk.com). CLE has made a substantial evidence-based [submission](#) to the original CAR Call for Evidence, and has collaborated with others to produce a [digest](#) of 19 submissions from bodies with expertise in the area of language.

In line with those earlier documents, we have a number of comments to make on the implications for language education of the positions being taken in the CAR Interim Report, and suggestions for next steps.

Knowledge, skills and subjects

We respect the commitment of CAR to a “knowledge rich” curriculum. Disciplinary knowledge and disciplinary argumentation and critical thinking are central to education. However, they cannot develop in isolation from personal growth. Students will not engage effectively with a curriculum heavy with content which they perceive as imposed and distant from their everyday lives; curriculum design must also foster student agency and self-determination, creativity, life skills and an overall sense of self-efficacy, and these cannot be separated from the growth of knowledge. (This is well recognised in Deng (2022), cited in the Conceptual Position Paper which accompanies the CAR Interim Report.)

Pointing to the high level of cross-field and cross-sectoral consensus evidenced both in the Coalition’s [Founding Statement](#) as well as in our Digest of Submissions to the Review, we question the assumption of the Interim Report that individual “subjects” must remain the cornerstones of education, and urge the CAR team to recognise the contribution of interdisciplinary connections to the development of key skills and abilities. In the area of language, for example, it is clear that English as a first language, English as an additional language, foreign languages, and children’s home and heritage languages can and should all work together to e.g. develop young people’s communication skills, including oracy as well as literacy, their intercultural understanding, their knowledge about language, their creativity, and their digital and media literacy. If young people are to ‘adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing and AI-enabled world’, they need systematic developmental experience of independent inquiry, collaborative working and community & environmental initiatives. These constitute a necessary

interdisciplinary dimension for a new curriculum, building language, thinking and problem-solving skills and connecting these to the acquisition of knowledge.

Diversity

We welcome the focus of the Interim Report on increasing the diversity of curriculum content. Across the whole curriculum there is a need to boost engaging content which connects positively with the identities and concerns of today's young people and future citizens. In the area of language, for example, this means positively acknowledging the multilingualism of individual children and of school communities, and language variation in society at large; broadening the range of language media to be studied and experienced; ensuring young people experience readings and literary texts which creatively address relevant themes (the environment; migration; gender; race ...) , in contemporary as well as historical settings, both local and global. It can be expected that given a broad curriculum framework, language(s) teachers themselves can make the specific choices of themes and texts best suited to their local needs.

Language at 16-19

Regarding the 16-19 curriculum, our view is that all students regardless of increasing specialism should have systematic opportunities to further develop their knowledge and skills in the language domain. Young people's agency, sense of self-efficacy, and readiness for the world of work will be enhanced by more varied and flexible courses and assessments, such as a revised communication-oriented GCSE English Language, an EAL curriculum supporting students to advance to Level 3 study, vocationally oriented courses in languages, and skills-based language assessments in a wide range of languages including home, heritage and community languages.

Performance measures

We are pleased that the CAR team plan to consider further the impact of current performance measures on children's educational experience. In our original submission we argued for the separation of system-wide accountability measures from assessment and certification of individual children's progress. There is ample evidence that use of SATs and GCSEs for accountability purposes, and the EBacc and Progress 8 measures, have distorting effects on pedagogy and institutional practice leading to a narrowing of the curriculum, e.g. focusing on a limited subset of literacy skills and reducing access to creative curriculum areas. We look forward to this issue being addressed through a longer term programme of work on varied aspects of assessment. We see an urgent need to move beyond the current over-use of end-of-course written examinations, moving instead to broader and more flexible assessments of language, oracy and literacy in support of learning. Longer term, research is needed on innovative forms of assessment, including digital assessment, to meet this goal.

Immediate issues in the language curriculum

The Interim Report recognises some problematic issues within the language area of the curriculum, which urgently need to be addressed. Regarding subject English, the Interim Report acknowledges that at primary level, the current curriculum is stifling creativity, and that at secondary level, the English language GCSE curriculum is not serving the needs of at least one-third of the school population. To address immediate problems at primary level, the curriculum should broaden its focus beyond Standard English and abandon narrow testing of SE grammar,

encouraging children to explore grammar as part of their experimentation with a wider range of genres and styles, also developing knowledge about language which encompasses language variation and multilingualism. At secondary level, GCSE English language requires fundamental redesign, to reduce the bias toward literary genres and offer a qualification focusing on a) the full range of communication skills (including oracy) applied to a wider range of media, and b) linguistically informed exploration of language variation.

A second immediately problematic issue for the languages area identified in the Interim Report is an apparent “lack of efficacy in modern foreign language teaching in primary and transition to secondary”. Systematic study of a second/foreign language is now mainstream in primary school curricula internationally, and research in English primary schools has demonstrated its positive contributions to the development of intercultural understanding, language awareness and creativity, as well as to communication skills. However primary MFL in England has suffered greatly from inconsistency of policy, an underdeveloped curriculum, and lack of investment in initial teacher training and ongoing professional development, which leaves many schools poorly equipped to deliver in this area. Issues of KS2/KS3 transition affect many subject areas, but are particularly acute in MFL. Better coordination of the MFL curriculum as a whole, from KS2 through to KS4, and the extension of professional support to primary schools will promote the spread of existing good practice and create a more cohesive experience overall.

Conclusion

The CAR has opened up a wide range of issues and we agree that these can only be addressed in a phased way. In the longer term, for example:

- comparative work is needed on the treatment of language(s) and literacy in the school curricula of other high performing jurisdictions;
- an ongoing research programme is needed to support and evaluate change, e.g. in relation to accountability and assessment of language, as of other areas;
- and following a period of stasis, a systematic means must be found to engage stakeholders beyond DfE with ongoing cycles of curriculum review and development, e.g. through the establishment of an independent body with responsibility for designing and overseeing an overall curriculum and assessment strategy.

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