

Response to the Department for Education National Curriculum Review

1. The 1994 Group welcomes the invitation from the Department for Education to submit evidence to its review of the National Curriculum. The following is the 1994 Group's response, for more detailed information please refer to any individual responses from our member institutions.
2. We are supportive of measures which encourage all students to have a broad-based education, particularly at Level 2 (GCSE and equivalent). Pupils should study a wide range of subjects, appropriate to them, taking into account their aptitude and interest. This has the potential to increase opportunities for all students at higher levels of study.
3. With a broad-based education students should be able to enjoy art-related subjects and wider humanities subjects such as religious studies, philosophy, economics, law and sociology alongside the core subjects English, the sciences and mathematics. Students should be encouraged to explore a wide range of disciplines, taking into account their aptitude and interest, as this will increase opportunities for all students at higher levels of study.
4. Good information, advice and guidance in schools is vital to support pupils in choosing subjects to study at GCSE level and beyond. It is critical that students understand the implications and long term effects of their subject choices. This is especially true at GCSE level, which impacts upon A-Level choices and thus has later implications for future higher education opportunities also.
5. We consider it important that pupils are encouraged to take up a foreign language. Student mobility and UK university students studying abroad as part of their programmes are highly contingent on prior language learning acquired in schools. Ensuring that UK students receive study abroad experience is of highly strategic importance for the future global competitiveness of the UK. Foreign languages open up opportunities for UK graduates to work and excel in a global market place. Demand for degree level languages has been in decline, having a damaging knock-on effect on the abilities of UK graduates to study and work abroad. It is vital that pupils are encouraged to take up language study at GCSE level and earlier in order to counteract this trend.
6. Universities mainly take Level 3 (A-Level and equivalent) qualifications into account when considering admissions. However, Level 2 (GCSE and equivalent) qualifications are taken into consideration as part of broader measures of attainment and to assess an applicant's suitability. Therefore, as we stressed in our response to the Education Select Committee Inquiry on the English Baccalaureate, it is important that pupils are encouraged to study a broad range of subjects, and the English Baccalaureate should promote this.
7. The 1994 Group members are committed to widening opportunities for students from all backgrounds and at all levels of study. While cooperation between HEIs and schools is crucial in reaching disadvantaged students, it is vital that the groundwork for widening participation starts as early as possible. A broad national curriculum that simultaneously promotes take-up of academic Level 2 qualifications will increase options for students

when looking to further and higher study, and so will high quality information, advice and guidance in schools. One of the problems currently facing widening participation students is they have too often been channelled into vocational qualifications at Level 2 thus leaving them with reduced options later on. This is of course, to a degree, taken into account at university admissions stage as universities take non-traditional and vocational qualifications and contextual information into consideration.

8. To conclude, it is important that the national curriculum encourages pupils to increase the breadth of their study, pupils should study a wide range of subjects, identified as appropriate to them through good quality information advice and guidance, taking into account their aptitude and interest. This has the potential to increase opportunities for all students at higher levels of study.

Appendix 1

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The 1994 Group represents 19 of UK's leading student-focused research-intensive universities. It was established in 1994 to promote excellence in University research and teaching.

12 of the top 20 universities in the Guardian University Guide 2011 league tables published on the 8th June 2010 are 1994 Group members. In 17 major subject areas 1994 Group universities are the UK leaders achieving 1st place in their field (THE RAE subject rankings 2008). 57% of the 1994 Group's research is rated 4* 'world-leading' or 3* 'internationally excellent' (RAE 2008, HEFCE). 10 of the top 200 universities in the 2010-11 THE World University Rankings are 1994 Group members.

The 1994 Group represents: University of Bath, Birkbeck University of London, Durham University, University of East Anglia, University of Essex, University of Exeter, Goldsmiths University of London, Institute of Education University of London, Royal Holloway University of London, Lancaster University, University of Leicester, Loughborough University, Queen Mary University of London, University of Reading, University of St Andrews, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of Surrey, University of Sussex, University of York.