



Haberdashers' Curriculum & Assessment Review Response

In this document you will find the verbatim answers of our respondents. The respondents who make up the collective Haberdashers' Review Response range from the senior leadership teams in our schools, to school staff, to Haberdasher members; representing a diverse range of industries.

1. Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

Individual

Organisation

2. If you are responding as an individual, in what capacity are you responding?

A student, pupil or learner

A parent or carer

Teacher, tutor or lecturer

Wider school, college or university workforce

Senior leader

Researcher, academic or education expert

Employer

Member of the public

Local authority officer

Other (please describe)

3. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, which of the below best describes which part of the sector your organisation represents?

Primary school

Secondary school or college

Sixth form

General FE College

Higher Education Institution

Multi-academy trust

AP/Specialist provider

Middle school

Union or professional association

Employer or employer representative body

Charity, social enterprise organisation or non-profit organisation

Community organisation

Local authority

Think tank

Professional association

Awarding organisation

Other (please describe) We are responding as the Worshipful Company of Haberdashers (a City of London livery company) and family of schools (comprising Haberdashers' Academies Trust South, Haberdashers' West Midlands Academies Trust, Haberdashers' Monmouth School and Haberdashers' Elstree Schools).

4. What is the name of your organisation? Worshipful Company of Haberdashers

5. What is your role within the organisation? Director for Schools & Estates

6. What is your name? Arabella Gonzalez

7. What is your email address? arabella@haberdashers.co.uk

8. Are you happy to be contacted directly about your response?

Yes

No

9. Would you like us to keep your responses confidential?

Yes

No

10. What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways are working well to support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

a. Curriculum

Haberdashers' schools include a wide variety of contexts including both MATs in areas of high relative deprivation and independent schools. We define curriculum as "The totality of our children and young people's Haberdashers' Experience". We consider that it covers everything that happens to students at school. We want that experience to be rigorous, fun and academic.

The responses to survey questions have been created based on input from trust and school senior leaders, a survey of school staff and a survey of members of the Company. Members are business leaders and professionals, many are school governors. They are linked by our commitment to the Company purpose of "Empowering young people from every background to achieve their potential through our schools and our communities".

Our position on the knowledge /skills debate is that in order to understand how to process and use things, you need to know things. People can become far more skilled with the relevant knowledge. The much-rehearsed knowledge/skills dichotomy is a false one, therefore. Educators know this.

We therefore strongly support a curriculum that retains the importance of rigorous academic content, and which allows students to develop deep knowledge, which will in turn enable them to develop stronger critical thinking, analysis and communication skills. We believe in ambition for all.

Strengths of the curriculum

Schools highlight the focus on curriculum intent which has led schools to be far more aware of the importance of curriculum. This has led to a far more sequenced and progressive curriculum for children and young people which, in theory at least, provides a coherent journey for them as they move from one key stage to the next. Educators are far more knowledgeable about the role of the curriculum.

The increased focus on the importance of Early Years and the need for a strong start has been welcomed. Alongside this, the recognition that children arrive at school with different experiences on their first few years, and that teacher assumptions at this point can present a significant barrier to future progress if not challenged.

The emphasis on reading from early years and onwards has led to a more deliberate approach not only for the teaching of early reading but also for the teaching of reading as children get older and fall behind and also the development of a love of reading.

The development of a more knowledge and skills rich curriculum has provided useful opportunities for schools to demonstrate the relevance of study in real world contexts. The move towards more targeted, cross-curricular connection has a positive impact on the ability of pupils to apply their learning, whilst also emphasising the continued benefits of a content rich, academic curriculum.

Members focus on:

- Strong Foundation in Core Subjects: Many respondents commend the curriculum for providing a solid foundation in core subjects like English, mathematics, and science. This foundation is seen as essential for further learning and career development.
- Improved Digital Literacy and Technology Skills: The sources consistently acknowledge the significant improvement in digital literacy and technology skills among young people. This is attributed to increased exposure to technology in the classroom and everyday life.
- Consistency and Well-Established Structure: which provides a stable framework for learning.

b. Assessment System

As curriculum implementation in the classroom has become important (rather than the teacher and the mechanics of teaching) schools have moved away from tick box assessments of teaching and a grade for progress within one lesson, which was never helpful. As a result, schools have become more aware of the importance of formative assessment.

Formative assessments are valued for supporting individualized feedback and deeper learning. HATS highlighted the shift away from "tick-box assessments" to methods that inform teaching and learning. Independent schools appreciate their flexibility to innovate in assessment, though state-funded schools report constraints due to accountability pressures.

c. Qualification Pathways

Both sectors value pathways that balance academic rigour with flexibility to meet diverse learner needs. The focus on foundational skills enables access to future opportunities and schools prioritize fostering intellectual curiosity and personal growth alongside qualifications.

11. What aspects of the current a) curriculum, b) assessment system and c) qualification pathways should be targeted for improvements to better support and recognise educational progress for children and young people?

While the current curriculum, assessment system, and qualification pathways have strengths, significant areas require improvement to better support and recognise educational progress for all children and young people. Across our schools, there is shared concern about the narrowing of education caused by high-stakes accountability frameworks, over-reliance on terminal exams, and undervaluation of certain subjects and skills.

a) Curriculum

The narrowing effect of accountability measures such as Progress 8 (P8) and the EBacc is a key challenge. Schools in disadvantaged areas face a particularly harsh tension between their accountability requirements and students' individual needs, exacerbating inequity in the system. Prioritizing a few subjects over others marginalizes areas like arts, sport, and technical education, which are crucial for fostering creativity, resilience, and engagement in students.

Schools highlight the need for a broader curriculum, noting the reduction in multi-disciplinary thinking due to rigid subject boundaries and accountability-driven decisions. Communication, fluency of expression, and the ability to listen and respond are undervalued in the current system, despite being essential skills for the future. In our survey 59% of staff did not agree that the current secondary curriculum and qualification pathways support students to have the knowledge they need for future study, life and work.

The importance of soft skills is a top priority for the Haberdashers' community. Our members only scored the current curriculum 3.1/5 as a preparation for workforce skills. Our members (professionals and business leaders) place an overwhelming emphasis on soft skills. None of our members believe that hard skills are more important than softer skills, 62% believe young people need hard and soft skills and 38% believe that soft skills, encompassing communication, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, and resilience, are the important skills for young people to develop. Communication is the most important soft skill.

Across all schools, there is agreement on the need to enrich the curriculum to better reflect the holistic development of students, ensuring it supports both academic and personal growth.

"We need a curriculum which encourages skills for life, the most important of which are communication, collaboration and creativity. We need to end archaic academic snobbery."
(Middle Manager HES)

b) Assessment System

The dominance of terminal exams as the primary mode of assessment is seen as overly restrictive and insufficient for measuring the breadth of students' abilities. We believe that assessment should include a variety of approaches, allowing for the recognition of skills like teamwork, creativity, and

practical application. 50% of staff in our survey did not agree that current assessment methods effectively measure pupils' knowledge, skills, and understanding across different subjects.

In science practical skills have been reduced to a “tick-box exercise,” rather than being central to the learning process. We believe that practicals are not a ‘nice to have’ but are constitutive of the scientific method and an important part of GCSE study. Similarly, the removal of the speaking component from English GCSE undermines the development of critical communication skills.

Our members note that workplace assessment of early career staff is based most significantly on the quality and accuracy of completed projects.

c) Qualification Pathways

Qualification pathways do not adequately support diverse student needs. While achieving eight subjects for P8 might benefit the school, gaining five strong passes in key subjects would better serve some students' next steps.

The EBacc's narrow focus has impacted on subject choices, particularly the arts and technical subjects, with hugely detrimental effects. A revised pathway system that allows students to follow a mix of academic and vocational courses, tailored to their aspirations, would better support individual progress.

Our schools agree that reforms should prioritize the education of the “whole child,” with less focus on high-stakes accountability and more on holistic development. We advocate:

- A broader, richer curriculum that values arts, sport, and technical subjects equally with core academic areas.
- Diversified assessment methods that capture a wider range of student skills and abilities.
- An accountability framework that prioritizes student needs over performance metrics.
- Exploration of a national, non-political body to oversee sustainable educational strategy, reducing the impact of frequent policy changes.

This shared vision highlights the need for a system that balances academic rigor with creativity, adaptability, and equity, ensuring that all young people are prepared for the challenges of the modern world.

12. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation (class ceilings for learners experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage)?

The current curriculum, assessment system, and qualification pathways present significant barriers to improving attainment, progress, access, and participation for socioeconomically disadvantaged learners. These systemic issues limit opportunities, reinforce inequities, and undermine progress for these pupils.

Key Barriers:

1. Narrowed Curriculum Offer:

The high-stakes accountability framework, including measures like the EBacc and Progress 8, has narrowed the range of subjects available. This restricts access to creative and vocational disciplines,

which may better align with the interests and strengths of disadvantaged pupils. Whilst English and Maths should be essential, pupils should be free to choose the subjects they will succeed in and are interested in. This will maintain a commitment to learning and development. An overly narrow focus on traditional academic subjects can alienate pupils who might excel in creative or vocational pathways.

2. Irrelevance of Exam Specifications:

Outdated exam specifications often fail to engage or inspire pupils. For example, English literature's reliance on classic texts limits its appeal to diverse learners. For example, the English GCSE syllabus has a focus on traditional literature. This is often replicated at Key stage 3 as schools feel the pressure to prepare pupils for the high stakes' exams. Often this means that modern/contemporary literature, that could engage and inspire many disadvantaged pupils, is ignored.

3. Overemphasis on Exams:

Exams as the primary mode of assessment disproportionately impact disadvantaged pupils, who may lack the resources or support to succeed in such high-stakes environments.

4. Mismatch Between Accountability and Pupil Needs:

Measures like Progress 8 focus on school-level performance rather than individual outcomes that matter to pupils, such as qualifications that directly support career progression.

Recommendations:

1. Broaden the Curriculum:

Introduce a wider range of subjects at Key Stage 4, including creative, vocational, and interdisciplinary options that allow pupils to discover their strengths.

2. Modernise Exam Specifications:

Update syllabi to include diverse and contemporary content that resonates with pupils' lived experiences, making education more relevant and engaging.

3. Diversify Assessment Methods:

Incorporate coursework, project-based evaluations, and oral presentations to provide a fuller picture of pupils' abilities and achievements.

4. Refocus Accountability Frameworks:

Shift emphasis from school-level metrics like Progress 8 to individual qualifications that support meaningful progression for pupils.

5. Early Engagement:

Ensure that Key Stage 3 curriculum includes engaging, modern content that prepares pupils for academic and vocational success at Key Stage 4.

13. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways are there any barriers to improving attainment, progress, access or participation which may disproportionately impact pupils based on other characteristics (e.g. disability, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion or belief etc.)

The curriculum, assessment system, and qualification pathways contain barriers that disproportionately impact pupils based on characteristics such as disability, sexual orientation, gender, race, or religion. These barriers hinder access, attainment, and participation, often perpetuating systemic inequities.

Key Barriers:

1. Lack of Representation in the Curriculum:

The curriculum insufficiently reflects the diversity of modern society, which can disengage pupils whose identities and histories are not represented.

2. Uniform Assessment Methods:

A reliance on terminal exams privileges specific learning styles and disadvantages others.

3. Structural Inequities:

High-stakes accountability metrics force schools to prioritize performance over individual needs, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities.

Recommendations:

1. Diversify the Curriculum:

Integrate diverse histories, cultures, and perspectives to foster inclusion and engagement.

2. Broaden Assessment Methods:

We believe that including more coursework, practicals, and oral assessments would ensure fairness for all learners.

“Assessment should be modernised to reflect how assessment is managed in industry and at university. A more modular approach with opportunity to readdress misconceptions.

(Middle Manager HWMAT)

In our teacher survey 45% of staff advocated for more coursework in the assessment mix. This would almost certainly have been higher without reservations about teacher workload - this was a recurring concern, with some suggesting that an increased focus on coursework might exacerbate this issue unless appropriate support and resources are provided.

3. Review Accountability Measures:

Focus on metrics that promote meaningful learning experiences over school rankings.

4. Strengthen Inclusion Policies:

Embed equitable support for all pupils, particularly those with disabilities or from underrepresented groups.

14. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any barriers in continuing to improve attainment, progress, access or participation for learners with SEND?

We believe that curriculum should be accessible to all pupils and all pupils should feel a sense of success. This requires a commitment to inclusion and equitable resourcing.

The current system presents significant challenges for learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), limiting their ability to achieve, progress, and participate fully in education.

Key Barriers:

1. Assessment Methods:

Timed, high-stakes assessments disproportionately disadvantage SEND learners by failing to accommodate their needs or recognize their abilities in areas like creativity and verbal reasoning.

2. Curriculum Limitations:

The EBacc framework restricts options for SEND learners, who may excel in non-EBacc subjects like arts or vocational training.

3. Resource Constraints:

Insufficient funding and staffing hinder effective SEND support.

Recommendations:

1. Diversify Assessment Methods:

Introduce coursework, project-based evaluations, oral presentations, and practical demonstrations tailored to SEND learners' strengths.

2. Ensure Equitable Funding:

Allocate resources for specialized staff, materials, and teacher training.

3. Broaden the Curriculum:

Elevate the status of non-EBacc subjects to provide pathways that align with SEND learners' strengths.

4. Simplify Access Arrangements:

Streamline the process for implementing reasonable adjustments to reduce administrative burdens.

By addressing these barriers, the system can create a more equitable, inclusive framework that enables all learners to achieve their potential.

15. In the current curriculum, assessment system and qualification pathways, are there any enablers that support attainment, progress, access or participation for the groups listed above?

While there are barriers in the curriculum, assessment system, and qualification pathways, several enablers currently support attainment, progress, access, and participation for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, with SEND, or from diverse groups. These enablers can be enhanced to create a more inclusive and effective educational system.

Key Enablers:

1. High Ambition and Expectations

Haberdashers' schools maintain high expectations for all pupils, fostering an environment where every learner is encouraged to succeed.

2. Focus on Early Years, Literacy, and Numeracy

Early interventions and a strong focus on foundational skills in literacy and numeracy provide pupils with the tools needed to navigate the curriculum successfully.

3. Broad and Balanced Curriculum Opportunities

Despite concerns about curriculum narrowing, there is recognition of the benefits of knowledge-rich content when combined with broader opportunities to connect learning to real-world contexts. We highlight the value of linking academic content to practical applications. Cross-curricular opportunities enhance the relevance of academic study to real-world challenges.

4. Practical Adjustments and Inclusion Strategies

Access arrangements, such as extra time or scribes for SEND learners, provide a baseline of equity in assessments. The growing emphasis on inclusion across schools is another positive development.

5. Teacher Expertise and Curriculum Planning

Schools, particularly in the state sector, have improved their understanding of curriculum design and implementation, leading to more effective teaching strategies.

6. Extracurricular and Wider Curriculum Enrichment

We stress the importance of extracurricular activities in fostering skills like resilience, teamwork, and critical thinking. These opportunities complement academic learning and prepare pupils for life beyond school.

Recommendations for Strengthening Enablers:

1. Maintain High Expectations Across All Subjects

Ensure high ambition is consistent across the curriculum, with tailored support to meet diverse pupil needs.

2. Enhance Curriculum Inclusivity

Expand the curriculum to better reflect pupils' lived experiences, creating content that engages and inspires.

3. Invest in Early Years, Literacy, and Numeracy

Prioritise funding and resources for foundational skills, particularly for disadvantaged pupils.

4. Expand Extracurricular Opportunities

Provide all pupils, regardless of background, with access to enrichment activities to develop transferable skills.

5. Support Teacher Development

Invest in professional development to enhance teachers' skills in curriculum planning, inclusive teaching, and diverse assessment methods.

By amplifying these enablers, the education system can build a strong foundation for equity and inclusion, ensuring all pupils can achieve their full potential.

16. To what extent does the content of the national curriculum at primary level (key stages 1 and 2) enable pupils to gain an excellent foundation in a) English and b) maths? Are there ways in which the content could change to better support this aim? Please note, we invite views specifically on transitions between key stages in section 9.

The national curriculum at the primary level (Key Stages 1 and 2) provides an effective foundation in English and Maths, equipping pupils with essential skills for their educational journey. However, improvements are needed to better support all pupils and ensure the curriculum remains relevant, flexible, and engaging.

Strengths of the Current Curriculum:

1. Clear Focus on Foundational Skills

The emphasis on literacy and numeracy is widely acknowledged as a strength, helping pupils build essential knowledge and skills.

2. Ambition for Early Success

Prioritizing foundational skills in the early years sets pupils on a trajectory for academic progress, creating equitable opportunities for future learning.

Challenges and Areas for Improvement:

1. High-Stakes Testing

SATs dominate the teaching agenda in the state sector, creating a high-pressure environment that can limit creative and varied approaches to learning.

2. Lack of Flexibility

The curriculum's rigidity often prevents teachers from adapting lessons to meet the diverse needs of their pupils.

3. Limited Opportunities for Application

While core skills are emphasized, there is less focus on applying these skills in real-world or cross-curricular contexts, reducing their transferability.

Recommendations:

1. Reduce Pressure from High-Stakes Testing

Reevaluate the role of SATs to reduce their influence on teaching and learning, allowing for greater flexibility and depth.

2. Diversify Content and Approaches

Incorporate creative and problem-solving activities into English and Maths to engage pupils and cater to diverse learning styles.

3. Strengthen Cross-Curricular Links

Embed opportunities for pupils to apply literacy and numeracy skills across subjects, enhancing their relevance and practical utility.

4. Support Teacher Autonomy

Empower teachers with the flexibility to tailor lessons to the needs of their pupils while maintaining alignment with the curriculum.

5. Improve Continuity Between Early Years and Key Stage 1

Build stronger connections between Early Years and Key Stage 1 to ensure a seamless transition and consistent development of foundational skills.

17. To what extent do the English and maths primary assessments support pupils to gain an excellent foundation in these key subjects? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support this aim?

English and maths assessments provide only one perspective on pupils' progress and learning. The emphasis on standardised exams may not fully capture a pupil's understanding or potential. The pressure of league tables can drive schools to focus narrowly on achieving high scores, potentially at the expense of deeper learning or a broader curriculum.

18. To what extent does the content of the a) English and b) maths national curriculum at secondary level (key stages 3 and 4) equip pupils with the knowledge and skills they need for life and further study? Are there ways in which the content could change to better support this aim?

a. English

The heavy focus on traditional texts often fails to engage students or reflect modern contexts. Modern/contemporary literature that could engage students is often overlooked. Modern media literacy is not included.

b. Maths

Emphasis on procedures over practical applications alienates pupils and reduces real-world connections. More focus on the rationale and purpose of mathematical concepts and financial literacy would make the subject more relevant and engaging.

Recommendations:

1. Diversify English content:

Include modern, diverse texts to engage students and reflect contemporary society.

2. Make Maths relevant:

Focus on practical applications such as budgeting and data analysis to improve engagement and utility.

3. Foster interdisciplinary learning:

Encourage connections between Maths, English, and other subjects to demonstrate real-world applications.

4. Protect Key Stage 3 Breadth:

Ensure this stage remains exploratory and not overly exam-focused.

19. To what extent do the current maths and English qualifications at a) pre-16 and b) 16-19 support pupils and learners to gain, and adequately demonstrate that they have achieved, the skills and knowledge they need? Are there any changes you would suggest that would support these outcomes?

Challenges and Areas for Improvement:

1. Relevance and Engagement:

a) English:

The focus on traditional texts, such as Romantic poets, is valuable for literary study but often fails to resonate with the lived experiences of diverse learners.

Transactional writing tasks (e.g., writing letters or leaflets) feel outdated and irrelevant to students. Literature and language content overlap too much, reducing the distinctiveness and applicability of the two courses.

b) **Maths:**

There is insufficient emphasis on real-world applications, such as financial literacy and practical problem-solving, which are vital for life and work.

2. **Overloaded Curricula:**

Students are required to cover too much content, leaving little time for deep engagement with texts or fostering a love for reading. The breadth of content can lead to a superficial understanding, particularly in schools with limited resources or time.

3. **Equity and Accessibility:**

For students who do not pass GCSE English or Maths, the focus on repeated resits does not adequately address underlying skill gaps. We believe there may be a need for alternative qualifications that reflect functional literacy and numeracy without compromising rigour.

4. **Assessment Methods:**

The dominance of high-stakes terminal assessments disadvantages many learners, particularly those with SEND or who perform better through continuous or varied forms of assessment. Current qualifications often prioritize theoretical knowledge over practical application, which can alienate students and fail to reflect their abilities. Moving to open book assessments should be considered:

"I believe all exams should be open book/note based so we are assessing application of skill, not memory" (Middle Manager HM)

Timing and subject suitability of assessment type should be considered:

"More choice in when qualifications are sat. I'd be keen to see an on-demand test for basic competencies in Maths and English, for example, which students can take when ready. More matching of assessment and subject- e.g. it makes sense to assess Maths in an exam. In other subjects, it can be reductionist." (Senior Leader HES)

Recommendations for Improvement:

1. **Broaden English Curriculum:**

- Reevaluate the balance between traditional and modern texts to include diverse voices and experiences.
- Reintroduce media literacy components, such as analyzing social media and identifying fake news, as these are critical life skills.
- Differentiate more clearly between literature and language to enhance their unique purposes and benefits.

2. **Revise Maths Curriculum:**

- Increase the focus on practical and real-world applications, such as financial literacy, budgeting, and statistical reasoning.
- Integrate tasks that require problem-solving in realistic contexts to improve engagement and understanding.

3. **Introduce Alternative Qualifications:**

- Develop pathways that focus on functional literacy and numeracy for students who struggle with traditional GCSE formats. These qualifications should be rigorous but tailored to demonstrate real-world skills.
- 4. Reform Assessment Practices:**
- Diversify assessment methods to include teacher assessments, coursework, and project-based evaluations alongside exams.
 - For English Literature, reduce the quantity of texts studied to allow for deeper exploration and critical analysis.

20. How can we better support learners who do not achieve level 2 in English and maths by 16 to learn what they need to thrive as citizens in work and life? In particular, do we have the right qualifications at level 2 for these 16-19 learners (including the maths and English study requirement)?

The current approach to supporting learners who do not achieve Level 2 in English and Maths by age 16 presents significant challenges. These learners often face barriers that existing qualifications and study requirements fail to adequately address. The following recommendations aim to improve support for this group while maintaining high expectations for their future success.

Challenges:

- 1. Relevance and Recognition:**
 - Alternative qualifications for these learners are often not widely recognized, undermining their value and utility in real-world settings.
 - GCSE resits may not be the most appropriate pathway for all learners, particularly those who struggle with traditional examination methods or face additional barriers such as SEND or socioeconomic disadvantages.
- 2. Content and Accessibility:**
 - Many learners, especially those with SEND or EAL, may not have had sufficient exposure to pre-20th-century texts or Shakespeare, limiting their ability to engage with the current English curriculum.
 - Socioeconomic disadvantage often restricts access to resources or opportunities to read and learn beyond the classroom.
- 3. Motivation and Confidence:**
 - Requiring repeated resits of the same qualifications without meaningful changes to teaching or assessment methods can demotivate learners and reduce their confidence.

Recommendations:

- 1. Develop Alternative, High-Quality Qualifications:**
 - Introduce rigorous, functional qualifications in English and Maths that emphasize real-world applications. For example:
 - English: Focus on practical communication, media literacy, and critical reading of everyday texts like news articles or workplace documents.
 - Maths: Emphasize financial literacy, data interpretation, and practical problem-solving.
 - Ensure these qualifications are widely recognized by employers and post-secondary institutions to enhance their value.

2. **Personalised Learning Pathways:**
 - Offer tailored pathways that account for individual learning needs, including options for vocational and technical education.
 - Integrate flexible assessment methods, such as coursework, portfolios, and oral presentations, alongside traditional exams.
3. **Enhanced Support and Resources:**
 - Provide targeted interventions for learners with SEND or EAL to address gaps in foundational skills and provide opportunities to engage with curriculum-relevant content.
 - Increase access to extracurricular learning resources, such as libraries, digital tools, and community programs, to mitigate the impact of socioeconomic disadvantage.
4. **High Ambition and Motivation:**
 - Ensure qualifications for these learners are seen as pathways to success rather than stopgaps.
 - Incorporate career education and citizenship components to connect learning outcomes with real-life goals and societal contributions.
5. **Teacher Training and Professional Development:**
 - Equip teachers with strategies to support diverse learning needs effectively, including differentiated instruction and inclusive practices.
 - Share best practices for motivating learners who may have struggled with traditional academic approaches.

21. Are there any particular challenges with regard to the English and maths a) curricula and b) assessment for learners in need of additional support (e.g. learners with SEND, socioeconomic disadvantage, English as an additional language (EAL))? Are there any changes you would suggest to overcome these challenges?

Covered in answer to question 20

- 22. Are there particular curriculum or qualifications subjects where:**
- a. there is too much content; not enough content, or content is missing;
 - b. the content is out-of-date;
 - c. the content is unhelpfully sequenced (for example to support good curriculum design or pedagogy);
 - d. there is a need for greater flexibility (for example to provide the space for teachers to develop and adapt content)? Please provide detail on specific key stages where appropriate.

1. English Curriculum:

a. Too Much Content / Missing Content:

- The reading canon, particularly in English Literature, is often seen as outdated, with many of the texts not resonating with modern students. Some of these works were written by authors whose contributions may be viewed with increasing scepticism, especially given historical and social contexts (e.g., colonialism or outdated societal norms).

Recommendation:

- Updating the canon: Introduce more contemporary texts, including a broader range of diverse voices that reflect modern society. These can include works by authors from different cultural, racial, and gender backgrounds, addressing contemporary issues that are more relatable for young people today.
- Connection to real world: Ensure that the curriculum reflects real-world applications of reading and writing, such as through the inclusion of media studies and digital literacy. This would also bridge the gap between academic and real-world uses of language.

b. Content is Out of Date:

- Some aspects of the English Language and Literature curriculum are increasingly irrelevant to the modern world. The emphasis on certain classical texts may not meet the interests and experiences of a significant portion of the student population.
- English Language is also falling increasingly out of step with expectations in the real world. Tasks are becoming convoluted and require an unnecessarily complex range of skills. Even engaged learners see a significant disparity between the skills that are required to excel in more 'factual' subjects.
- The English curriculum needs to be relevant and have more tangible skills. The inconsistency in marking every year suggests that it is too complicated and diffuse to provide a consistent marker of necessary skills.

Recommendation:

- Incorporate modern literature, including digital and multimedia texts, that students encounter in their everyday lives (e.g., social media, blogs, digital storytelling).
- Rethink the purpose and approach to literature study in schools, ensuring it remains relevant and engaging while also fostering critical thinking and creativity.

2. Computer Science Curriculum:

In Computer Science curriculum, the fast-paced changes in the development of technology mean that the syllabuses for GCSE and A Level have to be very broad, so as to leave scope for current developments. This means that the curriculum is not moving in line with technology as it currently stands. Teachers and students must find other ways to be engaging with technology at the cutting edge. In this particular area, the time it takes to accredit external qualifications is a barrier to being innovative

23. Are there particular changes that could be made to ensure the curriculum (including qualification content) is more diverse and representative of society?

Most subjects need to be reviewed in terms of the people studied, the books read, the knowledge considered important. Let's *'start with the end in mind'* - what do we want our young people to know which will help them succeed in the world today and in the future? How do we get there?

Across our schools **55%** of staff did not agree that the curriculum is diverse and representative of society. There is widespread agreement across the Haberdashers' network that the curriculum should better reflect the diversity of modern society. Schools stress the importance of genuine integration rather than superficial additions.

1. **Broadening Representation:**

Schools emphasize the need for curricula to represent diverse voices and perspectives, particularly in English, where the reading canon is perceived as overly Western-centric and traditional. We need to diversify the content taught in schools, including modern works from a variety of cultural, racial, and gender backgrounds.

2. **Beyond Tokenism:**

Efforts to diversify must go beyond adding "token" content. Integration should be meaningful, ensuring diverse perspectives are central rather than ancillary.

3. **Critical Thinking:**

Teach students how to engage with differing perspectives constructively. This includes fostering media literacy and encouraging critical discussions on complex societal issues. Students need to learn how to 'disagree agreeably' and analyse information critically.

It is worth noting that independent schools often have more flexibility to incorporate diverse and modern content due to fewer curriculum constraints, while state schools are more tightly bound by national frameworks.

Recommendations:

1. Broaden the curriculum to include modern, culturally diverse texts.
2. Embed critical engagement with diversity across subjects, not just in personal development lessons.
3. Reassess accountability frameworks to allow schools more flexibility in curriculum design.

24. To what extent does the current curriculum (including qualification content) support students to positively engage with, be knowledgeable about and respect others? Are there elements that could be improved?

Haberdashers believe that education is not merely for the benefit of the individual but also for the communities in which they live and work. We believe that the curriculum should be constructed to support character education (character *taught* in the terminology of the [Jubilee Centre](#)). Our members stress ethos and values – in particular empathy and respect:

“Empathy - this is more than just cultural sensitivity. It is being able to put yourself in someone else's shoes. Forgiveness - if someone unintentionally offends you....” (Haberdasher member)

If children are exposed to different worlds and different ways of living, early on, they will come to take difference as the norm. By carefully considering the curriculum we offer, we can address inclusion and acceptance more easily. While the curriculum has potential to foster understanding and respect, there is consensus that current efforts are uneven and rely too heavily on co-curricular programmes rather than formal teaching. Schools, whilst being academically aspirational, should become more reflective of the world that was changing even before Covid. We need to seek to

prepare young people to face a world that has changed significantly since teachers and policy makers were at school. A truly skills based, connected curriculum that created innovative thinkers with the real world skills to excel in the face of modern challenges would be of huge benefit.

1. Importance of Diverse Perspectives:

We should expose students to diverse viewpoints early to normalize difference.

2. Role of Co-Curricular Activities:

A significant portion of learning about responsibility and respect occurs outside formal lessons. At HES less than 12% of students reported learning about citizenship in lessons, compared to over 50% through co-curricular activities. This, in Jubilee Centre terminology, is character *sought* – meaning that students opt in to activities and those who are the most proactive receive the greatest benefit. By expanding the scope and reach of our Haberdashers' Advantage programme we aim to reach the maximum number of students.

Recommendations:

1. Integrate Values into the Formal Curriculum: Include topics such as empathy, collaboration, and community across academic lessons, not just in PSHE. It should be emphasised and taught throughout schools i.e. in academic lessons, curriculum, reading canon, school leadership etc.

2. Broaden Assessment Models: Use collaborative projects to teach teamwork and respect for different perspectives.

25. In which ways does the current primary curriculum support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for life and further study and what could we change to better support this?

As previous answers. A focus on literacy and numeracy is needed and is important (with all the caveats mentioned in relation to diversity and equity) but the high stakes accountability at KS2 narrows the curriculum offer and many 'teach to the test' and miss other aspects of learning. Teachers and school leaders need to be empowered to design the best curriculum for their children.

26. In which ways do the current secondary curriculum and qualification pathways support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?

There is significant concern that secondary qualification pathways do not adequately prepare students for life, study, and work. **59%** of staff in our survey did not agree that secondary curriculum and qualification pathways support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work. Similarly, members in our survey scored the question 'How effectively do you feel schools are preparing students for the specific demands of your industry or profession?' only **2.96/5**.

1. Content Overload:

Many teachers highlight the "race to complete content," which stifles deeper learning. The current system focuses too heavily on memorization, limiting creativity and critical thinking.

2. Neglect of Interdisciplinary Skills:

A lack of connections between subjects limits students' ability to apply knowledge holistically. The world does not exist in silos, but the curriculum does.

Recommendations:

1. Broaden and balance the curriculum to reduce content overload and encourage interdisciplinary approaches.
2. Foster creativity, critical thinking, and digital literacy through deliberate integration into academic pathways.

27. In which ways do the current qualification pathways and content at 16-19 support pupils to have the skills and knowledge they need for future study, life and work and what could we change to better support this?

The current qualification pathways at 16-19, particularly A Levels, provide a rigorous academic foundation for future study and work. However, Haberdashers believe that the system lacks breadth and parity for vocational pathways, limiting its capacity to fully prepare students for the diverse demands of modern life and work.

Strengths of the Current System

1. Academic Rigour and Specialisation

A Levels are valued for their depth and intellectual rigor, which allow students to specialize in areas of interest and prepare effectively for university.

Areas for improvement

1. Insufficient Real-World Preparation

The Haberdasher's community is concerned that there is too much focus on teaching students to pass exams, which does not always prepare them for productive work. Members rated the current curriculum only moderately effective in preparing students for the workforce, with a score of 3.1 out of 5.

"It teaches 'stuff' quite well but not so well how to apply it to the real world" (Haberdasher member.)

None (0%) of members in our survey believed that the priority at school should be hard skill acquisition in isolation. The focus should be on soft skill set acquisition :

"Focus on three areas of core skill: (1) Individual skills such as problem-solving, creativity, and delivery; (2) Team skills such as active listening, defining roles, identifying and covering gaps; (3) Key attitudes such as reliability, ownership, determination, and a growth mindset. Many technical skills can be learned over time with these three core skills in place." (Haberdasher member)

“Ability to complete longer projects, ability to tolerate setbacks or obstacles, ability to respectfully work with people from different cultural and social backgrounds, including those with different opinions.” (Haberdasher member)

This should be balanced with the acquisition of business ready hard skills such as digital literacy, data management, Excel and spreadsheet management, financial literacy and basic accounting were recommended.

2. Parity and Breadth in Pathways

There is a need for greater breadth in qualification pathways. This includes developing rigorous vocational options that are valued equally to A Levels and linked directly to careers, further study, and apprenticeships. Vocational qualifications need to lose any stigma and be recognised as valid and valuable components in preparation for working life.

3. Limited Assessment Diversity

The assessment diet for A Levels remains heavily reliant on terminal exams, which does not align with the varied methods used in higher education or the workplace.

Recommendation:

1. Broaden Qualification Pathways

- Develop vocational qualifications that are rigorous, respected, valued equally to A levels and directly linked to workforce and higher study opportunities.

2. Introduce complementary programs for skills education

Expand opportunities for students to engage in skills-focused enrichment programmes. This could take the form of a generic hard and soft skills induction programme for sixth form.

This is an area where we have focussed our attention. The Habs Diploma, recently accredited by the University of Buckingham, is a key innovation introduced by HES to complement the traditional A Level pathway. This programme provides opportunities for students to develop a range of skills, such as independence, critical thinking, global awareness, and cultural appreciation, that are essential for life and work but often overlooked in the standard curriculum. The diploma helps to embed a sense of intellectual curiosity, an enduring love of learning plus a wide range of the skills needed to flourish in an ever-changing world. Elective courses offered through the Habs Diploma include coding, finance, business, leadership, and beginner languages, equipping students with skills relevant to the modern workforce and fostering cultural capital.

Similarly, The Haberdashers' Advantage programme runs as a formal curriculum at our schools - focusing on moral, civic, performance and intellectual challenge. We also work with our schools as a single community and run a cross schools' programme covering Character and Futures initiatives. This includes character education, cultural capital initiatives, leadership, teambuilding, communication, professional networking and careers conferences as well as sporting and cultural competitions and festivals. This is intended to expose students to a wider social environment meeting and working with students from very different parts of the country and diverse backgrounds as well as Haberdasher members and professionals from many different sectors.

A national programme should involve developing close links with employers – possibly a move away from 'careers education' as part of the curriculum - this is such a fast-changing world that a 'skills

education' approach to the world of work is more appropriate. We recommend speaking to businesses/industries (as we do to our members) about what they want from their workforce...then weave this into the curriculum design.

“Try and close the gap between the curriculum and the real world. The real world is not necessarily what the press is saying which typical is about what might happen in a few years’ time. Establish good links with local companies and listen to their voice.” (Haberdasher member).

3. Diversify Assessment Methods

Introduce alternative assessment methods, such as coursework, project-based evaluations, and reflection assessments, to align with university practices and better prepare students for diverse professional environments.

28. To what extent does the current primary curriculum support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?

As above. The focus on Literacy and Numeracy is important but the high stakes KS2 assessments do impact on the delivery of the curriculum in years 5 and 6 and a ‘teach to the test’ approach in many cases. Teachers and leaders should be empowered to deliver a relevant and engaging curriculum for their pupils, within the context of a national framework, but freed from high stakes. Assessment should be ongoing and low stakes to ensure pupils are secondary ready.

29. To what extent do the current secondary curriculum and qualifications pathways support pupils to study a broad and balanced curriculum? Should anything change to better support this?

A majority of respondents to our staff survey (66%) felt that the curriculum on offer is on the whole broad and balanced. Some commented on the lack of diversity in the curriculum, as reflected in answers to other questions. However, due to environmental factors, the curriculum is narrowing.

As mentioned in our answer to question 11, the EBacc has really driven a certain narrative about which subjects are important, and which are not. Even in schools not ostensibly held to these measures, this narrative has become powerful. One thing that is tragic about this is the extent to which students feel they must choose what they do for utilitarian reasons, rather than according to their interests or talents, which can actually be counterproductive. This is reflected in the attitudes of some of our staff, who feel that arts and humanities courses suffer from a narrative which is not of the school’s making, but which pervades the educational discourse outside. Financial pressure on both the state and independent sectors is exaggerating this trend – it is increasingly hard for many schools to continue to offer languages, for example, at A level. This will have the longterm effect of making the UK culturally isolated.

Narrowing the artistic and creative curriculum is very short-sighted, given the success that British creative industries have on a global scale. The last government estimated that creative industries contributed £126bn to the economy and employed 2.4 million people in 2022. Moreover, now that many technical coding tasks can be completed by AI, it is in being originative that people can make a difference, and this requires creativity.

30. To what extent do the current qualifications pathways at 16-19 support learners to study a broad curriculum which gives them the right knowledge and skills to progress? Should anything change to better support this?

See answer to question 27.

31. To what extent do the current curriculum (at primary and secondary) and qualifications pathways (at secondary and 16-19) ensure that pupils and learners are able to develop creative skills and have access to creative subjects?

Creative subjects have been squeezed for all the reasons listed. They are essential subjects which many pupils enjoy and are successful in. This will have a positive impact on engagement, attendance and learning. The skills developed in these areas will also benefit other subjects.

Whilst 95% of staff in one school survey agree that creative and innovative skills are of vital importance, the external narrative about the importance of a STEM-heavy curriculum for future success has an impact on students' choices, and the assessment methods available in STEM do not always support teachers to teach the creative, originative thinking which is actually central to scientific work.

A science teacher in our survey commented:

"In the context of my own school, it has effectively become a STEM specialism school. As a science teacher, it actually saddens me that opportunities to study arts, languages (and to an extent, humanities) at post-16 level are so limited." (Middle Manager HWMAT)

Another teacher expressed concern about the broader cultural impact:

"Where is the interest in the wider world? Too narrow a focus on STEM has seen a generation of parents and pupils lose empathy and understanding of the wealth of culture, languages, art, and humanities that give content to life." (Teacher HES)

Our students are ambitious and want to achieve lots for their futures, but the message they are hearing is that the arts and humanities are not the best path to get them there. This then has a knock-on effect in A Level choices, a decline in university courses, which we are now seeing, and then a concomitant shortage of people choosing to teach those subjects.

In large part, this is to do with the narrative that the EBacc created around certain subjects and before this, the Russell Group list of 'facilitating subjects'. In recent student surveys **17-22%** identified that they learned how to be creative and innovative in lessons, whereas **51-54%** felt they learned this from the cocurricular provision, or other aspects of school life.

This underlines the picture emerging in many parts of this survey, namely that a narrowing of curriculum and assessment have undervalued skills that are deemed vital for the future by bodies such as the OECD, Unesco and WEF. We take this issue seriously. Arts and performance are an important part of a Haberdashers' education with significant funding to support schools' music and, at one school at least, a requirement for all students to take a performance based GCSE option.

32. Do you have any explanations for the trends outlined in the analysis and/or suggestions to address any that might be of concern?

It would be interesting to see this data then reflecting the outcomes those students get. Are students who get mainly 7s-9s at GCSE taking Art, or are they taking more STEM subjects? Are those who are taking Music taking it as one of 8, 9 10 or more? Undoubtedly there's complexity going on here, and it's not just that STEM is borrowing from arts, but there probably are some trends that could be pulled out by further disaggregating the data.

33. To what extent and how do pupils benefit from being able to take vocational or applied qualifications in secondary schools alongside more academically focused GCSEs?

These are important subjects but are often devalued and not seen as equal to GCSEs and A Levels. They should remain, and possibly broaden, and be linked more closely to the world of work, offering WEX opportunities.

34. To what extent does the current pre-16 vocational offer equip pupils with the necessary knowledge and skills and prepare them for further study options, including 16-19 technical pathways and/or A Levels? Could the pre-16 vocational offer be improved?

As above. They are not valued as much as GCSEs/A Levels. A carefully thought through vocational offer, linked to work and careers, is powerful and important. A reduction in exam assessment is needed, with thought given to a more balanced approach to assessment. These subjects should remain more practical in nature.

35. Is the volume of statutory assessment at Key Stages 1 and 2 right for the purposes set out above?

As above. Assessment should be a tool for teachers. The high stakes around them, leads to a 'teaching to the test' approach.

36. Are there any changes that could be made to improve efficacy without having a negative impact on pupils' learning or the wider education system?

We believe that the priority is to start with the end in mind. What are we aspiring to achieve and why? How will we know if we are being successful? Assessment should come last, not first. It should be a tool for teachers and schools to be able to know if the pupils are learning what they need to in order to be successful. At the moment, it feels like it is a tool for Government to hold schools very tightly to account. There are significant consequences for schools which are seen to 'fail' and this gets in the way of what is sensible.

37. Are there other changes to the statutory assessment system at Key Stages 1 and 2 that could be made to improve pupils' experience of assessment without negatively impacting learning or the wider system?

We recommend on-going, low stakes assessment supported by teacher assessment

38. What can we do to ensure the assessment system at key stages 1 and 2 works well for all learners, including learners in need of additional support in their education (for example SEND, disadvantage, EAL)?

As above

39. Is the volume of assessment required for GCSEs right for the purposes set out above? Are there any changes that could be made without having a negative impact on either pupils' learning or the wider education system?

There is widespread agreement that the current volume and structure of GCSE assessments could be improved to better align with pupils' learning needs and the realities of the wider world. Schools and Haberdashers' Company members highlight the excessive content load, the dominance of terminal exams, and the misalignment with skills required in the workplace as key challenges.

1. Excessive Content

Schools expressed strong concerns about the content-heavy nature of GCSEs, which drives a "race to complete" the curriculum and discourages deeper learning. Less is more.

2. Terminal assessment

Students can be facing up to 30 exams in a concentrated period. We recommend a more balanced approach to assessment using a bigger range of higher and lower stake assessment methods which can be triangulated, assuaging concerns about fairness and academic integrity. Measures such as iterative controlled assessment, opportunities for presentations, collaborative projects, coursework would reduce the reliance on externally validated measure. We also advocate for the removal of league tables.

Our staff surveys revealed significant support for diversifying assessment methods. 45% advocated for a broader "assessment diet." This is strong advocacy in the context of an environment where many teachers are change averse after many rapid changes of education policy in recent years. However, there was caution about implementation, with respondents emphasizing the need for fairness, comparability, and manageable workloads for teachers.

3. Misalignment with Workplace Skills

Members highlighted the stark differences between GCSE and A level assessments and real-world performance measures, where success is judged on metrics like achieving set performance targets, project quality, and team contributions.

"The real world is cross-functional and interactive. The curriculum is vertical and siloed by subject with too much specialism too early at A level." (Haberdasher member)

Members argued for a focus on teaching students how to apply knowledge and interpret data rather than simply memorising facts:

"Pupils need basic knowledge, but also how to use knowledge and data. Teaching 'stuff' is not the same as teaching 'how to use and interpret stuff' that is needed in the real world."

(Haberdasher member)

Members also emphasised the need to equip pupils with entrepreneurialism, adaptability, and resilience to thrive in a future where many traditional roles are being automated or outsourced.

40. What more can we do to ensure that:

a) the assessment requirements for GCSEs capture and support the development of knowledge and skills of every young person; and

b) young people's wellbeing is effectively considered when assessments are developed, giving pupils the best chance to show what they can do to support their progression?

The current GCSE assessment model needs to evolve to better capture a full range of pupils' skills and knowledge, including essential soft skills such as communication. Both schools and Haberdashers' Company members also emphasize that pupil wellbeing must be a priority in assessment design, ensuring fair and supportive conditions that allow all students to thrive.

a. Addressing Knowledge and Skills

1. Communication as a Core Skill:

In the Haberdashers' Company members' survey, communication was identified as the most important soft skill, reinforcing the need to integrate oracy and collaborative skills into formal assessments. We propose reinstating the speaking component of English GCSE as part of the final grade or developing a dedicated oracy qualification to ensure this critical skill is formally recognised.

2. Broadening Assessment Methods:

We advocate for a more varied "assessment diet" that moves beyond exams to include practical, collaborative, and creative opportunities. We recommend surveying the opportunities for achievement that are given at some of the most successful schools, to give a more accurate picture of what formal and informal opportunities students have to be assessed. Schools that are noticing the paucity of options for a broad assessment diet in the main curriculum are often forced to build these chances elsewhere where they have the resources to do so.

At our schools, often under the Haberdasher's Advantage programme, students take part in sports fixtures, essay competitions, robotics tournaments, debating and public speaking competitions, poetry reading in foreign languages, Model United Nations meetings, inter-House competitions, independent learning projects, music grades and much more besides. All of these opportunities offer some kind of outcome which broadens the educational diet they receive. Our students may also have considerable chance to follow their own interests, by writing for school subject journals, running their own activities and societies and this contributes to the breadth of their educational experience.

We also argue for linking assessment to workplace skills. Haberdashers' Company members highlight the gap between school assessments and real-world performance measures, which prioritize

communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Ensuring assessments align with these priorities would better prepare pupils for future success.

b. Considering Wellbeing in Assessment Design

1. Reducing High-Stakes Pressure

High-stakes exams can negatively impact pupil wellbeing. A more flexible assessment structure would help reduce stress and create a more supportive learning environment.

2. Encouraging Individual Strengths:

Schools emphasize giving students the chance to explore their interests through independent projects, student-led societies, and creative initiatives, fostering a broader sense of achievement.

Programmes like Haberdashers' Advantage provide students with structured opportunities to develop leadership, collaboration, employability and public speaking skills. Expanding similar initiatives nationally would ensure all pupils can access these benefits.

A way needs to be found to assess these skills in a manner that is universally recognised and presents different forms of achievement.

41. Are there particular GCSE subjects where changes could be made to the qualification content and/or assessment that would be beneficial for pupils' learning?

Specific concerns include:

1. Assessment Methods:

Computer science exams being taken on paper and the lack of assessed practicals in science highlight mismatches between subject content and evaluation methods.

2. Diversification or update of Content:

English Language, English literature, History, and Music curricula need updating to include more diverse and contemporary voices. Computer science subject matter needs updating. Maths should have a greater emphasis on the purpose of learning maths including core units on financial literacy (both in personal and professional lives).

3. Elevate Marginalised Subjects:

Address the impact of EBacc, which has relegated creative and technical subjects. Ensure equal focus on arts and vocational pathways.

42. Are there ways in which we could support improvement in pupil progress and outcomes at Key Stage 3?

Improving pupil progress and outcomes at Key Stage 3 requires a combination of curriculum reform, teacher empowerment, and practical changes to teaching and assessment. Addressing these areas holistically will ensure that students build strong foundations for future success while maintaining engagement and motivation.

1. Curriculum and Teaching Improvements

- **Freedom to Teach and Innovate:**

Schools stress the importance of giving teachers the autonomy to teach creatively within a broad and secure curriculum framework that integrates modern and relevant content. By reducing external pressures such as league tables, teachers can focus on fostering a love of learning and deeper understanding.

- **Low-Stakes Assessments:**

Building in ongoing, low-stakes assessments allows for continuous monitoring of pupil progress without creating undue pressure. These assessments can also provide actionable feedback to both students and teachers.

- **Professional Support for Teachers:**

Support teachers with manageable workloads and opportunities for meaningful professional learning. Treating educators as valued professionals will enable them to focus on their teaching and personal development.

2. Broader Educational Context

- **Promoting the Purpose of Education:**

Engage schools, policymakers, and communities in meaningful discussions about the purpose of education in the UK is essential for aligning efforts to improve outcomes.

43. Are there ways in which we could support pupils who do not meet the expected standard at Key Stage 2?

If we get it right before year 6, this number will be less and less. Those who still do not meet the standard are likely to include students with SEND. A robust and secure SEND framework with strong and effective provision will enable these children to access the curriculum in a way which works for them. We should maintain an ambitious approach.

44. To what extent, and in what ways, does the accountability system influence curriculum and assessment decisions in schools and colleges?

The accountability system has a profound influence on curriculum and assessment decisions in schools, shaping priorities and often narrowing focus in ways that are not always aligned with the best interests of pupils. This is a concern shared across the Haberdashers' network, particularly in the state sector, where external accountability measures such as league tables and inspection frameworks exert significant pressure. This has been covered in detail in other answers. But we highlight : EBacc and Progress 8 prioritize core subjects, marginalizing creative and vocational disciplines and that standardized metrics fail to reflect the progress of pupils with SEND, disadvantaging schools serving these students.

45. How well does the current accountability system support and recognize progress for all pupils and learners? What works well and what could be improved?

The current accountability system plays a significant role in shaping educational outcomes, but it has inherent limitations that often prevent it from fully supporting and recognizing progress for all pupils. While it ensures a baseline of academic standards and progress measurement, it can also create systemic inequities and fail to capture the full range of pupil achievements.

45. How well does the current accountability system support and recognise progress for all pupils and learners? What works well and what could be improved?

This has been covered in detail in previous answers.

46. Should there be any changes to the current accountability system to better support progress and incentivize inclusion for young people with SEND and/or from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds?

This has been covered in detail in previous answers.

47. To what extent does the range of programmes and qualifications on offer at each level meet the needs and aspirations of learners?

This has been covered in other answers. The flexibility for schools to build their own qualifications within broad guidelines with curriculum that speaks to their own students in a way that has support, structure and guidance, and was available for all schools would be a step forward.

48. Are there particular changes that could be made to the following programmes and qualifications and/or their assessment that would be beneficial to learners?

Changes to the structure, content, and assessment of current qualifications are essential to ensure they meet the diverse needs of learners and prepare them for higher education, employment, and life. Feedback across the Haberdashers' network highlights the need for greater flexibility, practical application, and a broader approach to assessment. Our answer to this question was previously explored in question 27.

a. AS/A Level Qualifications

1. Reintroducing Coursework:

Coursework fosters independent research, critical thinking, and time management skills. Its removal has led to an over-reliance on terminal exams, disadvantaging learners who excel in practical or iterative tasks.

2. Broadening Assessment Formats:

Incorporating open-book exams, problem-solving tasks, and creative projects would better assess applied knowledge and real-world skills.

3. Diversifying and Updating Subject Content:

A Levels need to reflect evolving fields such as AI, digital literacy, and global challenges. Subjects like computer science must be updated regularly to avoid obsolescence.

b. T Levels and T Level Foundation Year Programmes

1. Strengthen Industry Links:

Expand partnerships with employers to ensure T Level placements are meaningful and aligned with workplace expectations.

2. Increase Awareness and Accessibility:

Many learners and parents remain unaware of T Levels as a viable pathway. National campaigns and clearer progression routes are needed to boost their uptake.

3. Financial support to develop required spaces and resources to deliver these courses.

c. Other Applied or Vocational Qualifications at Level 3

1. Focus on Practical Assessments:

Shift from heavy reliance on exams to hands-on, project-based assessments that mirror workplace tasks.

2. Integrate Soft Skills Development:

Include teamwork, communication, and adaptability as assessed components of vocational qualifications.

d. Other Applied or Vocational Qualifications at Level 2 and Below

1. Improved Pathways to Progression:

Entry-level and Level 2 qualifications should provide clear bridges to Level 3 options, preventing learners from being "stuck" at lower levels.

2. Embed Practical Learning:

Practical, hands-on modules that reflect industry needs should be a core component of Level 2 and below qualifications.

49. How can we improve learners' understanding of how different programmes and qualifications prepare them for university, employment, and further technical study?

69% of our members recommended that short term internships in diverse industries be included in the school curriculum, 65% for apprenticeships and vocational training and 50% for project-based learning with real world applications. This was a strong theme across all respondents:

"I would insist that work experience be mandatory. Many people leave school and have never done a day's work in their lives." (Haberdasher member)

Realistically, those working in education know that useful work experience is challenging to arrange at scale. At Haberdashers we currently seek to address this through extensive programmes intended to bring sixth form students into other forms of direct and productive contact with the working world. This includes careers' talks, sector conferences, networking sessions/breakfasts/lunches and business simulation exercises. We are now launching a professional mentoring initiative, Habs Aspire, which will, in time, directly connect each of our 2000 sixth formers with a professional mentor.

Our recommendations are:

1. Early and Sustained Careers Education:

Begin careers guidance from Key Stage 2 and continue through Key Stage 5, focusing on pathways to higher education, technical study, and employment.

2. Real-World Exposure:

Incorporate internships, workplace projects, and job shadowing into school programmes. These experiences help learners understand the practical applications of their studies.

3. Partnerships with Universities and Employers:

Engage employers and higher education institutions to provide clear information about the skills and qualifications they value.

4. Modernise Assessment Methods:

Use assessment formats such as presentations, podcasts, and collaborative projects to reflect workplace and university practices.

50. To what extent is there enough scope and flexibility in the system to support learners who may need to change course?

The current system offers limited flexibility for learners to adapt their pathways. Structural, timing, and funding constraints often make it difficult for students to pivot when their needs or aspirations change.

51. Are there additional skills, subjects, or experiences that all learners should develop or study during 16-19 education, regardless of their chosen programmes and qualifications?

Refer to our answer to question 27 and the Haberdashers' Advantage and Habs Diploma programmes. These are deliberate programmes for developing character, soft skills and workplace ready hard skills. Any programmes of this nature should be 'deliberate' in their approach and offer coherence from EY to KS5.

52. How can the curriculum, assessment, and wraparound support better enable transitions between key stages to ensure continuous learning and support attainment?

More coherent school place planning so that secondary schools have fewer 'feeder' schools. This will enable much closer working between phases. At the moment some secondary schools have more

than 50 feeder schools, this makes knowing pupils very challenging. As a result, assumptions are made about where pupils are in their learning. This can limit progress and lead to repetition in the curriculum.

53. How could technology be used to improve how we deliver the curriculum, assessment, and qualifications in England?

Technology is moving much faster than educational policy, and this causes a mismatch between the realities of the world of work and the realities of the classroom. Technology has the potential to transform the delivery of curriculum, assessment, and qualifications in England. However, its implementation must be strategic, equitable, and aligned with educational objectives. Haberdashers contributed to the (multi school and trust)development of the [Shape the Future Report](#), which emphasizes the need for thoughtful integration of technology to support teachers, enhance student learning, and modernize assessments.

Key Opportunities for Technology in Education

1. Enhancing Teaching and Learning :

Technology provides tools that can engage students, foster collaboration, and support deeper understanding. For example, interactive resources, simulations, and virtual reality can help bring abstract concepts to life. Personalized learning platforms powered by AI can adapt content to individual students' needs, offering targeted interventions and enabling differentiated instruction.

2. Reducing Teacher Workload :

Automation of routine administrative tasks such as marking, data analysis, and lesson planning can free teachers to focus on high-value activities like mentoring and personalized instruction.

3. Modernising Assessment Practices:

The current reliance on paper-based exams is outdated. Digital assessments can provide more flexible, efficient, and innovative formats, such as interactive simulations, project-based evaluations, and real-time feedback. The fact that exams are still largely paper-based feels retrograde in a world increasingly reliant on technology. AI could facilitate more nuanced assessments by analyzing student contributions in discussions, evaluating critical thinking in essays, or even assessing collaboration in group projects.

4. Improving Digital Literacy and Readiness :

Digital skills, including coding, data management and analysis and AI literacy, are essential for the modern workforce. Embedding these competencies into curricula will ensure students are future-ready. However, the pace of technological advancement outstrips the approval process for new qualifications. This leads to delays in implementing relevant content.

5. Fostering Collaboration and Citizenship:

Online platforms can connect classrooms across different areas of the country and the world, promoting cultural exchange and global awareness. Virtual group projects, video conferencing, and collaborative tools like shared documents can support teamwork and communication.

Challenges and Considerations

1. Equity of Access:

Not all schools and students have access to the infrastructure needed for technology integration, such as reliable internet, modern devices, or up-to-date software. Addressing this digital divide is critical to ensure equitable opportunities.

2. The Role of Teachers:

Teachers must receive training and ongoing support to effectively incorporate technology into their pedagogy. Technology should enhance, not replace, the teacher's role as the primary driver of learning.

3. Alignment with Educational Objectives:

Technology must serve the broader goals of education, such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving, rather than encouraging reliance on quick answers or superficial learning. Use of technology must be aligned with our educational 'why.' It should support knowledge-building and help students evaluate the quality of information.

4. Ethical and Privacy Concerns:

Safeguarding student data and addressing ethical issues related to AI and machine learning must be integral to any technological implementation.

5. Collaboration and Policy Coherence:

Effective use of technology requires coordination among policymakers, educators, and technology providers to create consistent and scalable solutions. The potential benefits of technology require a joined-up approach, balancing innovation with equity and inclusivity.

Recommendations

1. Modernise Assessment Practices:

Transition to digital assessment formats that reflect real-world applications and foster skills such as critical thinking and collaboration.

2. Invest in Teacher Training:

Provide teachers with the knowledge and resources to integrate technology effectively, focusing on tools such as AI, interactive platforms, and digital learning environments.

3. Expand Digital Literacy in Curricula:

Mandate digital literacy and citizenship education at all key stages, ensuring students are equipped to navigate and contribute to a digital society.

4. Foster Partnerships:

Collaborate with tech companies, universities, and employers to develop relevant tools and resources while addressing ethical considerations.

5. Guarantee Equity:

Prioritise funding and support for underserved schools to close the digital divide and ensure all students benefit from technological advancements.

54. Do you have any further views on anything else associated with the Curriculum and Assessment Review not covered in the questions throughout the call for evidence?

We were excited and interested to have the opportunity to contribute a response to this review. However, it is important to highlight that it required a significant dedication of resources. It is not easy for educational institutions to contribute actively to educational policy debate due to pressure on staff time and resources. This was compounded by the repetitive nature of many of the questions and, rather than expend additional time on reworking answers, we assume that responses will be considered a whole rather than on an individual question basis.

Key Themes and Recommendations

1. Collaboration Between Independent and State Sectors

Collaboration between the independent and state sectors is essential for sharing best practices, leveraging resources, and driving innovation in education. The independent sector often has the flexibility and resources to trial innovative initiatives, while the state sector brings critical expertise in meeting the needs of diverse pupil cohorts and addressing systemic challenges such as high-stakes accountability and limited funding. The Haberdashers' Advantage Programme, which runs across both state and independent schools in the network, exemplifies how collaboration can address equity issues by providing access to opportunities. These include character development, leadership training, and enrichment activities that prepare pupils for life and work. (It is important to note that this is facilitated by endowment funding from historic charities). Expanding such initiatives nationally could ensure that all pupils, irrespective of their school type, have access to these critical developmental experiences.

2. A Gradual Approach to Reform: Evolution, Not Revolution

The teaching profession is under significant pressure, with concerns about workload, recruitment, and retention. Reform must be introduced gradually to avoid exacerbating these issues. The approach must be as evolution, not revolution, and long-term consistent planning without frequent changes of policy. Rapid or poorly communicated changes to curriculum and assessment frameworks risk overwhelming schools and reducing their ability to deliver quality education. Policymakers should prioritize long-term, stable planning cycles, involving educators in the design and rollout of changes to ensure reforms are practical and sustainable.

3. A Unified, Long-Term Vision for Education

Education reform should begin with a clear articulation of the broader purpose of education, fostering a shared understanding of its goals across all sectors.

"We need to revisit why education is important to us—our 'why.' This will help build a coherent and inspiring education system that aligns with the needs of society and the economy" (Senior leader HATS).

A long-term vision, planned across ten-year cycles and involving cross-party collaboration, would provide stability and consistency. This would reduce the disruptive impact of frequent policy shifts tied to political cycles. It is high time that education starts to be planned on a timeline longer than one parliament... cross-party involvement is essential.

4. Supporting the Teaching Profession

Teachers are the foundation of any successful education system, and reforms must prioritize their wellbeing, professional development, and autonomy. We need great teachers. If we do not have them, then pupils will not enjoy school as much, achieve well, attend, or behave.

Key measures to support the profession include:

- Reducing unnecessary workload associated with high-stakes accountability.
- Offering high-quality, decentralized professional learning opportunities.
- Providing greater autonomy for teachers to innovate and focus on what works best for their pupils.

5. Broader Assessment Reforms

The current focus on high-stakes testing and narrow performance metrics often undermines broader educational goals. A more balanced approach to assessment is needed. Assessments should evaluate a wide range of skills, including creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication, aligning with real-world needs. Gradual reintroduction of coursework and more flexible assessment models would allow students to demonstrate their abilities in diverse ways.

6. Alignment with Workforce Needs

Employers within the Haberdashers' Company have consistently highlighted the gap between education and the demands of modern industries.

"Schools must prepare students for the realities of modern work, where skills like adaptability and resilience are as important as academic knowledge" (Haberdashers' Company Member)."

Reforms should bridge this divide by:

- Incorporating skills such as communication, problem-solving, and digital literacy into the curriculum.
- Strengthening links between schools and businesses to provide real-world insights and opportunities for students.

Conclusion

The Haberdashers' network advocates for a thoughtful, inclusive approach to education reform that prioritises collaboration, gradual implementation, and alignment with a clear, long-term vision. By fostering partnerships between sectors, supporting the teaching profession, and addressing real-world needs, the curriculum and assessment system can be transformed to benefit all learners. Education reform must be a journey, not a race. We need to take the time to get it right for our pupils, our teachers, and our society.