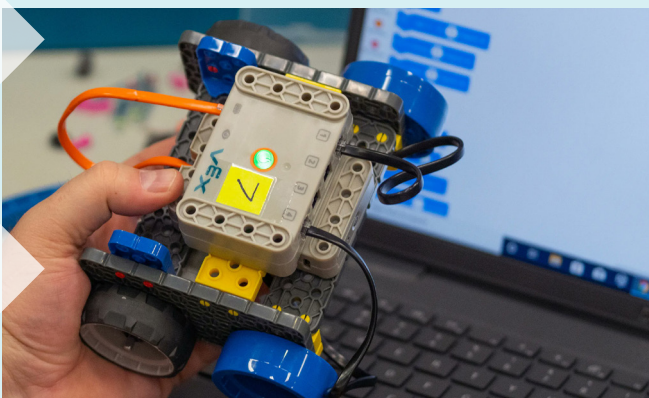
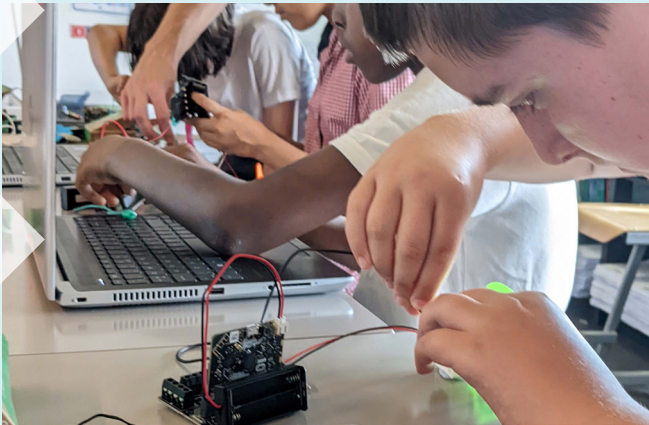


CURRICULUM REVIEW

Analysis of Interim Report
Design & Technology Association

Analysis of the Curriculum Review Interim Report from a D&T Perspective



Overarching statements

- High standards within the current system currently means "high standards for some", with the socio-economic, SEND vs Mainstream and other issues related to equality of access evident
- The recommendation is that the current architecture of Key Stages works well and should be maintained.
- Generally, National assessments and qualifications are "broadly working well". This fits the Review Panel's opening statement that the panel would seek "evolution, not revolution".
- The review panel recognises that when looking at the combined impact of Ebacc and other outside influences on student choice **"design and technology stands as the subject that has fared worst over time."**
- The review panel is "committed to the principle of a broad and balanced curriculum and recognises that the curriculum's current shape at key stages 1-4 provides students with good exposure to a wide range of subjects". Within this, it is acknowledged that the challenge of breadth vs depth needs to be reviewed as available curriculum time has resulted in some subjects (creative subjects in the main but not exclusively) being squeezed out.

Four main areas have been identified for further investigation and possible change, these being:

1. The gap between socio-economically challenged students and those from wealthier backgrounds is too big and expanding. SEND students still make far less progress than their peers. Curriculum and assessment must work for all, not for some.
2. There appears to be a breadth vs depth imbalance (more noticeable in some subjects than others), which differs across England. The review panel will look hard at the possible unintentional adverse effects of the Ebacc on curriculum breadth

and related institutional behaviours (academy chains taking unilateral decisions to drop/marginalise some subjects through the curriculum autonomy they have been given).

3. Attention is needed to ensure opportunities are taken to address the needs of a fast-changing world, including but far from exclusive to the introduction and use of AI (trends in digital information, etc). Young people, parents, and carers have clearly stated that they would like to see more 'applied knowledge' to support young people in being ready for life and work.
4. Whilst the panel considers KS4 syllabi and assessment to be "generally fit for purpose", it is recognised that the volume of KS4 assessments is an area for deeper study.

Key statement

"Following conclusion of the review, all state schools, including academies, will be required to teach the National Curriculum".

(Interestingly, there is no mention of the time to be allocated to each subject throughout this interim report) we know that many academies are currently 'compliant' in that they deliver the subject but with vastly reduced curriculum time allocated to it.

"Art & Design continues to thrive at KS4". There is no recognition that these numbers are currently propped up by an estimated 20% plus of D&T entries being delivered through the Art & design qualification. If reform saw these teachers returning to D&T, Art & design numbers would almost definitely not be so healthy.

Assessment

The review panel is generally happy with the spread and effectiveness of all current assessment points. Any questioning of the validity of KS4 terminal ("high stakes") assessment at age sixteen would strongly counteract the "evolution, not revolution" mantra. Do not expect to see a significant change in assessment points or methodologies.

The panel deems A Level and T Level qualifications to "Adequately prepare students for next steps". They go on to recognise that T Levels still only represent a very small number of students (currently 2%), but this is expected to rise, and these qualifications show "great potential".

Summary and observations

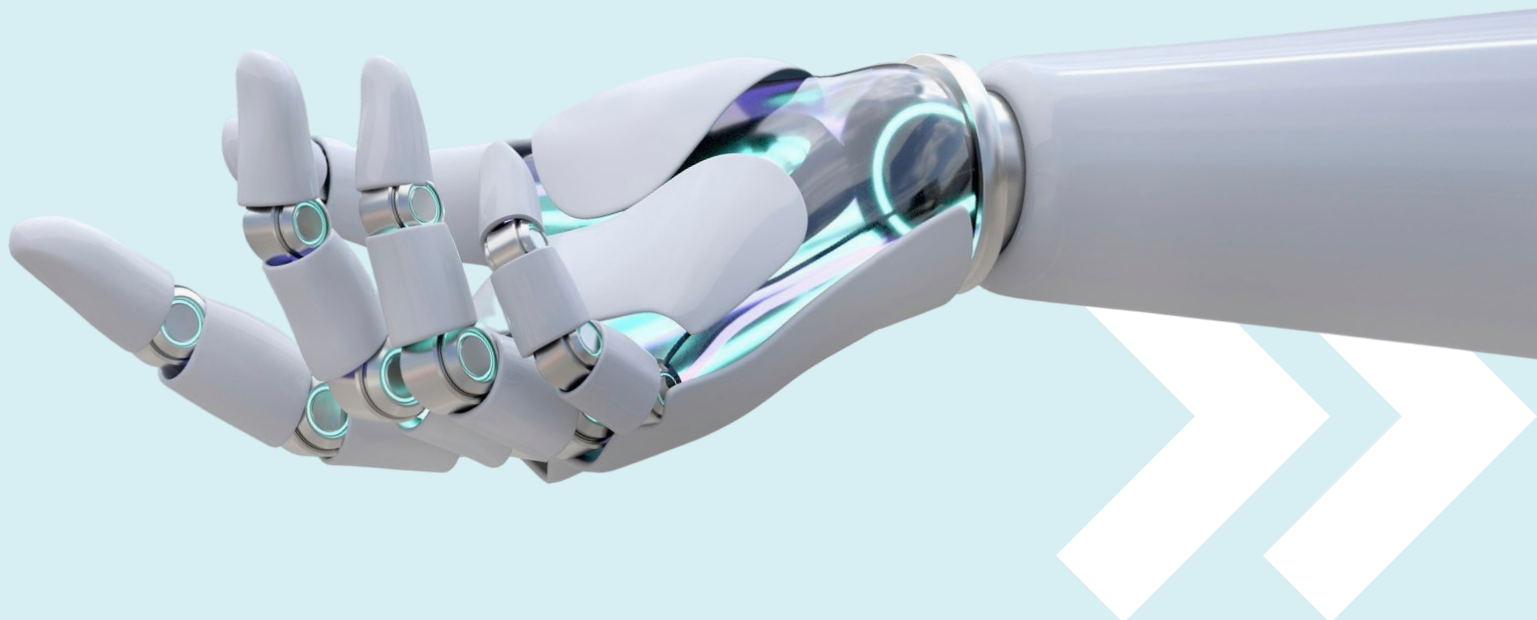
There are no great surprises in these opening statements; there is more of a reconciliation of what the sector already knows too well. The last decade-plus has seen gaps widen between those who have and those who do not (this was only exasperated by COVID-19).

Most educators and parents would agree that the current assessment points are generally fit for purpose and have been adjusted to by educators and students alike; other parts of the system demand change sooner than this.

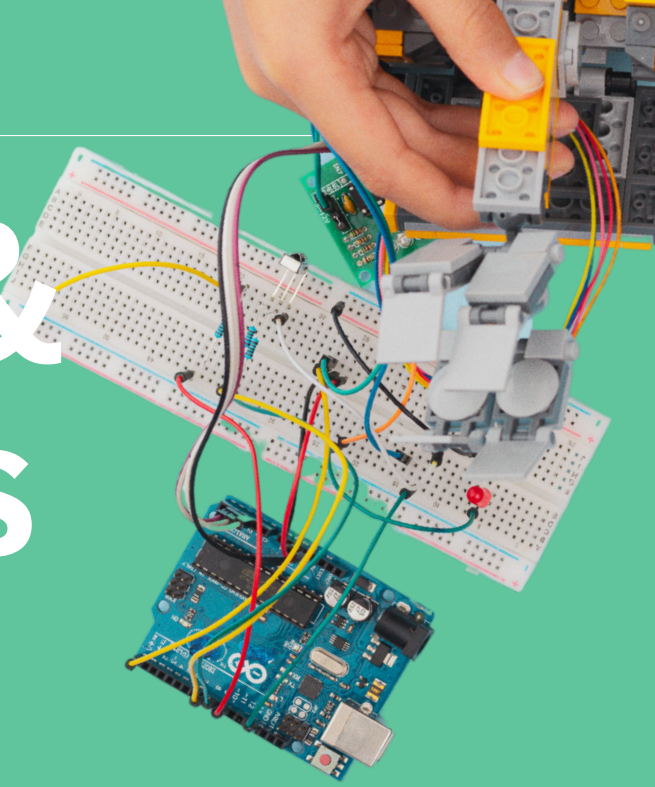
It has been some time (2013) since the outcomes of the last review were implemented. In this time, the world has moved on at pace and it is recognised that the National Curriculum will need to be updated to reflect this change.

Detail is needed as to precisely what is meant by "Following conclusion of the review, all state schools, including academies, will be required to teach the National Curriculum". Without any stipulation on the curriculum time to be afforded to subjects, we fear some academies will use this ambiguity to comply, but marginalising subjects so as to make GCSE take up almost impossible.

A Levels and the much newer and as yet unestablished T Levels receive a vote of confidence from the review panel as being "fit for purpose and enabling progression". Again, I think most would generally agree with this, with the D&T A Level syllabus and content receiving much less criticism from teachers than the GCSE.



Direction & Next Steps



Knowledge rich curriculum

Anyone hoping to see a radical change away from this curriculum methodology will be disappointed. The fact that we continue to perform favourably in international tests is "evidence that the current arrangements have positively impacted attainment".

Again, the socio-economic and SEND attainment gaps are noted as requiring action.

Availability of subjects at KS4

The panel polling of over 2,000 parents across the country suggests that three-quarters of all students could study the subjects of their choice!

We find this surprising as our investigations suggest that the Ebacc has seriously reduced choice at KS4, a topic the review panel acknowledges later in the report.

Transition KS2/KS3

This has been a problem area for as long as I can remember in most subjects, but arguably, especially D&T. The panel recognises this as a general problem area that often suffers from a lack of rigour and communication, which can too easily result in regression for students at the start of KS3.

A general but important point

The report talks of core subjects, the Arts and "Vocational subjects". It is clear from references within the document that D&T is being viewed as a "vocational" option. I personally have issues with that label as I feel it is heavily loaded, especially in the minds of some parents: "Smart kids go towards academic subjects, and the less able can study vocational options" a uniquely 'English' problem. D&T is a complex subject that, when taught well, can appeal and be accessible to students across the ability range. Labelling the subject "vocational" does not add to this inclusivity, especially in the eyes and minds of some parents.

Ebacc and Progress measures

The panel recognise that the introduction of the Ebacc has fulfilled the intention of 'boosting' certain subjects while at the same time effectively relegating the importance of others. It is impossible to place all the blame for diminishing GCSE and A Level entries on the Ebacc as, in reality, numbers started to decline in our subject before its introduction. That said, it is also difficult to ignore the fact that once schools have allocated GCSE space for Ebacc, triple science and RE, there is often only room for one creative or 'vocational' subject, limiting student choice.

The review panel has identified the Ebacc, Progress and Attainment 8 as areas for further investigation.

Breadth Vs Depth at KS4

The panel accepts that some subjects suffer from too much breadth and a heavy content load at KS4. This is definitely the case in design & technology, and we still have a case to press here. We must accept that stating that there is too much content is insufficient; we must determine exactly what content needs to be slimmed down or dropped (and what content is currently missing).

Bringing curriculum content up to date

"Rapid social, environmental and technological change necessitates adapting the curriculum to keep pace". This is obviously the case within design & technology education.

We applaud the panel's desire for an increased emphasis on sustainability, climate change and circularity.

Interestingly, 31% of parents questioned would like to see a greater emphasis on "technical subjects" whilst only 19% of students questioned want this. Ditto, an increase in "Creative thinking and problem-solving problems" would be supported by 39% of parents and only 26% of students. It is worth noting that across all comparisons made here, parents were more enthusiastic than students across all but one category (more PE) where they were equal.



Post-16 study and qualifications

- The A Level is deemed "generally fit for purpose". 35% of all post-16 learners study A Levels exclusively, with the vast majority of these students studying three.
- T Levels are acknowledged as being very young and small in number (2% of all 16/17-year-olds studying them) but with great potential to grow as new subjects come online.
- It is acknowledged that other Level 3 technical/vocational qualifications are needed for various reasons, including a high entry level at T Levels, low 16-year-old confidence in career aspirations, Etc. This is an area for deeper study by the panel.
- Compared to many other comparable countries, students in England spend more hours in written examinations (24-31 hours on average). This is compared to Singapore (roughly equal to England, and so it should be as their education system is based on ours), Ireland (16 hours), New Zealand (18 hours) and Canada (10 hours).
- The NEA and its accuracy and draw on teacher time will be a topic for further study by the review panel. Undoubtedly, trust issues would need to be overcome if we are to better balance assessment in design & technology at KS4 and KS5.

Next steps on Assessment

In the next phase of work, the panel will "assess if the overall volume of assessment can be reduced without compromising the reliability of results". The review panel clearly states, "The traditional examined format should remain the main form of assessment across GCSE". We know that the DfE is working with Ofqual to examine the opportunities afforded by digital assessment.

Review next steps

The review panel will publish its final report in Autumn 2025 and recommend a phased schedule of work across different subjects so as not to destabilise the system. In the interim, some subjects (including D&T) will be subject to deeper analysis by a "Task and finish group" who will gather further data and analysis before making recommendations.

Summary

There are no great shocks within this interim report, and it is encouraging to see many of the points we made in our response to evidence played back favourably. It is recognised that D&T has "suffered more than most" in recent years and there is no doubt in our minds that change will be inevitable if we are to emerge from this review successfully and with growth in mind.

Evolution, not revolution, is written across this document, and we will now continue to work with all parties to ensure the best for the future of D&T education.

Tony Ryan

Chief Executive Officer
D&T Association

