

Jon Coles

Director-General for Education Standards at the Department for Education

Department for Education

Sanctuary Buildings

Great Smith Street

London

SW1P 3 BT

31 October 2011

Dear Jon,

Re: National Curriculum Review

As you will be aware SCORE fully supports the aims of the National Curriculum Review – although we have always been concerned about the timescale. The SCORE member organisations are more than willing to work with the Department for Education to ensure the revised National Curriculum is as good as possible within the limited time available and provides a structure for high quality teaching and learning of the sciences.

We are writing because of our growing concerns about the review process, its pace and its transparency. We would like to get clarification about the role of the informal advisory groups and the likelihood of an interim consultation, to seek reassurance that the work of the advisory groups will influence the new drafts, and to propose that the development time is extended.

As we highlighted in our response to the Call for Evidence, subject expertise is essential to ensure that the content and its sequencing are correct, coherent and consistent (within and across the sciences). SCORE member organisations are well placed to provide this subject expertise. For several months we have worked closely with the Department through the informal advisory groups for the National Curriculum Review. These groups were provided with source documents that contained collections of statements (taken from previous and overseas National Curricula); the groups have given detailed advice on the content, wording and sequencing of those statements.

At a meeting on the 16th September, the group was informed that there had been changes to the source documents. These changes were most far reaching in chemistry: both the statements and the sequencing had been changed without any reference to the existing work or any explanation for the changes. There was a complete disconnect between the advice of the advisory group and the version of the source document that was presented on the 16th September. We are concerned that physics and biology may undergo a similarly disconnected revision because the Programmes of Study are now being written by newly-appointed and as yet unknown freelance authors. These authors have not met with

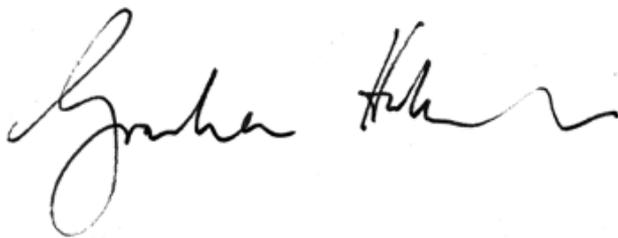
the advisory groups or discussed rationales with them. While we welcome the involvement of subject experts we are concerned by the lack of connection with the advisory groups and the lack of transparency in the way they have been selected. We will be very disappointed if the views of the advisory group are not reflected in the Programme of Study or that their intricate and iterated contributions and discussions are overridden by a single, isolated author.

In August it was announced by the Secretary of State that there would be a pre-consultation exercise in September 2011. SCORE welcomed this announcement and saw the exercise as an important mechanism to engage further with the subject communities on a draft Programme of Study. This has not yet occurred and, given that it is now the beginning of November, it seems unlikely that this can be included in the development timeline if there is to be a full consultation in the New Year. We urge that the pre-consultation takes place as announced – albeit with a delay – and is given sufficient time to allow for responses to be gathered and further iterations of the Programme of Study to take place (through the advisory groups if necessary) before it is published for full consultation. This may require a delay to the full consultation.

The role of the informal advisory groups is now uncertain and has changed. The SCORE member organisations would welcome formal clarification of their role. We recommend that the informal advisory groups for each of the sciences are used to provide comment on the draft content statements produced by the Department for Education and their expert subject writers.

In summary, we remain committed to supporting the current review of the National Curriculum but require clarification of the role of the informal advisory groups and how their work will be fed into the revision and iteration process. We would like the dates of the informal consultation to be announced soon so that it has enough time to effectively influence the first draft of the Programme of Study to be fully consulted on in 2012.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Hutchings', written in a cursive style.

Professor Graham Hutchings FRS
SCORE Chair

Cc Jacquie Spatcher and Stefano Pozzi (Department for Education) and Tim Oates, Mary James, Dylan Wiliam and Andrew Pollard (National Curriculum Review Expert Panel)