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# What do school leaders and teachers think about the Curriculum & Assessment Review?

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# About this report

The government published its long-awaited Curriculum and Assessment Review on 5th November 2025. The reaction from organisations within the sector, from unions, subject associations, trade press and others has been loud and clear.

We set out to take a quick 'temperature check' amongst school leaders and teachers.

The results of this research provide a glimpse into the sentiment and feelings of a wide cross-section of 100+ education professionals. Our panel comprised primarily secondary school staff, with some primary representation. Respondents included headteachers, senior leaders, and heads of department from academies, MATs, and local authority schools.

While not statistically representative, this provides a timely snapshot of initial reactions from the chalk-face. We did not set out to conduct a robust and statistically significant piece of research - merely to get an of-the-moment check-in about how the sector has responded to the Review, and to look forward to what the sector may need in the coming couple of years as they navigate the changes to come.

# Setting the context

We regularly carry out in-depth, nuanced qualitative research with school leaders and teachers. Over the past year, many of them have shared with us their hopes and fears for the outcomes of the Curriculum and Assessment Review.

## What did teachers tell us they hoped for from the Curriculum and Assessment Review?

- There was a clear demand for slow, sustainable and incremental change rather than a complete revolution Teachers wanted a reduction in content, particularly at GCSE level to allow for deeper, more meaningful learning
- An updated and contemporary curriculum, including topics such as climate change, modern social issues and topics that genuinely prepare students for their futures
- Prioritising skills over content - a shift towards critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving rather than assessments that rely on memorisation
- An inclusive and accessible learning: curriculum design that works for all students, including those from diverse backgrounds and varying abilities
- A broader curriculum vision: moving beyond EBacc as the 'gold standard' to value arts, vocational subjects, and cross-curricular approaches

**At first glance, the Curriculum and Assessment Review appears to support and address many of these issues. What did the teachers in our panel think?**

# Taking part

**Three quarters** of the teachers we surveyed said they had **contributed in some way** to the Call for Evidence as part of the Curriculum & Assessment Review.

The most common engagement was **taking part in an online poll or survey** (44%).

At the time of the research, **less than a quarter** of our panel had read the review in full, although **70% had read a summary or engaged in media and social media coverage** of the review.

The curriculum review panel had extensive engagement with the education sector. What was your personal experience of engaging with the review, if at all?



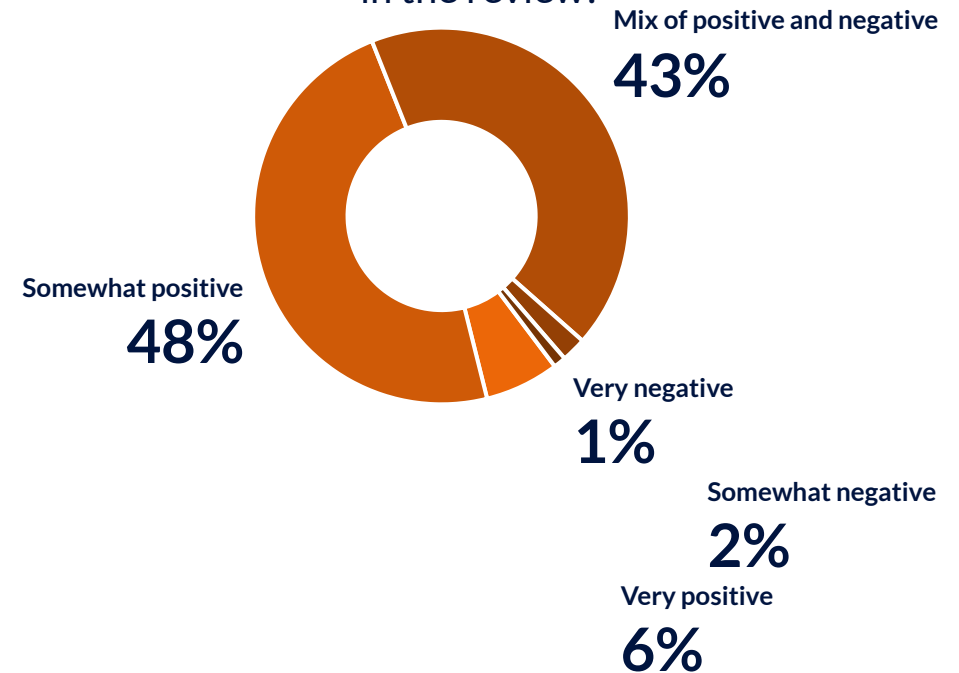
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# Initial reactions

Overall, the Review has been broadly well-received.

**54% of our panel had a positive reaction to the proposals**, with 42% having a mixed reaction with some positive and some negative feelings.

Overall, what is your initial reaction to the proposals outlined in the review?



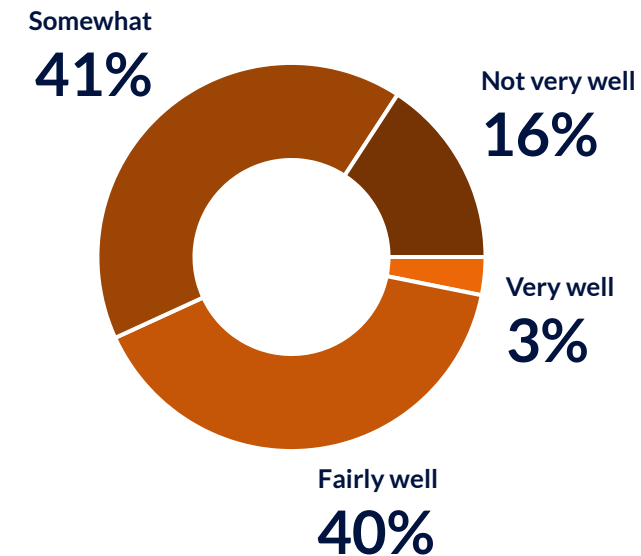
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# Initial reactions

However, **57% felt the Review had not fully captured all issues schools face.**

Analysis of comments shows these concerns predominantly relate to funding, inspections, and teacher workload - issues outside the Review's Terms of Reference - reinforcing that this Review addresses only one piece of the jigsaw.

How well do you feel the review has understood the real challenges facing schools and teachers like you?



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# Amount of change

48% feel that the Review suggests 'about the right amount of change'. It reflects the desire for evolution rather than revolution that we heard in interviews throughout last year.

That said, there is a small group of teachers who were hoping for more - **over a quarter wanted to see greater change than was proposed.**

Some of these teachers connected the Review to accelerating change in the job market and the development of AI, asking if the Review really went far enough to prepare young people for the future. Others were disappointed that changes to Progress 8 did not go further.

"There was real opportunity for reform to create a workforce for the future and this opportunity will now be lost." SLT, Secondary Academy

"Doesn't seem to go far enough in relation to any revolutionary change to the issues of current education system. Is it really fit for purpose with the evolutionary nature of future job markets and the implementation and challenges of AI?" Head of Department, Secondary MAT

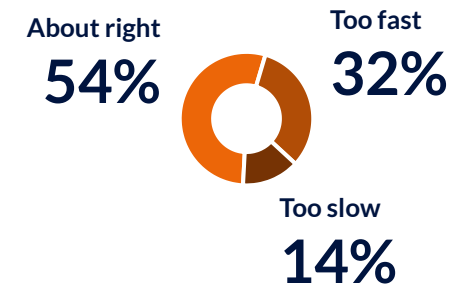
"On the whole I felt it was a strong review - I just worry about the impact of politics on the actual outcomes." MAT Leader

# Pace of change

When it comes to the pace of change, around **half** our sample think the pace of change is about right, but **31%** are concerned that the pace is too fast.

This is likely to reflect deep-seated concerns about teacher workload.

What do you think about the pace of change recommended in the review?



*"I would like to emphasise that curriculum implementation in schools, done well, is an intensive process and the timescale does feel rushed."*  
Deputy Head, Secondary Academy

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# What did the Review get right?

## When asked to name the most positive aspect of the proposals from the Review, we could see some key trends...

- Removal of the EBacc was extremely popular amongst Secondary staff. It was widely seen as a positive change, linking it to greater flexibility and opportunities for creative and vocational subjects. Notably, while the Review recommends reducing EBacc weighting rather than removal, many respondents interpreted this as complete removal - highlighting potential communication challenges during implementation.
- The proposed reduction in exam time and content was warmly welcomed, seeing this as a great way to reduce student stress and curriculum overload.
- The modernisation of the curriculum and emphasis on a broader curriculum was also welcomed. Teachers told us they valued the emphasis on digital literacy, real-world links and broader skills such as financial literacy and oracy.
- Primary voices feature less prominently in our panel, though where they did respond, the review of KS2 grammar was warmly welcomed alongside the broader focus on other skills and subjects, such as arts, citizenship and financial literacy.

# What are the positives...?

**“Preparing students to be more future ready ie focus on life skills , tech, wider citizenship. Being more inclusive ie SEND / PP and narrow the gap. Move away from purely exam to a more inclusive assessment structure.,,”**

**Deputy Head, Secondary MAT**

**“The review recommends increasing life-skills content (financial literacy, media literacy, oracy) alongside traditional academic knowledge.,,”**

**Head of Department, Secondary MAT**

**“Removal of Ebacc Focus on breadth spotlight on digital literacy, oracy, reading, financial education and enrichment.,,”**

**Deputy Head, Secondary LA School**

## ... and what did it miss?

- Primary leaders and teachers were dismayed at the lack of a review of KS2 assessments (although welcomed the changes to grammar teaching).
- Whilst the EBacc changes were welcomed, many teachers feel this leaves modern foreign languages in a vulnerable position and may reduce demand for the subject.
- Some felt that the Review did not give sufficient emphasis to changes being wrought by AI - both in how to prepare students for the likely new realities and specifically how it relates to Non-Examined Assessment and Coursework.

# What are the negatives?

**“I would have welcomed a strong position on the teaching of languages. I think the decision over 20 years ago to make MFL optional at GCSE was a very negative step and we should be moving in line with other European countries in terms of a strategy to encourage learning another language right from primary school.”**

**Headteacher, Secondary Local Authority School**

**“It is not a forward thinking curriculum considering the changes that AI is bringing to our lives. Old school AI/machine learning and data science will be obsolete by the time the courses come out. It needed a visionary to truly understand the future implications of gen AI and build a dynamic curriculum that teaches the skills for the next 20+ years rather than the last 10.”**

**Head of Department, Secondary MAT**

# What are the main concerns?

- Whilst not a direct recommendation from the Review itself, the simultaneous government announcement that schools will be held to account for their enrichment provision is causing worry and concern amongst teachers. Many feel that the positive changes arising from a reduction in curriculum content will evaporate in the face of new demands for 'enrichment'.
- There are other concerns that the broadening of the curriculum, particularly to include a greater focus on some life skills, will have an adverse effect on teacher workload.
- The Curriculum and Assessment Review can only go so far - and for many school leaders and teachers it leads to uncertainty over which proposals will turn into government policy, and which may fall by the wayside. There have already been contradictory announcements such as the Year 8 reading test which do not align with some of the recommendations in the Review.

# What are the concerns?

**“A 10% reduction in GCSE exams isn't enough, some content needs to be significantly slimmed down (eg Maths, Science) in order to create space for the enrichment that we are now being held to account on,,**

**Headteacher, Secondary**

**“With all the additional considerations to get our students ready for the wider world, there needs to be more in place to support teacher workload. Not only are they teaching their subject content, but also instructed to teach wider world issues / skills.,,**

**Head of Department, Secondary MAT**

**“[My biggest concern is] That the government is imposing its own agenda on top of the recommendations and that this will likely lead to distortion of the recommendations (eg Y8 testing),,**

**Deputy Head, Secondary Academy**

**“The government's response where it misaligns with the recommendations e.g. confusion on testing in year 8 and the significant reform to progress 8,,**

**Headteacher, Secondary MAT**

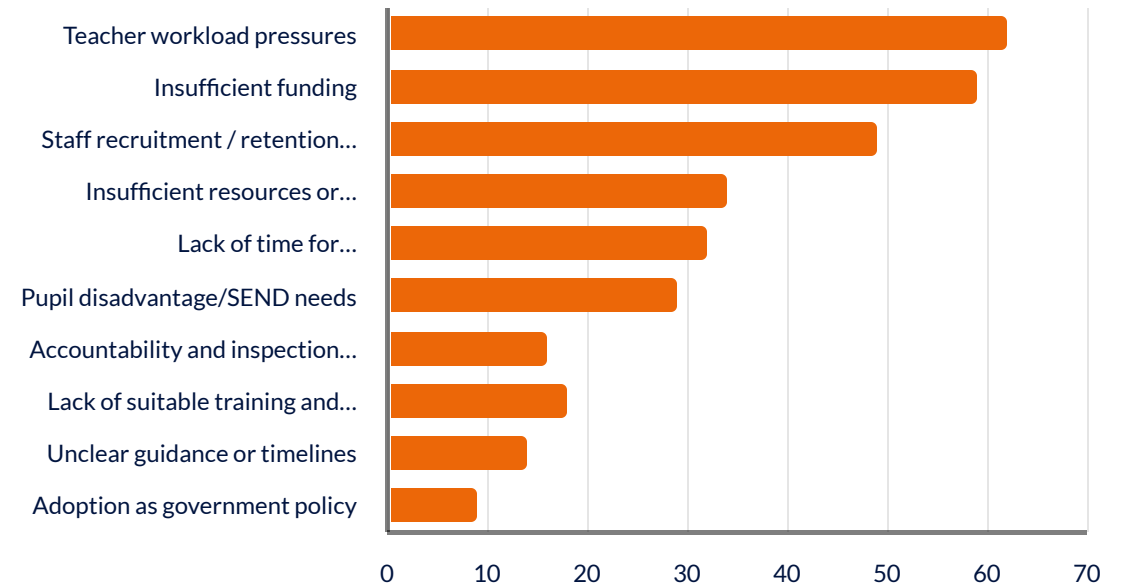
# Barriers to implementation

Unsurprisingly, **teacher workload** issues and **insufficient funding** were the two main barriers to implementation, followed closely by **staff recruitment and retention** issues.

The latter is particularly an issue if needing to deliver Triple Science and increase Computing provision as these subjects are hit hardest by current teacher shortages.

Schools also predict a barrier to implementation are insufficient resources or materials and a lack of time for planning and preparation.

Which of the following, if any, do you see as the biggest barriers to successful implementation of the recommendations arising from this review?



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# What schools will need

For those providing their services to the education sector, there is evidence of future opportunities to come.

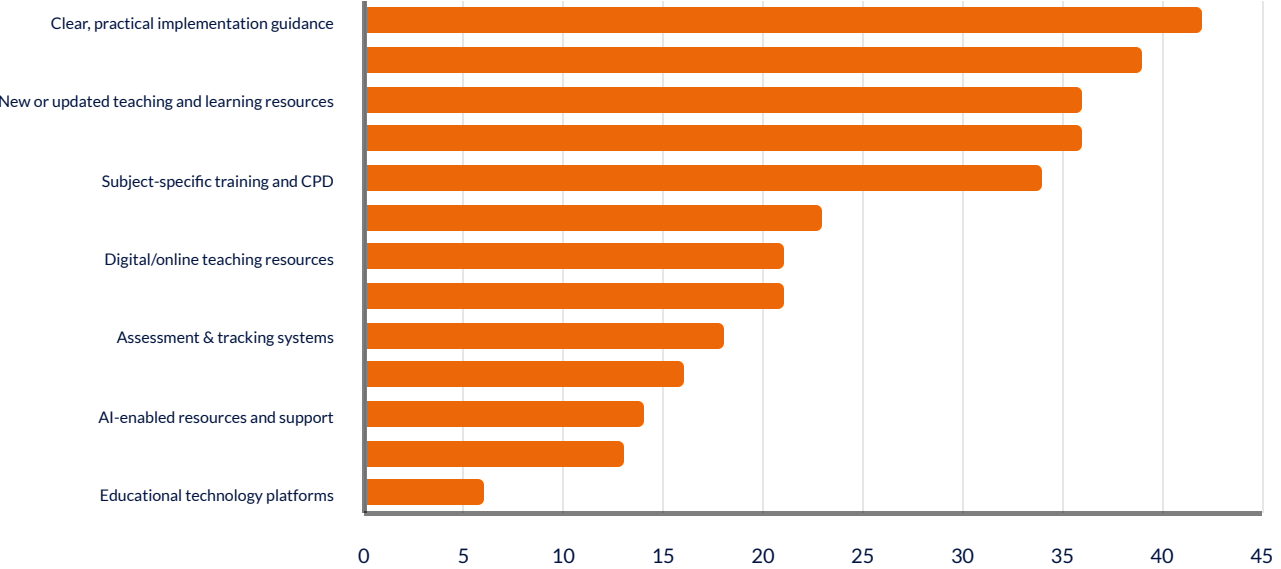
There is likely to be strong demand for curriculum planning tools and frameworks, new or updated teaching and learning resources, new or updated assessment materials and both subject-specific and leadership training and CPD.

New enrichment benchmarks mean that 15% see a need for support in delivering extra-curricular or enrichment programmes.

There is also growing interest in AI to provide resources and support. We asked the 13% of respondents who selected this option what, in particular, they wanted to use AI for.

Marking and assessment were most frequently mentioned as where teachers see the opportunity for AI to support them, followed by resource creation. Though a few just want to AI to support them in reducing workload, without a clear idea of how this might be achieved.

What are you most likely to need to help you implement changes resulting from the review? (Select up to 5)



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**Conclusions...**

# Conclusions

As schools move from reaction to planning, demand for curriculum support, resources and training will intensify ahead of September 2028. But as this research shows, knowing what schools think they need and understanding what will genuinely support them through change are two different things.

At Insightful Research, we specialise in providing that nuanced insight to education suppliers. We have a 14-year track record of working with some of the biggest names in education, helping them to understand teacher and school needs, develop products and services, address sales and marketing challenges, and more. We have a team of specialist education research associates and a growing panel of school leaders and teachers willing to take part in our research.

**If you are planning your response to the changes beginning to be outlined by this Curriculum and Assessment Review and need strategic insight to help you on the way, do get in touch.**

## Find out more...

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