

What is the National Curriculum for England?

The National Curriculum sets out a clear, full and statutory entitlement to learning for all pupils up to the age of 16. It determines the content of what will be taught and sets attainment targets for learning. It also determines how performance will be assessed and reported. An effective National Curriculum gives teachers, pupils, parents, employers and the wider community a clear and shared understanding of the skills and knowledge that young people will gain at school.

The National Curriculum is regularly reviewed to ensure that it continues to meet the changing needs of pupils and society. This revised National Curriculum principally reflects changes made to the key stage 4 curriculum from 2004. These changes enable schools to offer pupils greater choice, while ensuring they acquire the core of general learning and experience essential to later learning and employment. At key stage 4, young people should see how their studies will lead to further education and employment and be helped to develop competence in skills such as analysis, problem solving, reasoning and communication.

The key stage 4 curriculum should:

- challenge all students whatever their ability
- use curriculum flexibility to motivate students and encourage
- achievement
- encourage institutions to work together to deliver programmes suitable for each student.

The following are compulsory at key stage 4: English, mathematics, science, ICT, physical education, citizenship, religious education, sex education, careers education and work-related learning. The arts, design and technology, the humanities and modern foreign languages are entitlement areas at key stage 4. This means schools must make available courses in each of these areas to all students who wish to study them.

Work-related learning is a new statutory requirement at key stage 4. This handbook includes a non-statutory framework for work-related learning, which sets out the minimum experience schools should provide. Careers education is now statutory from year 7. This handbook includes non-statutory guidelines for careers education at key stages 3 and 4.

Schools must provide religious education for all pupils, although parents can choose to withdraw their children. This handbook includes guidelines from the non-statutory national framework for religious education at key stages 3 and 4. These will support the work of local education authorities and the Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education, who have the legal responsibility for producing an agreed religious education syllabus.

The principles of the National Curriculum remain the same at key stages 3 and 4. However, to reflect the greater flexibility available at key stage 4, this handbook presents the subject requirements of the two key stages separately.

The information in this handbook is also available on *National curriculum online* (www.nc.uk.net). This website has, for each subject:

- the programmes of study and non-statutory guidelines
- attainment targets and notes
- links to online resources.

National curriculum online also has information about the changes to the key stage 4 curriculum.

In addition, the website *National curriculum in action* (www.ncaction.org.uk) shows standards of pupils' work at different key stages and how the programmes of study translate into real activities. The schemes of work website (www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes3) shows practical ways to teach the programmes of study.