

WESTMINSTER EDUCATION FORUM

10 May 2011

Session Chair's opening remarks **Lord Lucas of Crudwell and Dingwall**

Well welcome back ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for being here for the second session.

I'm Ralph Lucas, I shan't take up your time now, I'm here to listen like you are, I just want to pitch Professor Alexander straight in and see if we can add on some extra time for questions at the end.

Priorities for a primary curriculum

Professor Robin Alexander, Director, the Cambridge Primary Review, University of Cambridge

The Cambridge Primary Review, in case you wondered, is still very much in business. It was launched in 2006 and published its final report 18 months ago. But then we entered a new phase of building a professional network which is now going very well, with 12 regional centres to date and a large and increasing number of members. What we're trying to do is to take forward the ideas, evidence and proposals in our final report while acting on one of the Government's stated commitments – to give teaching back to teachers. This commitment is not without its tensions, as we shall see.

I want to start by reminding you of the priorities for the curriculum as a whole contained in the remit for the Government's current National Curriculum Review. First we have 'rigour, high standards and coherence'. Then there's the requirement that seems straightforward but is actually problematic: 'ensure that all children acquire a core of essential knowledge in the key subject disciplines.' So far these key subject disciplines have been defined as English, Maths, Science and PE, and they are non-negotiable, but the review's first consultation also asks respondents to say what else should be included. And then, beyond whatever is to be statutory, or compulsory but without statutory content, schools will decide for themselves what to teach.

I shall argue that reducing the curriculum to a 'core of essential knowledge' cannot be about cutting back the curriculum to those four mandated subjects, let alone – thinking for example of the fears recently voiced by Michael Rosen – about specifying in one of those subjects precisely what books children should read. Identifying the essential core must also be about – should be preceded by – a proper debate about what primary education is for. I referred in a previous Westminster Education Forum to the 'Mrs Beeton' approach to curriculum planning: first catch your curriculum, then liberally garnish with aims; or first set out the curriculum you want, then look around for some high-sounding values to make it look as though you are planning from first principles. But we really must start an exercise as radical

as the present one purports to be with aims, and so far *educational* aims – as opposed to procedural aims - are not much in evidence.

We also need to study and learn from other countries - which *is* part of the present exercise - but to do so with discrimination and sensitivity, not merely cherry picking the policies that we like and ignoring those we don't, or the factors in another country's success which may be significant there, but are politically unpalatable here.

We also need to learn from this country's recent educational history, from past successes as well as mistakes, and to resist the temptation, to which all new governments seem to be prone, to demolish and rebuild rather than to build on the best of what has gone before.

And finally, we – or rather the government – must give very careful thought to the balance of *teachers' freedom*, which I think everyone accepts is a significant and welcome corrective in the present national curriculum review, and *children's statutory entitlement*: the need for all children, regardless of where they go to school, to have a right to an education whose scope and priorities are agreed, with professional freedom covering what lies beyond that, and of course how the curriculum as a whole should be taught. And the notion of entitlement is doubly important in a country like ours, where the population is culturally diverse and geographically if not socially mobile, and where schools vary enormously in the quality as well as the character of their provision.

So if we - the Cambridge Primary Review this time - were to be asked what we wish for, we would say an entitlement curriculum for all children in England's primary schools which:

- enacts a coherent and properly argued set of educational aims;
- secures high standards in literacy and numeracy but is also broad, balanced and rich - because of course those two are not, as is sometimes claimed, incompatible;
- engages children's attention, excites and empowers their thinking and advances their knowledge and understanding and skill;
- attends to their present needs as well as their future needs, for primary education isn't merely a preparation for secondary, and pre-adolescent children have their own characteristics, and their own needs, and these must be addressed;
- yet at the same time provides a proper foundation for later learning and choice.
- rejects English primary education's tendency to parochialism and looks out from school to the condition of our complex society and wider world.
- ensures progression from the early years through primary to secondary, but without being subservient to the preceding or the following stage, and without losing its developmental distinctiveness.
- is taught to the highest possible standard in all its aspects, not just in the basics - thus adopting a more generous definition of standards to the one that we've inherited from the last decade or so in which 'standards' are equated with test scores in literacy and numeracy alone.

Surely, we say, this is the very least that one of the world's richest nations can do for its children.

One of the conditions I mentioned earlier was 'learn from past successes and mistakes.' We've had two recent official analyses of what's wrong with the national curriculum as it relates to the primary phase. The Rose Review said that the current national curriculum for Key Stages One and Two is inherently unmanageable, and Jim Rose set himself this question for his review to answer: 'How can we best help primary class teachers solve the "quarts into pint pots problem" of teaching 13 subjects plus RE to sufficient depth in the time available?' That begs all kinds of questions, not least for people who grew up after metrication. Is reform merely about re-packaging the existing curriculum so that 13/14

subjects becomes six 'areas of learning' but the content stays pretty well the same? What of this strangely ambiguous and semi-detached element, shades of the 1944 Butler Education Act, called 'Plus RE': does it have a place or not? And why is it assumed that the task is to 'help primary class teachers' solve an essentially logistical problem rather than devise a curriculum which is right for their pupils?

Then we have the current Government's analysis: too many subjects, too many outcomes, too much time; the whole thing has become too diffuse; there's a loss of focus on essential knowledge in the key subject disciplines and with that, a loss of rigour and standards and of course, a loss of professional freedom too. So the Government argues that we need to return to the concept of a national curriculum as a small compulsory core with the rest for schools to determine.

The Cambridge Primary Review says that the current primary curriculum problem is more complex than either of these analyses admits. It may well be tightly packed, but actually Ofsted evidence shows that many primary schools successfully both teach the full range of the current national curriculum and achieve high standards in Key Stage 2 tests, so it cannot be *inherently* unmanageable. The real problem may lie elsewhere, and we suggest that part of it is the failure to address the long standing challenge of the capacity of many primary schools successfully to conceive, plan and teach a complex, sophisticated curriculum using a staffing default - the generalist class teacher system - which was introduced in the 19th century on the grounds of cheapness rather than educational efficacy. But this - as we emphasise lest we be misunderstood, and we are misunderstood on this score despite the warning - this is not about generalists *versus* specialists, or making primary schools look like secondary. It is about asking questions, without prejudice, about curriculum capacity, curriculum expertise and curriculum leadership in primary schools, and of course the way primary teachers are trained and the roles they are trained for.

Another problem is that the scope and the quality of the curriculum has been compromised by a very narrow definition of educational 'standards', as no more and no less than children's test scores at age 11 in literacy and numeracy; a definition delivered through the national strategies which have now gone, and the tests which haven't; enforced by Ofsted and some but not all school improvement partners (SIPs - also on their way out); and reinforced by a neglect of the wider curriculum in initial teacher training and CPD. All of this brings about what a former HMCI and now DfE Permanent Secretary has called the 'two-tier curriculum' of the 'core' and the rest.

Allied to and perhaps feeding this is the mistaken belief that the pursuit of a broad and balanced curriculum is incompatible with achieving high standards in the 'basics'. It isn't. Ofsted studies show that there is an association, not an invariable association but a close and consistent one, between schools which do well in the Key Stage 2 SATs and their capacity to offer children a broad, balanced and well managed curriculum. Far from being incompatible, the two go actually go together.

But fuelling this is the historic divide between the so called basics and the rest of the curriculum, which impoverishes the arts and humanities and indeed, as we say in our report, learning in all areas - including literacy and numeracy - that requires time for talking, problem solving and the exploration of ideas. Added to this is excessive prescription and micro management from the centre, a muddled and reductive discourse about subjects, knowledge and skills, an absence of vision and purpose: (where - yet again - are the aims?).

We say, then, that there isn't just one problem - curriculum overcrowding or a loss of disciplinary focus, for example - but an interconnected set of problems, some of which relate to a mindset about key ideas like 'basics', 'core knowledge' and 'standards' which is pretty impervious to challenge.

And if we do want to learn from history, let's recall the 1931 Hadow Report:

The primary school should not be regarded merely as a preparatory department for the subsequent stage and the courses should be planned and conditioned not by the supposed requirements of the secondary stage, nor by the exigencies of an exam at the age 11 but by the needs of the child at that particular stage in his physical and mental development.

Or this, from the 1985 White Paper *Better Schools*:

The mistaken belief, once widely held, that a concentration on basic skills is by itself enough to improve literacy and numeracy has left its mark. Many children are still given too little opportunity for work in the practical, scientific and aesthetic areas of the curriculum which increases not only their understanding in these areas but also their literacy and numeracy. Over-concentration on the practice of basic skills in literacy and numeracy unrelated to a context in which they are needed means that those skills are insufficiently extended and applied.

And what about those aims? Well, the aims that were adopted for the revised secondary curriculum in 2007 and recommended for primary education by the Rose Review were that children should be:

Successful learners
Confident individuals
Responsible citizens

Look at Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* and you'll find an almost identical statement. Go to Australia and you'll find it again. Then on to Singapore, and after that We could go on and on. These aims have been lifted off from a convenient OECD document and dusted down, and curriculum planners in too many countries seem to have said, 'No need for hard thinking here: these will do nicely thank you.' That, of course, is not the way to establish aims for a national system of education and its curriculum.

If you're familiar with the final report of Cambridge Primary Review you'll know that at its heart is a detailed discussion of the purposes and values of primary education. We accept that the whole of compulsory schooling, primary and secondary, needs a single set of aims to ensure coherence and continuity, but we also argue – as did Hadow, above – that each phase has its own imperatives. The strapline of the Cambridge Review, and the title of its final report, is 'children, their world, their education' and that's reflected in the aims that we propose. They stem from analysis of the thousands of submissions and emails we received in response to our questions about the purposes of primary education, the discussions we had with parents, teachers, children and many others as we travelled round the country, and from reviews of both official documents and the research literature. From all this we crystallised twelve aims in three groups, concerning the individual, the individual in relation to others and the wider world, and what goes on in classrooms.

The individual

Wellbeing
Engagement
Empowerment
Autonomy

Self, others and the wider world

Encouraging respect and reciprocity

Promoting interdependence and sustainability
Empowering local, national and global citizenship
Celebrating culture and community

Learning, knowing and doing

Exploring, knowing, understanding, making sense
Fostering skill
Exciting the imagination
Enacting dialogue

The headings may convey little as they stand, for each has a detailed description which you will find in our final report, but they should convey a sense of a deeper engagement with matters of purpose and value than that trio of successful learners / confident individuals / responsible citizens - which also, some might suggest, sets a somewhat low threshold of expectations for an education system. Indeed, since one could hardly wish a school to produce *unsuccessful* learners, 'successful learners' is surely redundant.

Let's turn now to another problem I mentioned earlier: learning from other countries. As I said, we must certainly do this, and indeed although some recent commentators in this area think they're onto something novel, the global traffic in educational ideas is much older than what we currently call globalisation. But the list of acronyms – FIMS, SIMS, FISS, TIMSS, TIMSS-R, PIRLS, ICCS, SITES, TEDS-M, PISA – reminds us that educational comparison currently has a very particular fixation: international surveys of student achievement and the league tables to which they give rise.

The fixation isn't unique to Britain, for governments all over the world are busy studying the outcomes of these tests and drawing interesting though not necessarily legitimate conclusions from them. In 2007, McKinsey published its Mourshed/Barber report *How the World's Best Performing Systems Come Out on Top*, and as you see from the screen, England or the UK are not among the 'top ten' countries from which they propose the rest of us should learn. But nor is the United States. A decade earlier, Ofsted commissioned its *Worlds Apart* study of 1996, from Reynolds and Farrell, about what we can learn from differential national performance in the international achievement surveys. They argued that we need more whole class teaching in which the teacher attempts to ensure that the entire class has a grasp of the information being given, couple with the same text books for every child in the class, ensure that the range achievement is kept small. Since a key difference between Britain and America on the one hand and many Asian and continental European countries on the other is the range of attainment in the tests – here we have the so-called 'long tail' of under-achievement, elsewhere a much narrower spread of scores - Reynolds and Farrell argued that if you adopt teaching methods that keep children together rather than accentuate their differences you will reduce the gap in outcomes.

But working from the same dataset updated, the 2007 McKinsey Report argued that what matters most is 'getting the right people to become teachers, developing them into effective instructors, and ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction to every child.' At that point it descended from the obvious to the meaningless: 'Top performing school systems leverage a substantial and growing knowledge about what constitutes effective leadership to develop their principals into drivers of instruction.'

The most recent attempt to explain differential student performance in the international achievement surveys, at least of those studies that have impressed governments (for the mainstream comparative education literature is completely ignored in this exercise, possibly because its conclusions are more nuanced) is Tim Oates' paper *Could do Better?* His conclusion, which the Government has endorsed, is that in all so-called high performing systems the fundamentals of subjects are strongly emphasised and have substantial time

allocations, so what is needed is to cut back the curriculum to the knowledge which is essential and concentrate on that in schools and classrooms. That, indeed, is the remit of the current National Curriculum review.

Three studies, each favoured by different governments – Conservative, Labour, Conservative/LibDem coalition – and three different conclusions. Which is right? Let's take, since we are constantly exhorted to do so, Finland. With a mere 5 million inhabitants and relatively cultural and linguistic homogeneity it's not really a sensible comparison, but then neither are Singapore or Hong Kong, and they too feature prominently in this debate.

What are the secrets of Finland's success? Well, Finnish experts say that the two characteristics I've just mentioned – small population and relative cultural homogeneity – are contributory rather than coincidental. To these they add: relative demographic stability; high levels of student engagement with reading outside school as well as inside it; universal high quality pre-school education concentrating on preparing children for formal schooling which, as you know, comes much later than ours, at age 7 but builds on very secure early years foundations; decentralised decision making; well motivated and highly qualified teachers; and a high level of school and teacher autonomy. Already we are just about as far from England, demographically, culturally and systemically speaking, as it's possible to be. But beyond these factors are two which tend not to be even mentioned in official extrapolations from Finland, possibly because they fall into the category of 'inconvenient truth': first, Finland has a paramount commitment to social and educational equity, with common state schooling for all as the default and a small private sector which co-exists but doesn't compete; second, Finland has no national tests, no league tables, no national school inspection system, no national teaching standards, and indeed none of the so-called 'drivers' of school improvement that have been favoured by recent British governments.

And so, as the 2007 McKinsey report rightly argues: 'The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers'. But here's Ernest Boyer in 1983 in the United States: 'A report card on public education is a report card on the nation. Schools can rise no higher than the communities that support them'. And here are Wilkinson and Pickett in their controversial 2009 epidemiological study *The Spirit Level*:

Greater equality, as well as improving the wellbeing of the whole population, is also the key to national standards of achievement ... If a country wants higher levels of educational achievement among its school children, it must address the underlying inequality which creates a steeper social grade in educational achievement.

And PISA's own analysis concurs with this, showing the equity is a key factor:

The best performing school systems manage to provide high quality education to all students. Canada, Finland, Japan, Korea and the partner economies Hong Kong-China and Shanghai-China all perform well above the OECD mean and students tend to perform well regardless of their background or the school they attend.

In one of my own papers, after analysing the same data but combining it with a much closer look at the cultural contexts of each country's education system, I suggested:

There is a constellation of factors in which demography, wealth, equity and relative equality all play a part alongside the school and system factors on which McKinsey concentrates, though in the end it is culture that determines how wealth is disposed, how education is conceived and how much or how little equality matters.

Let's return to the curriculum. The Cambridge Review said that one of several obstacles to genuine curriculum reform in the primary sector is the way curriculum discourse is dominated

by tired slogans and dichotomies: 'We teach children, not subjects', 'The curriculum is about skills, not knowledge,' 'Children don't need us to teach them knowledge. They can Google what they need,' 'Themes not subjects,' 'Let's concentrate on process, not content,' 'Let's talk about learning, not teaching.' And so on. That discourse, I fear to say, has even crept into this seminar. In your printed programme you'll find that one of the questions for the discussion session which follows this one is 'Should a new curriculum be based on cross-curricular methods or be more rigidly subject-based?' Why 'rigidly'? Why, whenever subjects are mentioned, are 'rigid' or 'rigidly' so often appended? Discussing this problem our final report notes:

The word 'subject' itself is neutral. It bears no particular meaning until it is translated into practice. A subject's relevance resides not in its name but, under whatever name is chosen, in exactly what is taught and how. A subject is not of itself old fashioned just because subjects have been used as a curriculum organising device for centuries. The disciplines which form the basis for many school subjects are constantly pushing at their own boundaries and challenging their own assumptions, for that is how knowledge advances. Subjects can excite and empower, or they can bore and alienate. If in the classroom a subject is rigid, or if amounts to no more than the transmission, memorisation and recall of inert facts, then this is the fault of the teacher, not the subject.

So the Cambridge Primary Review's take on knowledge, as expressed in aim 9 in the list I mentioned earlier, is this: far from being opposed to 'skills', 'process' or whatever, and far from being redundant, knowledge is absolutely central to any curriculum. Here is Cambridge Primary Review Aim 9 in full:

Exploring, knowing, understanding and making sense. To enable children to encounter and begin to explore the wealth of human experience through induction into, and active engagement in, the different ways through which humans make sense of their world and act upon it: intellectual, moral, spiritual, aesthetic, social, emotional and physical; through language, mathematics, science, the humanities, the arts, religion and other ways of knowing and understanding.

Induction acknowledges and respects our membership of a culture with its own deeply-embedded ways of thinking and acting which can make sense of complexity and through which human understanding constantly changes and advances. Education is necessarily a process of acculturation.

Exploration is grounded in that distinctive mixture of amazement, perplexity and curiosity which constitutes childhood wonder; a commitment to discovery, invention, experiment, speculation, fantasy, play and growing linguistic agility which are the essence of childhood.

Both/and, then, not either/or.

But the current National Curriculum Review has to decide what knowledge is essential, so here are some questions about its remit.

- 'The best that has been thought and said...' Yes, Matthew Arnold is much in evidence at the moment, but did he really mean just English, Maths, Science and PE? And how does one define 'essential knowledge' for a 21st century England which admits its plurality and inequality rather than sweeps them under the carpet? A single definition of 'essential' for every child and every community?

- In any event, against what criteria, in the absence of a clear prior statement of aims for the new National Curriculum, will what counts as 'essential knowledge' be determined? If you have completed the recent consultation form you will be impressed or overwhelmed by its 232 tick boxes. Will these provide the answer? Does 'essential' mean what wins the most votes in a consultation? Again, we say, that is not the way to do it. The exercise must be aims based.
- Then there's that injunction to 'ensure that the content of our national curriculum compares favourably with ... the highest performing jurisdictions, reflecting the best collective wisdom ... about ... what children should know.' Now there's a non-sequitur. Should children in England have the same curriculum as children in Singapore just because Singapore does better in PISA? Does being a high performing jurisdiction mean that one possesses 'the best collective wisdom about what children should know?' Or might it say more about a country's ability to get its school students to pass tests?
- On the nature of knowledge itself: is 'essential knowledge' only about content? What of a discipline's no less essential core of concepts, modes of enquiry and means of authentication or verification? Is there essential knowledge beyond the established subject disciplines? (Of course there is). And even if we adopt a broad view what knowledge entails, does it cover all that is essential to children's primary education? (Of course it doesn't).

All this takes us to what I see as the two basic options for a government rightly committed to reducing the sheer weight of what is prescribed in the National Curriculum. I call them, prosaically, 'Minimalism 1' and 'Minimalism 2'.

Minimalism 1 achieves the desired objective of slimming down the curriculum by reducing the statutory requirement to four core subjects, English, Maths, Science and PE. It may well commend breadth but it leaves it to each school to decide what that means, thus in theory permitting as many definitions as there are schools.

Minimalism 2 is premised on the belief, and on the evidence from Ofsted about how high performing schools in England (as opposed to Finland, Singapore or Hong Kong) achieve their success, that curriculum breadth matters, that it is essential and that it should be a statutory entitlement for every child. To make such entitlement meaningful, it specifies the subjects or domains, and the main elements of these, of which breadth is constituted. It then achieves the required slimming down by reducing what is specified to those core learnings across *all* the specified subjects or domains – including the four protected subjects of Minimalism 1 - which are essential to a curriculum which lays a proper foundation for children's lives and education now and in the future.

I argue, as you probably realise, for Minimalism 2 rather than 1. But I accept that for schools there's a dilemma. It's the dilemma of how to balance professional freedom and educational entitlement. After years of curriculum prescription and micromanagement schools are at last being offered freedom. If your school is successful and you are committed to a broad, rich curriculum, and you provide such a curriculum and children prosper from it, then the freedom to do all this as you see fit is what you will want. On that basis you will probably opt for Minimalism 1, because it's best for your school.

But the Cambridge Primary Review – and I hope the Government – must consider not just high-performing schools but the system as a whole and – in the case of primary education – its 17,000 schools, 4 million children and 200,000 teachers. It must consider those schools in this vast and diverse system which are doing less well. Can we say that if offered Minimalism 1 they will give their pupils a broad, rich and well taught curriculum? And it must consider

those children who move from one school to another and surely have a right to a reasonable degree of consistency and continuity in their education.

Here, once again, we must learn from history. Remember 1978 and the HMI primary survey, before the arrival of the National Curriculum, which found that everywhere primary schools were teaching the basics, but in too many schools the rest of the curriculum was something of a lottery. Remember 1988, the Education Reform Act, the promise of entitlement of the first National Curriculum, and the way that it brought science, history and much else into the primary education of children who otherwise would not have encountered these vital areas of learning. Remember 1998, a decade later, when the then Secretary of State removed the obligation on primary schools to teach the non-core subject programmes of study in order to give a fair wind to his Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. What happened? In many schools the curriculum contracted to what was required or what was tested. We have been warned.

Our view is that at the primary stage all children should have a statutory entitlement to a broad and rich curriculum in which every aspect is taught to the highest possible standard, regardless of how much or how little time is allocated to it. If it's worth teaching at all, it's worth teaching well. On that basis, Minimalism 1 is not an option for the system as a whole even though it may be an option for our best schools. But even in those schools, Minimalism 1 may deny those children who move schools the consistency and continuity they need in all aspects of the curriculum, non-statutory as well as statutory.

You may be aware that the Cambridge Primary Review doesn't stop there. We have presented a framework for the primary curriculum which starts with the 12 aims referred to earlier. These in turn inform the selection and content of eight broad domains of knowledge, understanding, enquiry and skill – eight domains rather than '13 subjects plus RE' - some broad and novel, others narrower and more familiar. The framework seeks to secure the right balance of statutory and non-statutory, making the overall scope, elements and direction of travel of the curriculum statutory but the detail non-statutory, with the balance in favour, anticipating the present government's policy, of schools making their own decisions. So there's an overall framework which is nationally determined, but beyond a certain level of necessary detail the programmes of study are nationally proposed in order to provide support to those schools that need it, but are non-statutory, and of course they cover all the domains: Minimalism 2 rather than 1. To the national curriculum, and responding to demographic diversity, cultural plurality and individual differences, is added a 'community curriculum', with the proportions roughly 70/30 national/community. Time is freed up not only for schools to exercise their own judgement about curriculum and pedagogy, but also to encourage them to work together and to work with their local communities to ensure that the curriculum responds to local needs and local opportunities, as well as giving children a national entitlement.

But I stress, it's all about balance: the balance of teachers' freedom and children's entitlement; the balance of subjects/domains across the curriculum as a whole; the balance of statutory and non-statutory; the balance within a highly diverse country of a national curriculum which unites around common aims and domains and a community curriculum which responds to local needs, interests, needs and priorities.

Priorities for a primary curriculum

Questions and comments from the floor

Lord Lucas of Crudwell and Dingwall: Yes, thank you very much, we have about 10 minutes for questions, if I can see anyone in the gloom. Ah that's better. Who is going to ask the first one? The lady at the back there.

Dr. Fiona Maine: From Bath Spa University.
Dr. Fiona Maine: Are there any current indicators that the curriculum review of the moment will be building on the Cambridge Primary Review. Are you in discussion with that group.

Professor Robin Alexander: Any indicators that the current National Curriculum Review will be building on the Cambridge Primary Review?

Dr. Fiona Maine: Absolutely.

Professor Robin Alexander: We are in discussion with DfE, but as for the outcomes of that discussion I'm not the person to ask. I simply don't know.

Dr. Fiona Maine: There's a lot of questions being raised.

Professor Robin Alexander: There are a number of people here from the Department: you could ask them.

Lord Lucas of Crudwell and Dingwall: Is one of them going to pick up the microphone? Who else would like to ask a question? Okay, there.

Dr. Sue Rogers: From the Institute of Education.
I mentioned earlier this morning the issue of Reception classes and some of the competing pedagogic issues for Reception class teachers and their children, the top down pressure and the EYFS and we touched also on adult/child ratios. I recall when the launch of the Cambridge Review, there was huge media attention around the....I believe you talked about upward extension of the EYFS rather than changing the school starting age, but that was the issue that was seized by the media, and I would just like to hear your views on why there is this enduring interest in changing it, but equally why nothing is ever done about it?

Professor Robin Alexander: The Cambridge Primary Review supported the principle of EYFS, but raised questions that everyone has done about the detail. As for what we said in our final report, the previous Government and many of the press got it comprehensively wrong: they said we argued that children should be kept at home until age 6 or 7. In fact what we argued was that there should be consideration given to building on the success of the EYFS and extending it upwards to age 6. We registered an important question about the school starting age, given what we know about the Scandinavian countries, for example. Having said that, the most important thing in our view was that the nature of the provision which children experience in their

early years should be right, regardless of where it takes place. That's much more important than the question about the starting age of formal schooling and that was our clear position yet that was what people managed to get so spectacularly wrong. We regret that there is no reference at all to the Cambridge Primary Review's analysis and recommendations in the Tickell Report. We thought that there would be some consideration of the possibility of extending upwards the EYFS. We also recommended, of course, extending it downwards to children aged 2 in areas of social disadvantage, and that part has been implemented as part of the pupil premium package. So this area remains contentious, and Reception – which you asked about and which worried us because it was squeezed between two philosophies, two views of early education, for the moment remains a contested area.

Dr. Sue Rogers:

Just to finish it's not simply the kind of squashing in relation to curriculum and pedagogy but there are very real structural issues like the adult/child ratio and as you know the school admissions code has recently changed quietly and now all four year olds can go to Reception classes soon after their 4th birthday, so there are very real issues there in terms of supporting those children and the practitioners who work with them, so I hope we will continue to have a lively debate about this and in some way influence Government.

Professor Robin Alexander:

And of course Rose's recommendations on the starting age went out with the rest of his report.

Dr. Sue Rogers:

Yes, thank you.

Lord Lucas of Crudwell and Dingwall:

Who next? This lady in front here. And then who after that? The lady there, in the middle.

Professor Berry Mayall:

Institute of Education.

I wondered if you would like to say a bit more about the community curriculum aspect of your report, because as I understand it, when you did your consultations up and down the country, one of the points that emerged from parents, teachers, local authorities and community groups was that people thought that the primary school could readily be identified as the hub of the community and that therefore for it to be within walls and barriers and electronic what-have-yous, was not an appropriate way for it to be developed and I personally found very interesting the idea that schoolchildren and their teachers might go out of the school into the locality and work with local agencies. It's another form of education and it also addresses aspects of children's rights. Would you like to say a bit more about that?

Professor Robin Alexander:

Well Berry that's a partly rhetorical question isn't it? (Professor Berry Mayall has done a great deal of work on the sociology of childhood and in fact contributed substantial material to the Review about the nature and educational significance of children's lives outside school). Yes we did find as we went up

and down the country that everywhere, particularly in the most fractured communities, parents were saying to us, actually the primary school at best is the one point of stability, in a country where many communities are experiencing problems of one kind or another, and we misquoted Yeats about the centre not holding as well for good measure. And that was one of the reasons why we argued for the community curriculum, freeing up time not just for individual schools to do their own thing - in the way that has been argued by successive reviews from Dearing to Rose, and is also perhaps implicit in the current National Curriculum Review's remit - but much more proactively freeing up time for schools to work together and to work with their communities, to identify in a forensic and collaborative way the key local needs to which they should respond and to work together to resolve them. There are also pragmatic reasons why this is an advantageous strategy, because primary schools tend to be fairly small compared to secondary, particularly in rural communities, and if schools can work together in partnership to identify local needs and opportunities, they can also work together to share resources and perhaps staffing as well.

Louise Bamfield:

From Barnardo's.

Thank you for your presentation. You set out very clearly your two models of Minimalism 1 and Minimalism 2 so the first one four core subjects and the rest, and the second one the idea of slimming down by reducing to core learning across all subjects and domains, and I just wondered clearly you're interpreting current Government policy as being in the first camp, I just wondered, in any conversations you have had with Ministers or senior officials, have you got any sense that perhaps there is a more nuanced view beneath the Government rhetoric to suggest that there is perhaps...is there any hope for greater sympathy towards the second model, so I was just wondering if you have got any insight or inklings there?

Professor Robin Alexander:

Again that puts me on the spot, and I can't comment on conversations with officials or ministers, I can only comment on what I have said publicly already. I made this distinction in the press a couple of months ago between Minimalism 1 and 2, arguing that Minimalism 1 is a danger in the present exercise. We believe that breadth is crucially important at the primary stage, both because children at that stage of their lives need it, but also to provide a proper foundation for later learning and choice. But if you look at past evidence, including from Ofsted, you will know that we have a very uneven system and that unless breadth is actually a statutory entitlement, and the character of breadth is spelled out, then there is a risk of this reduction that we saw in many schools before the arrival of the National Curriculum, and again from January 1998 after David Blunkett removed the obligation on schools to teach the programmes of study in the non-core subjects. So that is why we argue for breadth. But we also say that there are two ways of slimming down. One is that you don't make it a winner-takes-all approach, specifying just four subjects, giving them as much

time as they wish and letting the rest settle for what they can get. Instead you say that art matters, history matters, music matters and a whole host of other things matter at the primary stage, and what you do then is to identify core learnings across these and across the so-called core subjects. In other words we don't agree with a core curriculum being equated with core subjects. We prefer it to be defined as *core learnings across a range of domains*, some of which are subject, some of which are not.

Lord Lucas of Crudwell and Dingwall: Sorry, who would....this lady at the front and then at the back and then here.

Rebecca Jones: Deputy Head at TreeHouse School which is a special school for children with autism. My understanding is that the National Curriculum was always intended to be a part of the school curriculum and not everything that a school does and that curriculum is, as a colleague said earlier today, everything that a young person does within their day at school. Just wondering, given that one of the purposes of the National Curriculum is the spiritual, moral, cultural, physical development of young people and also with their dissolving of Every Child Matters outcomes etc. whether you have got any suggested solutions of how we might value those bits within education and the progress that children are making in their development outside the National Curriculum areas?

Professor Robin Alexander: We've actually....in our model we do try to embed those within the domains. It's important to do this rather than assume they will happen, although they will happen to a degree because pedagogy is more than the content of the curriculum. There used to be something called the hidden curriculum. It was never hidden from anyone, least of all from children, so some people called it the para-curriculum, but that's a very powerful element in what goes on in classrooms. So I wouldn't be too fearful that unless the personal, social, spiritual elements are specified that they will disappear because this aspect of children's education has always been a strength of English primary education. Our worry is more about the arts and humanities, clinging by their fingertips, and the quality of teaching associated with those two major areas of children's learning. That's the area where questions have been raised by the old HMI and more recently by Ofsted in their subject inspections.

Pearl Barnes: I'm from NASEN, the National Association of Special Educational Needs. I have just two short questions. One is that given the Ofsted inspection, SEN Review, and the Green Paper Support and Aspiration, both support that there's an over identification of Special Educational Needs, and I would argue that in part that could be due to the delivery of inappropriate curriculum for some children. How would you address this, given that your statement is that there should be a National Curriculum that is

suitable for all children? And the second question is around, because we haven't had a mention of the phonics, the Year 1 phonics screener check, do you support that Year 1 phonics screener and what is your discussion or what is your view on it perhaps shaping the curriculum, certainly the literacy reading curriculum?

Professor Robin Alexander:

The acoustics in here are terrible, I only caught about one word in 20, the question was about children's special needs. What I am talking about at the moment is the entitlement of all curriculum, clearly a curriculum then needs to be differentiated to meet the needs of particular children, but if you have a very broad view of entitlement and you define the content in terms of broad domains, then it is for schools to determine how these are translated into practice. I don't think one needs to say more than that really. So one relies on, as Michael Gove said he wants to rely on, the professionalism of teachers to ensure that the precise content within the various domains actually matches the needs of individual children.

Lord Lucas of Crudwell and Dingwall: We have time for two more questions. The lady and the back and the lady in the front. If we start with you and end with you.

Vicky Ireland:

Action for Children's Arts.

I was absolutely delighted that your first...first domain is arts and creativity but for the first time the word imagination has appeared on the screen, and my question is how do we get across to movers and shakers how important exciting the imagination is?

Professor Robin Alexander:

How do you get it across? With great difficulty, I think. You tell me, you tell us. It's been a constant, constant battle over decades, hasn't it?

Vicky Ireland:

I think it is the acceptance that the arts are there for children of all ages, including early years, and we not only should encourage children to create their own art, but we need to encourage the practitioners who also give them art and deliver art for them to share in, but we have got to get that across to the people in power just how important this is.

Professor Robin Alexander:

Yes and I think one of my worries, and I imagine it's yours as well, is that if, as we are arguing, schools should work with the community and that means taking advantage of local resources and local expertise - and there's a lot of it locally in the arts - the latest Arts Council cutbacks present a very worrying situation at a time when local authority advisory support, including in the arts, is also being reduced. So, for example, heads have told me said they will no longer be able to bring writers or artists into school.

Julie McCulloch:

From Pearson.

I'm interested in your belief in an entitlement curriculum for all children in a political context in which primary schools are being encouraged to become academies, and therefore

obviously won't have to follow the National Curriculum, and I just wondered what your views on that were?

Professor Robin Alexander:

Well there's a tension isn't there? If it is a public system of education then the notion of entitlement presumably applies to all children. It's a tension which hasn't been worked through yet. As I said earlier, there's a balance to be struck between curriculum freedom for teachers and curriculum entitlement for children.

Lord Lucas of Crudwell and Dingwall: Thank you very much indeed Professor.

Professor Robin Alexander: Thank you.

Lord Lucas of Crudwell and Dingwall: I should be very grateful if I can have my panel up here. Sit yourself where you want. You're on first aren't you, do you want to....going to keep you to about five minutes. Good we will have five minutes from each of the members and then as much time as possible for questions. Thank you.