

# Taking English forward



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# Taking English forward



## Challenges for the future

During 2004/5 QCA started a national conversation on the future of the subject of English. 'English 21' was a new way of involving a wide range of people in a discussion about a vital part of our children's education.

By the summer of 2005 more than 5,000 people had joined the conversation. Those contributing included teachers, parents, pupils, employers, employees, writers, literature organisations, local authorities and many others.

The overwhelming view put forward was that now is the time for the study of English to be reinvigorated.

The ideas in this booklet have been prompted by all those who were involved in English 21. *Taking English forward* is a response from the English team at QCA, joining in the conversation about

the English curriculum. We hope the discussion will continue as we seek to renew and refresh English in the classroom.

There has long been general consensus about the importance of teaching children to read and write. Beyond this, there is also agreement that the English curriculum needs to encompass a range of skills and experiences that develop the imagination and cultural appreciation of literature and language.

The English 21 responses show that there are challenges for the future, to extend the current curriculum and to move ahead. Changes in society and technology are altering the nature of speaking, listening, reading and writing. The subject English needs to develop in the light of these

changes. Many of the suggestions about change are practical ones about the emphasis and content of what is taught.

For example, there is a strong consensus about the need to give more weight to the teaching of speaking and listening in its own right. This is particularly important in a world where talk is becoming more prevalent and English is the global language of communication. Another view, clearly supported by many, is the need for creativity and imagination to be given more opportunity to develop in English.

The themes and ideas in these responses are important guides to action and we hope many will join us in making them reality.

### The four Cs

There are other dimensions to the responses, which became evident in reading them carefully. These relate to the assumptions made about the subject and how it should be defined. There has been continuing debate about the nature of English and what should be the priorities in teaching it. Respondents to English 21 often emphasised one or more aspects of the subject as complementary threads, which run through thinking, teaching and learning in English:

**Competence** in using language means being able to communicate effectively and adapt to different situations.

**Creativity** in language involves exploiting linguistic resources, experiences and imaginations to create new meanings and make new effects.

**Cultural understanding** involves appreciation of the best achievements of our literature and language, and the new ways that culture develops and lives on in our society.

**Critical skills** are needed when looking at all forms of media and communication, as well as literary texts.



## Connecting the four Cs

These threads run across the modes of speaking and listening, reading and writing. They incorporate knowledge, skills and understanding. They reverberate around the range of texts and activities that are commonplace in classrooms where English is being taught. They help to define purposes as well as content.

These threads arise in different ways and reshape themselves as they are applied. They are separately identifiable and yet inextricably intertwined, enhancing each other and also demanding specific attention.

For example, to be creative in writing it is necessary to be competent in some of the conventions of communication. These conventions are familiar to the reader and can only be manipulated to a certain degree without losing the reader.

Often one aspect is dependent on another, for example:

- in order to be creative it is necessary to be competent in the use of language. Being able to apply criteria to their own and others' talk and texts is hard for learners. Yet this is an important skill for life in order to become competent in adapting to different contexts
- critical understanding about how language can transform and subvert meaning is necessary to appreciation of culture
- many writers attest to their experience that studying all kinds of great texts from our various heritages feeds the creative imagination and extends understanding of what is possible. Becoming a part of a community of writers means finding out how others write, as well as learning to express individual, personal meanings.

The four Cs are also a way of describing the range and essence of the subject to which all children and young people are entitled. In the classroom the links create exciting possibilities for using and studying language.

Discussions of competence, creativity, cultural understanding and critical skills, as well as features of these and activities that can help develop them, are on pages 4 to 11.



# An inspiring curriculum in English

Teachers can use the four Cs to review the curriculum they offer their pupils.

They can consider how, over a period of time, to focus on competence. This may mean teaching spelling patterns, the way meanings vary with intonation, the way punctuation clarifies meaning or other important skills. But when this kind of work is considered and/or applied in a more general context of what is possible, then learners can make language choices confidently with appropriate attention to accuracy.

They can encourage learners to be creative in speaking, writing, reading and listening. This involves giving them the skills to be confident risk-takers and stimulating them to try out new ideas and expressions. Provoking imagination through drama

can be a powerful way for children to move beyond their usual boundaries to explore what language can do.

It is essential to build in regular opportunities for children and young people to do this.

They can help children experience, as an entitlement, the richness of literature and their cultural heritage from their earliest years. They can help them learn language that will stay with them through life and appreciate how culture changes, perhaps because of technology or social customs. Many aspects of the English curriculum offer these possibilities.

They can help pupils develop critical skills, which are partners of competence. If competence relates mostly to speaking and writing, critical and analytic skills are essential for listening and reading and being able to participate effectively in society.

Throughout schooling, the four Cs need to be woven into a curriculum that catches the imagination of both pupils and teachers.



# Competence

Those who are competent in using language are able to communicate effectively and adapt to the contexts they are in. They have skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing that enable them to be successful.

From their essential early experience of speaking and listening, the priority for young children at school is to learn to read and write as well as develop their talk. Competence in reading and writing at age 7 enables them to make progress in other areas of learning, but the standards achieved then are not sufficient for the rest of their lives. Competence for secondary age pupils demands more complex skills and also the ability to apply them in more demanding circumstances.

It is quite possible to be competent in one context and not in another. Thus Competence is not a single set of skills. It is the ability to use language and respond to language, including speaking, writing, reading and listening, in the many different ways that any young person needs in order to make their way in the world. It enables people to be proactive not just survive.

The English curriculum in the classroom needs to ensure all learners are developing competence in speaking, listening, reading and writing and can adapt to different circumstances. They will need to be able to use language for many different purposes and to be convincing in a wide range of situations.

The English 21 conversation suggests that there is unease about how competent learners are in the range of skills they need when progressing from key stage 4. Many employers and higher education institutions are dissatisfied with the level of competence in speaking, reading, listening and writing they see.

Being competent in a language is seen not only as speaking and writing 'correctly' but being able to adapt, flexibly and effectively, to the demands of work or study.



| Pupils who are competent users of English:   | Competence may be developed by:   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● are effective in different contexts</li></ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● interviewing an adult on how the locality has changed</li><li>● writing a report on a reading survey</li></ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● use and respond to language appropriately in their speaking, listening and reading</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● using formal language in a radio broadcast</li><li>● identifying persuasive techniques</li></ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● speak and write concisely and accurately</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● presenting a complicated investigation succinctly</li><li>● using correct spelling and punctuation when writing a proposal for the school council</li></ul>                           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● read and understand texts</li></ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● reading instructions on staging a play to put on a performance</li><li>● summarising a text which explains in detail a set of facts</li></ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● analyse and evaluate how communications work</li></ul>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● analysing the words and images of an advert and how it appeals to the reader</li><li>● evaluating the rhetorical devices in a speech and assess their effectiveness</li></ul>         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● communicate clearly and persuasively</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● explaining why a particular choice of word is appropriate</li><li>● writing a case for changing an aspect of school</li></ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● draft, edit, summarise</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● revising a piece of writing in the light of feedback</li><li>● picking out the main points from a talk</li></ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● employ language skills that are 'beyond the basic'.</li></ul>                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● risking a different form for writing a report to have a different effect on the reader</li><li>● using reference books and technology to convey information on a new topic.</li></ul> |



# Creativity

Creative users of language are able to exploit their linguistic resources, experiences and imaginations to create new meanings and make new effects. They talk and respond to others, for example, using emphasis and intonation, non-verbal gestures, rhetorical expressions for effect, knowing when to keep quiet as well as when to talk at length. Such skills are developed through drama and through explicit exploration of how spoken language works. Reading enables learners to understand how others have used language to

illuminate experience and ideas and to experience the potential and power of words. Creative writing is more than the untrammelled spillage of words on to a page. It struggles to convey thoughts and feelings through exactly the right words in the most telling order. It uses form and structure to give shape, but can surprise and please the reader too.

English 21 respondents suggest that the English classroom has become rather mundane, where the pressures have led teachers to assume that

success will be achieved by routines and structures with little time for experiment or expansion or following interests. Many suggest the power of literature has a role to play in encouraging creativity and that young people need to be in contact with those whose business is words to learn what language can do.



| Pupils who are creative users of English:                               | Creativity may be developed by:   |
|---|---|
| ● use language in new ways  | ● experimenting with new poetic forms such as concrete poetry<br>● performing a scene from a traditional play in modern style                       |
| ● envisage what might be  | ● creating a future scenario based on familiar characters<br>● considering how a family in another part of the world might react to events          |
| ● surprise the reader/listener  | ● juxtaposing images and words so that unusual associations are made<br>● acting 'counter to the words' for example by delivering humour tragically |
| ● exploit media, including aural, visual, digital and paper-based media | ● using digital texts in a campaign<br>● using a variety of techniques to present facts to an audience  |
| ● play with patterns in language  | ● transforming rhymes into new words<br>● using clichés, euphemisms and other devices to make an amusing presentation                               |
| ● imagine   | ● giving a story a setting beyond the ordinary<br>● drawing illustrations for a poetry collection   |
| ● write down and shape the expression of their own experience           | ● writing alternative endings to a story<br>● arguing a case convincingly in a debate   |
| ● explore and entertain   | ● using anecdotes to amuse listeners<br>● using words, sounds and pictures to engage the reader   |
| ● make fresh connections between ideas, experiences, words              | ● trying out different ways to describe places<br>● mixing elements of different forms of texts such as poetry and prose                            |
| ● read and engage with others' works                                    | ● interpreting texts for different readers<br>● thinking about what the writer really meant   |
| ● work with poets, novelists, actors, non-fiction writers.              | ● learning how to revisit and reinvent experience<br>● learning ways to start and sustain writing.  |



# Cultural understanding

Young people need to be in touch with the culture of their society and the groups in which they participate, to appreciate the best achievements of our language and literature and the new, living ways that culture develops.

In English, the literary heritage is centrally important. It gives insight into the worlds of the past and illuminates the present. As society has changed and as the world has grown smaller, the heritage of all our citizens includes texts from many different traditions. Learners need to value cultural excellence, even when this is hard for them to access. But they also need to be able to engage with the new ways culture is now expressed and to judge its worth. They need to

be able to engage with all texts, whether these are in words or images, on paper or screen, live or recorded. In literary culture, there needs to be aesthetic appreciation of the language of poetry, the creation of impressions of place in travel writing, the uses of imagery to convey scientific ideas and the juxtaposition of words and pictures

As well as literature, there are different linguistic heritages that can be drawn on in the classroom. The ways language has been and is being used can illuminate ways of thinking and interacting in speaking and writing. Oral traditions, including story telling and oratory, are part of this heritage.

Cultural experiences affect our views of art and of identity. English 21 reaffirmed the centrality of our literary heritage but also asserted that it should not be seen as a static and fixed list of texts. What we consider our literary heritage must be constantly revisited to include texts from diverse traditions, particularly the traditions of young people whose cultural origins are in different parts of the world.



| Pupils who have a cultural understanding of English:   | Cultural understanding may be developed by:   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● draw on our literary heritage</li></ul>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● looking at classic and traditional texts as models of good writing</li><li>● discussing why a text has been valued for centuries</li></ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● recognise the power of narrative</li></ul>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● comparing how stories in prose, poetry, drama and anecdote appeal to an audience</li><li>● looking at how stories are different when transformed into different media</li></ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● are aware of linguistic traditions</li></ul>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● looking at how expectations of talk vary in different communities</li><li>● investigating dialect words and their origins</li></ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● reflect on our culturally diverse world</li></ul>                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● looking at picture books from around the world and talking about how people are represented</li><li>● considering how characters relate to place in works from different traditions</li></ul>                                     |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● see literature as part of identity</li></ul>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● adding texts from a variety of cultures to class libraries</li><li>● looking at the kinds of values that are portrayed in different traditions and the way these values are portrayed</li></ul>                                   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● study English as the language of global communication</li></ul>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● investigating how forms of English vary around the world</li><li>● thinking about ways that English may be ambiguous or mean different things in different cultures</li></ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● appreciate the aesthetics of English</li></ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● studying how rhymes, rhythms, assonance and beat in poetry convey meaning</li><li>● considering how economy of expression and irony, for example in Jane Austen's novels, can contribute to the enjoyment of literature</li></ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● gain knowledge of older and contemporary texts, print and graphics</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● looking at the full range of texts from modern comics to Middle English, noting shared features as well as differences</li><li>● understanding the significance of texts for their time</li></ul>                                 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● engage imaginatively with texts</li></ul>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● writing as a character from a novel</li><li>● turning a story into a play</li></ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● are aware of the importance of oral tradition.</li></ul>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● studying how and why certain speeches, such as those of Nelson Mandela or Martin Luther King, have inspired their listeners</li><li>● finding out how the oral tradition has been maintained in different cultures.</li></ul>     |



## Critical skills

Analysis and critical evaluation are essential skills for operating effectively in all aspects of life.

They are needed when looking at all uses of language and forms of media and communication, including literary texts as well as the spoken word.

In the workplace, sensitivity to implicit as well as explicit meanings is very important in relationships with colleagues. When using the internet, the ability to check the authenticity of information and its origins is critical.

Children and young people need to be able to challenge what they are told on grounds of logic, evidence or argument. They need to be able to form their own views independently. They need to be able to interpret messages accurately, clarify implications and see consequences.

By participating in discussions of all kinds of text and applying criteria and debating, young people learn about how language works and is manipulated.

Evaluating texts (after reading them sensitively and considering the text itself) is a staple feature of literature lessons. The evaluation is influenced by an understanding of the social and historical contexts in which the texts were written and the literary traditions of which the texts are a part. As well, the meaning we make of texts is influenced by our own experiences and expectations as well as our appreciation of their technical qualities.



| Pupils who have critical skills in English:    | Critical skills may be developed by:  |
|--|---|
| ● analyse and evaluate                         | ● using tools to analyse the power of language and then considering effect<br>● learning to apply criteria to judge quality   |
| ● challenge what they hear or read             | ● using clear arguments to disagree with what is said<br>● asking questions to elicit meaning, intention and error  |
| ● detect bias, opinion, abuse of evidence      | ● comparing two accounts of an event to find differences in emphasis and implication<br>● looking at the logic of a position and how far the evidence supports it   |
| ● appreciate how meaning is shaped             | ● analysing the use of rhetorical devices such as repetition, and questions to persuade the listener<br>● exploring the meaning and effect of imagery in poetry   |
| ● understand and give multiple interpretations | ● investigating how language use has changed and how words have had different meanings over time<br>● comparing how texts can mean different things to a range of readers   |
| ● see how context and form influence meaning   | ● comparing how ideas of success and honour have changed over time in literature<br>● looking at poems in different forms on the same theme   |
| ● assess provenance and usefulness             | ● learning about the criteria to apply to judge whether information on the internet, including documents accessed from the internet, can be trusted<br>● setting a purpose for research and searching for relevant material from a variety of sources |
| ● form their own views                         | ● discussing texts independently with or without a teacher<br>● considering merits of others' ideas before deciding for self  |
| ● self-evaluate.                               | ● using criteria gained from studying literature when assessing own writing<br>● understanding own preferences in texts and being adventurous about what they read.   |



# Taking English forward: a partnership

The four Cs can give a shape to the renewal of English that English 21 calls for. They need to be translated into action. QCA hopes that the

suggestions coming out of the discussions can be taken up by all the various groups that are interested in influencing the ways ahead.

| Some areas that need new ideas and impetus:   | The area of focus is:  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>speaking and listening becomes a priority for all ages, for social, vocational and personal purposes as well as to increase learning</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>competence</li> <li>creativity</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>creativity is encouraged across the English curriculum</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>creativity</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>what makes up our literary heritage is reworked for our changing society</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>cultural understanding</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the literary and linguistic heritage of our pupils is included in the classroom, in particular texts from a wide range of cultures and traditions</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>cultural understanding</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the range of texts used in the classroom is expanded to include reading and writing texts on screen</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>competence</li> <li>cultural understanding</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>poets, novelists, dramatists, actors, journalists, non-fiction writers and others whose business is words are brought into the classroom and regularly involved</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>creativity</li> <li>cultural understanding</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>pupils' understanding of how communication works in the world beyond school is extended, through greater contact, in and out of school, with local businesses, community and others from outside school</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>competence</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ways of integrating the study of spoken and written language into other aspects of the subject are developed</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>creativity</li> <li>critical skills</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>eight- and nine-year-olds are taught keyboard skills</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>competence</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>courses and qualifications in creative writing are developed</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>competence</li> <li>creativity</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>qualifications that encourage choice and flexibility are developed</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>competence</li> <li>creativity</li> <li>cultural understanding</li> <li>critical skills</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>teacher assessment is strengthened.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>competence</li> <li>creativity</li> <li>cultural understanding</li> <li>critical skills.</li> </ul> |



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