THE VANISHING NATIONAL CURRICULUM

One of the major outcomes of the Dearing review of the National Curriculum (Dearing, 1994) is a proposal for a much slimmer curriculum (SCAA, 1994). So, what has gone and why?

Some indication of what has gone can be gleaned by comparing the new draft Orders (SCAA, 1994) with the current Orders (DES, 1989). A document, distributed at the SCAA 'Consultation' meetings, details the content removed from the current Order. This document shows, for instance, that 34 items are no longer to be in the Statutory Orders. The document also gives a reason for each deletion and it is these reasons that caught our attention.

One common reason given for the deletions is "implied in other references to ...". In other words, the specific item to be deleted is implied in another item that remains. Our interest is in the 'reason' provided by SCAA, intriguingly captured in the phrase: "*not further developed in the Order"*.

For example, in the draft new Orders you may have noticed that there is no mention of flow diagrams. Here is the deleted phrase and the reason for its proposed deletion.

Ma3, level 7   constructing and interpreting flow diagrams with and without loops

not further developed in the Order.

Now it is not our purpose at this point to question this *particular* deletion. What we are interested in here is the *process* of deletion.

You may also have noticed that there is no mention of vectors in the draft new Orders. Here are the deleted statements and the reasons given for their proposed deletion.

Ma4, level 8   understanding and using vector notation including its use in describing translations

not further developed in the Order.

and

Ma4, level 9   understanding and using the laws of addition and subtraction of vectors

not further developed in the Order.

In this case the level 9 statement *must* have been deleted first. This then leaves the level 8 statement "not further developed in the Order".

In reading this we realised that herein lies a way of getting rid of the whole of the mathematics National Curriculum through use of the following algorithm:

Step 1: Take any higher level statement of your choice which is not developed further in the Order and delete it.

Step 2: Replace old version of statements with new version.

Continue repeating steps one and two until there is nothing left.

For instance, if we started with deleting "solve equations using graphical methods" from Ma3 level 9, we could then go on to delete "solve inequalities" from level 8, and so on. Quite quickly we would no longer have any equation solving as part of the statutory curriculum.

A more efficient algorithm, of course, would involve, as a first step, the deletion of all of level 10. By definition level 10 is "not further developed in the Order". As a result of replacing the old version of the statements with this new version, level 9 would not be further developed in the Order. Repeating such a process through 10 iterations would result in the deletion of the entire mathematics National Curriculum!

Notes

If you have not seen the distributed at the SCAA 'Consultation' meetings but would like a copy, please contact the authors.

References

Dearing, R (1994), *The National Curriculum and its Assessment final report*. London: SCAA.

DES and Welsh Office (1989), Mathematics in the National Curriculum. London: HMSO.

School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (1994), *Mathematics in the National Curriculum: draft proposals*. London: SCAA.

Keith Jones, University of Southampton

Laurinda Brown, University of Bristol