

Primary D&T National Curriculum 2014 – Myths and Facts

Myth: The Government will be publishing non-statutory guidance to support schools with implementation of the new National Curriculum. If we wait long enough it will appear.

Fact: There is no indication that the Government intends to provide any meaningful non-statutory guidance to support schools with implementation – certainly not in D&T.

Your local authority may well provide some general guidance on implementation and, if you are very fortunate, some guidance specifically on D&T. However, very few local authorities have the in-house expertise to provide specialist D&T support. Educational publishers are currently producing guidance, but its quality will depend on whether their authors have the necessary subject expertise in primary D&T. It is important to evaluate what is being offered with a critical eye. The quality will be variable.

It is certainly the case that National Curriculum Expert Groups, working independently of the Government, have developed high quality guidance for schools on implementation, including specific guidance on D&T. See <http://www.expertssubjectgroups.co.uk> for links to all the materials. For D&T, the materials were developed in collaboration with the D&T Association and are hosted at <https://www.data.org.uk/for-education/curriculum/dt-national-curriculum-for-england-2014>. The D&T Association has also provided guidance in D&T Primary magazine to support members, published a new national scheme of work ‘Projects on a Page’ and is providing primary-specific CPD, including branch meetings and full day courses – see www.data.org.uk.

Myth: The new National Curriculum is still in draft.

Fact: The final statutory version was published online by the Government on 11th September 2013. This is the version that all local authority maintained schools must teach from this September. As no printed copies were sent out by the Government, some schools have been under the misapprehension that nothing has been finalised – it has.

Myth: It is likely that the new curriculum will be abandoned, just like the Rose review, so it would be a mistake to invest any time preparing for it.

Fact: It is very understandable that some primary schools might hold this view. However, the new National Curriculum cannot simply be abandoned in the way that the Rose curriculum was scrapped prior to the last General Election in May 2010. The difference is that the Rose curriculum was only ever a draft document, whereas new National Curriculum framework is subject to a statutory order that has already been laid before Parliament and will come into force on 1st September 2014.

Myth: I've heard that nothing has changed in the new D&T programmes of study.

Fact: Some well-meaning commentators have downplayed the changes in the D&T curriculum to reassure schools that they can simply reuse existing curriculum planning. It is true that much of the new National Curriculum for D&T is the same at the previous version – in fact it was designed to build on existing good planning and practice. But there are some significant new elements. These include, for example, a requirement that children in both key stages follow an ‘iterative’ design and make process; that children in KS2 are taught to be ‘innovative’; to use the new computing curriculum to programme and control their products, and to understand the concept of mechanical and electrical ‘systems’. Also, the subject is now in two strands – designing and making, and cooking and nutrition. So plenty of food for thought in the lead up to and beyond September!

Myth: We are being expected to teach all the new requirements equally well from this September.

Fact: That is not realistic or desirable. The introduction of the new National Curriculum is certainly daunting. Some schools will feel under considerable pressure to have everything up to scratch from 1st September. Even if this were achievable in relation to mapping the curriculum, teaching all the new elements effectively will take time and require guidance and CPD to develop the necessary subject expertise, together with new resources in some areas. The overriding message is don’t panic! An appropriate strategy would be to draw up an action plan for D&T (and other subjects) and improve teaching of the new requirements over a period of time, to ensure that the curriculum is properly embedded and well taught. To help with this process use the freely available guidance at <https://www.data.org.uk/for-education/curriculum/dt-national-curriculum-for-england-2014> and the new primary scheme of work ‘Projects on a Page’.

Myth: If something is no longer a requirement in the new programmes of study then it is no longer important.

Fact: If something is no longer a requirement it is up to schools to decide whether or not to continue to teach it. It does not mean it is no longer important. As a non-core subject, the amount of content has been reduced in the new requirements for D&T and some important elements, such as ‘planning the sequence of making’ and ‘focused practical tasks’ have been removed. Both of these are considered to be fundamental to good practice in the subject, even though they no longer part of the National Curriculum.

Myth: The Government haven’t got round to writing the new level descriptions yet, but they will.

Fact: There is no intention by the Government to provide new level descriptions. If your school used the level descriptions in the previous National Curriculum, be wary of using them in the long term to assess children’s progress. The expectations in the new programmes of study are not compatible with the level descriptions.

Myth: It's not worth academies, free schools and independent schools looking at the new programmes of study for D&T.

Fact: It is very worthwhile academies, free schools and independent schools looking closely at the new programmes of study. They are based on best practice in the subject, written by subject experts and form a sound basis for teaching D&T in all primary schools, not just local authority maintained schools.

Myth: There is no point in reading the Purpose of Study and Aims for D&T.

Fact: Everything in the new programmes of study is important and the document is intended to be read as a whole. As well as following the Subject Content, planning and teaching also needs to reflect the Purpose of Study and Aims in a way that is appropriate to children's ages.

Myth: We can teach the new programmes of study exclusively through a skills-based approach.

Fact: The new programmes of study for D&T are a mixture of knowledge, understanding and skills – all of which play an important role in children's learning. Design and technology is often perceived as a skills-based subject, with a focus on designing skills and making skills. In reality, designing and making requires a considerable amount of knowledge and understanding. Sometimes this comes from other subjects such as maths (e.g. 2D and 3D shapes) or science (e.g. properties of materials), but there is also a body of technical knowledge and understanding that is unique to D&T, such as exploring and using mechanisms (e.g. how wheels and axles work in a toy vehicle).

Myth: The new requirements are all about children learning facts.

Fact: Nothing could be further from the truth. Most of the technical knowledge in the new programmes of study is conceptual (e.g. understanding and using the idea of a system) or procedural (e.g. understanding how to strengthen a structure) and all of it is applied when children design and make products. There is no list of facts or information to be learnt in the new requirements.

Myth: We can teach the new requirements effectively by melding D&T with Art and Design or Science – in order to save time.

Fact: It is doubtful whether the quality or integrity of children's learning in D&T can be maintained if it is *combined* with another subject. Evidence suggests that such an approach is likely to water down the nature of the subject as set out in the new programmes of study and undermine both coverage and progression. By comparison, it is very advantageous to make intelligent *connections* between D&T and other subjects. In fact maths, science, computing and art and design are listed in the Purpose of Study as subjects that children should draw on when carrying out D&T activities.

Myth: There is no need to spend any time thinking about how to implement D&T – it's a non-core subject.

Fact: Evidence from the Cambridge Primary Review (CPR) suggests that there is every reason to spend time considering the new requirements for the non-core subjects including D&T, even if the overriding focus for a school is raising standards in English and maths. Drawing on successive reports from HMI and Ofsted, the CPR found schools that were most successful in the KS2 English and maths tests were often those that also delivered a balanced, broadly-based and well-managed curriculum.

Myth: 'Cooking and nutrition' should be taught separately from 'designing and making'.

Fact: There is no requirement for the two strands to be taught separately. In fact the D&T Association recommends that 'cooking and nutrition' are linked with 'designing and making'. This means that as part of their food technology projects children will apply the principles of healthy eating and nutrition, learn how to prepare dishes at KS1, and prepare and cook dishes at KS2.

Myth: It doesn't matter if we don't cover all the material areas listed in the programmes of study for KS1 and 2.

Fact: In the new National Curriculum children continue to have an entitlement to a broad experience of D&T in KS1 and 2, and the new requirements safeguard this by clearly setting out a minimum range of materials that they should select from and use when designing and making.

Myth: The examples in the new programmes of study have to be followed.

Fact: The examples are just that – examples – and therefore non-statutory. In the case of the D&T requirements they provide a helpful guide to the range of experiences that should be offered. Schools can choose to adopt, adapt or add to the example content as they see fit.