

2 School Geography in England 1991–2001

The politics and practicalities of curriculum change

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Why 1991?

1991 was a key year for school Geography. In that year the Statutory Order for Geography in the National Curriculum was published. To achieve Geography's acceptance as a NC subject and its 'place in the sun', the Geographical Association (GA) had campaigned vigorously and many hailed this as a significant triumph for the subject community (Bailey 1991). In fact, geographers paid a high price for this victory. With its five traditionally focused attainment targets and 183 content-based statements of attainment, the 1991 Geography Order seemed to signal a move back to the kind of informational/utilitarian tradition from which Goodson (1998) claims the geography community had worked so hard to break away since 1950. The overlapping programmes of study did not make a workable curriculum framework and the Order seemed to ignore features such as key ideas, geographical enquiry and issue-based investigations in Geography, characteristic of the previous twenty years of curriculum development (Rawling 1992; Lambert 1994; Roberts 1991). Stephen Ball (1994), in his work on the influence of the New Right, commented on the consequences of this repositioning of the Geography curriculum as he saw it:

With its undertones of assimilation, nationalism and consensus around the regressive re-establishment of fictional past glories, restorationist National Curriculum geography isolates students in time and space, cutting them off from the realities of the single European market, global economic dependencies and inequalities, and the ecological crisis.

This experience of complete curriculum upheaval was shared by many other curriculum subjects, as a result of the processes set in motion by the Education Reform Act. Ball (1990) examines the conflicts which characterised the production of the Mathematics and English Orders, and other authors have investigated the experience of non-core subjects (e.g. Evans and Penney 1995 for PE; Phillips 1998 for History). In each case, as Ball points out, contestation over the detail of subject knowledge represented a power struggle for domination and for prestige by

different communities and groups within the educational state. Specifically, in the 1988–93 period, the dominant group influencing educational policy was the ‘New Right’. In the case of geography, the government-appointed Geography Working Group was steered towards a political solution (Rawling 1992). Thus geography had won the status battle but apparently lost the ideological arguments to the ‘New Right’ and to what Ball and subsequent writers have called ‘cultural restorationism’ with its emphasis on discrete and traditional forms of subject content and a pedagogy of didactic transmission.

It can be argued that the subsequent curriculum history of school Geography in the 1990s reveals the substantial cost of this ideological defeat. The subject community suffered a blow to its confidence and morale, particularly those curriculum projects and individuals which had moved into more progressive modes of operation. It also had to devote considerable creative energy to supporting teachers and to redressing this formulation, with some success, as this paper will show. It might also be argued that, as a consequence of its residual image as merely a utilitarian and informational subject, school Geography in the 1990s has not been recognised as a significant ‘frontline’ contributor to the curriculum. It is always the first candidate for reduction, optional status or dis-application when more important initiatives require space, as recent policy decisions over KS1, 2 and 4 reveal. It has also been constrained from playing its full part in debates about broader initiatives – for example, citizenship, sustainable development education and thinking skills.

Given this situation, it is tempting to assume that all subsequent curriculum changes have been minor. In both the Dearing Review (1993–5) and the QCA Review (1998–9) the emphasis has been on reduction, simplification and improving manageability and there has not been the opportunity for a major rethink, certainly for any non-core subject (though the Literacy and Numeracy strategies have necessitated reformulation for English and Maths). Much of the New Right ideology (subject-based curriculum, emphasis on content) has remained embedded in the NC structure. Indeed Kelly (1999) suggests that curriculum change in the 1990s has been ‘no more than tinkering with content, attainment targets, profile components, levels and so on ...’ (p. 101). Nevertheless, the Geography Order has undergone significant restructuring, and seen the re-emergence of progressive educational features such as geographical enquiry, values and a global dimension (though significantly geography has not managed to improve its curriculum status, particularly at KS4). Helsby and McCulloch note that

disputes over detail (of the NC) should not be seen as simply teething problems, as the sponsors of the National Curriculum would no doubt have preferred to think, but as continuing contestation over the principles and practices involved.

(Helsby and McCulloch 1996: 8)

The remainder of this chapter will analyse the continuing contestation over the Geography curriculum. In so doing it will also raise more general issues about the politics and practicalities of curriculum change in this period since 1991. Many

studies of educational policy-making (Dale 1989; Ball 1990; Ball 1994; Carr and Hartnett 1996) have focused on analysing aspects of the 1988 Education Reform Act, particularly the National Curriculum, and in this way have elucidated the characteristics and impacts of policy-making for the period from the mid-1980s to about 1993. Studies of other National Curriculum subjects (Evans and Penney 1995; Phillips 1998) have also tended to focus on the construction and implementation of the original National Curriculum documents. This chapter will seek to move the debate forward by looking at the processes and impacts of two National Curriculum Reviews and the changing policy trends and structures becoming apparent under 'New Labour'.

The policy cycle applied to the changing Geography curriculum

Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) warn of the dangers of following a linear approach to policy studies in education, explaining that this leads to a separation of policy generation from policy implementation, as if policy is merely 'what gets done to people'. They propose instead recognition of a continuous policy cycle, comprising three policy contexts: the context of influence, in which interested parties struggle to dominate the prevailing discourses; the context of text production in which the official policy texts (e.g. NC Order, non-statutory guidance) are produced; and the context of practice, in which the official policy is received and subject to interpretation and to some extent 're-creation'. Evans and Penney (1995) have traced the sequence of policy text production for a National Curriculum subject (PE) but it has not been used before to analyse and compare the subsequent impact of two National Curriculum Reviews. Table 2.1 (overleaf) shows in overview how the policy contexts can be applied to Geography and should be referred to, alongside the text of this section. The overlapping nature of each context is significant – effectively the context of practice for one National Curriculum is the context of influence for the next. Note that the dates are notional – the 'contexts' are not precise periods.

The first review of the National Geography Curriculum

The 1991–3 period (the context of practice for the first NC and the context of influence for the Dearing Review) was dominated by the pragmatic realisation that the national Geography framework, as outlined in the 1991 Order, was virtually unworkable in curriculum and assessment terms. Initial reactions both of the geography community as a whole and of individual teachers, focused on the sheer weight of prescription, on the limiting nature of the 'information about the world' view of geography, and on the apparently alien ideology it incorporated. However, as more evidence became available about implementation from Ofsted (1993a and b), so deeper structural concerns assumed greater significance. Despite the conclusion that – 'the way in which the AT/PoS structure has been interpreted makes it difficult to plan good quality work' (NCC 1992), neither the National Curriculum

Table 2.1 The Policy Cycle Approach applied to the Geography National Curriculum

	<i>Original Geography NC (1991 Order)</i>	<i>Dearing Review of NC (1995 Order)</i>	<i>QCA Review of NC (1999 Order)</i>	<i>Future Curriculum Review/Change?</i>
<i>Context of influence</i>	New Right 'discourse of derision' Geography gains a place in the curriculum but unresolved issues about process/content	Overwhelming evidence of faulty Order (NCC/Ofsted) Political imperative to 'rescue' the NC and Dearing special para 3.49 about geography	Relief at structural changes and flexibility Re-emergence of progressive educational influence via SCAA/QCA publications	Government priorities at KS1/2/4 constrain Geography further? 'Command curriculum' approach threatens teacher professionalism?
<i>Context of text production</i>	Direct political control over Geography Working Group and intervention by Secretary of State with Draft Order Subject professional influence marginalised	Pragmatic single-focus exercise – 'simplify' SCAA runs subject advisory groups, with strong central control of task + outcomes Subject community has constrained influence	Multi-focus exercise – simplify + new agenda QCA subject teams given freedom to draw on subject task groups + consultants Labour's new agenda is a 'no-go' area for QCA	Rolling programme of projects instead of 2005 review – Geography included from 2001 Existing strategies (e.g. Literacy KS1/2, KS3 Strategy) preempt decisions?
<i>Context of practice</i>	Severe implementation problems especially primary KS4 curriculum never implemented and Geography optional after 1993–4	Improvements in practice noted by SCAA/Ofsted Subject associations raise profile and membership and work together	Big issues will be: Re-establishing high quality geography at KS1, 2 and 3 Supply of geography teachers Changing 14–19 curriculum context	<i>Either</i> Creative interpretation of NC by geography community ensures contribution to curriculum priorities <i>Or</i> continued decline in quality/status
<i>Overall message</i>	<i>An imposed political solution produces a 'culturally restored' Geography curriculum</i>	<i>A pragmatic solution results in an improved simplified Geography curriculum framework</i>	<i>Professional influence allows consolidation in curriculum detail but fails to improve status</i>	?

Note

The 1991 and 1995 Geography requirements were both implemented in the same year that they became statutory (i.e. September 1991 and September 1995). The 1999 requirements received statutory status in 1999 but were not implemented until September 2000. Hence they are often referred to as the National Curriculum 2000.

Council (NCC) nor the Schools Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC) were able to provide much immediate support. As Ball points out (1994, p. 28) the New Right actually tightened its grip on policy-making in the 1991–3 period. NCC's 1991 non-statutory guidance for Geography was the subject of bitter conflicts between the Geography Task Group (professional geography educationalists called in to advise NCC) and the right-wing-dominated NCC Council members. It was later rated by an independent evaluation as 'the least useful' of NCC's INSET materials (Social Surveys, Gallup Poll 1992). In SEAC, under Lord Griffiths' chairmanship, there was a continuing push from the centre to extend bureaucratic control, in the form of national assessment instruments. For geography, work began on optional KS1 SATs, KS3 tests, KS4 National Curriculum-based GCSE criteria, despite SEAC Geography Committee's own recognition of the intractable problems the requirements provided for assessment (1990). In the event, both KS3 tests and the NC-related GCSE criteria were abandoned in 1993, but for political rather than curriculum reasons.

It would have been difficult to ignore the mounting evidence in 1991–3 of the structural inadequacies of the Geography Order. The Geographical Association (GA), whilst explicitly recognising these faults, took the line that constructive support to geography teachers on making the most of the National Curriculum (Rawling 1991) was the best way to maintain and promote good geography, at the same time as campaigning for change. Both the GA and the Council of British Geography (COBRIG) made strong representations to Sir Ron Dearing, attempting to read the political climate by accepting that major change to content was not on offer, but suggesting that reformulation of the AT/PoS relationship was a necessary first step, before slimming could be addressed. Such lobbying, backed by Ofsted evidence, proved effective. The Final Dearing Report (1993) contained a separate paragraph (4.39, p. 36) which gave special dispensation for structural amendments to be made to the Geography Order, despite the fact that the whole exercise was publicised as merely 'slimming down'.

The process of text production in the Dearing Review (December 1993–September 1995) was handled not by the Department for Education (DfE) but by the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) newly created in October 1993 as a direct result of the Dearing recommendations. Teacher discontent 1992/3 meant that, for negative reasons, the brief was slimming down the overweighted National Curriculum structure and enhancing flexibility for teachers. For geography, there was the added necessity for structural change. Subject advisory groups were set up to undertake the threefold task of identifying essential knowledge, understanding and skills from the original subject orders, redrafting the programmes of study more simply and writing the new level descriptions (SCAA 1993). SCAA was anxious to keep a tight rein on individual subject enthusiasms (seen by many as a problem of the original exercise) and to maintain overarching consistency and coherence. Hence there were also powerful Key Stage Advisory Groups acting in a cross-checking and supervisory capacity at every stage of the work. Although subject officers were nominally in charge of the development work, control was also exerted centrally from SCAA by means of: set guidelines for

membership of the subject advisory groups; chairing of each subject advisory group by an assistant chief executive of SCAA (in Geography's case, Keith Weller – also responsible for Science and the KS4 groups); common proforma for undertaking and reporting the development work; and the existence of a SCAA Council observer on each subject advisory group (for Geography, Shawar Sadeque). The work was all tightly managed and controlled within the short timescale (Jan–March 1994), before the proposals went to the Secretary of State (April) and out for consultation in May 1994. Although some subjects may have chafed under these restrictions, for Geography the situation could only improve from the low point of 1991. The subject advisory group, with strong GA and teacher representation, was fully supportive of the thrust towards simplification and may even be said to have gained from the tightly focused task, given the clear recognition of the Geography Order's problems (Battersby 1995). The revised Geography Order may be described as a pragmatic solution to the 1991 Order. It provided a new structure for the programmes of study, clarified the relationship between the ATs and PoS and gave partial recognition to geographical enquiry (though, significantly, this politically sensitive term was not actually used in the Order).

The second review of the National Geography Curriculum

The context of practice for the 1995 Order was also the context of influence for the QCA Review, and for the subject community the emphasis was on professional consolidation. Roger Carter, Chair of the GA's Education Standing Committee, expressed the relief of much of the profession:

The revised National Curriculum for geography is good news. Most of the problems identified in the earlier Order have been addressed, although some with more success than others. Teachers will now be able to work with programmes of study that are more realistic in content terms, more straightforward in presentation, and clearer about the relationship between Key Stages.

(Roger Carter, *TES*, November 1994)

For the National Curriculum as a whole, the Dearing Review had shifted the emphasis away from 'delivery' and towards teachers' responsibilities for developing a minimum national framework. Given this, SCAA was able to play a very different role to that of SEAC and NCC pre-1993. The appointments of Sir Ron Dearing as its first chair (from April 1994), Gillian Shepherd as Secretary of State for Education (from July 1994), and Nick Tate as Chief Executive of SCAA (from October 1994) signalled the beginning of a period in which the curriculum and assessment body was able to give greater stress to curriculum matters and, as Dainton (1996) suggests, to operate more consultatively. Significantly, the Corporate Plan for 1995–8 (SCAA 1995a) recognised, in Aim 1, the need to identify and undertake 'development work to support the National Curriculum'. The SCAA (and later QCA) Geography Team was able to develop a strategy for subject support and an increasingly fruitful relationship with the subject

associations and the geography teaching community. This was reflected during the 1994–9 period in regular updating meetings, publication of a termly subject 'Update', and involvement of subject experts and consultative groups in all its work. SCAA/QCA officers also attended subject association committee meetings as observers. Another result was the production of a whole range of curriculum-focused guidance publications. Exemplification of Standards for Geography at KS3 (SCAA 1996a), Expectations in Geography at KS1/2 (SCAA 1997a), and Optional Tests and Tasks for Geography at KS3 (SCAA 1996b) all incorporated a strong element of curriculum planning and a framework of geographical enquiry, despite their rather unpromising assessment-focused titles. Curriculum Planning at Key Stage 2 (SCAA 1997b) and Geographical Enquiry at Key Stages 1–3 (QCA 1998) were more ostentatiously focused on curriculum matters. Geography's high profile in more general SCAA publications (IT guidance 1995b; Use of Language 1996c) also proved useful as a way of emphasising geography's wider contribution. The significance of these publications is that, at national level, they laid the groundwork for further necessary structural changes and more progressive features to be added to the Geography Order in the forthcoming review. They also lifted the level of professional debate and raised the morale of the geography education community. It is not surprising to find that SCAA monitoring (1996d and 1997c) and Ofsted inspection evidence (1999a and b) charted a steady improvement in the implementation of school geography. There were, of course, continuing concerns (e.g. interpretation of enquiry, assessment) but by July 1997 when a pre-Review Consultation Conference was held, the SCAA geography team reported that manageability was no longer the big issue. A growing realisation that Geography's position in the school curriculum was steadily being diminished, particularly in the primary curriculum and at KS4, meant that 'the key issue in a review of Geography is its place in the curriculum' (SCAA 1997d).

In the 1998–9 Review, handled by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA, newly-formed in 1997 from the merger of SCAA and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, NCVQ), although the subject groups were given the more directive name of 'task groups', they were not as tightly constrained this time. QCA was keen as SCAA had been to maintain consistency and coherence across the whole exercise but, given the greater consultation and dialogue which had taken place in the 1995–8 period, it felt more able to involve and trust the subject communities to undertake the required work. Significantly too, QCA was much larger than SCAA, since it had taken over the vocational and general vocational qualifications work from NCVQ, and its Council, despite having stronger representation from the more progressive educational community, played a very different role to that of its predecessor. It was no longer possible after October 1997 to involve Council members in the minutiae of decisions about individual subjects. QCA's own subject officers were given responsibility for leading and managing the process. There was a small co-ordinating National Curriculum Review division and Key Stage/phase groups were established with a remit to overview the whole process. But the task groups were chaired by the QCA subject teams not by senior QCA officers and there were no QCA Council observers on subject task groups.

More significantly, despite their names, the subject task groups did not represent one single high profile group destined to carry out all the work. They were merely one part of a myriad of groups and individuals from which the subject teams sought assistance. For Geography, again, the style of development suited the situation, at least in terms of the work on the curriculum. The subject officers had built up a strong and positive relationship with the subject community, including not only the Geographical Association but also the Council for British Geography and the newly-merged (1995) Royal Geographical Society with Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG). The SCAA and GA publications of the 1995–8 period had established considerable agreement over the key aspects of the subject at school level. This all provided a sound professional basis from which to ensure that the review would make further improvements to the structure and detail of the Geography Order. The subject community was not as successful in effecting changes to geography's curriculum status. The KS4 curriculum requirements remained virtually intact, apart from additional new requirements in the form of citizenship.

The next curriculum review?

As far as providing a context of practice for teachers and an influence on the next review, the National Geography Curriculum 2000 (DfEE/QCA 1999) now provides a national framework for the subject which, after ten years, finally makes curriculum sense. It highlights Geography's wider contribution to the curriculum (including to education for sustainable development and citizenship) and leaves teachers considerable curriculum freedom to vary the content and develop varied teaching and learning approaches. More significantly, perhaps, a progressive educational ideology has emerged, thus to some extent contesting the 'cultural restorationism' of the 1991 Order. Of course, as Alexander has commented (1985, p. 158), 'ideologies do not come in single file, one replacing the other, but compete, interact and continue in juxtaposition'. The current National Geography Curriculum is a mix of residual and emerging ideologies, but it least it represents a better balance of what Marsden (1995) has called education-focused, society-focused and subject-focused emphases than at any time in the past twenty years. This combined with its minimal format means that there is freedom of interpretation. Arguably it is a 'post-modern curriculum' in this respect, although whether teachers will be willing or able to implement this newly found freedom is less clear (Rawling 2001).

However, since 1997, the educational discourse has been moving away from the details of curriculum frameworks – that was yesterday's struggle for which the QCA Review probably represented the last battle. Not only has the focus shifted to new policy issues (e.g. literacy, numeracy, thinking skills) but the conditions in the 1990s which allowed increasing influence from professional geography educators are already changing. As Power and Whitty (1999) have shown, New Labour educational policies do not so much present 'a Third Way' as a continuation of right-wing policies with an even harder-line approach to implementation, apparent in targets, performance indicators and specific curriculum strategies (e.g. the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies). Bell (1999) refers to the post-1997 period as a

distinctive 'excellence phase' in educational policy-making, with a strong emphasis on outcomes and controlled strategies. Geography has not gained from these approaches in the 1997–2001 period. The stress on literacy and numeracy and the 1998 announcement that the programmes of study were no longer compulsory for the 'non-core six' have caused a decline in access to geography for pupils in many primary schools. The KS4 review decision leaves Geography as an optional subject alongside an ever-expanding compulsory curriculum, so it will not be able to improve its position, despite the wider disapplication possibilities now available (QCA 2000). Geographers are also anxious about the possible impact of the Labour Government's desire to create room for its new agenda of citizenship, personal, social and health education, education for sustainable development and creative and cultural education. The new Citizenship requirements, compulsory from 2002 at KS3 and 4, provide particular concerns because of their separate subject format. Implementation details have been left to schools and so it is not clear yet to what extent the existence of another set of requirements will be interpreted as a totally new subject on the timetable, or as an opportunity to extend and develop the contribution of existing subjects like Geography.

For all curriculum subjects, the experience of Geography also reveals the growing impact of new groups of people and new structures which have been brought into policy-making by New Labour. The recommendations about the 'new agenda' topics (citizenship, personal, social and health education, sustainable development education, creativity and cultural education) were made by government-appointed task groups working throughout 1998–9. Although they eventually fed into a joint DfEE/QCA Preparation for Adult Life overview group and so into the NC review, they were not an integral part of the review process. Thus the QCA subject teams were only able to feed appropriate curriculum requirements into revised orders at a late stage (e.g. environmental change/sustainable development and citizenship references into geography) and in some cases, a separate decision was taken (e.g. to create a Citizenship Subject Order) instead of considering what existing subject formulations had to offer.

Another example is the Standards and Effectiveness Unit (SEU), established as a separate unit at the DfEE. The SEU is large and influential (in numbers, SEU staff roughly equal numbers in SCAA pre-1997). The SEU has impacted directly on the work of QCA's subject teams. Although the decision was taken to produce joint SEU/QCA Schemes of Work for all subjects instead of non-statutory guidance to support the revised curriculum, the Maths and English teams were not allowed to produce KS1/2 Schemes of Work because of potential conflict with the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. So far the impact on Geography has been slight but significant, involving debates over the extent to which the Schemes of Work for Geography were to be directive (the approved interpretation) or exemplary (a model for curriculum development). From 2001, SEU activities will impact more directly on geography departments as the Key Stage 3 Strategy extends the Literacy and Numeracy initiatives into secondary schools, promotes ICT and introduces a specific strand concerned with Teaching and Learning in the Foundation subjects (TLF). The TLF is being trialled in some pilot local authorities during 2000–1 and

many geography departments are involved. Potentially the individual elements of TLF (including planning effective learning, thinking skills, motivation and continuity) offer the opportunity for geography teachers to be more creative and flexible with the National Curriculum. However, what it also reveals is that the centre of gravity of curriculum policy-making and management seems to be changing, with the SEU in the ascendant. Ministerial appointments and departmental changes resulting from the 2001 General Election (June) seem unlikely to cause major new directions at the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). With Estelle Morris as Secretary of State, the DfES is likely to continue the DfEE's proactive role in curriculum matters. Since October 2000, Professor David Hargreaves has taken over as the new Chief Executive of QCA. With future changes to the National Curriculum and the school curriculum in mind, it will be crucial to see how QCA and SEU divide up their respective responsibilities, what processes of continuing review and change might be envisaged and how centrally individual subjects will be involved in policy matters. Already, in 2001, the signs are that QCA, under Hargreaves' leadership, wishes to maintain a significant curriculum role – seen for example in the attention being given to the Creativity Across the Curriculum Project and to the development of Citizenship Schemes of Work. Geography is involved in both these initiatives. Equally however, QCA's regulatory and monitoring functions as an assessment authority are assuming greater importance as the number of academic and vocational qualifications grows and with the recently announced review of the functioning of the AS/A2 structure. Although no official pronouncements have been made about the next curriculum review, it now seems less likely that there will be a big National Curriculum review in 2005. The QCA curriculum projects, established after the last review (e.g. Science for the 21st Century, coherence in the 14–19 curriculum) effectively comprise a rolling programme of change and development. From April 2001, Geography and History are included in this process through the QCA Geography and History Curriculum Project. A small amount of funding is available for some reflection and rethinking about the appropriateness of existing curriculum frameworks (from 3–19 years) for the twenty-first century. What is not clear yet is what, if any, action will result from the project's findings and how significant these will be alongside the more directed and classroom-focused strategies being developed by the SEU's TLF activities.

Identifying some key conclusions and issues

The differing scale and character of curriculum change

The 1989–91 period was an example of the 'big bang' approach to subject change, with a high-profile working group developing a completely new curriculum in relative secrecy and isolation from the rest of the subject community. The Conservative government had chosen this approach deliberately, in order to promote what it saw as a 'fresh start' to the school curriculum and to reject previously accepted professional expertise and wisdom about the subject (Lawton 1994). By contrast, both reviews of the National Curriculum were necessarily smaller scale because

they were starting from existing Orders and attempting to simplify and reduce them. In addition, and also inevitably because of problems caused both for the whole curriculum and for Geography by the first attempt, the process was less secretive and involved the subject community more directly. The Dearing Review may be seen, in retrospect, as a pragmatic single focus exercise, aimed at 'rescuing' the National Curriculum. In comparison, the QCA Review was a more multi-focused exercise, encompassing both continuing amendment and consolidation of the 'old' curriculum (inherited from the previous government), but more significantly, the introduction of New Labour's distinctive interests which tended to cut across the old subject framework. Some NC subjects benefited from this clash of interests – in Geography's case there were gains in the curriculum framework but losses in curriculum status. The Dearing and QCA Reviews now seem to represent the end of 'sorting out' the old curriculum; the signs are that New Labour's policy emphases and new ways of working herald a new era in which there is less interest in the details of curriculum input by subject (e.g. the Geography curriculum details) and more interest in curriculum output in certain defined areas (literacy targets, GCSE league tables). As already suggested, there is unlikely to be full-scale curriculum review in 2005 but instead a programme of separate 'projects' over the next few years. The Geography and History Curriculum Project provides one part of the context of influence for future changes, but so also do the Key Stage 3 Strategy and the promotion of citizenship.

Changing sites for struggles over subject knowledge

If the analysis is correct, then the 1990s have seen a significant shift in the location of subject power struggles. The 1990s for geography have been all about amending the detail of the 1991 Order to produce a workable curriculum framework and, in this respect, the 1994–2000 climate was favourable to change. Within the subject community it is now essential to support teachers in creatively implementing this framework and so to continue to be concerned with subject content details. However, at national level, the sites for promotion of and maintenance of the subject perspective have changed. Geography's future status and the contribution it will be allowed to make to the curriculum will depend, as for other subjects, on how it is seen to address the newer policy initiatives emerging since 1997. These include raising literacy and numeracy standards, contributing to ICT developments, participating in the TLF work, promoting citizenship and sustainable development education and, for 14–19, providing a range of accessible opportunities for young people. For many of these, Geography has relevant experience to share (e.g. thinking skills, Leat 1998), is already being asked to contribute (e.g. GA involvement in the literacy strategy at KS3), or can draw on new aspects of the Geography curriculum (e.g. environmental change and sustainable development; enquiry). This is not to suggest that school subjects like Geography should merely become servicing agents for continually changing national priorities. Geographers have gradually realised that the existence of a strong and interactive relationship between the subject in schools and in higher education is crucial to the status and

well-being at all levels (Rawling and Daugherty 1996). It does not matter whether the context is a primary curriculum increasingly focused on the basics, coherence at 14–19, or Geography's role in key skills development in higher education. Most geographers agree that these are better dealt with from the base of a common and dynamically growing understanding of Geography's contribution to education for the twenty-first century (Unwin 1992; Morgan 2000). In the more diffuse policy arenas of the 2000s, one important weapon for geography educators may be a much clearer view of geographic entitlement – what aspects of geographical knowledge, skills and understanding are essential for young people at different ages, and particularly by the time they leave school. Power struggles over subject knowledge are likely to continue, even in an increasingly non-subject-based educational policy framework.

The growing importance of professional educators active within policy-making arenas

In 1986, Lawton drew attention to the different kinds of people involved in policy-making at the DES, then perceived as the central body in decision-making. He identified politicians, bureaucrats and professional educators, represented particularly by the 450 or so HMI, as holding different beliefs and values and hence making distinctive impacts on educational policy. As a result, policy decisions at the DES were rarely the result of consensus, but more often arose from compromise or negotiation within what Lawton called the 'tension system'. For geography pre-1988, the HMI had been particularly supportive of some of the more progressive developments initiated by the curriculum projects and this may, in part, explain why the geography subject community failed to recognise the dangers in the NC exercise.

After 1988, this delicately balanced tension system was destroyed and the impact of professional educators as a group was seriously constrained. The experience of geography shows that the influence of subject HMI, and of the newly created subject officers at NCC and SEAC, was marginalised in the National Curriculum production process. The evidence points overwhelmingly to the dominant influence of politicians in the 1991–3 period as far as policy affecting the Geography curriculum is concerned.

However, after 1993, one of the most significant features for Geography, and possibly for other subjects, has been the re-emergence of a professional educational influence. This is particularly noticeable through the work of the subject officers in SCAA and QCA, but supported by those remaining HMI able to play a subject role (e.g. the HMI National Geography Adviser and the HMI Teacher Education Inspector). The changed political climate and procedures in both reviews have enabled these people to work co-operatively rather than in conflict with the subject community and so to help effect considerable change to the Geography Order.

Significantly, the Labour administration has brought new groups of professionals into policy-making and policy management since 1997 – the task forces, advisory groups, special advisers, developers of literacy and numeracy strategies and staff of

the SEU. The SEU, for example, now has five divisions (LEA Improvement, School Improvement, Pupils Standards, Diversity and Best Practice, Excellence in Cities) and many of its staff come from educational rather than a civil service or administrative background (see DfEE Standards website). High-profile educationalists such as Tim Brighouse (until 1999 Vice-Chair of the Standards Task Force), David Hargreaves (Vice-Chair of the Standards Task Force until 2000 and his appointment as Chief Executive of QCA) and David Reynolds (School Improvement Adviser) have been given positions where their voices can be heard. The National Education Research Forum is another initiative (from 1999) which intends to draw educationalists into the debate about using research findings to inform policy. Whilst these attempts at dialogue reflect Labour's belief that 'what matters is what works' (Blair 1998) and are to be welcomed generally because they bring a larger group of professional educators into the policy-making circle, they do raise wider issues. For example, how should some, at least, of these people be classified on Lawton's table? As a number of commentators have pointed out (Bell 1999; Power and Whitty 1999) the Labour government's approach promotes a strange mixture of autonomy and control. It is pragmatic and willing initially to incorporate ideas from different perspectives but, having decided on policy, then detailed implementation is set within a directive framework of targets and strategies. Thus the work of the SEU now focuses almost exclusively on specific strategies such as school improvement and raising standards, using the government's own interpretation of how this is to be pursued and, significantly for Geography, of which subjects will be included. For the moment, it might be more correct to see SEU staff as 'technocrats' acting in a tightly controlled policy management role, rather than as professional educators commenting on and influencing policy direction. Task groups and advisory groups may be less directed, and it is not yet clear, for instance, how much freedom will be exercised by the National Education Research Forum and whether it will have the genuine ability to influence rather than react to the policy agenda (Pring 2000). Given this situation, it becomes even more crucial that the geographic education community can act as a united and powerful professional voice for the subject at all levels in education.

Changing power structures inside the educational state

In the conclusion (Endnote) to his book about *Politics and Policy-making in Education*, Ball (1990) presented a diagrammatic representation of the contending influences inside the educational state (p. 212). It illustrates the struggles over school knowledge played out between the New Right 'cultural restorationists', who strongly influenced Number 10 and the Secretary of State's office, and the more progressive educationalists with their power base in the NCC and HMI. The DES, with its more traditional 'reforming humanist' ideology and openness to 'industrial trainer' ideas from business and industry lobbies, acted as a moderating influence.

The politics of the changing Geography curriculum throughout the 1990s suggests that this representation now needs to be amended (see Figure 2.1). The lines of ideological conflict are not so easily drawn in 2001. New Labour does not

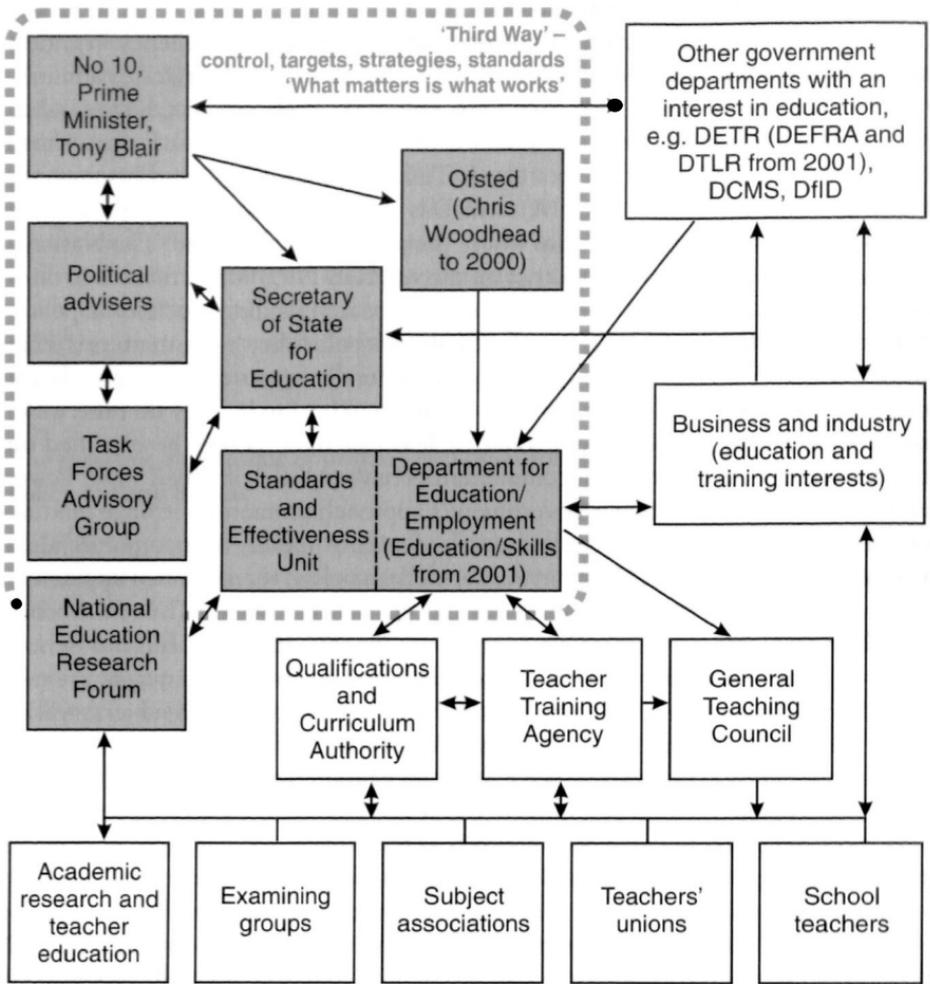


Figure 2.1 Struggles over school knowledge inside the educational state

Source: Ball (1990: 212).

define itself in old ideological terms, but draws on a mixture of ideas from across the full ideological spectrum. Targets, performance indicators and the basic and key skills represent a continuation of right-wing curriculum policies. Measures to promote citizenship, sustainable development education, personal, social and health education and values borrow from more radical, left-wing agendas. It might be suggested that it is not the curriculum policies themselves which represent New Labour's 'Third Way', but the approach and structures of control which have been introduced to implement these policies. New Labour seems to have built up a power bloc in which political advisers, task groups, Ofsted and, notably, the SEU, are focused directly on implementing stated government educational policies on a direct line from Number 10. Several political commentators have noted the

growing influence and strong control exerted by the Prime Minister (Kavanagh and Seldon 1999; Hennessy 2000). Kavanagh and Seldon noted that Tony Blair increased the number of political advisers in Whitehall from 38 under John Major to 64 by January 1998 (and recent newspaper speculations suggest that the number is now nearer 78). He has taken on a more direct approach to setting and overseeing strategy which frequently sidelines government departments. This is what Hennessy (2000) calls the 'command premiership'. Although designed to make things happen and to promote 'joined up policy' this strong control has implications for education, and specifically for curriculum policy-making. In the last six years, professional geography educators have been given considerable freedom within broad policy frameworks to manage the detail and make amendments to the subject order. This was true in SCAA and also in the first two years of QCA. However, once the official National Curriculum Review was finished and Labour's own actions started to take effect, QCA was faced with a whole range of new political advisers and a rival body. The SEU now provides not only advice to Ministers on QCA's policy management role but it actually implements new policy initiatives (e.g. the Literacy Strategy). So far the greatest impact of this has been felt by the core subjects. The SEU staff responsible for Literacy and Numeracy already duplicate to some extent the work of QCA subject officers, with consequences for the latter's independence. The appointment of a SEU Science Director for KS3 may overlap with the work of the QCA Science Team. New initiatives such as thinking skills and assessment for learning, both part of the Key Stage 3 strategy, seem to be led from SEU, though they could easily have been allocated to QCA's curriculum division. There is not necessarily any greater merit in QCA being the curriculum policy management body as compared to SEU. What is significant is that the government has not re-defined QCA's curriculum role but created new structures which are under its direct influence. These more restricted approaches to curriculum policy management are already bringing criticism from academics (e.g. Ball 1999; Goldstein and Woodhouse 2000) and seem set to continue under the new Secretary of State from 2001, despite talk of a toning-down of the 'control ethos'. It may be that the freedom of movement which has been enjoyed and the open dialogue which this has allowed between geography educators within and outside the official agencies, is threatened by the more rigid and managerialist approach of the 'Third Way'. The subject communities will need to be astute and watchful as to where the most powerful sites of curriculum policy-making emerge in the 2000s.

Phases of policy-making

Bell's study of educational policy in England (1990) suggested that the 1988–99 period divided into two main phases – the 'market phase' 1988–96 and the 'excellence phase', 1997 onwards. Although this may be appropriate as a broad framework for all educational policy, my analysis seems to suggest that, as far as curriculum policy-making is concerned, there needs to be three subdivisions, as follows:

- The 1988–93 phase, during which the National Curriculum subject Orders were developed. This was characterised by *strong political control of the curriculum content*, the pervasive influence of ‘cultural restorationist’ ideology, and the marginalisation of professional educators.
- The 1993–7 phase was a period of *pragmatic accommodation and negotiation*, in which New Right influence diminished and, because of the need to involve teachers more co-operatively in implementation, professional educators and teachers within and beyond the central agencies participated more in policy-making and management.
- The final phase, 1997 onwards, has been characterised by *less ideology and more control – a ‘command curriculum’*. New Labour’s Third Way is recognisable in the greater direction over outcomes and implementation strategies, with a new breed of ‘technocrats’ managing policy and even classroom interventions. The 2001 Labour election victory may result in some changes of emphasis, but it seems unlikely that there will be major changes in overall direction or any reason to talk of a new policy-making phase.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on analysing the changing National Geography Curriculum 1991–2001. It has not dealt with the 14–19 curriculum where school Geography is heavily influenced by GCSE and AS/A level criteria and by awarding body specifications. However, the fortunes of Geography KS1–3 are inextricably linked to the character and status of the subject at 14–19. Recent declining numbers for GCSE and A level, whatever the causes (Westaway and Rawling 2001), are almost certain to have a negative effect down the curriculum (5–14) and also up the curriculum into higher education. The analysis in this chapter seems to suggest that if the geography community is to ensure the continuing growth and quality of the subject in primary and secondary schools, it will be necessary to maintain an awareness and understanding of the policy process and to recognise and use any opportunities which arise to strengthen the subject. A strong and cohesive geography subject community will be an important prerequisite so that geography can promote a positive image, revive and extend professionalism to deal with new initiatives, and present a united front to counter other powerful groups. Finally, an important weapon in the increasingly non-subject-based curricular struggles may be the recognition of a clear geographical entitlement, aiming to explain and justify the contribution of geography to education for the twenty-first century.

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