



GSOC.ED11 The 1988 Education Reform Act and the National Curriculum

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 60 minutes

Total Marks

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Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Use sociological vocabulary and, where asked, short full sentences. The extended evaluation question at the end requires a developed conclusion. Time guide: 60 minutes.

- 1** Which statutory change in the 1988 Education Reform Act required the same basic subjects to be taught in maintained schools across England and Wales?

- ☐ A) The fragmentation of local education authorities
- ☐ B) The compulsory National Curriculum
- ☐ C) The expansion of private academies
- ☐ D) The abolition of standardised testing

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** Define what is meant by the National Curriculum as introduced by the 1988 Education Reform Act, in the context of school subjects and attainment targets.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

- 3** Identify one element of assessment that the 1988 Act introduced at Key Stages in maintained schools.

(Total for Question 3 is 2 marks)

- 4** Explain two purposes of the attainment targets set out in the National Curriculum by the 1988 Education Reform Act.

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

- 5** State one subject that became part of the core National Curriculum subjects under the 1988 Act, for example at primary level.

(Total for Question 5 is 2 marks)

- 6** Explain one way the 1988 Education Reform Act linked the National Curriculum to measuring pupil progress.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

- 7** The 1988 Act required publication of certain school data that later formed the basis for league tables.

(Total for Question 7 is 4 marks)

- 8** Define the New Right rationale, in the context of the 1988 Act justifying a National Curriculum and standardised testing.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

- 9** Identify two Key Stages at which SATs were introduced under the assessment framework created by the Education Reform Act and its immediate successors, naming the Key Stages and typical pupil ages.

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

- 10** Using the 1988 Act context, explain one advantage of having a compulsory National Curriculum for pupil equality of opportunity.

(Total for Question 10 is 2 marks)

- 11** Explain one criticism, from an interactionist perspective, of standardised testing such as SATs introduced after the 1988 Act.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

- 12** State one way the National Curriculum, as created by the 1988 Act, limited local discretion over what was taught in maintained schools.

(Total for Question 12 is 2 marks)

- 13** Explain two possible effects of publishing SAT results on classroom practice, in the context of the 1988 Act making performance information public.

(Total for Question 13 is 4 marks)

- 14** Identify and explain one way the National Curriculum attempted to make school outcomes more comparable across the country under the 1988 Act.

(Total for Question 14 is 2 marks)

- 15** Explain two reasons the New Right gave for introducing both a compulsory National Curriculum and standardised testing in the 1988 Act.

(Total for Question 15 is 4 marks)

- 16** Discuss how far sociologists would agree that the National Curriculum and standardised testing introduced by the 1988 Education Reform Act raised educational standards. Refer to differing sociological perspectives and reach a supported conclusion.

Evaluate the claim that the National Curriculum and SATs raised educational standards, using sociological perspectives to support and challenge the claim. Give a judgement.

(Total for Question 16 is 12 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.ED11 The 1988 Education Reform Act and the National Curriculum

Question 1

- **B1** B (the compulsory National Curriculum)
- **Answer: B**

Question 2

- **B1** identifies the National Curriculum as a centrally specified set of subjects and programmes of study for schools (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. it included attainment targets and programmes of study for each Key Stage to set expectations for what pupils should learn
- **Answer: The National Curriculum is a centrally specified set of subjects and programmes of study for maintained schools, including attainment targets and programmes of study for each Key Stage.**

Question 3

- **B1** identifies one element, e.g. Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) at Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 and later Key Stage 3
- **B1** brief development, e.g. used to measure attainment against National Curriculum standards
- **Answer: Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) at Key Stages to measure pupil attainment against National Curriculum expectations.**

Question 4

- **B1** identifies one purpose, e.g. to give clear expectations of what pupils should learn at each Key Stage
- **B1** development of that purpose, e.g. helping teachers plan lessons and ensure consistency across schools
- **B1** identifies a second purpose, e.g. to provide a basis for assessing pupils and comparing attainment
- **B1** development of that purpose, e.g. attainment targets linked to SATs allowed measurement of progress and school performance
- **Answer: Attainment targets set out clear expectations of what pupils should learn at each Key Stage, helping teachers plan and ensuring consistency; they also provided a basis for assessment, linking to SATs so pupil progress and school performance could be measured.**

Question 5

- **B1** identifies a core subject, e.g. English, Mathematics or Science
- **B1** brief development, e.g. these were mandatory parts of the National Curriculum programmes of study
- **Answer: English (or Mathematics or Science) became core National Curriculum subjects and were mandatory parts of the programmes of study.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies the link, e.g. attainment targets in the National Curriculum provided criteria for Standard Assessment Tests (SATs)
- **B1** development, e.g. SAT results could show how well pupils met the National Curriculum expectations at each Key Stage
- **Answer: Attainment targets provided criteria for SATs, so SAT results could show how well pupils met National Curriculum expectations at each Key Stage.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies that the Act required schools to publish exam and test results and other performance information
- **B1** development, e.g. publication made school performance comparable for parents and local communities
- **B1** identifies that the statutory requirement for publishing results provided the legislative origin for later school league tables
- **B1** development, e.g. this comparability enabled central and media ranking of schools using published data
- **Answer: The Act required publication of test and exam results and performance information, making schools comparable for parents and communities; this statutory publication provided the legislative origin for later league tables and allowed central or media rankings based on published data.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies New Right rationale, e.g. belief that central prescription and standard measures raise educational standards and drive improvement
- **B1** development, e.g. emphasis on the state setting clear requirements so schools are held accountable and comparable
- **Answer: The New Right rationale is the belief that central prescription and standard measures, such as a National Curriculum and SATs, raise standards by making schools accountable and comparable.**

Question 9

- **B1** first Key Stage correctly identified, e.g. Key Stage 1
- **B1** correct typical age given for that Key Stage, e.g. age 7
- **B1** second Key Stage correctly identified, e.g. Key Stage 2
- **B1** correct typical age given for that Key Stage, e.g. age 11
- **Answer: Key Stage 1, age 7; Key Stage 2, age 11. (Key Stage 3, age 14 was part of the wider framework and had assessments introduced in follow-up policy.)**

Question 10

- **B1** identifies advantage, e.g. all pupils taught a common core of knowledge so those in different areas get similar entitlement
- **B1** development, e.g. this reduces postcode variation in what is taught and supports fairness in educational entitlement
- **Answer: A compulsory National Curriculum gives all pupils a common core of knowledge, so children in different areas are entitled to similar learning and reduce postcode variation in teaching.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies criticism, e.g. tests label pupils and can lead to teacher expectations shaping pupil performance
- **B1** development, e.g. labelling can create self-fulfilling prophecies and affect pupils identity and future achievement
- **Answer: Interactionists criticise SATs because tests can label pupils and create teacher expectations that shape performance, producing self-fulfilling prophecies that affect pupil identity and future achievement.**

Question 12

- **B1** identifies limitation, e.g. programmes of study and attainment targets were centrally specified, reducing local curriculum design
- **B1** brief development, e.g. local authorities and schools had less freedom to choose which topics to prioritise
- **Answer: The National Curriculum's centrally specified programmes of study and attainment targets reduced local curriculum design and meant local authorities and schools had less freedom to choose topics.**

Question 13

- **B1** identifies one effect, e.g. teaching to the test, concentrating on content most likely to appear in SATs
- **B1** development of that effect, e.g. narrowing of the taught curriculum and less time for wider skills or creativity
- **B1** identifies second effect, e.g. increased use of target setting and tracking to raise test scores
- **B1** development of that effect, e.g. data-driven practice may intensify focus on pupils near the pass level and change resource allocation
- **Answer: Publishing SAT results can lead to teaching to the test, narrowing the taught curriculum to likely SAT content and reducing wider skills work; it can also increase target setting and tracking to raise scores, focusing resources on pupils near key thresholds.**

Question 14

- **B1** identifies a method, e.g. standardised attainment targets and programmes of study
- **B1** explains how this supported comparability, e.g. common criteria meant different schools were teaching to the same standards so results could be compared
- **Answer: By setting standardised attainment targets and programmes of study, the National Curriculum meant different schools taught to the same standards, so pupil outcomes could be compared nationally.**

Question 15

- **B1** identifies one reason, e.g. to raise standards by ensuring a clear, central expectation for schools
- **B1** development, e.g. central prescription reduces variation in quality and makes schools accountable for delivering core knowledge
- **B1** identifies second reason, e.g. to make schools comparable through measurable outcomes
- **B1** development, e.g. comparability enables parents and the state to judge school performance and pressures schools to improve
- **Answer: The New Right argued a central National Curriculum would raise standards by giving clear expectations and reducing variation, and that standardised testing would make schools comparable through measurable outcomes so parents and the state could judge and pressure schools to improve.**

Question 16

- **Level 1** (1-3): Basic statements about the National Curriculum and testing with limited use of sociological ideas. Little or no argument and no clear conclusion.
- **Level 2** (4-6): Some relevant sociological points made, for example simple New Right support and one criticism. Some development but limited use of evidence. A simple judgement may be given.
- **Level 3** (7-9): Clear use of at least two sociological perspectives, such as New Right support and interactionist or Marxist/feminist criticisms, with developed reasoning and some evidence. A balanced argument is presented with a tentative conclusion.
- **Level 4** (10-12): Thorough evaluation using multiple perspectives. Arguments for the claim, for example New Right ideas about raising standards and comparability, are linked to evidence such as measured improvements in basic attainment. Strong counter-arguments are given, for example that testing narrows the curriculum, produces teaching to the test, or reflects social class differences in achievement, with clear analysis of strengths and limits. A well-supported, reasoned judgement is reached.
- **Indicative content:**
 - New Right view: support for the claim because a compulsory National Curriculum and SATs set clear expectations, created comparability, and held schools to account, which should raise standards.
 - Evidence supporting improvement: points about measured rises in basic attainment in core subjects in some periods after introduction, and clearer benchmarks for progress.
 - Interactionist criticism: testing creates labels and raises teacher expectations, which may distort outcomes rather than reflect genuine rises in learning.
 - Marxist/feminist criticisms: centralised tests and curriculum may reproduce social class or gender inequalities, since pupils from advantaged backgrounds are better prepared to meet standardised measures.
 - Curriculum narrowing: argument that teaching to the test reduces time for broader skills, creativity and non-tested subjects, which may limit genuine educational development.
 - Validity and reliability issues: standardised tests measure narrow skills and may not capture wider educational aims; changes in test design over time affect comparability.
 - Policy limitations: improvements may result from other factors such as resource changes, teacher training or broader social shifts, not only the Act itself.
 - Balanced conclusion: on balance, some standards in basic measurable skills may have risen, but sociologists would caution that rises are uneven, may mask narrowed curricula, and that inequalities remain.