

Speech: International Textbook Summit

It is my pleasure to open the international textbook summit and welcome guests from all over the world. From Iceland to Singapore, China to the USA, it is an honour to host world-leading experts on the importance of textbooks.

Over the course of this summit, we will hear from leading academics, publishers and policy makers, including Professor Bill Schmidt, Ms Lee Fei Chen and my friend Dr Nuno Crato.

And we are fortunate to have some of the most influential British curriculum experts addressing the summit, including Tim Oates from Cambridge Assessment – the architect of the National Curriculum – and Debbie Morgan from the NCETM, who is leading a revolution in the way maths is taught in English primary schools through the ‘Teaching for Mastery’ programme and we have learnt quite heavily on Singapore and Shanghai textbooks.

Textbooks support teachers to translate the vision of a curriculum into carefully sequenced and well-resourced lessons, reducing teacher workload and increasing the quality of those lessons.

And yet, textbooks have become worryingly unfashionable in English classrooms. In a recent survey, just 8% of teachers expect to be using textbooks in most or all of their lessons by 2020.

Given the shared desire of teachers and government to tackle unnecessary teacher workload, it is troubling that so few teachers expect to be using one of the best workload-reduction tools a teacher could find: a high-quality textbook.

Until we reached out to other nations, we thought that we were unique in experiencing this antipathy to textbooks. But since we have made our concerns explicit, an increasing number of key people around the world have been citing a similar attitude in their own countries, sometimes bubbling beneath the surface, sometimes more explicit.

But in the highest performing countries, educationally, including Finland, textbooks are a key part of the toolkit of all teachers.

Perhaps part of the problem in England has been how well our textbooks fit into the school curriculum. Textbooks work best, and reduce workload most efficiently, when they are used as part of a well-developed, systematic programme of study.

Policy Exchange’s John Blake has written an excellent report, arguing for the importance of textbooks at the heart of coherent curriculum programmes (shortened to CCPs) – units of work, supported by professional development, lesson resources and textbooks. John argues persuasively that CCPs – already employed by leading multi-academy trusts, chains of charter type like schools – help to reduce workload and improve the quality of curriculum, as experienced in the classroom.

Crucially, his report highlights the fact that textbooks support teachers in what he terms “the final foot”. According to the latest TALIS data, teachers spend almost 8 hours per week planning lessons. Often, teachers report spending much of this time searching for worksheets online or creating them from scratch, which bridge the divide between their instruction and their pupils’ understanding.

Bridging “the final foot” and converting the promise of the new National Curriculum into higher standards in schools will require both expert teaching and the widespread use of high-quality resources.

Working closely with the teaching profession, the government has embarked on an ambitious set of reforms to teacher careers. The government is determined that teachers:

- Are better supported to develop expertise in the classroom;
- Have clear routes to progress in their careers; and
- Receive high-quality professional development at all phases in their careers.

In particular, we are committed to developing what we are calling an ‘Early Career Framework’ to support newly qualified teachers to develop proficiency in core aspects of teaching. And we will be extending the induction period from one year to two years to allow teachers more time to develop at the beginning of their career. Because teachers – particularly those starting out their career – should have a network of training, resources and support that ensures they can focus on teaching.

The Early Career Framework will help to ensure that all newly qualified teachers can share in the professional knowledge that defines what it is to be a teacher. Too often, the skill required to be an expert teacher – unlike that required of an expert lawyer, doctor or accountant – is overlooked and taken for granted. What makes expert teaching is invisible to most. The intricacies and techniques on show appear effortless, yet they are the accumulation of years of careful thought and deliberate practice.

With the help of the teaching profession, the Early Career Framework will seek to codify the core knowledge and skills required to develop into an expert teacher, so that all teachers – wherever they train – are taught this shared body of knowledge, and part of this will be having textbooks as part of their toolkit.

Already, many teachers are fortunate enough to have mentors who help them to develop expertise in the classroom, but we want this to be the norm for all new teachers. So we are strengthening the mentoring provision for early career teachers to ensure that all schools have excellent mentors with access to high-quality training. We know that good mentoring is not generic, but is highly specific. It should draw high-quality evidence and the mentor’s own expertise, providing relevant feedback.

And as a key component of the government’s recruitment and retention strategy, these important reforms we believe will help to raise the status of

the profession.

But these important reforms, which we will continue to develop with the profession, will not be enough on their own. As well as ensuring teachers are supported to develop their careers, more needs to be done to ensure teachers are freed from unnecessary workload, so that they can focus on teaching excellent lessons.

Our system should allow teachers the time and space to maintain that focus, and a crucial way of doing that is ensuring sufficient textbooks exist which are knowledge-rich, easy to use and coherently structured so teachers can use them with confidence that their teaching will be better for it.

That is why the government is meeting the Conservative Party's manifesto commitment by creating a curriculum fund. We have allocated about £7 million over five years to encourage the development of high quality teaching resources.

Inspired by the success of the Far East and building on the reformed national curriculum, the NCETM and the maths hubs are spreading evidence-based approaches to maths teaching, through the Teaching for Mastery programme, which promotes the use of high-quality textbooks.

And there is good evidence that textbooks can help schools to save time and money. For example, data from the Publishers Association suggests that textbooks only need to save teachers 5 minutes a day to be good value for money, yet some evidence suggests textbooks save around 18 minutes a day.

In 'Why Textbooks Count', the report Tim Oates wrote makes clear the stark differences in our approach to textbooks and those of the highest performing jurisdictions. In England, only 10% of pupils' teachers use maths textbooks as the basis for their teaching compared to 70% in Singapore. Through the government's commitment to textbooks and our investment in evidence-based approaches to teaching, we hope to put textbooks back at the heart of England's classrooms.

Textbooks provide the detailed knowledge implicit in the national curriculum programmes of study, which are succinct and broad descriptions of the content that needs to be taught. This is "the final foot" described in John Blake's report.

I'll give one example. In the Key Stage 3 History Curriculum requires 11 to 14-year-old pupils to be taught about the development of Church, state and society in Britain 1509-1745. The national curriculum gives some suggested areas of focus to teachers, but without the support of a detailed and well-structured textbook pupils risk leaving school without a rich understanding of the complex links between Henry VIII's marriage to Anne Boleyn, the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution.

Without the cultural capital provided by an education that includes exploration of the causes and consequences of the 1689 Bill of Rights, children are denied a full appreciation of how Britain became a liberal

democracy, let alone the historical reverberations of this a century later in the New World.

Textbooks bridge that “final foot”, providing teachers with well-sequenced material that frees teachers to focus on delivering high-quality lessons. Without a greater focus on how the national curriculum is delivered, particularly through the use of textbooks, the promise of those reforms may not be fully realised.

The decline in the use of textbooks has occurred in the space of a few decades – a veritable crash. Their replacement with work sheets and hundreds of thousands of bespoke written lesson plans has added to teacher workload, detracted from curriculum coherence, negatively affected standards and cost schools huge sums of money in printing and photocopying.

This dysfunctional trend must be reversed, and I hope this summit will be an important milestone in returning textbooks to the heart of England’s classrooms.