

Nick Gibb
Minister of State for Schools
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

27 September 2011

You may have seen in the press that five organisations and thirty leading scientists have come together to launch a new website, 'Teach evolution, not creationism!', calling for the Department for Education to introduce enforceable, statutory guidance that creationism and intelligent design may not be presented as scientific theories in any publicly-funded school of whatever type; and that the teaching of evolution should be included at both primary and secondary levels in the National Curriculum and in all schools. I have appended the statement onto this letter for your reference. I am now writing to you to clarify the rationale behind this campaign.

We previously discussed this matter when we met in February, and the Department for Education and its ministers have in the past made several public statements in opposition to the teaching of creationism and intelligent design as science, and in support of the teaching of evolution, and we welcome these.

However, we do not think there has been enough action to back up these words. It remains the case that the guidance on the teaching of creationism and 'intelligent design' is non-statutory, and only applies to the National Curriculum. Furthermore, the statement on the matter in the guidance on how to apply to open a Free School does not also appear in the Free School and Academy funding agreements. It would be simple and cheap to make the guidance statutory and apply to all state-funded schools, as the new website suggests. Given that Everyday Champions Academy's proposal to open a Free School has progressed to the interview stage, when the school were initially extremely clear that they intend to teach creationism alongside evolution, now is really the time to clear up any confusion by drawing a line under the matter.

With regards to evolution, the statement demonstrates the strength of feeling across the scientific community about the need to teach it from primary level. This consensus view also emerged when the previous Government held their consultation on a new primary curriculum. We very much hope that the coalition listens and re-adopts the changes following on from the curriculum review.

We know this government supports the teaching of evolution, and opposes creationism being taught in state schools. We believe that if the simple steps I have outlined are taken, which would cost the government little, then these would be effective in stopping creationist teaching dead in the water.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Copson
Chief Executive

The statement can be found at <http://evolutionnotcreationism.org.uk/> and reads:

Creationism and 'intelligent design'

Creationism and 'intelligent design' are not scientific theories, but they are portrayed as scientific theories by some religious fundamentalists who attempt to have their views promoted in publicly-funded schools. There should be enforceable statutory guidance that they may not be presented as scientific theories in any publicly-funded school of whatever type.

Organisations like 'Truth in Science' are encouraging teachers to incorporate 'intelligent design' into their science teaching. 'Truth in Science' has sent free resources to all Secondary Heads of Science and to school librarians around the country that seek to undermine the theory of evolution and have 'intelligent design' ideas portrayed as credible scientific viewpoints. Speakers from Creation Ministries International are touring the UK, presenting themselves as scientists and their creationist views as science at a number of schools.

The current government guidance that creationism and 'intelligent design' should not be taught in school science should be made statutory and enforceable. It also needs to be made comprehensive so that it is clear that any portrayal of creationism and 'intelligent design' as science (whether it takes place in science lessons or not) is unacceptable.

Evolution

An understanding of evolution is central to understanding all aspects of biology. The teaching of evolution should be included at both primary and secondary levels in the National Curriculum and in all schools.

Currently, the study of evolution does not feature explicitly in the National Curriculum until year 10 (ages 14-15), but the government is overseeing a review of the whole curriculum with the revised National Curriculum for science being introduced in September 2012 to be made compulsory from 2013. Free Schools and Academies are not obliged to teach the National Curriculum and so are under no obligation to teach about evolution at all.

Organisations signing the statement are the Association for Science Education, the British Humanist Association, the British Science Association, the Campaign for Science & Engineering and Ekklesia.

Individuals signing the statement are Jim al-Khalili, Sir David Attenborough, Sir Patrick Bateson, Colin Blakemore, Sir Tom Blundell, Sir Roy Calne, Helena Cronin, Richard Dawkins, Robin Dunbar, R. John Ellis, Sir Anthony Epstein, Dylan Evans, James Gowans, Robert Hinde, Julian Huppert, Hugh Huxley, Steve Jones, Sir Hans Kornberg, Lord John Krebs, Sir Harry Kroto, John Lee, Sir Paul Nurse, Michael Reiss, Steven Rose, Sir David Smith, Sir John Sulston, Sir Fraser Stoddart, Raymond Tallis, James Williams and Lewis Wolpert.

Department for Education

STEM Team
2nd Floor, Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
LONDON SW1P 3BT

Tel: 020 7340 7448
Email: Alistair.McMillan@Education.gsi.gov.uk

Mr Andrew Copson
1 Gower Street
LONDON
WC1E 6HD

Your ref:
Our ref: 2011/0068349
24 October 2011

RECEIVED
25 OCT 2011

Dear Mr Copson,

Thank you for your letter of 29 September, addressed to the Minister of State for Schools. This letter has been passed to my team as we have responsibility for science in the national curriculum. The Department for Education is very clear that the teaching of creationist views as science, as a potentially valid alternative theory to evolution, is not acceptable in any state funded school.

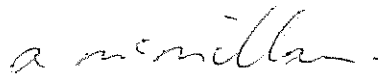
However the Secretary of State for Education has no plans to introduce statutory guidance on creationism. There is no evidence that any school is teaching creationism as science. Furthermore the Government gave a commitment in *The Schools White Paper: The importance of teaching*, to significantly reduce the volume of DfE guidance to schools.

During the Free School assessment process, the Department tests applications across a range of areas. The Department for Education has not and will not approve an application where we have any concerns about creationism being taught as a valid scientific theory. Although the current model funding agreement for Free Schools does not include a generic clause relating to creationism, adjustments can be made to individual agreements to ensure specific concerns – on any issue – can be addressed. The model funding agreement is also subject to regular review.

The National Curriculum review is currently looking at the essential knowledge that should be studied pre-16. The aim of the review is to slim down the National Curriculum so that it reflects the essential knowledge in key subjects (English, maths, science and PE) and does not absorb the overwhelming majority of teaching time in schools. It should thus free up teachers to use their professional judgement to design a wider school curriculum that meet the needs of their pupils and to choose, as context for their teaching, issues that are relevant

to their pupils. Whilst the detailed content of the new Programmes of Study are still being developed in light of international evidence and responses to our recent call for evidence, we fully anticipate that evolution will be included in the science programmes of study as it represents core scientific knowledge that young people should be taught. Ministers will be considering all the issues carefully before announcing their proposals early next year. Following that announcement there will be a full public consultation before final decisions are taken.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "a. mcmillan".

Alistair McMillan
Curriculum Policy Division

Alistair McMillan
STEM Team
Department for Education
2nd Floor, Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

15 November 2011

Thank you for your letter dated 24 October (ref: 2011/0068349) in response to our letter to Nick Gibb on our 'Teach Evolution, not Creationism!' website. Your letter is helpful, though we find it disappointing that despite a call from so many prominent scientists, science educators and scientific organisations, the government has apparently not shifted its position in our direction.

We would also dispute the statement that *'there is no evidence that any school is teaching creationism as science'* as there is a very clear example of creationism being taught in Creation Ministries International, who have been going into schools such as St Peter's Church of England Aided School in Essex.¹ In addition there are plenty of other individual examples of schools themselves teaching creationism that we send to the Department from time to time. Furthermore, the head of Bethany School, who is proposing Sheffield Christian Free School, was very clear on BBC Radio Sheffield about his wish to teach creationism throughout the curriculum² – so the threat of creationist Free Schools is certainly there as well, even if the Department has so far rejected such bids. Our concern is for the government to make absolutely clear that there is no chance it will ever accept such bids, or allow any state-funded school to teach creationism as science, anywhere in the curriculum, and this is only possible through a change in the law.

I was hoping that you could clarify one point made in your letter. On Free Schools, you state that *'Although the current model funding agreement for Free Schools does not include a generic clause relating to creationism, adjustments can be made to individual agreements to ensure specific concerns – on any issue – can be addressed. The model funding agreement is also subject to regular review.'* The last part is reassuring, and we would support any adjustment to the model funding agreement to add a statement similar to the one in the *Free Schools – How to Apply* guidance. Could we request that the next time the model funding agreement is reviewed, our desire for this point's inclusion is considered?

However, in another way, this section of your letter is less reassuring, as the Department has stated elsewhere that, where it has concerns about creationism and a given school proposal, it will not

¹ Reported at <http://www.thisisdevon.co.uk/Anger-creationist-invited-talk-school/story-11664070-detail/story.html>. It is clear from Creation Ministries International's website that they present themselves as scientists and their creationist views as science.

² You can listen at <http://www.humanism.org.uk/uploads/documents/richyradiosheffield.mp3> or read a transcript at <http://www.humanism.org.uk/uploads/documents/richy-thompson-ken-walze-interview-transcript.pdf>

approve it. As a result, it is unclear how the Department arrives at a situation where it needs to adjust the funding agreement on an individual case, as surely in all such cases the proposals would simply have been rejected? Could you clarify how such a case could arise?

To reiterate, the 'Teach Evolution, Not Creationism' platform³ is supported by a wide range of scientists and science educators including Sir David Attenborough, Professor Colin Blakemore, Professor Richard Dawkins, Sir Paul Nurse and Revd Professor Michael Reiss; and five national organisations, including the Association for Science Education, the British Science Association and the Campaign for Science & Engineering.⁴ It is also supported by a Government e-petition that has garnered almost 15,000 signatures, making it the second most signed Education petition on the website and one of the most signed across all areas.⁵ The demands of the campaign are that there should be enforceable statutory guidance that creationism and intelligent design may not be presented as scientific theories in any publicly-funded school of whatever type; and that the teaching of evolution should be included at both primary and secondary levels in the National Curriculum and in all schools.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Copson
Chief Executive

³ <http://evolutionnotcreationism.org.uk/>

⁴ See <http://evolutionnotcreationism.org.uk/signatories/> for the full list

⁵ <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/1617>