

Alphabetic Code Chart Survey – April 2013

Thank you to everyone who responded to our online survey about your experiences of the usefulness of **Alphabetic Code Charts** and your views on whether a generic version should be included in the appendix of the English National Curriculum for 2014 onwards. Within a few days, well over two hundred people responded to the survey rising to nearly 350.

Survey conducted via Phonics International e-newsletter:

Q1. Have you ever used an Alphabetic Code Chart for your adult or professional understanding?
[Yes – No]

Q2. Do you find an Alphabetic Code Chart useful to help you understand the English alphabetic code
[Never used one – Not at all – Never used one but would find it useful – Occasionally useful]

Q3. Complete the following statement by checking one or more options below – “Alphabetic Code Charts are useful for... [Teachers – Parents – Students – All]

Q4. Should a generic Alphabetic Code Chart be included in the ‘English’ section of England’s National Curriculum? [Yes – No]

85% of people said they had used an Alphabetic Code Chart personally. Of those who have not used a chart, 50% said they would probably find it useful. 80% said they found the chart ‘very useful’ or ‘invaluable’ and a further 7.5% said it was ‘occasionally’ useful. 99.6% of people said they believe an Alphabetic Code Chart to be useful for teachers, parents or students. 96% of people said they thought a generic Alphabetic Code Chart should be included in the ‘English’ section of England’s National Curriculum.

We have compiled a list of any specific comments you included on your response forms. Debbie has added some subsequent thoughts which can be seen in red below.

Feedback provided on the survey form in black:

Debbie’s comments in red

1. The Alphabetic Code Chart will assist students greatly in reading as English pronunciations are quite complex.
2. A generic Alphabetic Code Chart is very useful for both parents and students. We used it a lot to prepare for the KS1 Year 1 Reading Test.
3. As an American teacher of English to Adults from other nations, I have found the work of Debbie Hepplewhite to be exceedingly helpful. I have given the American/Canadian version of her Alphabetic Code Chart to friends with young children, my own children for my grandchildren, students from the University of Iowa whom I have tutored, my fellow ELL instructors, and of course, the adult students I teach from Asia, Africa, the Mideast, and Europe. Whether Hispanic adults who have been in the USA for decades, Asian post-doctoral researchers at the university, or refugees from Africa and the Mideast, all have been thankful to get a copy of Debbie's chart because it unlocks the mystery of the basis of our language! It is EXACTLY what I needed. I feel blessed to have accidentally found her website - and I have shared it with many others. [Debbie says: Thank you for such a detailed comment as to the widespread need for Alphabetic Code Charts for us all!]
4. Please add some audio files to your chart too. [Debbie says: This is an excellent idea – and one which has been on our ‘to do’ list for years. We’ll try to achieve this as soon as possible.]
5. I still feel that many primary staff really do NOT understand how the English Code works beyond 1 letter 1 sound. As some find it impossible to explain multiple spellings etc. OFSTED despite their "training" have similar difficulties. There is still a problem with Year 7s entering Secondary School when it comes to reading. [Debbie says: There will be teachers

and assistants in primary and secondary schools – and Ofsted inspectors – and teacher-trainers in universities - who are not knowledgeable enough about the complexities of the English Alphabetic Code and how best to teach the code and phonics skills. I suggest that the whole teaching profession - indeed 'everyone' - should be knowledgeable about the code of their language in an organised way which is why I think the notion of an Alphabetic Code Chart as a main visual aid and working tool is so fundamentally important.]

6. It helps students of English as a Foreign Language as well.
7. Would be a useful tool for teaching assistants to be introduced to - i.e. induction / toolkit. I stumbled upon it when I was doing my own research on phonics and find it a very useful tool for helping me grasp the pronunciation of the certain sounds.
8. The alphabetic code chart helped me as a teacher move from an implicit understanding of how our language is written to an explicit understanding which has been absolutely essential in my role as a teacher working with children who find learning to read and spell extremely difficult. [Debbie says: I like the way that you have described the move from an 'implicit understanding' to an 'explicit understanding' as I think this is probably the case for many people who have become literate through a book-by-book experience as children - that is, without explicitly being taught the alphabetic code. Sir Jim Rose described this state of affairs as children being left to 'ferret out' the alphabetic code on their own and suggests that this should not be left to chance.]
9. I'm from Dublin Ireland and personally I have found your material very useful in my teaching. I teach in a DEIS 1 (school in a deprived area). Unfortunately those in charge of providing curriculum material for these schools have been heavily influenced by the theories behind Reading Recovery. [Debbie says: Reading Recovery is a firmly entrenched 'establishment' multi-cueing programme. The same is true of various literacy and intervention programmes and approaches which are 'established'. It is extremely difficult to challenge or change long-standing practice or to change 'mind-sets' once such programmes have become established. That is why it is important for us to work collaboratively and internationally by describing our own findings from a move away from the multi-cueing reading strategies as is practised in Reading Recovery to systematic synthetic phonics practices. We also need to take heed of the body of research that shows multi-cueing strategies, when these amount to guessing words from various cues, are not an advisable approach.]
10. My students and myself find an Alphabetic Code Chart invaluable: 1) They use yours in conjunction with a blank personal chart - which they gradually fill in with the sounds as they master them. They are able to use this for reference and to chart their own progress clearly. 2) As a real confidence booster (I teach children and adults and it works equally well for both). [Debbie says: I am really glad to hear of you using different types of Alphabetic Code Charts for different purposes as this is what I promote – and the reason that I provide a wide selection of charts to download for teachers and learners via www.alphabeticcodecharts.com . The main Alphabetic Code Chart provides the overview, and the personal blank chart enables the learner to plot his or her progress and get a satisfying sense of achievement. I agree this works well for children and adults alike as they are all in the 'learning' situation and the alphabetic code is the same to teach and learn whatever the age!]
11. Hi Debbie, I am pleased to see your initiative in trying to get an Alphabetic Code Chart included in the ed curriculum. I myself have generated and used a colour coded chart that has proven quite a resourceful tool for both beginners and struggling readers.
12. It would be very useful if the generic alphabetical code for countries where English is taught as a second language might have taken into consideration the fact that the teachers teaching English might not be natives themselves. [Debbie says: I totally agree – and I have pointed out to the people in charge of the draft English national curriculum that there will be teachers and others taking account of the English national curriculum in their own schools and countries for whom a generic chart will be very helpful. I know of many non-native teachers teaching English who have reported to us already that they have been helped greatly by using my Alphabetic Code Charts. I think, however, that the International Phonetic Alphabet should be included to support international use as well as the more simple way of denoting the sounds – so I shall soon provide a chart which includes the IPA which may be particularly helpful to non-native English teachers and for teachers' professional development.]
13. I'd like to thank your efforts to allow all your studies to be open in your web, through which I can learn about much more than just phonics that has been taught in ordinary nursery or pre-school for decades in many countries. I think your ideas seem to directly or indirectly influence educational mind for pre-schoolers.
14. As a teacher who uses charts in the classroom I have only praise for the power they can have on improving reading, writing and spelling.
15. I think if a student, teacher or parent can see all the English phonemes and frequent spelling patterns used to represent those sounds, then it provides a clear structure and reduces confusion - particularly if the spelling patterns are put in order of frequency with clear examples. I feel it would also be useful to stress that while English contains spelling irregularities, the vast majority of our words do in fact conform to a recognisable spelling code!
16. The Code should be mandatory in every classroom because of its importance as a reference point for both teacher and students. [Debbie says: I totally agree which is why I am trying to make the notion of Alphabetic Code Charts more im-

portant by suggesting that a generic chart – along with the guidance to use them in every classroom – should be included in the English National Curriculum.]

17. I think this should definitely be a starting point although some students will need an alternative way of learning as they find it difficult to blend sounds. [Debbie says: The common idea that learners who find it difficult to blend sounds should have an 'alternative way' is rather worrying as phonics is important for long-term adult reading and spelling skills – not just for teaching and learning early reading. If a child, for example, is struggling to sound out and blend the sounds to 'discern' the target word, it is far too easy for the teacher/s to think that the method does not suit the individual child therefore that child 'needs something different'. It is better to consider whether the phonics teaching and learning practices and conditions can be improved and the time afforded for the child's practice increased. I find that many children who are slower-to-learn for one reason or another are often provided with a plethora of 'fun games and activities' rather than very simple, direct, frequent, fit-for-purpose, simple teaching and learning opportunities. In England, for example, there is a worrying move away from paper and pencil activities whilst sitting at desks in comfort and yet this is exactly what is needed for learning to read, spell and handwrite.]
18. I teach one-on-one and find the use of Alphabetic Code Chart invaluable for the understanding of how words work. Children will suddenly go 'Oh I get it!' [Debbie says: I agree and many teachers report to us that their pupils say, 'Oh I get it!' Sometimes older pupils get angry because they feel that they should have had this information before. They are justified in feeling that way.]
19. This should also be introduced to ALL student teachers!!! [Debbie says: Yes – I totally agree – and I have provided an Alphabetic Code Chart designed with student teachers in mind for which universities can approach us with a view to publishing it in their literature. Some universities have already done this to great feedback from students and their teacher-mentors alike.]
20. I teach an adult learner and I personally believe these charts to be very useful for children and adults. I have not yet used it extensively, so I am planning to use it more in the future as my student becomes more familiar with the basics.
21. I have used these with children with special educational needs, to support parent volunteers who are listening to children read, training TAs, supporting TA's and teachers for whom English is an additional language and teachers in KS2 who do not as a rule need to teach phonics for reading but find it helpful to have a clear phonic chart for spelling. They helped me when I started to teach phonics and I've used some different ones but I have to say I think yours are the clearest.
22. I always use The Alphabetic Code Chart, when training teachers, parents, students and college professors; I have always had wonderful evaluations all over the world where I have trained: Spain, Portugal, England, Italy, Switzerland, Malaysia, Pakistan, Egypt, Mexico and USA.
23. I have used the Hickey Multisensory Language Programme Alphabetic codes for teaching children sounds. It would be useful if these alphabetic code charts were all the same (Uniform) e.g. /a/ is always apple and not sometimes a different object. [Debbie says: This will never be the case because there are already so many different phonics programmes in existence. There are also countries where some words are not considered appropriate or the selected words are not sufficiently culture-specific so there will always be the need for variety and adaptation. Remember, however, that these are just simple example words and only one word for each spelling alternative when, ultimately, learners need to learn substantial word banks of words with the same sounds and spelling alternatives. This emphasis on familiarity with spelling word banks is something which may be missing or weak in many phonics programmes.]
24. Essential to understanding our written system. Generally Alphabetic codes are good (I am using the Read, Write, Inc code at the moment) However, not all codes are as useful and some are just confusing. I also think they need to be used cautiously and in a particular order (again, the Read, Write, Inc order works very well). [Debbie says: Bear in mind that the Read Write Inc alphabetic code charts are not the same kind of charts that I am referring to in this survey. The Read Write Inc programme includes a chart of the graphemes (letters and letter groups) for the 'simple code' and a chart of the graphemes for the 'complex code' and they can be used to excellent effect. They do not include, however, the notation to indicate sounds and the spelling alternatives are not shown in example words. In other words, they do not show the full 'rationale' of the English alphabetic code. They also do not follow a specific 'order' of introducing the letter/s-sound correspondences.]
25. The Alphabet Code chart is an invaluable teaching tool which I use every single day for reading, writing and spelling with my pupils ranging from Foundation to Year 6 age. Every single child, when asked, has enthusiastically agreed that it helps them to make sense of our complex spelling rules. [Debbie says: Some teachers are quite shocked at the idea of using a full Alphabetic Code Chart with children as young as four and five, but I have found, like you, that it is an invaluable tool even with the teenies and I have amazing experiences and anecdotes for children of this age.]
26. By moving content down a year it won't necessarily improve standards. Pace will be too brisk to consolidate learning. Introduction of new code is too fast. Much rather it was 2 or 3 graphemes a week to allow time to acquire new knowledge and to have to practise and apply their new 'code' knowledge. [Debbie says: I totally agree which may surprise you! I demonstrate to the teaching profession in talks and training that a huge amount of alphabetic code can be covered even at the pace of introducing two letter/s-sound correspondences per week rather than the four per week that is often recommended. In addition, however, I recommend the 'two-pronged' approach to phonics teaching which encourages teachers and parents to introduce any letter/s-sound correspondence 'incidentally' as required in phonics lessons and in

wider reading and writing and in the wider curriculum. Thus, the teacher is introducing the letter/s-sound correspondences of the alphabetic code both 'systematically' and 'incidentally' – along with a steady pace which allows learners to embed their learning and to really practise the new code with a cumulative word bank for reading, spelling and hand-writing. Of course the use of an Alphabetic Code Chart hugely helps the incidental teaching. Teachers/tutors/parents need to use their discretion as to the pace of introducing letter/s-sound correspondences according to the learners' needs.]

27. I appreciate all your help, Debbie.
28. I have found it very useful for EFL students (and teachers).
29. I am home-schooling my 5 year old daughter in Australia, and have been investigating and using phonics programmes since mid-2011 when she was four years old.
30. I am a new user of Phonics international resources and I am finding Debbie Hepplewhite's alphabet code and associated resources an essential component of my teaching practice. My grade 4 students have been exposed to other 'sound charts' such as Thrass in the past, but we are finding Debbie's far more appealing and user friendly.
31. We have adapted a code for our Children in our school in South Africa to make it culture appropriate but have used yours as a referral source. I wish our phonic curriculum supplied a phonic code chart.
32. An alphabetic code is exceptionally useful for teachers, children and parents for learning to read and write but also to assist, in particular, with pronunciation of words. As an international teacher, I strongly believe that it is more important that my students can talk such that others can understand them rather than being grammatically correct.
33. I haven't had the opportunity to use the Alphabetic code yet as I don't feel fully confident with it. I have been impressed by what I have seen but would like to work alongside someone using the system so that I fully understand it.
34. I am looking for a short sentence for English 2nd language readers to remember the vowels and also games and ideas for the silent e. [Debbie says: It could be that what you really need is a thorough, systematic phonics programme which fulfills your teaching and learning needs. A 'short sentence...to remember the vowels' and some 'games and ideas for the silent e' will not be sufficient to teach the alphabetic code.]
35. Thank you for the code it will be very useful teaching my Spanish children here in Tenerife.
36. I do not believe that phonic teaching is the one and only approach to teaching children to read and write, but it is clearly useful for some children. The government is placing significant emphasis on phonics, but many parents, who themselves grew up taught literacy by different methods, wouldn't have any idea what is expected of their children, where to start and how they can help. Some parents might also find phonics useful for their own understanding. Without visual cues relating phonemes to graphemes can be extremely confusing, so these charts - or some version of them - should be easily available if phonics are to be taught as part of the curriculum. [Debbie says: You are right that phonics isn't the 'one and only approach' to teaching children to read – indeed many literate adults have no specific recollection of being taught to read through a systematic phonics approach. We probably, however, use a phonics approach for reading and spelling new, longer and more challenging words as literate adults even when we don't realise that this is the case. As Sir Jim Rose states, as children we probably had to 'ferret out' the code for ourselves. Thus, phonics knowledge and skills are quite essential for long-term reading and spelling and not merely one method amongst many to teach reading. As a teaching profession, then, I suggest that it is our duty (backed by research and leading practice) to teach the alphabetic code and phonics skills as well as we can. I agree with you that Alphabetic Code Charts 'should be easily available' which is why I make them available as free charts via www.alphabeticcodecharts.com !]
37. With regard to Q4, as long as phonics is recognised as key in early reading development, then an alphabetic code chart must be useful.
38. The alphabetic codes have helped me deliver more effective phonics lessons to my tutees. Using the codes, my tutees have developed good reading and spelling strategies. As the teacher who is not a native English speaker, I also have improved my pronunciation skills when I started using the chart in teaching phonics.
39. As an Argentine teacher of English, the chart is of an immense help as our mother tongue sounds interfere all the time and the charts are clear and friendly to use. We keep copies of your charts in every classroom at the school where I work and that helps us plan our work and what to teach next. Thank you very much!
40. I agree with the need for a code chart. I've been arguing with the powers that be for years to get teachers and admin to realise the importance of firstly them understanding the code. I don't know many teachers that do - and yet they're still teaching phonics without understanding! Along with the code I think there should be compulsory training for all teachers and education assistants to ensure understanding.
41. I think an ACC clarifies our spelling system and, because the charts are set out in a clear and logical manner they demystify the synthetic phonics approach which seems to panic so many teachers and parents. Other professionals are often amazed when I say that I love teaching synthetic phonics and have obviously never used such a chart, they have just used *Letters and Sounds*, which has some gaping holes in it, the lack of a code chart being one of them. [Debbie says: I agree with what you say – including your suggestion that the previous UK government's 'Letters and Sounds' phonics publication has 'some gaping holes in it'. There are virtually no teaching and learning resources in 'Letters and Sounds' and so very busy teachers have had to turn the guidance into a programme by sourcing resources, or making them, or putting together a range of commercial materials. Some teachers/schools have managed this successfully (but should not have had to) and other teachers understandably struggle. There are actually four code 'tables' in the 'Notes of Guid-

ance' booklet for 'Letters and Sounds' but, arguably, they cannot be used for practical teaching and learning purposes. The phoneme charts miss out altogether any code where letters or letter groups are code for two phonemes combined such as 'x' as code for /k+s/ as in 'fox' and 'u' as code for /y+oo/ as in 'uniform' and yet these are essential parts of the alphabetic code.]

42. We are a secondary SEN College. All the classrooms have a chart. The teachers are secondary subject teachers and have found the charts invaluable and they have helped them understand the system which before was complicated for them. [Debbie says: There are a number of secondary schools, mainstream and SEN, that now display Alphabetic Code Charts in both English and other-subject classrooms to support reading and spelling generally. Many secondary schools receive pupils with very weak alphabetic code knowledge and reading and spelling skills and so the charts and a programme such as *Phonics International* can provide an important boost in basic skills.]
43. I have found it very useful for EFL students (and teachers).
44. Your e mails have been very useful and the alphabet code colourful and very useful.
45. Essential to understanding our written system.
46. It is very useful for student to remember it. Can you please send me one, so I can print out. Thanks! [Debbie says: See www.alphabeticcodecharts.com for free charts to print out.]
47. I do not think Alphabetic is suitable for class and students.
48. For English country this method would be very easy to distinguish and study but for the other country like Asia, they hardly find difficulties in phonetic style writing mainly the correct spelling of a word. But constant practice makes perfect right. Thank you.
49. I have been through a lot of programs and find Debbie's is definitely the most helpful it is a great boon.
50. I had the chance to make a workshop for parents about how to use phonics to enable your learners to become good at reading and writing.
51. The alphabetic code charts are an integral part whenever I am teaching English - they provide a sound basis for establishing some sense of order when learning the patterns that sounds follow and for developing a sense of the English sound world.
52. Jolly Phonics programme works. I have been using it for several years now. [Debbie says: The 'Jolly Phonics' programme by Jolly Learning Ltd certainly does work and there are a significant number of studies conducted internationally which evidence this. Quite a lot of schools go on to use 'Phonics International' following on from 'Jolly Phonics' as the vocabulary and nature of the resources are suitable for all ages.]
53. I am a Year 1 teacher and the alphabetic code has been very helpful to me in my job.
54. Reading through phonics is a brilliant idea - children not only learn to read but learn to spell independently.
55. Over the last two years I have used the Alphabetic Code Chart with pupils of 12-14 years of age who have previously struggled with literacy in general, reading, spelling and handwriting. I work with them privately, one-to-one, for one hour per week and have given each of them a 'mini version' of the ACC for their continued use. I have seen incredible results in the space of just a few weeks, just a few hours with me followed by individual practice. Parents are thrilled with the progress and school teachers have commented on the improvement also. I cannot over-emphasise how useful this resource has been and I agree that every classroom, every pupil and every teacher would benefit from their inclusion in the National Curriculum, English section. [Debbie says: For those people who have worked as tutors and in the special needs domain, it can be astounding how quickly learners progress once they got explicit and specific teaching based on the alphabetic code and all-through-the-word phonics skills. I despair, however, when I still see practices with older learners with dyslexic tendencies forming letter shapes with fingers in a sand tray and handling wooden letters. 'Multi-sensory activities' need to be much more direct – as I said previously, paper and pencil activities whilst writing the letters and letter groups and saying the sounds and understanding about the nature of the alphabetic code, practising the three core skills (and their sub-skills) of blending for reading, orally segmenting for spelling and handwriting.]
56. I think a generic alphabetic code chart could be very useful but I also think it would need to be very rigorous 'proof-reading' during the development phase so that any glitches were ironed out before it was rolled out to schools. [Debbie says: I totally agree – but, even then, the outcome would depend on 'who' did the proofreading!]
57. Phonics to be longer in school and not 15-20 mins in the morning and followed up in guided reading especially for lower, Non English speaking children. [Debbie says: I totally agree. There has become a real 'myth' around the 15-20 minutes of phonics a day – which I think came from the rather *apologetic* official focus on explicit phonics teaching in England. The time on the time-table should not dictate how long is spent on phonics and spelling – but how much time is required, realistically, for thorough teaching and thorough practice according to each learner's needs. I really, really emphasise the need for each learner to have plenty of opportunity to apply the new letter/s-sound correspondence for reading, spelling and writing mainly through paper-based activities. Sadly, because we start teaching phonics with very young learners, the 'entertainment culture' has taken precedence and many teachers think they have to provide a huge variety of 'fun games and activities' instead of simple, repetitive activities. The pre-printed paper can provide the *content* of the focus letter/s-sound correspondence, the cumulative words, sentences and texts for reading, spelling, writing, understanding, building up vocabulary and knowledge of spelling word banks, and also drip-feeding aspects of grammar.]
58. I have one as a giant poster and have had it on permanent display in years 1, 3 and now reception. The children are constantly referring to it independently, as well as in planned lessons. I also have A4 versions which I've used with year 1 &

3, and which my own kids have used at home. My 12 year old son still uses his and has it on his desk to refer to. [Debbie says: I do recommend that there is a giant Alphabetic Code Chart on clear and accessible display in the classroom and, in addition, every learner has a mini alphabetic code chart in his or her phonics folder (plus the 'Say the Sounds Posters' and multi-skills 'Activity Sheets') – which is used in the school's bookbag routine – thus parents are constantly informed and there may even be extra practice taking place at home.]

59. Thanks for all. I really enjoy your lessons and I find them useful. I want to ask you to provide us with phonetic lessons for non-native beginner learners to help us to improve the learning process. Pronunciation, stress, silent letters and intonation. [Debbie says: We plan to provide far more audio-visual help in the future. This is all in our plans. By the way, all letters are 'silent', but if you use the notion of a 'code' and links between letter/s and the sounds, you can say that the letters and letter groups – including 'kn', 'wr', 'mb', 'gn' – are CODE FOR the sounds.]
60. Hi, anything to help an individual to understand the English code is only a good thing. But the problem with the English code is that once you get beyond the basic phonics that problems start to happen, example: /k/ /a/ /t/ for cat – is great, if the symbol relates to the sound. But once the child gets past this stage in phonics books, they start to come across the same symbols that represent a different sound: c-a-t, can also say /s/ /o/ /sh/ as in city, all and nation. How do you explain this to a child? OK, there are children who are brought up in good supportive environment who can cope. But what about where the support is not there, who struggle to decode the English sound and have a greater chance of struggling with English later in life. [Debbie says: That is exactly why the particular style of Alphabetic Code Chart that I promote is so important. The style shows the sounds of English speech down the left column/s and all their spelling alternatives across the rows. This means that, from the outset, the learner can see that for the sound /s/, there are many spelling alternatives including letter 's' and letter 'c'. The learner can also see that the letter 'c' can be code for more than one sound, for example: /k/ as in cat and /s/ as in city. It is important that teachers are supported with a rigorous synthetic phonics programme which introduces all the complexities of the English alphabetic code as the programme progresses. With regards to how much 'support' different children receive, we cannot necessarily change this state of affairs – but we can inform parents about alphabetic code knowledge and the phonics skills. If they are sufficiently interested, this may increase the likelihood of parents supporting their children from an informed knowledge-base. Children are not helped, however, if they are led to believe in a false sense of security that letters behave consistently and the same in all words because we know they clearly don't. That is why we need to engage children in the interesting history of the English language – spoken and written - and the notion of our very complex English alphabetic code and use the Alphabetic Code Charts as fundamentally important visual aids.]

Thank you, once again, to everyone who took part in our Alphabetic Code Chart survey.

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Debbie Hepplewhite

www.alphabeticcodecharts.com