



Consultation response by the Runnymede Trust
in conjunction with Operation Black Vote and supported by a coalition of
race equality organisations,
to the proposed changes to
The National Curriculum in England
History Key Stages 1 - 4

About Runnymede

Runnymede is a social policy research organisation focused on race equality and race relations. We work by:

- Identifying barriers to race equality and good race relations
- Enabling effective action for social change
- Influencing policy at all levels through providing thought leadership and robust evidence

Further information is available on our website: **www.runnymedetrust.org**

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the proposed curriculum for children and young people being taught in English schools in Key stages 1 through to 4. The responses included below are based on existing work conducted by Runnymede which looked in the first instance at the history curriculum as taught in secondary schools in England¹, but which also extends to work we are currently conducting with the University of Reading exploring diversity in Roman Britain², and of immediate relevance to those learning the subject at key Stage 2. Our comments therefore relate specifically to the subject of History as proposed for all key stages.

¹ Alexander, C, Chatterji, J & Weekes-Bernard, D (2012) *Making British Histories: Diversity and the National Curriculum*, Runnymede

<http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/MakingBritishHistories-2012.pdf>

² *Romans Revealed* <http://www.romansrevealed.com>

1. The focus on the ‘island story’

Throughout all three key stages as identified in the consultation document, the proposed history content is to explore the ‘story of these islands’ and ensure pupils are familiar with the concept of nation, as it applies to Britain, and of those who have been integral to its shaping. The teaching of the national story is certainly important and it is necessary for children and young people to be aware of the nation in which they live and its relationship to other nations. However, what the content as outlined in the proposal presumes, is that there is one ‘island’ story to be told. Given the plurality of countries, cultures, religions and ethnicities of those who both live and have lived in Britain historically, such presumptions are incomplete. If this curriculum is to demonstrate that the nation it refers to is not simply that relating to England, the inclusion of the way that Scotland, Wales and Ireland have engaged with the concept of the nation should do more than make brief reference to some of these relationships during the scope of study in Key Stages 2 and 3.

1.2 Whilst the aims of the national curriculum for history include ensuring pupils can understand the ‘broad outlines of European and world history’, these histories are only to be positioned with regards to how they relate to British history. World histories are not to be taught in and of themselves and the focus on British history to the exclusion of any other, will do little to broaden the scope of knowledge of young people or engender an interest in the subject of those who feel excluded from the British story, either by virtue of place of birth or heritage.

2. A curriculum for all

2.1 The national curriculum consultation document notes that with regard to Equalities, the Government has ‘been determined, throughout this process, to ensure that our policies make opportunities more equal for every child. [...] This means allowing the National Curriculum to be taught in ways that enable all pupils to have an equal opportunity to succeed’³. Enabling pupils to be taught in ways that allow all to succeed suggests that the way they learn should be both relevant and engaging for them. The educational engagement of minority ethnic pupils, particularly those for whom gaps in educational achievement remain, has been shown to be linked to their participation in learning activities which bear direct relevance to their lives, histories and communities. This is a point applicable across a number of curriculum subjects, but has certainly shown to be the case for those children, regardless of ethnic background, who may be disengaged with the subject of history.⁴

³ DfE 2013, “Impact of the new national Curriculum”

<https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=conSection&consultationId=1881&dId=1253&sId=8305>

⁴ Runnymede’s *Making History* (www.makinghistories.org.uk) project explored the role that historical migration to British shores has played in the historical and geographical make-up of towns and cities,

2.2 Whilst the proposed curriculum makes reference to the migration stories of some minority ethnic communities to Britain and notes the contribution of a few key individuals, these areas will not be taught to children until they are 11. There are a number of points worth making with regards to this. Firstly the inclusion of minority ethnic histories, contributions and stories of migration occurs only once the Empire is taught. Much comment, work and curriculum innovation has been made by many historians and history teachers problematizing the notion that there was no presence of minority individuals and communities in the UK prior to the periods of the colonisation of specific countries by Britain⁵. The proposed inclusion of the presence of those of African or Asian descent in the linear narrative at the basis of the secondary curriculum sees them either as enslaved, or as refugees and only in relation to the 'development of the modern nation'.⁶

2.3 Secondly all children, regardless of ethnic backgrounds are aware of the ethnic differences between them at a very early age and thus should be supported by schools in what they can learn about diversity. We are not suggesting that this only occur in history lessons, but that this be one of many opportunities taken to teach children about other cultures and religions within rather than outside of the curriculum, instead of the relegation of any discussion of diversity to annual Black History or Gypsy Roma Traveller month activities.

2.4 The linear chronological nature of the proposed curriculum removes from the secondary curriculum many subject areas previously covered there and places them within key stage 2. This in itself poses a number of staff resource implications in terms of levels of expertise and re-training. Furthermore however, the age appropriateness of this content is in question. Whilst we raise the issue of creating a means of teaching the subject that will generate interest among children of minority ethnic backgrounds regardless of aptitude or levels of engagement, it is equally as vital to generate a love for the subject among the very young *regardless* of ethnic background. Developing an interest in content that is engaging and age linked, particularly for young children should surely be of more priority than ensuring more content is learnt. This is necessary for both engagement and achievement, and whilst history is not externally assessed in the two early key stages, an early and continuing interest in the subject will certainly produce better outcomes at secondary level. Including a focus on local

generating interest in history among students of ALL backgrounds who previously struggled with the subject.

⁵ The Black and Asian Studies Association (BASA) has written many articles and developed numerous resources about the history of Black and Asian presence in the UK. Runnymede has produced many educational resources exploring cultural diversity including *Romans Revealed* www.romansrevealed.com which draws on archaeological research to teach very young children about the diversity which existed within Roman Britain

⁶ Spafford, M, 2013, "Who are the people of Britain? What knowledge? Whose Understanding?", Hodder Education, History Nest, Expert Blog http://www.hoddereducation.co.uk/Schools/Nests/Hodder_History_Subject_Nest/nest_blog_history/History_Blog_history/March-2013/What-knowledge--Whose-knowledge_history.aspx

history in key stage 1 is also welcome, but why should this interest in what is of local relevance stop at the age of 6? Runnymede's work on local and community history has shown that this immediate and often personal link to the subject of history can create high levels of engagement in young people in key stages 3 and 4. Whilst local or community historical links may not be relevant for all areas covered in the history curriculum, its inclusion across all key stages, and particularly for the very young will aid engagement for all.

2.4 Elsewhere we have noted that the inclusion of diversity within the national curriculum can contribute greatly to improved integration in classrooms and schools.⁷ The government's integration strategy notes that we should 'celebrate what we have in common and promote the shared values and shared commitments which underpin and strengthen our national identity'. The history curriculum provides an opportunity to reflect both on the ethnic diversity of our national history and the shared values that can be derived from it.⁸ Not only therefore can the recognition of themselves within the 'island story' of young people from diverse backgrounds assist in academic achievement within the subject, it can also contribute to the prevention of conflict.⁹

This consultation response has been prepared by the Runnymede Trust in conjunction with the following organisations:

Operation Black Vote

Race on the Agenda

Equanomics-UK

Race Equality Foundation

BARAC

Every Generation

Odu-Dua Housing Association

London Race and Criminal Justice Consortium

⁷ Runnymede Trust, 2013, *Mary Seacole, Oluadah Equiano and the National Curriculum*, Briefing document accompanying the Change.org petition on the inclusion of Mary Seacole & Oluadah Equiano in the history national curriculum

⁸ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/7504/2092103.pdf

⁹ Research undertaken on ways to prevent racist violence have shown that education is a key method of challenging racist attitudes
<http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/PreventingRacistViolence.pdf>

Just West Yorkshire

BTEG

Race Equality Coalition

For further information about the points raised here please contact Debbie Weekes-Bernard on debbie@runnymedetrust.org