

Statement in response to the Department for Education consultation on the proposed History Curriculum, Key Stages 1 – 3

This response is submitted on behalf of the National Museum Directors' Council (NMDC). NMDC represents the leaders of the UK's national and major non-national collections. For a full list of NMDC's members, please see www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/members.

Summary

The NMDC welcomes the proposed Purpose of Study and many of the Aims of the History curriculum. By developing skills of historical enquiry, being able to view history from different perspectives, studying local and global history, children understand Britain's past, our place in the world and the challenges of our time. However, NMDC has serious concerns that the proposed Subject Content will not deliver these laudable ambitions because the detailed chronological approach across two Key Stages, removing Modern British History (post-1750) content from the Key Stage 2 (KS2) curriculum, will mean pupils have neither the time to develop historical skills nor study age appropriate content that will inspire an interest and understanding of History. The curriculum may also not deliver the desired global perspective and could be seen as somewhat Anglocentric. There will not be the time for teachers to arrange visits to museums and use museum resources, and the content of the KS2 curriculum does not include topics for which there is the same wealth of resources in museums across England, and therefore there is a serious risk that children will therefore be denied access to these inspirational and enriching experiences.

How museums support teaching of the National Curriculum

Museums support the teaching of a number of subjects across the National Curriculum. There are very few subjects within the National Curriculum that cannot be supported with museum education programmes, be they visits to museums, digital resources, collaborative projects or object handling boxes sent to schools. Nevertheless, it is History that usually provides the primary reason for a school to visit a museum.

Museums across England provide invaluable support for the teaching of the History Curriculum, with school visits to museums accounting for about 30% of all museum visits and being a key motivation behind family visits. Museums bring subjects to life because of the availability of objects to look at and handle, and develop activities based around how people lived. They provide a stimulating and enjoyable experience that cannot be provided anywhere else, and have been shown to improve understanding and raise attainment.¹ Research suggests 99% of teachers feel children enjoy museum visits; 95% feel pupils are inspired to learn more; 88% would explore new ideas with their pupils as a consequence of a museum visit; and 94% thought pupils would increase subject-related understanding.²

Millions of pounds of public and lottery funding, augmented by contributions from private organisations, charitable trusts, have been invested in the development of museum education in the last twenty years, revolutionising the experience from the old-fashioned "look and don't touch" to providing inspirational and immersive experiences for children

¹ National and large regional museums regularly survey the teachers to adapt their programmes and assess the impact. Examples include *Education Evaluation for Teachers/Group Leaders* by Brighton and Hove Museums (July 2009) and *Secondary Teacher Consultation* by National Maritime Museum (July 2012). Also, *What did you learn at the museum today?*, Research Centre for Museums and Galleries at University of Leicester, 2005, p.20

² *What did you learn at the museum today?*, p.12

which enthuse them about History and aid their learning and understanding of the subject. Research shows pupils understand and progress better as a result of a museum visit because they, in their words, make facts "real".³ Children understand historic events and concepts better through encountering primary source material. Museum educators are a source of respected expertise on the teaching of subjects via object and experience-based learning, and use this expertise to deliver programmes to thousands of schoolchildren. In 2011/12, the Learning Department of the Imperial War Museums delivered 3088 learning sessions.

Although museums support learning at every Key Stage, the majority of school and family visits are made with children at KS2. Children have developed the degree of maturity to understand the subject matter, particularly social and cultural history, but crucially there is a greater degree of flexibility in the school timetable to allow teaching outside the classroom than at Key Stage (KS3). School visits and the content of the National Curriculum further motivate families to return to the museum during school holidays.

Museums, particularly the national and major non-national museums, now play a larger role in the training and professional development of teachers, and develop formal and informal programmes based around the National Curriculum.

Purpose of study

NMDC supports the Purpose of Study in the proposed curriculum as it is important that children develop the skills to think critically, weigh evidence and sift arguments. Museum education programmes are developed on those principles. Similarly, it is important that children understand Britain's place in the world and the challenges of our own time if they are to understand the world around them. Major museums develop their public programming and education programmes around these principles. For example, public programming to mark the forthcoming commemoration of the First World War will not only look at the political events which led to the declaration of war and the experience of British soldiers on the frontline, but will examine the experience of soldiers who fought on both sides, the Home Front, and the long-lasting impact on society, art, science, economics and conflict.

Nevertheless, this Purpose of Study is a little more functional than some of the others. Geography, for example, opens with "a high-quality geography education should inspire in pupils a curiosity and fascination about the world and its people that will remain with them for the rest of their lives". The same could be repeated for History which, like Geography, is a subject which has the potential to inspire a curiosity and fascination with the World. It is a subject which, taught well and pitched right, excites children and prompts independent learning. It is the reason that the Egyptology galleries at the British Museum and Manchester Museum, Blists Hill Victorian Town at Ironbridge and the Pit Village at Beamish, and the Imperial War Museum and the National Railway Museum, are so incredibly popular during school holidays.

Aims

NMDC would broadly agree with the Aims, particularly aims 4 -7. It is fundamental to an understanding of History that a student aims to, by the end of KS3, understand historical concepts and be able to appreciate the development of themes over periods of time, rather than detailed knowledge of single events without the context. Understanding different points of view and how evidence is used are essential life skills for pupils to develop and need to be nurtured if that pupil wishes to continue to study the subject at GCSE and beyond.

NMDC would strongly agree with the final aim for pupils to understand the connections between local, regional, national and international history, as well as the interdependencies of cultural, economic, military, political, religious and social history. A child growing up in Liverpool or Bristol, for example, cannot properly gain an understanding of the world around them without understanding the impact of historic events and developments overseas.

³ *What did you learn at the museum today?*

NMDC also welcomes the emphasis on local history, as children, particularly younger children, gain a greater understanding of the past when introduced to a subject via something familiar, be it a place they know, the experience of children their own age, or a family member.

However, whilst NMDC would support Aims 1 – 3, it would be with a qualification. It is important that the History Curriculum aims to understand how British people shaped the nation and how Britain influenced the world. Many of the UK's major museums also seek to do this. For example, the Revolution Gallery at the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester focuses on the impact Manchester and Mancunians have had on shaping Britain and the world. However, it would tell an unnecessarily one-sided history of the city if it did not also document how the world influenced Manchester. The Aims of the curriculum also need to ensure pupils understand not only how Britain influenced the World, but also how this was received and then how the world influenced Britain.

Aim 2 appears to be political in focus and should include social and cultural history, so as to avoid focusing solely on the development of institutions but also the societies and places they are within. Furthermore, the Aims should make reference to looking at the same historical event from different perspectives.

Subject Content

NMDC is very concerned that the subject content would not deliver the Purpose of Study or the Aims of the History Curriculum. There are serious inherent problems with teaching a detailed and prescriptive chronology across two Key Stages, and this method will leave limited time and scope for teaching outside of the classroom and the use of museum resources. This is curious given that the preamble to each Key Stage reflects both the Purpose of Study and the Aims.

Detailed and prescriptive chronology across Key Stages 2 and 3

The chronological approach does not allow for a child to return to a subject once they have developed the maturity and life experience to be able to fully understand it. For example, a child will study early Britons and the Romans at the age of 7, then not again until and unless they study it for GCSE, meaning they may not ever fully understand the impact of this period or develop an interest in it. How a subject is taught to 7 year olds is very different to how the same period is covered at KS3. The subjects early in the curriculum will necessarily only ever be taught at a comparatively simple and superficial level. This difference is well-illustrated by examining how the primary and secondary school teachers' guides handle the subject matter in the British Museum exhibition *Life and Death: Pompeii and Herculaneum*.⁴

Furthermore, by teaching in strict chronology and not returning to a subject, teachers are unable to teach themes throughout history. It would be difficult to teach Home Rule for Ireland at KS3 without returning the plantation of Ireland and the Glorious Revolution in more detail (currently in KS2), or the First World War.

NMDC is sympathetic to the Department's aim to ensure children are able to place historic events in order and there should be some emphasis on this in the National Curriculum. However, the teaching of History by theme, starting with that which is understandable to younger children (domestic life, development of industry) and moving to more complex themes as they get older (Transatlantic slavery, women and history and the relationship between Britain and Ireland), better aids children's understanding of change. Nevertheless, if the Department does wish to maintain the proposal to teach Key Stages 2 and 3 chronologically, NMDC would urge the Department to do this within KS2 and then again in KS3, and not stretch a single syllabus across seven academic years.

⁴ Guide for secondary school teachers: http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/Exhib_visit_Pompeii_KS3to5.pdf
Guide for primary school teachers: http://www.britishmuseum.org/pdf/Exhib_visit_Pompeii_KS2b.pdf

At KS2 the pre-amble suggests pupils “should be made aware history takes many forms” and that “they should also be given the opportunity to study local history”. However, the prescribed chronology from early Britons to the Glorious Revolution will not provide this. There is too much detail to practically allow for the time to study local history or expand beyond the mere accumulation of facts, and the subjects listed do not provide appropriate or accessible content for this age group to be aware that history takes many forms. By structuring the curriculum in this way, much of the subject matter which would allow for the study of local history across the whole country (post 1750) is in the KS3 curriculum and not KS2. For example, it would be difficult to study a local history of Tyne and Wear which is accessible to KS2 pupils without studying post-1750, as that was the period when the region significantly changed and the local identity was formed. It would also mean that museum resources, such as the National Gallery's *Take One*, could not be fully explored.⁵ The value of this resource as one of many to aid the understanding of local history is demonstrated by the teachers' feedback:

*“It has the potential to engage pupils across the ability range.
“It has a strong focus on pupils' sense of place identity and community.”⁶*

The detailed and prescriptive chronology leaves little room to teach beyond the relaying of facts. In KS2 there are 16 topics listed with 35 sub topics, and in KS3 there are 20 topics with 52 sub topics. This level of detail is very different to other subjects in the curriculum. The sub topics leave little room or time for a teacher to make choices and tailor teaching to their geographic location, local history and use locally accessible resources (including museums). Furthermore, the sheer quantity of sub topics mean each major topic is reduced to just a focus on events and individuals, rather than why something happened and the impact it had. This may lead to a dull, uninspiring narrative history which neither engages children nor develops skills of historical enquiry. This approach will therefore not address the concerns of Ofsted in their 2011 report *History for All*: “pupils tended to be passive, work was not challenging enough and they were expected to listen to the teacher for far too long.”⁷

The sheer quantity of subject content will make it difficult to find time to spend outside of the classroom, developing a more thorough understanding and therefore historical skills. Teachers see the value of this, as this feedback from the National Gallery shows:

*“The children were totally engrossed in the experience.”
“It managed to be both challenging and suitably pitched to the students – really expanding their understanding.”
“It opened their minds to new possibilities.”*

Knowing the order in which something happens is not an indication of understanding. A teacher would not teach quadratic equations without first developing pupils' thorough understanding of the individual mathematical functions which are required. The detailed curriculum is weighted towards political history, which does not engage younger children, and leads to a rather narrow view of the past. For example, the sub topics for the Second World War do not include the Home Front. The approach seems contrary to the views of the Expert Panel convened to advise on this curriculum as they wished “to give teachers greater professional freedom over how they organize and teach curriculum”.

NMDC would urge the Department for Education to revise the curriculum so that it is less prescriptive, and to remove some of the sub topics. For example, it would be preferable to include the Stuart period in the curriculum but not be so specific as to include six topics within that. This would give teachers time to tailor the curriculum to their locality, develop skills of historical enquiry and teach the impact of historic events, as opposed to just the fact they occurred. They would therefore have time to be able to take advantage of the wealth of

⁵ www.nationalgallery.org.uk/take-one. The programme uses the National Gallery's model of taking one picture from a collection and using this as the starting point to study other subjects in the curriculum, particularly History. Take One uses regional collections and objects in museums local to schools.

⁶ Feedback on the National Gallery's *Take One* programme, ECORYS system

⁷ *History for All*, Ofsted, 2011, p.20

resources available for teaching outside of the classroom, including those provided by museums, which have been proven to aid understanding.

Age appropriate content

The major challenge with such a prescriptive chronology across two Key Stages – and between the ages of 7 and 14 when children's maturity significantly develops – is that a subject is taught because it occurred at a particular point in time rather than because the content is appropriate for that age group. It expects that a child's comprehension of historical events is the same at 7 years old as it is at 14, which is not the case. There seems to be a risk of glossing over important historical events or characters because the younger child's lack of maturity prevents them from understanding or appreciating the subject in a way they would when they are 14 or 15 years old. The inclusion of William Wilberforce and Christina Rossetti at Key Stage 1 (KS1), and then Chaucer, the Crusades and the Glorious Revolution at KS2, are examples of age inappropriate content. To appreciate the achievements of Wilberforce means a child would have to understand the concept slavery, and that is unlikely before the age of 7.

The considerable experience and expertise of museum educators in the UK's national and major non-national museums, supported by child development and learning theory, suggests a "scaffolding" approach to History teaching is the most effective. It is the only subject within the proposed National Curriculum not to be taught in this way.

If children have developed the concept of the past and understood recent, older, and much older history through the familiarities of locality and family history at KS1, they can then begin to understand how people used to live. However, the curriculum moves too quickly from this at KS1 to a syllabus of people, concepts and events which children do not have the real world experience to contextualise.

Subjects such as the Romans, Victorians and the Second World War lend themselves particularly well to being taught at KS2 because they can include a significant amount of social and cultural history and are therefore accessible and relevant to children of this age. Furthermore, the most successful and popular museum programmes are those which cover modern history (post-1750) because there are more accessible points of reference for children, as it was likely to be the time that their locality developed to look like it does today. These sessions embrace a variety of learning styles but in particular those relating to the spatial, auditory and kinaesthetic and these are particularly effective at KS2. Being able to teach children the experience of working in a mine or mill in the town or region in which they live, or being an evacuee in the Second World War at the age when this could have happened to them, is evocative and memorable. At this age, children are receptive to immersive learning, which is a successful way of teaching subjects such as Victorian England and the Second World War (for example pretending to be servants in the kitchens at Preston Manor in Brighton). This promotes much better understanding than the rote learning of facts and political events from a period of time they cannot relate to, and is illustrated by the popularity of museum school programmes. In 2012, the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust saw 73,296 formal educational visits to its 10 museums. 89% of these visits were to sites dedicated to interpreting the Victorians and the Industrial Revolution. The majority of these visits were Key Stages 1 and 2.

"The children all thoroughly enjoyed the village, experiencing Victorian life and using Victorian money."

Teacher, Ysgol Cynddelw of a visit to Blists Hill Victorian Town

The Second World War is living history, and this subject works well at KS2 because children can access it through their family history by speaking to older relatives, looking at the impact of the war on where they live, handling objects which would have been used by their grandparents and great-grandparents. Again, the popularity of these schools programmes shows how successful this is. 66,059 primary school children took part in the Imperial War Museums' schools programme in 2011/12 and 60,892 of these were studying the Second

World War. In addition, 28,171 primary school children from 715 school groups undertook self-directed visits to the Imperial War Museums. It is difficult to envisage this quality of learning on the subject of the Hundred Years War, for example.

"The World War II Hut puts learning in context for the children"

Teacher from Eastfield Primary of a visit to the RAF Museum (December 2012)

Scaffolding approach

Evidence suggests that approaching the personal and local at KS1, the cultural and social at KS2 (such as how people lived during the Black Death, the Industrial Revolution or the Second World War), and then the political and global at KS3, when children have the maturity to understand complex or challenging subjects (such as the plantation of Ireland, the Transatlantic Slave Trade or the Glorious Revolution) promotes the best understanding of history. NMDC would strongly urge the Government to adopt this "scaffolding" approach. It would still be possible to teach a chronology using this approach by doing it within each Key Stage. KS2 would then focus on aspects of history which a child is able to understand at that age, and KS3 would develop the more complex or political concepts at the age a child is able to comprehend them. Furthermore, by adopting this approach, schools will be able to take advantage of museum resources which are most effective when supporting the teaching of social and cultural history at KS2. At KS3, schools would then be able to take advantage of the increasingly innovative digital resources produced by museums, such as the *Revealing Histories* teachers' resource, to support the understanding of political and global history.⁸

Preparing children for the World they will graduate into

Whilst we support the aims to ensure children understand the history of the British Isles, it is important that the children are alert to their place in the history of the world, and the impact of global history on British history and Britain today. Then children who will be taught this curriculum will graduate into a world which is undergoing fundamental and rapid technological, economic and social change. The impact of the growth of Asian and South American economies and global political events, information about which is relayed around the world quicker than ever via social media, global news, more accessible international travel and smartphone technology, means that children will grow up in a more globally connected world. The National Curriculum needs to prepare them to know more about the world around them than ever before.

The curriculum risks promoting an Anglocentric view of history missing the plurality of voices which make up 21st century Britain. This is reinforced by old fashioned use of language relating the Britain and Empire, which subject headings such as "Britain's retreat from Empire". There is not the room in the curriculum to teach the development of other areas of the world and therefore place the history of Britain in an accurate context. For example, there is no reference to Ancient Egypt, the history of China, or Africa beyond Transatlantic slavery and the British Empire. Children may be at a disadvantage because they may not develop a balanced knowledge of world history.

Teachers are keen to ensure that pupils have a more fully developed understanding of the world around them. The schools programme for the British Museum's *First Emperor* sold out in a matter of hours as it was a way of explaining the history and development of China to a generation that will be more familiar with the country on a daily basis. Additionally this curriculum appears to be unrepresentative of many children and young people's heritage. 41% of pupils visiting the V&A in 2011-12 were from BAME communities.

There is little room for historical comparison. Large museums' collections, for example, can show both what happened in West Africa in the 16th century and Britain, and the Horniman

⁸ <http://www.revealinghistories.org.uk/>

Museum and British Museum like many other museums have developed education resources to support this. This is not reflected in the curriculum. The omission of Ancient Egypt denies children an education about this important aspect of world history and one which is extremely well supported by museum collections and expertise across the UK.

"Without doubt, engaging with the themes of Ancient Egypt has been fundamental to my children's understanding of the importance and value of historical study and my experience of teaching it leaves me in no doubt of its significance in this. Being able to see and handle artefacts from thousands of years ago brings history alive and contextualizes the children's own sense of chronology and of the wider world that they are citizens within."

Key Stage 2 Phase 2 Leader and Curriculum Co-ordinator from Oswald Road Primary School of a visit to Manchester Museum.

It is a subject which captures children's imagination and consequently is one through which they can develop skills of historical enquiry. It seems odd to reference Ancient Greece in the curriculum and not Ancient Egypt.

"It was great seeing the mummy! I really enjoyed the morning because we were archaeologists and detectives, also the room where we handled real artefacts".

Year 6 pupil from Adswood Primary School of a visit to Manchester Museum

Impact on museums' support of History teaching

"Learning outside the classroom brings the curriculum to life and is essential to our children's development."

Employment Minister Chris Grayling, 2nd July 2011⁹

By structuring the curriculum as proposed, the support and resources museums can offer will not be fully utilised and the opportunities to visit museums will be much reduced, meaning fewer primary school children will visit museums. The detailed and prescribed chronological curriculum leaves little time for learning outside of the classroom and a study of local history. Feedback from teachers state that the main reason for their visit is to support the curriculum. 81% of teachers stated that "curriculum relevance" was the main motivation behind a school visit to the V&A.¹⁰ The subjects listed for KS2 do not best utilise museum resources because the subjects neither lend themselves to this sort of learning nor is there quantity of primary source material available.

KS2 is the optimum time for schools to visit museums. Children are receptive to immersive and object-based learning, and there is more time in the school timetable to spend outside the classroom. KS3 is the point when schools have the least time available in the calendar for museum visits. Last year, 46% of the schools visits to the V&A were made by KS2 groups, with KS3 being the lowest attending school audience at 9.2%.

School visits to museums ensure that pupils, irrespective of their social or economic circumstances, are able to visit museums. Although many school children return with their families, a proportion (particularly those from a lower socio-economic background where there may not be the time, money or inclination to visit) will not. If the opportunity to visit a museum with school is much reduced, the opportunity for a number of children to visit at all is reduced and they are further disadvantaged. The largest piece of research on school visits, *What did you learn at the museum today?*, found that 32% of the visits were made by schools in the 20% most deprived areas of England.¹¹ School visits present the opportunity, usually unavailable as part of the standard public offer to handle primary source material, dress in period costume and speak to experts directly. If children do not visit museums with their

⁹ <http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a00191772/150-pages-of-unduly-complex-guidance-slashed-to-just-eight>

¹⁰ V&A Teachers' Evaluation Form and Schools Census, 2010-11

¹¹ *What did you learn at the museum today?*, p.1

schools, they may not experience this part of their History education. These teachers, visiting Brighton and Hove Museums, support the importance of exposing children to artefacts:

“Artefacts provide ideal opportunity for discussion, application of knowledge, investigation skills.”

“Wonderful to have such a wide range of artefacts for hands-on experience and thinking.”

“Brilliant opportunity for children to explore and handle artefacts.”

“This has been the only opportunity to handle real Victorian artefacts.”¹²

Visitor research suggests both school visits and the curriculum also motivate family visits, as these parents visiting the Imperial War Museum testify:

“The kids have projects, so that’s why we went to the Imperial War Museum”

“There’s only so much they can learn online”.

Henley Review of Cultural Education and investment in existing resources and expertise

Given that the prescriptive nature and KS2 content will leave little time or curriculum links to encourage teachers to visit museums with their pupils, it would be a great pity to see the considerable investment and training that has taken place in developing resources and expertise go unrealised. Local authorities, DCMS and the Heritage Lottery Fund (along with numerous private trusts, foundations and corporate sponsors) have invested millions into improving museum education (and the National Lottery has allowed for the investment of millions into museum buildings and public spaces). It would also seem to undermine the recommendations of the Henley Review of Cultural Education, which demonstrated the importance of museum visits to pupils. Following the Henley Review, the Department for Education made funding available to promote visits to heritage sites and partnerships between museums, along with programmes designed to increase the study of local history. It is difficult to see how something like the Cultural Education Partnership in Bristol, established as a result of the Henley Review, can fully realise its potential in the context of this curriculum.

Practical considerations

Preparing teachers for the new curriculum

The very quick implementation of the new curriculum (to start September 2014) will not give enough time for teachers to acquire the necessary knowledge or for museums to produce the required supporting resources. A “curriculum holiday” would be necessary.

Demand for resources

If all schools will be asked to teach this amount of content in this order, then schools will all study the same subject in the same half-term. That will place strain on resources at the point when, for example, primary school children study the Romans. Because of the comparatively few subjects at KS2 which could be well supported by museum resources, this will exacerbate the demand on those that are (such as the Romans, Tudors and the Black Death). School visits to museums are predominantly to a local museum: 75% of school visits to Manchester Museum, Manchester City Art Gallery and the Whitworth Art Gallery are from schools in Greater Manchester; 67% of school visits to the V&A are from schools in Greater London; and 75% of school visits to Beamish are from schools in the North-East (with the remainder being from Yorkshire, Cumbria and Scotland). If those local museums do not have the collection to support the KS2 curriculum, then children will miss out on visiting a local museum.

GCSE and A Level

It is difficult to comment on whether this curriculum would provide an appropriate preparation for further study of History as an academic subject because it has been published and consulted on without sight of the proposals for the new GCSE and A Levels. Although academies and free schools are given greater freedom, museum learning managers have found that they frequently follow the National Curriculum as it prepares children for GCSE.

¹² Education Evaluation for Teachers/Group Leaders, Brighton and Hove Museums, July 2009