

## **Response to the consultation on the National Curriculum Review**

*This response is submitted on behalf of the National Museum Directors' Council (NMDC). This 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](http://www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/members).*

NMDC welcomes this opportunity to offer views on the National Curriculum Review, having responded to the initial consultation on the revised National Curriculum in April 2013. This response, like the first submitted in April, focuses on History.

### **Summary**

NMDC welcomes the revisions that have been made to the Subject Content of the History National Curriculum for Key Stages (KS) 1, 2 and 3. In our initial response to the first draft of the new National Curriculum for History, NMDC had serious concerns that the detailed chronological approach across KS 2 and 3, the removal of Modern British History from the KS 2 curriculum and the absence of world and local history, would mean that pupils would not have the time to develop skills of historical enquiry, nor study age appropriate content nor understand the history of the world. The changes to this re-drafted National Curriculum go some way to addressing these concerns.

The NMDC felt that the initial draft of the curriculum would not allow the opportunity for schools to visit museums and engage in vital learning outside of the classroom. The less prescriptive nature of the curriculum and the introduction of the study of local history, world history and historical themes means that there now is the time and subject matter (particularly at KS2) to encourage museum visits. Nevertheless, NMDC remains concerned that the timetable for introduction may be a little ambitious and that a start date of September 2014 may not provide adequate opportunity for teachers and supporting organisations to prepare new resources.

### **Purpose of Study**

The Purpose of Study, and in particular the requirements that "teaching should equip pupils to ask perceptive questions, think critically, weigh evidence, sift arguments, and develop perspective and judgement", remains something NMDC strongly supports. NMDC is also delighted that the hope that pupils are inspired by the subject of History is now included in the Purpose of Study with the phrase "it should inspire pupils' curiosity to know more about the past".

### **Aims**

NMDC supports the aims of the revised History National Curriculum and particularly the inclusion that pupils should "know and understand significant aspects of the history of the wider world". The re-drafting of the first aim, so it no longer solely focuses on the development of British political history and how Britain influenced the world, now encourages the study of the social history and the influence of the world on Britain.

### **Subject Content**

#### Detailed chronology

Whilst NMDC had been broadly supportive of the purpose of study and many of the aims of the initial History National Curriculum, we felt that the subject content would not allow these aims to be achieved. However, NMDC is delighted that the subject content has been revised which assuages many of museums' concerns. The stripping away of the detailed chronology

and the greater flexibility schools will have with the local history study, the study of an aspect or theme of British history and a study of world history at both KS 2 and 3 should provide the opportunity for pupils to think critically, weigh evidence and develop perspective and judgment.

NMDC raised concerns that the detailed chronology stretched across KS 2 and 3 would not allow children time to develop skills of historical enquiry and that it would expose them to age inappropriate content. This has certainly been addressed in the re-draft, and some of the most challenging subject areas moved to a point in a pupil's education where they have developed the necessary maturity and real world experience to fully understand these subjects' historic importance.

In our initial submission, NMDC raised concerns that a detailed chronology stretched across two Key Stages would mean that there was no opportunity for pupils to return to a period of history they had studied at KS 2. This was a concern because pupil's learning styles are very different at 8 years old than they are at 13 years old. This is addressed in the revised curriculum with the requirement for pupils to study an aspect or theme of British history from before 1066.

#### Local history

NMDC welcomes the opportunity to study local history at each Key Stage and that period of history is not constrained. Not only does this aid pupil's understanding of historical events, theme and change over time, but also provides the opportunity for learning outside the classroom and in particular visits to museums. Teachers will be able to tailor this part of the curriculum to best utilise local resources, including those provided by museums.

#### World history

NMDC strongly supports the requirements to study world history at both KS2 and KS3. In our original response we felt that the curriculum risked promoting an Anglocentric view of history missing the plurality of voices that make up 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain today (illustrated, for example, by the fact that 41% of schoolchildren visiting the V&A in 2011-12 were from BAME communities).

NMDC feared that only teaching world history in the context of the British Empire would not prepare children adequately for the world into which they would graduate. Therefore, NMDC very much welcomes the inclusion of world history (both early and modern) in both KS 2 and 3. Furthermore, NMDC is delighted to see the study of other Ancient civilisations including Ancient Egypt and Ancient China, as well as the comparative study with a non-European society in KS 2. Museums with collections acquired from across the world, such as those at Manchester Museum, the Royal Albert Memorial Museum in Exeter and Leeds Museum are ideally placed to be able to support this aspect of the curriculum. The popularity of museums' Ancient Egypt schools resources already illustrates the important role object-based learning plays in developing KS 2 pupils understanding of less familiar periods of world history.

#### Key Stage1 (KS1)

NMDC is content with the revisions to the KS1 curriculum. The suggested list of significant individuals is a little more accessible than the initial list and NMDC is glad to see that there is to be a focus on changes within living memory and the history of their locality. Evidence suggests that approaching the personal and local at KS1 is the best way to ensure a sound basis of historic understanding.

#### **Impact on museums**

The considerably less prescriptive nature of the curriculum will allow schools to have the opportunity to support teaching with learning outside the classroom, specifically with visits to museums. NMDC had expressed serious concerns that there would simply not have been time, particularly in the KS2 curriculum (as this is the age group where museum visits can be both easier to arrange and have greatest impact), for schools to visit museums or heritage

sites. Although it is regrettable that visiting a museum or heritage site is not specifically required, this revised curriculum does at least provide the time and subject content for school visits to museums. Furthermore, its less prescriptive nature means that teachers will have greater flexibility as to when they can teach certain subjects. The first draft of the curriculum would have meant that all schools would have had to have taught the same topic in the same half-term, meaning that all schools would have wanted to utilise museum resources at the same time.

The removal of Victorian England and modern British history from the compulsory element of KS2 is still a concern for a number of museums because, as we explained in our initial submission, they are subjects which capture children's imagination and are age appropriate for KS2. Nevertheless, it is now possible for schools to teach some Modern British History via the theme or local history element at KS2, and this may very well motivate schools to use their local museum resources. The world history element may similarly encourage visits and, as with Victorian England and the experience of the Home Front during the Second World War, these subjects very much benefit from object-based learning. This can only be delivered by museums and the popularity of the programmes museums already deliver on the subject of Ancient Egypt, for example, illustrates this. NMDC hopes that the Department for Education will be strongly encourage schools to use museum resources and visit museums and heritage sites as part of the implementation of this curriculum.

### **Timetable for implementation**

NMDC is concerned however about the timescale for implementation and is sceptical as to whether it will allow schools, teachers and supporting organisations (like museums), time to produce the required resources for learning outside the classroom and professional development.

### **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 they develop activities based around how people used to live. They provide a stimulating and enjoyable experience that cannot be provided anywhere else, and have been shown to improve understanding and raise attainment.<sup>1</sup> 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% though pupils would increase subject-related understanding.<sup>2</sup>

Millions of pounds of public and lottery funding, augmented by contributions from private organisations and 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 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> *What did you learn at the museum today?*, p.12

they, in their words, make facts “real”.<sup>3</sup> 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.

School visits ensure that pupils, irrespective of their social or economic circumstances, are able to experience 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. This would have been the case with the first draft of the curriculum. 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

Museums, particularly the national and major non-national museums, now play a role in training and professional development for teachers, and develop formal and informal programmes based around the National Curriculum. These changes to the History National Curriculum could, if encouraged by the Department for Education, be an excellent opportunity for teachers to work with museums for professional development (especially as the changes to teacher training and the reductions in school budgets for cover make it more difficult to find the opportunities to do this).

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<sup>3</sup> *What did you learn at the museum today?*