
As representatives of the principal organisations for historians in the UK, we would like to respond to the publication of the draft Programmes of Study for History in the national curriculum released by the Department for Education on 7 February 2013. We want to voice significant reservations both about the content of the Programmes of Study which have been proposed, and about the process by which the Programmes have been devised.

First, we believe that the Programmes of Study are far too narrowly and exclusively focused on British history to serve the needs of children growing up in the world today. History is of course an important and necessary tool for teaching future citizens about the making of their localities and nations. But it is not only that – it is also the treasure-house of human experience across millennia and around the world. Students *should* learn about British history: but knowledge of the history of other cultures (and not only as they have been encountered through their interactions with the British Isles) is as vital as knowledge of foreign languages to enable British citizens to understand the full variety and diversity of human life. The narrowness of the Programmes deprives children, many of whom will not continue with the study of History beyond the national curriculum, of the vast bulk of the precious inheritance of the past.

Secondly, we welcome the inclusion within the Programmes of Study of topics concerned with social, economic and cultural history. Students should certainly be taught political history; but they should also be taught the histories of economies, societies, ideas, beliefs and cultures. As the writings of historians over the past hundred years have eloquently demonstrated, it is in any case impossible properly to understand political history without an appreciation of these other histories. It might still be debated whether the specifications set out in the Programmes of Study have yet found the ideal balance between political history and other aspects of the past, not least in relation to conveying to students a proper appreciation of what the discipline of History now encompasses. This is especially important with reference to how the subject is studied and taught in the higher level qualifications delivered in both schools and universities for which these programmes of study must in part be seen as preparation (a point of equal relevance in consideration of the concentration on British history).

Thirdly, we regret that the construction of the Programme in a strictly chronological sequence from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 ensures that many students will not be properly exposed to the exciting and intellectually demanding study of pre-modern history other than in the very earliest stages of their studies. This risks promoting even if only inadvertently the naive assumption that human society and culture become more sophisticated and complex through time, and also potentially encourages students and teachers to neglect pre-modern history as they move on to study history at GCSE, A-Level and beyond.

We recognize that there are limits to the capacity of a curriculum to encompass all desiderata, and that a balance must be struck between ambition and practicality. It is partly for this reason that we also regret the way in which the curriculum was drafted. Despite much interesting debate in the media about the future of the curriculum, and especially the History curriculum, in the early days of the current government, the details of the curriculum have been drafted inside the Department for Education without any systematic consultation or public discussion with historians, teachers or the wider public. The contrast with the practice of the Conservative

**Joint Statement on the Draft
National Curriculum for History
12 February 2013**



government of the late 1980s when it drafted the first national curriculum is striking. Then, a History Working Group including teachers, educational experts and academics worked in tandem with the ministry of the day to produce first an interim report and then a final report in the midst of much public discussion. The curriculum that resulted was widely supported across many professional and political divisions in the teaching and academic professions and by the general public. The current government was certainly right to feel that after many interim changes it was time for a fresh look. Unfortunately, it has not attempted to assemble the same kind of consensus, and as a result it has produced a draft curriculum which it can be argued could still benefit from extensive discussion about how to ensure that it best serves both good practice and the public interest. Rather than find ourselves cast necessarily in the role of critics, we would welcome an opportunity to engage constructively with the government in fashioning Programmes of Study which could seek to deliver outcomes equally acceptable to politicians, working historians, the public at large and above all students, their teachers and parents.

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