

# **Why History Matters**

**Institute of Historical Research  
publication**

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## **Report of the conference held at the Institute of Historical Research, 12-13 February 2007**

### **Schools and History in 2007**

**David Bates**

**Director, Institute of Historical Research**

**Paul Armitage**

**Formerly Her Majesty's Inspector and Ofsted Specialist Adviser for History**

The Why History Matters conference held at the Institute of Historical Research in the University of London tackled head on the question of why History is a crucial element in UK education and national life in the early twenty-first century. From the first intended as an event to produce a statement of History's importance and relevance, it was sponsored by Ofsted and by the main organisations with formal responsibility for speaking on the discipline's behalf, namely, the Historical Association, the Royal Historical Society, History UK (HE), the Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology, and the Institute of Historical Research.

150 delegates were drawn from an unprecedented range of professional backgrounds, including primary, secondary, further and higher education, school governors, HMIs, representatives of museums, the QCA, the media, the Connexions and guidance services, examining boards, English Heritage, the Council for British Archaeology and Historic Royal Palaces. The depth of the discussion during the conference's plenary sessions and during the break-out groups was as a result truly remarkable. Its quality gives the published conference reports which follow an unrivalled authority which makes them indispensable reading for all in a position to influence of future of History's place in UK education and national life.

It has often been said (not only for history) that different parts of education exist in silos; they talk amongst themselves but seldom to each other. Thus there is seldom a concerted view from the history sector as a whole. A good example about which there is much concern in some quarters is the inter-linkage between higher education and schools. For one reason or another, it is generally not great. There are various aspects to it but one is the extent to which research priorities do or do not take into account school's needs. Many researchers will say well, why should they? Others, however, might welcome the idea that scholarship can be of direct and immediate value to local schools.

So the conference was risky business with outcomes that were uncertain. Would it be possible for the disparate composition of working groups to come to a view of why history in the school curriculum matters? The conference organizers thought hard about the brief for the delegates. Too tight a brief would be to presume

outcomes; too loose a brief might result in nothing. So organizers took a middle route which required some skill from conveners and delegates in relation to this flexibility.

In the end, the plan worked and there were both interesting discussions and thought-provoking reports from working groups. Comments from delegates included:

*'I found the event extremely useful - as a personal learning experience, for my professional development and for networking opportunities.'*

*'I really enjoyed the course and found the speakers both interesting and thought-provoking. I also found that the break-out groups worked very well in that a choice was offered and the appointment of a designated facilitator really focused the discussion.'*

*'Enjoyed everything and thought that the short but full, well-presented papers from a variety of experts worked particularly well.'*

*'Good, because it informed us about developments re government policy and good practice by leading practitioners, also challenged aspects for example exam syllabus that many are unhappy with and as HMIs were there in force it seemed to indicate they are interested in these things! Good they would hear this level of reflection.'*

This is not to say that there were no negative comments. A very few delegates found the absence of a tighter brief difficult. Others, however, welcomed the absence of this given the broad range of people from all different parts of the history education world. Many commented that it was the range that was both impressive and interesting and that it could have stifled things if the conference organizers had forced people into a mould. One teacher respondent said that she would have liked a separate session for teachers and HMI.

The conference concerned itself with History's place in education from the ages of 4 to 19 and with the relationship between schools, further education and higher education. It was structured around plenary talks by speakers assigned the responsibility of setting out current issues and debates and break-out groups assigned the following four themes:-

*History and Every Child Matters*

*How can History be made significant to all ages and abilities?*

*History, Britishness and Citizenship*

*School History and Academic History*

The articles and reports which follow largely speak for themselves. They take a very positive view of History's role and affirm very clearly the integrity, usefulness and uniqueness of the discipline. At the same time, however, they warn strongly against complacency and inertia and argue that history must engage with current political agendas. They contain within them suggestions for change and proposals for action.

## **The Issue**

The issue of history and why it matters is a pregnant one.

The National Strategy and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) are encouraging schools to look more creatively at the curriculum for young people to make it more meaningful, relevant and successful. In part, this is reflected in the new history Key Stage 3 just approved by the government. It is also reflected in some schools reducing Key Stage 2 to two years and to others integrating or running the subject alongside others in humanities or programmes based on a selected theme.

The government is putting much faith in the development of vocational qualifications for 14 – 19 year olds which will take up a substantial part of the school curriculum leaving a question mark over whether there will be much space left for history. Already only 32% of pupils study the subject after the ages of 13 or 14 depending on whether a school runs a two or three year Key Stage 3.

There is at least a case to say that the above developments are reducing history's role in the curriculum. This is odd, not least because politicians of all persuasions are certain of the importance of history's role in the curriculum because they believe it is essential for pupils to understand the background to the present so that UK values and beliefs and practices are understood and not taken for granted. They also see it as a way of encouraging social understanding and cohesion – for instance, the study of why people have come to Britain over the centuries and their stories while they have been here has the potential to encourage respect and mutual understanding. The most obvious statement of this is Gordon Brown's interest in 'Britishness'.

It is also odd because at the heart of government policy in many areas is the *Every Child Matters* agenda which requires that all education focuses on the needs of young people and gives them the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills to equip them to be successful, self-sustaining adults.<sup>1</sup>

It is also odd because virtually everyone will tell you that history matters. Ask any parent or pupil and they will tell you that you need to know something of the past, not least to try to avoid making similar mistakes, but the big question is what does this and the bullets above mean for history in schools?

So there are two key issues for the public, politicians and educationalists at all levels to resolve. The first is does history matter? Should it be in the school curriculum and if so for whom – should it be an entitlement for all? And then the second key issue is if it does matter, in what form should it be in the curriculum? The first question was the subject of this conference; the second requires a conference to itself although it is discussed in Ofsted's recent three year report on history – *History in the Balance: History in English Schools 2003 – 2007*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Every Child Matters*. Cm 5860. London, The Stationery Office, 2003

<sup>2</sup> *History in the Balance: History in English Schools 2003 – 2007*. London, Ofsted, 2007

Ofsted is an inspection body so it is not its job to establish the curriculum or to tell teachers how to teach. What it does is to judge effectiveness however it is achieved and that there are many different ways to achievement. So *History in the Balance* is cautious. What it says is to report its evidence. It reports strengths and weaknesses and it raises questions about the future of the subject given the pressures and innovations outlined in the bullets above. *History in the Balance* thus presents everyone – schools, parents, politicians with a challenge and asks a genuine question – what do want the role of history to be in the school curriculum? Given all the pressures on the curriculum, the answer maybe that history has enough time and space already. Others may take a different view. There is also the issue of how far history should combine with other subjects to improve effectiveness and also gain time – the links with literacy, ICT, art and citizenship being perhaps the most obvious.

Given Ofsted's evidence which says that history only has limited current success, *History in the Balance* suggests that school history has to be made more relevant for children. Discrete bits of history have to be joined together better to form stories and narratives and overall points have to be made clear to pupils. Big questions such as how human rights have developed in the UK and why Britain has fought wars have to be addressed. The history that is selected has to be the most useful for potential adults as well as enjoyable for pupils. But the report also warns that the history has to be 'good' history – based on good historical method that maintains the subject's integrity.

So these are important times for history and some of the issues and more besides were brought out by a number of expert speakers and by working groups of conference members. All reflect around the theme of why history matters.

## The Speakers

**Justin Champion of Royal Holloway, University of London** spoke of the utility of history, particularly its relationship with citizenship. He emphasized the need for history to engage more with the public, addressing key citizenship matters.

Champion's first point was that historians should not fear a history that is relevant and useful to people. He commented that he had no fear that history has a role to play in citizenship education provided that the integrity of the subject is preserved. Citing Trevor-Roper, he commented that history which is not useful is mere antiquarianism and history that is not controversial is dead history. Champion made the very strong point that he doubted whether academics in most history departments are aware of the debates and issues of school history or school citizenship and certainly will not have taken these into account when constructing courses and undergraduate and postgraduate level. They do not explicitly engage in history/citizenship themes such as the evolution of human rights, criminal justice, forms of government, conflict resolution and so on.

Champion's second main point was that currently, historians do not engage enough with the public; they do not address, enough, matters of public interest. Citing Starkey, Champion said that too often, history is about academics engaging in conversations amongst themselves in dark corners. Champion argued that it is possible both to be academically rigorous and deal with popular history.

Champion's concluding point was that history gives significant knowledge and also, very importantly, it provides critical power – skills of reflection. Quoting an Ofsted report, he spoke of history helping people to make up their own minds with the result that it produces better, experienced human beings who are balanced, humane, brave and critical. So history matters.

**Roy Foster from the University of Oxford** took up the themes of falling numbers of pupils studying history; the contrasting popularity of history on television and elsewhere; government and other pressures on the subject – both positive and negative; history and its relationship with citizenship; and the interests and debates within academic history. He said that history matters because of the way it explores issues and raises tensions between the different pressures.

Foster recognized the importance of popular history in sustaining an individual's need to know who they are; he also recognized the desire to understand national history. Citing Sharma, with reservation, he agreed that popular history can be good history and further agreed that history should seek to address a wider audience.

But Foster was uneasy. The British Academy's view that the objectives of research programmes in the humanities, particularly history, should contribute to the intellectual and cultural health of the nation had, according to Foster, echoes of Mussolini; and Foster then went on to say how officialdom can influence in lots of ways from simple options systems in schools through to criteria for awarding research grants. And Foster also drew attention to debates within the discipline itself

– largely inspired by the post-modernists about what history is capable of in its contribution to understanding. But then he gave examples where history of where the discipline of history has mattered a great deal – Ireland, the Balkans and in times such as World War II.

Foster finally ended his talk by perhaps being surprisingly insistent that despite a hint of uneasiness, history linked to citizenship is important – it does matter. Critical though is how it is put across and how the different parts, particularly schools and academe interlink to avoid 'official' history.

**Penelope Harnett from the University of the West of England** was unequivocal about why history matters. She spoke about creating a curriculum that will help all young people in Britain understand the world in which they live. She argued that studying the dilemmas and conflicts experienced by earlier societies and individuals in the past contributes to children's own developing understanding of dilemmas and issues which they face in their own personal and daily lives. Consequently such a curriculum needs to be one which:

permits children to explore who they are – their own beliefs and values

develops children's understanding of differences and similarities between their own and other people's lives in the past and present

encourages a greater understanding, past and present, of the communities and localities where children live.

On the first and second of these, Harnett reminded the audience that recent television programmes in the series *Who do you think you are?* have attracted large audiences and that a similar fascination with their past is replicated by young children. They enjoy hearing stories about when they were younger and sharing photographs and memories of things which have happened to them. As they observe changes, young children are drawn into explanations. They begin to suggest reasons and some consequences for some of the changes which have occurred to them. They begin to raise questions such as who am I? They also begin to develop awareness of other people's different experiences and begin to recognize that not everyone shares the same story.

Drawing on research from Northern Ireland, Harnett emphasized the importance of developing young children's awareness of difference and their abilities to respond to difference in a positive way. She emphasized that this is far from straightforward and there is a real question about the extent to which education may contribute to reducing tensions and cultural prejudices which currently exist. But it can be done by challenging young children's implicit assumptions and in providing them with alternative role models.

She commented that for children, history can provide a powerful vehicle for moving them beyond their existing understandings of the world to a fuller experience of the diversity of the human race and a greater understanding of the world in which they

live. Stories about people and events in the past permit children to explore different beliefs and values, and different ways of life. They provide opportunities for children to explore motivation – what choices people had and made in their lives and the results of their choices; to consider other people’s feelings and how they might be different from their own and to investigate people’s different points of view.

**Stuart Foster from the Institute of Education, University of London** opening presentations from himself and three other colleagues from the Institute focused on Weinberg’s interest in standards in history in the USA since 1917. According to Foster, Weinberg’s interest has shown one thing, namely that although society and history education have changed, there is still much public and political interest in pupils knowing arbitrary, isolated pieces of history and critics regularly complain that pupils do not know enough. History therefore matters to society at large.

Foster then suggested that because pupils over generations clearly do not satisfy critics’ concerns, perhaps we should focus our attention elsewhere – namely what pupils do know – for instance, what concept they have of a ‘big picture’ and where they fit in it. Foster then added that the Institute has been commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to explore whether pupils have a big picture – is history coherent or is it a series of disconnected events?

Foster stressed that the aim of the research is to help identify how pupils can be helped to develop a better and more meaningful understanding of the past.

**Ros Ashby from the Institute of Education, University of London** spoke of three goals for history education and why, therefore, history matters.

The first is to reaffirm the open tradition of enquiry, central to which is the concept of evidence. For Ashby, this is critical, not only for the subject but also for the individual and society as a whole. It is at the basis of a reflective approach to knowledge; underlines the need for a respect for evidence; re-examines certainties; recognizes judgements; shows contempt for polemic; and identifies context for speech, intention and action.

The second is the need for all of us to orientate ourselves in time. This is an explicit admission that the present is firmly linked to the past. Citing Shemilt in support, Ashby spoke of the importance of the ‘big picture’ which cannot be disaggregated and serving as a frame of reference into which present phenomena are fitted.

The third is that pupils must gain from history an idea of what it is to be human. This view was well summed up in her final words:

‘School history has to do much more than confirm or enhanced an individual’s identity. It has to be about the bigger picture and a wider world because to study history is to grow up and move beyond ourselves’.

**Peter Lee from the Institute of Education, University of London** again stressed the importance of history to young people. He talked in terms of historical



literacy. He said that pupils need a coherent understanding of the past as well as an understanding of how we know about the past.

Using examples from interviews with pupils, Lee showed how some pupils regard history as useful and some do not. In his sample, the split was about 50:50. What was interesting though was that both sets of pupils supported their view with the same reason – the fact that times change. Lee commented that those who thought that history is no use saw it as a series of disconnected events that happened a long time ago. Those who thought it useful were beginning to understand that events were connected, slowly building up a bigger picture linked even to the present. Intimately linked into these pupils' views was their understanding of the nature of evidence, its veracity and how it is handled by historians. Lee cautioned on the need to understand pupils' conceptual understandings and how they develop rather than just teaching interpretation as a set of contemporary views.

Lee then moved on to the concept of the 'big picture'. Here he returned to Weinberg and his findings that even when told a whole story, pupils generally forget it; it is not something they use every day. So, concluded Lee, we have to be careful what we teach, the more so because time and other constraints mean that pupils only gain access to a small part of history. Hence, maybe, we should move in the direction of patterns of change rather than specific events – the development of national characteristics, understanding democratic change, the evolution of human rights, and so on.

**Jonathan Howson from the Institute of Education, University of London** working around the theme that young people need 'big pictures' or overviews of history to help them understand the world in which they live reported on the preliminary findings of the ESRC-funded research referred to earlier by Stuart Foster. Howson commented that the research is concentrating on pupils in the London area beginning to start their history GCSEs. Thus they are pupils with a commitment to history having opted for it.

The methodology of the research is to ask pupils to reflect on issues or themes which require the use of historical evidence to support a point of view – for example, the evolution from monarch to democracy and other political, social and economic trends. Howson's main message that few, if any pupils are able to do this. Some cannot reflect at all on an issue, let alone deploy substantiating history to support a view. Others demonstrate the beginnings of an ability to define a trend or reasons for change over time but have very limited ability in terms of selecting evidence or understanding the relevance of different bits of evidence let alone forming a conceptual over-view itself. Even more damning is that some pupils will go a little way to forming an overview but they will seldom use supporting material they have learnt in school. Very often it is history learnt elsewhere.

**Michael Riley from Bath Spa University and Somerset Local Authority** said that history matters because it is central to establishing an individual's identity. He then focused on *making history matter* and how this can be done. Reilly identified three case studies used by local schools.

The first, linked to local history, focused on his home area showed how schools can use the historical richness of their localities. This creates a sense of local identity based on a shared historical landscape. Reilly spoke of Iron Age, Roman, Saxon, Norman, Elizabethan and later industrial evidence.

The second, linked to a national theme, used Chard church and the local war memorial as a focus for a study of men who died in the First World War. Studying their lives from birth to their deaths led not only to the detailed study of different parts of the town but also a greater understanding of the local human condition. Reilly spoke of the pupils connecting, caring and communicating.

The third, linked to a global theme, looked at the life of 16th century traveler, Thomas Coryat and his journeys through the Moghul Empire and other 'hidden histories' – i.e. stories of people that are seldom if ever told. The story of Coryat in particular carries the subtle message of how trusting relations between Europeans and others moved to becoming unfriendly. As such, there are contemporary messages about race and other relationships; diversity and inclusion. Reilly concluded by saying that we need a diverse yet inclusive history to avoid the sense of alienation.

**Rachel Ward, King Edward VI Upper School, Bury St Edmunds** welcomed the new Key Stage 3 National Curriculum in history and said that it offers a magnificent opportunity to address the issue of making history relevant to today's pupils. But, she said, the critical issue is how do we let pupils in on this 'secret' and how do we help them see why history matters? Ward then went on to address what is perhaps the most difficult and certainly most contentious issue of all – precisely what history do we teach? She summed this up with the questions: 'How do we give our students chronological understanding; a sound knowledge of major turning points in the past whatever they might be; and an ability to comprehend Britain's relationship with the rest of the world?' Ward firmly rejected the simple recitation of dates and advocated instead ideas put forward by her students in her upper school. She asked students which topics would most help students understand the world in which they live. Ward reported that to some extent, topics were predictable; for instance, all year groups thought the study of the 20<sup>th</sup> century important but with some innovative dimensions.

**Madge Dresser of the University of the West of England** emphasized that it is impossible to understand the present with out understanding the past. But she was also concerned about the tension between rigorous critical history and public accessibility and the fact that the latter may distort the past or even omit it altogether. In this context she spoke of the 'perils of post-modernism and public memory'.

As an example, Dresser spoke about young people's ignorance of the holocaust despite all the money that has been spent on it. She had concerns too about reinterpretation of history for political and other reasons – the dislike by some of Israeli/western policy, the dying off of last survivors + the spread of moral relativism

– stepchild of post-modernism which has also led young people to question the holocaust. In counterbalance, Dresser commented that Jewish agencies' intransigence to explore history and their current unwillingness to criticise Israel is also unhelpful in establishing a rigorous critical history. Her solution is the careful sifting of evidence and precise use of language. Thus, as an example, in considering the history of Jews in Poland, she emphasized the need to explore the diversity of Polish Jewry in much more detail with clear parallels drawn with discrimination today such as stereotypes of asylum seekers and migrant workers. Dresser said that Nazi stereotypes of Jews need challenging; for instance, the portrayal of Jews as dirty, devious and conspiratorial. There were good reasons why Jews were successful; not because of conspiracies. Likewise, the attractiveness of Nazism needs to be acknowledged – social programmes; German suffering post-war I; and the seductiveness of the Nazi aesthetic which, Dresser sees as still having an impact today in various fields including modern advertising.

Dresser then went on to describe the activities in a school in protestant, white Tennessee in exploring the Holocaust and the implications for discrimination in modern society. She had criticisms about the way gender, homosexuality and other issues were handled but overall was impressed. Finally, switching to her work in Bristol to emphasise why history matters in understanding the present, she commented that we cannot understand police/migrant relations in the 50s and 60s without understanding the underdevelopment of Jamaica, the history of slave rebellion in Jamaica, the history of land and trade union riots, and the composition of the police force, many of whom had been in colonial service in Jamaica and other islands.

**Don Henson of the British Council for Archaeology** covered both why history and archaeology matter. He commented that he spoke from deep seated anger and frustration that AQA abandoned its GCSE in archaeology and that he could persuade no one in power that archaeology actually mattered.

Henson then cited numerous reasons why archaeology matters to us in the modern world. He stressed that it is at the heart of environmental management, heritage management and conservation which is the basis of renewal in Britain's towns and cities. He also did not forget to say that archaeology and history are fun. He cited examples of archaeological and historical sites attracting many thousands of visitors to the benefit of the local region and economy; spoke of heritage railways attracting 9 million visitors, 400,000 volunteers and many societies. He commented that cathedrals generate money for localities. Henson emphasized the importance of archaeology and history as central to establishing individual and common identities.

Henson then went on to emphasise a message that is also very important for history. In having to justify archaeology over the last few years, archaeologists have had to challenge their own mindsets about what they do and why they do it. This, he said, has been incredibly valuable and its effects can be seen very widely in archaeology. Jobs in the profession now almost always have community angle - supporting local groups, providing knowledge skills, equipment and links with professional units. There is a much greater reach to wide sectors of the population –

he cited the example of people involved in metal detecting who generally come from lower socio-economic classes who would never visit a museum. However, he still felt that archaeology could do better. He said it is not successful in engaging current issues of contemporary society, for example, global warming where archaeologists have a unique perspective through excavations in peat and elsewhere. They also have a view on the impact of different farming practices over time and other influences on the environment

Finally, Henson said that history has been afraid to engage intellectually in personal, subjective, emotive narrative because this is supposedly not intellectually rigorous. He also said that the subject has been unwilling to engage overtly our political masters. He spoke of a 'loss of nerve between our joint professions – history and archaeology'. He concluded that the past does matter. Be overt; tap into the public demand for history; get pupils to create their own archives for the future. History matters because it is fundamentally about people. Without the past, people are adrift and they can't make connections with each other. It is the glue.

**Sèan** Lang of Anglia Ruskin University began by recounting a discussion with a radio presenter who, when he was at school, recognised how critical an understanding the past is for understanding the present. Yet, his teacher drained it of all life and interest with the result that he left school without knowing much about the past. He could analyse and see bias but had no overall knowledge of history – 'a great blank'. Lang said that because school history is still just a focus on a few well-trodden historical themes it is serious that pupils still leave school with patchy knowledge because there are plenty of 'unsavory characters' who are ready to fill the gaps.

Lang also had of criticism for examinations. Citing the evidence in the Historical Association's 14 – 19 study, he commented that examinations are narrow and formulaic. Content is narrow and repetitive – Hitler being only one case in point. The source analysis pupils are asked to undertake does not reflect good professional practice. Questions are not good leading to coaching to a question frame. Mark schemes are too omnipresent and too prescriptive leading to a loss in historical imagination. The best students are penalised for being historians and those who do well are mechanically minded. As a consequence, students with high A-level grades not well prepared for university history. Lang also had criticism of National Curriculum levels in history and schools' obsession with them He said that we cannot level history precisely and children do not progress along easily identifiable lines.

Lang then returned to the old skills versus content debate that raged in the 1980s. He did not enjoy the debate and thought it pointless since inevitably history has to be both content and skills. But he did say that the overemphasis on skills and the under-emphasis on content has been serious. It has undermined history's claim to a place in the curriculum because other subjects also teach parallel skills. Understanding chronology is history's one claim to uniqueness. Lang stressed that learning content does not mean just teaching facts – historical knowledge is not absorbed in this way but earning new things in different ways can be fun.

Lang finished by saying that it is critical that pupils understand the historical background to the present. The options system which prevents this is ludicrous. It is no good government departments saying history is important but then not delivering it to more than a few pupils after the age of 14.

**John Nichol** [INSERT DETAILS AND SUMMARY OF HIS CONTRIBUTION – NOT AUDIBLE ON THE CD]

## **Reports from Conference Members**

*Groups of conference members reported in slightly different styles. This has been preserved in this document.*

### **Group 1: History and Every Child Matters**

*Group Convener: Tim Bristow. The group consisted of representatives from The group consisted of representatives from primary and secondary education, university Departments of Education, Connexions Careers Service, the media, the museums sector and HMIs. Members came from all parts of the UK and also from Ireland and Korea.*

The group took the view that history matters to pupils for a range of reasons. At the heart of the Every Child Matters agenda are the needs of the child. The group took the view that all young people need to be aware of the background to the world in which they live if they are to be effective and proactive. The group also took the view that learning about history is most effective when pupils and students are actively involved in discovery. The group recognised that this approach is demanding of teachers and pupils but focuses education clearly on the needs of the learner. If this environment is created the group was confident that the Every Child Matters outcomes would be assured.

History should play a vital part in pupils' well-being.

History is critical to understanding the present. History enables children to develop their understanding of national and global events, values and beliefs. Knowing backgrounds to issues helps understanding and the formulation of effective responses.

History should become compulsory until the age of 16. If pupils are to be prepared for their future by understanding the past, education does them a disservice by not ensuring that they all have opportunities to study it.

By studying their own culture and identity the social and emotional well being of pupils is nurtured, giving pupils a sense of worth and belonging.

A study of other cultures and communities enables pupils to value and respect our differences.

History gives pupils an appreciation of their communities and local heritage. It provides pupils with opportunities to engage with the wider community outside their school.

History makes a unique contribution to pupils' future well-being by providing the opportunity to analyse critically the past. Pupils raise questions, hypothesise, interpret different sources of evidence, identify significant issues and draw conclusions from a critical analysis of the past. They develop their abilities to understand change and the bigger picture through the development of key concepts such as causation, enquiry, interpretation, chronology and empathy. These are all features of which contribute to life long learning.

Effective learning in history is promoted through activity based learning which addresses pupils' different learning styles.

- Pupils enjoy history, find visits to places of historic interest exciting and motivating and like the active nature of historical enquiries.

### **The way forward**

In order for history to make this contribution to pupils' well being the following needs to take place:

- Schools and other should review the curriculum to improve its relevance to young people. Is it focusing on useful issues, big questions, etc?
- Assessment for learning needs to focus on how pupils develop concepts and what they need to do to improve. Giving pupils levels is necessary for summative purposes but it is not the prime motive for assessment.
- Cross-curricular links are very important but assessment should not be restricted to judgments about literacy skills.
- If teachers are to help pupils then changes in initial teacher training and continual professional development are required. Smarter use of time on ITT programmes and induction years is required to train and support trainee teachers. There needs to be more professional development opportunities for existing teachers to develop their knowledge and skills in teaching history.
- The history curriculum needs to be rooted in the local community to ensure that pupils are motivated and see the value of history. Teachers require more support in developing local history units to meet the needs and interests of their school populations.

- A stronger more meaningful long term relationship needs to be developed between schools and outside agencies, for example heritage sites, so that learning opportunities are exploited and go beyond the traditional school trip. Whilst we appreciate that the care and safety of pupils is paramount, perceived barriers like the bureaucratic demand for risk assessments need to become more realistic.
- Approaches to teaching should be pupil-centered. This establishes strong relationships with pupils that foster respect, self esteem, collaborative learning and values all learners.
- Pupil-centered learning focuses on the needs of learners and differentiates learning in terms of personal background, ability and learning style.
- The approach looks beyond the classroom in order to provide enrichment for pupils.

## **Group 2: How can history be made significant to all ages and abilities?**

*Group Convener: Michael Maddison. The group consisted of representatives from primary, secondary and further education, history teachers, heads of history, governors, HMIs, and representatives from English Heritage and the Royal Palaces. Members came from all parts of the UK and also from Greece, India, Ireland and Portugal.*

It was extremely fortunate that this break-out group included a variety of different experiences and backgrounds for this mix brought breadth and depth to the discussions. As a result it is only to be expected that such a group of individuals would express a range of views and opinions on the topic under discussion. Nevertheless there was a considerable amount of agreement and common ground on both the wishes and the concerns voiced by colleagues round the table. This was an engaging discussion and although no final conclusions were drawn certain key points did emerge during the course of the two days.

Although there was much discussion about the question we had been set, there was strong agreement that history had an important place in the education of all young people irrespective of their age or ability.

For the purpose of this conference 'all ages' was taken to refer to young people between the ages of 4 and 19. Nevertheless there was recognition that history was important in lifelong learning. It was extremely popular for large numbers of people beyond school age as evidenced, for example, by the plethora of historical material now being produced in television programmes, by the increasing number of visitors to historical sites around the country and by the growth of interest in genealogy and family history. Furthermore, in relation to the question, there was a strong belief that history must be inclusive for all irrespective of religion, race or culture, let alone age or ability.

It is not surprising that the meaning and implication of the word 'significance' led to much discussion and especially in relation to the crucial linked question: significant for whom? One could argue over whether significant was the right word or whether it should be replaced by relevant or meaningful. The point - and there was broad agreement on this - is that history should be significant, relevant and meaningful not least in terms of what is taught but also in relation to how it is taught and to whom it is taught. The key is to ensure that a broad curriculum framework is in place which sets down specific principles and parameters. Within this framework teachers would have some freedom to select specific topics which would allow them to meet the needs of the young people who attended that school. So government should set the broad outline of the curriculum but teachers should determine the detail. What is so important, though, is that the history curriculum has to be fit for purpose.

There was no doubt that history should and could be made significant to all young people of all ages and abilities. There was strong feeling that history should not be optional at 14 but that all young people should study history as part of their KS4 curriculum. There was concern at the prospect of historical topics being included in a revised citizenship programme for 15 and 16 year olds. Group members agreed that there is clearly an important historical dimension to citizenship and therefore there were no objections in principle. However, there was concern about practical issues - the need to provide progression from history and citizenship in KS3 and coherence with current GCSE history courses.

In terms of overriding principles, the history curriculum should equip young people with the knowledge, skills and understanding to explore their own identity as well as the identities of others. In this way the history curriculum has to recognise diversity. Teaching should help young people develop their ability to appraise critically the past, make sense of the present and prepare them for adult life.

The curriculum should have a balance of themes and periods which would encourage curiosity and inquisitiveness. It should help young people to think. The history curriculum should be flexible enough to allow young people to return to topics at different stages in their schooling. In this way learning will be reinforced and not forgotten, coherence can be made clear and not vague and progression can be planned and not haphazard. Young people should consider the evidence, ask questions, analyse interpretations, draw conclusions and make judgments but they must also be exposed to the 'big picture' and the 'story' of the past. There must be a history which is significant to them because it explores local, national and international dimensions. It should give young people 'roots' by providing for them a clear and coherent chronological framework. This will allow them to know and understand the society in which they live and to locate themselves within their local setting and within the bigger national and international settings.

Through study of the past young people are given the opportunity to develop their ideas, their views and their own sense of what is fair and just so that they can become confident and responsible citizens. At a time when social cohesion is a major political focus, the case that history is highly significant for all is overwhelming.



There was wide recognition that the success of any history curriculum depended on the skills of individual history teachers. Their work in making history significant for all, though, is not helped by such concerns as inadequate time on the timetable, inadequate resources and the limitations placed in some schools on fieldwork visits. Nevertheless there is much optimism, much willingness and much success as is evidenced by the fact that a record number of young people took history GCSEs in 2006 with nearly a quarter of a million entries. It was felt, though, that greater opportunities for continuous professional development were essential for teachers to ensure that they had the skills to be more flexible in the way in which they deliver the requirements of the curriculum at all key stages.

Training and guidance could also help teachers review their approach to assessment with the intention of ensuring that it tests what young people know, understand and can do, and reinforces their learning. It would also help them to appreciate the significance of what they had studied as well as its significance to them!

### **Group 3: Britishness and Citizenship: History and how should they be taught?**

*Group Convener: Fiona Kisby. The group consisted of representatives from secondary education, university departments of history and education, the museums sector, the media, the QCA, History Today, the National Council on Archives, The National Archives, the Prince of Wales Summer Schools and HMIs. Members came from all parts of the UK and also from Ireland.*

The group decided to set aside issues of *could* or *should* citizenship be taught and any reservations that people might have had about these issues. Instead, we sought to focus on how it might be possible to deliver the citizenship curriculum in a way which:

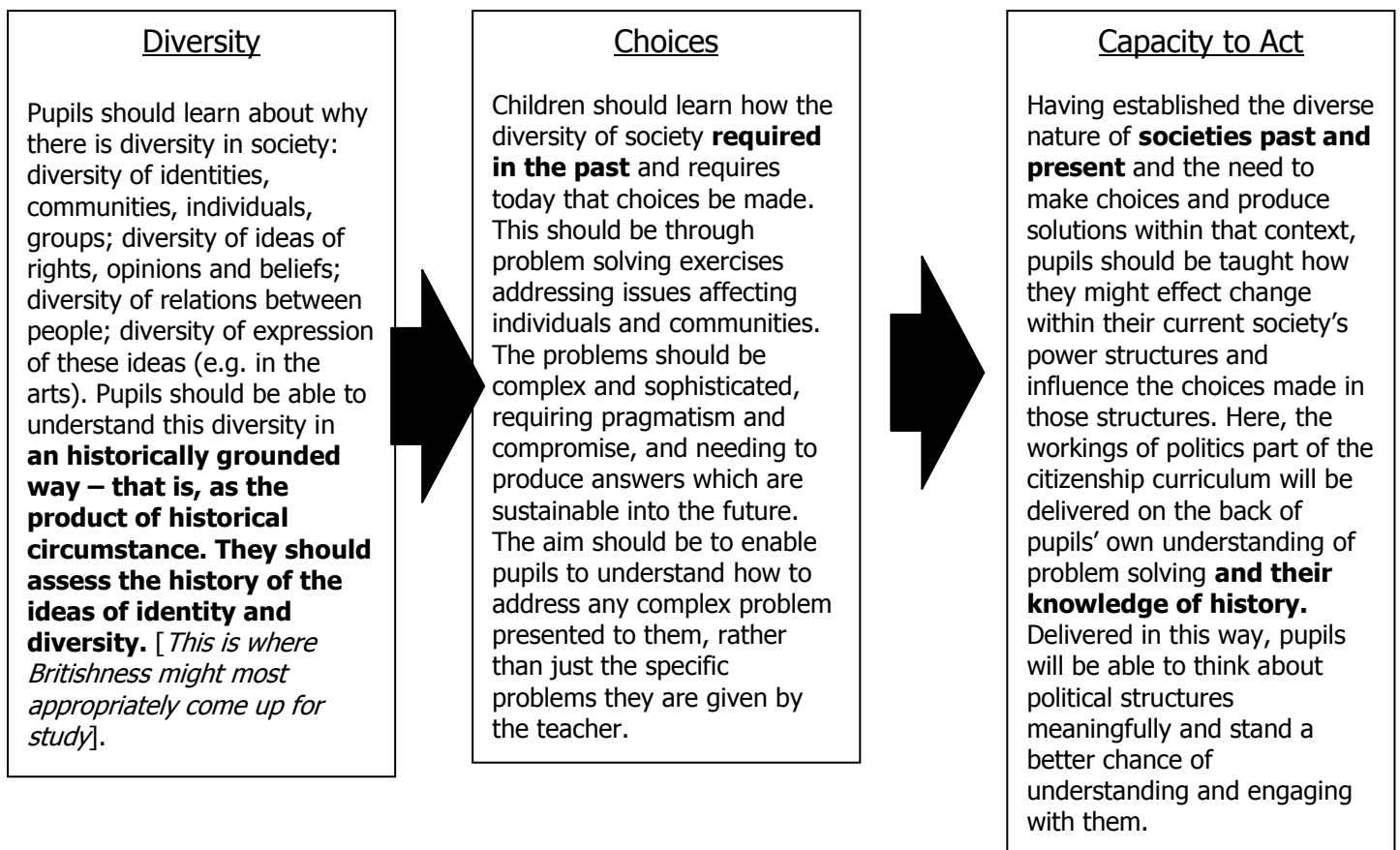
- used history to help understanding but did not pose a threat to the integrity of history teaching, and
- which would ensure that children came away from citizenship with some form of meaningful understanding about the issues selected for study given the research evidence on how children learn.

We resolved that to ensure that the first bullet was satisfied, that citizenship should not be delivered through history and should occupy its own curriculum time but that it should draw upon the knowledge, skills and conceptual understandings which are at the heart of a fully rounded history education - an understanding of evidence, historical accounts, change and continuity, and so on.

To satisfy the second bullet, we felt that it would be unproductive to create citizenship lessons as purely civics lessons: how a law is passed, how your local council works. Learning by rote such facts will not work given how dull such a lesson might be. Instead we set out an end goal of enabling young people to be participants in their learning, discovering and participating in citizenship supported by history.

We established three pillars upon which this understanding could be built, which would include all the requirements laid out in the citizenship National Curriculum, and we felt it stood the best chance of producing something meaningful for young people. It is described in the table which follows:

## History and Active Citizenship in an Open Society



### Group 4: School History and Academic History

**How should they relate?**

**How can progression from school history to HE be achieved?**

*Group Convener:* **Barbara Hibbert, Harrogate Grammar School**

*The group consisted of representatives from representatives from secondary education, university departments of history and education, Edexcel and HMIs. Members came from all parts of the UK and also from Ireland and Portugal.*

The group believes that history is an essential component in the education of every child and that a good history education from the ages of 5 – 21 helps create informed and questioning citizens. New elements of the history curriculum can maintain the essentials of the discipline while also delivering important outcomes of initiatives such as the 'Every Child Matters' agenda. Though history is not citizenship as such it can engender vitally important values that underpin citizenship such as emphasising the importance of disciplined inquiry and not generalising from false premises based on inadequate evidence; the subject is the only rational way of finding out about the past, including our own past and identity, of acquiring important concepts as tools to explain rationally how things have come to be the way they are.

We believe that history teaching and learning at all levels would be strengthened by greater dialogue between the different sectors. Whilst recognising the existence of much good practice we want to see it easily accessible to all, rather than being in isolated pockets.

It was recognised that history education begins at primary level and that the academic value of primary teachers should not be undervalued.

At HE level there was a perceived need for greater reflection on the pedagogy of the subject and recognition and knowledge of the prior attainment of the students.

A big concern was the marginalisation of history in the school curriculum with the danger of the subject becoming the new Latin. It was felt that the universities have a role to play in giving the subject a national profile.

### **Curriculum Development**

The loss of university input into exam boards was regretted and there was a belief that incentives were needed to reinstate it. Exam boards should be encouraged to seek links with academics to ensure quality control through validation from current practice, both in terms of curriculum development and assessment. The diversity and variety of the subject at HE level needs to be reflected in the school curriculum at GCSE level and beyond, as it is a major part of the excitement of the discipline. Coherence and chronology to be laid down at an early stage.

Innovative A levels such as London Syllabus E and Cambridge History Project are now lost, but history is a dynamic subject, focusing on research and this should be reflected in the history curriculum at all levels. While many teachers achieve this whatever the overt requirements of the curriculum it needs to be embedded so that it is the default position for all teachers.

### **Transition issues**

Starting university is a transitional period for students and it would be wrong to expect them to arrive at university fully formed. Nevertheless issues about the nature of the discipline and necessary study skills could be addressed in schools, to ease the transition and enable greater progression, while recognising the significant intellectual leap at university.

Universities need greater awareness of what happens in schools and other A level providing institutions to help develop more effective induction programmes. These programmes need to make expectations clear. Students are used to more contact time in schools and can have misunderstandings about expectations in HE.

Students arrive at university with widely differing experiences both in the form of the nature of the institution attended and their previous educational experiences. Those who had completed a personal study had experiences of serious research, those who had taken IB had been on a linear rather than modular course. The personal study was applauded as providing a good foundation for higher level study.

Students of history in HE need to be independent rather than spoonfed and to be able to read, make notes and construct coherent arguments. They need familiarity with books and a range of resources and to be able to read with discrimination. These are skills which could be better developed at school if the examination system required them. Once at university students need to be self-motivated and take responsibility for using the available support systems.

Students in higher education are taught by tutors who are writing history and this led to an understanding of the nature of creating history which was usually missing at a lower level. The danger is that this understanding might be lost as more teaching is undertaken by postgraduate students.

### **Progression**

There are some positive issues on progression. It is already possible to trace the understanding of interpretation through from 5 to post 18. While some knowledge of prior attainment is useful there was also recognition of the need for a fresh start at certain stages, and the identification of progression in history as not necessarily linear. The most significant difference was that the further a student gets the less certain history becomes.

### **Assessment**

There was regret at the loss of the contribution of professional historians to examining. It was felt it was incumbent on exam boards to seek links with academics to ensure that the subject at GCSE and A level had integrity with recent development in universities as a means of quality control. Academics needed incentives in the form of career progression and recognition for such contact.

External examinations at school level are often formulaic and do not reflect the diversity and variety of the subject. Different methods of examining at all levels need to be explored and trust in school teachers needs to be regained.

The exam system was seen as an obstacle to good teaching at school level.

### **Enrichment**

There is much excellent work through widening participation initiatives, the Sutton Trust, Villiers Park, and outreach from universities. This needs to be embedded so that all students have access. Ideas included virtual academies and distance learning, such as Oxford's web-based discussion form 'HOTS' and the HA's online 'centenary debates', as well as 'taster days' and essay competitions. A mechanism to publicise such initiatives is needed.

## **CPD**

CPD is an important interface between academic and school history and would benefit all sectors. Subject specific CPD in schools is vitally important in updating the subject knowledge and expertise of teachers. This needs to be part of quality control measures to assess a school's effectiveness. B.Ed. students might have given up the subject in year 1 of their courses. They then teach half the National Curriculum in history. Universities need a pedagogical as well as a research focus if their students are to progress as they should. Recent developments such as the HE Academy Subject Centre for History and the growing literature on the improvement of the quality of teaching at university are helping to focus more attention on this issue.

Regional events would generate a professional dialogue between sectors. Sabbaticals in which teachers are able to 'do' history would improve the standards of teaching and through this student interface with the nature of the subject.

The key driver would be adequate funding at both ends, so that teachers can get cover to get out of the classroom and HE can integrate such work in the career path of HE lecturers. Senior management in HE needs to value this in terms of recruitment and retention of students as well as staff development.

## **Research needs**

Existing research into transition between school and university need wider dissemination and needs to be extended. Other areas for further research include induction at various levels and how pupils think as they progress through a history education. There needs to be more understanding of what happens to students at university and the variety of experience they have. There is a need for universities to understand what is happening in schools and for what works in schools to be identified so that year 1 of HE can then be used as a proper transition period. There is little work on pedagogy and learning post 18, for example on how students approach problems, training in adult learning or how undergraduates learn. There is a need to find out why students drop out of their courses early as well as find out what successful students have found most valuable.

## Conclusions

As we have already indicated, conference delegates came from the broad sweep of people linked to history education. The potential for disagreement was therefore substantial. In the end, there was agreement.

- Above all, delegates agreed that history in the school curriculum does matter. More than any other subject, it helps pupils of all abilities to understand how the past has shaped the present. It helps explain our values, beliefs, the way we do things, our mistakes and our successes.
- There was agreement that it makes a unique contribution to pupils' sense of worth, capacity to value and respect differences and understanding of local, national and global events. It has the potential combat prejudice of all kinds by making clear what has happened in the past. History supports citizenship education because it enables pupils to understand how the world has come to be the way it is. It also inculcates the questioning attitudes essential to mature adult life.
- While the teaching of 'Britishness' is extremely difficult and carries with it many dangers, history is of fundamental importance to understanding personal and national identity.

But delegates also agreed that there needs to be better links between historians:

- Strong, meaningful, long-term relationships need to be developed between schools and outside agencies, such as heritage sites and museums.
- Links between schools and higher education should be rebuilt, encouraged and developed.
- The transition from school to university needs to be better understood. There is a need for universities to understand better what is happening in schools.

And the fact that delegates acknowledged Every Child Matters as the basis for the history curriculum was also significant. School history as opposed to history generally has multiple jobs. Not only does it have to be good history, it also has to contribute to Every Child Matters aims of preparing young people for their future. It has to history for young people's sake, not history for history's sake.

The universal view was that 'good' history with its integrity preserved does matter. It is up to everyone to recognize it, assure its place in the school curriculum and ensure that it remains responsive to the needs of the pupils and students it serves.