**The new Primary History Curriculum (whisper it) is really good**

A copy of the New National Curriculum can be downloaded from the DfE website.

The history programmes of study have been the most controversial aspect of the curriculum review process. The current draft document, which is likely to become law in August with some minor revisions, is very different from the draft history curriculum published in February. These changes are likely to be welcomed by primary school teachers.

In reviewing the changes from the current National Curriculum, published in 2000, I’ve found it useful, in terms of trying to understand the differences and implications for planning and teaching, to examine both programmes of study side-by-side.

After having read through both documents it is striking how similar they are in their aims, although the content at KS.2 has some significant differences.

**History – Programmes of Study**

**Key Stage 1**

**Key Stage 1: Purpose & Aims**

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| **Curriculum 2000** | **New Curriculum** | **Differences** |
| **Chronological understanding** – place events & objects in chronological order | - Know where people & events fit within chronological framework  -Develop an awareness of the past & passing of time | Small change in the need for children to develop more awareness of time. |
| **Vocabulary** – use common words & phrases relating to passing of time | - Use wide vocabulary of everyday historical terms | No change |
| **Processes –** recognise why people did things, why events happened & results | - Use parts of stories & other sources to show that they know & understand key features | This seems a small change, emphasising more the use of stories |
| **Differences** – between ways of life at different times | - Similarities & differences | No change |
| **Representation** – identify different ways the past is represented | - Some of the ways the past is represented | No Change |
| **Historical Enquiry –** use a range of different sources of information | - Understand some of the ways we find out about the past | No change |
| **Questioning –** ask & answer questions about the past | - Ask & answer questions | No change |
| **Communicate –** Select from knowledge of history & communicate in a variety of ways |  | This is not expressed explicitly in KS.1 but is one of the programmes of study main aims |

**KS.1 Breadth of Study**

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| **Curriculum 2000** | **New Curriculum** | **Differences** |
| **Changes –** own lives, family & others | - Changes within living memory, reveal aspects of change in national life | Small change in emphasis towards national events |
| **Ways of life –** people in the past, local or national | - Significant historical events, people and places in their own locality. | No change |
| **Significant people –** from history of Britain or world**–** for example, artists, engineers, explorers, inventors, pioneers, rulers, saints, scientists | - Lives of significant individuals in the past who have contributed to national and international achievements.  e.g. Elizabeth I and Queen Victoria, Christopher Columbus and Neil Armstrong, William Caxton and Tim Berners-Lee, Pieter Bruegel the Elder and LS Lowry, Rosa Parks and Emily Davison, Mary Seacole and Edith Cavell | The new curriculum is more specific and offers a longer list. But is not prescriptive, the choice remains with schools. |
| **Past events –** from history of Britain or world**–** for example, events such as the Gunpowder Plot, the Olympic Games other events that are commemorated | - Events beyond living memory that are significant nationally or globally e.g. the Great Fire of London, the first aeroplane flight or events commemorated through festivals or anniversaries | Small changes. |

**Implications for KS.1**

Displayed like this it is obvious the new curriculum will represent very little change for the teaching of history at Key Stage 1.

Note: the suggested examples for studying significant people and past events are non-prescriptive.

**Key Stage 2**

Not surprisingly there are more changes between the purpose and aims at Key Stage 2, but maybe not as many as you might think.

**Key Stage 2: Purpose & Aims**

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| **Curriculum 2000** | **New Curriculum** | **Differences** |
| **Chronological understanding** – events, people & changes in correct periods of time | - Develop a chronologically secure knowledge and understanding | No change |
| **Vocabulary** – use dates, passing of time, incl. ancient, modern etc | - Develop the appropriate use of historical terms | No change |
| **Features of the past –** of periods & societies, incl ideas, beliefs, attitudes & experiences | - Know and understand significant aspects of history: nature of ancient civilisations; expansion & dissolution empires; characteristic features of past non-European societies; achievements & follies of mankind | The aims for the new curriculum are taken from the over aims of history PoS & include KS3. There does seem a shift in emphasis here, but the difference relies on interpretation of ‘aspects’ & ‘nature’, both terms are ambiguous. |
| **Diversity** – social, cultural, religious & ethnic | - Gain historical perspective by placing their growing knowledge into different contexts | This is a significant difference, the new curriculum putting much less emphasis on diversity. Although, again, it would seem to be a matter of interpretation. ‘Contexts’ is a very wide term. |
| **Causes** – identify & describe reasons for & against historical events, situations & changes | - …questions about change, cause, similarity and difference, and significance | No change |
| **Links –** describe & make links between events, situations etc | - Note connections, contrasts and trends over time  - Establishing clear narratives within and across periods of study | Little change, although the new curriculum does put a welcome emphasis on narrative in both KS1 & KS2 |
| **Historical interpretation –** Recognise the past is represented & interpreted in diff ways | - Understand how our knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources and that different versions of past events may exist, giving some reasons for this. | No change |
| **Historical Enquiry –** find out about the past using diff media | - Understand the methods of historical enquiry, how evidence is used to make historical claims, & discern how & why contrasting arguments & interpretations of the past have been constructed | No change |
| **Questioning –** ask & answer questions, select & record information | - Regularly address and sometimes devise historically valid questions | There is a small change in emphasis here with the introduction of the word ‘sometimes’ |
| **Organise –** Recall, select & organise information | - Construct informed responses that involve thoughtful selection and organisation of relevant historical information | No change |
| **Communicate –** Communicate knowledge & understanding in a variety of ways | - Make connections, draw contrasts, analyse trends, frame historically-valid questions and create their own structured accounts, including written narratives and analyses | No change |

The really noticeable changes are in the units of study.

**KS.2 Breadth of Study**

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| **Curriculum 2000** | **New Curriculum** | **Differences** |
| **Overview -** During the key stage, pupils should be taught the Knowledge, skills and understanding through: a local history study; three British history studies; a European history study; a world history study | **Overview** - In planning teachers should combine overview & depth studies to help pupils understand both the long arc of development and the complexity of specific aspects of the content. | There is a shift here towards understanding how history ‘fits together’ & events from one time period affect another. However, there is no requirement to teach the different areas of study chronologically (see below). |
| **1. Local history study-** A study investigating how an aspect in the local area has changed over a long period of time, or how the locality was affected by a significant national or local event or development or by the work of a significant individual. | **1. A local history study** For example:  - a depth study linked to one of the British areas of study listed below  - a study over time tracing how several aspects national history are reflected in the locality (this can go beyond 1066)  - a study of an aspect of history or a site dating from a period beyond 1066 that is significant in the locality. | Little change.  However, it is worth noting in the new curriculum the local history study can be incorporated with one of the other history studies as a depth study, effectively making it possible to reduce the number of history studies in KS.2 to 8. |
|  | **2. Changes in Britain from the Stone Age to the Iron Age**  This could include:  - late Neolithic hunter-gatherers and early farmers, e.g. Skara Brae - Bronze Age religion, technology and travel, e.g. Stonehenge - Iron Age hill forts: tribal kingdoms, farming, art and culture | This is entirely new. |
| **2. Romans, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings in Britain -** study of how British society was shaped by the movement & settlement of different peoples in the period before the Norman Conquest & an in-depth study of how British society was affected by:  - Roman  - or Anglo-Saxon  - or Viking settlement. | **3. Roman Empire and its impact on Britain** This could include:  - Julius Caesar’s attempted invasion in 55-54 BC  - the Roman Empire by AD 42 and the power of its army  - successful invasion by Claudius and conquest, including Hadrian’s Wall  - British resistance, e.g. Boudica  - “Romanisation” of Britain: sites such as Caerwent and the impact of technology, culture and beliefs, including early Christianity | Although there was always a choice between studying the Romans, Anglo-Saxon and Vikings, many schools chose to teach all three.  Note, the content is only suggested & is not too dissimilar to the examples of study for the Romans in Curriculum 2000. |
|  | **4. Britain’s settlement by Anglo-Saxons and Scots** This could include:  Roman withdrawal from Britain in c. AD 410 and the fall of the western Roman Empire  Scots invasions from Ireland to north Britain (now Scotland)  Anglo-Saxon invasions, settlements and kingdoms: place names and  village life  Anglo-Saxon art and culture  Christian conversion – Canterbury, Iona and Lindisfarne | The Anglo-Saxon and Viking Studies (along with the Romans) have now become a required part of the KS.2 curriculum. Presumably so children don’t leave primary without studying them.  Anglo-Saxon history has been divided into two separate studies – before and after Alfred the Great and the creation of the kingdom of England.  Presumably schools can choose to teach the two areas at different times in KS2. |
|  | **5. Viking and Anglo-Saxon struggle for the Kingdom of England to the time of Edward the Confessor**  This could include:  - Viking raids and invasion - resistance by Alfred the Great and Athelstan, first king of England - further Viking invasions and Danegeld - Anglo-Saxon laws and justice - Edward the Confessor and his death in 1066 |  |
| **3. Victorian Britain or Britain since 1930 -** Teachers can choose between:  **Victorian Britain**  A study of the impact of significant individuals, events and changes in work and transport on the lives of men, women and children from different sections of society  **Britain since 1930**  A study of the impact of the Second World War or social and technological changes that have taken place since 1930, on the lives of men, women and children from different sections of society. | **6. A study** of an aspect or theme in **British history** extends chronological knowledge **beyond 1066** For example:  - the changing power of monarchs using case studies such as John, Anne and Victoria  - changes in an aspect of social history, such as crime and punishment from the Anglo-Saxons to the present or leisure and entertainment in the 20th Century  - the legacy of Greek or Roman culture (art, architecture or literature) on later periods in British history, including the present day  - a significant turning point in British history, e.g. the first railways or the Battle of Britain | I’ve put the Victorians and Britain since 1930 together with this study because although they are far from an exact match there is some similarity.  This unit seems a very exciting opportunity for schools to spread their wings in KS.2 and offers an opportunity for exploring a wide diversity of different areas. |
| **4. A world history study-** A study of the key features, including the everyday lives of men, women and children, of a past society selected from: Ancient Egypt, Ancient Sumer, the Assyrian Empire, the Indus Valley, the Maya, Benin, or the Aztecs. | **7.** The achievements of the **earliest civilizations** – an overview of where and when the first civilizations appeared and a depth study of one of the following: Ancient Sumer; The Indus Valley; Ancient Egypt; The Shang Dynasty of Ancient China | Ancient Egypt is back! That should please most schools. Although it is, (as it has always been), only one of a list of different options. |
| **5. Britain and the wider world in Tudor times -** study of some significant events and individuals, including Tudor monarchs, who shaped this period and of the everyday lives of men, women & children from different sections of society. | **8. A non-European society** - one study chosen from:  - Early Islamic civilization, c. AD 900;  - Mayan civilization c. AD 900;  - Benin c. AD 900-1300. | The Tudors are gone (unless you choose to teach them in the local history study or Britain Beyond 1066). In their place is a second non-European study. I suspect this is going to be the most difficult for schools to resource and plan. |
| **6. A European history study-** A study of **Ancient Greece** and the influence of their civilization. | **9. Ancient Greece** – a study of Greek life and achievements and their influence on the western world | No change |

**Implications for KS.2**

* Some of the units are familiar and schools will find they have the necessary resources and teaching expertise. Others are going to need new resource; the ‘non-European society’ is probably the most challenging in this regard.
* It is very interesting that the authors of the new curriculum decided to split the study of Anglo-Saxon history into two units. This puts a great deal more focus on this period than in the past. In my experience age-appropriate books on the Anglo-Saxons do not contain the kinds of information the new curriculum requires and teachers who find themselves teaching these units may need to make a lot of their own information resources.
* At KS.2 the new curriculum involves a considerable increase in content, from six to nine units. However:
  + The local history unit can be combined with another unit to reduce the overall number to eight.
  + And, significantly, the overview of the new curriculum makes it clear not all units have to be studied to the same depth: “In planning teachers should combine overview & depth studies”. The definition of ‘overview’ and ‘depth’ has serious implications for curriculum design and classroom study time and schools will probably want clarification on this matter from the DfE.
* There was a suggestion during the consultation period that schools would be required to teach the history curriculum chronologically, this has been dropped. However, it would seem to make obvious sense to teach the Pre-history unit, the Roman Britain unit and the two Anglo-Saxon units sequentially and fit the other units in around them. (I’ve made a suggestion of how this might be done as a history curriculum map for KS.2).
* Teaching the history curriculum sequentially will be challenging in mixed-age classes. What’s new?

**Some thoughts on the new history curriculum**

Despite many people’s fears the new history curriculum is not nearly as prescriptive, content-laden or Anglocentric as the original draft suggested it might be. It seems the outcry had its effect and the people in the secret committees at the DfE had second thoughts. All of which is welcome. As I hope the tables demonstrate, in terms of purposes and aims, the two programmes of study are very similar. Enquiry is still included; questioning, interrogating, organising and communicating are still considered important historical study skills; and knowledge *and* understanding are still at the centre of what we want to achieve.

It is a relief to see that rote learning and regurgitating dates, monarchs and battles has not become the prescribed pedagogy, although the new curriculum rightly stresses the importance of chronological understanding, coherent knowledge and placing the students’ growing historical understanding into different contexts.

If we were to search for clues as to how the history curriculum is be best taught (as there is no prescribed method) then it is worth analysing the following paragraph from subject’s purpose of study:

“A high-quality history education will help pupils gain a coherent knowledge and understanding of Britain’s past and that of the wider world. It should:

* Inspire pupils’ curiosity to know more about the past.
* Equip pupils to ask perceptive questions, think critically, weigh evidence, sift arguments, and develop perspective and judgement.
* Help pupils to understand the complexity of people’s lives, the process of change, the diversity of societies and relationships between different groups, as well as their own identity and the challenges of their time.”