



FURTHER BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In March 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) announced plans to create a ‘model history curriculum’. The announcement was part of the Inclusive Britain Strategy which was itself a response to the action points of the much-criticised (Ford, 2022a) Sewell Report (2021).

Action 57 in the Inclusive Britain Strategy states:

To help pupils understand the intertwined nature of British and global history, and their own place within it, the DfE will work with history curriculum experts, historians and school leaders to develop a Model History curriculum by 2024 that will stand as an exemplar for a knowledge-rich, coherent approach to the teaching of history.

(HM Government, 2022, p.29)

A ‘model history curriculum’ group was convened in response to this report, though the members of this group, and the process by which they were selected remained undisclosed.

Highlighting the need to make the history curriculum more diverse and inclusive is not new. Similar calls for curriculum reform can be found in the Rampton Report (1981) and Swann Report (1985), as well as in the Macpherson Report (1999). However, in all of these instances, the assumption was that individual schools would need to consider how best to respond. What was new in this instance was the idea of creating an actual model curriculum which could be enacted directly in schools.

The idea of having a model curriculum for history was not new in 2022. The former Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, had trailed the concept during his time in office, and had enacted the same in a number of subjects. For instance, March 2021 saw the publication of a controversial “model curriculum” for Music.

Notably, neither Gibb nor Sewell acknowledge the role played by the curriculum reforms of 2013-4 which actively shifted the National Curriculum towards a narrower, ‘traditional’, nationalistic narrative. It is notable that, since 2014, many schools have shifted towards this narrowed vision of history education as a cultural capital via ‘Our Island Story’ (Ford, 2022b).

COMMUNITY RESPONSES

Between March and April 2022, Schools History Project (SHP) conducted a survey of Primary and Secondary history teachers and teacher educators, exploring their views on the plan to have a single, DfE created ‘model history curriculum’. Over 260 people responded to the survey, which revealed a number of serious reservations about the idea (Ford, 2022a).

The first set of questions asked teachers to consider the potential risks or benefits of a DfE created ‘model history curriculum’. In no instance did more than 50% of respondents feel that the potential benefits of a ‘model history curriculum’ outweigh the risks. In some instances, the perceived benefits fell below 25% of respondents.



A summary of some of the key responses is given below:

Statement	Benefits outweigh the risks (%)
A single 'model curriculum' will lead to specific CPD to improve teacher knowledge in those areas	45%
A single model curriculum might encourage some schools to broaden and diversify their offering	41%
That a 'knowledge-rich' focus might allow for a greater emphasis on learning more diverse content in more depth	41%
A single 'model curriculum' will potentially reduce teacher workload	36%
A single 'model curriculum' is likely to attract textbook publishers	35%
A single 'model curriculum' makes it easier to see and refine a gold standard in curriculum	27%
A DfE funded group will ensure backing and adoption of the curriculum model in schools	19%

The second set of questions asked respondents to consider their levels of concern in relation to specific aspects of the 'model history curriculum'. Significant concerns were raised in relation to a number of aspects, notably in relation to the selection of the 'model history curriculum' steering group and the potential impact of a single DfE approved 'model history curriculum'.

Potential areas of concern	Concerned / very concerned (%)
That there is no model for how the curriculum writing group will be selected	93%
That the curriculum group will be chosen by the DfE	91%
That there will be a single 'model curriculum'	88%
That the 'model curriculum' will focus more on a nationally positive story rather than recognising past injustices	83%
That the 'model curriculum' may narrow local diversity in curriculum design	82%
That the 'model curriculum' may be supported by a single textbook/online resource	78%
That the 'model curriculum' may follow a 'cultural capital' or 'knowledge rich' approach in line with current DfE thinking	52%

In addition to the concerns outlined above, a significant number of respondents raised concerns in 'free comments' about the risk of creating a defacto curriculum standard which other schools would be expected to follow, as well as the potential de-professionalising impact of removing curriculum thinking from individual schools and history departments.

In essence, respondents were concerned that an unknown group had been selected to create a single exemplar curriculum, based on a narrow range of voices, with both DfE and Ofsted support, which might in turn restrict teacher freedoms to design curricula suitable for their contexts and choose pedagogies most appropriate for delivering these. In short there was significant concerns that the 'model history curriculum' risked marginalising teacher expertise and de-professionalising departments.

The subsequent publication of the terms of reference for the 'model history curriculum' (DfE, 2022) did little to assuage these fears. Questions around the selection criteria for the curriculum writing group were not properly addressed. In addition, the terms of reference placed a lot of emphasis on the selection and sequencing of a body of knowledge, suggesting the creation of a single route for pupils to take through the history curriculum, at the



expense of more responsive child and context centred approaches to curriculum construction (DfE, 2022).

In response to the above, SHP and Nick Dennis convened a meeting of history teachers and other related persons to discuss the issues and challenges. This meeting, and the subsequent discussions led to the creation of SHP Curriculum PATHS (Principled Alternatives for Teaching History in Schools).

THE CREATION OF SHP CURRICULUM PATHS

SHP Curriculum PATHS was first formed in Summer 2022. Curriculum PATHS set out with the explicit aim to meet the call to ‘help pupils understand the intertwined nature of British and global history, and their own place within it’ (Inclusive Britain Strategy, 2022, p.29). However, Curriculum PATHS started from the premise that the power to improve history teaching for children resides in harnessing the work of the community of history educators, rather than through centrally directed curriculum planning.

Discussions held between the 300 plus contributors to the Curriculum PATHS group during 2022 and 2023 led to a broad consensus on some key issues:

1. The importance of having a broad, inclusive and well-constructed curriculum for all young people.
2. The professional and ethical problems associated with having a single model curriculum.
3. The limits of a curriculum based mainly in the concept of logical content sequencing.
4. The professional and ethical benefits of having multiple curriculum examples of curriculum construction and how these might empower teachers to find solutions for their own settings and contexts.
5. The moral and academic case for having a framework of ethical principles, which meet the ambitions of the National Curriculum but also speak to wider societal needs, to shape curriculum decisions.
6. The role of inclusive curricula as part of the safeguarding agenda in schools, especially in relation to inclusion and tackling racism.

Recognising the concerns raised about the creation of the ‘model history curriculum’ group, Curriculum PATHS has been an open and democratic group from the outset. In Summer 2023, the first Curriculum PATHS Council was elected from the initial membership. In September 2023, the Council drafted its Constitution, which was then ratified by the membership in October 2023.

The Curriculum PATHS Constitution outlines the following core aims:

1. Recognise and draw on the excellent curriculum-level work already being done by history educators in their school contexts.
2. Empower teachers by developing a framework of Ethical Principles for ethical curriculum design, to support the framing of curricular rationales, and guiding curriculum design and development at a departmental level.
3. Be accountable to the community by establishing a democratic process creating and reviewing this framework, drawing on expertise from across the sector.
4. Provide multiple examples of curriculum models, rooted in Curriculum PATHS principles, which could be adapted for specific contexts.
5. Offer suggestions for resourcing (especially free options) to support teachers in adapting curriculum constructions for their own contexts.
6. Develop a network to collect and share curriculum constructions.



A core part of the work of Curriculum PATHS is the creation and maintenance of a set of core Ethical Principles for curriculum construction, which aim to provide a guide to teachers in creating and sharing a plurality of curriculum options and pathways. The Ethical Principles are outlined in the next part of this document.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

The (CPC) met formally on 7 November 2023 to discuss the creation of the Ethical Principles. At this meeting it was agreed that the Ethical Principles for curriculum construction needed to be justifiable and defensible outside of particular ideologies. The CPC therefore chose to focus on a range of nationally and internationally agreed upon definitions of a meaningful education. The items referred to were chosen for one or more of the following reasons:

- They hold a specific status in international law.
- They are documents drawn up by a diverse range of contributors and agreed upon nationally, or internationally.
- They are documents which have significantly shaped the direction of Education in the United Kingdom

The documents consulted included:

- UNDHR - The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- UNCRC - The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- General Comment 1 - The Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Comment 1 (2001)
- UNDRIP - The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)

In addition to these internationally agreed definitions, the CPC also consulted a range of relevant work on the purposes of history education in particular. These included, but were not limited to:

- A New Look at History (1976)
- The Schools History Project Principles (2008)
- Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and Standards (2018)
- Knowing History in Schools (2021)
- Aotearoa New Zealand's histories in the New Zealand Curriculum (2023)

These documents were all used to inform discussions around the creation of the Ethical Principles contained in this document. Appendix A contains a summary of how the various documents shaped the discussions and thinking which led to the creation of the Ethical Principles in this document.

Between January and April 2024, the Ethical Principles were refined through discussion and review by critical friends. The final Ethical Principles in this document are now ready to be presented to the Curriculum PATHS membership for ratification.

Once the Ethical Principles have been ratified, they will form a core part of the work of Curriculum PATHS, by underpinning the aims set out in the introduction.



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