

# Petitions Committee and Women and Equalities Committee

## Oral evidence: Black history and cultural diversity in the curriculum, HC 893

Thursday 5 November 2020

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Members present: Catherine McKinnell (Chair); Tonia Antoniazzi; Apsana Begum; Elliot Colburn; Chris Evans; Katherine Fletcher; Peter Gibson; Kim Johnson; Caroline Nokes; Kate Osborne; Bell Ribeiro-Addy.

Questions 1 - 31

### Witnesses

**I:** Esmie Jikiemi-Pearson, petition creator; Nell Bevan, petition creator; Cynthia Muthoni, petition creator; and Yacoub Yasin, petition creator.

**II:** Eleshea Williams, Media and Communications Manager, The Black Curriculum; Rosamund McNeil, Assistant General Secretary, National Education Union; Dr Katharine Burn, Deputy President, Historical Association; and Professor Rhiannon Turner, Professor of Social Psychology, Queen's University Belfast.



## Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Esmie Jikiemi-Pearson, Nell Bevan, Cynthia Muthoni and Yacoub Yasin.

**Q1 Chair:** Thank you very much, everybody, for joining us today. This is our first session on black history and cultural diversity in the curriculum. We are holding the session because hundreds of thousands of people have signed petitions calling on the Government to diversify the school curriculum.

As there are several House of Commons Committees with an interest in the area, we are holding this session jointly with the Women and Equalities Committee and the Education Committee. We are holding it to delve deeper into the issues raised by the petitions calling for changes to the curriculum, including adding colonial and black and other minority ethnic history, and classes specifically on diversity and racism. We are really looking forward to hearing what our witnesses have to say today. Could each of our witnesses briefly introduce themselves?

**Esmie Jikiemi-Pearson:** I am Esmie. I am the co-host of Impact of Omission, which did a big survey recently to ascertain how people have been taught colonial history in the UK. I am also the co-creator of the petition that we will be discussing today, to include colonial history in the curriculum.

**Nell Bevan:** My name is Nell. I am the other co-founder of Impact of Omission and co-creator of the petition.

**Cynthia Muthoni:** I am Cynthia Muthoni. I created a petition asking the Government to introduce lessons on racism and racial diversity.

**Yacoub Yasin:** My name is Yacoub Yasin. I am a student at Central Foundation Boys School. I set up a petition to make education more BAME inclusive.

**Q2 Chair:** Thank you very much for being with us today. Esmie and Nell, your petition specifically asks for Britain's colonial past to be taught as part of the national curriculum. What prompted you to start the petition?

**Esmie Jikiemi-Pearson:** Many things prompted me to start the petition. There was the survey, which Nell is going to talk about later, and my own experiences. Of course, the worldwide resurgent interest in the Black Lives Matter movement was what really prompted me to sit down and create the petition. For the first time, people seemed to be really listening, and there was the key acknowledgment that racism is not simply limited to isolated incidents of hate speech or violence. It is entrenched in the foundations of many of the institutions we participate in and are beholden to; it is systemic.

As a 19-year-old, the institution I have had the most experience in so far is the institution of education. When everything was going on, that was



where I decided I could make a difference and where I had the most knowledge, and I set out to change it. My own experiences in school were incredibly whitewashed and exclusionary. When I created the petition, I had just finished my first year at university, so it was still very fresh in my mind. I was looking back on my time in school and, to be honest, I found it severely lacking not only with regard to black history; huge sections of white British history had been omitted, particularly colonial history. I thought that something had to be done about that.

**Nell Bevan:** Education-wise, my reasons were similar to Esmie's. We studied history together up to A-level. We studied the industrial revolution, and a lot was left out regarding the role of slavery in British industrialisation, which is taught as one of the reasons why Britain is the empire it is today. I was not getting taught those things at home or at school, and recently, with the incredible resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, I realised that I did not know as much as I should to be able to have important conversations with my family. When I spoke to Esmie about it, it seemed that we both had the same reaction when thinking back to our education.

Q3 **Chair:** Could you both say a little bit about what kinds of things you would like to see taught? Your petition talks about colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, but it would be helpful to understand, from your experiences of what you learned, what you would like to see in the curriculum.

**Esmie Jikiemi-Pearson:** Personally, I think the way the curriculum is structured at the moment works. We aren't proposing huge fundamental changes to the structure. For us, it would be about supplementing and weaving in the facts and figures that have always been there but have historically been omitted.

There is one example I like to use. Slavery and colonialism is talked about a lot, and it is important, but small things also help. For example, even at the beginning, in key stage 1, it is a statutory requirement that students develop "pleasure in reading, motivation to read, vocabulary and understanding" by listening to, and discussing, a wide range of poems, stories and non-fiction. They are encouraged to link what they read and hear to their own experiences. As the curriculum stands, that is completely inaccessible to a wide swathe of the population.

Ways that you could change it could simply be by thinking about the picture books that you show children in reception. Are there black characters or are they only in the background? What roles do they fulfil? Are they ever the main character? I remember thinking, when I was very young, "Why is the black character always the maid? Why are they always in the background? Why am I never allowed to be like the hero?"

Something else that is interesting is that I remember learning about Thomas Edison inventing the light bulb, but it is never mentioned that a black man called Lewis Latimer invented the carbon filament that was



used in the light bulb or that, for example, another black man named James E West co-invented the microphone, both of which are equally important inventions that are still in widespread use today. It is very little known, and that does a massive disservice to children because they deserve to know things like that.

When you learn about industrialisation, there should be specificity. It should be mandated by the national curriculum that the entire story must be told. Putting that specifically on the national curriculum is the first of many steps. The next step is providing resources to teachers. Many teachers said to us that there is a desire to teach it, but heads are reticent because there are not enough resources for them to use. They felt that they did not want to do it an injustice, so the Government could surely help by providing resources to them.

**Q4 Chair:** Nell, do you want to talk about your survey of people's experiences of history at school?

**Nell Bevan:** We created our survey in early June, and to date it has had over 56,000 responses. Although we did it anonymously, we asked for some background information to make sure we were getting a wide enough pool of people. Sure enough, we have a mix of age groups and a mix of people all around the country. We crucially asked if people were state or privately educated, or a mix of both. The ratio we got for the survey represents the ratio of methods of education in Britain.

I will give a couple of statistics that we got from the survey. We asked people to tick off things that they were taught in school from a list that we created. We found that, of the 56,000-plus who took our survey, 86% learned about the Tudors, 72.3% learned about the battle of Hastings and 72.5% learned about the great fire of London. Only 9.9% of responders learned about the role of slavery in the British industrial revolution, only 9.6% learned about the British colonisation of India and only 4.5% learned about modern slavery and slavery as it exists today. On top of that, we found that only 5.9% of responders had learned any black literature, art or culture in their studies.

We are both quite clear that those results give hard and concrete evidence that there is a massive major problem that needs to be tackled. Not only that, but a lot of the responses we got, not from the survey but from people who reached out—students and teachers at all levels—showed that this is something that a lot of people want to get fixed and sorted.

**Q5 Chair:** Cynthia, your petition focuses less on history and more on diversity and racism, and teaching that in the curriculum. Can you tell us a little bit about what drove you to start your petition?

**Cynthia Muthoni:** I honestly feel like my petition has been years in the making. I became aware of racism at a young age because I was on the receiving end of it. As I grew older, I came to understand that racism



stretched beyond my day-to-day experiences and that it was something embedded in our institutions. Minorities are disproportionately affected on almost every issue, and negatively so.

If we look at ONS's reporting on the ethnic pay gap last year, in London, the city with the highest concentration of minorities, it was 21.7%. This year, it has risen to 23.8%, yet so few people are aware of that. I have heard UK politicians openly say that race relations are better here than in other countries, namely the US, and that we do not have the same problems here. That could not be further from the truth.

We have a past that is riddled with slavery and colonialism. We had bus boycotts and race riots, too. Those things are still impacting us today. I do not believe racism is something inherent. I believe it is something that is taught and that there is a failure to correct racist behaviour. The catalyst for my petition was the George Floyd protests and the unity that that tragedy inspired.

A lot of racism takes place on an individual level and an institutional level because people are uninformed. When we were informed this summer, we protested against that. We did not want to stand for that. My petition is asking schools to play a role in deconstructing racism and, in turn, give children the tools they need to become anti-racist.

**Q6 Katherine Fletcher:** First of all, thanks to all the witnesses. It has been a difficult year, examining these topics that have been 400 years in the making. It is important that we talk about it.

I want to come at it from two different angles, especially the "what" of any teaching or guidance that would be inserted into the curriculum. I used to live in Africa. One of the things that became clear to me was how important oral histories were in the African tradition. It is incredibly important that history is not only written by the people who had the pen, or the skills and the education to have the pen.

Esmie or Nell, to what extent have you considered making sure that we can have those African oral histories? There are two sides of the debate in the conversation.

**Esmie Jikiemi-Pearson:** You raise an interesting point. One of the pitfalls with that idea could be that, if we try to translate it ourselves, there could be things that are lost in translation when white scholars and white academics begin to try to teach African oral traditions. The idea of an African oral tradition is interesting. Are we talking about a pan-African tradition or stories from different countries? Then there are the myths and the things that are told in the diaspora as well. That is an important distinction to make, and probably one that we would be dealing with more closely as people—ancestry—migrated or were forcibly taken from Africa and brought to Britain.

If that was something we were going to introduce in the curriculum, which would definitely be interesting, it would probably be best to partner



with people on the continent of Africa who are familiar with those traditions. We would have to make sure it is in a way that is respectful of their culture and make it very clear that we feel no kind of right to have any of these stories brought here.

There is also a case to be made for a cultural programme that helps people who are already here, such as members of the Windrush generation, to conserve their unique history, the oral traditions that they have made and their oral histories. As the British Government encouraged them to come here in the first place, perhaps we should be focusing our attention more towards people who live here, what their stories are and how their stories have been impacted by the lives they have led. You make an interesting proposition about people in Africa, and I think it is one that we should look at.

**Q7 Katherine Fletcher:** I can certainly put you in touch with a couple of people who are broad users of WhatsApp, despite living in possibly stereotypical African surroundings. They shout at me on a regular basis, just so you know.

Let me switch it around slightly, again in terms of topics and how you would cover this in the curriculum. I am a proud Lancashire MP. We have an enormous tradition of the Lancashire Fusiliers. There are lots of stories of children—and I mean children—joining up during the colonial era because it was the only way they were going to get a meal. With some of the poverty in the north of England, the Army was the only option.

I have seen some very interesting historical documentation about those young men ending up in Africa and, candidly, being bested by the locals. I wonder to what extent there is room to tell both sides of a contemporaneous story within black history. There was poverty on both sides of what was an awful situation. That is felt very strongly in some of the Lancashire regimental history.

**Nell Bevan:** As Esmie mentioned, it is important to get stories directly from the people who were involved, and not have translators or people speaking on behalf of anyone. It is incredibly important that any history that concerns foundational parts of the making of the Britain we see today in all regions of the country is taught. That is part of the reason why we are all here and are doing this. We cannot really omit anything, and as long as things are told relatively unbiasedly, especially early on, that is a crucial part of education. The problem at the moment is that there is a lot omitted, and that makes history seem quite biased. Telling as many stories as we can, and making sure that we teach them in a way that is not whitewashed, as Esmie said, and is not spoken for people, can only help.

**Chair:** Katherine, I am conscious of the time. We have 10 minutes left with these witnesses, and we have not heard from Cynthia and Yacoub yet.

**Q8 Katherine Fletcher:** I was channelling my GCSE primary school history.



Cynthia, what is your reaction to some of the questions I have just posed?

**Cynthia Muthoni:** Esmie's and Nell's petition relates more to history, so their answers are more suited to your question. Relating it to my petition, I believe the teaching of racism and racial diversity needs two elements. One is tackling the harsher realities, like prejudice, discrimination and racism. The other is more of a celebratory element of diversity.

An example of a lesson plan I could do is appreciation versus appropriation, in which we would take the issue of braided hair and look at how it is represented across different cultures. In African culture, traditionally it was used to identify which tribe you belonged to. In ancient China, it was used to represent a woman's age, and when she came of age they would symbolically untie the braids. In old Russia, braiding hair used to be a symbol of strength, pride and honour. In that way, you see different people from different backgrounds being included and represented.

**Katherine Fletcher:** Brilliant.

Q9 **Chair:** That is really fascinating. I want to go back to your petition, Cynthia. In terms of classes on diversity and racism, is there anything you want to add about what you would like to see in the curriculum?

**Cynthia Muthoni:** There are three different elements that we need to tackle in order to have an anti-racist curriculum. One is representation embedded throughout the curriculum. As Esmie said, it would be reading authors of colour and things like that in English lessons. In science lessons, to introduce lessons about blood, you could mention the African American scientist Charles Drew, who invented the blood bank.

Another element is the specific and significant inclusion of race, racism and anti-racism as a lesson where it appears and is taught throughout the year. The third element, which we have not talked about too much, is teacher training. If we look at teaching standards and the core content framework on which teachers need to qualify to be a teacher, there is never a mention of race, racism, racial sensitivity or anti-racism. What does that mean? It means that individual teacher training programmes get to decide whether teachers are taught how to deal with those experiences. I think that can be quite damaging, for lack of a better word. It is damaging in terms of the teacher's self-confidence and their ability to feel that they can teach these subjects effectively.

If we consider that teaching is a predominantly white career path, it can lead to quite a lot of uncomfortableness. We need to give our teachers the tools and resources, so that when they become qualified they do not shy away from these topics because they feel confident teaching them.

Q10 **Chris Evans:** My questions are to Yacoub. I apologise that I have to leave at 3 because I have another meeting.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Yacoub, I was very interested in your petition about more black and ethnic minority teaching in the curriculum. The way that history is taught in schools is something that I am quite passionate about. I felt from my own experience—I did a degree in history—that I did not learn anything about black history until I went to university, and then it was from an American perspective and people like Stokely Carmichael, the Black Panther party, Martin Luther King and those things. I did not learn anything until much later. Recently, I visited the Mary Seacole Trust, which is fantastic, I learned a lot about her as well.

I am just wondering what your experience is. I did history 20 or 30 years ago. What have been your experiences as a student of the teaching of history?

**Yacoub Yasin:** I find that quite interesting because of the career path that I am planning to take. I will start off with how it came about. Essentially, it started with two causes. One was the personal identity crisis that I was going through with the curriculum. The second was the George Floyd protest.

It was essentially that the only time I had ever heard history of where I was from being spoken about was the British Raj and the element of being subservient to a higher form of power. That led to an identity crisis and made me start to question what I was learning. I started building up an essence of historical and political apathy towards the curriculum. I decided to drop out of history at GCSE because I felt like it was not me and it was not what I wanted to learn; I was completely done.

I changed that after my first year at college. I had to sacrifice a year of my life to go back and pick up politics. In picking up politics, I realised that there is so much discussion that needs to be had. In terms of what you said, there are many points I could raise about the curriculum. Some of the research that I did among students was with my peers who are going to study in the States. One of them, who is now studying at Vassar College, said that she dropped history before GCSE for the same reasons as me. She is now questioning why she has to leave the country to find some form of understanding in history. That would be one of my answers.

Q11 **Chris Evans:** From my perspective, what interests me is that, when my grandparents died, their stories died with them. Esmie talked about the traditions. Do you think that if we had an element of oral history, sitting down and talking to relatives, we would have a better picture of the black and ethnic minority experience in Britain through the years? That would be a way of teaching future generations as well, so that those voices will not be lost even after they have passed away.

**Yacoub Yasin:** I think that is 100%. I remember learning about the holocaust in primary school. There was a video where an elderly woman's experiences were documented. The tattoos that she bore still resonate with me today. If there was that documentation, yes, the history would



never leave us. There would be some form of tangibility that we could always go back to.

**Q12 Chris Evans:** My final question is from personal experience. I went to a boxing group, having met someone who was involved in the Mary Seacole Trust. We met at Mary Seacole. I spent the morning with him and we talked about Mary Seacole's role in the Crimea and how it was pushed to the back by Florence Nightingale.

I put a photograph out and said how much I had enjoyed it and how we should learn more about Mary Seacole. I had a barrage of abuse on email saying that I did not know anything about Mary Seacole and that she was not a nurse. I am talking as a white working-class Welshman, and I got a lot of abuse just because I went and had a photo taken and spent a morning there. I would like to know what Cynthia and Esmie have to say about this as well. Have you found that when you put your head above the parapet? Did you have those experiences as well?

**Yacoub Yasin:** It is inevitable because there is an essence of nuance, especially as a novice, when understanding things. There is that element that you lack enough understanding. As Cynthia says, there is the element of appreciation versus appropriation.

I learned about Mary Seacole in primary school. I will be honest; I have not needed to use that once in my life. For me personally, the curriculum is good, and that is clearly the case when we are at Oxford or Cambridge, but is what is being taught really relevant to daily life? I can give many examples. I have not needed to use Mary Seacole, and I find it disheartening that I have never needed to use something I was taught so young in 18 years of life. That is just a question around what we are being taught.

There is an issue about Black History Month. We highlight individuals in black society and put them on a pedestal. We almost marginalise them from their entire community. That is a form of tokenism. We say they are so exceptionally good that surely they cannot be from the community they are from. That is the issue. The Government have said that the curriculum needs to be broad and balanced, but frankly it isn't if we have to dedicate a whole month to a group in society. If the curriculum was broad and balanced, we would not need to take an extra month. It would be there for us to learn, but it is not.

**Esmie Jikiemi-Pearson:** You asked if we get abuse. On a baseline, yes, but one of the things that people love to say, and that I would like to address, is the idea of guilt and division. They say, "Oh, you guys just want to come here and make us white people feel guilty. You just want to make us feel so bad about what happened." Categorically no, that is not what we are trying to do at all.

It is interesting that they are very concerned about white children feeling guilty, but there are black and brown children sitting in classrooms



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

feeling terrible about themselves, disheartened and dropping out of GCSE subjects because they do not see themselves or because they see themselves reflected so negatively in the curriculum. That is where we should be focusing our attention. A broad and diverse education is a way to help foster empathy. Currently, the society we live in has a lack of empathy. The fact that there is already a division is what we should be focusing on, not hypothetical divisions.

**Cynthia Muthoni:** This speaks to what I was saying earlier about one of the elements being representation throughout the curriculum. I was speaking to a researcher at my university, East Anglia, Dr Sarah Brownsword. She does a lot of work on anti-racism in the curriculum. She said that, if we had representation throughout the curriculum, what you would see, first, is that all the minority children would have confidence in their own abilities to become successful. What you would see with white children is that they would have less feeling of abnormality when they come into contact with people of a different colour, or when they learn about people of a different colour, because they would be constantly seeing it, and it would become normalised. In time, you would stop seeing that hateful reaction when you bring someone of colour to the forefront.

**Yacoub Yasin:** I would like to add something to Katherine's comments about the element of working class. From the presidential election, we have realised that the white working class in particular is a very big part of our population. They should not be ignored; their experiences should be spoken about as well. Sometimes we do not realise that the experiences we are hearing are from writers, poets and people higher up in society. The working class should not be neglected.

My teacher is a working-class person from Scotland. My best friend is a working-class Irish boy from Wembley. For them, it is not about division; it is about inclusion. It is about understanding other experiences and them being able to portray their experiences to me. I would never have been able to accept that I am a working-class boy if it was not for my teacher, and him giving me that experience. It is less about seeing this as almost an invasion or a division. It is about inclusion. It is about everyone understanding and learning more about each other.

I want to add something about oral history. It is very interesting when you look at jazz, Cuban music and things like that and how it came about; it came from west African language and music. In my music lessons, I have not learned anything; I haven't taken away anything. It is through my own personal research that I have found that. There is a lot to say and a lot to learn, but we are not taught it. In certain subjects, it will be more interwoven and part of the curriculum, and will make more sense. In other topics and subjects, like formal sciences, it will be more contextual—learning about the scientists and things like that.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

As an Asian, and speaking widely about Asians, I have seen Asians stereotyped in STEM subjects, but I cannot name you a single scientist or engineer who is Asian. It is interesting.

**Katherine Fletcher:** I understand that Yacoub has had quite a busy morning. I want to thank him for his time. Best of luck, sir.

**Yacoub Yasin:** Thank you.

**Chair:** I echo that. Petitioners, thank you so much for joining us today and for sharing your thoughts, insights and experiences, but most of all for putting in these petitions and inspiring hundreds of thousands of people to sign them and put them on the agenda for Parliament to debate. We will move on now to take some evidence from the education sector as to how we make this happen.

Thank you so much. Obviously, we will keep you very much in the loop on the conversation. You have inspired it, and we will very much continue to include you in how the process continues. Thank you.

### Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Eleshea Williams, Rosamund McNeil, Dr Katharine Burn and Professor Rhiannon Turner.

Q13 **Chair:** We now move to our second panel of witnesses. Would each of our witnesses introduce themselves and tell us a little bit about the work they do and how it relates to the topic we are discussing this afternoon in these petitions?

**Eleshea Williams:** My name is Eleshea Williams. I work as a media and communications manager at The Black Curriculum, a social enterprise that campaigns to include black British history across the UK curriculum for ages eight to 16, with the aims of empowering our young people in the UK and improving social cohesion.

**Dr Burn:** I am Katharine Burn, deputy president of the Historical Association, a society that combines membership of the general public interested in history and a very strong primary, secondary and higher education committee campaigning as the voice for history. It is very much concerned with history education in schools.

**Rosamund McNeil:** It is great to join you this afternoon; thank you so much. I am one of the assistant general secretaries of one of the teachers' unions, the National Education Union. I lead on policy relating to inequality and equality, and how we are going to move towards that. I do a lot of the union's work in terms of our black members and their concerns, their work and contribution. I also look at issues of students and access, inclusion and equity and student outcomes.

**Professor Turner:** I am a professor of social psychology at Queen's University, Belfast. My research focuses on developing and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions, including schools-based programmes that



harness diversity, promote inclusivity and try to go about reducing prejudice. I was recently involved in a Channel 4 documentary, *The School That Tried to End Racism*, which looked at how issues of race and racism can be integrated into the school curriculum to tackle unconscious bias. I hope I can speak to the value of covering those issues in more depth and in a more sustained way throughout the school curriculum.

**Q14 Apsana Begum:** Welcome to everybody at the Committee today. I am a member of the Education Committee and am a guest participant. It is a pleasure to join you all.

I want to ask about the Government's response to all three petitions that prompted today's session. We heard from the petitioners in our earlier session. The Government's response has been that the current curriculum already provides teachers with the freedom and flexibility to teach a diverse curriculum. Do you think it is enough that they have freedom or flexibility, or do you think that teaching a more diverse curriculum should be mandated? If so, why do you think that is the case?

**Professor Turner:** One thing that is really noticeable in the responses from the Government is the optional nature of covering issues of diversity in the curriculum. The word "can" is used quite a lot. "You could cover it here," or, "You could potentially cover it here." I can see that flexibility is important, so that schools can choose what they do for many aspects of the curriculum, but when it comes to race I think it is quite problematic.

The reason is that research suggests that people are generally very anxious about discussing issues of race and racism. I have seen that play out even in quite multicultural schools that have a positive ethos around diversity. When we do not have confidence in dealing with something, our usual response is to avoid it. If we do not make it a compulsory part of the curriculum, in the majority of places proper engagement with these issues is not going to happen. Indeed, Esmie and Nell's survey seems to suggest that it is not happening as much as it should be.

**Rosamund McNeil:** I agree with the last point. We can do more, and we need to do more, to have a consistent approach in schools across the country. It cannot be a question of saying that there is enough flexibility or enough freedom. We need to say clearly that there needs to be a responsibility on all schools, and that we have to harness the potential in education. It cannot be okay that so many black teachers and black head teachers say to us that they feel isolated, marginalised and not understood, and that so many black students feel that they do not have a sense of belonging in their school.

We need a system approach, where the curriculum absolutely needs to be one of the things we talk about. There are also things like behaviour policies and recruitment policies. We need consistent leadership across Government Departments. We need to be very clear that we want this to be at the heart of professional standards. We want the profession to play a key role in thinking, "Okay, how are we going to prepare every young



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

person in Britain to be proudly part of a multiracial, multicultural society and a global world?" We want British young people to be absolutely ready to do that.

**Dr Burn:** In the view of the Historical Association, it is quite nuanced. We have some reservations about making things compulsory and, in a sense, feeling that by doing that we have solved the problem. Picking up the concerns, and the idea of a curriculum of omission, where things get missed out of the curriculum, is a serious issue. There is flexibility in the curriculum. In fact, there is enormous flexibility in the national curriculum from key stage 1 to key stage 3, in part because many schools are not obliged to follow the national curriculum as it is stated anyway. There is an issue, if we are to address this, of how we manage it in appropriate ways when some schools could opt out. We have some reservations about saying, "Change the national curriculum," because that is not necessarily going to address the issue.

The problem with putting specific elements into the curriculum, which goes back to Rosamund's point about the profession and taking the profession with you, is that teachers need to invest time. You can put an element into the curriculum; the classic example is the history of the transatlantic slave trade, which was made compulsory in the 2008 version. We know it was taught because it had to be. In many respects, it is still taught because it was put into the curriculum, but that does not necessarily influence how it is taught if teachers lack the further training or the developed subject knowledge to teach it effectively.

We think that improvements could be made within the structure of the existing curriculum. That leaves aside schools that are not obliged to follow it; that is a different question. Serious attention needs to be paid to the aims and the purpose of history teaching, in association with schools' obligations under the Equality Act, to support young people of all ethnicities to feel that they can explore their own identity and use their knowledge to become contributing citizens. All of that is really important.

We have a slight concern that we will say, "Change the curriculum and that's the problem resolved." The issue is giving teachers space and time and access to historical scholarship. It is about the way we have knowledge of many of the issues to do with empire and pre-colonial African history. We talked about oral history. It is about learning how historians are now working with those in cultural studies, anthropology and archaeology to build our knowledge further. All those things take time. Our anxiety is that changing the curriculum is a quick fix but does not actually address the substantial issues, many of which are to do with teacher knowledge and confidence in how they approach that teaching.

**Eleshea Williams:** Katharine raises a really interesting point. A lot of the petitions and The Black Curriculum did an email template directed towards Gavin Williamson, on which we received the same response. They drew attention to the fact that the Department believes that



teachers should be able to use their own knowledge and make their own choices about what they teach.

As an organisation, we are aware that a lot of the national curriculum is optional, but teachers and all of us are a product of our own education. If teachers have not been taught black history, they are not necessarily going to feel confident to teach it. As Rhiannon said, there is a lot of “can” and options. Stating that black history, which is a huge and integral part of British history, is optional teaches our young people that their history is not valued or that they do not matter. We often pride ourselves on being a multicultural country. We often say that black history is British history, so we question why it should be relegated to an option.

The second thing is that there are risks attached to teachers using their own knowledge. They might not necessarily be equipped with that. As Katharine said, we believe a step could be introducing more black writers in the English curriculum, but ultimately we have to have the right facilitators of conversations about race. At The Black Curriculum, we offer teacher training sessions. We also offer curriculum consultations. We are not necessarily suggesting a reshape of how the curriculum is structured, but we are asking for a seat at the table. We are asking for black figures to be included along with their white counterparts. We want to provide teachers with support so that they feel confident to facilitate productive conversations about race. What better environment to do it in than the educational environment?

**Cynthia Muthoni:** I know this is not my section, but I wanted to touch on what Katharine said about the Equality Act. The Equality Act grants protection to people based on sex, sexuality, gender, religion, age, disability, pregnancy, marriage and race. We are taught about all of those things specifically and explicitly in schools, except for the racial element. We need to ask ourselves, is the curriculum truly equal?

Q15 **Apsana Begum:** Thank you for that, Cynthia. I have a couple of follow-up questions. The first one was touched on by Rosamund and is about what needs to be done in reforming the curriculum. You talked a bit about behaviour policies. One of the reasons why I was asking my questions was that there are cautions against what is seen as rewriting history for the sake of political correctness. I want to understand a bit more about what you thought of proposals to reform the curriculum in view of that.

On the Education Committee, we are currently undertaking an inquiry into the experiences of left-behind white working-class students in this country. I want to know what you think, from your experiences in the education sector. Does that work run the risk of undermining those who have experience of both race and class injustices in the education sector? It would be helpful to hear from you on that.

**Rosamund McNeil:** Those issues are real. When you facilitate conversations with lots of black young people in classrooms, there is a



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

huge appetite to have racism acknowledged and understood. If we want a fair and equal education system, we all have to acknowledge that there are huge differences in young people's lives that they bring with them into the classroom. We need the goal of having a profession that is confident in understanding the differences in children's lives—positive differences and differences that arise from barriers, be they sexist and racist cultural norms. Our plan has to be, how do we use the curriculum to respond to that? How do we train the profession and how do we keep them confident? Often, this cannot be about a one-lesson plan or a one-off training session. There is a role for training and there is a role for curriculum reform, but it is actually about how we get a high-quality profession and a high-quality curriculum offer.

You are right to talk about class and race together. The answer is to try to create spaces where young people have a voice, and there is some part of the curriculum where young people can talk about what is worrying them and their experiences. If we make the curriculum and learning opportunities relevant to young people, they engage better, learn more and progress more, and the outcomes are better. It works pedagogically to try to make education reflect the experiences of young people.

At the moment, I think teachers would say that the main barrier is time and space, and that time in school feels very pressured and the curriculum feels very full. If I draw you a circle, the national curriculum was only ever meant to be a part of the circle, if you can imagine a circle within a circle. In the earlier panel, people started to talk about local examples. For me, a priority would be to work out how we can create some space to bring local history back. If you are a teacher in Hull, you want to think about the local history of Hull. If you are in Bristol, you want to teach about the fantastic black men and women who have been active in different decades in Bristol. We can combine issues that bring together working-class kids, black and white, because they are all Bristol kids or they are all Hull kids or from Kirklees, Gateshead or Southend. For me, local history brings us a solution.

Young people are often dying for spaces and opportunities to talk about this, and we need to realise that it is about giving teachers confidence, within some kind of strategy, to understand in what lessons and for what part of the time. It is about the Government giving consistent back-up, structure and leadership to say, "Yes, this is what schools should be doing. This is a valid and relevant discussion because it empowers young people and lets them have a sense of confidence and agency. They learn well, they thrive and they do better."

**Dr Burn:** I want to pick up the point about local history. That is a point where there is flexibility in the national curriculum. It is often an element that is neglected in the national curriculum, but it is there at key stage 1, key stage 2 and key stage 3. The mandated bit is that somewhere you should be doing local history. You only had to hear the debate in



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliament about Black History Month, when MP after MP wanted to share local, as well as inspirational, stories of people from black and minority ethnic communities. There is a wealth of examples. The connection between the local and the global can often be extremely powerful in showing the interconnections between Britain and the wider world, and the influence going both ways.

I want to pick up the point about class and white working-class students, only because my day job is in history education at the University of Oxford, working on PGCE teaching. My role in the Historical Association is a voluntary one. I was working with student teachers this week on an article by Catherine McCrory in *Teaching History* about teaching the history of Essex and the history of migration. It was taking a thematic study, which is another requirement in the curriculum. For young people in Essex, it began with their preconceptions, how people think of Essex man or Essex woman, and some of what the children shared about their sense of other people's perceptions, and the stereotypes of white working-class people from that area.

A thematic study of the waves of migration through time was really powerful in showing the richness of the community and that we are all the descendants of immigrants—that is profoundly true—by layering those successive studies. It was obviously giving quite a bit of time to 20th-century migration and the range of experiences, but it started with the Romans. It was working with different kinds of sources, and where we can tell more or less, depending on the sources that we have available, about people's experiences. That was a really strong example where, by taking the local, and the history of migration we all share through many generations, it is possible to build a sense of connection.

**Yacoub Yasin:** I had a discussion with the teachers and head teacher at my school. My head teacher said that it is difficult because all the training that is done is around a certain few topics. How do you expect teachers to go into a classroom and have the confidence to teach certain subjects or certain events when no training or information is provided around it?

My history teacher—now my politics teacher—told me that it is so difficult with the time on hand. There is too much going on. Again, that links back to the kind of history that we are learning. It is very elitist and upper class. I was reading something the other day that said the Cornish language is dying out. When I look at Britain, I do not look at Britain as though I am only from London. No, I am from Britain entirely. When I go on an international scale, people from Cornwall, people from Liverpool and the working class are still very much part of my identity.

As much as I am saying that there should be BAME inclusion, there needs to be working-class inclusion just as much. If the Cornish language needs to be implemented, it should be implemented. In areas like Liverpool and Essex, it is something as small as RP and the way we speak. People from Essex cannot get upper-class jobs. They cannot get the highest jobs



because of their accent. It does not make sense that we are still living in a society that does not allow you to flourish because of the way you speak.

**Q16 Kate Osborne:** My question is to all our guests today. The primary focus of today's petitions has been on race and ethnicity, but there are of course important intersecting issues—for example, around gender, class and sexual orientation. If changes were to be made to the curriculum, is it important to consider how the history and achievements of black women and those from LGBT communities are included?

**Dr Burn:** Absolutely. It is important to think about that. It is why the national curriculum has a second-order concept—that is how they talk about it at GCSE—devoted to similarity and difference, which is about recognising what we share and where we differ from one another, and that being a point of analysis that historians use. Some of those differences may be very visible and others are not visible, but there are points of connection across what you cannot see as well as what you can see.

On the question about what we need to include, it is the history of all. The last subject report we had from Ofsted was called "History for all", but it is actually about history of all for all. Those issues really matter. The need to look at race and gender simultaneously, or race and class simultaneously, makes history complex for young people. It is again why there is concern about curriculum time to equip teachers to make decisions. You need to choose, "Which topics am I going to study in depth because I need to be able to do further analysis or I need to look?" It applies to all those categories, and whether or not it is the history of LGBTQI+, the histories are very often hidden histories. It is the history of those who were not in power and who have not, in many contexts, left extensive written records.

We need to give time to look at the question of how we know and how we make claims about the history of those people. What kind of evidence and what kinds of sources are available to us and how can we use them? Again, you need to spend time. Respecting that teachers need to decide where they can do things in depth, precisely because they want to look at complex issues and how they intersect with one another, is really important. They might need to concentrate on understanding how people have begun to reconstruct hidden histories and what are the grounds for their claim. They may not have written sources, but does that mean we throw those claims out? No, of course not. We have to understand the different sources.

It is complex. I am going to talk about history; I cannot talk across the whole curriculum. If we are to do history properly, we have to do some things in depth, to do more investigation, and some things at an overview level. That is partly why I have some reservations about prescribing, because it often gets teachers to teach everything at the same level and loses the opportunity to do the kind of in-depth work that is needed.



**Professor Turner:** I had a bit of an issue with my connection and I disappeared, but I am now back. If I duplicate anything, I apologise, as I missed about five minutes.

I want to follow up the point Rosamund was making about providing people with the space to have those sorts of conversations. The evidence from research in social psychology is that if you directly and regularly give people the opportunity to have those conversations, and to engage with issues of diversity—race and all the other potential groups that we have talked about—it is associated with lower levels of bias and having more cross-group friendships. They are more comfortable with people from other groups and are able to have those relationships, and they are not anxious about this thing that they are not able to talk about because they do not have the skills and the confidence. It is associated with greater empathy and trust.

There is evidence that engaging with issues of diversity through meaningful conversations is associated with better problem-solving skills and higher levels of creativity. There is also evidence that discussing these issues increases the likelihood of collective action among not only BAME but white people to work together to address issues of inequality and racism in society. If we are not creating the spaces to have those conversations and we are not discussing the issues, how are we ever going to make that change? To me, that conversation piece, having those discussions and feeling that you have a safe space to have conversations, is a critical thing that should come alongside whatever the subject in which we are teaching issues of race or diversity.

Q17 **Kate Osborne:** I am not sure whether you were with us when I put the question about intersecting issues of gender, class and sexual orientation. I was asking whether, if changes are made to the curriculum, it is important to consider how the history and achievements of black women and those from LGBT communities are included.

**Professor Turner:** I didn't hear that. I come from a background of research looking at various groups that have been stigmatised or discriminated against in society. Race is at the forefront of our attention at the moment and is incredibly important because it is so deeply ingrained in the inequalities in society. I absolutely agree that we need to look at LGBT issues, gender identity and all of those different considerations. There needs to be an integrated approach where we consider diversity. From my point of view, I do not think there are many places in the curriculum, in every subject in the curriculum, where you could not consider these sorts of issues.

**Rosamund McNeil:** It is a really good question. We need ways to allow teachers to look at the evidence and know that young people's experiences show us that black girls face a different set of stereotypes that affect their life, and different opportunities, and black boys have a different set of barriers and expectations placed on them, with very stereotypical ideas that we all hold about young black men. It is



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

experienced differently. Racism and sexism also play out differently in different areas of the country.

At national policy level, the DFE has to understand that schools are different. The local context matters very much to the school. I don't think it is about making lots and lots of different additional separate changes to the curriculum. It is more that, if you have a philosophy in your school whereby you think about whether the young people feel they have a sense of place in the school, and give them opportunities to learn about people who have campaigned or struggled in their area to make things better for everybody, it often brings huge amounts of benefits to all the students in the school.

I am not saying that you avoid talking about racism; you absolutely need to talk with young people about racism and where it comes from. As you do that, you need to bring in how it has been different for men and women and girls and boys. That will often immediately bring out very helpful, productive conversations. They often happen in drama and art. There are parts of the curriculum where that kind of personal social development is well placed.

Please do not misunderstand me. Academic progress really matters. Learning and grades really matter—they are passports to the next step of your life—but we need to rebalance and look at wellbeing and the social and emotional aspects of learning. That is not soft or a waste of time. They are not peripheral elements; they underpin good engagement with learning. The DFE could focus more generally on the balance in the curriculum. The DFE will say, "We are balanced and we want schools to deliver breadth and balance," but most teachers say it is very clear that the message coming out is that English and maths really count, and then the rest.

There is something national we could do, because England is an outlier compared with other countries in support for the social and emotional aspects of learning. That is where you have the opportunity to challenge prejudice and bias, and come up with creative and innovative ways to make sure that you have an inclusive pedagogy.

**Q18** **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** In response to the petitions, the Government said they intend to make relationship education compulsory for all schools, that primary pupils would be taught about the importance of respecting others and that pupils would be taught what a stereotype is and how stereotypes can be unfair, negative and destructive. Given the overall response to the petition, how confident are you that the Government will provide the necessary training for teachers to enable them to teach that subject matter effectively? How confident are you that relationship education classes could even be used to teach pupils about racism and discrimination?

**Rosamund McNeil:** My answer is that it would be sensible, and on balance we think it is good to make relationship education mandatory.



There is always a hierarchy of subjects, and profiles within subjects, as to what gets teaching time and what gets the budget for CPD. We have too much focus on the core subjects, so it is helpful to take that step, but doing that does not necessarily mean you achieve the right balance.

The Government have to give a consistent set of messages and encouragement to schools to say, "Academic engagement and success is very important, but we also have a strategy to help you as a school system support young people's wellbeing, engagement and self-confidence across all the subjects." Recently, the DFE issued some slightly unhelpful new guidance on SRE. That has led to confusion and lack of clarity, with some head teachers not knowing why it happened, but on balance I think we are going in the right direction on that aspect of the curriculum.

Pressure on time is tricky. The coronavirus is making everything difficult, and that has upset the DFE's timetable for implementation. We absolutely accept that, but once we have come through coronavirus it will need some investment in training and budget to make sure that SRE goes well.

We are all very aware of pupils' mental health and wellbeing. What is the right Government and school-level response to pupils' mental health at the moment? The curriculum is one part of that, but it is also about having strong pastoral systems. We have to work together across the whole school system to make sure that we get the pastoral response as good as it can be.

Q19 **Elliot Colburn:** Rhiannon, I would like to turn to the documentary *The School That Tried to End Racism*, which is particularly interesting to me as it is in my local authority; Glenthorne High School is just down the road from me. The experiment you did there claimed to show that students exhibited unconscious bias, despite the school being ethnically diverse and apparently well integrated. To what extent do you feel that the curriculum is an important part of tackling that? What other aspects, such as the diversity of teaching staff, are important in bringing it down?

**Professor Turner:** For those who have not seen it, in the documentary, essentially, we tried to tackle and reduce unconscious bias in a class of 11-year-olds at Glenthorne, which is an ethnically mixed south London school. It already had a very positive ethos on diversity, but it wanted to try to do more. Over a three-week period, we integrated a variety of different activities in the curriculum, things that took place as part of their regular lessons.

Activities included an unconscious bias test at the start to trigger or generate conversation on what unconscious bias is. There was a history trip to the National Portrait Gallery where children got to see how black and minority ethnic individuals were under-represented in the pictures in the gallery. They had a discussion about slavery as well. They had activities where they explored empathy and perspective-taking through discussing experiences of discrimination. They learned about white



privilege; they learned quite a lot about each other's backgrounds and identity. At the end of the three weeks of activity, they had a debate on whether the UK is a racist society. We also used affinity groups, where we separated children into their different ethnic groups to have conversations about race in a safe space. Then we brought them back together to share their thoughts and have a much more mixed conversation about their various experiences.

After three weeks of those activities, we found through the documentary that there was a significant reduction in unconscious bias. Children no longer showed a pro-white bias on a measure of unconscious bias. In addition, anecdotally, you could see a lot just from observing the children. They had much greater confidence talking about race; they had a much greater understanding of race. They understood that it exists at institutional level and goes way beyond individual racist comments. You could see them developing empathy towards one another. They were much less anxious when they were all together discussing the topics. At the beginning they were quite anxious, and over time they became much more comfortable. As a result, they seemed much more bonded as a group and had formed meaningful relationships with one another.

There was a general feeling that children from all backgrounds felt empowered to work together to try to make a difference, particularly in tackling the root causes of inequality, while recognising the huge challenges that exist. The fact that you could achieve that kind of change in just three weeks made me wonder what could be achieved if those types of activity were incorporated in different areas of the curriculum on an ongoing basis. I recognise that it was a TV programme and it was very condensed. I am not in any way suggesting you could do something like that on a daily basis where we had three weeks very much devoted to these topics. I realise there are other parts of the curriculum, but I do not see any reason why those sorts of activities could not be embedded.

The other part of the question was about increasing the number of staff from different backgrounds. Is that right?

**Q20 Elliot Colburn:** Yes. You mentioned the curriculum as an important part of tackling that. How much do you think there are other aspects, such as diversity of teaching staff, that play a role, as compared with just changing the curriculum, for example?

**Professor Turner:** We have already talked a bit about teacher training, and that is obviously important. Diversity in teaching staff is important. We have already talked about how the lack of representation in various areas of life feeds into unconscious biases, so having diversity of teaching staff, where children can see in their school that their teachers are providing role model positions, will make a huge difference.

In terms of encouraging children to be able to have difficult conversations about diversity and racism, if you have teachers from a range of backgrounds facilitating those conversations, it will be more effective



than if you just have some white teachers telling children what sorts of conversations they should be having. It makes a huge difference. If you were to make changes to the education system so that issues of diversity were taken more seriously and were more embedded in the curriculum, perhaps you would see that black, Asian and minority ethnic people were more encouraged to come into teaching; they could see that there is a place for them because it is important in schools.

**Q21 Elliot Colburn:** You mentioned the scene in the documentary where you went to the National Portrait Gallery. You touched on the fact that not having visible representation in somebody's real life can impact the way they view this topic. When you went to the portrait gallery and students were talking about the lack of diversity, perhaps in history, literature and other curriculums, how much do you think that visible representation had an impact on students from diverse backgrounds?

**Professor Turner:** It has enormous impact on a whole range of different factors. We know that children's experience of discrimination—lack of representation and not seeing yourself in those positions is part of that discrimination—has been shown to result in lower levels of self-esteem, higher levels of depression and anxiety, and increased risk of poor physical health, high blood pressure and heart disease later in life.

Thinking specifically about educational attainment, perceptions of inequality among young people from minority groups predict disengagement from school. For example, a longitudinal study published this year showed that minority children who feel that their schools are not supportive of equality and multiculturalism are less likely to listen to their teachers and more likely to play truant and miss classes. They disengage. That chimes with what Yacoub said earlier about the apathy he felt studying history. He thought, "If I'm not part of this, why should I be paying attention to it? Why should I be listening?" The study also showed that the pattern was completely reversed when the schools were perceived to have a positive ethos on multiculturalism and equality. If pupils perceive their schools to be positive in focusing on it, they engage much more, so it is really important.

**Yacoub Yasin:** There was a similar issue in our school. When we had a working-class Asian teacher, a lot of BAME students could relate to him when discussing behavioural issues. He was sent by other teachers to do that. They would engage with him and want to listen because they were able to connect at that level. There just is not that connection. My school borders Hackney and Islington, and there is only one black teacher. I did not know of her existence until this year, and I am retaking year 13. I did not know that she had been writing for *The Guardian* since 2003. That should put things into perspective. There is a huge issue about staffing, and it needs to be tackled.

**Eleshea Williams:** It is a twofold process. Before I joined The Black Curriculum, I wanted to be a teacher. I think it is one of the most admirable professions. Until last year, my aspirations stayed the same.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

Then I began to think about my own educational experience and felt slightly uncomfortable teaching young people the same curriculum that had made me feel that none of my ancestors had ever done anything worthy of being in a history book.

A saying that came out of the Black Lives Matters movement is "You can't be what you can't see." It is equally important for black and non-black students to see teachers and black people in leadership roles both in school and in the community. If we were to diversify the teaching workforce more, we would see a lot more black and Asian people entering the teaching profession. Statistically, black and Asian teachers feel a lot less supported, especially in outer-city schools. A lot of them face racism themselves and feel that the school or the higher education sector does not have the facilities to deal with it properly, so you find a higher rate of teachers leaving. If we want to diversify both our curriculum and our workforce, it is important that we invite more black and Asian employees and teachers.

**Dr Burn:** Coming back to history teaching in particular, we have focused so far on the compulsory curriculum up to the end of key stage 3, but, as Yacoub was saying, if we want to diversify the teaching profession, it is about ensuring that students from BAME backgrounds go into GCSE, A-level and undergraduate study. Looking at the Royal Historical Society's report, the proportion of BAME students is about 11%, whereas the proportion across all undergraduates is about 23%; there are significantly fewer BAME history graduates than there are across all subjects.

There is a critical issue about the curriculum at GCSE and A-level that we lose if we debate just the national curriculum. Although the Historical Association is reluctant to embark on a wholesale national curriculum review, we think there are smaller changes that could be made to improve things. The current GCSE specifications are due for renewal. There is a serious concern. They specify content tightly, and it is the standard topics that are taught. For example, the Tudors is a very popular topic and there is new scholarship on it. Miranda Kaufmann's book has stimulated a lot of interest, and a lot of teachers are now thinking about how they can change their key stage 3 curriculum in ways that integrate that history into what they are already teaching.

There is currently no scope in the specifications and exams set on that basis. Because they tend to be quite narrowly political questions, we have not looked at how to set different questions. The Historical Association is working with the RHS, the Runnymede Trust, the Schools History Project and the Institute of Historical Research to say together, "These are recommendations we would like to make to the exam boards about what they could do within the existing national criteria for GCSE." More needs to be done. That is due for renewal. If we want to change those coming into the profession, it is important that they do not have Yacoub's experience and say, "I don't want to study that curriculum; I don't see that I fit there."



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

In part, it comes back to the scope for teacher training. When GCSEs were last changed, two exam boards introduced units on migration, and that could be studied as a thematic topic. In some cases, they also had empire units, or they linked migration and empire together, but because teachers were anxious, and because the changes were made in such a rush, they opted for the thematic studies that had previously been taught. Most of them—70%—went for the history of medicine because that has long been taught and they felt secure in the resources, whereas only 4% of students in that first wave got to study thematic units about migration to and from Britain, or in some cases migration to Britain. We definitely need to look at the curriculum further up, because that is a serious issue if we want to diversify the profession. There are important issues to make those courses more attractive.

**Esmie Jikiemi-Pearson:** I completely agree with what everyone is saying. A point worth making is about the role of the specification in keeping certain things out of the curriculum. Teachers teach what they know and what they are comfortable with. A large part of what they teach is based on that. I know it was in my school, and it is probably the case in a lot of grammar schools as well. League tables are very important, so they teach what they know so that they can get the best results and have high positions in the league tables.

Maybe there should be some kind of failsafe built into the system where a teacher might have to go out of their comfort zone. For example, for my English literature A-level, I was taught *Jane Eyre*, *Sense and Sensibility* and a contemporary text by an Irish author. Throughout my entire A-level and school life, I never got to read a book with a person of colour in it. The only character I can think of is Bertha in *Jane Eyre*. She is a crazed, abusive wife or whatever, so it is not a positive portrayal. There should be some kind of failsafe mechanism that means three texts like that cannot happen within the bounds of the curriculum. Sometimes I sat in that classroom thinking, “Why am I even here? This isn’t inspiring to me at all.”

**Yacoub Yasin:** It is interesting to hear Esmie’s experience. She went to a grammar school; I went to an all-boys state school. I have observed a lot of things. Katharine spoke about further down the curriculum. When I spoke to a primary head teacher in Richmond, he said that the only training they get is in maths, English and science. If that is the case, it shows us that our students are not being taught to value world history and how we have come about as a civilisation. If we do not tackle that early on in school, it will be a recurring issue later on at key stages 4 and 5 where they teach BAME issues, but there are no BAME students being taught it at that point because they have all decided to drop out.

I am studying politics now in key stage 5. I have had to go back a year and redo that. Other students will not do that. They have spent 18 years being disengaged from the curriculum and they do not want to spend another year in it. It is a huge issue that we are not being taught the



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

politics, economics and aspects like feminism that I am taught now. If I had known that earlier in my school life, I would have had a way different perception of what feminism is. All I heard was gossip and what other boys thought feminism was. I was never taught it. If that is the case in an all-boys school, imagine it happening in an all-white school where they do not have interaction with BAME students. They do not know their experiences.

**Chair:** What experience, knowledge, background and interest the teacher might have that they can give to the students is a real lottery. It has to be part of teaching, obviously, but it cannot be left entirely to that; it has to be a fundamental part of the curriculum.

Q22 **Kim Johnson:** I want to start by paying tribute to the young people on the first panel. They are a credit to their generation.

The Black Curriculum and the Historical Association have both called for black history and more diverse histories to be integrated throughout the year, not just delivered in October. What do you think is the impact of focusing on just one month, rather than it being integral to the whole curriculum? There have been calls for the curriculum to be far more diverse. We have just been talking about that. Esmie has just made a very valid point about the lack of diverse literature. That goes right across the board.

**Eleshea Williams:** Post-October, there is a huge conversation at the moment, in 2020, as to the purpose of Black History Month now. At The Black Curriculum, we acknowledge that Black History Month served a really important role in the past. However, in light of the Black Lives Matter movement, and the comment we keep hearing about black history being synonymous with British history, we question why black history is still relegated to one month in a year and then ignored for the other 11.

In teaching our young people, we reinforce the notion that black history matters only in October, which is absolutely untrue. By doing that, we drive a perception of black history being other. We do not want our young people to feel that they are an other to white history, or less important, and that is where integration is a key word. The Romans and Tudors have been brought up; for example, there is the story of John Blanke who was a trumpeter for Henry VIII and played at the court. That is the equivalent of playing at the Olympics today. It was a huge moment in history. It is momentous when a black man is not enslaved and is not part of the Windrush generation.

There is often a misconception that black history in the UK began with the Windrush generation. We should acknowledge that black people have existed in Britain for centuries. We cannot do that by just fitting it into one month; it needs to be integrated. When we are learning about the Tudors, why not talk about black Tudors as well? It is important that we start to integrate it in every month of the year.



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

**Professor Turner:** Research suggests that short-term interventions to try to reduce biases or prejudice do not result in long-term change. If you have something in place for only a month in the year, or a couple of weeks here or there, it will perhaps have a short-term impact but not the lasting effect we would like to see. Only long-term sustained programmes, as you might suspect, result in long-lasting change.

In evaluations of interventions that have integrated things into the classroom for a period of time, you see that they tend to have an effect on attitudes towards other groups nine or 12 months down the line, but if you do something short term it will probably last one or two weeks. I agree that from a psychological perspective it is crucial that this is sustained and integrated in the curriculum.

**Dr Burn:** It is a crazy idea to suggest that it could be confined to one month a year, although it was an important initiative in generating awareness and moving people on when it was introduced 30 years ago.

For coherent curriculum planning, it is complete nonsense to say, "This is Black History Month." You have to think carefully about the sequencing of your curriculum. If we know we will be teaching the transatlantic slave trade, we have to think beforehand about where to do studies of pre-colonial Africa, and acknowledge the agency and vibrancy of those civilisations before we introduce people to such a traumatic event and the way Africans were treated. We need coherence in our curriculum, and we need to know that it is then connected to our teaching of the industrial revolution. The explanation depends on that history. Teachers need to plan coherently and sensibly across years and key stages of the whole curriculum.

**Rosamund McNeil:** It is important for us to understand that Black History Month has come from black struggle and from black activists securing it as a staging post to try to build awareness, but it is meant to be a stepping stone, not the end point. At the moment, one of the values of having the month identified is that often it is where schools form partnerships, and libraries, local authorities and local museums do activities. Schools start something off that can then last for longer periods. There is value in that.

We have to do more to check that the profession understands that the value and the benefit is for all students, not black students; all young people should have an entitlement to learn about the entirety of British history. A rich, diverse take on British history is a benefit for all young people.

Although having one month has lots of pitfalls, I would not want to see the Government reduce any focus on it until we have lots more in place, and other commitments about longer and more sustainable work. We need it at the moment, but it should be in parallel with plans and commitments to have more of a strategy. What we are really talking about is culture change at school level. We want inclusive school cultures,



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

and that is about recruitment, staff behaviour, professional standards and school behaviour policy.

If a school wanted to do something helpful in history month, it would get further by thinking, "How is the behaviour policy operating in our school? Are we policing black kids' hair, and are they getting detentions for hair infringement? Let's stop that straightaway." Zero tolerance does not work. We have the DFE supporting a zero-tolerance approach to pupil behaviour that leads to huge, disproportionate outcomes for black children. History month often starts conversations that are helpful, but I am absolutely with the other panellists: what we are after is sustainable change.

If I were the DFE or the Government, I would pick some immediate partnerships. The Runnymede Trust, which people have mentioned lots of times, has some fantastic things. They have something called Our Migration Story, which is a really good website developed with a range of high-quality researchers. It is there ready to use. I would roll out a huge programme to get that into every school, and that would be a good place for the DFE to start. If I were the Government, I would have launched that in Black History Month, but it would be an ongoing sustainable project.

**Chair:** "Spend Black History Month working out the interwoven curriculum for the year" is probably the message coming from that.

**Kim Johnson:** Can I finish off with one more question?

**Chair:** I am sorry but we are up against time. This is an incredibly rich discussion. We have 25 minutes left and four members still have questions. Panel members, could you just add to what others have said, otherwise we will struggle to fit everything in? Thank you.

**Q23 Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** Rosamund, I am aware that the NEU has written to the Prime Minister calling for a review of the black curriculum to ensure that it includes the achievements of black Britons, as recommended in the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, and to learn from the Windrush review and develop a plan to teach black history in the UK and its relationship to the rest of the world. What form would you like the review to take, and what do you hope it would reveal that we do not already know? What could it achieve in moving things forward?

**Rosamund McNeil:** It connects very much to the conversation we have already had, and the discussion we are having. Our policy suggestions and recommendations in that pitch to Government is the discussion we are having now. I will not say much more because I think it is the conversation we are having.

It would be three things. It would be trying to create more space in the curriculum for teachers to use local history, and to think about black history in that area, for the benefit of all young people quite explicitly, particularly in schools with all-white pupil populations. We have a set of



myths, one of which is, “We are an all-white school, so we don’t need to talk about those issues here.” Incorrect. The other myth is, “We treat everyone the same here. We have very high expectations of every child.” Wholly insufficient. We need to talk about structural racism explicitly, and the curriculum is one way to do it. I think we are into the conversation, and I do not think there is anything extra we were saying in that letter that is different from the policy ideas.

Given what is going on with coronavirus currently, it would not be realistic, or something the profession would be looking for right now, to have a huge, central national curriculum review, but we need to catch hold of and understand that there is a range of building issues with the curriculum in England. It is overpacked; it does not have the diversity and representation that I think we all understand need to be achieved. I would not start with a national curriculum review at the moment; I would start by changing how we assess the curriculum. It is how we assess students and hold schools accountable that leads to insufficient time to do the work we are discussing today. The accountability pressures need to be urgently adjusted.

The Government will probably have to do that this year anyway, because of the disruption from coronavirus. As we see what happens this year with the virus, we should also be trying to think about how the English system needs to be more fit for purpose. That is about diversity in the black curriculum, but it is also about skills. There is not enough focus on skills in the way we assess the English curriculum. A lot of people are in agreement on that: employers, teacher unions and international evidence. The discussion we are currently having is what we were getting to in that particular letter.

That is another long answer, Chair. I am sorry.

Q24 **Chair:** No, it is very rich. Does anyone have anything to build on that? I don’t want to put you off.

**Yacoub Yasin:** I want to say something about the Department for Education and the education community. It is about making education relevant. As I said earlier, I don’t understand how learning about Mary Seacole is relevant to my life, but learning about Elijah McCoy, who helped find lubrication, which helped the industrial revolution work, is relevant to me. That helps me gain a better understanding of world history and British history.

I recognise the need to talk explicitly about race, religion and ethnicity, but at the end of the day it is about remembering that we are trying to provide our children with British history and world history, and allowing them to find their place in both Britain and the wider world. It is not about a white curriculum, a black curriculum or an Asian curriculum; it is about a British curriculum that is representative of everyone.

**Chair:** Very well put.



**Q25 Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** There has been a lot of criticism of the reviews and inquiries we have conducted in the past few years, particularly on race and racism, such as the Macpherson inquiry. It is not that those reviews and inquiries are not great, because they always have some fantastic recommendations, but they are rarely ever fully implemented in the way people would like. Do you agree that a review would be the best way forward, or is there something else we could do that might change the culture of having reviews and then not implementing their recommendations?

**Dr Burn:** It goes back to the issue of preparing teachers to ensure that they can make appropriate decisions and act on the outcomes of reviews. We have a very good model of professional development in the Centre for Holocaust Education, which has been a significantly funded research and development initiative. It began by researching what young people know and understand, and how that relates to what historical scholars know and understand about the holocaust.

On the basis of that research into pupils' knowledge, and subsequent research into teachers' knowledge, they have very professional development programmes. They have a programme that they can offer any initial teacher education programme that is running. They take it around the country to different providers, including school-based providers. They have professional development training days, and they release their resources to teachers who have been on those professional development training days, so that they feel equipped to use them effectively. They have a masters-level module that brings teachers into close contact with scholars.

There are calls that have come out of the TIDE project at Liverpool University—Travel, Transculturality, and Identity in England—and from the Runnymede Trust project for an equivalent kind of centre. We have an excellent model for sustained research, particularly into the teaching of empire, migration and belonging, which is how they framed it. Do I see myself in British history? How do I connect through that with world history? That is a very powerful model. They say they will root it in research. What do children, young people and teachers need, and how do we provide that systematically in sustained models of professional learning? That is the other critical point. As we mentioned, one-off days or months for children do not work. We need sustained programmes. They have looked at how to develop that, so a similar model for teaching these issues is important.

**Cynthia Muthoni:** On the review element, one of the questions you guys need to ask pupils and students is about how racism is tackled in their school. There is a lack of teaching in subjects such as anti-racism, which leads to children feeling that racism is not an issue and that it is normal. That prevents them from reporting issues.

As part of my evidence supporting my petition, I did a survey on that. I asked those of school-leaving age—16 and over: What is your



experience? Have you experienced racism? Did it come from a student, member of staff or senior member of staff? Have you ever witnessed somebody receiving abuse? The answers are quite significant and are very saddening to read. I would like to submit that to you later, because I do not want to take up too much of your time, but it should definitely be inquired about.

**Yacoub Yasin:** When we teach history, we cannot just say black or African. These people come from a specific tribe or culture that is unique and independent. I have faced it myself from Pakistani or Indian colleagues. I have been stereotyped, or there have been certain expectations. It does not make sense. People do not understand who I am and where I am from.

**Chair:** I completely get that.

Q26 **Peter Gibson:** I have two questions, and it is prudent to ask my second question first, following the last point. It is a question specifically for Rosamund. The National Education Union said that it will launch an anti-racist framework to respond to the experiences of black children and black staff, to develop an anti-racist approach. What will it involve specifically?

**Rosamund McNeil:** We have that live now. It is a toolkit to speak to lots of the issues. It has come from evidence from black staff and black members. It is not just our union. You could survey other union members and get the same finding that black staff, unfortunately, face very high levels of discrimination in pay, progression and stereotyping about things they would be good at. They are over-represented in the number of teachers put on to capability procedures. There are widespread patterns of non-fair treatment. Often, black members are very unsure about how to respond to that.

We do not want our members to feel alone; we want it acknowledged that there are patterns of discrimination, we want to help people assert their rights, and we want to start conversations to make sure that discrimination does not happen and is not happening, and is reduced and challenged. It is a practical toolkit designed for schools to use to think about where they are at. What are they doing well? What might they want to develop? What kind of professional learning is there? It is designed to start deep professional reflection about how young people feel in their schools.

The word we all use is “belonging”—the sense of belonging. I come back to it again. We want schools to be able to investigate pupil experience and the levels of motivation and engagement, and look at the patterns of exclusion. Who is going to the seclusion room? What are the underlying problems? What is that masking? What social and emotional support might be needed? It is a practical tool with five sections: leadership; teaching and learning; power and voice; wellbeing and belonging; and community—how you bring in the strength of your parent community.



Often, black parents report not feeling a sense of belonging in the school space. It asks teachers and heads to think again, to go beyond engagement and think about the strengths in their community and how you harness them to make their school more effective. It is out there.

We are seeking to work with local authorities on that as well. The missing piece in the jigsaw for me this afternoon is that we have not talked about the potential for local authority leads and academy chains to be drivers for change. If we look at evidence historically about what has happened to drive cultural change, local authorities often ran quite proactive programmes and brought schools together across an area—for example, all the schools in Hackney or Kirklees. Together, you can get teachers to reflect on what is happening and why, to think about pedagogy and look to the needs of the child and what that means for their teaching. We are proud of our framework and we would love to explore with Government ways to make it a useful tool for change.

**Q27 Peter Gibson:** My next question brings together some points that have already been made in a number of the contributions. I want to refer specifically to Arthur Wharton. He came to the UK from Ghana and was the first black professional footballer in Britain. He played for Darlington in 1885. The foundation in his name, based in my constituency, visits schools. I asked Shaun, who runs the foundation, about teacher and pupil confidence in discussing these issues. This feeds into what was discussed earlier. Shaun told me that teacher and pupil confidence in respect of these issues is greatly increased when that local history is brought to life.

I also asked Shaun about the recent unveiling of a mural about Arthur. I said to him, "Are you doing this for Black History Month?" Shaun said, "As a black man, every month is history month for me." That illustrates the story that is coming through from a number of the contributions. Can the witnesses tell us what the Government need to do to improve teacher confidence, and what changes can be made to teacher training?

**Dr Burn:** Teacher training is really important. Initial teacher education has become very fragmented, with different forms of provision. In particular, when it is school-centred provision there are often small programmes that make it very difficult to have a subject-specific dimension. I think Yacoub mentioned primary teacher training. That is really significant. How much attention is paid to these issues?

The weight of time in primary teacher education, but across all teacher education programmes, is the subject dimension. That plays out in history and English, and in science, as Yacoub said—there are scientists I need to know about—as well as in PSHE or other fields. It is about ensuring that enough time is given to the subject-specific dimension. At the moment, because the core content framework is built around teacher standards, it has only one area to do with subject knowledge, but subject knowledge is crucial to confidence. How can you make sure that the support and mentoring for that is properly given?



The inspection framework is important. Does your curriculum and your teacher education address these issues? The point about race and racism not being mentioned in it suggests that there needs to be more scope for that.

There is an issue about funding. We have just had the announcement of a new round of bursaries. We are in a very difficult financial situation, but if you say that the only teachers who will get bursaries to train are, essentially, in STEM subjects and you are not giving any bursaries, given what we know about the socioeconomic position—we are back to the intersection between race and class—it will be more difficult for potential teachers from BAME communities to train in subjects like history if the funding is not available. That issue needs to be looked at.

On ongoing training, we need something equivalent to what has been done effectively with holocaust education to allow us to know what the effects of our policies are. We also need more data. It is very hard to get ethnicity data. It used to be collected and published much more clearly, but we have less data about the ethnicity of students taking history at GCSE and A-level and going into that pipeline so that they might be able to become teachers. If we want to see the effect of our policies, we need to have more visible data.

**Eleshea Williams:** Arthur Wharton is another example of an incredible story we often do not hear about. I got a bit emotional about the unveiling. What you say about local history being important is true. A question we get asked a lot is, “What can we do, or what can the Government do right now?” We had a response from Nick Gibb, who said that Covid restrictions meant he was unable to meet us straightaway.

In light of the recent DFE guidelines about divisive teaching and teaching victim narratives, there needs to be Government support that alerts local authorities to organisations that are allowed to enter schools. There is a huge lack of clarity for teachers and educators in highlighting and alerting local authorities about organisations going around doing that. We try to tailor our teaching to local aspects, and local authorities are very influential in mandating those kinds of things. They take directions from central Government, but they need assurance that it is legal in light of those recent guidelines. Teacher training, separate from diversity and inclusion training, on the psychological importance of teaching black history is also important for esteem building.

Q28 **Peter Gibson:** Eleshea, if you would like to visit the mural, I am more than happy to take you there.

**Eleshea Williams:** I would love to.

**Chair:** Covid permitting.

Q29 **Caroline Nokes:** Eleshea just covered an element of my question, and Rosamund referred to it earlier in some of the evidence she gave. We all



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

recognise how important impartiality is, but, on the lack of clarity about the DFE guidance issued back in September, what more needs to be done? How can we best emphasise to the DFE the need not to put teachers in a difficult position when they are looking at the resources they want to use?

**Rosamund McNeil:** It would be helpful if the DFE could take out that particular phrase. I do not think “divisive or victim narrative” is a helpful phrase. What I think the DFE was trying to do was to be helpful and encourage schools to think about the principles you need to apply if you are partnering with other groups to get them into school, which is a legitimate aim for DFE. We already have it in law. It is very important that we all understand that the Education Act 1996 has it covered.

In the Act, it is very clear that schools and pupils cannot pursue partisan political activity. There is already a duty against political indoctrination and a duty to secure balanced treatment of political issues. It is all there in law already, so having new extra non-statutory guidance becomes confusing. There is constant questioning as to whether or not the DFE was trying to say black lives matter in that phrase. Was it aimed at Black Lives Matter?

The DFE has to be more transparent. It is very important to understand that we need teachers to recognise that in their school young people and black staff are affected by racism every day, and the school must have a response in terms of curriculum, culture and behaviour. It has to respond to racist incidents appropriately, seriously and robustly; it has to use the curriculum to try to produce those aims. All of those are legitimate aims and activities for education. Perhaps it would be helpful if the DFE felt able to look again at this latest in a very small number of unhelpful statements in what otherwise is useful guidance.

The other Achilles heel—I am not sure that is the right metaphor—is that schools want some support and guidance about appropriate partnership working. That needs to be looked at again. If I were the DFE, at the moment I would put my focus on tracking down some of the good practice that is out there. Some local authorities are doing productive stuff—Hackney is an example, but not the only one—in developing good curriculum initiatives. The DFE should do some research on where they are, and take the principles and good practice learning from that and translate it across the system

If I were the DFE, I would focus on some of the good partnerships going on between teacher training providers and academics. There is some good thinking about how to prepare teachers to carry out their professional responsibilities well in challenging inequality and doing education in a way that reduces inequality. It is not always about doing something extra or new; it is about teaching and learning, and being cognisant of the issues, aiming for high-quality relationships between teachers and pupils. It is the relationships in education that are so important. That is what leads to learning. They support good learning;



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

they scaffold learning. We need to empower teachers to do that, and it is about the DFE thinking what would empower teachers. It is about good engagement by the DFE on some of these issues in what is not a normal year for MPs, teachers or heads. I hope that has answered your question.

**Q30 Caroline Nokes:** I see Katharine nodding. Would you like to add anything or has Rosamund covered it?

**Dr Burn:** Essentially, it is about support and recognising teachers' anxieties. We have talked about it a lot. As Rosamund said, it is already covered by legislation. If you add layers, you create a culture of fear. The main issue is about building teachers' knowledge, confidence and professional skills. If you add warnings and that sort of language, it makes teachers much more fearful. We have enough legislation. It is about supporting them, not putting in additional fears.

On the use of materials, you have to teach about different groups historically who held extremist views. There is a difference between teaching about those groups and teaching their ideas. It is about recognising that distinction, but, critically, removing barriers that make teachers fearful of opening conversations in what should be a safe space to explore important issues.

**Q31 Tonia Antoniazzi:** I was a teacher for 20 years before coming into Parliament, so I very much recognise the demands on teachers and the curriculum. I recognise what Yacoub is saying; he has a point. We have to embrace diversity throughout the curriculum and not have an add-on for a month. I want to ask a question of Katharine. Rosamund and Eleshea have spoken about this. Your resources are very well regarded, but what do you think of the Runnymede Trust's idea of a one-stop shop, and for all resources to be in one place for all teachers, for everybody, to access?

**Dr Burn:** I have huge respect for Runnymede's resources and Our Migration Story, which was mentioned earlier and was developed in partnership.

I am wary of creating any one-stop shop, because it creates the idea that there is a single authorised version. One of the huge strengths of the history curriculum is that it says that young people should understand how and why different interpretations of the past have been constructed. We need to protect that. It is a really important defence of history, as opposed to anybody's myth-making or attempt to impose a single version of the past.

I am very supportive of guidance and direction. One of the things the RHS did in its report was to direct people to possible resources to try to address these issues, but, much as I respect the Runnymede Trust, I am very wary of saying that anybody is the holder and that these are approved resources. It goes back to the point that we are a democracy and we need to respect diversity of opinion, and understand how and why



## HOUSE OF COMMONS

people reach different conclusions about the past. Yes to pointers and encouragement, but I am wary of a single location.

**Yacoub Yasin:** I am reminded of Chris's question at the start. He said he faced almost a backlash. It is understanding that, when you have discussions with those communities, their experiences might come from ancestral stories, they might come from folklore or they might come from a writer from a certain background that differs from where we are getting our sources of information.

**Chair:** Thank you. I thank everybody; all our witnesses—they have been absolutely brilliant—the petitioners who inspired the whole discussion and the members for their questions. I wish we had more time. We could discuss this for a long time yet. Fortunately, we will be holding another evidence session on the subject, which Caroline will lead. We will also have some public engagement with teachers and students.

We will take on board all the evidence you have all submitted, including written evidence to the inquiry, and it will inform our debates in Parliament. It has been incredibly rich. I thank you personally. I have found it fascinating. I am a historian by background and, from listening to you today, I feel I have missed half the story. We can, hopefully, put that right for the generations being educated from now on. Thank you very much indeed.