

Women and Equalities Committee and Petitions Committee

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

Wednesday 18 November 2020

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Members present: Caroline Nokes (Chair); Elliot Colburn; Angela Crawley; Chris Evans; Peter Gibson; Kim Johnson; Catherine McKinnell; Kate Osborne; Bell Ribeiro-Addy.

Education Committee member also present: Apsana Begum.

Panel 1 Questions 32 - 54

Witnesses

I: Dr Marlon Moncrieffe, Senior Lecturer, School of Education; Lucy Stokes, Principal Economist, National Institute of Economic and Social Research; Professor Claire Alexander, Professor of Sociology, University of Manchester.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Marlon Moncrieffe, Lucy Stokes and Professor Claire Alexander.

Q32 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to this afternoon's joint evidence session on black history and cultural diversity in the curriculum, which is hosted by the Women and Equalities Committee and the Petitions Committee. Can I thank our witnesses on this first panel for joining us? We have Dr Marlon Moncrieffe, Professor Claire Alexander and Lucy Stokes. I am going to start with the first question. Can I ask witnesses to try to keep answers succinct where possible? Could each of you say a little about how your work is relevant to the subject of today's discussion?

Professor Alexander: Thank you for the invitation to speak. I am a professor of sociology at the University of Manchester and I am also the associate director of the Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity, so I have been working on issues of race and ethnicity in Britain for about 30 years. For the last 10 to 12 years, I have been working very closely with the Runnymede Trust on a series of projects funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which have been aiming to diversify the history curriculum. In particular, I am a project lead on the Our Migration Story website.

Lucy Stokes: Likewise, thank you very much for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Lucy Stokes. I work at the National Institute of Economic and Social Research. I am here particularly because I am one of the co-authors on a report for the Department for Education published in 2015, which comprised a review of evidence on educational attainment by ethnic group with a particular focus on pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Dr Moncrieffe: Good afternoon. I am Dr Marlon Moncrieffe from the school of education at the University of Brighton. I am a former primary school teacher. I taught in primary school education for 14 years. My expertise is in examining the history curriculum and how it is enacted by trainee teachers in the early years of the profession. I have done some research on that. That is what I have to contribute to this discussion.

Q33 **Kim Johnson:** Good afternoon. Many of the petitions we have received call for the curriculum to be diversified, but there have also been calls for it to be decolonised. Could you explain the difference between these two terms? What does a decolonised curriculum look like?

Professor Alexander: There is a certain amount of slippage between those two terms. Often, it is probably one of generation. I suspect that young people are talking about decolonisation, whereas people of my generation are talking about diversifying or developing an inclusive curriculum. Broadly speaking, in both cases, they share the desire to tell different stories, to bring more people into the curriculum as it is understood and taught, and to shift the standpoint away from very



dominant, quite narrow views, often Eurocentric, white, male, middle-class views, of what history is or what knowledge is. It is about unsettling those and providing new entry points into and standpoints from which we can understand the world we live in.

Dr Moncrieffe: When decolonising the curriculum, we are considering a document that has been constructed—the national curriculum for history. For observers, it is an identification of any potential bias, disadvantage, oppression, marginalisation, suffocation or violence caused by the contents of that particular document that are imposed upon specific groups in society. Through research, we found that this current curriculum is a Eurocentric and Anglo-centric construct that favours the dominant group in society over others. Decolonising the curriculum is recognising those disadvantages. To diversify the curriculum would be to add equity to the content of the curriculum.

Q34 **Kim Johnson:** In recent debate in the House of Commons on Black History Month, the Minister for Equalities, Kemi Badenoch, said that our curriculum does not need to be decolonised for the simple reason that it is not colonised and we should not apologise for the fact that British children primarily study the history of these islands. Would you agree or not agree?

Lucy Stokes: I am probably not the expert best placed to answer that on the evidence, but I know there is some.

Dr Moncrieffe: I did see that speech and I do disagree with that comment that the curriculum does not need to be decolonised. When you look at the non-statutory guidance, for example, which outweighs the statutory elements of the curriculum, it is very Eurocentric in whom it asks teaching teachers to refer to as part of their teaching. It is very Anglo-centric. Therefore, the contents have been colonised and they basically are geared to give a particular group in society an advantage. By looking more deeply into the curriculum, hopefully, the Minister for Equalities will recognise that.

Professor Alexander: The comments are disappointing. It shows a lack of understanding over time of the way that the history curriculum has been shaped because, at particular points since the national curriculum was instituted in 1991, it has been broader and narrower depending on the political objectives of the day. There have been points when it has taught migration and the empire. It has been more inclusive. At other points, it has narrowed to deal with the question of Britishness in a very narrow way. The latest version, which is very much our island story, erases a whole range of different narratives and the fact that Britain cannot be understood without understanding its place in a broader world. Those global interconnections are very important.

It is a mistake to say that it has not been colonised. I am not sure the use of that kind of language really helps. It shows that there has been a narrowing of how one thinks about what Britishness is and Britain's place



in the world. There have been opportunities in the past where that has been much broader. It is important to recognise that a lot of professional expert historians, for example at the Royal Historical Society, have been arguing for a long time that the history curriculum is not fit for purpose and does not represent how history as a modern discipline thinks of itself or the kinds of knowledge that fit our young people to go out into the world and contribute to it in a meaningful way.

Q35 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Professor Matthew Goodwin recently told the Education Committee's inquiry into left-behind white pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds that talking to these pupils about white privilege was nonsensical and dangerous. I would like to know what your views are on this.

Dr Moncrieffe: I did see these comments. I think our colleague Professor Goodwin needs to understand more about the nuances of that particular term. It has been bandied around a bit, but the term is really aiming to explain, as I have spoken about already, the advantage and entitlement of which certain people in society have more than others according to their ethnicity.

White privilege is the umbrella term, but we are talking about things such as symmetrical recognition. For example, within the national history curriculum, there are characters to whom, if you are white, you can better relate because of your ethnicity. Within the national curriculum, there are no black people whatsoever, so you cannot relate straightaway. If you are white, you will. If there is a particular ethnic group in the national curriculum—this relates to white people—and if you are white, you are going to relate more to those, so there is an element of symmetrical recognition that gives an advantage.

This relates not only to the curriculum but to wider society. For example, 88% of the teaching profession is white British, so, if you are a white child or student going into the classroom, you are more likely to come across a white teacher. That is probably going to give you more of an advantage based upon your socialisation or life experiences than if you are a black person. White privilege needs to be understood more deeply through the finer nuances that we are talking about, in terms of advantage and how it gives certain people in society a head start over others.

I understand where he was coming from in speaking to white working-class children's results, but, as part of his discussion, he did not take into account that African-Caribbean children are still anchored to the bottom of the attainment league table and have been for the last 50 years. Bernard Coard made his speech in 1971 about how the West Indian child is made educationally subnormal. That was 50 years ago. They are still the same today. Mr Goodwin did not give that example to contrast with his argument, so he needs to look more clearly into the terms of white privilege to understand what the issues are.



Professor Alexander: There are a couple of things. I am always slightly wary when people wheel out the white working-class as an emblem of some kind of innate disadvantage that means that we should not address inequalities more broadly. That does a disservice to white disadvantaged young people as much as it does to black, Asian and other kinds of minority disadvantaged young people. I am not convinced that that is necessarily how they feel. We worked with some white working-class young people when we did some work in schools with the Runnymede projects that we have worked on. Their voices are not heard any more in the curriculum than black and Asian young people because of the way that history is taught is about kings, queens and politicians.

Very often, for us, it was about getting young people to think about how their families, their communities and their areas are part of history. We worked with a number of young people. In fact, we worked in a school in Greenwich, which was predominantly white, in a quite disadvantaged area. There was a certain amount of resistance to begin with and they did not have anything interesting to say. When we asked them to think or talk to their grandparents about what they were doing and what they had done, they would say, "My grandmother came over from Ireland. Does that mean that that is my story? I have a story to tell." There is something about history more broadly that is a problem.

The focus on white privilege assumes that we are individualising it and therefore saying to individuals, "You are more privileged than I am." Often, of course, that is not going to look like it makes sense to some young person growing up in a very disadvantaged area. What I think is missing is the understanding that we are talking about structures, not individuals. We are talking about the structures that mean that, if you are white, you are not going to be discriminated against on the grounds of your race. You may be discriminated against on a range of other dimensions, such as where you live, how you look, your class, sexuality or gender. It will not be about race.

For young people from BAME backgrounds, race is something that they always have to contend with and that often disadvantages them. It does not need to be personalised in the way that it is. It is not a zero-sum game. People always assume that, somehow, the white working-class are losing out to black and minority ethnic young people if we start talking about race. That is not where the problems lie. The problems lie within the structures that are disadvantaging all kinds of people for all kinds of reasons.

Q36 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** In the debate on Black History Month, the Government's Equalities Minister also said that teachers who present the idea of white privilege or other key components of critical race theory as a fact to their students were breaking the law, specifically saying that we do not want teachers to teach their white pupils about white privilege and inherited racial guilt. What are your views on the Government's response to teaching race and cultural diversity? How important is it for schools to



discuss critical race theory ideas in relation to diversity and the curriculum?

Dr Moncrieffe: Critical race theory is just a way of seeing. It is not an ideology. It is simply a way of aiming to understand the world around us, and you can either accept that or dismiss it. With history, we aim to provide students with different lenses to understand the phenomenon or concept that we are aiming to explore. CRT does come from a black lens, and it casts a particular perspective on the way in which society is structured and the way in which history has been written. That should not be dismissed. That should be expressed and allowed as one way of seeing a particular story or notion. I would not know whether it is against the law to do that at all. It is about giving students different ranges of seeing things and a broader repertoire of ways to see history. I was quite shocked by that particular comment, to tell the truth.

Professor Alexander: I completely agree with Marlon. The issue is a misunderstanding of what critical race theory is. As I was just saying, this is a focus on structures, so it is not about individuals or blaming individuals. I find it really bizarre that an Equalities Minister would think that teaching anything that talks about the equality between different groups of people is illegal. It is extraordinary to me.

Q37 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** Is it clear from the curriculum and the law what approach teachers should be taking in teaching race and diversity? Would you say that there is any confusion about what is and is not allowed?

Dr Moncrieffe: Considering the teachers' standards, for example, no element of the teachers' standards, part 1 or part 2, asks trainee teachers to demonstrate their competence with teaching through the lenses of race equality or to demonstrate their race literacy through their pedagogical approaches or the resources they are using in their classroom. If that were part of the teachers' standards, that could help to equip teachers in the future to be much more conscious about inclusive practices in this day and age. It is very vague at the moment. I know there is a lot of talk about fundamental British values as an approach to teaching about race equality, but that is pretty vague.

I have done some research on how teachers in schools have been applying the fundamental British values policy. The outputs of that are not the civic nationalist ideals that we probably would have wanted. They are white British ethnic national outputs, which actually reinforce racism. That needs to be reviewed, as do the teachers' standards and the history curriculum.

Professor Alexander: I completely agree with what Marlon is saying. One thing that came out of the work we have been doing with Runnymede, where we work with a number of teachers across a range of schools across the country, was that the teachers we worked with, partly because they were involved in our projects, were very keen to diversify their curriculum and to teach material in ways that the young people in



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their very diverse classrooms could understand. We did a survey alongside that work, with, I think, 112 teachers, most of who said that they would really like to teach more diverse things but were not sure how to do that.

One problem that we have identified, which is exactly what Marlon was saying, is that there is a real gap in training. There is a need for continual professional development and support for teachers to be able to take on that work, giving them the space and the time to develop those resources, and to deal with the discomfort that teachers often feel when they worry about saying the wrong thing or upsetting people. It is very clear that teacher training does not deal with any of those issues.

There was a very interesting article in *The Guardian* a couple of months ago by Aditya Chakraborty, which talked about the young person who had done a survey of racism in schools. The material coming out of that was horrific in terms of the complete failures of schools and institutions to deal with racism in any meaningful way, whether you are talking about from teachers or the curriculum or in the playground. A lot of the things that those young people were dealing with were the same things that I was dealing with when I was at school more than 40 years ago. I find it a little bit shocking that, in such a multicultural society, in which 28% of our state school young people are from BAME backgrounds, that schools are not adequately equipped to deal with those questions.

Dr Moncrieffe: In terms of curriculum content and the current iteration of the curriculum that we are dealing with today, we have to think about who was around the table in constructing that particular curriculum. Were there any people of colour—black people or Asian people? I doubt it. If there is another iteration of the curriculum to come in the future, we need to ensure that we have diversity of thought there. We need to ensure that we have people who are representative of Britain around that table, having some input into curriculum content, because, at the moment, it is Eurocentric and white British, based on the biases of the people who were around that table. That is a step that could be taken to help to revise both statutory and non-statutory components of the curriculum.

I know Claire has done a lot of work on this, and I have done some as well. One particular word, “migration”, does not feature in the key stage 1 or key stage 2 curriculum. If it did, that would give an opportunity for teachers to think more broadly about the people of Britain and how people have come to Britain over the years. That would enable them to reach out to more ethnically diverse teaching. That one word going into the key stage 1 or key stage 2 curriculum could have a seismic effect to make teaching of history much more inclusive and diverse.

Q38 **Peter Gibson:** Following the conversation that has just been had with regards to Minister Badenoch, following your shock or surprise in respect of her comments, have either of you engaged with the Minister either



directly or through any other means to clarify your understanding of what the Minister meant or to convey your shock, surprise or views to her in respect of that?

Dr Moncrieffe: No, I have not had contact with the Minister. I have read through her speech. I have taken some notes from the speech. I feel that there are some contradictions in it. For example, she said, "We should not apologise for the fact that British children primarily study the history of these islands." We do not. Look at the key stage 2 curriculum, for example. If you want to think about some black people in the key stage 2 curriculum, the examples we are given are Rosa Parks from the USA and Mary Seacole, who was Jamaican of course. There are no other black British people within the curriculum. There is a conspicuous omission of the black British experience and history.

There is no opportunity to raise the profile of black British people through the curriculum, because no one has been identified. What is interesting about her speech is that, at the very end of it, she goes on to refer to black American history as an example of what we could do here. I felt that it was a speech that needed a bit more depth to convince me, as an academic and a teacher, that she has engaged thoroughly with the current aims and contents of the national curriculum.

Professor Alexander: No, we have not engaged with the Minister. We have tried over the last few years through the Runnymede connection to engage with the Department for Education on our concerns about the curriculum. We have had a couple of meetings. People working for the Department have been very supportive of the Our Migration Story resource and have pointed people towards it as an example of what could be done. They have been really reluctant to do anything more dramatic, either making migration mandatory or at least emphasising that we might want to think about it in a slightly stronger way. I would be very happy to get in a room with the Minister at any point she wants to talk about the work we have been doing.

Peter Gibson: Thank you for those contributions. It is important to note that the Minister was responding to a debate and was limited for time. She is not an Education Minister either, but thank you for those comments. I appreciate that.

Q39 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** The Government's response to the petitions that prompted these sessions is that the current curriculum already provides teachers with the freedom and flexibility to teach a diverse curriculum. Yet, since the Government's extensive reforms, which began in 2010, experts have been really vocal about their criticism of the national curriculum. Just to point to a few, historian Simon Schama said it was nationalistic and imperialist. Mary Bousted, the joint secretary of the NEU, said it was backward with a narrow view of skills and reactionary nationalism. That is just to count a few. Dr Moncrieffe, as an experienced classroom teacher and deputy head, do you agree with the Government response and have you evidenced this freedom and flexibility of teaching



a diverse curriculum?

Dr Moncrieffe: I will start from the last points you make. I have not evidenced that freedom that has been expressed in the Government responses to the petitions at all, to tell the truth. The national curriculum is a chronology based upon the “our island story” master narrative that Claire has spoken about already today. That is where it stems from. The examples that are given stem from that particular Henrietta Marshall story, where key components of Anglo-centric history are taught as facts.

There are no doubt aspects of the national curriculum that allow for exploration and investigation. Those aspects are not the issue. It is more to do with the content and the guidance. As I said, the guidance outweighs the actual statutory elements. If you are a beginning teacher aiming to teach history to your first class and you want to make reference to the national curriculum, you are probably going to be drawn to that guidance, which is very Eurocentric and Anglo-centric. You are probably going to be teaching down that particular route.

In my research, I have found that the trainee teachers I work with tend to rely upon the history they have been taught or what they have been taught by their parents in terms of their experiences of British history. One simple question that I asked them was, “What does British history mean to you?” They simply regurgitated everything that you would find in the national curriculum: the Tudors, Victorians, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. For me, as a black British man, I could tell you a lot about black British history and white British history. I doubt there are many white British people like me who could tell you a lot about black British history. It is about trying to find some space for equity in the curriculum so that we can offer alternative narratives and equip young people to see the world through different lenses.

Professor Alexander: I agree with everything that Marlon said. The argument that the Department for Education always comes back with is, “There is space in the curriculum.” On one hand, that is right. There is some space. We have been working quite closely with various exam boards, OCR and AQA in particular, in our Runnymede capacity. We worked alongside OCR in developing Our Migration Story to give teachers the resources they need to teach that kind of course and content easily.

There are a number of problems. One is that the national curriculum applies, increasingly, to fewer and fewer schools, so it is not a national curriculum. Most places can opt out of it. That is a problem. My very strong view is that, if you are going to have a national curriculum, it should be a national curriculum. It should reflect the nation that we are part of and not the nation that whoever has designed it thinks we are part of.

Teachers need to be supported to do that work. Even when you have teachers who want to teach this work, they are so beleaguered with work, timetables, marking and everything else that they have to do that



they go for what is easy and what is familiar. The Our Migration Story resource was developed precisely because one of the teachers we have been working with said, "I would love to teach this stuff. This is great, but I am really busy. I do not really have time. I am going to go to the TES site and just pull down stuff on Henry VIII." We need a resource that can give us that.

This is what we responded to. Let us give teachers the resources they need. They can go; they can find the lesson plans. They are getting expert knowledge from leading academics, cultural institutions and archives that bring that stuff to life, and they can take it into their classrooms easily. Some teachers are doing that, particularly in multicultural, quite diverse urban classrooms. It is less true elsewhere because teachers in less diverse schools somehow think it is not important. It is really important for us in the OMS team that this history is everybody's history, and everybody needs to understand it, even in what seem to be very white areas.

I was reading a new manuscript coming out on Burnley, which has had a lot of problems around intercommunal racial tensions. If you take a local history like that, where one might worry about the white working class, it is very clear from this book that Mike Waite, who was a council worker in the area, was saying that the history of Burnley is bound up with mills, cotton being produced, slaves in America, the links with the colonies, India and the cotton trade. There is a whole range of ways in which it applies to everybody, and it is really important that those stories get told, but teachers need to be supported and encouraged to do that.

Q40 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: You already answered part of my next question. What is stopping teachers from having that freedom and flexibility? What reforms and solutions would you propose? Is the current teacher training fit for purpose to equip teachers to teach a culturally diverse programme?

Dr Moncrieffe: I will reiterate what I have said about the teachers' standards. They are being revised as we speak. If there were an element of that allowing teachers to demonstrate their racial literacy through their pedagogical approaches and the resources they are using as part of the training, that would prepare them to step into the profession.

When teachers do step into the profession and into the culture of the school for the first time, it is about feeling that particular culture. Some teachers may want to go into schools with inclusion and diversity in their minds, but the schools may not allow for that in the cultural ethos that they have. That can be off-putting for teachers. It is not just about working with trainee teachers. As Claire said earlier, it is about offering CPD to existing teachers and head teachers as well, and holding them to account, so that they are demonstrating inclusive practice around race equality and teaching history. That needs to happen.

One thing that Claire pointed to as well is this notion of schemes of work. A long time ago, there was the QCA. The QCA used to create some



schemes of work in relation to the national curriculum. Perhaps Government need to consider establishing a body like that, which can help with devising exemplar schemes of work that schools can use in order to meet these calls to transform the curriculum. There are a few things to consider.

Professor Alexander: The teachers we worked with and surveyed as part of the OMS project very clearly said that they wanted more support in this. In the survey we did in 2019, 78% of the teachers said that they wanted more support and training to be able to teach questions of empire and migration. There is a real need and desire there for teachers to have the space to develop the professional skills that they need.

Q41 **Chris Evans:** Dr Moncrieffe, I was very interested in what you had to say about teaching history through the prism of the Tudors, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, which has not changed much since I was in school, to be straight with you. However, in the last couple of years, I have noticed an explosion of interest in local history. I have been passionate about oral history and recording the experiences of family members. I notice a lack of this oral history tradition being taught in our schools. When you talk about that review, not only do we have to mention what is in the curriculum but the way in which history is taught. How do you weave in the idea of bringing about that oral history tradition, which I know is prevalent in my part of the world in Wales and throughout the country?

Dr Moncrieffe: It is so important to record the stories of your parents and your grandparents, and to share those with each other. I know that Claire's work touched upon this as well. The work that I have done and the book that I have just written does that. In my work, I have recorded the oral histories of my mother in relation to her migration to Britain and her experience of cross-cultural encounters with white Britain through the uprisings of the 1980s in Brixton. If we can encourage teachers to work with their students to allow them to consider their own experiences, life experiences and local life experiences, to record them, to make reference to them, to share them, to use them to understand the past, and to develop future ideas for social cohesion, that would be a fantastic way of teaching history. Local history really helps with that.

There should be more emphasis on using local history as part of teaching and learning, and showcasing local role models, their historical experiences and what they have done for the local community in schools, so that we can share them across the country as well. I am very much for that approach to teaching and learning. As I said, that has been part of my research more recently through the book that I have just written.

Q42 **Chris Evans:** I know a lot about Muhammad Ali. I know a lot about Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Eldridge Cleaver and the Black Panther movement in the States. I watched a documentary the other day about Laurie Cunningham, one of the very first black footballers to make a breakthrough in the 1970s. It was very interesting and very harrowing in parts. How do we then ensure that those stories of British black people



not only are taught in schools but get in the mainstream media, which then spikes an interest in young people who believe the history is relevant to them?

Professor Alexander: One of the key lessons that came out of our work in schools through the Runnymede projects was the importance of local and family histories. We did a project on getting people to talk to someone's grandmother and make a film. We did something on heritage, so getting young people to do history walks and understand how their area had been shaped through migration. It allows much more passionate and creative engagement with history because it immediately relates what is going on to their lives, the lives of people around them and the streets they grow up in.

When you put those stories alongside each other, you have groups from quite different parts of the world and the sense of, "This is our city; this is who we are and how we make up that city". One of the schools we work with was in Cardiff, for example. They produced amazing work. If you go to the Making Histories website, there is a wonderful poem by a young Somali man called Farhan in Cardiff, who was talking about Welsh gold. It was about the coal trade between Wales and Somalia, which he learned about through doing this local history work. It is a really powerful and important way of connecting the personal to the broader social and historical. That is a good entry point and it allows for commonality and sharing experiences in a really powerful way.

Q43 **Chris Evans:** That is my frustration about being Welsh. We talk about Owain Glyndŵr, Hywel Dda and other Welsh princes, who are long forgotten about. They lived in the 1000s. We do not talk about the Somali community in Cardiff. I am glad you mentioned that because I was going to bring that up. We do not talk about why I speak with a thick Welsh accent yet somebody in Cardiff speaks with a different accent. My ancestors came from a Welsh-speaking part of Wales. We do not talk about any of that. I am just wondering, if we have a review, how we ensure that that comes over into our youngsters. The problem we have here is that youngsters do not engage and do not feel it is relevant to them. They do not feel that connection. How do we get that connection back to history again?

Professor Alexander: We worked with a wonderful young woman at a school in Sheffield very early on, who said to us, "I do not like history because it is about old dead people." The history work that we were doing, which allowed them to connect to people or areas that they knew, did allow for that kind of re-engagement. The original history work we have been doing came out of a project on the Bengal diaspora, which told the big stories of migration and partition through the stories of ordinary people who never normally get featured in the way that people tell history, because people are always fixated on famous people, kings, queens and politicians.



This comes back to my earlier point about the white working class. There is a whole realm of histories. Everybody creates history the whole time. These young people create history. They can learn that history and become historians themselves. It is about telling a whole range of stories, which can be around racial and ethnic minorities, working-class communities, women, sexual and religious minorities—all of those stories that never got told. I am a huge fan of reintroducing that into classrooms, because people have a real passion for understanding history from the bottom up.

Q44 Apsana Begum: I sit on the Education Committee, so my question is from that perspective, about the teaching of community languages. I have seen, over the years, a narrowing of the school curriculum. Languages, going up to GCSE level and beyond, are optional. The teaching of foreign languages up to a certain level is not mandatory any more. I am speaking about my own constituency here. The subjects are just the European languages right now, so Spanish and French. There is a bit of whittling away of availability of Commonwealth languages in the curriculum. I wanted to get your views on how important it is to retain that.

I am raising this partly because I know the impact that it has had, not only in helping students understand their backgrounds and connect in the way that you have described, but also, in terms of school performance, in giving a lot of pupils a boost in their education, when they have had their community language as an option to choose from in their studies.

Professor Alexander: There is a way in which certain languages are dismissed. The notion of community languages in itself separates them out from modern languages. That in itself is a problem. It is a real shame when those kinds of resources get lost. We did not come across it in our work with Runnymede, but I have been doing a project recently with a colleague called Suzi Hall at the LSE. She does stuff on everyday streets, looking at high streets. She maps these streets and she does it in terms of things like resources that people who own businesses have. One thing that she looks at is the languages that people speak. Very often, BAME communities speak a range of different languages, not necessarily the ones that you would expect. That is a huge resource that is in danger of being lost if it is not taught in schools.

Some of the arguments we have been making about history absolutely are going on in English literature. My first degree was in English. There is another way of talking about what Englishness or Britishness is through the way in which the English language has been formed and how it cannot be understood without understanding the different forms of global interaction, migration and change. There is something about language in particular that is, again, a very powerful way of connecting through making those stories very visible.

Dr Moncrieffe: I concur with everything that Claire has said. The original question points to how, since 2010, when there was curriculum reform,



there has been a devaluing and a narrowing of focus on broader languages. That is something that you have identified and something that we ought to review for the future.

Q45 Chris Evans: Take-up for history at GCSE, A-level and university level is very low among ethnic minorities. What can we do to improve that? What are the barriers in place? How can we ensure that more people from ethnic minorities train to become teachers, particularly history teachers?

Dr Moncrieffe: There has always been a haemorrhaging of young black people's educational opportunities from primary school into secondary school. They do not have the grades required to go on to train to become a teacher, because a lot of black children have been excluded from schools, so the pipeline has not been there. A long time ago, I did some research where I asked young black male undergraduate students why they had not trained to become teachers. I questioned the very few black male undergraduate students that I saw at a particular university on that. They said, "Because that particular profession was not put to me. I am more interested in doing things like business and computing."

Education, academia and teaching needs to be sold to young black people as a profession that they can do well in. We need to showcase our role models in Britain who have done well at this. I know that Nicola Rollock is doing quite a lot of work on this, in showcasing black female professors. There is a lot that needs to be done to prevent the haemorrhaging of young black people's education so that they can become educators of the future.

Professor Alexander: The Royal Historical Society did a really interesting report, if you have not seen it, on history as a discipline. It identified real pipeline problems partly because of the way that history is taught and the content, so people think it is not for them. It was a mistake to make the choice between history and geography. Most ethnic minority young people chose geography because it looked more interesting. If you are not taking it at GCSE, you are not taking it at A-level or going into university. History departments are very white. That problem has been acknowledged by the Royal Historical Society. It is doing a lot to diversify the curriculum at university level, which, hopefully, will bring more people through and then into the teaching profession.

My main concern with history is that the way it is taught, in both content and method, is boring. It is really boring, and it really should not be. If that were changed, you would attract more people to it and that would feed through the pipeline.

Q46 Chris Evans: I could talk to you both all day because I am in total agreement with what you said. I am very passionate about the teaching of history and the importance of understanding our past. What you say is spot on.



I must move on to Ms Stokes now for my final questions. The questions I just asked both Professor Alexander and Dr Moncrieffe lead on to the work you did in the 2015 report on ethnic minorities and attainment. That report is now five years old. Obviously, the data is going to be out of time now. Have you seen any changes in the last five years?

Lucy Stokes: To briefly recap on what that report shows, as part of it, it summarises some detailed analysis of trends in attainment conducted by Professor Steve Strand at Oxford. For attainment at GCSE at least, it had talked about the improvement in attainment that has been seen over that prior decade, so from the mid-2000s, among many ethnic groups. Indian and Chinese groups have been the highest attaining. There had been some improvement in Bangladeshi pupils, going from below the white British average to above, and black Africans, going from below to roughly the same as the white British average. There had been a narrowing of the gap for black Caribbean. Mixed white and black Caribbean and Pakistani still remained below the white British average in 2013.

It is quite difficult sometimes to see accurately how these things have changed over time, because the measures against which things are assessed change. The ways in which we tend to report headline measures of GCSE attainment are a little different now to those in 2013. One notable thing that is pulled out in that report is the attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals. In 2013, for example, around a third of white British pupils who were eligible for free school meals were achieving five A* to C grades, including English and maths. The next lowest attaining were mixed white and black Caribbean pupils and then black Caribbean pupils.

Looking at how that stands in 2019, which would be the most recent data, unfortunately, we cannot compare exactly the same measures, but you see that, among pupils eligible for free school meals, those three groups of white British, mixed white and black Caribbean, and black Caribbean, would still be the lowest attaining among FSM-eligible pupils, with the exception of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils, whose attainment levels are much lower. I have seen some analysis by FFT Education Datalab that has recently looked at a fall in the percentage of black Caribbean pupils achieving 9 to 4, as it now is, particularly in maths. There is still a lot to follow and learn from this data.

Q47 **Chris Evans:** Is there a major difference across subject areas? Could we segment them? Is one group doing better in a subject than another? I was quite interested in what Professor Alexander said about how most people want to take geography but find history boring. Are you seeing that in the research that you have conducted?

Lucy Stokes: This is a really interesting area. One of the limitations is that we quite often see, for good reasons, aggregated measures of data, so how people are doing across a range of GCSEs. There is much less detail, as far as I am aware, about specific performance for different subjects by ethnicity. We may have seen something in maths, for



example, particularly in one group, but it would definitely be worth while exploring further.

This also picks up on not only looking at the impact on attainment but also coming back to this issue of subject choice. Where pupils have chosen to do, for example, history, geography or other subjects—obviously there are some core objects—what you see in attainment at GCSE will also reflect the choices that have been made and who chooses to pursue those subjects earlier on.

I have seen some exploration of subject choice by ethnicity, but, from what I have seen, the results of that are not always clearcut. It would be very important to learn more about how this affects particular subjects and to consider how important that is for later outcomes and how that determines what pupils and young people go on to do next.

Q48 **Chris Evans:** Dr Moncrieffe, as a former primary school teacher and someone who examines the history curriculum, is that borne out on the ground? Do you have any anecdotal evidence to back that up or do you see any difference in what Ms Stokes has just presented to us?

Dr Moncrieffe: I can only really speak to my experiences of being a primary school teacher. I worked in multicultural, all-white and all-black schools. The children I worked with were given the opportunity to learn all different facets of British history. From the perspective of an academic who trains students to become teachers, I have worked with some cohorts of trainee primary school teachers who want to specialise in history in primary school. They have all been white British teachers, so it serves to show that there is something occurring between primary school and university entry that is putting young black people off history. That could be to do with the content, which Claire was alluding to.

There has been some research out there to suggest that, where young black people, at secondary school level, encounter the traumas of slavery or do not see themselves in history, that puts them off the subject straightaway. If they were seeing histories that reflected a positive side to their existence, their parents and their families, that might encourage them to champion that history further on as they go through the education system and maybe even to teach or become an academic in the subject. There needs to be greater investigation as to how that haemorrhage occurs and what can be done to stop it in the future.

Professor Alexander: I have very limited experience apart from the work we did in classes. We worked with people just before they were choosing history or geography. They were saying, "If this was what we were going to be doing in history, we would love to do history," but they go back into the class and pick up the curriculum, and they are back to learning about Henry VIII and how he murdered some of his wives. There is a mismatch between what people would like to be doing and what is on offer.



Q49 **Apsana Begum:** Lucy, your report was focused on attainment and the impact of poverty. In what ways do you think the data suggests that ethnic group, socioeconomic background and gender intersect? It would be really good to hear from you on that first.

Lucy Stokes: You are right to highlight that because there are very important intersections between all those groups. One of the motivations for that report being commissioned was an idea about why pupils from other ethnic groups who were eligible for free school meals appeared to be more resilient, for want of a better phrase. These relationships are very complex to understand. There is not a lot of time to go into detail here, but, for example, we are looking at eligibility for free school meals. It is a very useful measure. It definitely captures disadvantage, but there is a lot of variation within that group and outside that group. What about the people who might not be eligible but are still disadvantaged?

There are a lot of complicated relationships with gender. A lot of attention gets paid to, on average, girls doing better than boys. A lot of debates have focused on how white working-class boys need help, but there is still a gap for girls and their more affluent peers as well. All of these things are rather complex and need to be considered together.

Q50 **Apsana Begum:** On the Education Committee, we are doing an inquiry at the moment into the experiences of white working-class pupils. You mentioned free school meals, which is an area that is often looked at in terms of poverty and deprivation. Is there a risk of missing out some of the experiences of how race and class interact in the education system? Is a double layer of discrimination or being left behind not being taken into account if we just look at things from the perspective of free school meals as an indicator of poverty and deprivation?

Lucy Stokes: Yes, we need to be looking at all these things. As you said, free school meals is a very important group to look at. We know that it is not a perfect measure of disadvantage. It is very helpful, but we know it is not a perfect measure. Yes, we need to be looking at a range of measures to identify the pupils and young people who most need support.

Q51 **Apsana Begum:** Dr Moncrieffe and Professor Alexander, does your research and the work you have done give any insights as to why some groups outperform others, despite having the same socioeconomic background?

Dr Moncrieffe: My research focused upon how trainee teachers enact the history curriculum, and how they can transform their approaches to teaching and learning about that through alternative, black and Asian narratives and so on. It did not look specifically to the question you are asking.

Professor Alexander: I am going to sound like a sociologist now, which is what I am. It is partly a question not so much of who the pupils are but the schools and the school structure. One thing that is really interesting is



the increased attainment among Bangladeshi pupils, particularly in London. How do we account for that? Their attainment levels have shot up, and the better attainment levels in London have been traced to the fact that there are more ethnic minorities in London schools. Because they are attaining better grades, they are pushing London's attainment levels up.

We worked with a couple of schools in Tower Hamlets. It was clearly apparent that there was a lot of resource, support and belief in what those pupils could achieve. It is a resourcing issue. How good are the schools? How much money do the schools have? How much exposure are they getting to people who are telling them they can do this kind of work? Is that different according to different areas? There is something about structures and resources that is really important.

Q52 **Apsana Begum:** I know you have done quite a lot of work in this area in my constituency and borough. In terms of the attainment differences between boys and girls from different ethnic groups, what do you think explains this if there is that kind of difference between boys and girls?

Lucy Stokes: That is a very big question. An awful lot of research is trying to answer these questions about why that persistent gender gap on average is there. People point to various explanations. It is probably a mix of factors. One thing that gets highlighted is about a focus on literacy and reading at earlier years, which has sometimes, maybe, been more open to girls. Perhaps that has helped them. There is a lot of evidence about the fundamental importance of literacy skills in the early years. Maybe that has been adopted, on average, more easily.

It is very difficult to give a precise answer. Some other research talks about how there has been a lot of work, for example, to help support girls' aspirations and so on, so it is likely that there are a lot of factors. We need to continue to increase our understanding of why we see this. It is another area where it is probably worth while looking at subject differences as well, throughout all phases of the education system.

Dr Moncrieffe: I have no further comments to add to what Lucy said there. The research I have focused on is examining the socialisation, background experiences and education of teachers, and how that can influence the way in which they teach history through the constructed national curriculum that we have at the moment. The next phase of research could be to understand the impacts of shifting from a traditional form of historical consciousness to a more critical form of historical consciousness in seeing history, and how that impacts upon the teaching and learning with a wider range of children in their class. If they are teaching in a multicultural classroom and using a much more critical perspective for teaching history, how does that impact on the teaching and learning with a range of children? That is something that I could do next.

Q53 **Kate Osborne:** Professor Alexander and Dr Moncrieffe, you have



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conducted a lot of work on developing online resources to support the teaching of migration in schools, including one that has won several awards—ourmigrationstory.org.uk. What could be done to support the development of more effective resources to support teachers to teach diverse curricula?

Professor Alexander: From doing the Our Migration Story site, I learned that there is a huge amount of expertise across the country, in universities, museums, archives, local historians and other people, that could be harnessed. We were incredibly lucky working with Runnymede to bring people who were very keen to contribute to developing this kind of resource hub. That could be done for a whole range of other things.

I know that universities, for example, are talking about developing online resources for a whole range of different subject areas, including my own, sociology. That allows people to bring things together and access things in a way that is very accessible—and it should always be free—with the lesson plans that will support teachers to use them in a way that is easy, which is what we tried to do. With Our Migration Story, we tried to make it good and interesting but, mainly, easy for teachers to use, and for people to find stuff and to find their own ways through that.

Dr Moncrieffe: I mentioned already the possibility of there being a universal reference point. In the past, there was the QCA that created exemplars and schemes of work in relation to the curriculum. If Government took the steps to aim to establish or work with a particular body that could devise schemes of work on diversity, migration and race equality, at least teachers would know where to go straightaway. That means Government working with experts and organisations, and possibly establishing them in the future, because there is a lot out there, but it is a case of teachers having the confidence to know where to look first.

Kate Osborne: Thank you for your very concise answers.

Q54 **Chair:** Can I thank all our panellists for having joined us for this first panel this afternoon? Thank you for your contributions.