

Petitions Committee: Online engagement on Black history and cultural diversity in the curriculum

Activity

The Petitions Committee ran two online surveys of people working in Primary and Secondary schools respectively, to ask their thoughts on how effective the National Curriculum is in ensuring that children and young people experience a 'truly diverse education'.

We have summarised the key themes below and illustrated them with quotes from respondents.

Please note: Unless otherwise stated, the percentages quoted are an average of responses across the Primary and Secondary surveys. Where there was a significant disparity between responses from primary and secondary school teachers, percentages for each are included.

Response

273 responses to primary survey

283 responses to secondary survey

Methodology

Nvivo Pro 12 was used to identify and contextualise the most common words and phrases found in the entire set of responses to open questions submitted through the survey. This allowed us to group and summarise recurring themes which were threaded throughout much of the responses.

In addition to this analysis of the data, Committee staff manually reviewed individual comments and answers, using both subject searches and randomised selection.

Survey questions which produced statistical results have been included in the summaries of key themes.

About the respondents

- The majority of respondents (79%) told us they were a member of the **teaching staff** or **senior management** at a school.
- Other respondents to the surveys include schools' administrative and support staff, Governors, home-educators, and parents.
- The age groups (key stages) taught by respondents were fairly evenly distributed across the full Primary and Secondary range.
- Respondents were spread across all English regions as follows:
 - London: 25%
 - South East: 15%
 - North West: 13%
 - South West: 12%
 - East Midlands: 9%
 - East of England: 7%
 - Yorkshire and the Humber: 6%
 - West Midlands: 3%
 - North East: 3%
- The largest group of primary school respondents worked at a '**community school**' (49%). 25% were working at an '**academy or free school**' (for

comparison, 32% of all English primary schools are academies or free schools¹). 26% were working at a **'foundation school or voluntary school, such as a faith school'**. Only 5% worked at a **'private/independent school'**.

- The largest group of secondary school respondents (51%) worked at an **'academy or free school'** (for comparison, 75% of all English secondary schools are academies or free schools²). 20% worked at a **'community school'** and 9% worked at an **FE college or similar**.

Key themes:

Giving teachers the 'flexibility' to teach about Black history is not sufficient – a statutory requirement is needed

- In their response to [this petition](#), the Government states that the curriculum gives teachers the "freedom and flexibility" to teach about Britain's role in colonisation and the transatlantic slave trade'. However, 69% of survey respondents **'strongly disagreed'** or **'disagreed'** that the curriculum, and the freedom and flexibility it is intended to give teachers, guarantees that children leave primary school with an **appropriate understanding of Britain's diverse history'**.
- **90%** of respondents felt there should be a **statutory requirement** for all

children to be taught explicitly about the history of Britain's ethnic and cultural minorities, including Britain's role in colonisation and the transatlantic slave trade'.

- 60% of the **home educators** of primary age children who told us they use the National Curriculum when planning their child(ren)'s learning 'strongly disagreed' or 'disagreed' with the statement that 'The national curriculum helps me provide my child or children with a balanced, ethnically and culturally diverse education'.
- There was a strong consensus that teachers and schools should be supported and encouraged to embed Black history and cultural diversity throughout the curriculum, and to teach about it year-round, not solely during Black History Month (October).

Quotes

Survey respondent (Primary): "Up until recently, I don't think black history features anywhere near strongly enough in the curriculum. As a school, we have started to explore this much more - but this has been based on our own initiatives".

Survey respondent (Secondary home educator): "One of the reasons for my initial decision to home educate was the lack of diversity in the National Curriculum. With history and geography in particular, the focus is still on the idea of a British Empire with little indication of the horrors that occurred in

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<https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/peformance-tracker-2019/schools>

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<https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/peformance-tracker-2019/schools>

relation to that. Children from minority backgrounds are not given a positive story of their history to draw on. Slavery cannot be the starting point. In providing such a narrow world view, we do a disservice to all children”.

Survey respondent (Secondary): “(The curriculum) needs much more representation of diversity, and school children also need to be taught the truth about Britain’s colonial past, and teaching of how to be an ally to Black people by recognising racism”.

Survey respondent (Secondary): “As a History teacher, there are some limits to what can be taught in terms of the Exam specification. As a dept, we have chosen topics to try to offer a broad and diverse History A Level (including the Civil Rights in the USA Topic), however, some topics are themselves rather 'undiverse'. Therefore, as a teacher, you have to choose to spend some teaching time on aspects which students won't be examined on (such as including the disability rights protests that occurred in the 1960s alongside the Civil Rights movement, or teaching about racial diversity in Tudor England, even those these are not on the spec.), or you stick to the specification and the course is less diverse. Essentially, some A levels need reformulating to make them include more Black History and cultural diversity”.

Survey respondent (Secondary): “A clear mandate from Government (is needed). By having more diverse specific content in both GCSE and National curriculum specifications then it would require departments to take responsibility for it and a level of accountability within management. Relying

on the good will of some teachers is not sufficient.”

Survey respondent (Secondary): “Religious Education has a permanent concern with ethnic and religious diversity and is often the year-long place within the curriculum where issues of prejudice reduction and racial justice are most addressed. Because the subject is not National Curriculum, but locally determined, this is sometimes ignored by policy reviewers. Please don't ignore the excellent contributions made by RE in thousands of schools [...] RE's place in challenging and confronting racism - in school society and religion - is vital if pupils are to develop the rich knowledge of different ethnic and religious heritages they need to be fully prepared for life in modern diverse Britain.”

The curriculum as a whole does not reflect the diversity of modern Britain

- **74%** of primary school respondents '**strongly disagreed**' or '**disagreed**' with the statement that 'The content, set texts, resources and guidance associated with the National Curriculum **fully reflect the diversity of modern Britain**'.
 - **70%** of secondary **History** teachers '**strongly disagreed**' or '**disagreed**' with the statement that 'As much as possible, the statutory content, resources, set texts, and guidance for history reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of modern Britain'.
 - Similarly, the majority of secondary teachers who taught **Geography** (86%), **English** (84%), **Maths** (78%), **Science** (70%), and
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Citizenship (57%) 'strongly disagreed' or 'disagreed' that the statutory content, resources, set texts and guidance for their subject "reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of modern Britain".

Quotes

Survey respondent (Primary): "Children need to see themselves reflected in their curriculum, as a History enthusiast I can adapt our curriculum accordingly, but what about those pupils in schools with no such drive?"

Survey respondent (Primary): "Teaching about Black history and cultural diversity should be embedded within all aspects of the curriculum and not just focus on a particular month or particular topics. For example, noteworthy black artists from British history are under-represented in existing resources, including poets, authors, playwrights and composers. Even those from World history are more difficult to discover (e.g. there is not a lot about Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint Georges, arguably the first, perhaps only, black classical composer)".

Survey respondent (Primary): "With a curriculum that was packed with knowledge, it was very difficult for teachers to specifically teach about (historical people of colour) unless it was clearly identified in the National Curriculum. Cultural diversity was a little easier to teach as it often fitted well into PHSE, RE, and geography based topics."

Survey respondent (Primary): "Black children do not have opportunities to see themselves reflected in the curriculum, the only thing they hear is about themselves as slaves. All children know about this. It's therefore creates a deficit model and inequalities for all

children and lead to incidents like George Floyd [...] a disrespect for one group. All histories need to be told".

Students are not experiencing a balanced variety of diverse role models

- **45%** of primary school respondents and **64%** of secondary school respondents 'strongly disagreed' or 'disagreed' with the statement that 'The National Curriculum ensures that students in my school experience a balanced range of ethnically and culturally diverse role models'.

Quotes

Survey respondent (Primary): "Currently we are trying to make our curriculum more diverse and include examples of non-white inspirational people (scientists/ inventors/ authors, etc). Our planning proforma actively encourages staff to explicitly think about diversity. I would like our curriculum to include black history but would not want this to be solely about colonisation and slavery. I want us to see the positive and inspirational black people in history to give our children more positive role models. Unfortunately finding 'child friendly' resources is not easy and varied".

Survey respondent (Primary home educator): "Hard to find primary aged materials for a range of topics which cover black and other ethnicity history in Britain. Most information available seems to focus on slavery and US civil rights Or apartheid. Little out there on positive roles Black British and other ethnicity groups have made. Textbooks are sometimes incorrect or stereotype. Ancient Egyptians were black but often books portray in their images them as white".

Survey respondent (Secondary): "The inclusion of specific black histories into the curriculum would clearly enable and encourage black young people to 'own' their inclusion, importance, significance and relevance to all historical developments in Britain".

Survey respondent (Secondary): "All black history should be (taught) to school children are now living in multiple race community and we can learn more from each other. Education and school need to learn how to change the way children are (taught), to keep them wanting to stay at school".

Recent Government guidance on relationships, sex and health education has been unhelpful

- Only 13% of primary teachers and 9% of secondary teachers '**strongly agreed**' or '**agreed**' that [recent Government guidance](#) on planning their relationships, sex and health curriculum³ helps them plan lessons relating to the 'history of Britain's ethnic and cultural minorities'.

The lack of diversity extends beyond statutory curriculum content

- Many teachers highlighted a lack of diversity in non-statutory curriculum content, guidance, set texts, and third-party resources such as schemes of work, textbooks, and other learning materials.

- Several teachers felt this was partly a consequence of the absence of a statutory requirement for schools to teach a diverse curriculum, which could otherwise drive the production of more diverse materials.

Quotes

Survey respondent (Primary): "Our school takes very seriously the need to teach our children about an accurate, balanced representation of modern Britain and the way it was created. However, from conversations with other schools it seems that many staff are under equipped in terms of knowledge and understanding, which leads to clumsy teaching and sometimes unintentional distress to children and parents of under represented groups. There is a need for statutory guidance and training in order to ensure any initiative has a meaningful effect".

Survey respondent (Primary): "Appropriate materials readily recommended and available as this is an area requiring a lot of research if it is to be an integral and meaningful part of the curriculum. The relevant organisations to be allowed to contribute to non-statutory materials approved by government. The Black Cultural Archive is a great source of information".

Survey respondent (Primary): "(I would welcome) more resources based on a UK perspective. Most things available are from a USA perspective. These resources need equal footing with what's currently available and should not be subordinate. Black history should not just be an 'add-on' and should be

³ Government guidance published in September 2020 prohibits schools from working with, or using materials produced by, third parties which "take or promote extreme positions" including positions which promote "divisive or victim narratives that are harmful to British society".

This has been interpreted by some as [discouraging schools](#) from working with, or using materials produced by, third parties which could support teaching about Britain's colonial past and the legacy of the slave trade.

taught right the way throughout the duration of a young person's time in school."

Survey respondent (Secondary): "We don't get a lot of time in school to develop new resources. Textbooks cover certain content and that tends to be what we use to plan our lessons. If textbooks had more diversity in them we would have more 'off the peg' lessons to incorporate into our schemes."

Many teachers lack confidence and need further support

- Around **1 in 4** teachers (28% primary, 23% secondary) told us they lacked confidence in their ability to develop their pupils' understanding of Black history and cultural diversity.
- This lack of confidence was expressed fairly consistently by teachers, no matter their ethnic background.
- A number of teachers indicated that this lack of confidence is, in part, a result of the complexity of the subject matter. In the absence of clear guidance, several teachers told us they lacked the time to carry out the research they feel would be required to teach these matters fully and fairly.
- This lack of confidence can result in even the most-well-meaning teachers finding it difficult to have open and honest conversations about race and diversity with their students.
- From a list of possible support measures to support the teaching of Black history and cultural diversity, the most requested was '**Specialised CPD/in-school training**' (88% primary, 85% secondary felt it would

be 'Extremely helpful' or 'Very helpful').

- 78% of all teachers felt '**Specialised initial teacher training**' would be 'Extremely helpful' or 'Very helpful'.
- The majority of primary teachers in particular felt that '**More Government-approved resources**' (77%) and '**Additional statutory curriculum content**' (76%) would also be 'Extremely helpful' or 'Very helpful'.
- A number of teachers commented that guidance and resources to help them teach about Black history and cultural diversity in the context of their local area would be welcome.

Quotes

Survey respondent (Primary): "I work in Essex and would find it useful to have an easily accessible picture in terms of diversity in the county and the other counties - so that one could place our town into a county-wide context. To know which groups are present and where, so that older children could question and use reasoning to explore diversity - historically and geographically. If the National Curriculum, with regular revisions, could provide a clear set of terminology - a glossary - which teachers could use and be confident that they are being rational, fair, legal and thorough in their discussions. I think schools should adapt to their cohort, however all pupils need a bigger picture in the same way that we teach RE as a means to learn about diversity of belief".

Survey respondent (Primary): "Reduce workload and expectations for work that is solely geared towards making the school look good for achieving high SATs result and more emphasis on building communities of young people that are aware of the history of colonization and its intertwined role in inequality and climate catastrophe".

Survey respondent (Primary): "Teachers will avoid difficult subjects if they think it may cause any controversy with parents and governors".

Survey respondent (Primary): "In my experience, Black History and Cultural Diversity is most often taught by white Teachers, working under white Heads. Teaching needs to be more representative and white teaching staff need to unpick their own privilege and fragility so that they can honestly engage in the history and culture they are attempting to teach. We have had a number of CPD session at our school on these concerns. Even though we are already a very multi-cultural school, these sessions have been really helpful in highlighting the depth of difficulties faced by Black, Asian and other minority groups, both historically and currently."

Survey respondent (Primary): "(I would welcome the) opportunity for pioneers of black, BAME groups to visit (remotely) and present their experiences/ knowledge to pupils. Opportunity for black and BAME celebrities/ scholars to remote visits to school to share their knowledge/ experience and future of black history. Make it a gov't requirement all staff teach about Black History."

Survey respondent (Secondary): "Since taking over as Head of Faculty in September, a main focus of our faculty development plan is promoting cultural diversity across our curriculum (English, history, politics and RE). Many of the staff within the faculty have an appraisal target which involves amending an area of the curriculum with this in mind."

Survey respondent (Secondary): "(It should be) compulsory to have a working party on diversity within every school and ensuring there is a celebration and awareness raised around the BAME cultures. Ensuring that the staff body is as diverse as can be."

Survey respondent (Secondary): "Our school has a person designated for community inclusion and a working party working to scrutinise the curriculum, to facilitate challenging conversations, to have more effective CPD and to celebrate the diverse demographic of the school. This is great but there are many obstacles because of the confinements of the National Curriculum and its emphasis on teaching narrow texts, as well as the outdated resources which do to encompass current perspectives".

Survey respondent (Secondary): "As a BAME member of staff, I wish non-BAME members of staff (vast majority) had more support in how to manage conversations about race and diversity in my school".