

## The Museums Association's response to the proposed new history curriculum in England

The Museums Association is concerned that the government's proposals to remove Victorian and early 20th century history from Key Stage 2 History in English schools will result in a diminution of the use of museums in formal education and, consequently, the loss of the interactive and inspiring experience museums offer children in the understanding of this country's history and traditions.

Museums have long been a source of inspiration and enlightenment helping teachers in their work. Much of this has been aimed at the 18th, 19th, and 20th century. The success of museums in satisfying schools' demand is shown by the fact that approximately one third of all visits to museum in England are in the form of school visits. This in turn stimulates equally important family visits outside of school time.

The new proposals suggest anything after 1688 would no longer be covered in primary schools at Key Stage 2. This will have a damaging effect on children's learning and appreciation of history; it will also prevent children from enjoying many museum visits and being inspired by history at this important time in their education. Out of classroom teaching provides an invaluable learning experience. It has long been recognised by the Department of Education, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and the teaching profession as stimulating the effectiveness and quality of learning and was this was recognised in the recent Henley Review of Cultural Education. In recent years there has been considerable public and lottery investment in developing learning resources in museums in response to the curriculum needs of schools. The proposed changes would result in much of this investment being lost.

Young people relate more easily to relatively recent history and it is well represented in most museum collections, providing a powerful and popular teaching resource that can be easily accessed by schools as a day visit. The strength of museum learning is in relating to a child's own experience and allowing him or her to see and touch objects and documents and experience now what children experienced in the past. How relevant will the new curriculum be to the learning styles of children? How will the children be inspired to learn more?

The government has a right to change the curriculum but it would be better if there was more flexibility given to teachers in terms of selecting time periods to study during Key Stages 1-3, allowing them to include more recent periods such as Victorian Britain or the First and Second World Wars. Greater flexibility would help teachers develop the skills of children through the learning of history, rather than just the learning information. By doing so we think the changes could achieve the laudable objectives of the review whilst at the same time ensuring that children continue to take advantage of the fantastic learning opportunities that museums across England offer.

Without greater flexibility, a lot of past investment made over the past decade in developing learning resources, activities, facilities and staff could become redundant. This seems a great pity and an unnecessary waste.

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