

The co-ordinator's role and the 2014 national curriculum for history

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Co-ordinator's dilemma:

I have seen the new requirements and know that I have a bit of time before things start, but I don't want to leave everything to the last minute. Without feeling that I have to get everything done now, are there some things I can be getting on with so that it does not all pile up at the end?

The first thing is not to panic or overact. Subject leaders like to do a good job, but this can lead to the twin dangers of going beyond what needs to be done, and being convinced that history is the most important subject in the curriculum, so alienating others. This means being realistic; but this is certainly not the same as doing nothing.

Below are ten activities that are worth doing before the teaching of the new curriculum starts in September 2014.

1. The actual curriculum framework is not extensive, so it is worth jotting down what is different to what is already offered. There are clearly new areas that need covering, particularly with regard to early history and some non-European civilisations, but there may be other aspects given more emphasis than perhaps the school is used to. These include the firming up of chronology, or the role of local history, or the new stress on comparison, or the need to balance depth and breadth, or the need for a study of an aspect or theme in post 1066 British history. See if there is an opportunity to go through some of the highlights of the new curriculum to enable you to outline the changes and continuities. The school may require this in any case.
2. Decide which aspects might be of most interest to cover in the new curriculum, or whether the school is going to cover it at all if your school is an academy. If the latter, you are not let off the hook, because some alternative to the National Curriculum needs to be planned. There will still be an expectation that some high-quality history is covered in the school. For others, there are options so decisions are needed. As a guide to what options are worth considering, it is worth sounding out teacher preferences and assessing what resources already exist. It may also be the case that the foundation stage needs consideration alongside Key Stages 1 and 2.
3. Make sure that you are fully aware what is happening throughout the school across all subjects. It would be pointless having grandiose plans when there is a clear school strategy on how to prepare and when. Is there an indication of the time available or how history might expect to be covered (integrated, in blocks, discrete etc)? What planning is the school expecting? There is guidance elsewhere on planning in this publication, but school requirements are the first thing to be determined.
4. See if you are able to attend some training or support groups prior to the start of the curriculum. Many traditional forms of support such as that provided by local authorities and some higher educational institutions may have largely disappeared, but there is likely to be something. The Historical Association will be heavily involved in offering support, not just through the journal but also through its website; for example, draft schemes of work.
5. Give some early thought to assessment. The school may already have expectations, but you are likely to have some responsibility for considering ways in which the progress of history throughout the school can be monitored in the absence of levels. If the school is considering its own levels for each subject, early thinking about progression in the subject would be worthwhile.
6. Start to gather some resources. Make sure you keep up-to-date with publishers' catalogues, on-line or on paper. It is unlikely that schools

will have large quantities of additional resources so one needs to be prudent. Two points are worth remembering; first, it is important to be discriminating. There is much that is poor. Second, as long as there is some variety of types, there is no need for massive amounts. With local history fairly prominent in the new curriculum, it may also be worth seeing if there is a need to extend what is already covered in terms of some interesting local history resources or new sites for visits.

7. Some contact with the receiving secondary school may be useful. Many of them will be introducing new material. It is worth considering whether there is unnecessary overlap, such as with the longitudinal study or with any history coverage beyond 1066 or your local history. It is also worth checking whether there are any resources they can help with/lend. Sharing some resources with other primary schools may also be worth considering in the earlier stages.
8. Although this is likely to be a whole-school issue, some early thinking on opportunities for links with other curriculum subjects and the wider curriculum may be worth thinking about. There should be no need for detailed planning immediately, but the contribution to, and links with, the key subject areas especially of literacy and numeracy might be valuable. Given that history is unlikely to have more than about 40 hours a year, some reinforcement elsewhere might benefit from early thinking. Likewise with subjects such as geography through local studies and art, music and the like might be valuable. So often in the past though this linking was rather contrived and ended up with a lowest common denominator. It would be worth ensuring that such planning avoids this rather mechanistic approach.
9. Given the limited amount of time to cover what could seem a large content list, there will obviously be a need to consider not just what topics but some general answers to a range of issues. Among the questions that need some preliminary answers are:
 - Key enquiries;
 - Key ideas;
 - Balance of local, British and world;
 - Key Stage 1 people;
 - What options;
 - Longitudinal study – why not something different such as children or animals through time?
 - Local history – field work;
 - How to address a chronological secure curriculum.



10. Although it might be rather difficult to believe at this stage, this task is something that could be enjoyed. Despite it seeming quite demanding, much of what is included is exemplar. As long as the bullet points are heeded, there is plenty of choice and freedom to do interesting and practical things. It may be a bridge too far to change everything, but opportunities abound to introduce something novel and interesting. Some early thinking on something innovative might be worth doing. There may even be the opportunity to try some things out before the new curriculum officially starts. Many teachers like teaching history, and many have taught bits before or have an interest in a particular area. Maybe you can tap into them as well. Working with others can prove enjoyable and productive.

This article has merely highlighted some of the activities that might be best considered prior to the start of the new curriculum. Nearer the day there is likely to be more detailed planning and collecting resources. The best advice though is do things systematically and there will not be so much panic when the day arrives.

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