

HISTORY AND EMPLOYMENT: A FORGOTTEN AGENDA?

Recent controversies over the teaching of history in British schools have tended to focus on the extent to which British history should be at the core of the syllabus, the way in which the past, and British history in particular, should be presented to pupils, and the relation between knowledge and "skills" in school history. More recently, in a throwback to Victorian attitudes to the place of history on the curriculum, there has been a reconsideration of the relation between school history, morality and citizenship, with claims that the teaching of history was "at the heart of Britain's cultural crisis." (1)

The publicity generated by these controversies has served to heighten the public profile of history; in a sense, its importance seemed to grow commensurate with the rancour and polemic it evinced; whatever positions were struck on these controversies, it no longer seemed fashionable to say that history didn't matter. Although not noted for her espousal of modish intellectual and academic trends, even Lady Thatcher did not seem indifferent to the public debate on the subject. Having dismissed history as a "luxury" (2), she subsequently reflected that, "Of course, everyone must have some history..." (3), and went on to make several illuminating statements about how and why history should be taught. History's position on the curriculum appeared to be further consolidated by the position bestowed upon it by the National Curriculum, as a foundation subject. It seemed as if history teachers might feel more sanguine about the future after the uncertainties of the 1970s and early 1980s, when history appeared to be fighting a losing battle for its place on the curriculum against social studies and integrated humanities. As I have argued elsewhere, confidence and complacency may be ill-founded in an era when curriculum arrangements seem subject to constant change and the National Curriculum itself seems to be proving far less monolithic and intractable than envisaged at its inception.(4)

The recent controversies over the way in which history should be taught to children have

deflected attention from the vocational justification for history's place on the curriculum; the extent to which history enhances the employability of young people across a wide range of jobs and professions. In an era where governments have an increasingly utilitarian attitude to education, it would be remiss of those who believe in the virtue and the utility of history not to constantly keep at the forefront of the curriculum debate the usefulness of history. If the proponents of history on the school curriculum do not convincingly articulate its utility, there is a danger that it may once more be marginalised or reduced to a minor component of some hybrid humanities package. The purpose of this paper is to examine the nature of contemporary justifications of history's place on the curriculum, and to consider how the case for history might best be presented, both to politicians who have become increasingly *dirigiste* over curriculum matters, and to parents and pupils who are being increasingly regarded as consumers or 'clients'

Differing rationales for history's place on the curriculum

History's return to curriculum favour was a result of a combination of factors. There is some evidence to suggest that after the scathing indictment of history teaching which emerged from Mary Price's 1966 research (5), history teachers had gone some way towards putting their house in order. By 1983, the percentages of pupils finding the study of history useful and interesting had risen substantially. (see Fig. 1) At the same time as the quiet revolution which was taking place in some (but not all) history lessons, politicians of all parties were becoming increasingly interested in the potential of history for socialisation. It was as if they had belatedly realised that the way in which children were taught history could have an important bearing on the sort of citizens who would emerge from schools. Left-wing education authorities saw the opportunity to use history to instill 'politically correct' attitudes to cultural diversity, sexism, racism and equal opportunities; Baker, Naismith, Hiskett and

others on the right condemned the 'politicising' of history, whilst advocating a history which ~~which~~ would inform pupils of the benefits and virtues of the British heritage of parliamentary democracy and "the spread of Britain's influence, for good, throughout the Empire, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries." (6)

The other powerful influence on the resurrection of school history was the coincidence that at the time that the National Curriculum was being formulated and put in place, two successive Secretaries of State for Education were staunch advocates of the subject. It is difficult to think of anyone currently in the corridors of power who holds a particular affinity for history, now that Sir Keith Joseph and Kenneth Baker have, in effect, retired from the fray.

Although there were various factors combining to restore history's position on the curriculum, there was no overarching or consensual rationale behind its rehabilitation. Careful examination of the justifications advanced for school history in recent years reveal two very disparate strands or schools of thought.

With the exception of Sir Keith Joseph, the rationale for school history put forward by politicians and think-tanks was predominantly traditional, even nostalgic. It needs to be remembered that as late as 1952, the Ministry of Education was still justifying history in terms of moral example, citizenship and Britain's constitutional and imperial heritage:

They (the pupils) should be introduced to their heritage...and so to their own environment, in which they will have to live and to act. This motive...is very largely moral, because it is a matter of introducing them to their responsibilities. If the soldiers and sailors who followed Marlborough and Wellington, Drake and Nelson, had defended the independence of this country from foreign danger, they in their turn might be called upon to do likewise.

If the yeomen who supported Pym and Hampden had won parliamentary liberties, they might be called upon to defend and also to exercise those liberties. (7)

This extract is taken from a 91 page pamphlet on the teaching of history which makes no reference to any connection between the study of history and employment after school.

Most right-wing politicians and the think-tanks associated with them echoed this Victorian rationale for the teaching of history in schools. Donald Naismith bemoaning the fact that changes to traditional history teaching meant that,

Most children leave school with little knowledge or understanding of the events that have shaped their country's history, and with even less pride in them... Britain has been silently repudiating its past and losing its self respect in the process. (8)

John Major also complained about "insidious attacks" on traditional British history (9), and Lady Thatcher advocated the study of periods of history "when Britain was furthest in advance of other nations." (10) When Lady Thatcher said that "Of Course, everyone must have some history..." she went on to justify this in terms of history as general knowledge, of knowing roughly what happened, when and why. (11) This was history as part of a "classical liberal" education- the sort of education that had formed the upbringing of most of our politicians and policy makers. This school of thought found its most extreme form in Robert Conquest's statement that it was more important for children to know about Titus Oates and Tiberius Gracchus than to be able to add or subtract. (12) Even history's most fanatical advocates might have a problem with this position. The left countered this view of school history with a different content but not completely unrelated rationale; David Edgington spoke of the "healing role" that history could play in a multi-cultural society (13),

Raphael Samuel suggested different cultural and social paradigms (14), but there was still very little reference to the ways in which history could contribute to the vocational attributes of young people leaving school.

There appeared to be a psychological attachment to the traditional "heritage" mode of history- even though there no longer existed any consensus on which facets of Britain's past constituted Britain's heritage. In a sense this conservatism was unsurprising, given that most of those pronouncing on these matters had done rather well out of the traditional "classical liberal" mode of education. It was perhaps more difficult for them to accept, or grasp, that not everyone had fared as well under this system of education. The fact that Britain's economy and position in the world were more exalted when traditional modes of history teaching were in vogue led some on the right into the *non sequitur* of believing that Britain's decline was at least in part due to the abandonment of such methods of history teaching.

History and employment

A very different view of the function of school history emerged in the early 1970s, with the dawning realisation that Britain's education system was not serving the interests of less academic pupils, and that Britain's economic performance was suffering as a consequence of this. (This situation has increasingly been acknowledged by all political parties in this country and is one of the few points of consensus in current educational debate.) In history, as in other subjects, increasing attention was paid to what Corelli Barnett has termed "education for capability" (15), with more emphasis on active pupil involvement in learning, oracy and problem solving skills, and on skills which might contribute to the employability of pupils on leaving school. Coltham and Fines "Educational Objectives for the Study of History"(16) was one of the first moves in this direction, with its stress on "the participation of the pupil in learning history" (17), the Schools Council History Project the first major curriculum

initiative to put into effect this philosophy. As Secretary of State for Education, Sir Keith Joseph's influential contributions supported this form of history, with his exhortation that pupils be encouraged "to use their reason as well as their memories and to develop skills of analysis and criticism in a situation in which there cannot be a provably right answer." (18) It was accepted by an increasing number of those in the world of education that, (as most of life's problems did not have a "provably right answer"), history could be taught in a way that could equip pupils with skills for life and for work. Some were sceptical of this development in history teaching. Stewart Deuchar, a member of the Centre for Policy Studies which was said to exert some influence on government thinking on education claimed that "All the talk about 'skills' and 'understanding' and 'empathy' is pure humbug." (19) but with the exception of the Adullamite Tory Right, most of the teaching profession and those involved in education, whether supporters of Schools Council History or not, accepted that history, like other subjects, should help to equip pupils for employment and for life in general. Her Majesty's Inspectorate for history unequivocally supported this rationale for history;

A subject that insists on the critical evaluation of evidence- written, pictorial, and statistical- and encourages the analysis of problems and the communication of ideas, not only contributes to pupils' general education but develops skills and perceptions that increase the employability of young people. (20)

Day to day contact with pupils and a sense of responsibility for their future inclines teachers intuitively to practical agendas; in general they have resented and attempted to resist the politicising of history, they have been suspicious of ideologues and see their function as trying to maximise pupils chances of employment and a reasonable quality of life. There is

still a need for them to make explicit to pupils the vocational attributes of the study of history. This will become even more important if, as expected, history once more retreats to being optional post-14. There are still many pupils who enjoy history at GCSE level but who are hesitant about pursuing it at 'A' level because of uncertainty as to its utility. The myth that history graduates are doomed to serve out the rest of their days as history teachers still lingers on. AGCAS information and statistics are an invaluable asset in this respect. (21)

The volatile and unpredictable nature of contemporary curriculum planning in Britain makes it essential for those concerned with history's place on the curriculum to be able to make a convincing case for its position, to politicians, pupils and parents. A study of the entrance criteria for two of Britain's major employers reveals that the study of history, in the form advocated by HMI in 1985, can play an important part in preparing pupils for employment. (see Figs. 2 and 3) Andrew Whitmore, Careers Officer at Manchester University, makes out a powerful case for history's attraction to employers;

Today's history graduates are tomorrow's managers and problem solvers. In studying history, you acquire personal, social and intellectual skills which are enormously useful in a wide range of jobs- collecting, managing and evaluating information, analysing and weighing evidence, formulating and presenting a case, verbally and in writing; organising and working to deadlines, explaining things to other people and getting on with people. (22)

Most people involved in the teaching of history are aware of history's potential in this respect, but it would be foolish to take these assets for granted, or to assume that they are widely acknowledged by politicians, governors and parents. Recent controversies have tended to divert attention from history's vocational utility. It will be interesting to see which philosophy for the teaching of history in schools prevails over the next few years, the

Victorian or the modern, but the ability to justify history's place on the curriculum in terms of its contribution to the production of "highly trained young people...trained to be capable and flexible in quite new ways." (23) will have an impact on the future of Britain which goes beyond the job security of history teachers, and the place of history on the school curriculum.

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Notes

1. Deuchar S. (1988) in preface to Kedourie H., *Errors and evils of the new history*, London, Centre for Policy Studies.
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3. *Sunday Telegraph*, 15/4/90.
4. Haydn T., (1992) "History Reprieved?", in *Teaching History*, No. 66, Jan 1992, pp 17-20.
5. Price M., (1968) "History in danger", in *History*, Nov. 1968, p 346.
6. Baker K., (1988) Speech to 1988 Conservative Party Conference.
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Hiskett M., (1988) *Choice in rotten apples; bias in GCSE and examining groups*, London Centre for Policy Studies.
7. Ministry of Education, (1952) *Teaching History*, pamphlet No. 23, pp 5-11.
8. Naismith D. (1988) op. cit.
9. Quoted in Chitty C. (ed.) (1993) *Education fights back*.
10. Quoted in Little V., (1990) "A National Curriculum in history: a very contentious issue" in *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. xxxviii, pp 319-334.
11. *The Sunday Telegraph*, 15/4/90.

12. Conquest R., (1969) from Cox C.B. and Dyson A.E., "Fight for Education; a black paper" in *Critical Quarterly*, 1969.
13. Edgington D., (1982) "The role of history in multi-cultural education" in *Teaching History*, No. 32, p 5.
14. Samuel R.,(1989) *The Guardian*, 21/1/89.
15. Barnett C., (1991) *The Sunday Times*, 26/6/91.
16. Coltham J.B. and Fines J., (1971) *Educational Objectives for the Study of History, a suggested framework*, Historical Association, Teaching of History Series, No. 23.
17. Lee P., (1978) "'Educational Objectives for the Study of History' Reconsidered", in Dickinson A. and Lee P. (ed.), *History Teaching and Historical Understanding*, London, Heinemann.
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19. Deuchar S., (1988) *The Daily Telegraph*, 18/6/88.
20. HMI, (1985) *History in the Primary and Secondary years*, HMSO, p 19.
21. Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, (annually) *What do Graduates do?* CRAC.
22. Whitmore A., (1991), Address to 'A' level conference, Manchester University, 18/11/91.
23. Black P., (1992) in *Putting the record straight*, Various Authors, Network Educational Press, p 7.

TABLES ETC.

Table 1

Percentages of children taking the subject saying it was useful.

| | 1968 | 1983 |
|-------------------|--------|------|
| History | 29% | 53% |
| Foreign languages | 41-45% | 68% |
| Science | 40-60% | 72% |

Table 2

Percentages of children taking the subject saying it was interesting.

| | 1968 | 1983 |
|-------------------|--------|------|
| History | 40% | 61% |
| Foreign languages | 27-34% | 40% |
| Social studies | 47-48% | 57% |

Fig. 1 Statistics taken from "Interesting and useful?", Aldrich R.E., (1987), in *Teaching History*, No. 47, Feb. 1987.

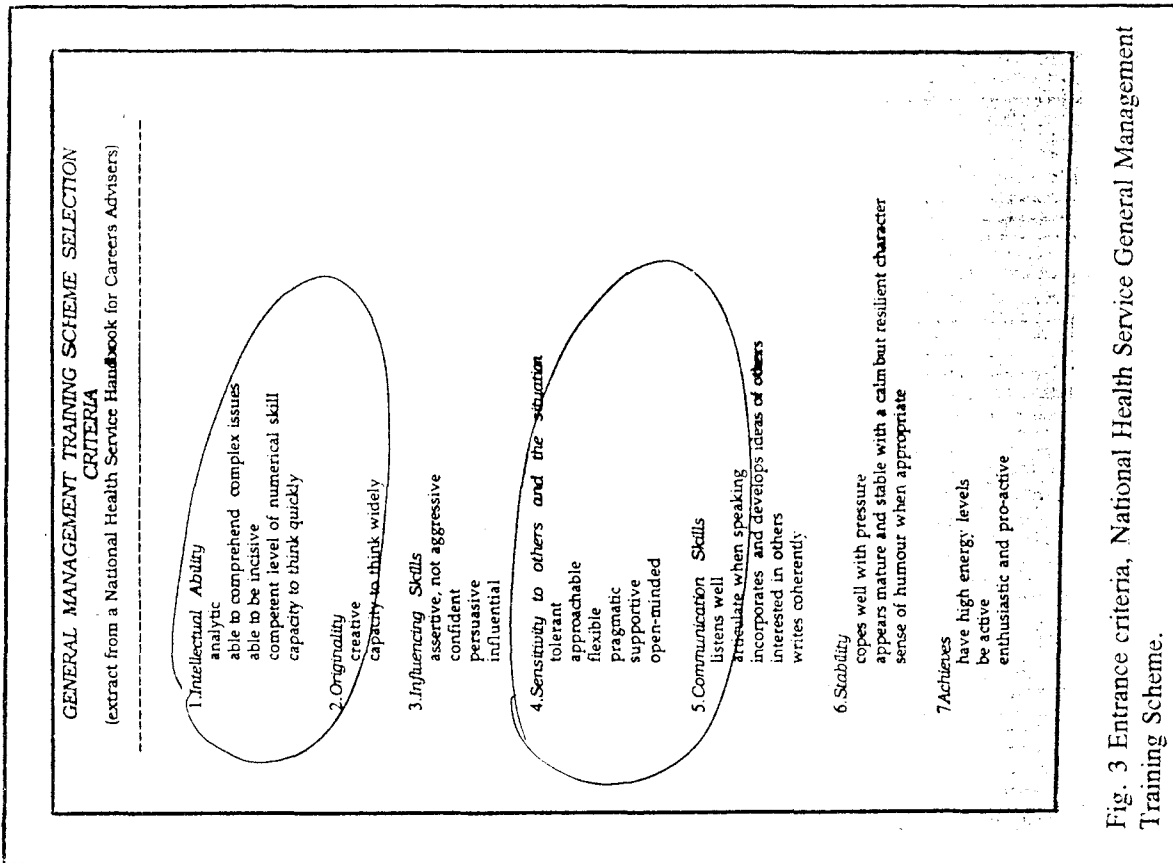


Fig. 3 Entrance criteria, National Health Service General Management Training Scheme.

CIVIL SERVICE ADMINISTRATION TRAINEE SCHEME FACTORS
(Extract from CSSB booklet for Candidates)

RATING SCALE

| | Poor | Good |
|-----------------------------|---------------|------|
| 1 Specialist Skill | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | |
| 2 Analytic Powers | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | |
| 3 Constructive Thinking | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | |
| 4 Judgement | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | |
| 5 Written Expression | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | |
| 6 Oral Expression | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | |
| 7 Working with people | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | |
| 8 Influence | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | |
| 9 Drive & Determination | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | |
| 10 Reliability & Resilience | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | |
| 11 Potential | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | |

Fig. 2 Entrance criteria, Civil Service Administrative Trainee Scheme.