



TIDE-Runnymede report

Teaching Migration, Belonging, and Empire in Secondary Schools

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Key findings and recommendations

- Migration and empire have shaped Britain and our relationship with the world.
- At Key Stages 3 and 4 (GCSE level), migration, belonging, and empire **can be taught as part of the History and English curriculum**. However, this is largely dependent on the modules, topics or texts selected by schools.
- According to the Department for Education, the secondary school History curriculum should ensure that pupils know and understand **‘how Britain has influenced and been influenced by the wider world’**, ‘the diversity of societies’, ‘their own identity and the challenges of their time’. **Migration, belonging, and empire are central to understanding these processes.**
- Research shows that **the curriculum is narrow in scope**. The new English curriculum launched in 2014 moved the subject into a more ‘traditional’ domain, and was branded a backlash against ‘multicultural texts’ by experts and commentators.
- About **4 per cent of pupils taking GCSE History are taking the ‘Migration to Britain’ option** (which also covers some empire) with exam boards AQA and OCR. Given these numbers, migration, belonging, and empire should be covered at Key Stage 3 level across different disciplines.
- The number of schools teaching migration, belonging, and empire is unknown. **Academies, which have increased in number, do not have to follow the National Curriculum**. Flexibility within the curriculum makes it hard to gauge what is being taught.
- Further research is therefore required to make an assessment of what is being delivered and what is absent. This research should evaluate students’ knowledge of migration, belonging, and empire, as well as teachers’ interest in and concerns and ambivalences about these topics. **The government should commission this research and reform the curriculum in response to the findings.**
- **Teachers need more support to equip them to teach migration, belonging, and empire sensitively and effectively.** A survey of teachers carried out by the Runnymede Trust, University of Manchester and University of Cambridge project Our Migration Story found that **78 per cent of those surveyed wanted training on teaching migration and 71 per cent on teaching empire.**
- Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses do not provide the space or skills to enable teachers to confidently cover sensitive and controversial issues with young people. Scholarship has found that **some teachers avoid topics they deem controversial.**
- The **UCL Centre for Holocaust Education offers a useful blueprint for a future programme to support teachers with migration, empire, and belonging.** It provides a national programme of ITE for early-career teachers, online materials and resources, continuing professional development (CPD) days, and a Masters accredited online distance-learning course; 90 per cent of participating teachers say that the CPD course is excellent and 10 per cent that it is good.
- **The preliminary findings of the TIDE Beacon Fellowship** with 12 selected History and English teachers **further support the need for teacher training.** Future CPD should engage with academics and draw on the expertise of and lessons learnt from teachers already engaging with migration, belonging, and empire.
- **The government should fund a new ITE and CPD programme for migration, belonging, and empire** in collaboration with universities.

Executive summary

Migration and empire have shaped Britain, and our relationship with the world. The Roman Empire and Anglo-Saxon invasions, the Norman conquest, and the rise and fall of the British Empire helped forge our institutions, language, literature and culture. Cross-cultural contact throughout centuries have shaped our perceptions of identity and belonging. The current secondary school curriculum should ensure that pupils know and understand ‘how Britain has influenced and been influenced by the wider world’; the ‘the expansion and dissolution of empires [and] characteristic features of past non-European societies’; ‘the process of change, the diversity of societies and relationships between different groups’; and ‘their own identity and the challenges of their time’ (DfE, 2013a, 2013b). This cannot be fully achieved without a thorough understanding of migration, belonging, and empire.

The vote to leave the European Union in 2016 has brought our relationship with migration, belonging, and empire to the fore. Migration was a major fault-line during the Brexit campaign. Talk of a forward-looking, confident ‘Global Britain’ has followed, bringing renewed relevance to the Commonwealth, as Britain searches for new, post-Brexit allies in once-familiar places. This has exposed a chronic misunderstanding among our political leaders of Britain’s relationship, past and present, to its former empire. The Windrush scandal of 2018 laid bare the dearth of understanding of successive British governments about the ‘winding up’ of the Empire. Further, discussions over a potential border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland during the Brexit negotiations have shown that there is little understanding of Britain’s past relationship with Ireland among some of our elected representatives. The need for a realistic appraisal of our past and present relationships with the wider world is evident and urgent.

How migration, belonging, and empire have been taught in schools and represented in textbooks has shifted with changes in government. Until the 1960s, the curriculum implicitly supported the merits of empire and remained evasive on its exploitative or violent realities for colonised people (Tomlinson, 2019). The most recent iteration of the National Curriculum, launched in 2014, does provide some opportunities for migration and empire to be taught

as part of History and English lessons. For example, the exam boards OCR and AQA launched GCSE-level units on ‘Migration to Britain’ in 2016, which include some coverage of empire. These are, however, optional modules. Further, at Key Stage 3 (KS3) level, migration and empire are signposted as ‘suggested topics’.

For English, reforms to examinations in 2015 narrowed the curriculum – something commentators branded a backlash against ‘multicultural texts’ (Goodwyn et al., 2018). The new curriculum moved the subject into a more ‘traditional’ domain: a Shakespeare play, the English Romantic poets, a 19th-century novel and modern British novel (Alexander, Weekes-Bernard and Arday, 2015).

This means that it is up to teachers, heads of department and curriculum leads to decide whether these topics are covered or not. The result: wide variations in the teaching of these crucial topics across the country.

In 2016, the Runnymede Trust, University of Manchester and University of Cambridge launched the *Our Migration Story* (OMS) project to provide teachers with classroom-ready materials for the new GCSE History module ‘Migration to Britain’. The initiative was built in collaboration with 80 academic historians and has since won two awards. However, a survey of teachers carried out by the project in 2019 found that 78 per cent of those surveyed wanted training on teaching migration and 71 per cent on teaching empire.

In response, the TIDE (Travel, Transculturality, and Identity in England, c. 1550–1700) project, funded by the European Research Council (ERC) and based at the University of Liverpool, joined forces with the Runnymede Trust to create a fellowship programme to support secondary school teachers who are already teaching migration, belonging, and empire as topics. The TIDE Beacon Fellowship, run for the first time in 2019, is an innovative 12-week programme of professional development for a group of 12 selected English and History secondary school teachers. It provided the teachers with three cumulative masterclasses, one a month from March to May. Each masterclass introduced the teachers to leading experts and the latest scholarship, as well as providing

time and space to think through the issues raised. Masterclass 1 introduced fellows to best practice in delivering what can be challenging and sensitive topics. Masterclass 2, held at the National Archives, aimed to develop teachers' subject knowledge and work alongside experienced teachers. The final masterclass, held at National Museums Liverpool, sought to help teachers think through how they could apply what they had learnt and develop materials for their classrooms. In between masterclasses, teachers took part in online forums hosted by the TIDE project, and undertook specialist subject training under the guidance of the TIDE project team subject experts.

The National Curriculum explicitly calls for pupils to be taught 'tolerance', as part of the British values agenda. It calls for young people to understand their own and others' cultures 'as an essential element of their preparation for life in modern Britain', in which 'they understand, accept, respect and celebrate

diversity'. Teaching the long, diverse, often-fraught history of migration, belonging, and empire would partially achieve this. To adequately prepare students to be tolerant, confident citizens, these topics must be understood as integral both to our history and to the richness of British culture. All children and young people need to feel a sense of belonging, and understand their identities. Migration and empire are not marginal events: they are central to our national story. As it stands, the story we are telling is incomplete.

This report explains why teaching migration, belonging, and empire matters. It outlines what is currently available on the curriculum and what is missing. It assesses the barriers teachers face in grappling with sensitive topics. Finally, it gives recommendations for change so that we can address the gaps in the curriculum for the benefit of students of all backgrounds.