

PRESS RELEASE: The Runnymede Trust and the TIDE Project

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Teaching migration should be made mandatory in secondary schools

Leading race equality think tank [Runnymede Trust](#) and the [TIDE Project](#) (University of Liverpool) have today published a report calling on the government to make the teaching of migration, including Empire, in secondary schools mandatory and to provide teachers with practical support and resources to equip them to teach migration, belonging and empire sensitively and effectively.

The report ***Teaching Migration, Belonging and Empire in Secondary Schools***, explains why a new approach to teaching migration, belonging and empire is required to reflect changing classroom demographics. Nearly 17% - **one in six** - of children aged 0-15 in England and Wales are from Black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds, and BME young people make up around 27% - **more than one in four** - of state-funded primary and secondary school pupils.

Inclusion and representation are important. However, teaching migration, belonging, and empire is not relevant to students from current ethnic minorities alone. It offers **all young people** a fuller understanding of the varied and wide-ranging cultural inputs that have contributed to the making of Britain.

Currently the secondary school curriculum *should* ensure that pupils know and understand 'how Britain has influenced and been influenced by the wider world'; 'the expansion and dissolution of empires'; 'the process of change, the diversity of societies and relationships between different groups' ([National Curriculum in England](#)). However, this cannot be fully achieved without a thorough understanding of migration, belonging, and empire - migration and empire have shaped Britain and our relationship with the world, and the teaching of British history informs Britain's national identity.

The report highlights that a survey of teachers carried out by the Runnymede Trust, University of Manchester and University of Cambridge education project [Our Migration Story](#) found that **78 per cent** of teachers surveyed wanted training on teaching migration and **71 per cent** on teaching empire.

The report also calls on the government to commission further research 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 about these topics, and reform the curriculum in response to the findings.

The most recent iteration of the National Curriculum, launched in 2014, provides 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 includes some coverage of empire. However, these are *optional* modules, and further, at Key Stage 3 (KS3) level, migration and empire are signposted as '*suggested topics*'.

The work undertaken by the Runnymede Trust and TIDE Project has shown that teachers need to be supported to teach migration at an institutional level. Teachers and schools are under immense pressure with limited resources, as a result institutional support is difficult to achieve without a pragmatic allowance and encouragement built into the curriculum, and championed by exam boards and the statutory curriculum framework.

The report highlights the [UCL Centre for Holocaust Education](#) as a useful blueprint for a future programme to support teachers with the teaching of migration, empire, and belonging. The centre provides a national programme of Initial Teaching Education (ITE) for early-career teachers, with 90 percent of participating teachers saying that the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) course is excellent and 10 per cent that it is good.

The vote to leave the European Union in 2016 has brought our relationship to 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.

However, 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 at government level of the 'winding up' of the Empire, with Ministers repeatedly misunderstanding post-war migration from the Caribbean to Britain.

Further, discussions over a potential border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland have shown that there is little understanding of Britain's past relationship with Ireland among some MPs. The need for a realistic appraisal of Britain's past and present relationships with the wider world is evident and urgent.

MPs including Dawn Butler (Shadow Women & Equalities Secretary), [Helen Hayes](#) and Chris Evans have expressed support for teaching migration, belonging, and empire in secondary schools. Dawn Butler MP, chairing a [panel discussion in Parliament on Thursday, July 4](#), hosted by the Runnymede Trust and TIDE Project, on how the teaching of migration and Empire can be expanded and improved in schools.

Kimberly McIntosh, Senior Policy Officer (The Runnymede Trust), said:

“Schools should prepare students to be confident citizens that have a thorough understanding of their country and the wider world. At the moment, the national story being taught across disciplines is incomplete. The influence of migration and empire both to our history and to the richness of British culture is unmistakable. Yet whether students get taught this vital part of our national story is a lottery. The curriculum offers some opportunities - but it remains narrow. And our understanding of what is being taught in our classrooms before GCSE level is patchy.

A lack of understanding of migration and empire has consequences for contemporary Britain. Last year’s Windrush scandal laid bare the shocking lack of understanding successive governments had about the ‘winding up’ of the Empire - with lives ruined as a result. As we grapple with our post-Brexit future, a realistic appraisal of our past and present relationships with the wider world, as well as migration and empire, has never been more urgent.

Teaching migration, belonging, and empire should be mandatory. But before we get there, we need more materials and training to support teachers to deliver these topics with confidence. That's why the Runnymede Trust and TIDE Project is calling on government to provide schools and teachers with the resources to enable the teaching of migration, belonging and empire, sensitively and effectively.”

Professor Nandini Das (TIDE Project, University of Liverpool), said:

"What does it mean to be British? What does it mean to 'belong'? The long history of migration and empire is an intrinsic part of British history, literature, and culture. It can be complex, fraught and problematic. But it is also the soil from which much that we think of as inherently 'British' today has emerged. The teaching of migration and empire should not be an alternative to a 'core' history of Britishness, nor is it understanding that speaks only to particular student groups alone. If we fail to accommodate migration, empire and belonging in our schools curriculum, we are failing to fulfill a fundamental commitment to generations to come, to give them the fullest, richest, most nuanced understanding that we can, about the nation, and about Britain’s place in the world.

The Runnymede Trust and the TIDE Project, based at the University of Liverpool, has taken an initial step towards initiating a conversation among academics and researchers in universities, school teachers, and cultural organisations to see how this can be done. Now we need the government and exam boards to play their part."

Kimberly McIntosh (Runnymede Trust) and Professor Nandini Das (TIDE Project, University of Liverpool) are available to interview. Teachers are also available on request.

For more information please contact Runnymede Trust, Communications Manager, Rahul Verma, on 020 7377 9222 or 07946 525223 or communications@runnymedetrust.org

THE RUNNYMEDE TRUST

[The Runnymede Trust](#) is the UK's leading independent race equality think tank. We generate intelligence for a multi-ethnic Britain through research, network building, leading debate, and policy engagement.

Established in 1968, for over 50 years the Runnymede Trust has been working to build a Britain in which all citizens and communities feel valued, enjoy equal opportunities, lead fulfilling lives, and share a common sense of belonging. Among other initiatives, in 2016, it helped to produce the award-winning [Our Migration Story](#) digital education resource and website in direct response to requests from teachers for classroom-ready materials on histories of migration and empire. Designed for use by young people, teachers and the general public, it is a one-stop shop detailing Britain's long migration history from AD43 to the present day.

TIDE Project (Travel, Transculturality and Identity in England c. 1550-1700)

The [TIDE Project](#) is a major European Research Council funded project based at the University of Liverpool (2016-2019) and the University of Oxford (2019-2021). Through interdisciplinary, multi-lingual research and collaboration with poets, writers, libraries, museums, and heritage institutions, it investigates how mobility in the great age of travel and discovery in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries played a formative role in shaping English perceptions of human identity and difference.

In 2018-19, TIDE and the Runnymede Trust collaborated on a programme of research on the teaching of migration, belonging, and empire in schools, which produced the first sustained teachers' fellowship programme on these 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, focusing on teaching migration, belonging and empire, sensitively and effectively.