

<b>Institution:</b> University of Cambridge
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA30
<b>Title of case study:</b> British Historians, European History and the Draft National History Curriculum
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Professor Sir Richard Evans' detailed research on the how and why European history has been studied by British historians, published in his book <i>Cosmopolitan Islanders</i> (2009), laid the basis for a series of newspaper articles, public lectures and private discussions which had a material influence on the recent debate on history teaching in British schools and on the thinking of the Secretary of State for Education, Mr Michael Gove.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>In 2008-9 Professor Richard J. Evans (Regius Professor of History since 2008) carried out research on British historians who write and publish on the history of the European Continent. The research consisted of an historical dimension, based on the printed work of, and studies and biographies about, British historians from Gibbon through the nineteenth century to the present, who have researched and published on the history of France, Germany and other European countries, set in their contemporary cultural and political context; a statistical dimension, based on the investigation of 1,471 historians and their research areas in selected American, British, French, German, and Italian universities in the present; and a questionnaire of some 70 living British historians who write on Continental European history (of all periods). The research concluded that when British historians began working in the nineteenth century on modern European history it was largely the French Revolution that they studied; at the end of the century their interest broadened but often came about by chance and always remained in a minority. Between the wars, British historians turned increasingly to modern diplomatic history, reflecting the troubled international scene of the day; then the combination of an influential generation of European exiles and British historians whom the war had brought into contact with the Continent, and a new generation of PhD students in the expanding universities of the 1960s, had produced a rapid growth of serious research into European history until there were proportionately far more British historians working on Continental European history than the other way round. This also reflected the strong presence of teaching on Continental European history in British schools and the prominence of the subject at GCSE level (where only one-sixth of the topics studied had to be on British history). British historians had become extremely influential in the countries they wrote about, were widely published there and often became best-sellers in translation. This, the research concluded, was a consequence largely of the literary tradition in which British historians wrote, contrasting with the social-science model dominant on the Continent. British historians now led the world in this respect, exerting more influence even than their counterparts in the USA. However, the decline of foreign language teaching in British schools, and the passing from the scene of the generation of British historians trained in the 1960s, meant that this world leadership in European history was now under threat. This research led to further work on the current National Curriculum in History. The compulsory British history element at GCSE had been increased to 25 per cent. The draft curriculum intended by the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, to replace the existing National History Curriculum, proposed to eliminate the teaching of any non-British history at all and to remove skills-focused teaching of history. Further research, involving discussions with schoolteachers, the National Curriculum Adviser on History, and others, revealed widespread dissatisfaction with these proposals.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b> (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>The principal research was published in two books. The first was <i>In Defence of History</i> (Granta Books, 1997, reissued with an extensive Afterword replying to critics in 2001), which so far has sold 35,000 copies in the UK and been translated into eleven languages. English-language sales</p>

have been running at around 2,000 copies a year since 2008. The book has been translated into Chinese, Czech, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Serbian, Swedish, and Turkish. This work argues a case for why and how history should be studied.

The second book was *Cosmopolitan Islanders: British Historians and the European Continent* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), a greatly expanded version of Professor Evans's Inaugural Lecture as Regius Professor of Modern History [now: History] in the University of Cambridge in May 2009. This research focused on the outstanding contribution of British historians to researching and writing the history of Continental European countries and the importance of the long tradition of teaching that history in British schools.

#### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The research formed the basis for articles aimed at a wide audience intended to begin a debate on the proposals of the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, to replace the current national history curriculum in the schools with a new curriculum focusing exclusively on British history and transmitting factual knowledge rather than skills (numerous reports, e.g. *The Guardian*, 21 January 2011, p. 15). These articles were directly based on the conclusions reached in *Cosmopolitan Islanders* and on further work on the existing and draft curricula and were as follows: Richard J. Evans, 'The Wonderfulness of Us (the Tory interpretation of History)', *London Review of Books* 33/6 (17 March 2011), 9-12; idem, 'Learn for the right reasons: history is not about encouraging a narrowly patriotic sense of national identity', *The Guardian*, 27 August 2011, p. 43; idem, '1066 and all that', *New Statesman*, 23 January 2012, pp. 42-5; 'The folly of putting Little England at the heart of history', *Financial Times*, 8 February 2013, p. 11; 'The rote sets in. Michael Gove's new history curriculum', *New Statesman*, 15-21 March 2012, pp. 60-61; and 'The Mr Men game. Richard J Evans challenges Michael Gove's history agenda', *New Statesman* 17-23 May 2013, p. 29.

These articles led to extensive correspondence in the press; see 'Letters' in *London Review of Books* 33.8 (14 April 2011), pp. 5-6, and online comments in the *New Statesman*, *Financial Times*, and *Guardian*.

As a result of the debate, Professor Evans was invited to attend and contribute to two conferences held in London on the teaching of History in British schools and universities. At the first, held on 14 November 2011 under the auspices of *History Today*, and attended by Mr David Willetts, Minister of State for Higher Education, Professor Evans delivered a lecture that subsequently formed the basis for the *New Statesman* article referred to above, and engaged in debate with Dr David Starkey on the issues raised.

At the second, held to mark the launch of David Cannadine's book *The Right Kind of History: Teaching the Past in Twentieth-Century England* on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> November in Senate House, London, Mr Gove delivered a speech and during discussion Professor Evans raised two issues with the Secretary of State: (1) the importance of foreign languages in schools and universities if the UK is to continue to produce leading historians of the European continent, and (2) the importance of history teaching in transmitting skills as well as knowledge. In a speech at Cambridge on the same day, in the evening, Mr Gove declared: 'The study of history is important. Not just because it is an excitement in itself – because it brings us into direct contact with the lives of those great men and women who bent events to their will. It also teaches us how to weigh evidence, test assertions, sort good arguments from bad, plausible explanations from bogus. I also believe in the study of a foreign language because it extends not just the reach of our empathy but it opens up new ways of reasoning and judging. It allows us to see how complex individual societies and cultures are, gives us a new way of observing the world and ourselves. It gives us a privileged vantage point accessible only after hard work, but worth it because so much is revealed.' This recognition of points (1) and (2) referred to above constituted a significant modification of his earlier demands for the study of history to be based on learning facts about British history alone.

Subsequently Professor Evans was invited to address the Annual General Meeting of the Historical Association (school History teachers) at York, and took part in live debates on the subject on

## Impact case study (REF3b)

*Sunday Politics* with Andrew Neill and David Starkey, 'head to head' on the national history curriculum, Sunday 3 March 2013, 11 a.m., BBC1 television, and *The Moral Maze*, BBC Radio 4, 8-9 p.m., Wednesday 27 March 2013, both on the national history curriculum.

Mr Gove sent a special adviser, Mr Dominic Cummings, to Professor Evans to discuss his criticisms of the draft History curriculum. Professor Evans repeated to him his central arguments about the lack of non-British history in the draft and the lack of in-depth studies that could be used to teach historical thinking and analytical skills.

In his speech at Brighton on 9 May 2013, and in a subsequent interview on *The Andrew Marr Show* live on BBC 1 on 12 May 2013, the Secretary of State acknowledged the impact of Professor Evans's criticisms ('there have been one or two academics, Richard Evans at Cambridge, for example, who've been quite critical'). On 18 May 2013 the *Daily Mirror* reported: 'Mr Gove admitted he was having "second thoughts" about his controversial review of history teaching in the National Curriculum which has come under fire from teachers for being too "narrow" and "data-driven." Mr Gove said under new changes there would be more time for in-depth study and the history of other civilisations would be included in response to criticisms that concentrated too much on British history.' The draft curriculum was then withdrawn, and the next and final version contained significant amounts of teaching on non-British, world and Continental European History.

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

'The Wonderfulness of Us' was discussed in the House of Lords debate on 20 October 2012 (House of Lords Hansard Debates 20 October 2011, Column 408, Baroness Walmsley <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201011/ldhansrd/text/111020-0001.html>).

The debates, including the contributions of Professor Evans, were reported in many sources in the press, including *The Guardian*, 19 November 2011, p. 47, *The Daily Mail* (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2061809/David-Starkey-row-British-history.html>), *The New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/28/world/europe/28iht-eduLede28.html?pagewanted=all>) and in the online edition of *The Telegraph* (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/8890624/David-Starkey-in-new-row-over-mono-culture-comments.html>).

Michael Gove's 24<sup>th</sup> November speech is given in full on <http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/speeches/a00200373/michael-gove-to-cambridge-university> and the passage in question is to be found near the end.

The *Daily Mirror* report of Mr Gove's second thoughts is on <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/michael-gove-jeered-heckled-national-1896623>.

Michael Gove's references to Professor Evans on *The Andrew Marr Show* are on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01skbrz> and in the 'Mr Men' speech on 9 May 2013 on <http://www.politics.co.uk/comment-analysis/2013/05/09/michael-gove-s-anti-mr-men-speech-in-full>.

The withdrawal of the Mr Gove's original proposals and their replacement with a curriculum containing significant elements of non-British, world and Continental European history is discussed in 'Myth-busting', *The Guardian*, Review section, 13 July 2013, pp. 2-4 (see <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jul/13/michael-gove-teaching-history-wars>).