

Impact case study (REF3b)

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| <p>Institution: Anglia Ruskin University</p> |
| <p>Unit of Assessment: 30</p> |
| <p>Title of case study: Influencing and Shaping Public Policy on History Teaching in English Schools</p> |
| <p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) The Better History Forum (BHF), based at Anglia Ruskin University, has had significant influence on the formation of government policy on the teaching of history in schools, and was instrumental in shaping the current revision to the National Curriculum for history during 2011-13. Research undertaken by the BHF has changed the parameters of debate about the place of history in the classroom. Expert advice has been provided to the government through consultation with ministers and senior civil servants.</p> |
| <p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) The key researcher is Dr Sean Lang, Senior Lecturer at Anglia Ruskin University and Director of the BHF. Formerly both a teacher of history in schools and sixth forms and a teacher trainer, Dr Lang became Senior Lecturer in History at Anglia Ruskin University in September 2008, having previously studied there as an ESRC-funded doctoral student (part-time 2000-2007) and having held honorary appointments within the submitting unit as a Research Fellow (2003-2007) and later Senior Research Fellow (2007-2008), the latter alongside a temporary lecturing contract (2007-8) in the Department of History. Dr Lang's appointment as Senior Lecturer in 2008 came with a brief to develop the department's connections with schools and the school curriculum, building on his advisory work with Labour and the Conservatives referenced in the RA5 environment statement for RAE 2008.</p> <p>The BHF comprises a team of practising teachers and educationists, coming together under Dr Lang's leadership. BHF (originally the Better History Group, BHG) was formed after the production of research reports dated 2005 and 2007, the latter by the BHF's precursor, the History Practitioners Advisory Team (HPAT). Although the publications referenced below are Dr Lang's work, other members of the BHF are also active in producing outputs.</p> <p>Research undertaken by the BHF on history teaching in schools has produced a range of findings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The 2003 National Curriculum for history failed to provide a solid basis for school history in schools and encouraged schools to teach a narrow range of topics and periods, instead of offering children a broad coverage. This narrowed-down curriculum inevitably left out major areas of British history, with serious consequences for the development of personal and community identity among young people, and making it much harder to give them an understanding of Britain's distinctive political process. The lack of focus on the development and extension of young people's historical knowledge undermined efforts to develop and strengthen their historical skills, since the latter depends heavily on the former. The 2003 National Curriculum still embodied the outmoded view that young people become better historians by developing skills rather than by extending their knowledge. The BHF has played a central role in reviving the neglected issue of narrative history and its crucial role in school history. The fact that this issue is now central to debates about history teaching is almost entirely down to the efforts of members of the BHF. Examining in history at GCSE and AS/A level has now largely parted company with actual historical practice, especially in the analysis of historical sources, so that these examinations have been become exercises in themselves, rather than helping in the formation of young people's ability as historians. <p>Much of this research was commissioned by Government or Opposition and is embodied in reports provided to the commissioning parties (for example, the outputs referenced at 1 to 4 below). The research typically consisted of reviews of relevant literature, administering</p> |

questionnaires to teachers and students, and organising consultative conferences with other experts. Research has also been published in journal papers, for example the Historical Association's specialist journal *Teaching History*, and *History Today* (outputs 5 and 6 below).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. *Historical Association Curriculum Project: History 14-19* (London: Historical Association, 2005) Report commissioned by the Secretary of State, with a £15,000 government grant Available from HEI on request
2. *History Practitioners Advisory Team: Report to the Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families* (Anglia Ruskin University, 2007) Report commissioned by the Shadow Education Secretary; research carried out by team put together and led by Dr Lang, financed with a £1000 grant. Available from HEI on request
3. *Better History For All* (Anglia Ruskin University 2012) Revised proposals commissioned by the Schools Minister. Available from HEI on request
4. *Better History* (Anglia Ruskin University 2013) Full set of proposals and underpinning research. Available from HEI on request
5. Lang, S., 'Telling Tales in School', *History Today*, 54 (12), December 2004, pp. 26-27 Available from HEI on request
6. Mandler, P., Lang, S. and Vallance, T. 'Debates: Narrative in School History', *Teaching History* 145 (Narrative) December 2011, 22-31 Available from HEI on request

History Today is a long-established publication, the market leader in terms of presenting history to the wider public. *Teaching History*, published by the Historical Association, is the leading journal of history education, widely read in secondary schools and in the history education community.

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

The BHF was set up to improve the quality of history teaching in schools and to maximise history's contribution to community cohesion, cultural literacy, the enjoyment and preservation of the historic environment and the public understanding of the modern world. The BHF seeks to do this by engagement in public debate, lobbying for change, and undertaking active research to develop new ways of teaching, assessing and examining.

The BHF has disseminated its research findings via consultative conferences, which have attracted leading policy-makers and practitioner figures in the history education field, including Sir David Cannadine, Director of the Institute for Historical Research; the historian Chris Skidmore MP, jointly (with the historian Tristram Hunt MP) vice-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History; Tim Oates, of Cambridge Assessment and chair of the Expert Panel advising the Secretary of State on the National Curriculum Review (see reference 1); and the Chief HMI for History (see reference 2). The first such conference, held in London in October 2010, was organised jointly with Cambridge Assessment, one of the UK's largest examination boards. The second was held at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge in January 2012. Furthermore, a workshop for teachers held at ARU in June 2012 was attended by a senior civil servant from the Department for Education, responsible for drafting the revisions to the National Curriculum for history. The BHF has also been invited to conferences, seminars and meetings about school history organised by other groups, including the Historical Association, the Prince's Teaching Institute, the H10 Group, the Raphael Samuel History Centre, the Institute of Ideas, the London Institute of Education and the influential Curriculum for Cohesion group.

As noted and referenced above, the BHF has been commissioned to produce a number of research reports for the Schools Minister including *Better History for All* (2012) and *Better History* (2013), which by their very nature were a means by which BHF research was disseminated to beneficiaries. Dr Lang has also regularly provided expert advice drawing on the findings of BHF research at meetings of parliamentary and government policy-makers developing the new National Curriculum. He has spoken at four ministerial round table meetings with the Secretary of State for Education and has had three individual meetings with the Schools Minister. He has also had four individual meetings with senior civil servants and advisers, with other such meetings planned. In July 2012 he gave evidence to the All Party Parliamentary group for Archives and History, which examined the current state of History provision in schools, and to ask the question of whether History should be made compulsory for all pupils, up to the age of 16. Its report on history teaching came out in December 2012, quoting Dr Lang's evidence (reference 3).

It will be clear, therefore, that the BHF's public impact has been extensive, through its high-profile contribution to popular national debate about the importance of history in school teaching. The national media have reported and critiqued the BHF's findings and recommendations. For example, website hits in the national press quoting Sean Lang numbered 78,440 for *The Daily Telegraph*, in an article by Graham Paton on 'School-children forced to drop History at 14', on 14 October 2010, (reference 4), and 1,973,411 hits for *The Guardian* website on 12 January, 2011, where Lang was quoted in an article by Jessica Shepherd entitled 'History Lessons will become a thing of the past, teachers warn Michael Gove' (reference 5). There were also extensive mentions in the *London Review of Books* (17 March 2011, reference 6). In total, articles on web sites have received an estimated 6.5 million hits, whilst local and national newspaper readership is over 1.4 million. The BHF's research has even featured on BBC Radio 4's popular *Thought for the Day* (19 January 2011) in a talk by Abdul Hakim Murad, a regular contributor to the programme. The Parliamentary Group report referenced above was also reported in the press as well as to both Houses of Parliament.

The BHF's impact extends far into the political and policy-making world, and has had a major influence on the new National Curriculum for history, which was presented to Parliament in September 2013 and will be taught in around 25,000 schools to 8.2 million pupils in England. The initial draft of the revised National Curriculum in history was published for consultation in February 2013 and attracted very negative comments from all quarters, including the BHF (see the official report on the consultation, reference 7). The revised proposals, published in July 2013, which were much more positively received, were significantly influenced by BHF research and conclusions (reference 8). The BHF's influence is also evident from the detail in the government's response to the consultation (reference 9), which emphasised how the revised curriculum 'retained a core focus on the teaching of Britain and its relationship with the world within a clear chronological framework.' Similarly, the new National Curriculum for history (reference 10) demonstrates the influence of BHF, for example in linking the importance of history to understanding 'the diversity of societies and relationships between different groups, as well as [pupils'] own identity and the challenges of their time'; highlighting the importance of gaining 'historical knowledge by placing [pupil's] growing knowledge into different contexts', different approaches to history, and different timescales; and the value of 'establishing clear narratives within and across the periods studied.'

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

- 1) The Group Director of Assessment Research and Development, Cambridge Assessment.
- 2) Director and Principal Researcher, Curriculum for Cohesion.
- 3) *History for all?* Report and oral evidence of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Archives and History, December 2012. Available online at http://www.htai.ie/docs/2012_docs/2013_history_for_all_report.pdf
- 4) Paton, G., 'Children forced to drop history because of trendy teaching', *Daily Telegraph*,

14 October 2010.(Figures compiled by ARU Press Office, available from the HEI on demand)

- 5) Shepherd, J., 'History Lessons will become a thing of the past, teachers warn Michael Gove' (Jessica Shepherd entitled 'History Lessons will become a thing of the past, teachers warn Michael Gove' (Figures compiled by ARU Press Office, available from the HEI on demand)
- 6) Evans, R.J., 'The Wonderfulness of Us: (the Tory interpretation of history)', *London Review of Books* 17 March 2011. Available online at <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n06/richard-j-evans/the-wonderfulness-of-us>. The *London Review of Books*' average circulation per issue in 2010, the nearest for which figures are available, was 53,215 (<http://www.lrb.co.uk/about>)
- 7) Department for Education, *Reform of the national curriculum in England: Report of the consultation conducted February-April 2013*, July 2013. Available online at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/NC%20in%20England%20consultation%20report%20-%20FINAL.pdf>
- 8) Civil Servant, Department for Education, with responsibility for history within the National Curriculum review.
- 9) Department for Education, *Reform of the national curriculum in England: Government response to the consultation conducted February-April 2013*, July 2013. Available online at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/040713%20NC%20in%20England%20consultation%20-%20govt%20response%20FINAL.pdf>
- 10) Department for Education, *The national curriculum in England: Framework document*, July 2013. Available online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/210969/NC_framework_document_-_FINAL.pdf