

Humanities in the 21st Century Curriculum

A response to the Current Secondary Curriculum Review

Submitted by Deirdre Smith on behalf of the Humanities Association

The most significant event for Humanities right now must be the current review of the secondary curriculum. A level review has already taken place, as has the review of GCSE criteria for history, geography, RE and citizenship. The review of criteria for Humanities GCSEs will take place later this month. The key stage 3 programmes of study for all National Curriculum subjects have been revised in the context of a review of the aims and purposes of the whole curriculum. The consultation, conducted by QCA, will conclude on April 30, 2007, so there is still time to make your views known. The Humanities Association is delighted at this more holistic approach to whole-school curriculum review. Please read on to find out more about The Humanities Association; our response to the whole -school curriculum review; the support we provide for members, and if your interest is aroused, please contact us to join us in the current debate.

The Humanities Association –Who Are We?

The Humanities Association is the only subject association which represents all humanities subjects including combined and integrated humanities GCSE courses. It is a grass roots organization of classroom teachers, headteachers, advisers and consultants.

What do we stand for?

Humanities is about people: how people create the world they live in; how the world they live in makes them the people they are. Humanities education recognises and explicitly acknowledges the human basis of the learning experience. It focuses on the human dimension of the curriculum, that area which deals with people and their interaction with their environment, in its historical, geographical, cultural, social, moral and spiritual dimensions.

We aim to ensure that children and young people in all schools and colleges benefit from strong, relevant and vibrant humanities provision. The Association strongly supports a Humanities entitlement for all young people. At 14-19 Humanities GCSE s provide opportunities for a coherent and meaningful approach to learning, for meeting many of the citizenship requirements, and for the possible double accreditation in both Humanities and either history, geography or RE. ¹ With our emphasis on an holistic approach to learning we are placed in a strong position to guide schools to meet the challenges of secondary curriculum reform.

Our focus on the outcomes for the learner being at the heart of any curriculum design are consistent with the draft aims of QCA's current secondary curriculum review: i.e. to enable all young people to become;

¹ For more information about Humanities GCSEs and the Humanities Association , see The Humanities Association Website; www.hums.org.uk.

- Successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve
- Confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives
- Responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society ²

What is exciting about this curriculum review is the shift away from a premium on content and a move towards the personal, learning and thinking skills that we want all young people of secondary age to develop. The revised programmes of study for History, geography, citizenship and RE are all mapped against the contribution made by their subject to these essential skills and to the aims of the whole curriculum. Key concepts and processes are the new driving forces in each programme of study. The section on 'Curriculum Opportunities' in each subject advocates links to other subjects and areas of the curriculum. There is a greater emphasis on creativity, cultural understanding and diversity, critical evaluation throughout the whole curriculum. The curriculum has the potential to be much more than the sum of its parts and presents the opportunity to create a curriculum with far greater coherence and meaning for the learner. There is greater flexibility for teachers to plan learning which meets individual needs and supports the transference of skills across the curriculum. If schools wish to provide a curriculum fit for the 21st century they should embrace this new flexibility and the benefits for learners that accompany it.

² For further information on the Secondary Curriculum Review see; www.qca.org.uk/secondary curriculum review. Consultation ends on 30 April 2007

The Humanities Association has been campaigning for years for a curriculum which provides a more coherent learning experience for young people. We would urge schools to grasp the opportunity to have a radical look at the way their curriculum is organized. We need to ensure that these principles are embedded in curriculum design so that the desired outcomes for all learners can be achieved and that all young people are prepared for the challenges of life in the 21st century. As the old Chinese proverb goes; 'If you keep doing what you've always done you'll always get what you always had.'