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History teachers as curriculum-makers in policy and practice: quantitative insights from England and Scotland

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ABSTRACT

In England and Scotland, the History National Curriculum avoids the prescription of specific content; expecting schools instead to devise a curriculum appropriate to their pupils within broad guidance. This means in both countries, teachers apparently have responsibility for constructing a curriculum: selecting content, sequencing learning and identifying resources, but only in Scotland is it explicitly stated in policy that teachers act as curriculum-makers. Based on the 2021 UK Historical Association survey, this paper explores the extent to which history teachers in England and Scotland use their curricular autonomy to respond to calls for diversified curricula. Drawing on responses from 8% of England's secondary schools and 20% of Scotland's, the data suggest that, although teachers in Scotland are more explicitly framed as curriculum-makers in policy, it is history teachers in English secondary schools who are more likely to have diversified their curricula. The paper explores possible explanations for these findings and suggests that demographic diversity, inspection cultures, and knowledge exchange networks exercise greater influence over teachers' willingness to diversify their curricula than the positioning of teachers in policy.

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Introduction

On 7 June 2020, a statue of Edward Colston, a trader in enslaved people was toppled from its plinth in Bristol and thrown into the city's harbour. This local dispute was interpreted emblematically as a call for Britain to reckon with representations of its colonial past in other sites of public memory. The Colston protest (and associated Black Lives Matter protests) catalysed earlier calls to revise the school curriculum to include greater coverage (and honesty) about Britain's imperial project and its legacies (Arday 2020; Mohamud and Whitburn 2016; Traille 2007). The history curriculum, as outlined in policy documents and resources has typically failed to address the negative issues associated with the British Empire. Instead, the focus of the period 1750–1900, for example, in different iterations of the National Curriculum (DfE 1995; DFEE 1999; DfES

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1990) has been on trade, industrial growth and Britain's worldwide expansion. Popular textbooks included chapters on 'Changes in Industry', 'The Canal Age' and 'The Power of Steam', but nothing on empire or colonization (Aylett 1985). In response, campaigners sought a curriculum which placed due emphasis on Britain's imperial crimes and resistance to them (Apps 2021); the legacy of colonialism in Britain's multicultural population (Lidher, McIntosh, and Alexander 2020); and the ways in which indigenous knowledges had been silenced (Lyndon-Cohen 2021). However, the powerful calls for Britain to reckon with the dark side of its colonial legacy encountered opposition from those seeking to preserve prevailing orthodoxies (History Reclaimed 2021).

In disputes over '*the* school history curriculum', it is easy to overlook that in all four nations of the UK, national curriculum policy does not direct schools about what historical topics should be taught; instead, policy devolves these decisions to schools. Thus, the responsibility for 'decolonising the curriculum' or 'restoring traditional history' rests with schools and the history teachers who work in them. This decentralised approach means that to know what schools teach, we must rely on research rather than policy. Since 2009, the UK Historical Association survey has done much to create a picture of the taught curriculum in schools. The 2019 iteration of the survey confirmed the widely held view that school history curricula were changing, with one-third of schools reporting that they had recently updated their curriculum 'to include a more diverse representation of people in the past' (Historical Association 2019).

Given this finding (and the events of summer 2020), the 2021 Historical Association survey was designed to explore further the teaching of diverse histories. Among other objectives, the survey sought to answer the following questions:

(1) To what extent does Black and Minority Ethnic history feature in the compulsory history of UK secondary schools?
(2) Have schools in the UK recently changed their curricula to include more Black and Minority Ethnic history?
(3) What factors do teachers in the UK identify as hindering and/or stimulating change?

When designing the survey and analysing the data, differences between the four nations of the UK were apparent. Schools follow different curricula and submit to different accountability systems, while teachers have different professional standards and performance criteria. Given these differences, data for each component nation were analysed separately. This paper presents a comparison of the data from the two largest policy contexts, England and Scotland, and explores the extent to which responsibilities for curriculum-making in policy were reflected in the willingness of teachers to act as curriculum-makers in practice.[1]

This paper begins by setting out the two policy contexts in more detail, looking at t each country's history curriculum requirements and how teachers are positioned in relation to curriculum development. The literature review will explore issues of teacher agency and curriculum-making before examining the patterns of decision-making in the two nations revealed by the survey data. Finally, we conclude with

a discussion, offering tentative explanations for the different curriculum-making practices seen in both countries.

Policy contexts

The history curriculum in England and Scotland

The current school curricula in Scotland and England reflect different claims about what matters in education. Following the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, the Labour-Liberal government launched a 'National Debate on Education', attracting some 1500 responses (Munn et al. 2004). In 2004, *Curriculum for Excellence* framework was announced, which organised the curriculum around four 'capacities' or aims: the development of successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors (Scottish Executive 2004). In emphasising transferrable skills over content knowledge, and interdisciplinarity over traditional subject domains, the curriculum exemplifies the kinds of competency-based curricula which became globally popular in the early twenty-first century (Downey, Byrne, and Souza 2013; Priestley and Biesta 2013).

In England, more tentative steps were taken in the same direction. The first English National Curriculum in 1991 had been based around traditional academic subjects (DFES 1990) which were preserved through revisions to the curriculum in 1995 and 2000. However, the introduction of the 'Every Child Matters' (DES 2003) report – which called for a joined-up approach to education and other social services around children and young people (encapsulated in the renaming of the relevant government department as the Department for Children, Schools and Families) – the 2007 iteration of the National Curriculum, appeared to adopt many elements of a competency curriculum. The breakdown of subject demarcations was indicated by a new logo in which the different colours previously used to represent each subject were now intertwined with one another, while social and emotional learning objectives were given new prominence. Nonetheless, the 'key process and concepts' used to frame what should be learnt were still presumed to reside within subjects, rather than being transcendent generic competencies (QCA 2007).

In 2010, however, the new Conservative led coalition ended any tentative steps towards a more interdisciplinary, competency-based approach. The new Education Secretary, Michael Gove, announced his intentions by reinstating a Department for Education (DfE) and declaring:

> I'm an unashamed traditionalist when it comes to the curriculum. Most parents would rather their children had a traditional education, with children sitting in rows, learning the kings and queens of England. (Gove 2010)

This extract highlights two curricular principles that became central to English educational policy. Firstly, traditional subjects should form the basis of the curriculum; secondly, these traditional subjects should comprise 'traditional' knowledge. In terms of the latter, Gove had been influenced by the 'cultural literacy' arguments of E. D. Hirsch (1987), where, a canon of culturally significant 'best knowledge' created a shared set of cultural touchstones. In Hirsch's (and Gove's) conception, this shared canon represented the democratisation of knowledge – by equalising children's entitlement to the same

knowledge, they argued, social mobility could be founded on the principles of meritocracy (Smith 2013). Gove's aspiration for a prescribed core knowledge curriculum for History soon ran into opposition from schoolteachers and subject associations which preserved considerable autonomy over the primary and lower secondary curriculum (Burn 2015; Smith 2017).

In England and Scotland, the secondary school curriculum is divided into two age phases – a lower secondary phase (ages 11–14) in which history is compulsory, and an upper secondary phase in which students can opt to study the subject. In the lower secondary phase – known as 'Key Stage 3' (KS3) in England, and as 'Broad General Education' (BGE) in Scotland – there is no officially mandated curriculum content.[2] Instead, both offer broad frameworks for content selection, but leave the choice of events to individual schools. In England, *The National Curriculum* requires that children in Key Stage 3 study a series of chronological topics centred on Britain (1066–1509; 1509–1745; 1745–1901; 1901-present day), a local history study, a theme or aspect of history, and a study of an issue or society from the wider world (DfE 2013). Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) offers even less direction, specifying only that children learn about 'the development of the Scottish nation' and 'why a group of people from beyond Scotland settled here' (Learning and Scotland 2006).

These broad frameworks mean that schools are entrusted to devise curricula for the pupils in their care. The history curricula of both countries are therefore high-autonomy and high trust models. As Ormond has written about the structurally similar New Zealand History curriculum, such models contain an 'unstated implication of high expectations … that suitable historical times and places, the breadth and depth of topic engagement and the sequencing of historical contexts will be carefully considered and accommodated' (Ormond 2017, 603). This paper explores one specific dimension of breadth – the extent to which schools include a diverse range of voices and positionalities in their curricula.

Teachers as curriculum-makers in policy and public discourse

The latitude offered to Scottish teachers regarding content selection reflects a broader emphasis in *Curriculum for Excellence* that teachers should act as curriculum-makers. Policy guidance in 2010–11 claimed that CfE 'places the responsibility for innovation at the level of the school' and emphasised the granting of much 'greater autonomy' than teachers had previously experienced (Scottish Government 2010, 6). The report 'Teaching Scotland's Future', was similarly explicit about the expansion of teachers' curriculum-making responsibilities:

> *Curriculum for Excellence* is much more than a reform of curriculum and assessment. It is predicated on a model of sustained change which sees schools and teachers as co-creators of the curriculum (Donaldson 2010, 4)

Curriculum-making at the school level means that the Scottish Government can absolve itself of responsibility for the specific content of the taught curriculum. This approach to curriculum can be seen in a response to a 2020 Freedom of Information request about the coverage of enslavement in the British Empire,

> The curriculum in Scotland is a flexible one as we believe it is best for schools and teachers to design and deliver a curriculum that meets the needs of their learners in their communities . . . . As such we do not hold detailed information about what is being taught in schools in Scotland. (Scottish Government 2020)

Yet, as demands for change escalated following the 2020 Black Lives Matters protests, the government appeared to concede that more central direction might be appropriate Lobbying from the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER) and various parliamentary petitions,[3] saw the Deputy First Minister acknowledge calls for the diversification of the Scottish curriculum (Swinney 2020). Consequently, a Race Equality and Anti-Racism in Education Programme was established by the Learning Directorate of the Scottish Government, which later included a curriculum reform subgroup (Scottish Government 2023).

In England, the formal expectations of schools and of teachers in relation to curriculum-making are inconsistent. Despite there being a *national* curriculum, the current version (DfE 2013) is only *required* to be taught by 'local-authority-maintained schools' and serves only as a benchmark for academy and free schools that now account for 80% of the country's state-funded secondary schools. The current Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted 2023) also implies that curriculum decisions are left to schools and/or teachers: inspectors require schools to make clear their curriculum 'intent' and focus their evaluation on the quality of that stated intention, the effectiveness of its implementation and the nature of its impact. Yet, formal definitions of teachers' roles place relatively little emphasis on curriculum-making. The Teachers Standards (DfE 2021), which set out the requirements for qualified teacher status, include a focus on individual lesson planning but beyond this, only expect that teachers should 'contribute to the design and provision of an engaging curriculum within the relevant subject area(s)'.

Similar inconsistencies can be seen in relation to the history curriculum. Pronouncements by Ofsted (the national inspectorate) and by government ministers seem to treat history teachers as curriculum-makers, recognising that,

> The history curriculum content in schools is significantly shaped by decisions made at school level. Many history teachers value this freedom with curriculum design, which allows them many possible routes to constructing a high-quality curriculum (Ofsted 2021)

In Parliamentary debates, the Minister for Schools, Nick Gibb (2023) rejected calls for making Black history in schools compulsory, insisting that history teachers 'should be able to use their own knowledge and expertise to determine how they teach pupils, and to make choices about what they teach', implying teachers had a large degree of curriculum freedom. Yet, other policy statements seem to constrain teachers' curricular freedom. In February 2022 the Conservative government issued new guidance to English schools around the issue of political impartiality (DfE 2022). This guidance explicitly forbade teachers from presenting 'partisan political views', specifically naming the Black Lives Matter movement as an example, and insisted that potentially contentious historical topics, including those 'related to empire and imperialism' must be taught 'in a balanced manner'. The DfE has also declared its intention to publish a 'model history curriculum' to promote 'knowledge-rich teaching of history for ages 5 to 14, giving all pupils a shared knowledge of British and world history' (DfE 2022). While the terms of reference for its

advisory group insist that this curriculum will merely provide one possible model of what schools might choose to teach, they also declare that this model 'will also provide the foundation for subsequent development of curriculum resources and teacher professional development in these subjects', implying a strong intention to shape future practice.

It was within this rather muddled and potentially contradictory policy context that the Historical Association commissioned research to understand more about curricular choices being made by history teachers, specifically choices related to the inclusion of more diverse and previously marginalised histories. In order to frame our examination of those choices, we now set out key themes from the literature, tracking the development of ideas related to teachers as curriculum-makers and to the process of history curriculum design.

Literature review

Teachers as curriculum-makers

The relationship between teachers and the curriculum in the UK has changed considerably over time (Lawn and Ozga 1986). From the end of World War Two until the mid-1980s, it was assumed that responsibility for curriculum-making lay with schools and local education authorities. This assumption was underpinned both by a post-war scepticism about the role of the state in prescribing knowledge and a belief that teachers were best placed to devise an appropriate curriculum relevant to their context. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Lawrence Stenhouse's work was influential in shaping teachers' understanding of their role as research-informed curriculum developers, specifically in the humanities (Stenhouse 1968). These curriculum developments even impacted on policy: the experimental approach of the Schools Council History 13–16 Project (Shemilt 1980), influenced some O level syllabi in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as informing the assessment objectives adopted for all GCSE history specifications from 1986 onwards.

This consensus in favour of school-based curriculum-making was challenged in the 1980s when the New Right – an uneasy alliance between neoliberals and neoconservatives – sought to recast teaching as a 'directed profession' (Bottery and Wright 2000). This was to be achieved through a prescriptive centralised curricula designed to tackle a perceived left-wing bias in school curricula (Quicke 1988), a language of consumer choice (Whitty 2002), and an outcomes-oriented managerialist discourse (Gerwitz 2002), underpinned by audits and surveillance (Perryman 2006). Teachers' responsibilities as curriculum-makers were actively circumscribed with the introduction of centralised National Curricula in both England and Scotland in 1991.

Although the initial iterations of the national curricula in each context prescribed the content to be taught, a 2007 revision to the *English National Curriculum* and the introduction of Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* in 2004 marked a considerable shift towards greater teacher involvement in curriculum-making. In doing so, they reflected a global trend described by Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) as 'the (re) turn to teacher agency', which

> Not only gives explicit permission to teachers to exert higher degrees of professional judgement and discretion within the contexts in which they work but also sees their agency as a key dimension of teachers' professionalism (Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson 2015, 2)

This research focuses on just one of these areas of 'professional judgement and discretion' – the selection of content within the history curriculum. The journey of curriculum from policy to classrooms has long been seen as a process of translation in which ideas are re-interpreted and operationalised (Goodlad 1979). Such translations are inevitable; there can never be a straight line from the intended curriculum, through the taught curriculum, to the received curriculum. Adapting the work of Thijs and van den Akker (2009), Priestley et al. (2021, 13) have described curriculum as being 'made' at sites of social practice from the supra site of transnational discourses, through the macro (national governments) and the meso (curriculum agencies and district authorities) to the micro (the school-level and the subject of this paper).

In focusing on the micro-level, Shawer (2010) sketches out three broad identities for teachers: 'curriculum transmitters' who try to faithfully transmit prescribed knowledge; 'curriculum developers' who recontextualise central curricula, and 'curriculum-makers' who create the curriculum within their schools. Policy in Scotland and England positions teachers differently with respect to these typologies. In Scotland, there is a coherent policy framing of teachers as curriculum-makers. The official list of teachers' duties identifies 'developing the curriculum' as one of the things that teachers are required to do as part of their role (McCrone 2001, 26), while Scottish teachers' professional standards require that they have 'a depth of knowledge and understanding of *curriculum design*' (GTCS 2021, 7). These policy statements on teachers' professional duties align with a school history curriculum which requires them to act as curriculum-makers who select and sequence content. In contrast, although the English history curriculum also requires teachers to devise curriculum at a school level, the Teachers Standards in England make no reference to curriculum-making as professional practice, requiring instead only that teachers 'demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge' (DfE 2021, 10). There is, then, a discrepancy between an English History curriculum which requires *de facto* that teachers act as curriculum-makers, while policy elsewhere positions them as curriculum developers.

There is, of course, a difference between the positioning of teachers as curriculum-makers in policy and their willingness (or ability) to act as such (Philippou, Kontovourki, and Theodorou 2014). Just because teachers in Scotland have curriculum-making among their professional duties and teachers in England do not, we cannot assume that these framings will be evident in practice; rather the confidence to make curriculum depends on a range of contextual factors which are possibly unique to every teacher. Curriculum-making can, then, be understood as a dimension of teacher's agency which Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015, 19–20) have argued is an 'emergent phenomenon', which is only achieved by individuals 'through the interplay of [their] personal capacities and the resources, affordances and constraints of the environment by means of which [they] act.'

The links between teacher agency and the confidence to act as a curriculum-maker are clear. Not surprisingly, then, many studies of curriculum-making have adopted qualitative methodologies. This is understandable; curriculum-making is a creative practice,

which is best understood through rich, detailed case-studies (Coburn and Russell 2008; Hizli Alkan 2021; Priestley et al. 2021). In contrast, the data collection phase of this research drew on quantitative approaches. Consequently, this paper does not attempt to explain the factors that make an individual teacher more or less likely to act as an agentic curriculum-maker, instead we explore how one socialising structure (the positioning of teachers as curriculum-makers in policy) works at scale. As such, it obviously cannot provide the richly detailed exploration needed to examine exactly how agency emerges in particular contexts, but it can prompt important questions about those contexts and generate some speculative responses that call for further investigation.

Content and knowledge in history curricula

Decisions about curriculum content in history tend to be more politically charged than in some other subject areas (Nakou and Barca 2010). As Counsell, argues, to make decisions about the curriculum in history is 'to exercise phenomenal power' (Counsell 2000, 61), since *any* specific selection of historical content creates a powerful 'narrative template' (Wertsch 2008), and serves to shape how people see themselves and others. The process of curriculum construction is therefore likely to generate debate over what is included, and thus deemed important, and what is excluded, and thus seen as insignificant. For Wilkinson (2014), the omission of various historical content is part of the 'absent' curriculum, which can occur at all three levels. Absence, in the form of a 'null' curriculum (Eisner 1985), occurs at the macro or meso 'site of social activity' (Priestley et al. 2021), where historical topics simply do not appear in any official educational policy. At the micro-level, within schools, departments and classrooms, teachers exert more control, so any absence is due to content being 'unselected' or 'unenacted', i.e. history teachers either choosing not to include potential topics in their programmes of study or failing to teach topics within their programmes.

With the power to choose content comes responsibility, with the curriculum treated as an object of enquiry to be tested and scrutinised (Stenhouse 1975). However, the choices that history teachers can make as they engage in that process are inevitably constrained in a number of ways. At one level, teachers face practical issues associated with timetable space, resources and their particular areas of expertise. Another major factor is the existence of the performative educational culture identified by Ball (2003), which, according to Harris (2021), tends to create a risk-averse environment, in which teachers may be reluctant to experiment with new content choices. Although Harris's argument was made with reference to the way in which new examination specifications shaped teachers decisions, earlier research by Harris and Reynolds (2018) also pointed to the high levels of inertia in curriculum thinking within the English context, especially in the early years of secondary education, with many teachers covering similar topics within each of the specified chronological periods; topics that had changed very little since 1991, through different iterations of the National Curriculum.

Within the Scottish context, Smith (2019) found that the greater freedom of choice built into *CfE*, often led to a much more fragmented approach, resulting in a history curriculum that was narrow, episodic and disjointed. In such cases, teachers' overriding considerations when it came to the choice of curriculum content were largely instrumental. A similar issue can also be seen in New Zealand, where public exam specifications stipulate learning outcomes in history but not particular content, thereby giving

teachers considerable agency and discretion in curriculum design. As Ormond (2017) found, this almost invariably resulted in a narrow curriculum, focused on meeting the examination outcomes. In these instances, teachers seemed to concentrate more on what they thought would lead to examination success, and/or what was within their comfort zones, in relation both to their own subject knowledge and existing resources. However, within each of the studies, there were examples of a few history teachers who did things differently. Some teachers showed a greater concern about the specific substantive content that they taught, citing the inherent value of various topics for students' understanding of the world in which they live. Some were also concerned with helping students build a bigger, more coherent picture of the past.

Recently, concerns about the picture of the past created by particular content choices have focused on the question of how inclusive that picture is. Lidher, McIntosh and Alexander (2020), for example, drew attention to the 'monochrome' nature of the history taught in English schools, which omitted the experiences of ethnically diverse people, positioning them as 'outsiders' (Arday 2020) in the national story. This can be seen an example of an absent curriculum in all its forms: null, unselected and unenacted (Wilkinson 2014).

The desire to embrace a more diverse history curriculum has been driven partly by concerns to better represent the past and its inherent diversity and complexity (Holliss 2021). It has also been underpinned by appeals to moral imperatives. Concerns have been expressed about the ways in which the history curriculum is currently constructed and how it alienates and marginalises students from minority ethnic backgrounds (Doharty 2019; Traille 2007, 2019). Calls have also been made for recognitive justice in which the recognition of different cultural and social backgrounds is seen as an essential part of a wider means of addressing disadvantage and social inequity. This is an issue highlighted by Mohamud and Whitburn (2016), whose call to do 'justice to history', is about restoring stories that have been consciously or unwittingly neglected and omitted.

By 2021, there was increasing evidence that some history teachers had taken steps to select and enact a more diverse curriculum (Chaudhry 2021; Cusworth 2021; Lyndon-Cohen 2021; Priggs 2020), the extent to which such approaches were being adopted was not clear, which is why the Historical Association chose to make this issue a particular focus of its survey of history teaching in schools.

Methods

The Historical Association survey of Secondary Schools (Associaton 2021) has been conducted regularly since 2009 and includes a number of recurring questions to allow analysis of change over time. The 2021 iteration of the survey built on two priorities emerging from the 2019 survey. The first was to achieve more granularity around the finding that a growing number of schools had recently worked to diversify their history curriculum. To respond to this, the authors of the 2021 survey worked with academic partners of the Runnymede Trust (Alexander, Weekes-Bernard, and Chatterji 2015; Lidher 2017) to devise survey items which asked specifically about schools' inclusion of Black and Minority History topics. A second priority for the 2021 iteration was a desire to increase participation from UK countries outside England. To achieve this, the survey

authors partnered with the Scottish Association of Teachers of History to ensure that the survey was appropriate to the Scottish context and to widen its distribution.

Respondents to the survey were made aware that while the survey's main purpose was to provide the Historical Association with an up-to-date picture of school history teaching to guide future policy, their anonymised responses might also be used in research publications and gave their consent to participate on that basis. The survey was given ethical approval by the Ethics Panels of the Universities of Stirling, Reading and Oxford in line with BERA's Ethical Guidelines for Educational research (BERA 2018). It was conducted during the summer of 2021 (running from May to the end of July). A particular ethical consideration was the use of appropriate terminology to describe the kinds of marginalised histories that we were seeking to explore. We needed a term which encompassed diverse histories in countries where Black people have historically been minoritized (such as the UK) as well as majority world contexts, such as Africa and Asia. While it is not unproblematic, we have chosen the term 'Black and Minority Ethnic Histories'.

Data were received from 286 secondary schools in England, and 70 secondary schools in Scotland, representing 8% and 20% respectively of the total number of such schools in those countries. Participants were invited to reply on behalf of their school as a whole, but in a small number of cases more than one response was received from the same school. In these cases, the response from the Head of Department was accepted and duplicates were disregarded. While the high response rate from Scotland and England allows for robust comparison between the two countries in relation to the three research questions, responses from Northern Ireland (3) and Wales (7) were too few to justify inclusion.

Initial analysis of survey data made it clear that there were marked differences between data from Scotland and data from England. Indeed, so stark were these differences that it became inevitable that the two countries should be treated as analytically separate data sets. Although it had not been the original intention, for the first time the Historical Association produced two separate reports – one on Scotland and one on England (Associaton 2021). The next section of the paper compares these two data sets before moving onto a discussion of the significance of these findings.

Results

RQ1 - To what extent does Black and Minority Ethnic History feature in the school-designed history curricula (first three years) of English and Scottish secondary schools?

This question identified some potential topics which would allow schools to explore Black and Minority Ethnic history with their pupils. Respondents were asked to indicate the presence (or absence) or each topic by responding to a closed question in one of three ways:

- We include a specific unit on this topic
- We include one or two lessons on this topic
- We do not include any teaching on this topic

Presence and absence

Table 1 shows that Black and Minority Ethnic history is considerably more likely to be taught in the history curriculum of English secondary schools than Scottish ones. Almost all English secondary schools teach at least one lesson about the Transatlantic Slave Trade (99%), while less than two-thirds (63%) of Scottish schools do so. Even more stark, while 98% of English schools taught about the British Empire, only just over a third of Scottish schools explored this topic (36%). The other two topics – migration to Britain and Black and Asian British history – were less comprehensively taught in English schools, but an English pupil is still twice as likely to have learned about Migration and three times more likely to have learned about BME presence in Britain than a Scottish counterpart.

Depth of study

An analysis of whether schools study these topics in a sustained and detailed manner reveals a similar picture (Table 2). Just 7% of Scottish schools teach the British Empire as a dedicated topic in the first three years of secondary school, while over 80% of English schools do so. Scottish schools pay more sustained attention to the Transatlantic Slave Trade (47%), but this is, again, considerably less than the 86% seen in England. Lower figures for the teaching of Migration and Black and Asian British History as dedicated topics reflect their overall lower popularity in the school curriculum, but stark differences between English and Scottish practices remain.

RQ2 - Have schools in England and Scotland recently changed their curricula to include more Black and Minority Ethnic History?

Table 1. Presence and absence of black and minority ethnic history in the compulsory curriculum of Scottish and English secondary schools.

	% Scottish schools teaching at least one lesson on this in the secondary school BGE ($n = 70$)	% English schools teaching at least one lesson on this in KS3 ($n = 286$)	Difference
Migration to Britain	35	73	38%
British Empire	36	98	62%
Transatlantic Slave Trade	63	99	36%
Black and Asian British History	18	57	39%

Table 2. Teaching black and minority ethnic history as a dedicated topic in the compulsory curriculum of Scottish and English secondary schools.

	% Scottish Schools teaching as a dedicated topic in the secondary school BGE ($n = 70$)	% English Schools teaching as a dedicated topic in KS3 ($n = 286$)	Difference
Migration	12	40	28%
British Empire	7	82	75%
TAST	47	86	39%
Black and Asian British History	6	23	17%

Although these topics are not 'new' in a historical sense, recent campaigns (Arday 2020) have undoubtedly raised the profile of these diverse histories and there has been an increased expectation that schools will engage children in debates around the historical origins of racism and the Black presence in Britain. To explore the extent to which this desire to change had been actioned, respondents were asked a closed question: 'Have you recently changed your BGE/KS3 History Curriculum to make it more inclusive or diverse?' and invited to respond in one of four ways:

- Considerable changes
- Some changes
- Minor changes
- No changes

Figure 1 shows a considerable difference in practice between Scotland and England. Over half of English schools stated that they had made 'considerable' changes to their curriculum, compared to just 6% of Scottish schools. At the other extreme, around a third of Scottish schools had made no recent changes to the school curriculum to make it more diverse while only a tiny proportion of English schools had acted similarly.

Although more will be said about this in the discussion section, it is enough to note here that the pattern of curriculum innovation is the opposite of what we might expect to see based on the way teachers are framed in policy in the two countries. In Scotland a policy framing of 'teachers as curriculum-makers' does not seem to have made them any more likely to change and update their curriculum, while the notionally more directed profession of 'curriculum developers' in England is actively engaged in redesigning curriculum.

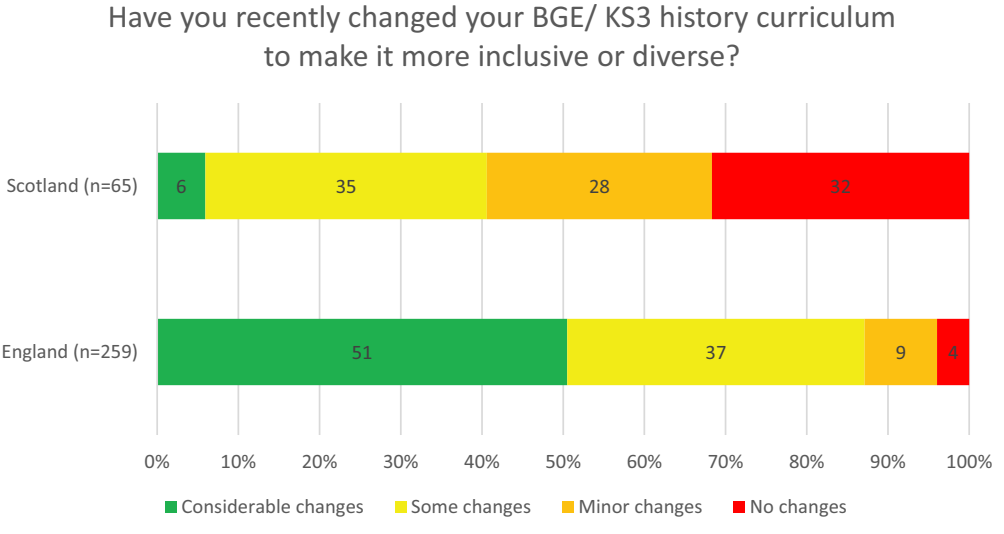

Figure 1. Recent changes to school-designed history curricula in Scotland and England. (Rounding of percentages may not equal 100.)

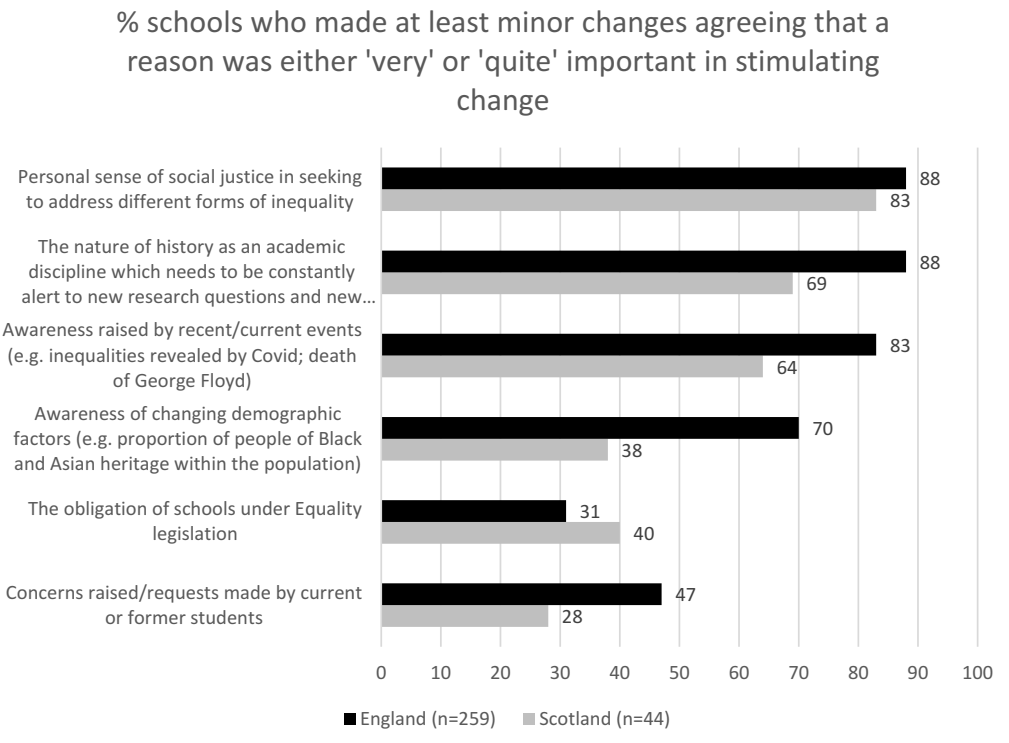

Figure 2. Graph showing the percentage of schools that had made at least minor change agreeing that a particular reason was 'Very' or 'Quite' important in stimulating curriculum change.

RQ3 - What factors do teachers in Scotland and England identify as stimulating and/or hindering change?

Schools which indicated that they had made at least minor changes to their curriculum (England $n = 259$, Scotland $n = 44$) were presented with a list six factors which have been cited as reasons for change by those creating or advocating more diverse' history curricula. Respondents were asked to indicate whether a given issue was:

- Very important
- Quite important
- Limited importance
- Unimportant

Figure 2 shows that there is considerable agreement between English and Scottish teachers about the relative importance of different factors. Both jurisdictions, for example, see 'the nature of history', 'recent events' and 'personal sense of social justice' towards the top of teachers' decision making, with less emphasis accorded to policy directives such as equalities legislation. Despite these similarities in overall trends, important differences between the two contexts are also discernible. Respondents in England were

much more likely than those in Scotland to cite 'changing demography' (70% compared to 38%) and 'awareness of current events' (83% to 64%) as factors in their decision-making and more likely to see their curriculum change as a response to pupils' requests (47% to 28%).

Caution must be exercised when drawing qualitative inferences from quantitative data, but it seems safe to suggest that these figures reveal potential differences in the way history is viewed in the two countries. In England, there seems to be a stronger sense that history is in a constant state of disciplinary flux, in terms of both its nature and its purpose. With respect to the former, 88% of respondents from England felt history's nature as' a discipline which needs to be alert to new research questions and methodologies' was an important reason to update the curriculum, but only 69% of respondents from Scotland agreed. Concerning the purpose of history, English participants seem more attuned to the idea that 'current events' should guide curricular thinking (England, 83%, Scotland, 64%).

The Scottish and English positions reflect, in part, the difference between what Seixas (2017) calls 'historical thinking' and 'historical consciousness' conceptions of the subject in schools. In England, the strong sense of disciplinary flux reflects a 'historical consciousness' view of the subject. Derived from the work of Rüsen (2006), this approach emphasises the ways in which individuals relate past, present and future. In these terms, the evolution of history as a subject is both inevitable and essential – as the 'present' changes, so do the questions that we ask of the past and the futures we try to imagine. Such an approach also centres the individual knower: history is a personal journey in which we use the past to try to make sense of our world. In contrast, the less responsive approach taken in Scotland perhaps reflects a more 'steady state' 'historical thinking' view of history. In this view, 'history' is a set of disciplinary norms and thinking practices which individual learners should develop. Such a view also allows for the evolution of the subject, but these changes are slower and are guided by academic convention, rather than the immediate contextual needs of the knower.

In terms of factors hindering change, all schools (both those which had and those which had not made changes to their curriculum) were offered a list of 16 factors which might act as barriers to curriculum change. Respondents were asked to indicate whether a given factor was:

- A significant barrier
- A minor barrier
- Caused some difficulties
- No obstacle at all

Figure 3 reveals noteworthy similarities between the two contexts. In both Scotland and England, lack of money (England 20%, Scotland 24%) and lack of time (England 19%, Scotland 21% are identified as the overriding factors impeding change. There were, however, also important differences between the contexts. Teachers in England were noticeably more likely to agree that a lack of access to resources was a barrier (11% v 7%) and twice as likely to say the same about a lack of subject knowledge (14% v 7%). This finding implies a paradox: that Scottish teachers feel more equipped to make change to

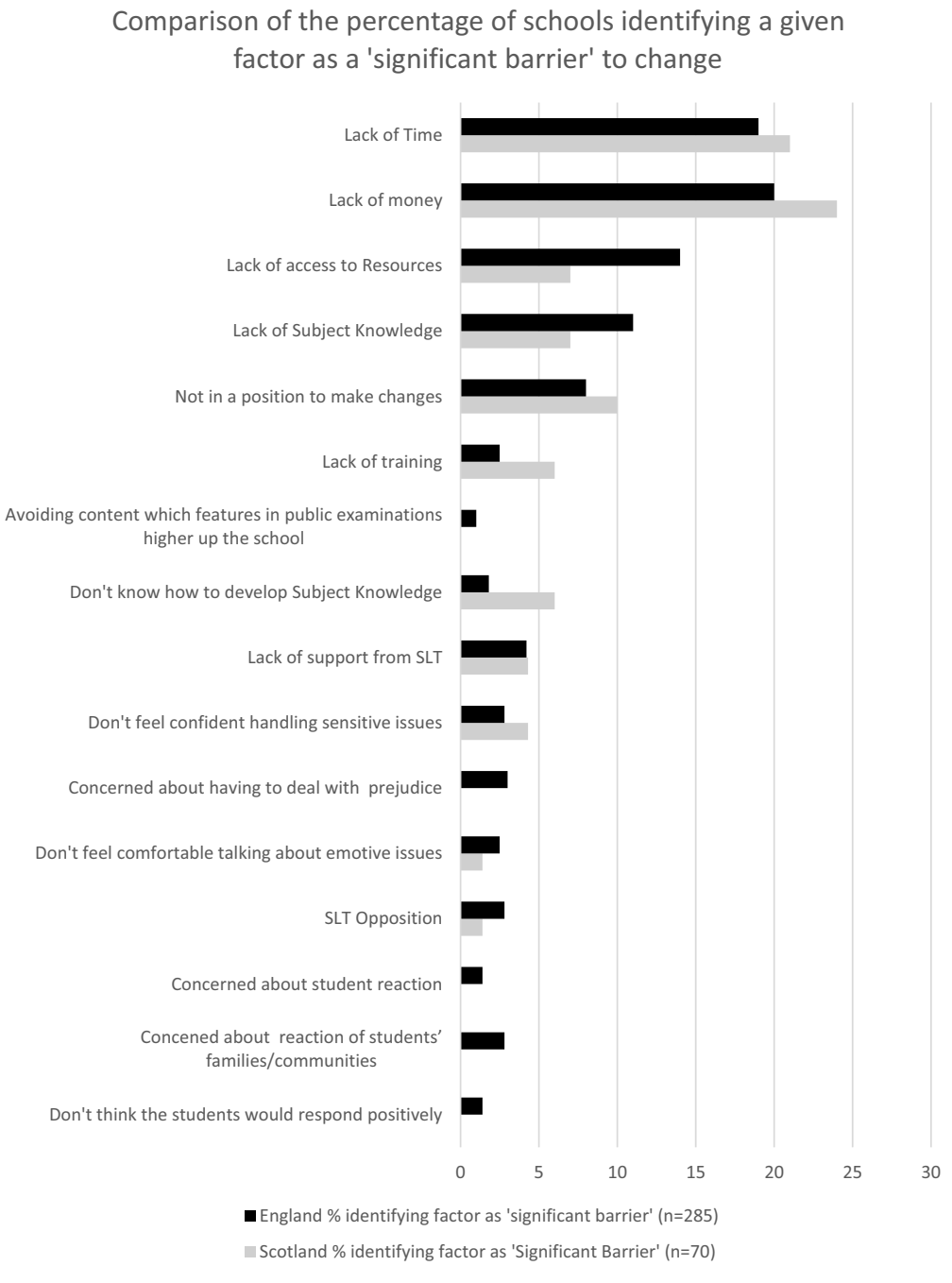

Figure 3. Graph showing the percentage of all schools who identified that a given factor was a 'significant obstacle to making change' (Scotland $n = 70$. England $n = 285$).

their curriculum content (in terms of resources and subject knowledge) but are also less likely to do so. English schools, meanwhile, are far more likely to diversify their curriculum despite reservations about access to resources and knowledge.

Discussion

The results section demonstrated that history teachers in England are considerably more likely than those in Scotland to (1) teach diverse histories and (2) change their curriculum to include these histories. Moreover, these differences are huge: while 73% of English schools taught children about migration to Britain, just a third of Scottish schools did so. While over 50% of English schools had taken 'considerable' steps to diversify their curriculum in recent years, just 6% of Scottish schools had done so.

These findings are surprising for at least two reasons. Firstly, although both countries allow space for interpretative curriculum-making in history, the English curriculum offers less latitude in this respect. Of the seven units which the English curriculum says schools must teach, six relate to British history; in contrast, *CfE* makes no specific stipulations regarding content. Secondly, while Scottish teachers are positioned as 'co-creators of the curriculum' (Donaldson 2010, 6) who 'have a depth of knowledge and understanding of curriculum design' (GTCS 2021, 7), English teachers are simply required to 'demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge' (DfE 2021, 10). Although less is expected of English teachers as curriculum-makers, they appear more willing to take on this role. This picture is complicated further by the fact that Scottish teachers describe themselves as better equipped to make changes (in terms of subject knowledge and resources) but are less likely to do so.

Perhaps more significantly, these findings belie the lazy assumption that greater teacher control over curriculum content necessarily leads to more politically progressive curricula, something of an article of faith for both the political right and left. On one side, this has led to the New Right orthodoxy that teachers' supposed radical instincts must be suppressed through centralised control of curriculum content (Smith 2017). On the other, these findings undermine the assumption that centralisation curtails the teaching of marginalised histories (Moncrieffe 2021). Indeed, if anything, the opposite seems to be the case: it is in the context of England's ostensibly more restrictive curriculum that we see greater creativity in curriculum design, with teachers finding stories and voices which broaden conceptions of British history beyond narrow nationalist narratives, while still complying with a curriculum which is overwhelmingly focused on Britain. Meanwhile, in Scotland the lack of guidance around curriculum design coexists with more examples of entrenched practice and a reliance on established traditional narratives (Smith 2019).

There are various explanations for this situation. The first conclusion must be a negative one: positioning teachers as curriculum-makers in policy does not ensure that these teachers will become effective curriculum-makers. As other researchers have found, autonomy cannot be imposed: the ability to capitalise on professional autonomy entails more than the removal of structures which constrain that agency (Philippou, Kontovourki, and Theodorou 2014). Such a conclusion lends support to an ecological view of agency (Priestley, Biesta, and Robinson 2015), suggesting that local contextual factors influence curriculum-making practices more than government policy.

The remainder of this paper identifies four important differences between the contexts which may have a bearing on the willingness of teachers to diversify the content of their school-designed curricula.

Ethnic demographics in England and Scotland

The relative ethnic diversity of the two countries populations may be relevant: 96% of Scottish people in Scottish identified as 'White' in the 2011 census, compared to 74% in England in the 2021 census.[4] This difference might help explain why 70% of schools in England cited 'changing demography' as a reason for updating their curriculum, compared to just 38% of Scottish schools. These differences are even more pronounced at a local level: in the 2011 census, just one of Scotland's 32 local authority areas has a population where fewer than 95% of residents identified as White (Scotland's Census 2021), the same was true of 119 out of 331 English local authorities (Office for National Statistics 2022). Such localised figures might explain why 47% of schools in England cited 'requests from students' as a reason for changing their curriculum, against just 28% of Scottish schools.

While there is an apparent link between national demography and curriculum change, the same is not true at the level of school intake. While 54% of schools where 'Black and/or other minority ethnic students make up the majority of the school population' reported having made 'considerable changes' to their curriculum in recent years, the same was true of 48% of schools where 'White students make up the majority of the school population'. It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that a more diverse school population does not automatically translate into a more diverse history curriculum.

However, there is some evidence in the data that the ethnicity of the *teacher* makes a difference. While 34% of White teachers had made 'considerable changes' to their curriculum, six of the eight teachers identifying as being from a minority ethnic background had done so. Just one respondent to the Scottish survey identified in this way and claimed to have made 'some changes' to the curriculum but felt the fact that 'they were not in a position to influence curriculum decisions' was a 'significant obstacle' to doing more. Although these numbers are small, there is enough here to suggest that a more diverse teaching workforce may be a catalyst for a more diverse curriculum, vindicating efforts in Scotland to diversify the profession (Scottish Government 2018). That said, the teaching workforce is likely to remain majority White, so it is incumbent upon White teachers to take more responsibility for broadening the curriculum.

Duration and structure of the compulsory history curriculum

A simple explanation for the relative lack of diverse histories in Scotland might be the fact that English students, on average, spend more time studying history. In both Scotland and England, a student's secondary school experience is effectively divided into two phases: a lower school phase in which history is compulsory and in which schools have considerable autonomy over curriculum content and assessment practices, and an upper school phase in which history is optional and both content and assessment are determined by external agencies for the purpose of awarding nationally recognised qualifications. In Scotland, emerging empirical evidence suggests that the compulsory lower

school phase lasts just one year in some 14% of schools and just two years in a further 51% (Shapira et al. 2021, 7). Consequently, the entire compulsory phase of the secondary school history curriculum for nearly two-thirds of Scottish children is two years or less. In England our data suggests that only 29% students have such a limited history education.

The notion that more time allocated to history will result in a more diverse curriculum is based upon two problematic assumptions. The first is that if more time were given, schools would automatically use this time to teach more diverse histories. Given the reluctance of some schools in Scotland to diversify their curriculum within the time they do have, we cannot be certain that any additional time would be used in this way. The second assumption is the problematic implication that diverse histories are luxuries to be included once more 'significant' histories have been covered. In other words, there is a sense that specific historical content can be ordered by its significance and that diverse histories are lower in the list of priorities than some other topics. Such a view is underpinned by what Tonkin (1990) has called 'the myth of the real' – that established histories seem 'more real' because of their familiarity and cultural currency. To put it another way, while less curriculum time necessarily demands increased selectivity, it does not follow that diverse histories should be the content that is excluded.

An explanation for the differences between England and Scotland may relate to the structure and cultures of the lower secondary school curriculum, rather than simply to its duration. In Scotland, history (more properly *People, Past Events and Societies*) is just one-third of the *CfE* Social Studies curriculum, alongside *People, place and environment* and *People in society, economy and business* - the last of which broadly corresponds with the uniquely Scottish subject area 'Modern Studies'. Devised in the 1960s, Modern Studies is an interdisciplinary subject, drawing together politics, international relations and social sciences, which aims to support 'an understanding of the world which young people inhabit today' (Proctor 2018, 467). It is, therefore, possible that topics such as migration and empire that we identify as 'absent' from the Scottish history curriculum might be adequately explored elsewhere in the curriculum.

Monitoring and inspection cultures

If written policy has little impact on school decision making, what can be said of the enforcement of that policy – i.e. the system of school monitoring and inspection. If autonomy does not necessarily lead to agency, can teachers, in Rousseau's phrase, be 'forced to be free' through regimes of discipline? Curriculum design has recently become a key focus for the education inspectorate in England (Ofsted 2019) which has been reflected in a change of language from a focus on 'teaching and learning' to 'quality of education (Ofsted 2019, p. 2). In England, curriculum is inspected at both whole school level (known as top-level view) and at the level of individual subjects (known as a deep-dive) (Ofsted 2019, p. 4), where there is a particular focus on the curriculum 'intent', i.e. how the curriculum is designed and sequenced, its 'implementation' and subsequent 'impact'. The focus on 'intent' means that departments are having to look very closely at their curriculum

rationale, which would include what departments choose to teach. In Scotland, meanwhile, school inspection is based around a system of self-evaluation informed by 15 so-called 'HGIOS indicators' [How good is our school?], of which just one relates to curriculum (Scotland 2015). Unlike their counterparts in England, the Scottish inspectorate does not release regular updates about changing priorities and expectations and so it is impossible to gauge the relative weight which the two jurisdictions place on school curriculum design. However, there is little doubt in this data that English schools have taken curriculum reform more seriously in recent years and there is some evidence that the education inspectorate in England has a more rigorous evaluation processes for curriculum design. As always, though, such correlation need not imply causation.

Knowledge exchange at the meso level

Recent curriculum research has highlighted the importance of the 'meso layer' between government and schools in supporting effective curriculum development (Priestley et al. 2021). This layer (or 'site of social practice') has two functions – to connect practitioners to policy, and to connect practitioners with one another. These meso-level practices can be either formal (such as school districts) or informal networks of association (see Hizli Alkan 2021). The meso-layer has an important role in mitigating the need for each stakeholder to engage with policy individually, reducing duplication, misinterpretation, and fragmentation.

In both the English and Scottish surveys, subject associations were identified as the primary external source of support that schools used in devising their curricula. The role of these organisations as advocacy groups (Hilferty 2008; Smith 2017), communities of practice (Burn 2021) and knowledge exchanges (Fordham 2015) is already well understood. There is, however, evidence that the influence of the HA does not fall evenly across all the nations of the UK: while 88% of respondents from England had heard about the survey direct from the HA, the same was true of just 30% of respondents from Scotland. Consequently, it is possible that the HA's recent work to promote diverse curricula – including a diversity 'mission statement', webinars on 'diversifying the curriculum', and diversity-oriented special editions of its journal, *Teaching History* – has not had the influence in Scotland that it has in England. While it is true that teachers in Scotland also benefit from membership of the Scottish Association for Teachers of History, this is a volunteer organisation with no formal membership and so incomparable with the HA's 10,000 members and annual income of over £1 million.

Conclusion and summary

This paper has used a large data set to identify history curriculum-making practices in England and Scotland and sought to offer explanations for these. It received data from some 20% of Scottish secondary schools and 7% of English secondary schools and drew high-level conclusions from these. The findings we have presented here are important in two respects: firstly, the fact that the school-designed curricula of the two countries should be so different is, itself, a surprise. Although their education systems have long been distinct, Scotland and England

are neighbours with a shared language and many shared cultural and historical traditions. Given these similarities and proximity, it is surprising that there seems to be such limited evidence of a cross-border exchange of ideas. Secondly, the direction of these differences is, perhaps, the opposite of what might be expected: Scotland, where policy positions teachers and curriculum-makers, sees less evidence of recent changes to content than England, where teachers' work is more directed.

Much research about teachers' curriculum-making practices in schools has, understandably, adopted a qualitative approach (Philippou, Kontovourki, and Theodorou 2014, Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, Teacher Agency: an Ecological Approach 2015). Such approaches can be enormously fruitful, revealing the complex web of factors which enable or constrain teachers' willingness to make curriculum. This paper adopts, instead a quantitative approach – it focuses explicitly on broad patterns at a system level and attempts to provide broader explanations for these. This study offers further empirical support to our growing understanding that positioning teachers as curriculum-makers in policy does not automatically make them so. However, it also supports the view that curriculum-making can happen in spaces where opportunities for it seem constrained (Apple, Teachers and Texts 1986, The state and the politics of knowledge; 1993, Official Knowledge : Democratic Education in a Conservative Age 2000). It is English teachers, constrained by policy and (according to self-report) more constrained by inadequate subject knowledge and resourcing that are diversifying the school curriculum.

Most importantly, our findings re-emphasise the importance of the meso layer in fostering curriculum-making in schools. School-based curriculum-making does not mean every school creating its own curriculum in a vacuum. For school-based curriculum-making to succeed, there must be meaningful collaboration and cross-fertilisation of ideas between schools. Here the potential history curriculum-maker in Scotland is doubly disadvantaged. First, as Hizli Alkan (2021) has shown curriculum-making networks in Scotland are weak. In part, this is related to the paucity of government-funded support for curriculum-making in Scotland, but it is also related to the comparative weakness of more horizontal networks and subject communities. In this respect, economies of scale give a considerable advantage to England – with a population 10 times that of Scotland, investments in meso-level curriculum-making are guaranteed better returns, both financial and pedagogical.

Overall, the paper has demonstrated the limitations of written policy in fostering particular kinds of teacher identities within a system. The paper has demonstrated that teachers in England are acting as energetic curriculum-makers in a policy context (and hegemonic political discourse) which discourages both school-level curriculum innovation and revisionist approaches to curriculum content. In Scotland, meanwhile, a policy landscape which encourages curriculum-making and a more politically progressive wider political discourse has not yielded the expected results. More research is required into the speculative factors that we identify to better understand how policy is refracted and implemented at different system levels in both Scotland and England.

Notes

1. The number of schools responding from Wales (7) and Northern Ireland (3) were too small to bear analysis.
2. The only exception is the Holocaust, which is specified.
3. https://archive2021.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/afroscotshistorycurriculum https://archive2021.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/BAMEHistory
4. Censuses take place every 10 years in the UK. In 2021, the Scottish government decided to delay the census for a year because of Covid, while the UK government went ahead with the census in England and Wales. These figures which draw on the 2011 Scottish Census and the 2021 Census for England and Wales represent the most recent available data in both contexts.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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