Diversifying the History curriculum – the beginning of change

March 2020 is remembered as a period of significant change and upheaval as Covid-19 enforced the closure of schools and wider society. For our department, the national lockdown of schools presented an opportunity to begin to unpick the KS3 curriculum and re-evaluate how it could be improved upon for our students. As a naturally collaborative team, we began to unravel the curriculum model and the flaws within it and it quite quickly became apparent that whilst we covered a lot of history over the course of 3 years, we really had a very traditional narrative focus. This would quickly become our new aim; a curriculum built on the notion of ‘blended history’ where stories and identities would be built within a chronological focus. A major discussion we had as a group was ‘Why diversify?’. Quite simply put, it is just good history. We decided that for our department, diversity under this guise is about broadening horizons in relation to geography, culture, race, class, sex, experience or religion.

How did we achieve this approach?

The process for which this change was undertaken was driven in two areas. Firstly, a desire to maintain a rigorous, knowledge-rich curriculum which embedded a pedagogical focus on historical scholarship and disciplinary thinking. The second was a need to broaden the curriculum narrative by building in stories of more varied experiences to ensure hidden voices became amplified to our students. Our starting point was to look at the work of historians who were being built into curriculums across the country. For example, the work of Miranda Kaufmann and her work on Black Tudors and Peter Frankopan’s analysis of the Silk Roads during the Middle Ages. We quickly created space in the curriculum for these new enquiries for students to develop a more global and diverse view of history. This was a good starting point but there is still work to be completed to ensure this blended approach to the curriculum is built across both key stage 3 and key stage 4.

Where are we now?

Ultimately, we have only scratched the surface when it comes to constructing a truly diversified curriculum. The availability of scholarship in the history community means there are lots of opportunities to diversify the curriculum even further. At key stage three we have integrated greater narratives into our established enquiries such as the role of women and medicine in our British Empire enquiry and the David Olusoga’s narrative on the ‘Forgotten Soldiers of World War One’. We have also sort to diversify the key stage 4 curriculum to give a greater representation of the history of medicine. All in all, this is very much in its infancy, but we have begun the process in a considered way which gives us the best grounding to build upon the curriculum and expose our students to a new global perspective.