

agenda

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM OCR / **SPRING 2011**

Bringing learning to life

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Welcome to **agenda**, OCR's new look termly publication which gives you a snapshot across the breadth of OCR's current activities. Agenda also shares views – not exclusively OCR's – on a number of topical issues that are important to you and to us. This issue features items on Apprenticeships, the E Bacc, what should be on the school history curriculum, as well as my views on the educational challenges ahead for OCR.

We would like to feature your feedback in future issues so please get in touch if you feel inspired to write to OCR. And let us know if you would prefer to receive your copy of **agenda** electronically.

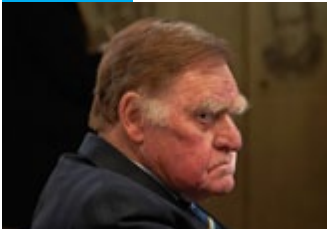
Our email is **agenda@ocr.org.uk**

Mark Dawe

Chief Executive, OCR

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Cover Story: Bringing learning to life

The SLAMBassadors – a group of young poets, rappers and beatboxers – got a standing ovation for their performance, organised by OCR, as part of an English conference held at the British Library at the end of February. Their protest pieces were inspired by contemporary poets such as Benjamin Zephaniah, Simon Armitage and Carol-Ann Duffy, all poets found in OCR's GCSE English Literature unit on literary heritage. See www.ocr.org.uk/events/past for highlights.



Sir Bernard Ingham on the Thatcher years

Sir Bernard Ingham, Chief Press Secretary to Margaret Thatcher for 11 years, was a star attraction at OCR's recent A Level CPD event on the Thatcher Years, held at the Churchill College Archives Centre in Cambridge.

OCR's CPD events are designed to inspire teachers by offering high calibre speakers, and sharing innovative teaching ideas and resources. Sir Bernard's account focused on "what she was like". He outlined the challenge for a press secretary of working for a Prime Minister who lacked interest in media and didn't see the need for presentation.

Full of frank anecdotes about Thatcher's relationships with Reagan, Gorbachev, Mitterrand and other world leaders, he confirmed some of her well known characteristics; her love of argument, her assiduousness with paperwork - she worked 20 hours per day during the week, but took weekends off - and her loyalty. Equally, he described her lack of tact or sense of humour but concluded: "her outstanding quality as a leader was that she didn't want to be loved".

OCR offers two units in its History A Level course covering the Thatcher years. It was, Ingham added afterwards, "quite frightening" to be part of a new generation's history course.

For details of OCR's CPD programme for teachers across a range of subjects, take a look at the list of events on OCR's website at www.ocr.org.uk/events/ocr_events

In brief

Spotlight on Thinking and Reasoning

Demand from employers and universities for improved thinking and problem-solving skills in young people could be addressed by a new OCR qualification.

OCR's Thinking and Reasoning Skills Level 2 qualification aims to develop thinking skills across all subjects, from the arts and humanities to science.

Suitable for KS3, KS4 and Sixth Form students, it encourages problem-solving, the ability to question evidence and stronger reasoning skills. It also links well to OCR's AS Level Critical Thinking.

If you are interested in finding out more about this new qualification, contact OCR's Customer Contact Centre on 01223 553998 or via email at general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

The Sims meets Science

The World of Science is OCR's new free digital tool that helps teachers to make science fun and to engage their students with OCR's science qualifications at the same time.

Students can build their own virtual world. Through a series of tasks, the scientific knowledge of users is tested across a wide range of topics. Topics covered include food and nutrition, health, different types of energy, plants and natural disasters such as earthquakes. Success in tasks, similar to the decisions people make every day, keeps virtual characters happy and earns points. Users can access World of Science by visiting www.gcse-science.com.

World of Science is designed to allow teachers to engage their students who may be studying a range of OCR's science qualifications, from Entry level up to A Level but with particular relevance to OCR's GCSE Science suites.

To encourage students to improve their scientific knowledge, schools can play against each other and get involved in OCR's inter-school competition to see which school achieves the highest score.

Dr Dave Cox, OCR's seconded science teacher said: "The 'World of Science' is the latest digital tool that OCR has created to help students engage with this subject. The virtual world concept demands that simulated real-life decisions are made to lift the scores and prolong the interaction. References to specification content enhance each student's contact with the material in an enjoyable fashion. The element of competition can promote teamwork as centres can pitch against each other."



Nominations please!

OCR sponsors the Functional Skills category of the prestigious AoC Beacon Awards.

If your FE college is delivering Functional Skills qualifications in English, maths or ICT, and has an innovative way of embedding them across the curriculum, you could win £5000. So don't miss this year's deadline for nominations: 06 July 2011. For more information, contact alice_thiagaraj@aoc.co.uk

Engineering a better education

The £22 million JCB Academy in Staffordshire, the first school of its kind to specialise in a technically-orientated education for 14 to 19 year olds in the country, is using OCR's qualifications to achieve its aims.

Funded by the DfE but sponsored by JCB, the Academy's aim is to nurture the engineering and business leaders of the future. Pupils at the Academy, which was officially opened by Prince Charles at the end of February, follow a unique curriculum which is 60% technical and 40% academic.

OCR's Engineering and Business Diploma is a core qualification on the JCB curriculum, supported by our GCSEs, A Levels and OCR Nationals in a wide range of subjects including maths, science, ICT and German.

The Academy is an example of a University Technical College (UTC), a new concept in education backed by the government. Building on the success of the JCB Academy, OCR is working with other UTCs around the country to support technical curriculums with a flexible range of qualifications.



OCR's Charlotte Bosworth commented: "We have worked in partnership with The JCB Academy and with employer and HE partners to build a really exciting, engaging curriculum. The technical education provided is inspirational for young people, and of great value to the national economy through the skills it will provide to our manufacturing and engineering companies."

More on UTCs in the next issue of Agenda.



Partnership with Institute of Career Guidance

A new partnership with the Institute of Career Guidance (ICG) reflects a shared commitment to the delivery of careers advice and guidance. OCR has launched three new Advice and Guidance qualifications which would suit a variety of people working in careers roles. The OCR/ICG partnership also benefits those taking the ICG's own qualifications which have now been mapped to OCR's to encourage stronger progression and reduce assessment burden.

For further information about our new Advice and Guidance qualifications, take a look on our website at www.ocr.org.uk/adviceguidance

Curriculum expertise



Tim Oates, Director of Research and Development Division at OCR parent Cambridge Assessment, is leading an expert panel of senior educationalists and academics reviewing the National Curriculum. His secondment to the panel reflects his expertise and the reputation of Cambridge Assessment in this field of research.

The review of the National Curriculum for 5 to 16 year olds was announced by Education Secretary Michael Gove back in January.

Oates said: "A review of the curriculum is necessary because problems have built up over time. There's a lack of clarity about which elements are statutory, there's over-load in certain areas, and in other areas a lack of clarity or specificity in the content."

In brief

Building bridges with HE

At a time when university admissions and the value of a university education are seldom out of the news, OCR is forging closer relationships with Higher Education through new strategic forums. Shaping the next generation of relevant qualifications for 18 year olds, starting with a new round of A Levels in 2013, is on the table.

The new forums, which take place quarterly, bring together senior personnel from a range of institutions to establish a strong working partnership.

The initiative was welcomed by Professor Debra Humphris, Pro Vice-Chancellor of Southampton University who described the strategic forums as "really useful... to debate and inform the work of OCR. The relationships between universities, schools, colleges and awarding bodies are critical in ensuring clarity for students about the nature and range of qualifications." She continued: "But universities also need to explore how best we inform the work of awarding bodies to prepare students for the transition to higher education, and the information we make available about our requirements."

In 2009/10, there were over half a million entries for OCR's A Levels. Vocationally-related qualifications such as OCR's Level 3 Nationals also attract UCAS tariff points and are a recognised entry requirement for over 140 HE institutions. As part of Cambridge Assessment – and the University of Cambridge – OCR is well-placed to look at ways of ensuring progression into Higher Education.

IT skills for the future

In the rapidly changing world of technology, working with market leaders such as Microsoft, Cisco and Oracle helps to ensure that OCR's vocational qualifications stay relevant to the needs of both employers and employees.

OCR has joined forces with Adobe over the last 12 months to integrate the Adobe Certified Associate (ACA) qualification in popular programmes used in day-to-day business such as Dreamweaver, Flash and Photoshop, into two OCR IT qualifications.

Learners, whether in education or in employment, can now take units specialising in these Adobe programmes as part of OCR's Creative iMedia and ITQ qualifications, and means that those with skills in Adobe's creative software can now achieve two nationally-recognised IT qualifications from OCR.

According to Adobe's Liz Wilkins, Senior Marketing Manager for Adobe Systems UK, initiatives such as these are needed in what is a difficult job market, particularly for graduates. "Digital media tools can help to equip students with the skills that will be required of them in the workplace. With the employment climate as it is, it is even more important that initiatives such as these are put into place to create a link between students and professionals to help bridge the gap between education and industry."



Caring with OCR

This Spring, OCR launched two new health and social care qualification ranges designed to enhance the skills and impact of over two million people in the UK involved in two key areas: dementia care and working with children and young people.



From left to right: Mark Dawe OCR, Melanie Pace NSPCC, Jane Roe Children's Workforce Development Council, Sarah Cotran OCR.

OCR's 'Dementia Care' qualifications are suitable for those employed in the care of people with dementia in residential care homes, day centres or at home, while the 'Children and Young People's Workforce' qualifications would suit those working with children in a range of roles such as early years workers, foster carers, or children's social care workers.

The qualifications have been developed with the expertise of the relevant Sector Skills Councils, reflect current best practice and meet the needs of employers.

The support provided to help those taking these qualifications includes an online tool on the topic of safeguarding, developed in conjunction with leading charity NSPCC, as a learning aid for those working with children.

NSPCC Head of Training Melanie Pace (second left) said: "The NSPCC is committed to developing its staff and offering learning and development services and resources to a wide range of organisations and agencies to help keep children safe from abuse. We welcome this opportunity to work in partnership with OCR to enable others to achieve the Health and Social Care award and in doing so achieve better outcomes for children and families."

Voice on offender learning

The views of John Brenchley, OCR's Head of Offender Learning and Skills Group, have been recognised in the Review of Offender Learning report published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

When BIS announced its review of Offender Learning, OCR was asked to contribute. OCR emphasised the need to get as many prisoners as possible on an appropriate programme, and then to support them up to the highest level, right up to degree standard. OCR also defined five key principles: secure IT facilities and internet access for offenders; the integration of learning programmes with other prison activities to extend learning opportunities; relevant training and development for prison officers and other



contributors to offender learning programmes; a service-wide database of transferable offender records; and incentives – in particular, equal or higher pay – for offenders to participate in education.

Of the 130+ prisons in England and Wales, virtually all use OCR qualifications as part of their offender learning programmes. Basic skills, Key skills and IT qualifications are most in demand. Every year, about 22,000 Basic Skills certificates are awarded to prisoners. Last year, several thousand OCR GCSE, AS and A Level units were

also awarded. Short, unit-based courses with on-screen tests suit prisons as abrupt changes in timetable or location tend to make longer courses and long-term entries more difficult to schedule.

John Brenchley commented: "The one massive question which needs an answer is, why, when there is so much isolated good practice across offender learning, is it not systematically applied across the entire service? In our view the systematic adoption of identified good practice is not just a priority but an essential."



A DAWE TO THE FUTURE

Mark Dawe became Chief Executive of OCR in November 2010. His first months have coincided with a frenzy of government activity affecting education; the Wolf Review, a radical Education Bill, the announcement of the new English Bacc, and the introduction of higher university tuition fees. Here, 42-year-old Dawe shares his vision for the future of one of the UK's leading awarding bodies with **agenda**.

What are your first impressions of OCR?

It's an organisation with a lot of very skilled and positive professional staff. I think there's a real opportunity to drive OCR forward as a leading awarding body because of the potential and commitment of its staff. I had been on the board of a specialist vocational awarding body before – the VTCT – through my previous job but the breadth of OCR's work is a real eye-opener. Are there occasions when we could explain things better? Yes, of course. There is a job to be done to explain what an awarding body does – I've certainly learnt a lot over the past few months!

Your previous role was as Principal at Oaklands College in Hertfordshire, one of the country's largest FE Colleges. Do you feel you have crossed over to the other side?

The challenges are very different. It's not a question of sides or scale. At Oaklands, leadership involved handling unexpected, daily events affecting students or staff and a complex relationship with Government – maybe things aren't that different! The agenda for OCR is more national, not so local. Having said that, there is an opportunity for OCR to build on its relationship with FE, it's an area where I'd like to develop some really strong partnerships replicating our success with schools. >>

“it’s the transformative role of education that appeals”



What do you like about working in the field of education?

When I first left university, I trained to be an accountant with KPMG but always had a focus on the public sector. I then moved across to Canterbury College and have stayed within education – including at the DfES – ever since. Economically and socially, the future of the country depends on a strong education system. Above all, it’s the transformative role of education that appeals. OCR has a part to play in that. It’s great seeing young people, some of whom have not had it easy, turn things round. When I was at Oaklands College, they held an annual achievement evening and by the end of the ceremony, there were few dry eyes because of the stories we had heard. I want to encourage more OCR staff to become governors at their local schools and colleges and experience this directly as it helps to understand how important their jobs are within the education system.

Are there any figures in education that you admire?

There are many people I admire including the many teachers and lecturers I have worked with. In terms of inspiration, I’d have to say my Grandfather stands out. He was a Headteacher in a school in Dorchester and I remember as a small boy walking by his side along the street and everyone from every generation saying hello to him. It made me realise what an important contribution he made. As an adult, I’ve been lucky enough to work with some inspiring people such as Susan Pember, my first boss in education. She was Principal at Canterbury College and I was able to work with her again when I moved to the DfES.

Another figure I’ve always admired is Dame Ruth Silver, of Lewisham College. She thinks about education in a different way, and is always about ten steps ahead of everyone else, which is very stimulating.

How would you describe your own experience of education? What were the highs and lows?

I had quite a traditional education I guess, moving from a state primary school to a public school in Croydon and then getting a place to read Economics at Pembroke College, Cambridge where I had a fantastic tutor. Getting into Cambridge was a surprise; I wasn’t always considered a star pupil. My biggest achievement at school was scraping a C for French O’level which was an Oxbridge requirement in those days. Don’t ask about Latin. After university, I trained as an accountant. I’d decided on this career at the age of 13 when I found filling in a family friend’s VAT returns much more appealing than washing his car in the cold. Training as an accountant wasn’t easy and the exams process was the hardest I have been through.

Outside work, how do you relax?

Cycling is my main hobby although most of my free time revolves around family at the moment. I have four children; three sons at primary school and a four-year-old daughter who starts school in September. I ride a motorbike to work – a BMW R1200RT. It’s very heavy but quiet. I’ve clocked up over 9,000 miles on it in the last 6 months. I listen to AC/DC to keep me focused on biking. Riding a motorbike is not a time to think problems through – you need to be 100% alert.

What are your thoughts on the future for your children’s education?

I’m aware that my children are all very different individuals needing to be supported in different ways. There is an incredible amount of parental input expected at primary school right from the earliest years. It makes you realise that those children who don’t have that support can be disadvantaged from the very start and we need to ensure that our education system supports those children.

“OCR’s shareholders are the whole education system”

How do you think awarding bodies will change in the next decade?

Nothing ever stands still, although we may think the pace of change is fast at the moment. In my experience, many of the core elements that make up our education system move very slowly, despite the ‘noise’. I believe that much of the delivery of education is still quite traditional and we haven’t scratched the surface of opportunities that technology presents us in providing a new and exciting way of learning. Think about 16 year olds who have never known anything but the internet. How are we going to keep them engaged?

I do think there is a problem between the relationship of teaching and learning with exams. Exams and assessment should be there to ensure that learning has taken place – learning should not be focused solely on the exam. IT is not the only influence on change however. Higher Education and employers should certainly be involved in shaping qualifications.



How do you see the relationship between awarding bodies and government/ government agencies changing?

I hope that qualifications will be left to the professionals. Yes, there is always a place for regulation to ensure standards, it's one of the key strengths of our education system but I hope that the small state approach of the new government will mean that awarding bodies can work on what is needed in partnership with others who are direct users.

Is OCR well-placed to adapt?

With our charitable status, our tradition as part of a larger assessment body, which is ultimately part of a university, I think OCR is uniquely well-placed. We're not driven solely by commercial interests. OCR's shareholders are the whole education system.

How can OCR exploit its position as part of the Cambridge Assessment Group?

There are tremendous benefits to being part of a wider group in terms of OCR's ability to improve technology, and to draw upon a research and development resource that is second to none. The values and approach of the Cambridge Assessment group are shared foundations for OCR and provide guidelines for us to test our future development against. With Cambridge ESOL and Cambridge International Examinations as part of the same Group, there are many exciting new opportunities.

How does OCR plan to support teachers/tutors and students/work-based learners through changing times?

Teachers are the key element. Good teachers mean good education. OCR is part of that equation; our job is to support

teachers without compromising standards. It's a partnership. I think teachers and tutors deserve consistency, prompt service, feedback and the right resources. I want to continue to improve our support to teachers, lecturers and trainers across all the sectors.

The new government is looking at changes to GCSEs and A Levels in terms of age and assessment. Do you think it is time for a change too and in what ways?

There's been a lot of fiddling with the education system for political reasons. I hope that awarding bodies can be left to work with Higher Education, schools and employers to improve progression and pathways for individual learners. As far as when exams should be taken, I'm a firm believer in stage, not age. This applies from primary education upwards. The 14 to 19 stage is critical but why should 16 year olds always take Level 2 exams and 18 year olds take Level 3? A more blended approach with greater flexibility is needed, and in many of the best schools this is already being practised. In terms of the modular versus linear argument, how we test doesn't have to determine how teaching is delivered. Subject communities, including those who teach, should be able to determine the best kind of assessment to suit the teaching in that field. The best approach to facilitate learning is key.

Given the wide range of qualifications that OCR offers, what is your position on the new English Bacc?

I can fully understand the intentions behind the English Bacc. The concept of key core subjects is also reflected in the latest guidance from the Russell Group. I believe in testing the core skills of English and maths. But the Bacc does leave a policy vacuum about what else is important. How do we keep the more applied learner engaged? We need breadth. I think schools should be measured in two ways; on value added and on progression. It should be about outcomes, not inputs – and for that reason I was never a supporter of the FE framework for excellence. Competent education leaders should be given the freedom and have confidence to offer what's right and appropriate for their kids.

At a time of increasing debate over the value of a university education, how can OCR make the progression between school and HE smoother?

We're adopting a partnership approach. We're working more closely to understand the needs of HE and also working with schools and colleges to ensure that the message about what they need is reflected in our future qualification design. The primary function of A Levels is progression, particularly to HE. But there are also cases where HE needs to be prepared to modernise too. We have seen real success through Extended Project as part of a programme of learning for progression on to university. One of my worries is that the removal of entitlement funding will have an impact on many learners' development and their readiness for higher education – the impact could be even greater than the removal of EMAs.

“Teachers are the key element. Good teachers mean good education. OCR is part of that equation.”

In what ways does OCR support alternative pathways after school?

All our qualifications should improve progression, not lead to a dead end. Our role must be to ensure that through the qualifications we offer every learner reaches their potential and progresses as far as possible. We must not abandon a single learner in that aspiration. We are currently looking into the University Technical College model, as the sort of approach we might follow more widely.

OCR has a reputation as an academic awarding body, so how can it meet the needs of a wide range of society?

Perhaps we had that reputation once. We are proud of our academic heritage and continue to build on it. But we've evolved into an inclusive awarding organisation with a breadth of offer. With initiatives such as OCR Nationals and other vocational qualifications, we have an amazing range and will strive to continue to develop pathways for every learner.

Mark Dawe will be speaking at the Future of Further Education Forum 2011 on 10 May in Central London.

APPRENTICESHIPS



WELCOME TO THE REAL WORLD

Dr Jon Nay, Regional Apprenticeship Director for the National Apprenticeship Service, explains to agenda what's involved in this type of training which forms a key part of the government's post 16 strategy.

What is an Apprenticeship?

As employees, apprentices earn a wage and work alongside experienced staff to gain job-specific skills. Off the job, usually on a day-release basis, apprentices receive training to work towards nationally-recognised qualifications. Anyone living in England, over 16 and not in full-time education can apply.

Apprenticeships can take between one and four years to complete depending on the level of Apprenticeship, the apprentice's ability and the industry sector. The minimum salary is £2.50 per hour; however, many apprentices earn significantly more.

An Apprenticeship is essentially a set of qualifications called a 'framework' developed by Sector Skills Councils. Most Apprenticeship frameworks follow a standard format that comprises:

- A National Vocational Qualification (Level 2 for Apprenticeships, Level 3 for Advanced Apprenticeships)
- Key Transferable Skills
- A Technical Certificate

The learning provider embeds knowledge and develops skills while the employer provides the practical experience to put those skills to the test. Training can be classroom based, in a workshop or in a workplace, depending on the subject and on the learning provider.

How popular are Apprenticeships?

Apprentice numbers are growing:

- In the year 2000, about 150,000 people started an apprenticeship in England
- In 2010, nearly 300,000 people started an apprenticeship in England
- In 2014, as many as 400,000 people a year could be starting one, as many as enter full time university

There are over 200 Apprenticeship frameworks suitable for hundreds of job roles from Nursing to Graphic Design, Horticulture to Engineering. The majority of apprenticeship starts come from six sectors: the so called Cross Cutting sector (business administration, customer services etc), Health and Social Work, Construction, Community, Social and Personal Services, Manufacturing and Retail/Wholesale.

What is the current government's strategy for apprenticeships?

The government wants to place apprenticeships at the heart of a reformed skills system which will involve employers getting more involved in shaping what is on offer. There is a need to boost the numbers of Level 3 and above apprenticeships through increasing the number of frameworks and improving progression routes. The government, with the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), is working on introducing graduation ceremonies, an Apprentice Roll of Honour and new alumni networks.

Are Apprenticeships going to get more popular with those worried about being able to afford university?

We have seen lots of really well-qualified young people come forward looking for Apprenticeships – but fortunately this has been at the same time as we have been working with employers to highlight the business benefits of taking on apprentices. At any one time however we usually have about 8000 vacancies on our website for apprentices so there are jobs out there for them. We are keen to ensure all our young people are in the best type of training for them; whether its university, an apprenticeship or college but if the debate

about university means that people are considering apprenticeships who may not have thought about them before, then that is good – it means they have considered all their options – and chosen the one which suits them, and their way of learning, the best.

Will the Apprenticeship 'Offer' be kept as part of Raising the Participation Age?

Yes. In fact, the offer is being re-designed to make it more robust. The current Education Bill will place a higher duty on the Chief Executive of Skills Funding to prioritise funding for Apprenticeship training for certain groups who have secured an apprenticeship place (the re-defined 'Apprenticeships Offer'). The groups remain the same as they were under the duty in the ASCL Act and are:

- young people aged 16-18;
- young people aged 19-24 who have a disability or learning difficulty; and
- young people aged 19-24 who have been in local authority care.

How does a potential apprentice find out more about apprenticeships?

The NAS website www.apprenticeships.org.uk has a wealth of helpful information and advice which can be accessed as an apprentice, employer or parent/guardian. It is also easy to search and apply for vacancies through the same website by clicking on Apprenticeship Vacancies to register personal details. An applicant can create their own "My Home" page which can be used to search for vacancies, to store results and manage applications.





OCR delivers the qualifications for many of the most popular Apprenticeship Frameworks including Business Administration, Customer Service and Health and Social Care.

We also work directly with employers and providers to develop specific Apprenticeship programmes to support the needs of particular organisations. Most recently, these have included the BBC and IBM.

All our Apprenticeship customers enjoy the freedom to choose the components they need, backed up by OCR's responsive customer support.

For full details of our Apprenticeships, please visit www.ocr.org.uk/apprenticeships





HISTORY IN THE MAKING

Can the words of the US President on turmoil in the Middle East inform the debate on what history should be on the school curriculum?

OCR's Mike Goddard, Qualifications Manager for A Level history, thinks so.

The words of Barack Obama were broadcast around the world on 11 February this year. The BBC cut from scenes of protestors celebrating in Tahrir Square in Cairo, to go live to Obama's ever-powerful rhetoric, and the President, as he often does, invoked *History*.

"Moral force [has] bent the arc of history toward justice once more. And while the sights and sounds that we heard were entirely Egyptian, we can't help but hear the echoes of history."

There's quite a lot in those two sentences: history as a (perhaps inevitable) progression towards justice and liberty; history being shaped by moral force; history 'echoing' itself, with, presumably, lessons that can be learned; history being shaped by actions from below. The metaphor of history as an 'arc' sums up a view that history is not just a sequence of random events but somehow a force on a global scale.

We know that world leaders have frequently made such references to history, and that political regimes use and manipulate it very deliberately. Churchill, an advocate if ever there was one of the importance of a knowledge of history, famously claimed: "History will be kind to me for I intend to write it."

That is contentious enough, but for a view of history that goes far beyond this to being truly sinister, 1930s Germany inevitably provides the ultimate example. In 1938, the German Central Institute of Education issued Official Instructions on the Teaching of History:

"The German nation in its essence and greatness, in its fateful struggle for internal and external identity is the subject of the teaching of history. It is based on the natural bond of the child with his nation and, by interpreting history as the fateful struggle for existence between the nations, has the particular task of educating young people to respect the great German past and to have faith in the mission and future of their own nation and to respect the right of existence of other nations... It must always show greatness... the powerless and the insignificant have no history."

Both Churchill's remark and the Nazis' policy are clearly a world away from anything expressed in Obama's speech. Nonetheless they all make us think about what history is for and, more fundamentally, what it is, what it can be used (and abused) for by historians, as well as by politicians. And, so, what its place should be in the school curriculum.



“Young historians must be taught to enquire and challenge as well as to understand”

Momentous events have continued apace in the Middle East in the weeks since Obama spoke of the “arc of history”. His words this February put me in mind of the novelist Julian Barnes who wrote: “History is just what historians tell us. There was a pattern, a plan, a movement, expansion, the march of democracy; it is a tapestry, a flow of events, a complex narrative, connected, explicable.”

We do need the past to be explicable; but if this is to be through narrative – the telling of a story – then whose story is it to be? Churchill was anxious that it was to be his own. Prominent historian David Starkey claims that narrative is “the only proper means of historical explanation”. I think we should be wary of that. It would be a questionable assumption that there is an accepted, objective narrative, rather than a variety of possible narratives which depend on the interpretations, approaches and methods of a writer.

Back to the words of Obama from this February: “Egypt ... has shown us echoes from Germans tearing down a wall, Indonesian students taking to the streets, Gandhi leading his people down the path of justice. As Martin Luther King said in celebrating the birth of a new nation in Ghana while trying to perfect his own, ‘there’s something in the soul that cries out for freedom.’”

In Obama’s analysis, links are made between events in different countries, at different times. The present is being understood more by looking at the theme of freedom and change than the narrative sequence of events.

This is what a historian should be looking at: not just the events, not just the story, but the links - what Obama calls ‘echoes’. Obama is not an unbiased observer. We have to assess his analysis by being aware of this, and of how his outlook might affect how he sees events in the past. We are unlikely to be able to do that by merely studying a series of historical narratives without developing a critical view.

The KS3 curriculum does a good job of ensuring a secure chronological framework in which the major events and developments from medieval times are located. Those who worry

about an absence of connected narrative at GCSE and A Level (dismissively described as the “smorgasbord” approach) are not necessarily nationalistic or right-wing; nor are they necessarily western-centric: for example, the left-leaning Tariq Ali and the more right-wing historian Niall Ferguson have agreed publicly on the issue. But this has to be balanced against the skills of enquiry and interpretation that have correctly put history from a variety of perspectives at the forefront of GCSE and have recently restored historiography to A Level (see OCR’s own History B A Level).

Young historians must be taught to enquire and challenge as well as to understand, and to provide their own frameworks for doing so. They must be able to make connections between events and periods. For example, the situation in North Africa and its impact on the West might well be illuminated by a consideration of Arab conquests in the middle ages. They must find their own ‘echoes’ and must have the critical sense to challenge what seem to be factual accounts, but are in reality interpretations. These vital life skills must not be threatened by the clamour for a return to narrative that could well be reductionist and simplistic. The current OCR History A level specifications stress understanding, critical reading of sources, informed discussion of historical interpretations and making connections between different elements over a long period of history. These, and not the ability to reproduce sequences of events and description, are the skills needed for a world which recent events in the Middle East have shown to be capable of changing at a bewildering pace.

*What do you think should be on the school history curriculum?
Send your comments to agenda@ocr.org.uk*

www.ocr.org.uk/history



ENGLISH BACCALAUREATE

PAUL STEER, OCR'S DIRECTOR OF STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS, ON THE LATEST SCHOOL PERFORMANCE INDICATOR, THE E BACC.

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The retrospective introduction of the English Baccalaureate as a new key indicator of how schools are performing has certainly caused a reaction. To be fair, the government has never described the E Bacc as the only measure for schools, but so far it is all they have introduced and therefore that is what schools are focusing on.

At the time of writing, I have a first cut of a telephone survey OCR conducted with 400 schools to find out how many of them are actively introducing changes to their curriculum in response to this new measure. It's clear that a lot of schools (though not all) are doing just that. This is backed up by anecdotal evidence picked up by OCR of a massive increase in the recruitment of language teachers and a commensurate downfall in demand for religious studies GCSEs.

This is proof, if any were needed, that school performance measures provide a very powerful instrument by which Government can influence the curriculum. Unfortunately, they are also a very blunt one that can have many unintended consequences - a point strongly made in OCR's evidence to the Wolf Review of 14-19 Vocational Education. A single performance indicator can incentivise schools to provide choices which are not in every learner's best interests. There is always an argument for alternative measures which reveal different aspects of a school's performance and measure other needs which also have to be covered.

Although the English Baccalaureate is in itself a wholly appropriate vehicle for recognising achievement at GCSE across a broad range of subjects, OCR does not believe that the selection of subjects within it represents the 'ideal' choice for all young people. There must be recognition of other qualifications that provide genuine 'value added' for learners and progression into further learning, training or work.

A measure which focuses exclusively on 5 GCSEs cannot allow for a sophisticated approach to providing choices to engage and stretch all young people. What about important programmes such as Asset Languages designed to develop foreign language skills from primary school onwards; and applied sciences which are key to securing the scientific literacy of the next generation?

So here's an idea - why not change the major school performance measure retrospectively every year? I predict this would have a very strange effect with different schools rushing up and down the league tables each year like bands in and out of the music charts. But I can't really advocate changing standards on an annual basis - not, after all, something OCR would advocate for an exam.

What is important to OCR is that there is more than one version of being excellent, and that schools can concentrate solely on what they know is best for each of their pupils without having one eye on a

single measure of success. And actually, this is compatible with the DfE's aim to make more of its statistics on schools available so that people can analyse the data themselves. The Department wants to encourage parents and the wider public to look at the data on the performance of schools in their local area, and to draw their own conclusions. Michael Gove, the Education Secretary, said the data would be the "educational equivalent of Go Compare". Now that sounds a better way forward than putting too much weight on a single indicator.

Have your say.

Email your comments to agenda@ocr.org.uk

JOIN OCR AT THESE EXHIBITIONS AND CONFERENCES SPRING/SUMMER 2011

APRIL

14/16

Geographical Association Annual Conference & Exhibition: Progress in Geography

University of Surrey

14/16

Mathematical Association Annual Conference: The Big Picture

Loughborough University

18/21

Association of Teachers of Mathematics Annual Conference: Celebrating Gattegno

University of Wolverhampton, Telford

The ATM is returning to its roots for this annual easter conference, with a strand of sessions exploring the philosophies of founder Gattegno on the 100th anniversary of his birth. Visit the OCR stand to discover our range of learning pathways in maths and talk to our experts to learn how OCR is bringing maths and functional skills to life.

19/20

UCAS Admissions Conference

Hilton Metropole, Birmingham

MAY

10

Future of Further Education Forum: Funding, Cost Savings; Quality and Reputation

Central London

OCR's Chief Executive Mark Dawe will speak on qualifications in partnership at this annual leadership forum, which will highlight how sector specialists, principals, senior management teams, and policy leaders will prepare for change. OCR will also have an exhibition stand where delegates can access the latest information on our post 16 learning pathways, and talk to our specialists about OCR's broad FE provision.

13/14

Historical Association Annual Conference

Manchester Conference Centre

JUNE

8/9

BE 2011

Business Design Centre, London

OCR is pleased to support the Institute of Education & Business Excellence's major annual convention, the largest event of its kind in the UK. OCR's CEO Mark Dawe will speak at this exciting conference which celebrates excellence in business and education partnerships, and promotes innovative collaboration which benefits industry while enriching the learning experience.

30

Westminster Education Forum: GCSEs & the English Baccalaureate

Central London

29 June / 1 July

The Sixth Form Colleges Forum 16 – 19 Summer Conference

Robinson College, Cambridge

OCR is pleased to continue our support for this key event for college leaders. The summer conference will provide delegates with a full programme of current and future developments relating to 16 – 19 education. Chief Executive of OCR Mark Dawe will provide a key note address as part of this informative agenda

JULY

8/9

ALL Language World 2011

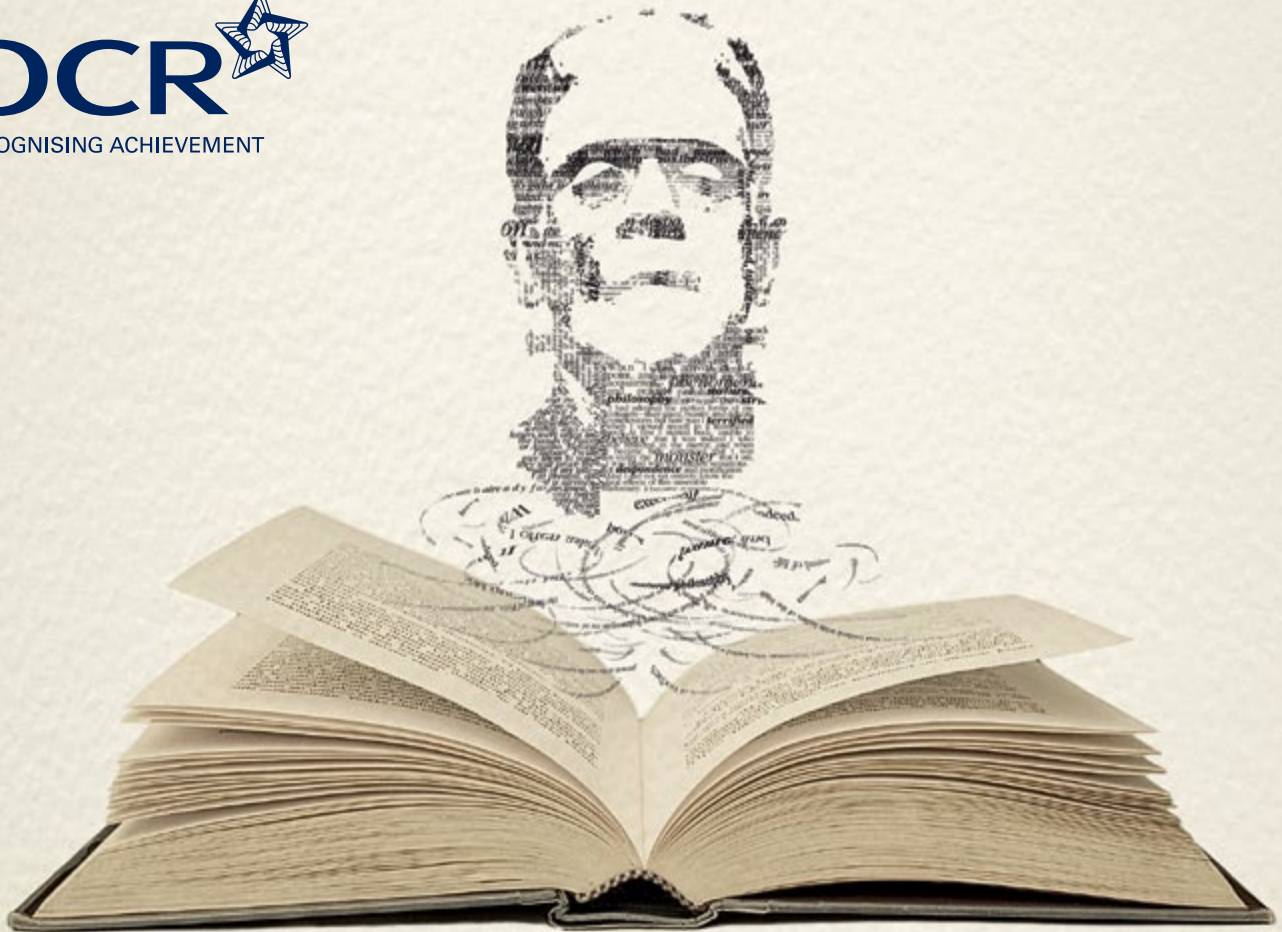
Imperial College, London

8/10

Association for the Teaching of Psychology Annual Conference

University of Hertfordshire

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