



Historical Association Royal Historical Society Bursary Funded Quality Mark Impact Report

Summer 2020

Introduction

In September of 2014, the Historical Association introduced a Quality Mark for history in schools. The purpose of the mark is to both build and recognise excellent provision for history in our primary and secondary schools. Given the wind-down of Ofsted subject inspections and reporting, the Quality Mark was designed to provide an important developmental health check and quality assurance from a trusted body.

The Quality Mark is a self-assessment framework supported by an assessor who visits the school and provides consultation and guidance as well as an assessment. This is supported by a final lengthy written subject report made to the school.

There are two levels to the award, silver and gold and participating schools must provide evidence to meet every subset of the 5 criteria areas:

- Teaching and learning
- Leadership
- Curriculum
- Achievement
- Enrichment

Assessment is made through the provision of an in-depth audit, a digital portfolio of evidence, conversation with an assessor and the assessment visit.

In 2018, as part of their 175th anniversary celebrations, the Royal Historical Society kindly agreed to sponsor a group of 8 state secondary schools to go through the Quality Mark Process. This report provides analysis of the impact the Quality Mark process has had on these schools.

Nature and Limitations

The report is based upon in depth interviews with those teachers responsible for leading the process in their schools and their responses to a defined set of questions. The questions followed a similar format to those asked of respondents to a study of the impact of the History Quality Mark on primary schools published in Education 3-13 in 2018.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03004279.2018.1483801?scroll=top&needAccess=true&journalCode=rett20>

There were originally 8 bursary funded schools however, one of these schools failed to complete due to unforeseen staffing issues that arose. The evidence presented below is therefore based on the answers of 7 respondents.

However, as with many subject focused initiatives, quantitative data is very difficult to measure – therefore it is virtually impossible to trace any upsurges in results or uptake at GCSE or A-level back to the Quality Mark. It should also be born in mind that much of the qualitative data for subject focused initiatives or training comes solely from teacher report and the Quality Mark is no different in this respect in that all of the evidence presented here is the result of teacher report.

Lastly it should be noted that all Quality Mark bursary schools are currently 12 months or less from assessment, so it is too early to discern any longer-term impact at this stage.

Summary of key findings emerging from interviews about Quality Mark:

- a) The schools were overwhelming positive about the benefits of the Quality Mark to history teaching and learning in their school;
- b) It was regarded as a most effective self-evaluation tool and a very useful mechanism to improve the quality and status of history in the school;
- c) There was a high level of respect for the Quality Mark, its relevance and its rigour
- d) The Quality Mark did lead to ideas and developments in areas such as curriculum and school improvement
- e) It was regarded as providing real value for money but some schools may have to make a strong case for the allocation of funds.

Question 1: How useful did you find the Quality Mark criteria as a framework to work to?

All seven respondents indicated that they had found the criteria framework an extremely useful tool to support the process and the development of history in their schools.

Respondents described the criteria as being detailed, comprehensive, holistic and thorough.

One respondent claimed that the criteria were thought provoking and enabled her not only to reflect upon what she does, but also to consider things she hadn't previously considered.

Two respondents indicated that they used the criteria throughout the process at every department meeting and still use them today as a benchmark. Two respondents also indicated that the criteria had helped them to fulfil the new Ofsted requirements.

Two respondents made comment that because it was a set of subject specific criteria, it was far more useful than anything generic that they might normally use and one respondent added that it was nice to be a part of something that wasn't about exams or Ofsted and where good history was the aim.

Two respondents felt that the criteria were good to use as a tool with senior leaders and one went further to say that the gold level of the criteria provided clear evidence for senior leaders of their responsibilities to individual subjects.

No negative comments were made about the criteria themselves although one interviewee did say that because they were so thorough, it took him a little while to get his head around them. Another interviewee said that she wasn't always sure how much evidence she should supply for each criterion and that some further indication or support for this element when putting together the portfolio might be worth developing. One respondent also felt that it would be a good idea to more clearly map the criteria to the audit document and to supply an editable version of the criteria document to allow notes to be more easily made.

Question 2A: What have been the main benefits of completing the Quality Mark process for your school?

This question asked interviewees to specifically focus upon what they perceive to have been the main benefits of completing the Quality Mark from a whole school perspective.

The focus of comments ranged from one interviewee to the next, but the following provides a summary of the whole school benefits identified by interviewees.

Three respondents pointed to a growth in the status of history either through the modelling of and appreciation for subject (history) in the school community or through the elevation of the school's status for history in the local community. Two respondents indicated that the History Quality Mark was used by the school as positive public relations and that it was used as a selling point for the school when recruiting for new intake.

Two interviewees also indicated that having the history Quality Mark had opened the door for them to get involved in other projects and initiatives. One interviewee felt that the Quality Mark had been instrumental in the school winning a bid for some local funding and another felt that the Quality Mark had had a direct influence on them being accepted onto another subject specific developmental project.

Several respondents indicated that the history Quality Mark had also provided a model for whole school improvement as it had defined what a department should be doing.

Two respondents also indicated that their senior leaders would say that the preparation for Ofsted that the Quality Mark provides was the greatest whole school benefit, especially when coupled with the notion that it can provide a blueprint for other departments. One respondent also went on to add that Ofsted came quickly after the Quality Mark assessment and that history was chosen for a deep dive. Having the Quality Mark already in place gave senior leaders confidence that history would come out well.

Finally, one respondent indicated that it had been useful from a trust perspective as his school was a relatively new member of a trust. His school had a different profile and location from others in the trust. Having the Quality Mark was excellent for having something to contribute to the trust's QA procedures.

Question 2B: For your Department?

This element of the question asked interviewees to reflect on what they felt were the main benefits of having completed the Quality Mark as a department. Again, responses varied, but there were strong common strands.

Several interviewees pointed to the fact that the Quality Mark had given their department confidence and cohesion. It was felt that as a department, they all had a common goal. They read more, discussed more and came together over this project like nothing before. One felt that it had brought together what was otherwise a disparate department (involving senior leaders, NQTs, non-specialists as well as history teaching staff). One interviewee went as far as to say that it had really benefitted the non-specialists in the department who attended more meetings and became more integrated. One also reported that it had benefitted SCITT trainees who had been trained to teach, but not really in history and that getting involved in the Quality Mark process had enabled them to see the rationale for history. The same interviewee also commented that as a department, because they had all been involved, it developed leadership skills across the department and gave less experienced staff a voice.

Another interviewee explained that it had also made them as a department have far more fruitful discussions. For the first time they were looking at things through a tightly focused subject lense and asking from a subject point of view, why are we doing this? Achieving the Quality Mark was considered a confidence boost and had empowered them as departments to recognise what they were doing well and what they needed to do to continue to develop.

Three interviewees felt that the Quality Mark had given them as a department greater power. They were identified as a strong department within the school and now had greater leverage with senior leaders who were prepared to listen to them. One of these interviewees added that it felt really good to be recognized, both from a trusted body like the HA and within the school. It also lent weight to greater consideration of subject specificity.

One interviewee felt that the Quality Mark had opened the door for the department in terms of partnerships. They got a number of new trainees and anecdotally the Quality Mark had been mentioned by more than one of the trainees as a reason for their placement. Another interviewee felt that the Quality Mark had empowered the department to take on new things and provided a launch pad for new projects.

Lastly, one interviewee felt that the greatest benefit for the department was the conversations they'd had around curriculum which had led to them re-writing at Key Stage 3 based on the QM criteria and advice from their assessor. What had been a very white stale curriculum is now much more diverse.

Question 2C: For pupils?

In this part of the question, interviewees were encouraged to think about whether there had been any benefit to pupils from participation in the Quality Mark.

Respondents mostly agreed that any benefit to pupils was likely to come indirectly through better teaching, better curriculum provision and more confident staff. Any attempt to measure benefit to pupils might be difficult to achieve outside of increased numbers for GCSE uptake or better examination results and even this would be difficult to trace solely back to the influence of the Quality Mark. It was also felt that these benefits would take a while to trickle down to students and so we might not see impact upon pupils immediately.

One respondent felt that because they had undertaken the Quality Mark to gain recognition for what was already felt to be strong provision, the greatest benefit to pupils was confidence. Pupils now had confidence that they were getting excellent history provision.

Having said this – anecdotally, one school indicated that they had a much larger cohort of students going on to take history at undergraduate level this year. Some of the students going on to do history at university were involved in the Quality Mark process as pupil voice or ambassadors. She believed that this may have opened their eyes to the opportunities that can come from studying history. Another pointed to a growth from 6 to 23 in their A-level cohort which she felt was down to the increased enthusiasm and passion for the subject generated through the Quality Mark process.

In the main, those interviewed felt that the most measurable benefit to pupils at the moment was the buzz around history as a subject that undertaking the Quality Mark had

given rise to. Pupils were talking about history and some of them got involved in the process by providing panels of pupil voice or becoming subject ambassadors. They grew to care about the subject and felt they were being listened to when they shared their experiences and ideas about their history provision. One respondent indicated that she was surprised when students told her they wanted more environmental history. It was something she had never considered before, but now the department has plans to develop the curriculum to include this.

Question 2D: On history as a subject?

In this final part of the question exploring the benefits of undertaking the Quality Mark, interviewees were asked to reflect upon whether the Quality Mark had served to benefit the subject itself. This was taken over the five elements of the criteria framework. A summary of responses is as follows:

- 1.) Teaching and learning: All respondents bar one suggested that teaching had improved although a variety of improvements were cited such as more risk taking and enthusiasm, greater subject knowledge, better development of second order concepts, consistency of quality across the department. Only one interviewee felt that teaching and learning hadn't really improved since undertaking the Quality Mark as it was already strong.
- 2.) Curriculum: This is where interviewees felt the greatest impact on the subject in the school had been. For two respondents, it provided validation from a trusted body for their innovative curriculum. For others, the Quality Mark led directly to changes. Two went as far as re-writing their Key Stage 3 curriculum and one also changed A-level unit options. Curricula were re-thought on the basis of the spread and breadth of history being offered to students, and the diversity of histories being covered as well as through approach – one school commenting that they were now looking to localise elements of their curriculum and another indicating that they had moved from a thematic curriculum to a chronological approach.
- 3.) Enrichment: This was the area that interviewees felt had least benefitted from undertaking the Quality Mark as most had good enrichment programmes and visits anyway. However, two respondents did indicate that the Quality Mark had made them consider accessibility to enrichment and the fact that not all students can afford big trips. For this reason, they decided to also develop bringing in more historians into school and to undertake some more local enrichment projects too. Additionally, a third respondent commented that the Quality Mark had made them think far more carefully about their community engagement.
- 4.) Leadership: Four pointed to a more convincing and systematic leadership of history resulting from the Quality Mark. One interviewee commented that the Quality Mark had resulted in new systems being put in place that would future proof history.

Another commented that as a subject leader, she felt that she was now given more respect and another commented that her assessor had given her the courage of her conviction as a leader and encouraged her to have faith in her vision for the subject and to challenge when necessary.

- 5.) Achievement: Interviewees felt that while it was probable that Quality Mark would have an impact upon achievement in the longer term, it was too early to make any firm statements about this.

Question 3: How was the Quality Mark appreciated by senior leaders in your school?

Most respondents agreed that their senior leaders had been delighted with the award and that the history department and the subject had increased status and/or trust with senior leaders as a result. One also pointed to senior leaders enjoying local press coverage for the school. Another commented that senior leaders were now more supportive of teachers undertaking subject focused CPD. One respondent felt that it had served to reinforce the high status that history already held with a new head-teacher. One respondent indicated that his senior leaders were so appreciative that they turned much of what the history department had done into a promise that they promoted about the quality of education at the school and several indicated that history was now being used as a blueprint for other subjects by senior leaders. One interviewee said that there was now a drive from senior leaders to go for gold having achieved silver this time, however, sadly the majority of others (see final question) felt that while senior leaders were appreciative and supportive, they would not have been inclined to support this initiative had it not been for the bursary funding, despite the benefits for the school and the subject.

Question 4: Has there been any negative impact on you, the pupils, the subject or the school of undertaking the process?

All respondents felt that the process had been an overwhelmingly positive one, however one respondent said that initially it had served to lower morale when they realised how “mediocre” their provision was (their words) and how much work there was to do to improve the quality. Another commented on the amount of time that Quality Mark takes up, but that the rigour of the process is appreciated and sets it apart from other awards. Two respondents also felt that earlier contact with an assessor would be more supportive and diminish some of the stress of undertaking the award.

Question 5: What did you set out to achieve by undertaking the Quality Mark and do you feel it has met this?

Responses to this question varied and reflected the sometimes-nuanced different needs and motivations of schools for participating in the Quality Mark. Broadly speaking, all

interviewees gave responses that reflected either a need for affirmation and validation or a need for supported development. All respondents indicated that the Quality Mark had helped them to achieve what they wanted to.

Four interviewees mentioned wanting to make sure they were on the right path developmentally and wanting to ensure that they were making history provision as good as it could be within their responses. Three responses indicated that participants were looking for affirmation, albeit for different reasons. One was looking to put schools in her geographical area on the map in terms of history provision, one was looking for validation of existing strength as a new school in a trust and one was looking for validation from her senior leadership team for what her department are doing. She also went on to comment that the Quality Mark helped her department to be the best that they can be as the process was not a daunting inspection like Ofsted might be considered, but more of a critical friend. One respondent indicated that he had been looking for direction, both personally and for his department and that he was hoping that the Quality Mark would provide him with high quality subject CPD. He felt that he had achieved this through participation. One respondent wanted to be less insular and to branch out, both in terms of working with other departments but also in the community. Again, she felt that the criteria enabled this to happen.

Question 6: Now that you are 6-12 months on from having been awarded, do you feel the QM has made any changes either to teacher development, teaching and learning, curriculum provision or to the subject as a whole in your school that will last? If so what? If none please explain why.

Most interviewees said that the Quality Mark had instigated changes that will last. Interestingly, all interviewees said that the lasting changes were in curriculum change that had been prompted by the Quality Mark process and conversations with assessors. As outlined above, curriculum changes were different from setting to setting, but it was interesting to note that the Quality Mark had really prompted such deep curricula conversations leading to lasting changes. One interviewee suggested that rather than direct curriculum change per se, the Quality Mark had instead changed the way the department thinks about curriculum development. They now take greater pride and careful thought and reflection. Another suggested that rather than direct change, it had led to conversations about how to improve community engagement. Two interviewees suggested that the process had also led to permanent changes in teaching and learning. One cited greater risk taking, while another indicated criteria for consistency across the department. One interviewee mentioned dramatic changes to enrichment culminating in meaningful local partnerships that will last. Three interviewees also mentioned lasting change within the

department in that the process had brought them together in a far more collaborative way with shared understanding and vision.

Question 7: Now that you have completed either the silver or gold Quality Mark, has it given rise to any further developmental goals? If so what?

Responses to this question were again varied reflecting different priorities. Three respondents would like to turn their silver awards into gold, but all commented on the lack of funds to do this. One sadly argued that the situation in schools is very real and that while they would love to now go for gold, they can't even afford A-level textbooks, let alone the Quality Mark and they have to fight for every penny.

One participant indicated that their conversations are now grounded in curriculum and that they would like to develop a "dream curriculum." Of course, such a thing does not exist and they are constantly evolving, but this idea of a dream curriculum is what they now aspire to. The same participant also indicated that with their award, they hope to now have greater confidence to share their thinking and ideas with the history teaching community through events, blogs and articles.

One participant would like to make far greater use of pupil voice in the future development of the subject and has realised that as the consumers of their curriculum and planning, the pupils are perhaps an important voice that has not always been listened to in the past. The Quality Mark process has helped them to realise the importance of pupil voice. Another two participants would like to develop greater partnership work in the community having begun this as part of the Quality Mark process.

Question 8: Bursary funded schools did not have to pay to participate in the Quality Mark. The normal cost of participation is £500 plus. Overall, weighing all things up, how beneficial do you feel the Quality Mark is weighed against the cost of taking part for those that have to pay?

The majority of interviewees felt that the Quality Mark represented good value for money. One interviewee said:

I can't understate how beneficial this has been. The cost is a bargain when you consider what you're getting. There is no other process available for history where you get such good critical insight on your department and provision.

Another went on to say that it represented *good value for what you get* while another commented that it would be an excellent investment.

One said: *At a time when education is so fractured, to have a trusted external organisation putting their weight behind good history is very worthwhile.*

One participant felt that the value for money might be improved through greater levels of contact with an assessor:

You get what you pay for. For £500 you get email contact plus a whole day with an assessor and written follow up report, but a second half day with the assessor would be better.

While the vast majority felt very pleased with what they had got out of participation, three participants said that they felt they'd have had to make a strong case to senior leaders if they'd had to pay for it. Two indicated that they would pay for it and in fact one of those indicated that she is moving schools and plans to register with her new school as a way of getting the department in shape. She hopes that she will be able to use the evidence of her success under the bursary scheme as leverage with a new senior leadership team. Another commented that if funds were available it would be something they would pay for and one commented that while they didn't feel that their senior leaders would have paid for the process in the past, the landscape is changing with emphasis on subject CPD growing and so the future is hopeful that more schools may opt to undertake this process as CPD.