



Little Heath and the HA Quality Mark

Little Heath's History Department has had the Quality Mark as the background to our thinking since I took the criteria to my interview for Head of Department over ten years ago. Whilst I value much of the internal monitoring within the school, I always wanted our drive for reflection and improvement to be subject specific. When I was preparing for my interview and thinking they would ask about 'what makes a great History department' the Quality Mark seemed to answer that question for me.

Since then, we have transformed much of our curriculum, in significant part due to three of the team being involved in the Historical Association's Teacher Fellowship programmes. Each resulted in distinctly different enquiries, and knock-on changes to our wider curriculum. As a result, the whole department value the impact of subject specific CPD and have seen how it can transform students' understanding in our classrooms. This was incredibly helpful when discussing signing up to complete the Quality Mark.

In the last few years, we have completed a significant proportion of the changes to our curriculum and starting to see the positive impact of this, but recognised that our enrichment provision was more limited (due in part to the impact of Covid). The Quality Mark criteria were central in helping us to decide where to focus our time, in particular we realised our links in the local community could be strengthened. As a result, we planned outreach visits to local primary schools, and an 'Escape Room' event where families came in to take part in historical puzzles. These have been such valuable events and experiences to come out of the reflections we did using the Quality Mark criteria.

Another aspect the criteria prompted us to consider is how we seek and use student and parents' views. This is something we will continue to develop but have been able to introduce systems which facilitate discussions on students' progress with their parents and teachers. Completing surveys in part for the Quality Mark portfolio was also an informative and useful process which was reassuring in many ways, but has also given us areas to consider further.

This all meant that when we signed up for the Quality Mark process (at last) we were not introducing anything new for the assessment but continuing to build on what we were already doing, and had been doing for years. The process itself was straightforward – we completed our initial audit and met with our assessor Catherine at the start. We then spent the year doing largely what we would have done anyway, but with our portfolio in mind as we went. When it came to collating the portfolio, Catherine put me in touch with another head of department who had completed the Quality Mark already, and Alice's help was invaluable in helping me to see how to put the evidence together.

The visit itself, whilst nerve-wracking in the run up, was actually a fantastic experience. I was most nervous about the interviews with students, and I was thrilled with how much of what we have worked on embedding with students came across in their answers. It was brilliant to hear them talking about different perspectives of the past, how much they enjoy History, and why it is important and relevant today. It was great to go into colleagues' lessons, who I have seen teach and know are fantastic, and to have that recognised by someone who has seen so much history teaching at other schools. One of the great features about the Quality Mark assessment is the time to talk through what you're doing with a specialist, where the discussion about the department and its progress and priorities was so firmly rooted in history specifically. It was incredibly affirming to receive the Gold Award and know that came from such a rigorous and positive process.

One aspect that had stopped me from beginning the process earlier was concerns about the amount of work it would add to the department to go through the whole process. I felt it was important to be in a position where we had embedded as much as possible, and the team felt there was positive momentum for what we were doing. The additional work created by completing the portfolio was not impossible by any means, and it was a valuable tool for self-reflection and informing our priorities for the next year. We managed to time the assessment after exams had finished which made that more straightforward (although did limit the number of students and classes in school for meetings and observations).

Completing the Quality Mark has been a whole-department effort, with everyone contributing through collation of the portfolio, providing students' books as evidence, being interviewed by Catherine and having lessons observed. Most importantly by working together to improve and develop teaching within the department and outside it through enrichment events and trips. The incredibly detailed report that has come out of the process is going to support further developments within the department, and serves as a valuable recognition of the work that we do to make history matter to our students.