

Jim Carroll on the benefits of subject development for middle managers



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The Subject Leader Development Programme

I was looking for CPD which would be directly relevant in helping me become a subject leader as well as in my further career. When surveying the training options available, I was particularly drawn to the Historical Association's Subject Leader Development Programme (HASLDP) for a number of reasons. First, I wanted a middle-leadership course which considered the subject-specific demands, challenges, and opportunities of running a history department. Additionally, having taken advantage of the HA's training opportunities in the past, I was confident the HASLDP would be of a high quality. The course more than met all of my hopes and expectations in these regards.

Expert tutors

During the HASLDP, I especially valued having the opportunity to learn from the experienced, expert subject leaders Sharon Aninakwa, Elizabeth Carr, David Hibbert, Ruth Lingard, Catherine Priggs, and Hugh Richards. It was invaluable to hear from such presenters who were equally comfortable discussing the theoretical bases to approaches to management and curriculum design as they were in rooting their ideas in real-life concrete scenarios and experiences. The course would therefore be equally useful for both aspiring and as current subject leaders.

Topics relevant to in-school subject leadership

The course provided training on topics highly relevant to subject leadership. These included short-, medium-, and long-term strategic planning; curricular design in terms of ensuring a clear vision that is implemented successfully, incorporating scope, coherence and rigour; choosing and changing examination specifications; team development including hiring, CPD, developing departmental subject knowledge, and drawing on the latest trends in history education; performance management including how to meaningfully respond to data and setting developmental targets; working with senior leadership; and raising one's department's profile in the wider school. We also had the opportunity to listen to a talk by Tim Jenner, the HMI Subject Lead for History. Tim's talk was incredibly informative (and reassuring!) about the implications for the new OFSTED framework focused on curriculum for subject leaders.



Ongoing professional conversations

The modular course was largely based on pre-recorded talks. This structure meant I could schedule my training at times that were convenient for me. There were also occasional online webinars where we could meet as a cohort. In these sessions, we had the opportunity to share our reflections on what we had learnt and how it applied to our particular contexts. These sessions were also very valuable in allowing us as a cohort to build a mutually supportive network. As a result, we have been able to have ongoing professional conversations about the opportunities and challenges of subject leadership during the course itself and beyond.

The impact on practice

The HASLDP has already had a profound impact on my practice. First, it has highlighted how it's vital for a subject leader to produce a self-improving departmental culture. For such a situation to happen, team members must feel safe to openly reflect and constructively criticise, and the course provided guidance on how to achieve this. Second, it has provided me with concrete guidance on how to avoid 'knowledge-doing gaps' in a department, ensuring that attempts at change become embedded in a team's practice. Third, it has given me specific guidance on how to build co-productive relationships with SLT, meaning my department can be alert to and adhere to wider-school policies while still maintaining the integrity of history as a specific discipline. Fourth, the course has given me concrete techniques for ring-fencing precious departmental time so that these can be focused on improving teaching. Fifth, it's helped me realise that self-regulation and self-care are critical for an effective subject leader to operate successfully. The course has also furnished ideas on how to achieve this, such as by identifying sources of support within my own context and in the wider history-teaching community.

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Invaluable for future career

To sum up, my experience of the HASLDP has been overwhelmingly positive. The course will, I believe, be invaluable for my future career in both the medium and long term. It has provided guidance to me on how to identify subject-leadership jobs that are congruent with my teaching values, how to apply successfully, as well as how to be effective when in post. For anyone considering joining the HASLDP, I can't think of better CPD for an aspiring or current history subject leader who wants to develop in terms of history-specific, subject-leadership training.

About Jim Carroll

Jim Carroll is a history teacher at a sixth form college in Surrey; a PhD candidate in History Education at University College London; and an associate editor for *Teaching History*.

The HA Subject Leader Development Programme is open to aspiring, new and experienced subject leaders new to a school or looking for a fresh direction. The course offers practical professional subject-specific development wherever you are on the path of subject leadership. To find out more, email events@history.org.uk
www.history.org.uk/go/sldp