

Summary findings:

UCL Beacon School Quality Mark re-accreditation review

Royal Wootton Bassett

January 24-27 2022

UCL Beacon Schools are hubs of educational excellence. They are institutions which have committed themselves to developing high quality teaching and learning about the Holocaust, and to sharing best practice among their wider communities and networks. These endeavours require the investment of considerable time and energy: commodities which are always in high demand in schools. Because of this – and because educational agendas within schools and the system more broadly are continually changing – it can be hard for Beacon Schools to maintain their commitments over time, despite the best intentions.

The Quality Mark award was developed as a means of recognising those schools with an ongoing and unrelenting commitment to making sure that the Holocaust education they provide is of the highest standard. The award is earned, not merely given; the review process is developmental, but it is also rigorous and robust, meaning that this is an achievement that schools work incredibly hard to attain. In order to ensure the integrity of the Quality Mark, and because things can change quickly in education, those schools who achieve the award are duly required after four years to apply for the status to be reaccredited.

Royal Wootton Bassett (RWBA) became a UCL Beacon School in 2012. In 2017 it was awarded the Quality Mark. In January 2022, it became the first school to be reaccredited as a Quality Mark UCL Beacon School. I offer them my very warmest congratulations.

Andy Pearce
January 2022

What went well

Key strengths of RWBA's Holocaust education provision include (but are not limited to) the following:

- The unique Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Programme (HGP). Established in 2009, this programme sits at the core of RWBA's teaching and learning about the Holocaust. Through it, students have historically had access to first-person testimony from survivors of the Holocaust and other genocides, teachers have been able to benefit from a research-informed CPD, and both external institutions and the wider community have experienced formal and informal educational experiences.
- The annual Empowering Young People to Change the World conference (#EYP2CtW). Since 2014, this initiative has acted as a fulcrum for the professional development of teachers within RWBA and the wider Royal Wootton Bassett Academy Trust (RWBAT). Attendees have benefitted from an evolving programme designed to inspire and empower them in the teaching of the Holocaust, genocide, human rights and sensitive and challenging issues. In the years following RWBA first achieving Quality

Mark status, the conference has gone from strength to strength. In 2021, despite the challenges brought by the pandemic, more than 964 teachers in over 40 countries attended events within the newly configured #EYP2CtW conference series.

- Strong, deep roots embedded within the school curriculum. Thanks in large part to the support of the HGP, teaching about the Holocaust takes place in a range of different curriculum areas – including History, RE, English, Music, Physical Education, and Drama. In all subjects the Holocaust is not merely bolted-on nor is it shoehorned into programmes of study for the sake of it. Instead, teachers give care and thought to how they can teach about the Holocaust at appropriate and relevant moments, in a way which does not compromise subject disciplinary but instead capitalises of disciplinary distinctiveness.
- A truly whole-school approach and culture. Through a variety of means, Holocaust education is part of the fabric of RWBA. Its position within the School Improvement Plan accords it status and importance, but this commitment is not just confined to a document or policy pledge. With the benefit of SLT support, the entire school community is aware of the import RWBA places on learning about the Holocaust and proud of this.
- Consistent and compelling evidence of improvements in students’ knowledge and understanding. By way of tried and tested data gathering techniques and mechanisms, there is irrefutable evidence that teaching at RWBA has positive impacts on students’ learning. By way of example, in 2021 a research study showed that after studying the Holocaust, students’ knowledge and understanding far outstripped levels found in the UCL 2016 national study.
- Innovative teaching techniques and approaches. A distinct feature of RWBA’s teaching is its iLearn provision. As much as this medium ensures broad reach and contributes to embedding Holocaust education in the school’s culture, it is also symbolic of how RWBA is not afraid to innovate in how it teaches about the subject. This pulls through into individual subjects, where ambitious teachers drive themselves to come up with fresh and engaging learning opportunities. Emblematic of this is the remarkable work that is taking place in the school’s PE department – a curriculum area not commonly associated with Holocaust education, but one where teacher drive and determination has led to creative approaches to teaching and learning.
- An inspirational Lead Teacher. Nicola Wetherall, the Beacon School Lead Teacher at RWBA, is held in the very highest regard by her colleagues for her work in and around the HGP and Holocaust education more broadly. She is respected for her commitment, admired for her sheer hard work, and regarded as a supportive critical friend who is never too busy to provide help and counsel. It is without surprise, therefore, that she has recently taken on new responsibilities for helping to share good practice in this area within the RWBAT.
- An emerging cohort of new leaders. Partly due to the encouragement of the Lead Teacher, partly through the circumstances created by the pandemic, and partly through individuals’ own initiative, there is a group of teachers at RWBA who demonstrate the confidence and competencies to help lead the school’s Holocaust education provision into the next phase. These teachers are, by nature,

reflective practitioners, sensitive to the subject of the Holocaust, aware of the challenges that come with teaching about it, and eager to learn.

- Ambitious, enthusiastic, and motivated students. These qualities are evident through a number of indicators – from samples of students’ work, to conversations with students, and through the existence of student-led extracurricular groups like the Reading and Discussion group. In all these areas students show themselves to be genuinely invested in learning about the Holocaust, genocide, and related issues, and prepared to invest extra energy and effort.
- A reputation for excellence and leadership. As part of the RWBAT, the school’s HGP and Holocaust education provision is seen as an exemplar of what can be achieved in this challenging and complex area. Importantly, the Trust does not seek to impose the RWBA “model” onto others – but the capacity of Trust members to draw on RWBA’s expertise is a reflection of its reputation for excellence. Beyond the Trust, the school continues to be regarded as a leading light in the field of Holocaust education. It regularly works with other schools – both in the form of providing CPD, but also in leading new projects such as the recently launched #HtFMeUs enrichment initiative – in which it is partnering with RWBAT schools and 20 other secondaries across the country.

Even better if...? Some areas for future development & further consideration

- Due to circumstances created by the pandemic, the Lead Teacher has not been able to be present within RWBA. This physical absence has created the need for other members of staff to take on certain roles and responsibilities – opportunities which, as noted above, have led to some very positive developments. However, these measures cannot completely compensate for the absence of the Lead Teacher from the school and it is clear that this absence is being keenly felt in different ways. There are no easy or straightforward ways of addressing this, but the school – in partnership and in consultation with the Trust – might look to approach this issue as a priority.
- A distinct strength of Holocaust education is that it is taught in a multitude of curriculum areas. That being said, much of this work relies on and is enabled by students developing strong and secure levels of historical knowledge and understanding: primarily through their encounter with the subject in the school History curriculum at Key Stage 3. At a time when there are repeated pressures – internally and externally – for schools to give maximum curriculum time to public examinations, it is essential that RWBA preserve and protect the position of the Holocaust in the Key Stage 3 history curriculum. To ensure this, the school might find it necessary to undertake some sort of curriculum re-sequencing: whilst not ideal, this should not be discounted as a means of making sure that the teaching of the Holocaust in history at Key Stage 3 is given the time and space it requires.
- Whilst students’ varied subject encounters in the curriculum are an undoubted facet of RWBA, there is an inherent possibility that – over time – these encounters become increasingly uncoupled from one another. To avoid potential fragmentation in students’ learning, RWBA should prioritise and accelerate the work it has started to do in mapping out a Learning Journey for the HGP in the school. This will not be an easy undertaking; precisely because of the breadth of curriculum coverage. But this enterprise – together with the school’s intention to concomitantly have individual subjects create

their own Learning Journey's vis-à-vis Holocaust education – should make a considerable difference in helping to maintain coherence across the curriculum.

- Like all schools, RWBA experiences staff turnover and staff change. It is to be welcomed then that Senior Leaders in the school are aware of the potential impact this could have on maintaining high quality Holocaust teaching. The Learning Journeys work mentioned above will certainly help to mitigate this, but the school might also look at ensuring that new staff are not just made aware of opportunities to engage in Holocaust-related CPD but are actively encouraged to do so.

Concluding remark:

'Like all Beacon Schools, Royal Wootton Bassett approach to Holocaust education is shaped by its contexts and circumstances, its culture and its communities. And, like all Beacon Schools, Royal Wootton Bassett's approach is also forged out of its history – a history in which, over the past thirteen years, teaching and learning about human atrocities has been central to the school's ethos, aims and philosophy. This longevity is distinctive. It means that Holocaust, genocide and human rights education has become part of the DNA of the school and all who pass through it.

At a time of much uncertainty and upheaval, where prejudice, intolerance and extremism continue to stalk our lives, we need our young people to be given the experiences and the tools to become compassionate, critical, and historically-literate members of society: aware of man's potentialities for good and for ill. There is ample evidence to suggest that because of the work that is taking place at RWBA, its students have every opportunity to become the adults of tomorrow that we need. And for that, I wholeheartedly commend and congratulate all who are involved in RWBA's Beacon School activities.'



Report summary findings by reviewer, Dr. Andy Pearce, Jan 2022.
Full report to be published later in the Spring