

Meaningful Learning Experiences

Strategic Commitment	✓	Part of a pilot supported by a large academy trust
Curriculum Provision	✓	A 'dry' topic in year 8 History
Employer Partnerships	✓	Input and feedback from the local MP
Reflective Young People	✓	Helping to develop a range of skills
Informed Career Choices	✓	Giving an insight into the world and work of politics

Member of Parliament helps year 8 students put a historic issue into a modern context

Year 8 students at Four Dwellings Academy in Birmingham follow a scheme of work about 'The Stuarts' in their History studies. The teacher's brief for this project stated that, *'Of all topics we cover, this is probably the one that the kids struggle with most. It can be dry at times and this can cause a slight dip in engagement.'* He also hoped that, *'Their interest in history would be deepened and I'm always keen to promote an enthusiasm for the subject in KS3.'*

The final topic covered in the scheme of work was 'The importance of the Acts of Union' and an outline plan for the project suggested, *'The recent election result and Brexit raise fresh questions about whether it's the end-of-the-line for the 'Union' in Great Britain. Based on their knowledge of C17th History and current affairs, students will present a balanced conclusion about the right way forward.'*

Local Member of Parliament, Preet Kaur Gill, was invited to visit the school and hear the students' presentations and respond, explaining her role and her views on the topical issue. Delivery of the topic was planned, with a date fixed for the visit ... but then Covid-19 closed the school to the majority of students.

In spite this setback, the MP wrote a letter to the students, saying, *'I remain interested in your views about if and how the union that was agreed in 17th Century is still relevant in 21st Century, post-coronavirus Britain.'* A selection of the students' work was sent to her, to which she recorded a short video message of congratulation and encouragement.

Benefits for the Students

- *'I've included a good sample of the work we received - there are more submissions to possibly be sent over, but I didn't want to take up Preet's entire day! The kids generally really enjoyed engaging with something a bit different and having the opportunity to share their ideas with a Member of Parliament.'*
- *'The students involved were incredibly engaged with a topic which has been a struggle to grasp in previous years.'*

Benefits for the School

- 'Framing a tricky historical issue in a context of what is happening in the world right now has allowed the kids to probe deeper into debates and improve their understanding of complex issues. They are now much more comfortable articulating their ideas on this topic too.'
- 'I'd love to do the same again next year, and possibly expand our work into other areas of the History curriculum!'

Benefits for the Employer

- 'There are no easy answers, so I am keen to hear how you weigh the advantages and disadvantages, the principles and compromises. What is the right thing to do for the people in both countries?'
- '... another project for you to think about is what does devolution – giving more power to people where they live – look like?'
- 'I have to say, the level of your work was absolutely outstanding, it was wonderful to read, and I look forward to personally coming into school and meeting with you.'

Preet Kaur Gill MP
HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Year 8, Four Dwellings Academy
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4th May 2020

Dear all,

I was planning to visit your school to hear your views about the Union of England with Scotland, about which I understand you have been learning in your History studies. However, this was before the coronavirus pandemic became an urgent concern in the UK, meaning that I had to postpone.

Although the current health crisis is changing our everyday lives and occupying most of the news coverage, that does not mean that other issues can be ignored. We are all having to consider what 'normal' will look like in the future and many of the issues that previously hit the headlines may be viewed in a different way.

So, I remain interested in your views about if and how the union that was agreed in 17th Century is still relevant in 21st Century, post-coronavirus Britain. There are no easy answers, so I am keen to hear how you weigh the advantages and disadvantages, the principles and compromises. What is the right thing to do for the people in both countries?

Your teachers are going to send across a selection of your work so I can consider what you have to say and I promise that I will send a response, with my thoughts and telling you a bit about life in politics.

In the meantime, I hope you and your families are staying safe and well. I know it is a very strange and difficult period, and we are all facing our own challenges – missing loved ones, or struggling to adjust to this limited way of life under lockdown – but I also know how the vast majority of people are doing their best to put together and follow the rules that have been put in place to keep people safe. I'm sincerely grateful to all of you who are doing your bit.

Nonetheless, if you ever find yourself struggling to make sense of things, or would like to raise something that you think the Government hasn't thought of or hasn't reconsidered, do please let me know. I am always glad to hear from you and will always try to help.

Yours sincerely,
Preet Kaur Gill

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Step 1 – Research

Act of union

Who was queen or king?
The two countries had shared a monarch since the Union of the Crowns in 1603, when King James VI of Scotland inherited the English throne from his double first cousin twice removed, Queen Elizabeth I.

When did the act of union happen?
Act of union happened on the 1st May 1707 in Westminster in London, which is the home of the English Parliament.

Why did the act of union happen?
The Scots feared that they would simply become another region of England, being swallowed up as had happened to Wales four hundred years earlier. In a poorly attended Scottish Parliament the 1707 union to agree the Union and on 21 January 1707 the Act of Union was signed.

To begin with, students began researching what the Act of Union actually was – some were surprised to find out England and Scotland had not always been very close allies! Here, Armoyone and Mikey have outlined their research.

Step 2 – Conclusions

"The Acts of the Union was huge for the what we now know to be the United Kingdom, the act bonded Scotland to England for the first time in law after years of conflict and uncertainty.

One Positive that came about from the Acts is King James 6th had two crowns in one head. Although there was some negative such as thousands of ordinary Scottish folk had been tempted to invest their hard earned money in a plan to link the two great oceans of the world by establishing an overland trading route between the Pacific and Atlantic. One of the biggest problems that came from the Acts of Union was the division among the people between King James having two crowns in one head.

In Conclusion, in think that the Acts of Union and subsequent union with Scotland is still important to us today mostly because it was part of the major history because this was the event that United England and Scotland through one King." – Joel

"The Union was part of a treaty between Scotland and England, forming Great Britain. This treaty was made on the 22nd July, 1706. This was so Scotland and England would become one, and their profits would benefit. This also meant that trading would be a much larger success.

This leads into why I believe we should keep the union between England and Scotland. We have been in the union for over 300 years now, and in my opinion, there isn't a point in breaking it off. After all, this union symbolizes England and Scotland being together. It's why I believe that the union should be kept, and not removed. After all, why get rid of something we worked so hard for?" – Hannah

A letter from the local MP encouraged year 8 students to learn about 'The importance of the Acts of Union', as part of History studies about The Stuarts. Preet Kaur Gill MP sent a short video message of congratulation after seeing their work, which was completed during the Covid-19 lock-down.