

**History Practitioners'
Advisory Team**

REPORT

**A Way Forward for School History,
11-16**

**A report presented to the Shadow Secretary
of State for Education,
David Willetts MP**

May 2007

The History Practitioners' Advisory Team (HPAT) is an independent team of experienced teachers of history, at school, sixth form and university level. It grew out of a seminar on school history held by David Willetts MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Education, at Portcullis House on 15 June 2006, and was set up at the request of Nick Gibb MP, Shadow Minister for Schools, to advise the Opposition Front Bench on a possible future shape for the school history curriculum.

The members of HPAT are all experienced teachers with wide experience of running training courses and conferences for history teachers and of negotiating and defending the position of school history at national and international level, through a number of different bodies, including the Historical Association, the Institute of Historical Research and the Prince of Wales Education Summer Schools.

The members of HPAT are:

- *Seán Lang* (Chairman), Research Fellow in History at Anglia Ruskin University and former Head of History at Hills Road Sixth Form College, Cambridge
- *Dr Barbara Hibbert*, Head of History, Harrogate Grammar School
- *Ruth Rowland*, Head of History, Long Road Sixth Form College, Cambridge
- *Nicolas Kinloch*, Professional Tutor and former Head of History, the Netherhall School, Cambridge
- *Prof. David Bates*, Director, Institute of Historical Research
- *Steve Mastin*, Head of History, Sawston Village College, Cambridgeshire
- *Elizabeth Eaves*, Head of History, Parkstone Grammar School, Dorset
- *Vikki Askew*, Head of Sixth Form, James Allen's Girls' School, London

HPAT has also benefited from advice offered by:

- *Tony McConnell*, History teacher at Mill Hill County High School, London and editor of *Teaching History*
- *Prof. Martin Daunton*, Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge and President of the Royal Historical Society
- *Martin Roberts*, former Headteacher of the Cherwell School, Oxford

HPAT met together on two occasions, on 9 December 2006 and on 10 March 2007, both times at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge. Our discussions focused on two main areas:

- The strengths and weaknesses of the current history curriculum
- How pupils' experience and understanding of history might be improved if the subject were to be made compulsory 11-16

Executive Summary

- 1. History should be made compulsory in every year of secondary schooling to the age of 16.** The great majority of pupils drop history altogether at the end of Key Stage 3. Since many schools are trying to cover Key Stage 3 in two years instead of three, increasing numbers of secondary school pupils only study this vital subject for two years before giving it up at the age of 13. Previous attempts to grant pupils an 'entitlement' to history have self-evidently failed. The only way to safeguard pupils' right to learn about their history is to make the subject compulsory.
- 2. The artificial division of subjects into "Core" and "Foundation" has had the effect of devaluing essential subjects like humanities and languages and should be abolished.** The proven educational value of subject disciplines should be reasserted and their position strengthened within the school curriculum.
- 3. Citizenship as a separate school subject should be abolished.** Its different components should be shared out between history, geography and PSE, with history taking over those elements of citizenship education which are designed to develop pupils' understanding of the different identities that go towards a collective sense of "Britishness".
- 4. There should be a single course of study in history from 11 to 16, with a strong core of narrative British history.** British history and the history of the British Empire should constitute an important element within GCSE.
- 5. British history should integrate elements of English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish and Empire and Commonwealth history.** This should be done in such a way as to enable pupils to have a better understanding of the various historical experiences which, over a long period of time, have contributed to the creation and development of the modern United Kingdom.
- 6. Pupils should gain an overall picture of the narrative shape of British history and should not spend time repeating or 'revisiting' topics.** The current arrangements whereby some topics are repeated in different school years, of which the best known example is the study of Nazi Germany, limit pupils' opportunity to discover the full richness of the past and should be ended.
- 7. History GCSE should draw mainly, *but not exclusively*, on the history studied in Years 10 and 11.** Credit should also be given to candidates who draw on the history they have studied in Years 7-9. This should be a condition for the award of an A* grade.

8. **The current examination and assessment requirements of history GCSE are in need of major revision.** Four changes in particular are needed:

a) The development of an assessment objective testing pupils' ability to **construct an historical narrative from historical material.**

b) **The current highly formulaic and unhistorical source questions in examinations should be replaced by historical inquiry based on real historical sources.** Many of these sources could be made available online by museums, archives, libraries and heritage agencies. It is time to end the practice of setting short extracts from sources on examination papers.

c) **Mark schemes should reward highly (rather than penalising, as at present) those candidates who show initiative, imagination and wide historical knowledge.** The award of an A* grade should be made conditional on wide historical knowledge and evidence of initiative beyond the strict requirements of the examination course.

d) **Candidates should be introduced to genuine differences in interpretations of major historical events.** Precisely because history is a controversial subject which thrives on debate and argument, it is an essential component in education within a functioning democracy. Pupils should learn that history is open to many different, and often conflicting, interpretations.

9. **Resources for the history curriculum should be planned from the start, in conjunction with publishers, online providers, archives, libraries, museums, galleries and heritage agencies.** The current arrangements, which allow examiners to profit from their own examinations by writing "badged" textbooks encourages narrow "teaching to the test", impoverishes the pupils' experience of history and raises serious questions of probity. It should be ended.

10. **There should be genuine incentives to encourage teachers to extend their historical knowledge.** Funding should be made available to support the providers of subject-based CPD and the extension of subject knowledge should be a criterion in inspection and for the award of Advanced Skills and Chartered Teacher status.

Introduction

Either we believe in the importance of history, or we do not.

If we do not, then let us stop pretending otherwise every time there is a significant historical anniversary, such as the recent commemoration of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade; let us stop asking ourselves why so few people have a grasp of British history, why the United Kingdom seems to be coming apart and why the concept of British identity seems so much weaker than in the past; let us stop our annual commemorations of the Holocaust or of the war dead; stop standing in the way of developers who want to demolish old buildings; and let the press stop running high-profile stories about how little school pupils or the general population seem to know about the past. For if history does not matter, if history is simply a leisure pursuit, an interesting subject for a television documentary or the background for a period drama, if it is, in short, of no more significance than stamp-collecting, then none of those things matter and we will not be any the poorer for seeing them go.

But if history does matter – and there are strong grounds for believing it matters a great deal – then we cannot let go of our commemorations, our environmental heritage, and our sense of the past. Commemorations matter because they are about *people*, and people matter, even after their death. If people matter, then history matters, and if history matters, then we cannot continue to stand by while it undergoes its long, slow process of decline in our schools.

What has gone wrong?

The tragedy of school history is that so much has actually gone right.

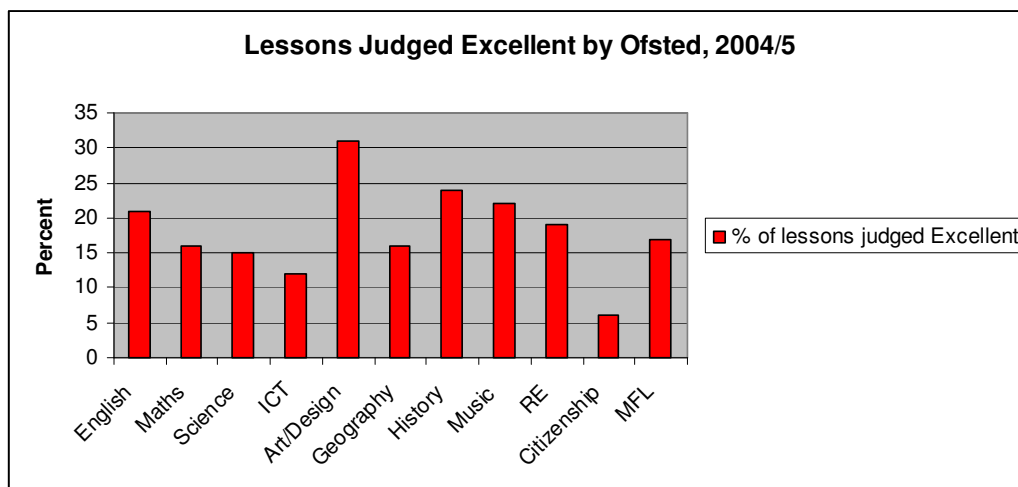
In the ‘real world’ history has seldom been healthier. As a nation, we have an apparently insatiable appetite for visiting heritage sites and museums, for history in paperback, and for history on television and at the cinema. History has successfully changed its image without entirely ditching how it used to look: David Starkey can still attract a large audience to his programmes about the Tudors, but so can Adam Hart-Davis or the late Fred Dibnah with their programmes about historical technology. Local and community history is flourishing as never before, Black History Month has grown into a popular annual festival, and major historical anniversaries regularly attract coverage across the media. It is no surprise that there are at least two television channels entirely devoted to history.

Particularly significant has been the phenomenal success of the television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* in which various well-known personalities were seen researching their family history. It proved compelling and often

very moving viewing; it also inspired many people to start researching their own family history. When the National Archives put the 1901 Census online so many people logged onto it that it crashed on its first day. Ordinary people are not just watching or reading history – they are researching it.

There is strong evidence that parents want their children to know about their history and about their cultural heritage and feel angry and alienated if they feel it is being denied to them.

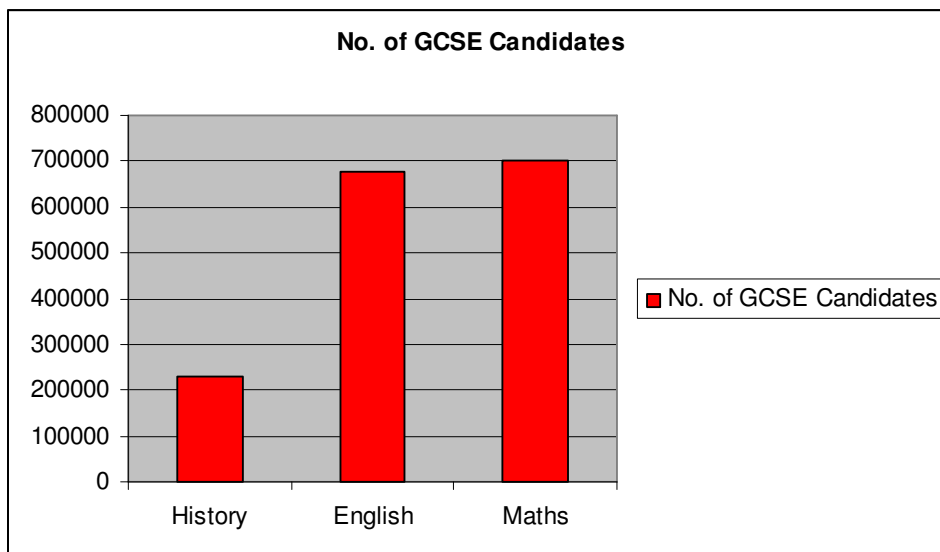
To an important degree, some of the robust health of history in society is reflected in schools. Ofsted has regularly found history to be one of the best taught subjects in secondary schools, and in 2004/5 it was second only to Art and Design in the proportion of its lessons judged Excellent.



Source: Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, 2004/5

By comparison with the 1990s, when the numbers taking history GCSE and A level seemed to be in unstoppable decline, the take-up for history at GCSE, AS and A level is healthy and the general trend is upwards. In 2005 history was the sixth most popular subject at A level, with 45,113 entries and 54,139 entries at AS level. All of this is very welcome.

However, it needs to be put into context. By comparison with the usual numbers taking English and mathematics, both of which are compulsory at GCSE, the numbers taking history GCSE are small:



Source: QCA (English and Maths figures), Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2004/5 (History figures)

All the complaints about school history – and there are many – have to take into account this basic fact, that of every ten pupils starting secondary school, only *three* will study any history at all after the age of 14.

In fact, the situation is even worse than that.

Some primary schools manage to keep a lively and exciting thread of history lessons going. Overall, however, primary history has suffered badly from the inroads into the school day made by the daily literacy and numeracy hours – and this, despite history's proven record as a vehicle for developing high-level literacy. HMCi reported in 2004/5 that achievement in primary history is lower than in most subjects:

Pupils' knowledge and understanding of key historical facts is not good enough; their knowledge is fragmented and their awareness and understanding of key concepts such as change and continuity are too limited.

Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for Schools, 2004/5.

Therefore, in many cases pupils will be arriving at secondary school with only a very patchy knowledge of history, and no sense of its overall chronology or narrative structure.

In theory, Key Stage 3 history should give them much of this, with units covering British history from the early middle ages to the Second World War. In practice, few pupils cover anything like this much. Major periods which are seldom if ever taught in Key Stage 3 history include:

- the late Middle Ages
- the creation of Parliament
- the Wars of the Roses
- most of the seventeenth century, often including the civil wars and certainly the period from the Protectorate onwards
- the whole of the political history of the eighteenth century, including the Act of Union and the Jacobite Rebellions
- the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars

The KS3 unit on the Twentieth Century World is usually covered by teaching about the two world wars, with a particular stress upon the Home Front in Britain.

Thus, few schools in England marked the three hundredth anniversary of the passage of the 1707 Act and Treaty of Union between England and Scotland, which fell in 2007, for the simple reason that no pupils study it and very few can even have heard of it. If one wants to see some of the seeds of political and social misunderstanding and resentment between England and Scotland, this complete lack of coverage of such a major event in our history is a good place to start.

Some topics have long been taught successfully at Key Stage 3, including the Norman Conquest of England, early medieval social history, the Tudors, especially Henry VIII and Elizabeth, the economic and social changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and particular studies like the slave trade, Chartism, the Suffragettes and the Holocaust.

However, a recent DfES-funded report from the Historical Association suggested that many teachers shy away from controversial and sensitive historical topics, including the crusades, the slave trade and even the Holocaust.¹ In such schools, pupils' historical knowledge will be even more patchy.

It is not difficult, therefore, to see why HMCI found:

In history it is easy for the curriculum to be fragmented, leaving pupils with a limited breadth of understanding.

Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for Schools, 2004/5.

¹ Historical Association TEACH Project, 2007.

Hostility to history

History teachers also have to cope with pressures placed upon them to shorten even the time devoted to history within Key Stage 3. More schools are opting to fit the three-year KS3 curriculum into two years. **This means that for many pupils, the only systematic history teaching they receive is in Years 7 and 8, and that many of them will stop their history education at the age of 13.**

Some schools are moving from history towards courses in Citizenship, even though these have repeatedly been found to be unsatisfactory. In some schools the Options system is so constructed as to make it difficult for any but the brightest pupils to study history beyond 14.² Most worryingly of all, in 2006 no fewer than **1,479 secondary schools did not enter any candidates at all for GCSE history.**

These pressures come from factors outside the control of history teachers. The decision to divide school subjects into a compulsory core and a set of optional Foundation subjects was taken at an early stage in the development of the National Curriculum in the late 1980s. That decision has had the disastrous unintended consequence of devaluing the humanities subjects and leading headteachers and deputies, even those with a history background, to concentrate funding, staffing and timetable time on those Core subjects which contribute to their schools' positions in the league tables. In effect, history teachers are having to face an entrenched institutional hostility to the humanities. As HMCI reported:

There is evidence that history is playing (and will play) an increasingly marginal role in the wider curriculum as schools give greater emphasis to literacy, numeracy and vocational subjects.

Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector for Schools, 2004/5.

As long as headteachers are free to deny pupils access to history in this way, historical knowledge and awareness in the population as a whole will continue to decline, regardless of what the history community, public opinion, or even ministers, might do about it. However the history curriculum is reformed, however much we might succeed in improving it, our efforts will be wasted if pupils are allowed – or encouraged, or forced – to drop the subject as early as 13 or 14.

This is why our first two recommendations lay the essential groundwork without which nothing else that we propose will achieve its aims:

² *Times Educational Supplement* 27 April 2007.

Recommendation 1

History should be made compulsory in every year of secondary schooling to the age of 16.

The Historical Association has often pointed out that we are one of very few countries that allow pupils to drop such an important subject at such an early stage. If history matters then it matters enough for pupils to study it until they have got a good grasp of the outlines of their country's history and of the historical background of the modern world. If we let them leave school without this, we are sending them out into the world improperly equipped to understand it.

Recommendation 2

The artificial division of subjects into "Core" and "Foundation" has had the effect of devaluing essential subjects like humanities and languages and should be abolished.

History is one of a number of vital subjects which have suffered badly from being classified as optional Foundation subjects. The crisis facing Modern Foreign Languages is the subject of a separate review undertaken by Lord Dearing; we are conscious that geography too has a strong claim to a stronger position within the curriculum. There are also those who, without properly understanding or appreciating the nature and value of subject disciplines, want to sweep academic subjects away in favour of a content-free competences-based curriculum. We reject this argument. Academic subjects embody well established and intellectually rigorous disciplines combining knowledge and professionalism. To learn skills or competences in a vacuum is to learn nothing. We therefore call for the position of subjects within the curriculum to be reinforced and for the artificial and harmful division of "Core" and "Foundation" subjects to be abolished.

History, Citizenship and British Identity

Changes in the constitutional structure of the United Kingdom and concerns about social cohesion between the different communities within it have led many commentators and politicians to ask urgent questions about the role and nature of teaching about Britain and its history within our schools. Specifically, it has been claimed that teachers should teach more British history in order to foster a sense of British national identity – “Britishness”, as it has been called – and of responsible citizenship.

The Ajebo Report on *Diversity and Citizenship in the Curriculum* (DfES 2007) called for a fourth strand within the existing Citizenship curriculum to focus on the historical context for modern citizenship. However, it also said that it did not want to go back to traditional British constitutional history and civics. Since Citizenship is compulsory to 16 this would mean, in theory, that some form of history is to be compulsory for every child to the age of sixteen.

However, this has to be weighed against the fact that the introduction of Citizenship has been heavily criticised and shown to be highly unsuccessful. **Ofsted has found Citizenship inadequately or poorly taught in one in four secondary schools in England** and in 2005 it found Citizenship to be **the worst taught subject at secondary level**.³ Ofsted reported similar findings in 2006. Teachers’ approach to Citizenship has been marked by ‘misunderstanding and scepticism’.⁴

It is difficult, therefore, to see the logic in adding a history strand to a failing subject rather than extending the scope of history itself, one of the best-taught subjects. We agree with the BBC’s education correspondent, Mike Baker, who wrote in response to the Ajebo Report:

If we really want to reawaken a greater sense of British identity, then it is time to bring back more British history.

Mike Baker *How about some British history?* <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

It is tempting to ascribe Citizenship’s problems to teething troubles and to say that it will be taught better when teachers have got used to it. We do not believe this. Citizenship was introduced into the curriculum as a compulsory subject in 2002, but it had had a long lead-in period from 1999 during which schools were given time and guidance to prepare for it. The reality on the ground is that responsibility for Citizenship has usually been given to PSE teachers. This is entirely suitable for those aspects of it which deal with life skills, but it is not appropriate for those aspects which deal with political education, with knowledge and understanding of the United Kingdom and its constitution, or with interaction with the environment. All too often

³ David Bell HMCi speaking to the Hansard Society, 17 January 2005.

⁴ *Annual Report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector for Schools, 2003/4.*

responsibility for Citizenship is a chore loaded onto already overloaded teachers, many of whom are unconvinced of its value.

The fact that Citizenship's introduction has been so unsatisfactory points to a much deeper problem. **Citizenship is not a subject.** It is an aspiration; indeed, active citizenship should be the goal of the whole of a child's education. But Citizenship as it is currently formulated for study in schools has no academic hinterland: it has no scholarship, no subject discipline, no academic tradition or convention upon which to draw or by which to be guided.

It is absolutely right that schools should aim to educate pupils in the duties and responsibilities of citizenship, but forcing an artificial subject called Citizenship on teachers is not the way to do it.

It is for this reason that our third recommendation is:

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| <i>Recommendation 3</i> |
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| Citizenship as a separate school subject should be abolished. |
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The different components should be shared out between history, geography, religious studies, English and PSE. History should take over those elements of citizenship education which are designed to develop pupils' understanding of the different identities that go towards a collective sense of "Britishness". This will also help free up curriculum space and timetable time to allow for history to be studied by all pupils to 16.

Does history promote Britishness?

Speaking at the *Why History Matters* conference at the Institute of Historical Research in February 2007, Professor Linda Colley warned against expecting history to solve all the problems associated with British national identity at a stroke. Some teachers also point out that it is not history's *role* to produce good citizens, however worthy an aspiration that might be.

Strictly speaking, this objection is well grounded. However, it is also true that a knowledge of one's nation's history does contribute to a sense of national identity, even if that was not the main motive for teaching it. Moreover, school history has by no means always been so fastidious about its motives. History teaching began in Britain in the nineteenth century with a specific agenda to foster patriotism and a sense of national and imperial identity. The stress upon skills of analysis and debate which has dominated history teaching since the late 1960s also emphasised that children who learned these through their history lessons would emerge better equipped for active citizenship within a democracy, subjecting public statements to analysis and aware of the bias and distortions in everything from news reporting to advertising. School

history has always had a political agenda; there is little point in pretending otherwise.

Teaching narrative British history *can*:

- give pupils a mental timeline into which to place their historical environment, and on which to plot their own, their families' and their communities' place in the national story.
- give people in the different parts of the United Kingdom an understanding of the historical and cultural backgrounds of their neighbours.
- give a sense of common experience and foster a sense of internal cohesion *as long as the course of study pays proper attention to the different histories of the different peoples of these islands*.
- help pupils to see what has been characteristic in Britain's culture and political and constitutional principles and which aspects have survived – and which are under threat - in the modern age.
- help pupils to find their own multi-layered sense of identity within the national story.

Narrative British history *cannot*:

- tell pupils what their identity should be.

In the end, people will always draw their own lessons from history, so it is important that they should do so on the basis of knowledge. Lessons drawn from ignorance of the past are usually based upon crude caricature and can engender serious inter-communal strife.

From this follow our fourth, fifth and sixth recommendations:

Recommendation 4

There should be a single course of study in history from 11 to 16, with a strong core of narrative British history.

British history is too important to be abandoned just when pupils reach the stage of maturity where they can best understand and appreciate it. British history, which should include elements of the history of the British Empire, should constitute an important element within GCSE.

Recommendation 5

British history should integrate elements of English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish and Empire and Commonwealth history.

Probably the single most common criticism of courses in British history is that they are not “British” at all, but rather courses in *English* history, with elements of Irish, Welsh and Scottish history included where they impinged on England, usually through armed conflict. Thus, for example, Welsh history rarely features at all in history classes in England, unless there is some coverage of Edward I’s conquest of Wales or of Owain Glyn Dwr’s rebellion against Henry IV (and, in truth, neither is very commonly taught in England).

Against this, it has to be said that it is not easy to integrate the different histories within Britain into one cohesive whole, ***nor is it necessarily always historically accurate to do so***. Just as British history is at once part of and separate from the history of Europe, so Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English history all have their own narratives, as well as being part of the wider narrative of British history. A particularly regrettable feature of recent history textbooks has been a tendency to speak of ‘Britain’ and ‘British’ figures when it is actually correct to speak of England and the English.

British history should therefore be genuinely British without compromising historical accuracy.

Recommendation 6

Pupils should gain an overall picture of the narrative shape of British history and should not spend time repeating or ‘revisiting’ topics.

It is difficult to reconcile (justified) complaints about the lack of time available for history teaching with the widespread tendency to devote scarce teaching time to going over topics pupils have already covered earlier in the curriculum. In theory such ‘revisiting’ is not repetition but looking at topics in greater depth, or looking at angles not covered the first time round, but in our experience that is seldom how pupils perceive it. It is this tendency which has led to the excessive coverage of Nazi Germany through the history curriculum which has been the subject of much recent complaint. **‘Revisiting’ a topic in effect denies pupils the opportunity to study something new.**

History at GCSE

It is in the examination years that the problems besetting school history are seen at their most oppressive. The team was trenchant in its criticisms of the effect current practice in history examinations has upon the subject:

Examinations and the boards that administer them now constitute the biggest obstacle to high standards in history.

Nearly all our concerns about the current state of history relate to the distorting and destructive influence the examination boards have on the way the subject is taught in schools.

The biggest single casualty in school history has been the Historical Imagination.

History examination courses militate against – and even penalise – the exercise of the imagination. It was felt that the brightest pupils actually *regress* when they reach GCSE.

Assessment for examination purposes has become mechanistic and arbitrary, and often penalises both the less and the more able.

Examinations are of little use as a guide to genuine historical ability; rather, they indicate how good the more compliant pupils are at passing history examinations. To argue, therefore, on the basis of improved examination results that standards in history are improving is a complete *non sequitur*. We are rewarding hoop-jumping, not history.

Although students often arrive in examination classes fired up with enthusiasm for history, this is all too often stifled by the deadening effect of examination requirements.

Examination requirements have become so complex that young people have to contort their historical understanding to meet the specific demands of the course and even the very different requirements of units within the same course.

Mechanistic work dulls the teacher's imagination as well as the pupils'.

Endless coaching for specific examination requirements robs teaching of the spark of inspiration and renders teachers jaded and bored. No pupil will be inspired by a bored teacher.

Teachers must have more opportunities to keep their own enthusiasm for history alive.

There are very few opportunities for teachers to go on courses connected with their subject knowledge, and subject knowledge nearly always comes very low on heads' and deputy heads' lists of priorities for CPD. ***If this is to change, the initiative must come from the top – heads will only respond to initiatives coming from government or the examination boards.***

Young people have very little sense of a wider chronological sweep into which they can fit the events they study at GCSE and AS/A level.

This is exacerbated by examination units which focus on short snippets of history. Without this breadth of knowledge, it is very difficult for young people to accord significance to particular historical events. Yet young people often have a thirst for historical knowledge, a thirst which simply is not being supplied.

We have lost the idea of the analytical narrative.

Not only does this impoverish school history, but it means that weaker pupils, who can often make a good attempt at narrative construction, can receive no credit for what they can actually do.

The assessment of pupils' understanding of historical source material has become so formulaic that it is of very limited historical use.

The less able are effectively excluded because they can seldom understand the subtleties of source material; the more able are penalised if their analysis does not fit the very precise demands of examination mark schemes. Moreover, the sheer amount of time source work takes up causes resentment, because it takes time away from what young people want above all from history – to find out what actually happened.

These criticisms therefore lead to our seventh and eighth recommendations:

Recommendation 7

History GCSE should draw mainly, *but not exclusively*, on the history studied in Years 10 and 11.

At present Progression in history is understood entirely in terms of skills – i.e. a pupil progresses from one year's study to the next by learning to analyse in greater depth or detail or to evaluate historical source material of greater complexity. Historical knowledge and content have always been excluded from this process. **We believe this view to be profoundly mistaken.** What marks a good historian is not simply how well he or she can present an argument – that is common to a wide range of disciplines – but how much history he or she knows and the ability to draw on that knowledge in presenting an argument. **It is impossible to conceive of someone being good at history without knowing a lot of history.**

The present arrangements for GCSE militate against pupils' exercising the full extent of their historical knowledge. To some extent this is inevitable: historical topics and periods must be set for study in much the same way that an English literature course must require candidates to study particular texts. But we do believe that the historical knowledge gained in Key Stage 3 can inform a good answer to questions put at Key Stage 4, in much the same way that knowledge gained in the early years of learning French or mathematics will still be relevant at GCSE. Therefore history GCSE should allow for

progression through historical knowledge and content by containing an element which enables pupils to make use of their knowledge of earlier periods. Doing this well is a sign of historical ability and might well constitute an appropriate criterion for the award of an A* grade.

Recommendation 8

The current examination and assessment requirements of history GCSE are in need of major revision.

Some of the weaknesses of current examination setting were highlighted in the Historical Association's 2005 report on History 14-19, described by Ofsted as 'seminal'. That report found:

Overall, the pattern of history examinations at GCSE can best be described as narrow and formulaic; some of the teachers and specialists we spoke to even described GCSE as a step backwards from Key Stage 3.

[At A/AS level] There are unhelpful inconsistencies in practice between awarding bodies and even within them. Content coverage is narrow, patchy and disjointed.

In the great majority of cases, assessment of work with sources bears very little direct relation to actual historical practice.

With very few exceptions, current examination practice in history at AS and A level is highly unsatisfactory.

Historical Association Curriculum Project: History 14-19 (2005)

Teachers at the Prince of Wales Summer Schools have reported in similar terms:

There is an excessively mechanistic and utility-driven model at the centre of educational policy. The emphasis on usefulness and equality can reduce subjects like English Literature and History to the teaching of extracts and skills.

Prince of Wales's Education Summer School, Buxton 2004

The current assessment criteria for history GCSE were developed in the 1980s but were based on those developed a decade earlier by the old *Schools Council Project: History 11-13*. A shelf-life of between twenty and thirty years might be considered fairly long; it is high time that these criteria were looked at afresh.

We believe that four changes in particular are needed:

Recommendation 8a

The development of an assessment objective testing pupils' ability to construct an historical narrative from historical material.

The construction of a historical narrative is the central skill of the historian yet, inexplicably, it has never formed part of the assessment pattern at GCSE or A level. We recognise that a lot of research needs to be done into how the construction of narrative can best be assessed, but we are adamant that it should form part of the experience of studying history at GCSE.

Note

The *construction* of narrative means building one's own version of events from the sources and information available to you. It does NOT mean rewarding simple 'narrative' answers to analytical questions.

Recommendation 8b

The current highly formulaic and unhistorical source questions in examinations should be replaced by historical inquiry based on real historical sources.

Pupils can and should work with historical sources. It is our contention that current examination practice denies them this opportunity by presenting them with small gobbets, often culled from the *text* of GCSE textbooks. **The practice of setting these in examination papers should cease.** We want pupils to have the opportunity to work with real source material in the context of genuine historical enquiry, in much the same way as people resort to the archives to research their family history. This would provide a unique opportunity to work in conjunction with museums, archives, galleries and heritage agencies and to develop proper use of ICT within GCSE history.

Recommendation 8c

Mark schemes should reward highly (rather than penalising, as at present) those candidates who show initiative, imagination and wide historical knowledge.

The award of an A* grade should be made conditional on wide historical knowledge and evidence of initiative beyond the strict requirements of the examination course.

Recommendation 8d

Candidates should be introduced to genuine differences in interpretations of major historical events.

Pupils are perfectly capable of coping with the idea that there is more than one way to interpret the past – and so they should. History’s value within a democratic society lies in its capacity to engender argument and debate. Pupils should learn that history is open to many different, and often conflicting, interpretations.

We have drawn up an outline of a possible course of study for school history 11-16 embodying these principles in the Appendix.

Resources and Training

It is a mark of poorly thought-out curriculum development that the practical implications in terms of resources and training are not planned for from the outset.

We are aware that our recommendations have major implications for teachers, not least in terms of developing and broadening their subject knowledge. Many, possibly all, would have to teach at least some history with which they were previously unfamiliar. We are aware that, with appropriate resources and support, teachers have met this sort of challenge in the past and we are confident that they will be able to do so again; however, we are also aware that there are pressures on teachers which can prevent them from getting the sort of help and support that is available.

Our ninth and tenth recommendations are therefore:

Recommendation 9

Resources for the history curriculum should be planned from the start, in conjunction with publishers, online providers, archives, libraries, museums, galleries and heritage agencies.

One of the saddest aspects of the all-pervasive influence of the examination has been the proliferation of textbooks and examination guides geared in fine detail to the specific requirements of particular examination papers. This has meant that books no longer carry any information except that which is absolutely necessary to pass a particular examination paper. This impoverishes the pupil's experience in history, which thus becomes entirely dominated by 'teaching to the test'. Where these books are written by examiners and carry the examination board logo this practice also raises serious questions of probity, since it means, in effect, that examiners are setting examinations and resourcing them for their private profit. Recent revelations in the *Times Educational Supplement* that some examiners have been selling specific examination advice on how to pass the papers they set suggest that there is an urgent issue here.⁵ Our concern is with the historical experience of the pupils and we do not believe that examiners should be able to benefit from retaining the sort of mechanistic examination system which lends itself to exploitation of this sort.

Recommendation 10

There should be genuine incentives to encourage teachers to extend their historical knowledge.

At present there are plenty of opportunities for teachers to extend their subject knowledge, through courses offered by universities and through the lecture programmes and CPD courses offered by the Historical Association and the Prince of Wales's Programme for Teaching, at Cambridge. However, it can be very difficult for a teacher to get funding or permission from a school to go to this sort of training. Usually, the only sort of subject-based training which teachers are allowed to go on is that provided by examination boards and geared specifically to the requirements of particular papers.

An important part of the reason for this is the systematic way in which the importance of subject knowledge has been downgraded. We therefore recommend that teachers' subject knowledge should be given much higher status. There are various ways in which this might be effected. Evidence of updating subject knowledge might be made a criterion in Ofsted inspections, or for the award of Advanced Skills Teacher status or Chartered History Teacher status. More knowledgeable teachers will inevitably produce higher standards. Headteachers need to get the message that the development and extension of teachers' subject knowledge should be taken seriously.

⁵ *Times Educational Supplement* 20 and 27 April 2007.

Appendix

A Proposed History Curriculum 11-16

The team devoted a lot of time to sketching out what a history curriculum 11-16 might look like.

It is important to be clear what such an outline can and cannot contain.

It can give a clear idea of the broad areas of study to be followed, of the organisational themes and underlying principles, and some idea of the assessment arrangements.

It cannot give a detailed list of historical content. Tempting though it might be to start with lists of major figures or events, this is not how successful curricula are constructed. Any course of study in history has to be selective in its content, and this means that some good, interesting and important topics will inevitably be omitted. **It is not feasible simply to list all the topics that one might wish for and expect them all to be taught.** Rather, we have aimed to provide pupils with a chronological framework into which they will be able to fit historical topics and events as they encounter them.

It is also important to stress that it is NOT our contention that every pupil should necessarily take GCSE in history. It would be possible to derive from the content for the full course of study an appropriate short course which would be suitable for those not best served by a full GCSE. *However, we firmly believe that every pupil, of every level of ability, needs to know about the history of the world they will live and work in. It can be positively dangerous to deny pupils, especially less academic pupils, the chance to learn their history objectively.*

This is therefore a DRAFT OUTLINE ONLY of what a single course of compulsory study in history 11-16 MIGHT look like. If it were to be adopted, there would need to be further research on aspects of the assessment, the development of appropriate guidance and resources, and eventually a more detailed programme of study.

This proposal is predicated on the basis that:

- History is made compulsory *every year* from 11 to 16
- A stated minimum of timetable time is laid down for each compulsory subject in the curriculum
- History takes on some of the more specifically political aspects of the citizenship curriculum.

We propose:

A single course of study for all pupils 11-16, based on three main themes:

- **Government**
- **Society**
- **Belief**

‘Government’ would include, as appropriate, monarchy, parliament, political rights, empire, democracy and dictatorship. It would also address the political aspects of citizenship.

‘Society’ will cover social and economic history, including the development of technology and, where schools wish to cover it, local or family history. This too can address issues relating to citizenship.

‘Belief’ will cover religious belief and political ideology where these have played a major part in history. This could be used to address issues of citizenship relating to the role of faith and ideas in society.

The structure of the course would be:

| | | | |
|----------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Year 7 | Britain and Britons | | |
| Year 8 | Britain and Britons | | |
| Year 9 | Britain and Britons | | |
| Year 10 | GCSE: Britain and Britons | GCSE: Source-based investigation | GCSE: Themes from 20 th century history |
| Year 11 | GCSE: Britain and Britons | GCSE: Source-based investigation | GCSE: Themes from 20 th century history |

The current National Curriculum structure based on History Study Units (HSUs), thematic studies of around a term’s length, has not proved robust enough to guarantee pupils coverage of all the content theoretically contained within them. Therefore, we propose dropping the HSU structure and moving instead to a structure based on topics requiring, typically, two or three lessons’ teaching.

Britain and Britons – *British Narrative History*

An understanding of Britain's distinctive history is crucial to any sense of national identity and shared values. These are often identified as including a sense of liberty, freedom of expression and tolerance.

Of course, not everyone would agree that British history shows Britain to be a tolerant or liberal country: British history has a long heritage of radicals and dissenters who have protested against the established order and who often suffered badly in the name of freedom of conscience or expression. It is a debate that carries on today.

This is why teaching British history should encourage debate and discussion about major figures and events in Britain's past. Rulers, military leaders and other traditional hero figures should certainly be taught about, but we should avoid anything looking like an "official" history of Britain. Indeed, official histories are usually the hallmark of unfree societies which stifle debate and freedom of opinion.

Is it really British?

We are also committed to ensuring that 'British History' actually *is* British. To show how this might affect the teaching of some familiar topics, take the example of the events of 1066.

Making it British – the case of 1066

1066 is easily the most famous and memorable date in English history. This is partly because the date trips neatly off the tongue, but mainly because it was identified as a "revolution" in English constitutional history in the English whig tradition, the point when a mythical balanced "Anglo-Saxon constitution" was overthrown by the more autocratic Normans.

However, since the Norman Conquest of England had major implications for Wales, Scotland and Ireland, it is a major date in British history too. It might therefore be presented in schools in a significantly different way.

Traditionally, the Norman Conquest has been taught as a *starting* point, often the opening topic in the HSU *Medieval Realms*. It is an engaging story with a simple structure which children can relate to: a straight contest between King Harold II Godwinsson and Duke William of Normandy for the throne of England.

However, it could also be taught in much more of a British context. For example, a figure usually left out of the story is Edgar the Ætheling. Edgar had by far the best blood claim to the English crown, but as he was only fourteen at the time of the Battle of Hastings he played no role in the events of 1066. After Hastings, however, he led the most serious rebellion the Normans faced before he fled to Scotland where he played a major role in Scottish politics. The story of Edgar the Ætheling therefore provides a rich case study which extends the traditional content coverage across national boundaries in a way which is entirely consonant with the history.

This can be taken a step further. 1066 did not happen in a vacuum: it was the climax of a series of challenges to reigning monarchs in the eleventh century, some of which mark dates in Irish and Scottish history every bit as important as 1066 is to the English. Thus:

In 1013 the High King of Ireland, Brian Boru, broke the power of the Vikings in Ireland (the Dublin Norse, as they are called) at the Battle of Clontarf, though he died in the fighting.

Five years later, King Malcolm II defeated the English at the Battle of Carham and drove them out of Scotland. Malcolm II was succeeded by his grandson Duncan, the same Duncan who appears in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Duncan was indeed overthrown and killed by Macbeth, but the real figures were very different from the characters in the play: there is a useful learning activity in a comparison between the history and the drama.

These events could fit into the overall theme "Government" as follows, with each topic designed to be taught in one or two lessons:

Theme: Government
Kingship and Succession in Eleventh Century Britain

The Viking invasions
Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf
Scotland: the Battle of Carham
Duncan and Macbeth
Ethelred II of England and the Vikings
The Danish kings of England and Edward the Confessor
1066 – the Disputed Succession
Challenges to William: Edgar the Ætheling and Hereward the Wake

Resourcing

Although this would make for a strong narrative, with a number of themes linking the experiences in England, Scotland and Ireland, clearly some teachers would feel uncomfortable with teaching unfamiliar material. The resourcing implications are therefore:

- a) Textbooks for classroom use, covering the topics.
- b) Short guides, possibly online, for teachers to give them a good grasp of the narrative of events.
- c) An online bank of materials from museums, archives or from archaeology to support the topics, with suggestions for activities based on the materials. These could be designed for classroom use or for homework tasks.

In addition there would be a need for subject-based CPD to ensure teachers felt confident with the historical topics and were aware of areas to explore.

In time, this sort of material will no doubt be available commercially, but in the short term, and especially for "new" topics, some material and guidance might need to be provided centrally.

There are plenty of other examples of familiar topics which could be taught in much more of a British context, including:

Magna Carta 1215 Among the barons at Runnymede were representatives of Ireland and Scotland, and the charter's terms specifically enjoined King John to make peace with the Welsh – on their terms

The Tudor period saw the 1535 Act of Union between England and Wales; the effect of the defeat at Flodden on Scotland; the religious conflict within Scotland that led Mary, Queen of Scots to flee to England; the beginnings of the Ulster plantations

The English Civil War has long been seen by historians as an event which involved all parts of Britain, but this idea has not fully taken root in schools. The wars began with a major rebellion in Ireland and a war of religion in Scotland. The Scots in particular played a crucial role in the events of the 1640s, and it was their decision to hand Charles I over to Parliament that essentially sealed his fate.

In addition to ensuring an appropriately 'British' coverage, the course will also follow its three threads of Government, Society and Belief through each element, with a series of key questions which will shape the programme of study.

European History

The relationship between Britain and Europe is the subject of ongoing debate both among historians and in the population at large. It is clear, however, that at certain points major events in European history have had an important impact on Britain, and pupils should learn something about these.

There will never be time to teach everything we might want pupils to know about, but it is important that some elements of European history should feature within the largely British narrative outline.

Britain and Britons:

British Narrative History Years 7-9

This gives an idea of the chronological coverage and some of the key questions around which lessons might be based.

| | Period | Government | Society | Belief |
|---------------|--------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Year 7 | Romans | Did Britain gain from being in the Roman Empire? | How can we find out what peoples lived in Britain in Roman times? Were the Romans really more technologically advanced than the Celts? | What can we deduce about the Romans from their different beliefs? |
| | Saxons and Celts | How did the Celts react to the arrival of the Angles and Saxons? What powers did an Anglo-Saxon king have? | In what ways were the Saxons like us? | How did the arrival of Christianity affect the peoples of Britain in Saxon times? |
| | Vikings | How successfully did the Irish, English and Scots resist the Viking invasions? | Do the Vikings deserve their violent reputation? | How did the Viking wars affect people's faith in God? |
| | Early medieval | Why were there so many challenges to the thrones of Britain in the 11 th century? Why did England grow so powerful? | How fair was feudalism? What did medieval people understand by "Christendom"? | What can we tell about people's beliefs and fears from the churches and cathedrals they built? What did Thomas à Becket die for? |
| | The Crusades | What was the purpose of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem? | Why did people go on crusade? What can we learn from the story of the Children's Crusade? | Why did Christians fear the spread of Islam? Why did the Crusades spark off anti-Semitism? |
| Year 8 | Medieval – peasants and plague | How important were Magna Carta and Parliament? Did medieval kings believe in law? Why did the Kings of England try to conquer Wales, Ireland and Scotland? | Why didn't peasants revolt more often? | How did people make sense of the Black Death? |
| | The 100 Years' War | What did the Kings of England want the crown of France for? | Did the wars with France give the English people a sense of unity? | How did people reconcile warfare with their Christian beliefs? |

| | | | | |
|---------------|------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| | The 15 th century | Why was it so dangerous to be king in 15 th century England and Scotland? Why did Wales not win its independence? | Is Chaucer a reliable guide to the people of 14 th and 15 th century England? | What did the Church mean to people in the late Middle Ages? Why were the Lollards suppressed? |
| | Renaissance and Reformation | Why did Henry VIII make himself Head of the Church? | What was so new about Renaissance art? What was life like at the courts of James IV and Henry VIII? | Why did some people become Protestants but others didn't? Why were some people prepared to kill for their faith? |
| | The Elizabethan Years | Why did Elizabeth I stay on her throne while Mary Stuart lost hers? How dangerous was the Spanish Armada? | What can we learn from Shakespeare about people in Elizabethan England? | Why did the Irish stay Catholic? How effective were the Ulster plantations? |
| | Exploration and Settlement | Why did so many explorers feel they had to <i>conquer</i> the lands and peoples they encountered? Were the Sea Dogs heroes – or pirates? | How did the Jamestown settlement survive? | Why did some people feel God wanted them to settle overseas? |
| Year 9 | The civil wars | Why did Charles I lose his throne? Why did Cromwell become so powerful? | How did people decide which side to fight on in the civil wars? | Who won the Putney debates? |
| | Restoration and Revolution | What freedoms did English people have by the end of the 17 th century that they didn't have at the start? | What lessons were learnt from the plague and fire in London? | Why did people in the seventeenth century want to know more about science? |
| | A New Britain | Why did government get involved in reforming social conditions? | How well did eighteenth century Britain feed its population? How did the new machinery change people's lives? | Why did people have such different beliefs about economic life and social class? |
| | Slavery | Why did it take so long to abolish slavery in the British Empire? What part Britain play in combating the slave trade after abolition? | How did British people make money out of African slavery? | Why did Africans, slave owners and abolitionists have such different ideas about equality? |
| | American independence | Were the American colonists right to declare themselves independent? | How popular was the war with America? | What did 18 th century people understand to be their "rights"? |
| | The French Revolution and Napoleon | Why did Britain go to war with the French Revolutionaries and with Napoleon? | Did the wars with France help create a united kingdom? Why did Nelson and Wellington become national heroes? | What did people in Britain believe they were fighting for and against? |
| | | | | |

GCSE History

This would consist of three main components:

- **Britain and Britons**
- **Themes from 20th Century history**
- **Investigations**

Britain and Britons would focus on two aspects:

- the creation of the modern state
- the British Empire.

Themes from Twentieth Century History would look at two broad periods, with options for looking at specific examples in depth:

- First World War to Second World War (including the Holocaust)

Either

- Communism and Democracy 1917-1991

Or

- Conflict in the Middle East 1917-2001

Investigations would focus on Society and Belief and would be based on source material made available online. Centres would free to construct inquiries from any period of history, including local and family history.

The course structure would therefore look like this:

| Government | Society | Belief |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Britain and Britons: nation-building | | |
| Britain and Britons: the British Empire and its legacy | | |
| Themes from 20 th century history | Source-based Investigation | Source-based Investigation |

Course Content

Britain and Britons: Nation-building

- Acts of Union (Wales, Scotland and Ireland)
- The vote: the Great Reform Act; the Chartists; women's suffrage
- Nationalism in modern Britain – conflict in Northern Ireland; devolution

Britain and Britons: The British Empire and its Legacy

- Africa: Scramble to Boer War
- The British Empire in World War II
- Independence: India and Pakistan OR an African country OR a Caribbean country
- The impact of Empire on post-war Britain and its people

Themes from 20th Century History

- First World War to Second World War
AND EITHER
- Communism and Democracy 1917-1991
OR
- Conflict in the Middle East 1917-2001

Society and Belief

For this component, schools would be provided with an on-line archive of historical material, to which they would be encouraged to add from other sources, such as other websites, organised trips to museums or heritage sites, further reading etc. Schools would be free to select from the archive according to the ability level of their pupils. Pupils would be encouraged to use this material, and to explore beyond it, in order to build up a picture of life and belief at different periods in the past.

Pupils would complete one task on Society and one on Belief.

Pupils will be set open-ended tasks in which they will be required to display their knowledge using the source material they have studied.

Such tasks might look like this:

Using the source material you have studied:

What can you learn from looking at Lincoln Cathedral about what medieval people believed in? Did poor people and rich people believe the same things?

Describe what religious beliefs people had in Elizabethan England. Why did religion cause so much conflict?

Describe how people lived in Cromwell's New Model Army. Why do you think it was so successful in battle?

What sort of crimes did people commit in Victorian times? Were the Victorians tough enough on the causes of crime?

Describe how some doctors worked out what caused cholera. Why did it take so long for most doctors to agree with them?

What did fascists and communists believe in the years between the wars? How did people decide which group to join?

Describe what you have found out about life for immigrants into Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. Why were there so many arguments for and against immigration?

Tasks drawn from family, local or community history

Assessment

Assessment objectives would focus on:

- Historical Knowledge
- Construction of historical narrative
- Construction and presentation of historical argument
- The evaluation and deployment of historical source material

GCSE assessment would be based on two written examination papers, one on British History and one on Twentieth Century History. Assessment in Society and in Belief would be through written test undertaken in controlled conditions at two appropriate points during the course.

Further Research

The main areas for further research are:

- Pupils' construction of historical narrative and how it might best be assessed
- The most effective way to integrate online archival resources with teaching and assessment. We would hope to research this in conjunction with the Churchill Archives Centre in Cambridge.