Lessons from the Past

Policy Exchange

The State of History in English Secondary Schools

Zachary Marsh and Iain Mansfield

Introduction by Lord Roberts of Belgravia

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About the Authors

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Published by
Policy Exchange, 1 Old Queen Street, Westminster, London SW1H 9JA

www.policyexchange.org.uk

ISBN: 978-1-917201-52-0

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Endorsements

'This report by Policy Exchange is a very balanced piece of work and makes its case extremely well. It is welcome news that the take-up of history at GCSE and A-Level is so strong – students clearly recognise the importance of a grasp of history.'

Rt Hon Lord Blunkett PC FAcSS, former Secretary of State for Education and Employment

'As a boy who arrived in this great country from Baghdad, I know how important it is that every child in this country – regardless of birth and background – has the opportunity to learn about Britain's inspiring heritage. This excellent report by Policy Exchange shows how the changes made over the last 15 years have strengthened the study of history in schools. Policy Exchange's recommendation of a new GCSE survey paper that would ensure every child who completes History GCSE has a strong understanding of Britain's national story is exactly what we need to build on this success.'

Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi, former Secretary of State for Education

'This thorough report from Policy Exchange demonstrates how much progress has been made over the last fifteen years, with increasing numbers of students receiving a knowledge-rich, chronological history education during Key Stage Three. It was heartening to see that core topics such as Magna Carta, the Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, the Slave Trade and its abolition, and Britain's roles in the World Wars are each taught in over 85% of schools – though disappointing that inspiring events in English history such as the Battles of Agincourt, Trafalgar and Waterloo appear to have dropped off the curriculum.'

'Policy Exchange's report rightly identifies that the area where further improvement is needed is at GCSE-level, where increasing specialisation and an over-emphasis on narrow 'theme-related' topics such as health means that too many pupils are never exposed to the full chronological breadth of British history. It cannot be right that a pupil could achieve a '9' in GCSE History and yet never have heard of the Glorious Revolution or the Act of Union. A British History survey paper, mandatory for all pupils taking History GCSE, would rectify this deficiency and ensure those taking the GCSE have a full chronological understanding of how the British state and society have developed over time – and why this is important in understanding our nation today.'

Rt Hon Sir Nick Gibb, former Minister of State for Schools

'The public appreciation of a nation's history plays a fundamental role in ensuring social cohesion. This paper from Policy Exchange should put to bed the common argument (now at least twenty years out of date) that school curriculums generally ignore Britain's imperial past. It contains thoughtful and clearly justified recommendations for how history teaching in England could be further improved to serve this function.'

Robert Peal MBE, joint headteacher of the West London Free School, history teacher and author and editor of the 'Knowing History' school textbook series

'A clear-sighted report that identifies the strengths of school history teaching and the impact of the subject community of history teachers on the quality of history education. Whilst outlining all the evidence of a subject in good health, this report doesn't back away from more difficult but timely messages. Whatever the challenges of maintaining political impartiality, when choosing and framing historical content, history teaching must not become advocacy and a vehicle to promote particular political perspectives. The recommendations in this report are measured and represent a clear and considered path forward for the subject.'

Heather Fearn, former Ofsted Curriculum Unit lead and history curriculum specialist

Introduction

By Lord Roberts of Belgravia, historian

Aldous Huxley once wrote '*that men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons that history has to teach*'. As sage as his observation may have been, I, and I am sure many others who have devoted their careers to the historical profession, remain very glad that we continue to attempt to teach young people vital lessons from the past. Amongst the varied clutch of subjects which students are expected to grapple with in our schools, history alone seeks to look backwards as well as forwards to enable us to make better and swifter decisions in the present.

We learn about the past in myriad ways and through a wide variety of sources – film and television, books, museums, podcasts and papers. Schools, however, are uniquely situated to give all young people a firm grounding in the expansive sweep of history by teaching the dates, people and events that provide the essential context for wider historical understanding. History teaching in schools has an obligation to fill the chronological gaps that popular history too often leaves behind. Yet the eighteenth century for example, on which I have written extensively, is too often a gaping blind spot, denying pupils the foundational knowledge from which to make sense of the rapid change of the nineteenth century.

It ought to be the birthright of English pupils to learn the story of their nation and the manner in which it has shaped and been shaped by its interactions with the wider world. Teaching the long narrative arc of British history in a manner that enables young people to orientate themselves, both historically and within our modern society, is only becoming more essential as our nation becomes more diverse and culturally fragmented.

This excellent report marks a timely intervention into the ongoing reappraisal of the curriculum prompted by the Government's current Review. The rich original data it gathers from schools, universities and exam boards paints a picture of the school history landscape that leaves much cause for celebration, particularly in comparison to other subjects. The enduring popularity of history, ranking fifth at both GCSE and A Level, demonstrates that young people continue to see the value – and the enjoyment – of learning about the past.

It also illuminates a number of key challenges for the role history must play in our society. It is vital that pupils are taught the history of their own nation in a manner that seeks to do more than simply inculcate shame

about our past. With the public clearly committed to the idea that history teaching ought to present a positive story of our national past, we must not shy away from promoting rigorous and nuanced school history that rejects ideological one-sidedness and the imposition of faddish prejudices on men and women who led complex but enthralling lives.

As this report finds, too much of the history taught in our schools remains fixated on 'Henry to Hitler', saturating students in the Tudors and twentieth century European conflict. As important and engaging as these subjects are, they have squeezed out the wider narrative that is essential to develop a coherent understanding of the past.

I therefore welcome Policy Exchange's call for a British history survey paper that will end the all-too-common scrimping on chronological breadth at GCSE. This will ensure all students who take the subject to 16 have a developed sense of change and continuity over time, anchored by dates that embed an unfolding narrative from 1066 to the recent past.

History in schools serves an essential purpose. When done well it exposes young people from all backgrounds to the richness and complexity of human experience and the engaging stories that have unfolded through time. It teaches them to be analytical and critical and equips them with the knowledge and sensibility to be effective citizens. We can ill-afford to become a society adrift from our past, or encumbered by a false narrative of history that simply talks Britain down. We must hope that the Curriculum Review appreciates not only the strong position of history in English schools, but the need to make changes where necessary to secure a thorough and balanced teaching of our national past.

Executive Summary

History is a fundamentally important subject in our schools. It gives students the opportunity to develop a rich knowledge of how the lives of people have differed over time, the key processes of change and how the community and nation they find themselves a part of has evolved. Without a secure understanding of these concepts, young people find themselves unanchored – unaware of why their life and their world is now the way that it is. History plays a vital role in building a patriotic, inclusive and cohesive society with shared values – which is of growing importance as Britain becomes increasingly diverse.

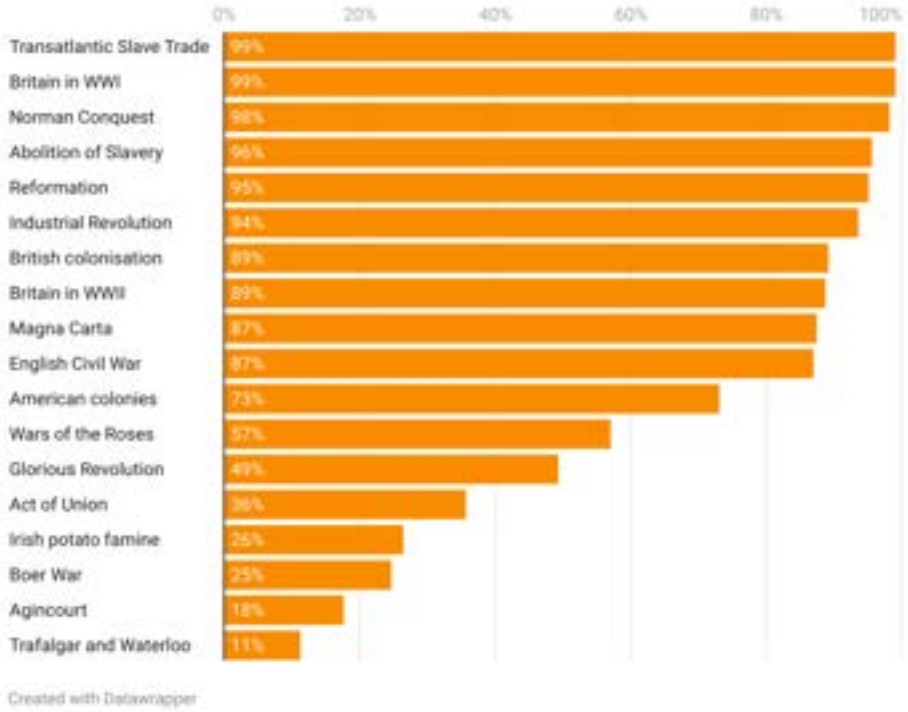
With the Government's ongoing Curriculum Review change may be on the horizon, justifying a reappraisal of how history is taught in schools. **Our research assesses the health of school history across its full breadth – from teacher training, to curriculum, to teaching resources and A level and GCSE qualifications.** As part of this work Policy Exchange submitted Freedom of Information requests to 500 English secondary schools, generating exclusive data on how and what students are being taught in history lessons. These were supplemented by interviews undertaken with a range of expert teachers, school leaders and inspectors. Further Freedom of Information requests were sent to all History PGCE courses in England about the content of their training programmes.

History in English secondary schools is generally in a strong position. Whilst England's improvements in international rankings in English and Maths have been widely recognised, History is another area where post-2010 reforms, reinforced by Ofsted's greater focus on the curriculum, have delivered success. At Key Stage 3 a clear majority of schools offer a broad and balanced curriculum. History remains popular at both GCSE and A Level, ranking as the fifth most popular subject for both qualifications in 2024. At both GCSE and A Level students are taught rigorous and varied courses, covering key themes and topics in the history of Britain and the wider world in increasing detail. Unlike many subjects there is no specialist teacher shortage in history – in 2023/24 92.4% of all history teaching hours were taught by specialists, while almost two-thirds of schools have all KS3 history lessons except cover taught by a specialist. Indeed, the quality of discourse and subject expertise within the history teaching community makes it the envy of the wider profession. However, in some cases students struggle to develop a synoptic outline of the national past and are exposed to one-sided and politicised narratives.

There is wide variation in the time given for history teaching at Key Stage 3. In general most schools devoted sufficient time to teach students

a rigorous curriculum. Policy Exchange research through Freedom of Information requests found that on average schools taught 1 hour and 47 minutes worth of history a week. However, nearly one in ten schools teach less than 80 minutes a week, whilst 13% of schools teach more than 125 minutes weekly. In schools which only offer a 2-year KS3, students received 64 fewer hours on average of history teaching than their peers in schools where KS3 lasts 3 years. Schools with higher numbers of students eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) taught proportionally more history at KS3, with those with 40% or more eligible for FSM teaching 20 more hours on average than schools where fewer than 20% were eligible. However, schools where less than 20% of pupils were eligible for FSM saw 6% more students take history at GCSE compared to schools where eligibility for FSM was 40% or more.

Key events in British history are widely taught across the vast majority of English schools. Events such as the Norman Conquest, Magna Carta, the Industrial Revolution and the Reformation are taught in over 85% of schools. Topics which touch on Britain's imperial past – despite assertions to the contrary in the public sphere – are almost universally taught. Encouragingly, 99% of schools teach the transatlantic slave trade, 96% teach the abolition of slavery and 89% teach the British Empire. This suggests those concerned by poor coverage of these topics in school may be thinking of an earlier era of teaching – or may simply not remember these areas being covered. While the overall picture is positive, some traditional topics in British history lack coverage. The battles of Agincourt, Waterloo and Trafalgar, which formed a core part of the curriculum for much of the 20th century, are each now taught in less than one in five schools.



There is too much specialisation in history at GCSE – and too much repetition at A Level. Despite GCSE courses being of consistently high quality, the fact that students study only four modules constrains the range of history they are exposed to. For example, 63% of students study the fairly narrow topic of 'health through time' at GCSE, whilst over three quarters study Nazi Germany and over 60% study the Elizabethan period. This limits their ability to develop a wider chronological understanding of the past and of wider themes and trends in national and world history. At A Level there is strong coverage of US, Russian and Germany history. However, there is limited study of wider parts of the world such as the Middle East and China, with only 1% studying China at GCSE and only 5% at A Level. Similarities between the modules offered by exam boards at GCSE and A level, and the popularity of these similar courses, indicates that too many students are revisiting narrow topics throughout their time in school as opposed to being exposed to a rich range of topics. For example, data indicates many students study the Tudor period as a British study at both GCSE and A Level.

83% of schools surveyed had made changes to 'diversify' or 'decolonise' their history curriculums, with some 'diversified' curriculums adopted by several hundred schools. In some cases this had a positive effect, exposing students to varied and knowledge-rich studies that better cover key areas of British history such as the women's suffrage movement, as well as a wider range of world history. However, in too many cases this process has gone too far, leading to the teaching of radical and contested interpretations of the past as fact, or with anecdotes of interesting lives replacing a deeper understanding of the core drivers of history. Numerous cases of poor-quality resources being used to teach contested narratives as fact have been identified. For example, one book used in classrooms claims black people built Stonehenge, whilst free resources produced by a subject organisation celebrate the genital mutilation of a slave as a form of 'gender transition'.

This politicising of the curriculum may have been promoted by low quality teacher training. Research by Policy Exchange has found that amongst PGCSE programmes analysed, trainees receive on average just 17.8 days of subject specific training over the course of a yearlong programme. This means that too many new teachers lack the subject-specific pedagogical knowledge to critically evaluate training and resources and ensure their teaching remains impartial. Furthermore, despite the limited time given to subject training, 76% of PGCE history courses include sessions on diversifying or decolonising the curriculum. Trainee reading lists also include articles advocating extreme conceptions of inclusive curriculums, such as an article on how black history month can fuel 'micro-aggressions' in black students, without a sufficient balance of alternative perspectives.

Some history teachers are reluctant to use externally produced lesson resources – despite these often being of higher quality. Planning and creating resources takes up 15% of the hours teachers work and is

consistently identified as one of the biggest factors in teacher workload. Despite this 59% of schools said they do not use textbooks as part of their lessons. This is despite these resources being consistently high quality and the growing availability of new externally produced packages such as Complete Curriculum Programmes. In contrast, examples of teacher-made resources provided show wide variation in quality.

Policy Recommendations

1. **A new British history survey paper should be introduced as a core requirement for all students taking history at GCSE, replacing an existing paper.** To address issues with excessive content at GCSE, all exam board specifications should be required to replace one of their current four topics with a specific breadth paper covering British history from 1066 to 1989. This should allow students to draw on and consolidate their learning from KS3 about Britain and its interactions with the wider world. A paper of this kind would guarantee that all students taking history to GCSE level have a clear chronological understanding of the evolution of the British state and society and how this has shaped our nation today.

2. **Beyond this, the Government's ongoing Curriculum Review should avoid tinkering with the National Curriculum for history, particularly at KS3.** Under the existing National Curriculum the vast majority of schools have devised challenging and varied curriculums that expose students to key events and themes in British and wider world history. The vast majority of schools already meet the Review's objective that their curriculum '*reflects the issues and diversities of our society, ensuring all children and young people are represented*'. There will be no benefit to forcing schools to undertake time-consuming and often costly curriculum redesign to align with new standards.

3. **The GCE Subject Level Conditions and Requirements for History should be amended to create an expectation that schools teach different historical topics at GCSE and A Level.** The Department for Education, in conjunction with Ofqual, should amend the regulations to require that as part of the breadth and depth of content, students must study different periods or topics to those taken at GCSE. This will reduce the number of students leaving school with only a narrow understanding of the past based on the revisitation of a restricted number of historical topics. Recognising that many students move to a different school or college between GCSEs and A-Levels, students should also be encouraged to choose different options at A-Level than at GCSE.

4. **The ITT Core Content Framework should be revised to establish**

a minimum time requirement of 25 hours for subject-specific training. This will ensure that trainee teachers are given sufficient time in training to develop a secure awareness of the content and pedagogical techniques of their subject. These hours must be reserved for genuine subject content and not used to shoehorn in generic training under the guise of subject-specificity.

5. **The Early Career Framework should be amended to introduce a greater focus on subject-specific training.** Subject and Curriculum Standard 3 should be extended to ensure new teachers receive greater subject support during their first years in the classroom. This will enable the PGCE to continue to focus on giving students a general grounding in the teaching profession, with support for new teachers as they grow into resource and curriculum development through the ECF.

6. **Schools should be mindful of their obligation to ensure impartiality when designing their history curriculum.** While diverse and varied history that reflects Britain's multi-cultural society is to be welcomed, the teaching of divisive and one-sided narratives is not. Schools should ensure that they include a variety of conflicting historical perspectives when teaching contested topics and events. Schools should also be careful when using external resources to ensure these do not distort the past or offer a particularly ones-sided version of events. The ITT Core Content Framework Standard 8 should be amended to specifically mention the obligation to teach impartially without inappropriately expressing one's personal beliefs.

7. **Schools should recognise high quality external resources are a good investment.** With high workload the top reason teachers are considering leaving the profession, it is vital for schools to acknowledge that teachers cannot be expected to resource high quality lessons consistently on their own. History departments should be encouraged to consider investing in high-quality externally-produced resources, such as textbook series and Complete Curriculum Programmes, to enable teachers to focus on their vital role of delivering content in the classroom.

Methodology

Policy Exchange submitted Freedom of Information requests to a random sample of 500 secondary state schools, 249 of whom responded fully or in part to our request. These schools were asked about the amount of teaching time devoted to history at KS3, the structure and content of their KS3 history curriculums, the proportion of specialist history teaching in their schools and the numbers of students that progressed to taking history at GCSE. A booster sample was also conducted comprised solely of a random sample of grammar schools. Full details of this research and the questions asked can be found in Chapter 3.

Further Freedom of Information requests were submitted to all 37 universities offering specific Postgraduate Certificate of Education courses with a history specialism. These universities were asked to provide course guides and information regarding module structure, in addition to teaching materials used to instruct trainees. Full details of this research can be found in Chapter 6.

England's three major exam boards – AQA, Pearson Edexcel and OCR – were asked to provide information regarding their history modules at both GCSE and A level and the uptake of these options. This was then compared and analysed.

As part of Chapter 5 a data-scraping exercise was completed, drawing on a wide variety of publicly available history teaching resources released by publishers, educational companies and third sector organisations to present a representative sample of teaching resources.

In addition to these research tools interviews were conducted with a wide range of experts with extensive experience in history teaching, school leadership or the broader social importance of history. We would like to thank the following for sharing their expertise with us, in addition to a range of subject specialists, school leaders and key policy makers who prefer to remain anonymous.

All views expressed in this report, and any errors, are solely those of the authors.

- Christine Counsell, leading history curriculum developer
- Heather Fearn, history curriculum expert
- Sir Nick Gibb, former Schools Minister
- Benjie Groom, History Subject Lead at Oak National Academy
- Stuart Lock, CEO of Advantage Schools
- Robert Peal, Head of the West London Free School and author of Knowing History

- Sir Trevor Phillips, founding chair of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission
- Lord Sewell of Sanderstead, educator and former chair of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities
- Amanda Spielman, formerly His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools

Chapter 1: Why study history?

As a compulsory subject to the end of Key Stage 3 and the fifth most popular GCSE, the time allotted to history in the curriculum is significant. More than almost any other school subject, many individuals choose to continue to learn about history throughout their lives – through visits to museums and stately homes, via popular works of non-fiction or historical fiction, and through television documentaries and podcasts. But why do we study history?

The National Curriculum specification for Key Stage 3 sets out that:

> *"A high-quality history education will help pupils gain a coherent knowledge and understanding of Britain's past and that of the wider world. It should inspire pupils' curiosity to know more about the past. Teaching should equip pupils to ask perceptive questions, think critically, weigh evidence, sift arguments, and develop perspective and judgement. History helps pupils to understand the complexity of people's lives, the process of change, the diversity of societies and relationships between different groups, as well as their own identity and the challenges of their time."*

Ofsted's recent subject review of history argues similarly, stating:

> *"History immerses pupils in unfamiliar worlds, and in the diversity and commonality of human experience across time and place. At the same time, history helps pupils to make sense of their own experiences, and of the world they inhabit. The study of history is complex and constantly evolving through new approaches, new lenses and new evidence. Every pupil is entitled to encounters with the richness of the past and the complexity of historical enquiry."*

To look beyond Government sources, an essay for the Historical Society set out eight reasons to study history:

- History helps us understand people and societies
- History helps us understand change and how the society we live in came to be
- History is important in our own lives
- History contributes to moral understanding
- History provides identity
- Studying history is essential for good citizenship
- History develops skills
- History is useful in the world of work

While most people would accept all of the above as things that history

can do, in practice different people would place a different emphasis on different elements. For some, the primary reason for studying history is to help us understand who we are, where we have come from, and in developing a sense of identity; others may see the principal purpose of studying the past as to avoid mistakes in the present; still others may emphasise the development of skills either for an individual's use in life and work. A successful history curriculum will strike a balance between these – but, with limited time available, choices must be made.

Those we interviewed during the course of writing this report therefore provided answers that meshed with the more formal statements provided above – but, as one would expect, typically emphasised one or more elements.

Gaining an understanding of the past and how it influences the present was, perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the most common themes. Stuart Lock, CEO of Advantage Schools, said, "*History gives students the ability to better understand and hence navigate their place in society through an understanding of vital historical and cultural context,*" while Sir Trevor Phillips, founding chair of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, said "*History is a guide to what to do next – it gives us the chance to learn from the past.*" Leading history curriculum developer Christine Counsell observed that, "*memory and other informal methods of relating the past are socially important but insufficient for educational purposes. History is contested and so pupils need to understand disciplined and rational methods – the approaches and conventions that historians have established for advancing and debating their claims*", while former Schools Minister Sir Nick Gibb said, "*To understand the world and our national past is important for understand the modern world. Large parts of British life are shaped by history or traditions that are explained by history*". A former Trust CEO we spoke to added that it was, "*Also important to give students a sense of 'the great sweep' of world history*".

History's role in building society, identity, nation and a shared sense of democracy was also a common theme amongst those interviewed. Benjie Groom, History Subject Lead at Oak National Academy said "*History provides students with a sense of where we as people and society come from, a sense of identity*". Christine Counsell said that "*A knowledge of history is essential for democracy. All citizens need an understanding of where and why democratic values and institutions have emerged and the long struggles by diverse peoples to secure democracy for all*". Sir Trevor Phillips agreed that history was "*vital for commonality*" and added that it was "*essential to have shared understandings of environment and identity,*" saying that "*shared understandings are necessary for meaningful interaction.*" Lord Sewell of Sanderstead, educator and former chair of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities said that "*we must understand antecedents of our culture and what it means to be British – complex with good and bad strands, but a journey into a past that links to the national story,*" and warned that "*we need it even more now, because history is being perceived with a sense of shame. But it should be a unifying force.*"

Several interviewees commented on the importance of enjoying history. Stuart Lock said that history "*gives students access to the joy of understanding and partaking in history as an academic discipline as an end in itself,*" while Lord Sewell of Sanderstead said simply, "*History is meant to be enjoyed.*"

When considering the more practical benefits of history, our interviewees tended to consider this broadly. Benjie Groom said that history "*develops historical skills – which should be delivered through subject content – and also helps students to understand careers specifically related to history such as historians, archaeologists, museum curators*", while a former Trust CEO we spoke to said it was "*critical for cultural literacy and societal participation*". Christine Counsell commented on the way in which familiarity with historians' arguments and their own practice in engaging in those historical arguments could "*teach pupils discipline and rigour that are needed in upholding agreed standards of truth within a subject domain.*" Several interviewees mentioned the role of history in expanding perspectives. Robert Peal, Head of the West London Free School and author of Knowing History, said that history "*informs people about the expansive nature of human capability by showcasing what has been done and achieved in the past,*" while Amanda Spielman, formerly His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, observed that it could help to "*develop the understanding that at different times different issues have been overriding moral pre-occupations. Taught well it helps people to develop self-awareness, to resist the simplistic teaching of victim narratives and the imposing of modern moral judgements on historical events.*"

We found broad-based support amongst those interviewed for the teaching of history as serving multiple, distinct but related objectives: the understanding of the past and, through it, the world we live in today; the development of a shared sense of identity, community and society, and the imparting of skills, taught through subject content, that can serve individuals in interacting with the world.

Knowledge As the Foundation

History is vast in scope and complex in its details. Having a secure and detailed knowledge of the topic in question is therefore a prerequisite for anything except the most rudimentary factual understanding of the past. As such, the teaching of rigorous curriculums rich in detail should be at the heart of history teaching in schools. Only once students have a confident knowledge of the subject can they then be expected to reflect critically and analytically on what they know. As Heather Fearn, subject expert, argued, '*we need to preserve the richness of the curriculum – the alternative is simply the rote learning of analysis*'.

To do this school history must preserve a sense of narrative. Christine Counsell remarked:

> '*In addition to the general benefits that stories have in helping children to remember material, they have a specific and vital role within history. Learning history needs to bring a human scale to past events. The rich, small details of place and period which enliven a story, and the human drama of a story, help pupils to make sense of high-level abstractions such as 'parliament', 'peasantry' or 'economy' and make events such as 'the 1832 Reform Act' meaningful and memorable.*'

As Lord Sewell argued, '*strong history curriculums should be rooted in stories. It must have in it a clear structure and it must have a narrative*'. Students should not

be taught history as disconnected conceptual investigations, but rather as part of a connected, chronological narrative of change over time that, as Nick Gibb argued, '*provides jumping off points for further interest*'. Narratives also help students to learn. As Heather Fearn said, '*stories serve as memory hooks*' to engage students and help them to retain and recall information. Schools should teach history in a way that enables students to organise and remember their historical learning in relation to other topics and concepts they encounter.

For effective historical learning to take place knowledge must be a precursor to skills. Students cannot be expected to critically evaluate the past, analyse sources or moderate between historical interpretations unless they are confident in their factual knowledge of the historical context in which these questions are posed. Building that knowledge should be the focus of the core years of history education for every child. As Robert Peal has argued that '*emulating what historians do is not the purpose of school history teaching*'. Skills should follow when historical knowledge is secure. Amanda Spielman has said that '*there is too much focus on disciplinary skills and understanding how historians work before they are ready for it. This should be done at a later, more advanced level*'. There is also a danger that teaching abstract skills-based lessons, where students are not sufficiently confident in their knowledge to offer genuine analysis, will alienate pupils. Nick Gibb has said that this approach can be '*boring and misleading*' for students if they do not have a rich and secure understanding of the historical context.

Chapter 2: The State of History and How We Got Here

Historical Education in English Schools 1944 - Present

The transmission of information and knowledge about the past to future generations has always been a core function of any civilisation. History has been a core subject of educational instruction since antiquity. Nonetheless prior to the twentieth century history was not a core part of the educational offering of state-funded English schools. It was only in 1900, with the introduction of the block grant funding model, that history began to be widely taught.

Post-War History Teaching

The 1944 Butler Act transformed education in England by extending the school leaving age first to 15 and then later 16. The Act cemented the formal division of primary and secondary education that exists to this day, with history expected to be taught at both levels. There was no National Curriculum, but guidance from the Ministry of Education advised primary history to focus on narrative and stories of great individuals. At secondary level there was a divide between grammar schools, which tended to teach overwhelmingly on British political history, and secondary moderns with a greater focus on modern and socio-economic topics. O levels, introduced in 1951, were only available to grammar school and top-performing secondary modern students, with history as the sixth most popular subject by the end of the 1960s.

The main pedagogy of the time was the traditionalist and didactic 'chalk and talk' with a focus on substantive knowledge over disciplinary knowledge, skills and independent learning. There was no particular focus on teaching history as the academic practice of interpreting the past – instead, as the 1952 Ministry of Education's '*Teaching History*' pamphlet recommended, history should provide students with a sense of '*the mental and spiritual background of their country*'. A lack of worksheets meant notetaking was a key feature of lessons. Teachers made widespread use of textbooks and increasingly integrated new audio-visual resources such as the radio into their teaching. Shortages of academically trained history teachers in secondary moderns limited the quality of teaching. Despite the traditionalist trend in history teaching in this period, David Cannadine has argued that '*most teachers were now being trained in the child-centred method… where the emphasis was for boys and girls to discover things for themselves*'.

Substantive knowledge, disciplinary knowledge and second-order concepts

Within history education one of the key divides has been how much relative emphasis to place on either substantive or disciplinary knowledge.

Substantive knowledge refers to the factual information students are expected to learn. In history this would include dates, the names of key figures and the details of major events.

Disciplinary knowledge refers to understanding of the specific methods of a particular academic discipline. In school history this has typically referred to the extent to which students understand and can undertake for themselves the practices of historians. This can include analysing sources and mediating between the competing interpretations historians may have of the same events.

Second-order concepts refer to tools and frames that help historians to analyse and evaluate the past. These include key ideas such as continuity and change, significance and causation. Second-order concepts are often used to frame questions students face about the past, particularly at KS3, GCSE and A Level. Second-order concepts are sometimes viewed as part of disciplinary knowledge.

The 'New History' of the 1960s and 1970s

By the mid-1960s Britain's shifting international position and the decline of the British Empire prompted a reappraisal of the heavily British curriculum taught in English schools. At the same time there was a major shift in school structures from the three-tier secondary model established by the Butler Act to comprehensives, which continued to expand throughout the 1970s. Whilst the 1967 Plowden Report on primary education advised that history at this level should continue to focus on narratives and historical personalities, the 1963 Newsom Report and 1967 Department for Education pamphlet, '*Towards World History*', advocated a more modern and less Anglo-centric focus in secondary history.[1] This influenced the historical content of the new Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) launched in 1963, although O levels were still dominated by British history. In the 1970s there was also growing anxiety amongst history teachers that history as a discrete subject was being eroded by the growth of humanities programmes in comprehensive schools. This prompted a new wave of thinking about how history should be taught.

The culmination of this work was the creation of the Schools Council History Project (SCHP). The SCHP included a more geographically diverse range of historical topics such as the American West and new thematic topic formats such as medicine through time. The SCHP was most distinctive for abandoning the knowledge-rich, traditional 'chalk and talk' approach. Instead the SCHP emphasised students investigating historical problems for themselves through much more widespread use of primary sources and original analysis using second-order concepts.[2] This approach

1. Cannadine, D., et. al., 'The Right Kind of History: Teaching the past in twentieth-century England', (2011), Palgrave Macmillan, p. 150-152
2. Cannadine, D., et. al., 'The Right Kind of History: Teaching the past in twentieth-century England', (2011), Palgrave Macmillan, p. 161

expanded the focus on disciplinary skills, but prioritised students reaching their own conclusions over being extensively trained in the historical method. Teachers were often expected to play a less dominant role within lessons, instead supporting students in their inquiries. Although there was still no National Curriculum, this 'New History' was promoted by school inspectors. The development of the photocopier increased the use of worksheets and cut down on notetaking. By the end of the 1970s there was a slight decline in O level history entries, whilst at A level history fell from being the fifth to the eight most popular subject.[3]

The Rise of the National Curriculum 1979-1999

Historically governments had made no efforts to prescribe what schools should teach in any subject, including history. Callaghan's famous Ruskin College speech in 1976 marked a departure from this approach.[4] In it he noted:

> *It is almost as though some people would wish that the subject matter and purpose of education should not have public attention focused on it: nor that profane hands should be allowed to touch it. I cannot believe that this is a considered reaction…There is nothing wrong with non-educationalists, even a prime minister, talking about it again.*[5]

> *Later in the speech Callaghan went further, indicating 'I am inclined to think there should be' a 'basic curriculum with universal standards'.*[6]

Although Callaghan's Labour government achieved no major reform following the speech, the incoming Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher in 1979 were eager to pursue change. Thatcher's government was largely hostile to the 'New History', abolishing the Schools Council, the originators of the SCHP, in 1982. Reform also came in other areas. Their 1983 white paper, '*Teaching Quality*', also required trainee teachers to spend more time in schools as opposed to university settings as part of their preparation.[7] In 1984 it was announced that from 1988 the CSE and O levels would be merged into the new GCSE qualification. In addition to traditional essays, the new history GCSE would incorporate source analysis and some short answer questions in addition to a 20% coursework component. In 1992 Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) were replaced by Ofsted.

The 1988 Education Reform Act for the first time created a National Curriculum for English schools. History was one of seven foundation subjects covered by the Act, in addition to the core subjects of English, Maths and Science. A History Working Group was created to design the curriculum. The Group was required to ensure that at least half the curriculum's content would be British history. Although complying with this rule, the Group refused to mandate specific content or facts students must be taught. At KS1 students were to '*develop an awareness of the past*' whilst KS2 would focus on '*Britain's past, from Roman to modern times*' in addition to local history. At secondary school KS3 would cover '*the early Middle Ages to the*

3. Ibid., p. 176
4. Guyver, R., 'Landmarks With Questions – England's school history wars 1967-2010 and 2010-2013', (2013), International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research, 11:2, p. 60, link
5. James Callaghan, 'A rational debate based on facts', Ruskin College Oxford 18 October 1976, link
6. Ibid.
7. Cannadine, D., et. al., 'The Right Kind of History: Teaching the past in twentieth-century England', (2011), Palgrave Macmillan, p. 184

era of the Second World War', with KS4 (GCSE) focusing on twentieth century history.[8]

The curriculum established three attainment targets, each comprised of ten levels, to be examined across all Key Stages. The targets were '*knowledge and understanding of history*', '*interpretations of history*' and '*the use of historical sources*'.[9] All three attainment targets assessed students application and analysis as opposed to recall of substantive knowledge.

Just prior to the implementation of the new National Curriculum it was decided that history would not be a compulsory GCSE subject, with students instead able to choose between it and geography.[10] This resulted in the compression of a curriculum designed to go through to 16 into one that ended at 14, leaving the curriculum over-burdened with content. The 1994 Dearing Review was a response to these issues, advocating a reduction in content, as well as a cut in attainment levels from three to one, to reflect the cut-off at 14.[11] These recommendations formed the basis for the changes made as part of the 1995 National Curriculum. However, the Dearing Review also recommended that students should no longer be required to choose between history or geography at 14, but from a greater range of subjects.

Non-specialist primary teachers benefited from economies of scale in the production of training and classroom resources to support the new National Curriculum's content. At secondary level history departments struggled with the levels of content resulting from the truncation of the curriculum but benefited from the elevation of KS3 as a discrete block of time, rather than simply a preliminary to GCSE. New textbook series also emerged to support the National Curriculum. Projectors and computers opened up new ways of teaching the past, although history was slower than some subjects to embrace ICT.

The Changing Nature of History and the National Curriculum 1999-2010

In 1999 the National Curriculum was revised again. Following the decision to make history optional at GCSE the National Curriculum for history, as a non-core subject, now only extended to the end of KS3. In KS1 and KS2 more local history was introduced, as well as greater coverage of Britain's relationship with the wider world.[12] The KS3 curriculum was also revised. Under '*the importance of history*' the KS3 curriculum was charged with encouraging '*pupils curiosity about the past in Britain and the wider world*'.[13] The curriculum aims referenced a desire for students to develop their substantive and chronological knowledge of the past as well as to learn to '*…research, sift through evidence and argue for their point of view – skills that are prized in adult life*'. History was expected to help students '*see the diversity of human experience*' and '*understand more about themselves*'.

Of the five-page curriculum one page was devoted to the skills and concepts students should encounter. This included disciplinary skills in handling sources and historical interpretations as well as understanding and applying second-order concepts. In terms of knowledge students were

8. 'History in the National Curriculum (England)', 1991, link
9. Ibid.
10. Cannadine, D., et. al., 'The Right Kind of History: Teaching the past in twentieth-century England', (2011), Palgrave Macmillan, p. 197
11. The Dearing Review, 'The National Curriculum and its Assessment: Final Report', 1994, link
12. Cannadine, D., et. al., 'The Right Kind of History: Teaching the past in twentieth-century England', (2011), Palgrave Macmillan, p. 201
13. 1999 National Curriculum, link

expected to '*recall, prioritise and select historical information*'.[14] Three pages set out the '*breadth of study*' that should be taught. Students were expected to study Britain from 1066 to 1900, a European study before 1914 and two world studies, one before and one after 1900. Non-statutory examples given included the Black Death, the abolition of slavery in Britain, the Crusades, the French Revolution and the rise of modern China.[15]

In 2007 the National Curriculum was again revised with a focus on KS3. The curriculum aims highlighted the importance of teaching '*personal, local, national and international*' histories of student's '*community, Britain, Europe and the world*', placing a greater emphasis on non-British history than the 1999 curriculum.[16] The 2007 curriculum further introduced as an aim '*…mutual understanding of the historic origins of our ethnic and cultural diversity.*'[17]

The 2007 curriculum continued to separate the disciplinary skills students were expected to learn into a separate section on '*key concepts*' and '*key processes*'. Unlike the 1999 curriculum there was no specified unit structure in the 2007 curriculum. However much of the content remained the same, with British history still expected to be covered '*from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century*' at KS3 both from a political and socio-economic perspective. There was however greater focus on relationships and differences between Britain's constituent nations over time as well as '*the movement and settlement of diverse peoples*'. Although for the most part the 2007 curriculum echoed the 1999 curriculum by mandating themes but not topics, it introduced a requirement to teach the British Empire and the slave trade (but not abolition) in addition to the previous requirement to teach the Holocaust. The curriculum also retained a single attainment target, with KS3 students assessed against six levels.

During the 2000s there was a rapid growth in the use of technology to support history lessons. The advent of PowerPoint, as in many subjects, fundamentally restructured lessons. The 1999 and 2007 curriculums prompted the rapid expansion of non-British and world history, often at the expense of local studies at KS3. At primary school there was again a departure from teaching history as a discrete subject with the rise of multi-disciplinary topic-based learning. Throughout the 2000s there was a decline in GCSE history entries. Between 33% and 36% of eligible students sat history GCSE, with pass rates rising to 69% by the end of the decade.[18] This was driven in part by the expansion of new GCSE options that students could choose in place of history, with history often perceived as a 'hard' subject. However A level entries for history increased by over 40% between 1988 and 2010, with pass rates rising to as high as 99%.[19]

The Current History Curriculum 2010 - 2014

When the Coalition government came to power in 2010 education was one of their core priorities. In addition to the rapid expansion of academies and free schools begun under the previous government, the new Education Secretary Michael Gove also sought to revise the curriculum, particularly in history. In a speech to the Conservative Party Conference in 2010 he said:

14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. 2007 National Curriculum
17. 2007 National Curriculum
18. Cannadine, D., et. al., 'The Right Kind of History: Teaching the past in twentieth-century England', (2011), Palgrave Macmillan, p. 214
19. Ibid., p. 215

> *'Children are growing up ignorant of one of the most inspiring stories I know – the history of our United Kingdom. The current approach we have to history denies children the opportunity to hear our island story. The trashing of our past has to stop.'*[20]

Gove was concerned about the loss of narrative and broad chronological sweep from the English history curriculum.[21] His concerns were to some extent echoed by the Ofsted's 2011 subject review of history entitled '*History for all*'.[22] Whilst finding most secondary history teachers were '*very well qualified*', the report noted the growing divide between the numbers taking history GCSE in the independent and state sectors, and that fewer students were taking the subject in academies than in local authority maintained schools. The report also criticised '*whole school curriculum changes*', specifically the move towards a three-year GCSE which further truncated KS3. The report further found that students' '*chronological understanding was often underdeveloped*', with thematically organised curriculums linked to poorer outcomes. Overall it concluded that about one third of KS3 lessons observed between 2007 and 2010 for the report were '*at best satisfactory*'.

The Draft History National Curriculum, 2013

In 2011 Gove announced a National Curriculum review, calling the existing programme '*substandard*' and arguing that it had '*failed to prepare us for the future*'.[23] Gove reserved particular criticism for the history curriculum and felt there was a '*disturbing historical ignorance*' amongst young people.[24] In addition to his concerns that the National Curriculum failed to provide an adequate grounding in Britain's national past, Gove felt there was a lack of chronological understanding in student's knowledge, as well as a lack of narrative in history teaching. Gove had also repeatedly stressed the importance of cultural capital and cultural literacy as a key tool of social mobility and felt that a consistent historical education for all pupils, with a shared understanding of the past, was key to achieving this.[25] Gove first approached the historian Niall Ferguson to advise on the new history curriculum, but disagreed with Ferguson's intended approach of teaching Britain's past as part of a broader narrative of western ascendency through a global lens.[26] Ferguson withdrew from the process and was replaced by the historian Simon Schama.

The draft history National Curriculum was published in spring 2013 and contained a number of significant changes to both the structure and content of the previous curriculum. Primary schools would be expected to cover the span of history from the ancient world to 1750, with KS3 at secondary school covering 1750 to the present. At all stages topics were expected to be covered '*sequentially*' to create a clear sense of chronology.[27] In a departure from previous National Curriculums, the proposed new curriculum contained a large number of mandated topics. At KS3, for example, 63 specific named processes and events were to be covered.[28] Within the proposed curriculum European and global history was only covered in reference to British events. For instance, the French

20. News Desk, 'Conservative Party: Proper knowledge of British history in national curriculum review', 6 October 2010, link
21. Smith, J., 'Discursive Dancing: Traditionalism and social realism in the 2013 English history curriculum wars', (2017), British Journal of Education Studies, 65:3, p. 314, link
22. Ofsted, 'History for all', 2011, link
23. Gov.uk, 'National curriculum review launched', 20 January 2011, link
24. BBC News, 'Hunt doubts Gove on history evidence', 13 May 2013, link
25. Social Market Foundation, 'Michael Gove speaks at the SMF', 5 February 2013, link
26. Richard J. Evans, 'Michael Gove's history curriculum is a pub quiz not an education', The New Statesman, 21 March 2013, link
27. Smith, J., 'A critical analysis of the discourse surrounding the 2013 draft English history curriculum and a comparison with current high school practice', (2013), International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research, 12:1, p.187, link
28. Ibid., p. 181

Revolution was to be taught as context to the Napoleonic Wars with France. The proposals included extensive coverage of the British Empire, including studies of specific colonies such as India. The slave trade remained a mandated topic but received less prominence than in prior National Curriculums. The proposals also reduced the emphasis placed on disciplinary knowledge, with fewer references to historical skills or second order concepts in the document's aims section.

The draft National Curriculum for History provoked significant controversy. An open letter in the Times by fifteen prominent historians and historical authors, including David Abulafia, David Starkey and Robert Tombs praised the proposals for '*this golden opportunity to place history back at the centre of the national curriculum and make it part of the common culture of every future citizen.*'[29]

However others, including those who had advised Gove, rejected the draft curriculum. Simon Schama described the proposals as '*1066 And All That without the jokes*'.[30] Richard J. Evans, Regius Professor of History at the University of Cambridge, described the proposed curriculum as '*a pub quiz*'.[31] A poll of history teachers by the Historical Association found only 4% felt the proposals were a positive change.

Critics argued that the proposals were too British and Anglo-centric and too prescriptive. The Historical Association, in its consultation response, criticised '*the lack of any real opportunity to study any area of world history*'.[32] There was also concern that such a large period of history was to only be covered at primary level, with Evans arguing students would '*come to maturity with a knowledge of the Middle Ages stuck at the level of a nine year old*'. There were concerns that the proposed curriculum was overburdened with content, which would make teaching more superficial and come at the expense of disciplinary knowledge and the development of historical skills. Historian David Cannadine argued it would leave the curriculum '*patchy, simplistic, superficial and disconnected*'.[33] There were also concerns that the proposals offered an overly laudatory and nationalistic view of Britain's past.

The level of public pushback from academic historians and the history teaching profession had not been anticipated. The consultation on the initial draft proposals saw some of the highest number of responses in relation to the proposed history curriculum.[34] By summer 2013 it became clear that significant revisions would be made to the final draft of the new National Curriculum for history. Published in July, the final draft, accounting for feedback received during the consultation process, was considerably shorter and less prescriptive than its predecessor. In line with his support for academies, which were exempt from the National Curriculum, Gove sought in the second draft to provide schools with maximum freedom to shape their curriculums.

The content boundaries for key stages were significantly revised, with 1066 serving as the end date for primary history and the start of KS3. The required topics were removed almost entirely, with schools now

29. The Times, 'Pupils 'will benefit' from Gove's history plans', 27 February 2013, link
30. Simon Schama, 'Speech at Hay Festival', 30 May 2013, link
31. Richard J. Evans, 'Michael Gove's history curriculum is a pub quiz not an education', The New Statesman, 21 March 2013, link
32. Historical Association, 'Reform of the national curriculum in England: consultation response form', 2013, link
33. Guyver, R., 'Landmarks With Questions – England's school history wars 1967-2010 and 2010-2013', (2013), International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research, 11:2, link
34. House of Commons Library, 'National curriculum review', 1 May 2014, link

given discretion over which topics to teach within broad chronological themes. Exemplar topics were also revised to include more events from European and world history and a requirement was introduced to teach at least one world history topic. The aims and disciplinary sections were also paired back, whilst centralised attainment targets and levels were removed altogether to empower schools to establish their own assessment systems. Historian Robert Guyver praised Gove for having '*clearly and wisely accepted very critical advice*' to achieve '*a connected and sequential national narrative*'.[35]

The 2014 National Curriculum for history at KS3 that emerged from this redrafting process remains in force. Its aims section, like those of its predecessors, mentions inspiring '*pupil's curiosity*' and helping students to develop '*their own identity*'. However, references to the teaching of '*the diversity of societies*' as an aspiration are paired back from the 2007 curriculum to language similar to that produced in 1999. Like previous curriculums the aims section of the 2014 curriculum also refers to developing students understanding and ability to utilise historical concepts and sources to analyse events and interpretations of the past. In line with Gove's aspirations the 2014 curriculum emphasises the essential importance of students learning '*a coherent, chronological narrative*' of the past.

The most notable changes from previous curriculums were made to attainment targets and the coverage of historical skills. The 2014 KS3 curriculum removed references to a national levelled target scheme, stating instead that:

'*By the end of key stage 3, pupils are expected to know, apply and understand matters, skills and processes specified in the programme of study.*'

Another major change was the reduction of coverage in the curriculum for disciplinary skills and second-order concepts. Rather than occupying a distinct section, as in the 1999 and 2007 curriculums, these areas are covered in a preamble to the curriculum content.

The 2014 curriculum for KS3 instructs teachers to '*combine overview and depth studies*' to deliver content. Secondary schools are expected to teach British history from 1066 to the present day through each of the following themes:

- 'the development of church, state and society in Medieval Britain 1066-1509'
- 'the development of church, state and society in Britain 1509-1745'
- 'ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain, 1745-1901'
- 'challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to the present day'

In addition the KS3 curriculum should incorporate:

- 'a local history study'

35. Guyver, R., 'Mr Gove's new history curriculum: top marks or could do better?', History & Policy, July 2013, link

- 'the study of an aspect or theme in British history that consolidates and extends pupils' chronological knowledge from before 1066'
- 'at least one study of a significant society or issue in world history and its interconnections with other world developments'

In contrast to the draft 2013 curriculum, the final 2014 National Curriculum had only one mandated topic (the Holocaust). Instead many of the topics that had been mandatory in the draft curriculum were listed as non-statutory exemplars. These include '*Magna Carta and the emergence of parliament*', '*Renaissance and Reformation in Europe*', '*Britain as the first industrial nation – the impact on society*', '*women's suffrage*' and '*Mughal India 1526-1857*'. It is worth noting that academies and free schools are not required to teach the National Curriculum, although most follow its outlines.

History in Schools Today 2014-

In 2019 Ofsted introduced a new Education Inspection Framework for schools. This introduced a new 'quality of education' component, with a particular focus on curriculum. As part of these changes, Ofsted introduced the concept of a curriculum 'deep dive', where as part of Ofsted inspections inspectors reviewed '*the curriculum intent, implementation and impact*' of a selected random sample of subjects. Schools were expected to have a clear rationale for the content and sequencing of their curriculums and could anticipate inspectors observing how effectively this was then delivered in the classroom. This greater level of scrutiny required schools to place a greater focus on subject and curriculum across all subjects, including history.

Concerns around the levels of clarity and guidance provided by the National Curriculum in all subjects led to the government commissioning the first '*model curriculum*', for Music, published in 2021. The model curriculum, designed to serve as a practical exemplar to the implementation of the National Curriculum, includes the specific content and skills to be taught to each year group to develop their understanding over time. History was established as the second subject to receive a model curriculum, with a Model History Curriculum Expert Panel announced in 2022. However, the group met rarely and appears to have since been disbanded.

In 2021 Ofsted published a report on history teaching as part of its research review series.

The review advocated the central role of knowledge within the history curriculum, arguing students must have a core base of historical knowledge through which to contextualise and analyse the past and that this was best acquired through studying topics in depth. The research review repeatedly asserted the importance of ensuring '*substantive and disciplinary learning are carefully integrated*', arguing second order concepts should be used to meaningfully analyse historical events. The review also made consistent reference to the importance of '*appropriately challenging texts*' to support student's learning by introducing historical narrative and developing literacy. The review

further cautioned against the use of GCSE-style questions and mark schemes for assessment at KS3, arguing these were inappropriate.

The subsequent 2023 history subject report '*Rich encounters with the past*' echoed many of the themes of the 2021 review and was widely influential. It concluded, in reference to its 2011 predecessor report discussed above, that '*history in schools is much more secure that it was 12 years ago*' and was '*highly valued*' as a '*distinct subject*'. It found that curriculums were generally broad and well designed and that history teaching was good overall. At primary level the report found most schools were teaching chronology and local history effectively, but that '*aims for the curriculum were too broad*' and the teaching of disciplinary knowledge was '*very limited*'.

At secondary school level it was felt that KS3 history teaching received sufficient time in the curriculum, averaging 100 to 150 minutes a fortnight. In line with the National Curriculum it was found that '*pupils were generally studying a broad curriculum that represented the complexity of the past*' but sometimes lacked the depth to develop secure knowledge of the past. The report argued disciplinary skills were not well taught, with students finding historical interpretations confusing. It found GCSE style questions were being used inappropriately with KS3 students. The report highlighted that '*typically, pupils studied little history relating to the 12th, 15th or 18th centuries*'. It urged schools to better integrate teaching of British and world history to encourage students to make comparisons across space.

In July 2024 the new Labour government announced a Curriculum and Assessment Review of all Key Stages and subjects, to report in 2025. It was announced at the commissioning of the review that, following its completion all schools – regardless of their academy or free school status – will be required to teach the National Curriculum.

The State of History Today

A Student's History Education Journey

Students in the English state education system will typically undertake a minimum of eight or nine years of history education. The first two years of this occurs at the beginning of primary school in KS1. However, as noted above, this period of history education is primarily designed to acquaint students with the concept of the past through relatively unstructured study of key events and figures.

More rigorous historical education begins in KS2 from when students enter Year 3. Over the course of the next four years they will (if their school is following the National Curriculum) encounter a swathe of ancient and early Medieval history. In line with the primary school model history is typically not delivered by a specialist, but by a generalist class teacher who will teach students every subject for that year. In many schools history is not taught consistently throughout the year but instead in blocks, often comprised of half terms, which alternate with geography. Although the time allocated to history teaching will vary significantly by school, the primacy given to English and Maths in primary education typically means

that time for other subjects is more limited. As a non-core subject history is not assessed as part of the SATs exams held at the end of Year 6.

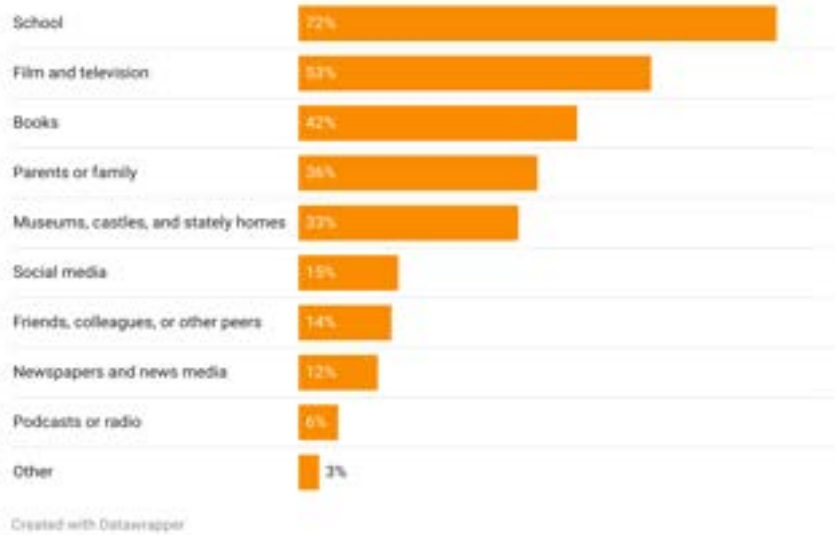
On entering secondary school students experience a very different dynamic of history teaching. In the vast majority of schools history is taught consistently throughout the year by specialist teachers in their own classrooms. Typically this means that the number of hours of history teaching students experience also increases. Students will over the course of KS3 study events from 1066 through to the present in both Britain and the wider world. In some schools KS3 is two years long, ending in Year 8 – in others it is traditional three years in length concluding in Year 9. At this point students may choose whether or not to pursue history further at GCSE.

Those who decide to take history will now typically spend several dedicated hours a week with a specialist teacher. They will study a course set by an exam board which will typically consist of a mix of pre-modern and modern British and world history divided across a number of units. In Year 11 students will take their GCSE exams – their first external assessment in history. Those that wish to may then progress to A level, which is increasingly delivered at separate sixth form colleges. With most students in England taking either three of four A levels, students will receive a significant number of hours of history teaching on a weekly basis and will increasingly be expected to supplement this with independent study. They will then sit their A levels at the end of Year 13.

Uptake and Engagement with School History

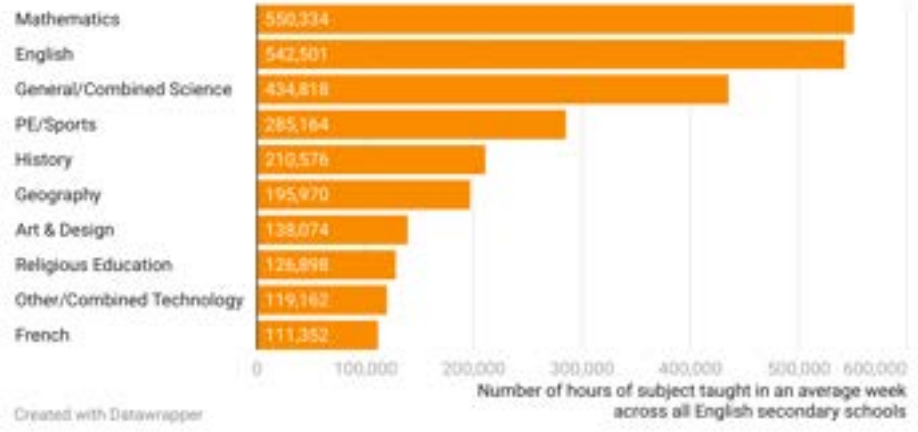
History education in schools plays a vital role in developing the public's knowledge and understanding of the past. Exclusive polling for Policy Exchange highlights that school history is the most significant source of public knowledge about British history. 72% of those surveyed identified school as one of the most important sources of their knowledge, 19 points ahead of the next most significant source (film and television) (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: 'What are the three most significant sources that have informed your knowledge of British history? You may select up to three.'



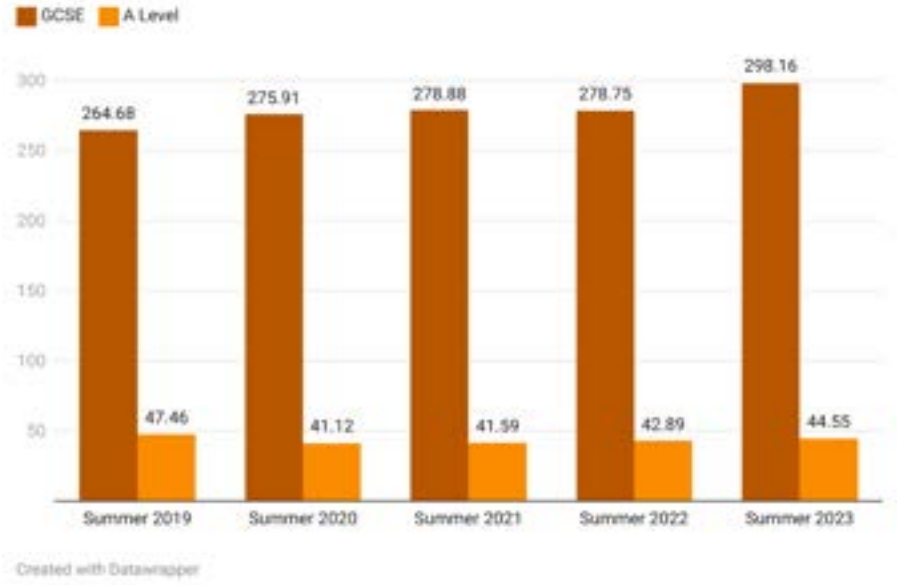
The government collects data on how many hours of teaching in each subject takes place in the average week across all secondary schools in England (Fig. 2). History receives the fifth highest number of teaching hours by subject in the average week (over 210,000 total hours), second only to physical education amongst non-core subjects.

Figure 2: Total number of hours taught by subject in an average week across all year groups in English secondary schools



History is also widely popular as a school subject based on exam entry data (Fig. 3). In 2024 History was the fifth most popular GCSE qualification in terms of exam entries, and the most popular optional GCSE (English Language and Literature, Maths and Science are core subjects that are mandatory at GCSE). At A level History also had the fifth highest number of exam entries. Between 2019 and 2023 GCSE History entries increased by 11.2% to 298,000, although in the same time frame A level History entries fell 6.5% to 44,000.

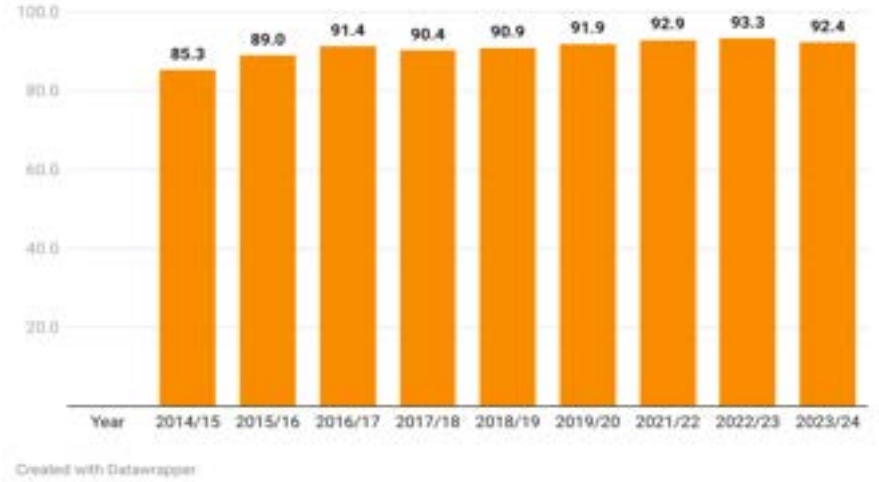
Figure 3: Exam Entries in England for History at GCSE and A Level from summer 2019 to summer 2023 (thousands)



The History Teaching Profession

According to government figures there were 18,291 history teachers in English secondary schools in 2022/2023. However, any teaching staff who taught some timetabled history lessons are counted within this figure. As such the number of history specialists is likely to be smaller. Despite this, in 2023/2024 92.4% of secondary history lessons were taught by teachers who had a post-A level qualification in history (Fig. 4). The proportion of lessons conducted by teachers with such qualifications has marginally improved over the last decade.

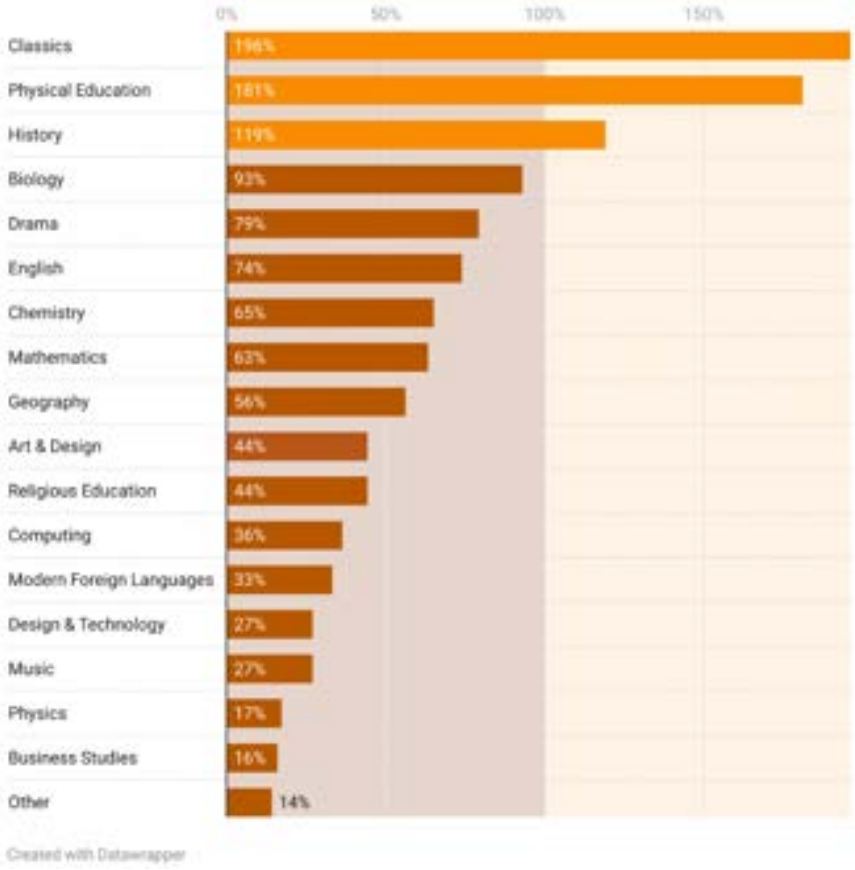
Figure 4: Percentage of hours of history teaching taught by a teacher with a relevant post-A level qualification



High levels of specialist history teaching in secondary schools in large part stem from strong recruitment and retention of History

specialists relative to colleagues in other subjects. In 2023/24 History was one of only three subjects (the others being Classics and Physical Education) in which government recruitment targets for new trainee teachers were met or exceeded, with almost 20% more History teachers recruited than the target called for (Fig. 5).

Figure 5: Percentage of Government Initial Teacher Training (ITT) recruitment target reached by subject 2023/2024



History teachers have formed a rich and interconnected professional community. Key to this has been the Historical Association (HA), which aims to '*support the teaching, learning and enjoyment of history at all levels and bring together people who share an interest in and love for the past*'. According to the Subject Association '*6,500 history teachers and subject leads*' are members of the HA, equating to over a third of history teachers. The HA has published the secondary history teaching magazine '*Teaching History*' since 1976. Heather Fearn has said '*the HA is reflective of the best of the history profession in its high quality, rigorous approach*'.

In more recent years new professional communities have formed over social media, with EduTwitter and latterly Bluesky serving as an important platform through which history teachers can debate pedagogy and share ideas and resources.

Chapter 3: History at KS3

The flexibility provided to schools through both the academies model and the National Curriculum means that KS3 history provision varies significantly between schools across England. To develop a picture of the KS3 history landscape, Policy Exchange undertook a Freedom of Information project involving 290 English schools.

Methodology

In July 2024 Policy Exchange submitted 500 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to a random sample of secondary state schools. Schools were randomly selected from a full list of English secondary schools, once special schools had been excluded.

What we asked schools:

Please provide any information that you hold in relation to the questions below:

1. *With regards to your KS3 curriculum I would like to know:*
   a. *How long, in years, is your KS3?*
   b. *How many history lessons a KS3 pupil in your school has each week on average, and how long is each lesson?*
   c. *Is your KS3 history curriculum structured chronologically or thematically?*

2. *Does your KS3 history curriculum cover the following historical events? Please indicate yes or no in each case:*
   a. *The Norman conquest of England*
   b. *The signing of Magna Carta*
   c. *The Battle of Agincourt*
   d. *The Wars of the Rosesa*
   e. *The Reformation*
   f. *The English Civil War*
   g. *The Glorious Revolution*
   h. *The Act of Union between England and Scotland*
   i. *British colonisation in America*
   j. *The Transatlantic Slave Trade*
   k. *The Abolition of the Slave Trade*
   l. *The Battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo*
   m. *The Irish potato famine*
   n. *The Industrial Revolution*
   o. *British colonisation in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean*

p. The Boer War
q. Britain's role in World War One
r. Britain's role in World War Two

For those topics that you have indicated 'yes' for, are these mandatory? If any are optional, please could you indicate which ones.

3. Are there any specific textbooks or other resources that are used in KS3? If so, please can you indicate which these are and provide the title of these resources, with links to them where possible?

4. Please can you provide the following information:
   a. The total number of pupils in the school in Year 11 for the 2023-24 academic year; and the number of those children who are (i) male and (ii) female.
   b. The number of pupils in the school in Year 11 who sat a History GCSE, and the number of those children who are (i) male and (ii) female.

5. Which exam board(s) do you use for History GCSE?

6. What proportion of your history lessons are delivered by a history specialist:
   a. At KS3:
      I. All lessons except those provided during cover
      II. 75% or more
      III. 50-75%
      IV. 25-50%
      V. 0-25%
   b. At GCSE:
      I. All lessons except those provided during cover
      II. 75% or more
      III. 50-75%
      IV. 25-50%
      V. 0-25%

7. Have you made changes in order to 'decolonise' or 'diversify' your history curriculum? If yes please provide copies of any relevant teaching materials/lesson plans you have introduced as part of this.

Separately the same FOI request was also sent to a booster sample of 80 other grammar schools that did not feature in the initial sample. Except in the final section, all graphs and references to data sets refer to the main sample alone and not the booster sample.

Responses

Of the 500 FOI requests in the main sample, 249 responded – either in full or in part – to the questions asked. 251 did not respond and 0 explicitly refused to comply with the FOI request. Of the 80 grammar schools in the

separate sample 41 responded in full or in part. 39 did not respond and 0 explicitly refused the request.

Figure 6: Responses to Freedom of Information requests

	Responded	Refused	Not Responded	Total
Mixed sample of English secondary schools	249	0	251	500
Sample of English grammar schools	41	0	39	80

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Results

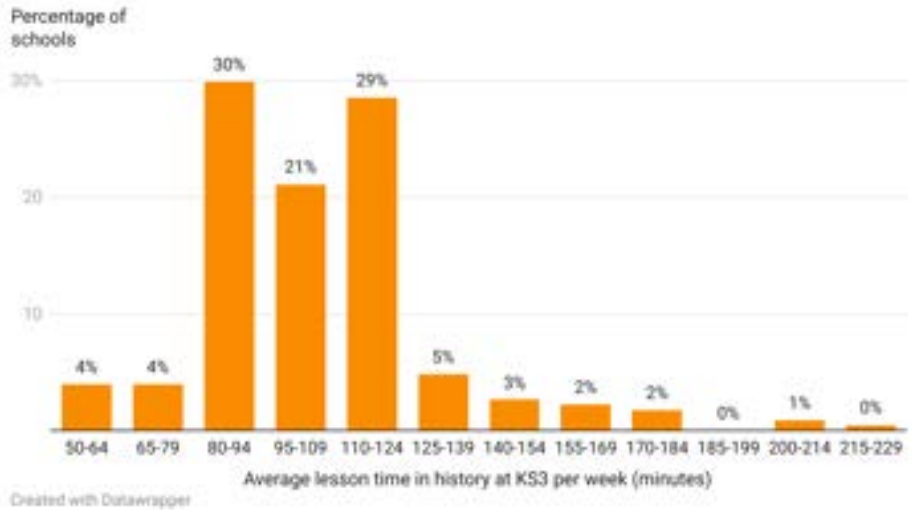
Lesson Time

87% of schools surveyed operated a Key Stage 3 lasting three years. In contrast only 12% of schools operated a two-year Key Stage 3. 1% of schools switched to Key Stage 4 part way through the third year.

On average, schools taught 107 minutes of history a week. Only one of the schools surveyed taught less than an hour of history a week on average at Key Stage 3 meaning that over 99% did so.[36]

37% of schools taught two history lessons a week on average, with 30% of schools teaching on average one and a half lessons per week. The most common lesson length amongst schools surveyed was 60 minutes (67%) followed by 50 minutes (13%).

Figure 7: Average lesson time in history at KS3 per week (minutes) by percentage of schools



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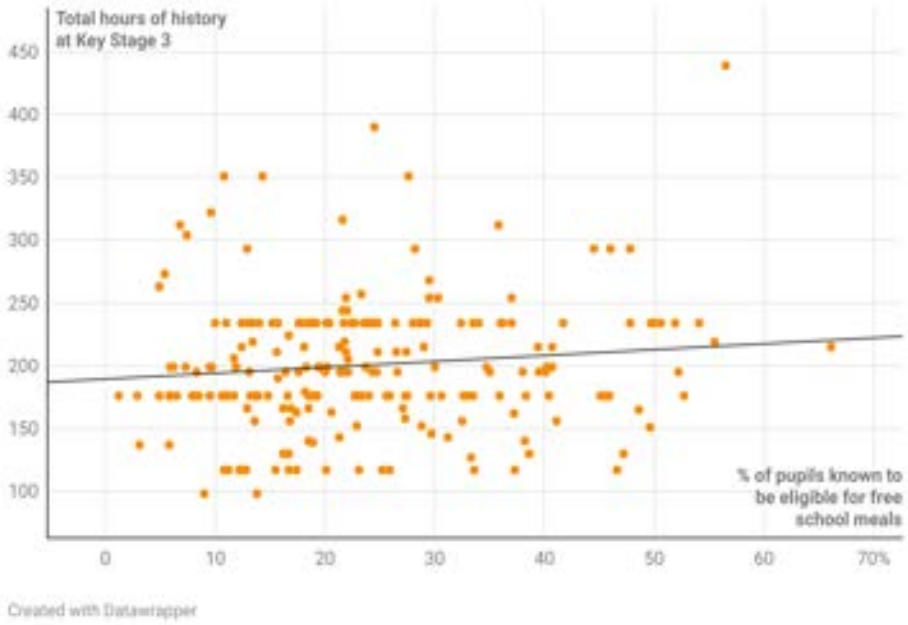
36. Many schools operated a fortnightly timetable in which students might have more lessons in one week than in the following week. Where this was the case, an average number of lessons per week was calculated.

This variation in both the length of KS3 and the number of hours of history teaching per week means students are receiving significantly different amounts of history teaching over the course of KS3.

Over the course of KS3, students at schools with a three-year KS3 on average received 64 more hours of history teaching than those at schools where KS3 lasted only two years.[37] This represents a significant difference in the quantity of history education students received.

This is exacerbated by the fact that, on average, schools with a three-year KS3 had marginally more history lesson time per week. Schools with a three-year KS3 taught on average 103 minutes of history per week at KS3, compared to 97 minutes for those with a two-year KS3. Whilst this is a difference of only 6 minutes, over the course of a school year this means that on average a student at a school with a three-year KS3 received four more hours of history teaching – in addition to a full further year at KS3 - than their two-year KS3 counterparts.

Figure 8: Average total number of hours of History taught throughout KS3 by percentage of pupils eligible for Free School Meals



Schools in our main sample with a higher proportion of pupils eligible for Free School Meals taught more hours of History at KS3 on average (Fig. 8). This relationship was statistically significant to the 10% significance level. Schools where the percentage of pupils eligible for Free School Meals was less than 20% on average taught 192 hours of history in the course of KS3, in contrast to those where 40% or more students were eligible, who on average taught 212 hours of KS3 history. As such these students, on average, received 9% more hours of history than their peers. This would be equivalent to ten additional weeks of history over the course of KS3 assuming two hour-long lessons a week.

Schools with a higher proportion of students for whom English is an

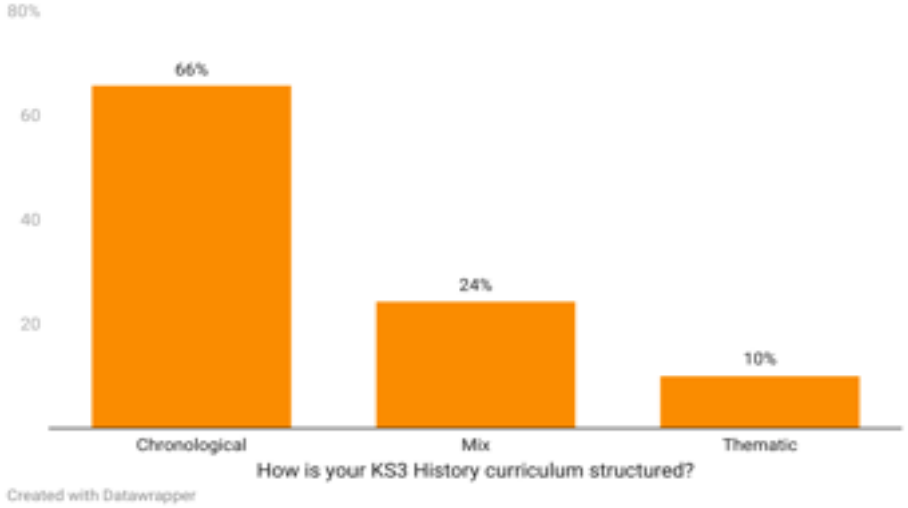
37. This assumes a standard 39-week school year for each year of KS3

Additional Language (EAL) also on average taught more hours of history at KS3. Schools where fewer than 10% of students were designated as EAL taught on average 198 hours of History in the course of KS3, compared with 218 hours for schools which had more than 40% EAL students.

Curriculum Structure

Schools have chosen to structure their history curriculums in different ways. Whilst a clear majority follow a chronological approach, taking periods and events in broad historical order, others have embraced a thematic approach comparing key trends or concepts, such as political power, over time.

Figure 9: Percentage of schools adopting chronological, thematic or mixed KS3 History Curriculum structures



As Figure 9 shows, in our study 66% of respondents said they structured their KS3 History curriculum chronologically, with 10% saying they took a thematic approach and 24% saying they used a mixture of the two.

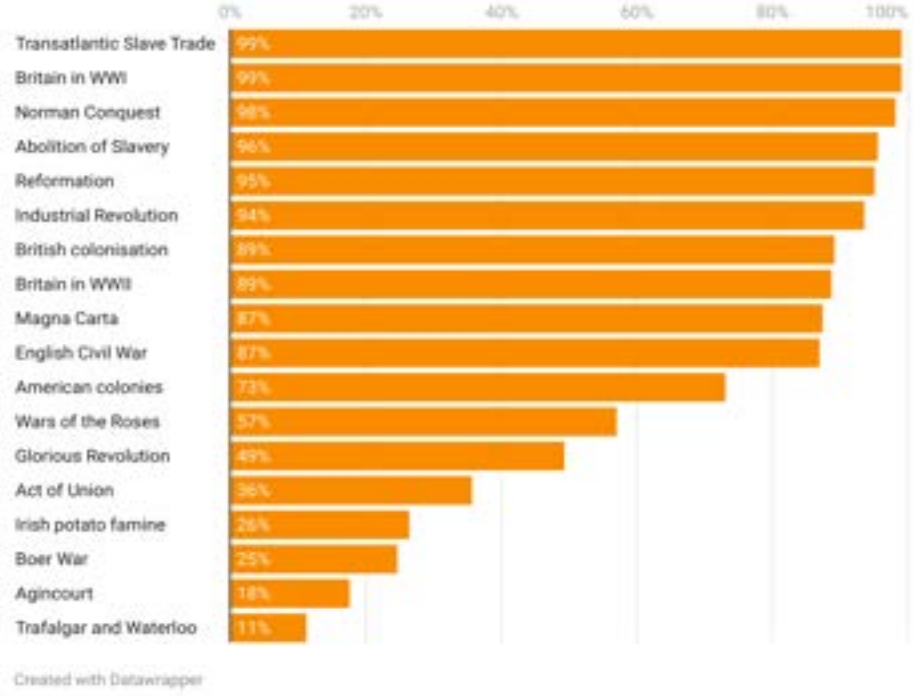
Curriculum Content

To get a sense of the breadth of content offered by schools' KS3 History curriculums, schools were asked which of a series of 18 predominantly British historical events they covered during KS3. This list was chosen to map with one used in exclusive polling by Policy Exchange as part of it's 'A Portrait of Modern Britain' series into British public attitudes.[38] The list of these events can be seen in the FOI box at the beginning of this chapter.

The listed events reflect the typical focus placed on British history in English schools, whereas world history topics tend to vary notably between schools. Several of the events on the list were intentionally more obscure than others. Whilst the list was intended to serve as a proxy for the breadth of the curriculum and chronological range of British history covered in schools, there was no expectation that any school would or should teach all of the events listed.

38. Policy Exchange, 'A Portrait of Modern Britain: Ethnicity and Religion', 14 October 2024, link

Figure 10: Percentage of schools teaching each historical topic as part of their KS3 History curriculum



These findings indicate that the vast majority of students are receiving a varied KS3 history curriculum that introduces them to core aspects of British history over time. 10 of the 18 surveyed topics were taught to more than 85% of students in surveyed schools (Fig. 10).

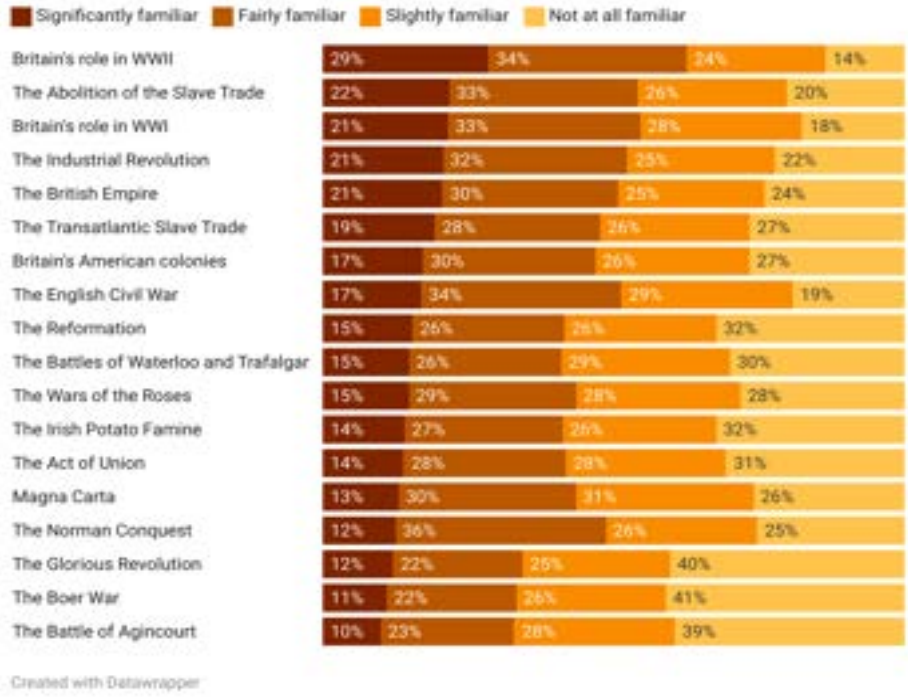
The most frequent topics taught in schools were the transatlantic slave trade and Britain's role in World War One, with both topics covered by 99% of schools. Many other topics were also widely covered, including the Norman Conquest (98%), the Industrial Revolution (94%), Magna Carta (87%) and the English Civil War (87%). Both the abolition of slavery in Britain and the British Empire and colonisation were extensively taught, with 96% and 89% of schools covering these topics respectively. This indicates that Britain's involvement with the slave trade and the British Empire are being widely taught to secondary school children in England. This is in stark contrast to some public criticism of British history education, which has suggested that students do not get opportunities to learn about these aspects of the past.

In spite of this broadly positive picture, these results highlight some gaps within the curriculum. Topics such as the Glorious Revolution and Act of Union, which help students develop an understanding of the development of British democracy between the 17th and mid-19th centuries, are taught in less than half of schools. Similarly non-English events which expose students to a wider British history that incorporates the devolved nations, such as the Irish potato famine, are not routinely taught.

The battle of Agincourt was only taught in 18% of schools, whilst the battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo were taught by only 11% of schools. The rarity with which these topics is covered is notable given their central

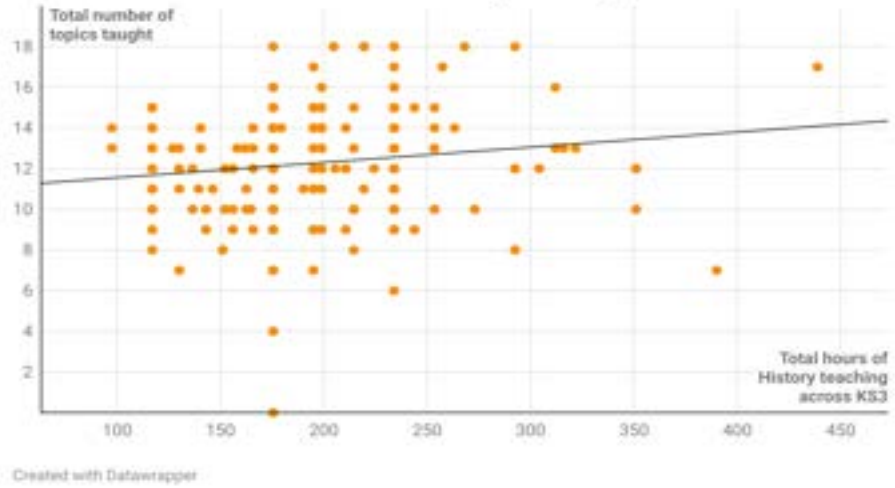
position in many school curriculums for much of the twentieth century, during which conflict with France was a prominent theme.

Figure 11: Polling as part of Policy Exchange's 'A Portrait of Modern Britain' of 18 to 30 year olds – 'To what extent, if at all, are you familiar with the following events in Britain's history?'



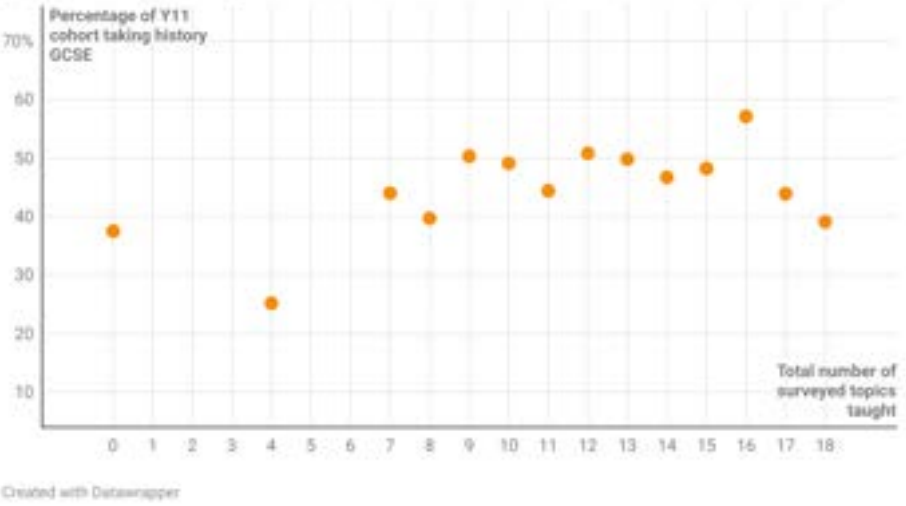
Interestingly, these findings contrast with the historical awareness reported by young people in Britain. Exclusive polling conducted by Policy Exchange as part of its 'A Portrait of Modern Britain' series found young people aged 18 to 30 were significantly less likely to feel familiar with key historical events than the data on what schools teach might suggest. For example, whilst 99% of schools reported teaching the Transatlantic Slave Trade, nearly one in three young people (27%) polled reported being '*not at all familiar*' with the event. Similarly 18% denied having any knowledge of Britain's role in World War One, whilst 25% denied knowing about the Norman Conquest. Even accounting for the fact that some of those polled may be migrants who were educated abroad, this comparison suggests significant numbers of young people do not recall any information about key historical events just a few years after studying them. This indicates that the failure of some people to recall learning certain events does not necessarily mean they were not taught them.

Figure 12: Relationship between total hours of history teaching across KS3 and number of surveyed topics taught



As Figure 12 demonstrates, there is a statistically significant correlation between the numbers of hours of History offered as part of KS3 and the proportio n of the 18 surveyed topics covered as part of the curriculum to the 5% significance level. This shows that schools which allocate more time overall to KS3 History are likely to be able to offer a broader and more wide-ranging curriculum, taking in a greater number of topics overall.

Figure 13: Relationship between total number of surveyed topics taught and percentage of Year 11 cohort taking History GCSE



However, as Figure 13 suggests, teaching the widest range of topics possible may not be beneficial. Schools teaching the same number of the surveyed topics were grouped and compared against their average Year 11 cohort uptake of history at GCSE.

Schools which taught fewer of the listed topics at KS3 saw on average a smaller proportion of their students go on to take history at GCSE. Yet there is also a tail-off, with schools teaching the highest number of

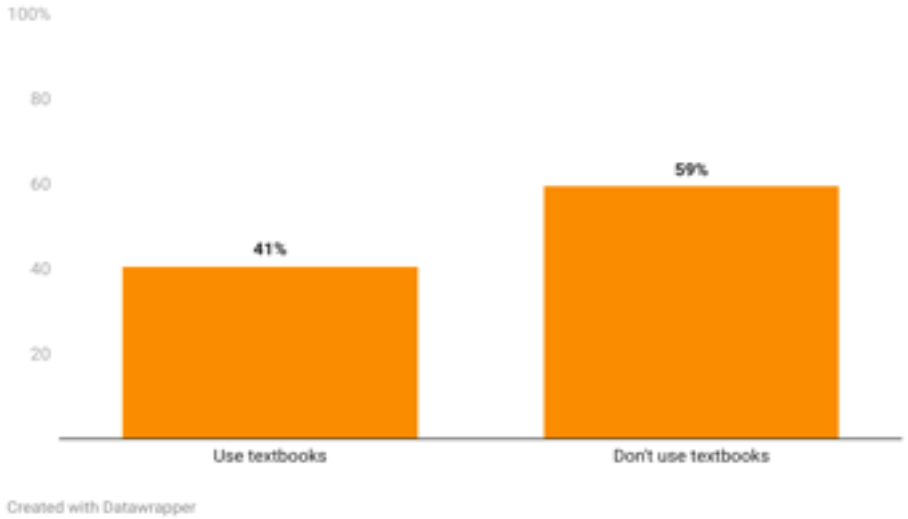
surveyed topics also seeing fewer students on average take GCSE history. This may reflect the fact that whilst curriculums with too little content can be undemanding and deny students a base of knowledge from which to confidently approach GCSE, those which attempt to teach too many topics may be confusing and lack sufficient depth to engage students. This data suggests it is important for schools to strike an appropriate balance between offering an expansive and varied curriculum and devoting enough time to topics for students to confidently develop their knowledge and experience topics in depth.

There was no significant correlation between the percentage of students at a school eligible for free school meals and the number of surveyed topics taught.

Textbook Use

As part of the request schools were asked to outline what textbooks, if any, they used to support their KS3 curriculum.

Figure 14: Percentage of schools using textbooks to support their KS3 curriculums



As Figure 14 shows, 59% of the schools surveyed did not routinely incorporate textbooks into their lessons. In many cases schools noted that whilst textbooks were used for cover lessons or to support teachers' planning, resources were mainly or exclusively made by teachers themselves. Common responses of this kind include:

> *'We create our own resources at KS3 to fit the content of our lessons.'*

> *'A specific textbook that covers our bespoke curriculum does not exist, the resources used by the department have been created by us using only occasional support from textbooks to deal with things like staff absence when a cover lesson is needed.'*

> *'Teachers design their own materials; textbooks are not used.'*

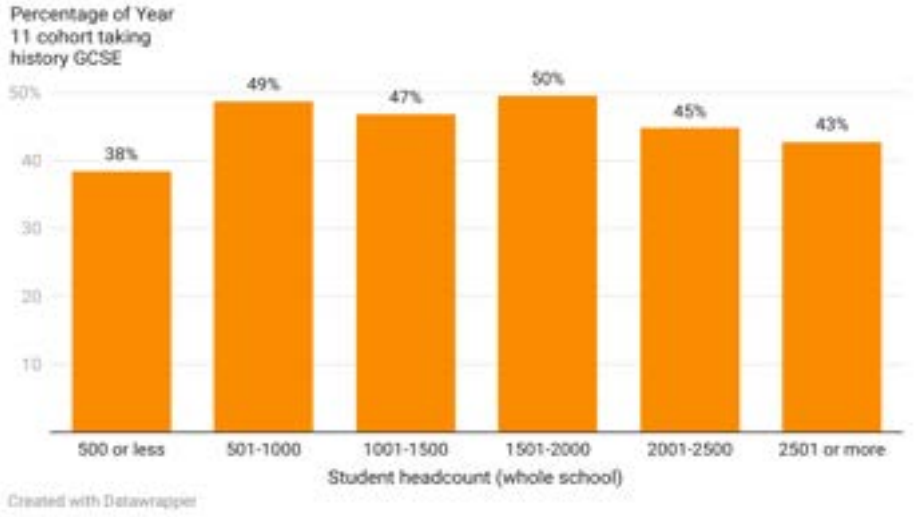
Amongst surveyed schools that did use textbooks a wide variety of resources were identified. 18 different history textbook series were mentioned by respondent schools. The most frequently used textbook series was the Aaron Wilkes Oxford University Press KS3 History series, with 66% of respondent schools who used textbooks saying they used these resources. Other popular series were a variety of resources by the Schools History Project, used by 26% of respondent schools, and Pearson's Exploring History series, used by 14% of respondent schools.

Progression to GCSE

Schools were asked to provide data on the number of Year 11 students in their 2023/2024 cohort (who will have sat GCSEs in summer 2024). They were then asked to provide data on how many of these had sat a History GCSE examination in that year.

Across the schools sampled an average of 47% of students in Year 11 sat History GCSE. This figure is broadly comparable with the 44% uptake identified by Cambridge University Press and Assessment in 2022.[39] Only 11% of schools surveyed had GCSE history cohorts that included less than 30% of their total Year 11.

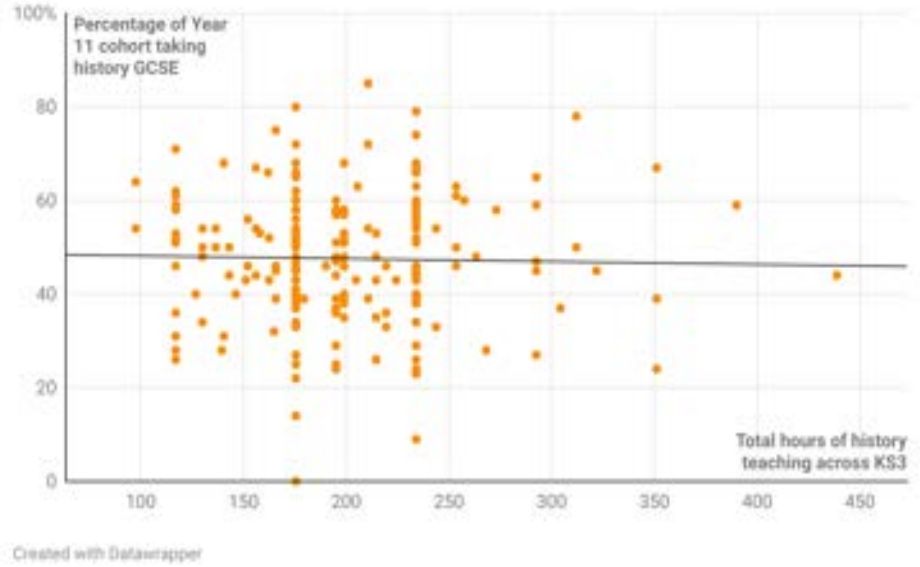
Figure 15: School headcount by percentage of Year 11 cohort sitting history GCSE



As Figure 15 shows, on average schools with 500 or fewer pupils had significantly smaller Year 11 history GCSE cohorts, with just 38% of students on average taking the subject at GCSE. Uptake of the subject at GCSE was highest in schools with between 1501 and 2000 pupils, with an average of 50% of Year 11 students in such schools sitting history GCSE.

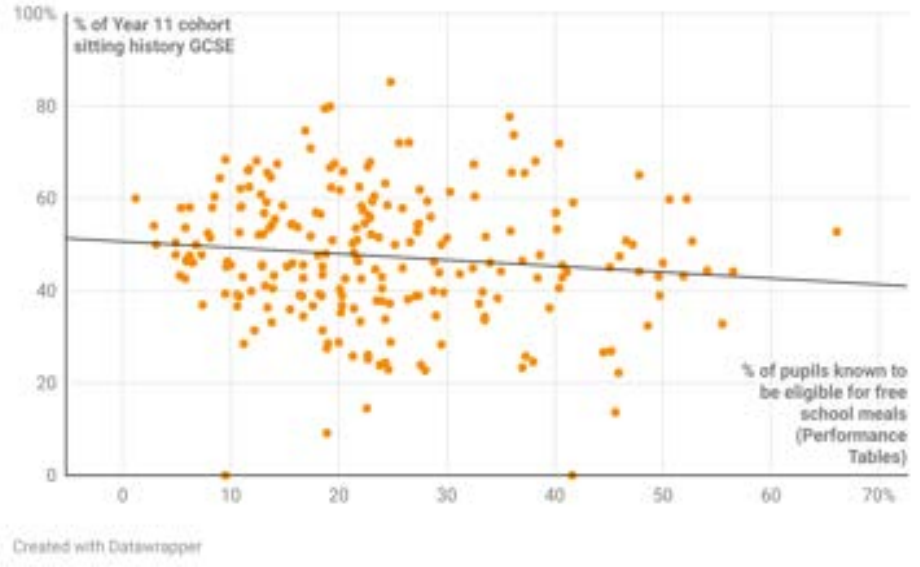
39. Cambridge University Press and Assessment, 'Uptake of GCSE subjects 2022', 17 November 2023, link

Figure 16: Percentage of Year 11 cohort taking history GCSE by total hours of history teaching across KS3



There was no significant correlation between the number of hours of KS3 history and the number of Year 11 students who took history GCSE. On average, schools with the highest number of hours at KS3 actually saw marginally fewer students continue with the subject, though this was not statistically significant.

Figure 17: Percentage of students in each school eligible for free school meals by percentage of Year 11 cohort sitting history GCSE

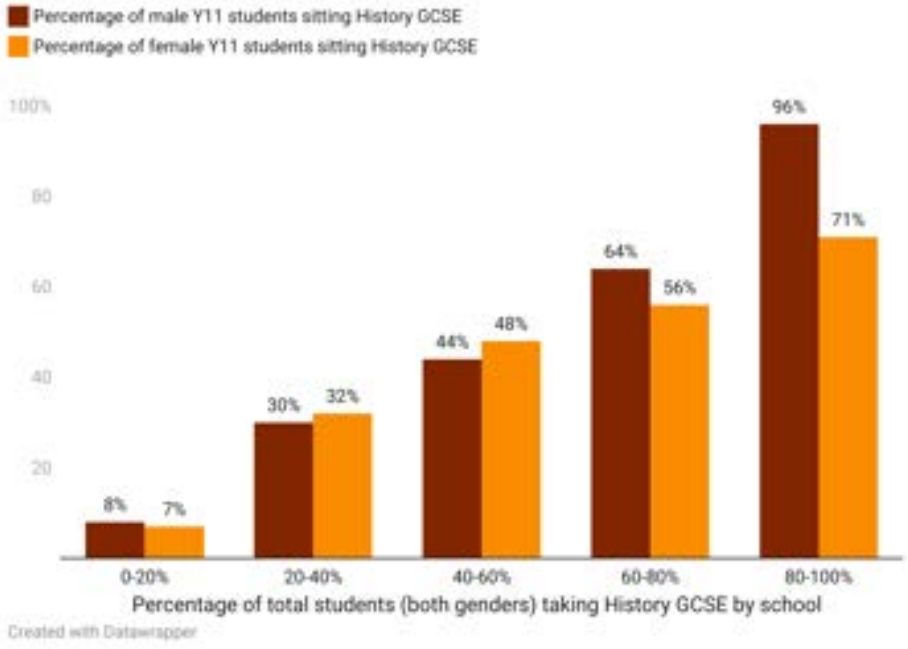


Amongst schools surveyed, those with lower proportions of students eligible for Free School Meals had a greater percentage of students who sat History GCSE in Year 11 (Fig. 17). This relationship was found to be statistically significant to the 10% significance level. Schools where fewer than 20% of students were eligible for free school meals on average had

50% of pupils sit History GCSE compared to 44% in schools where those eligible for free school meals was 40% or higher.

For schools that provided sex breakdowns of their Year 11 and GCSE History cohorts there was no significant difference in uptake of History GCSE between male and female students (Fig. 18). 43% of male students, on average, took history GCSE, compared with 44% of female students. This mirrors research by the Nuffield Foundation, which found a minimal difference between sexes.[40]

Figure 18: Percentage of Year 11 cohorts sitting history GCSE by percentage of students by sex sitting History GCSE

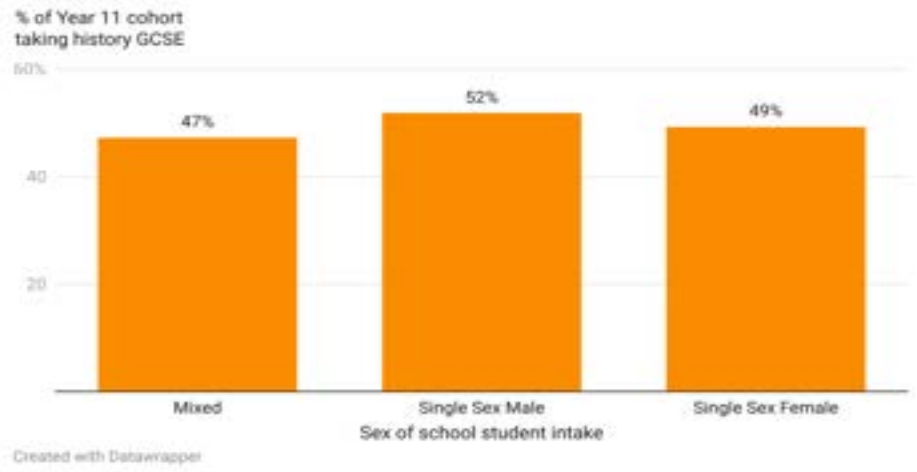


In schools where fewer than 60% of total students took History GCSE male and female students were similarly likely to take the subject. However as overall uptake of History GCSE increased above 60%, male students were disproportionately likely to take the subject. For example in schools where between 60% and 80% of students took History GCSE, male students were 8% more likely to take the subject than female students. This suggests male students are more likely to take History GCSE when overall uptake of the subject in a school is high.[41]

40. FFT Education Datalab, 'History GCSE', link

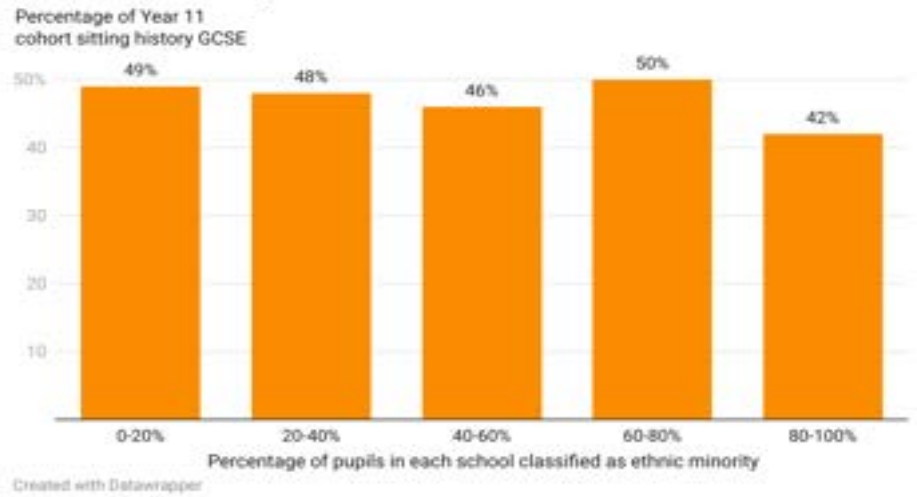
41. However, it is important to note that the sample included some single-sex schools, and if these schools either required students to take history GCSE or had high uptake in the subject, this will have influenced the sex splits seen.

Figure 19: Percentage of Year 11 cohorts sitting history GCSE by sex of school intake[42]



There was limited variation in history GCSE uptake between schools based on the sex of their intake. As shown in Figure 19, boy's and girl's schools had slightly higher proportions of their Year 11 students take history GCSE than did in mixed sex schools.

Figure 20: Percentage of Year 11 students sitting History GCSE by proportion of ethnic minority students per school



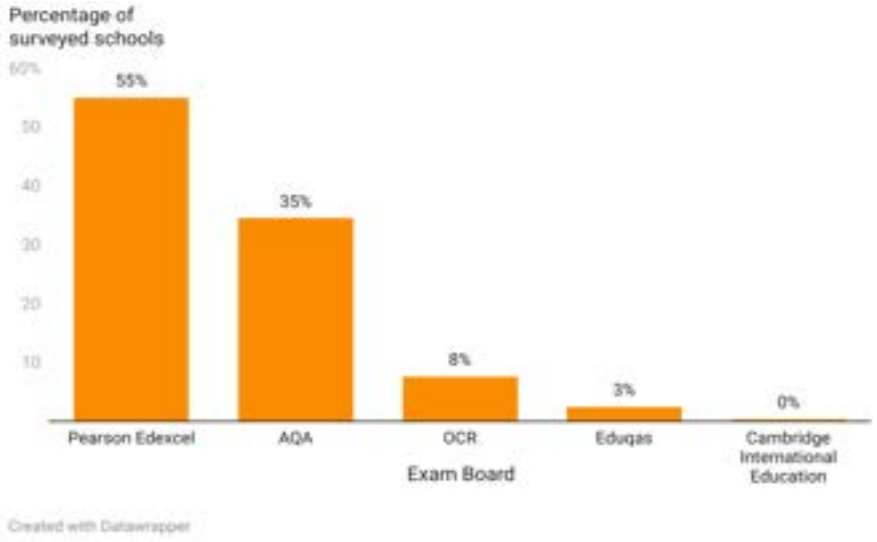
There is no clear relationship between the proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and the proportion progressing to GCSE. Schools where 80% or more students were from ethnic minorities had the lowest proportion of Year 11 students sitting History GCSE (Fig. 20). Amongst this group average uptake of History as a GCSE within the Year 11 cohort was 42%. In contrast the proportion of Year 11 students taking history GCSE was highest amongst schools with between 60% and 80% ethnic minority students, at 50%.

42. The sample size of single-sex schools was relatively small – our main sample included 16 male single-sex schools and 12 female single-sex schools

Exam Boards

Schools offering GCSE History were asked which exam board they used.

Figure 21: Exam board for History GCSE by percentage of sampled schools

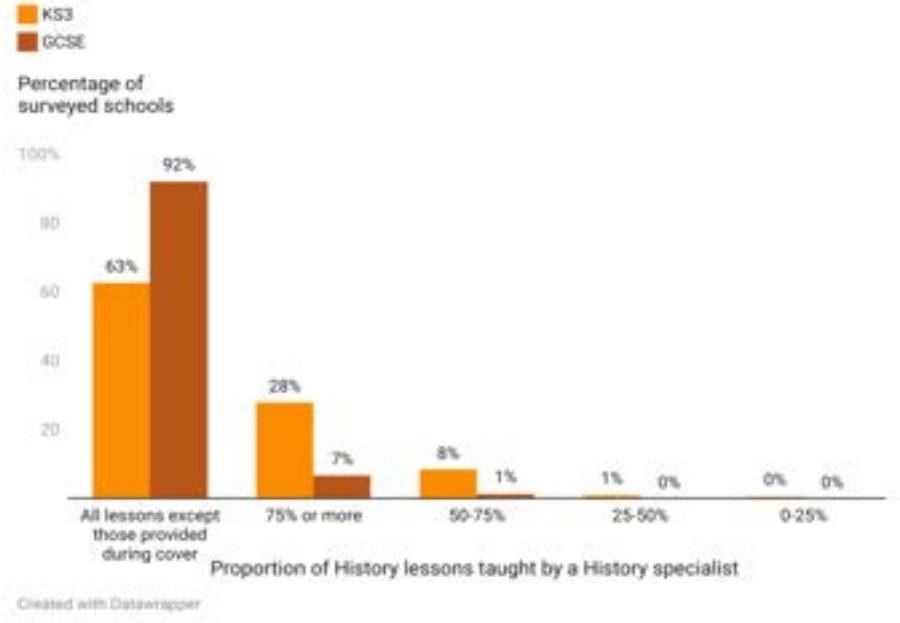


As shown in Figure 21, 55% of surveyed schools followed the Pearson Edexcel exam board, whilst 33% used AQA. OCR was only used by 8% of schools, with alternative boards accounting for just over 3% of schools.

Specialist History Teaching

Surveyed schools were asked to identify what proportion of their history lessons, at both KS3 and GCSE, were taught by a history specialist. Schools were able to determine the definition of 'specialist' themselves.

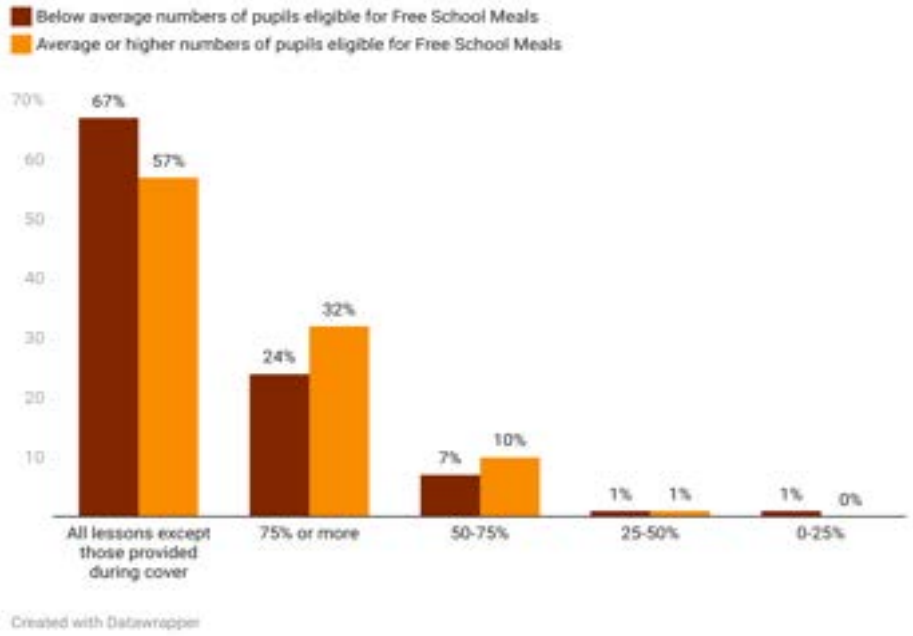
Figure 22: Proportion of History lessons at KS3 and GCSE taught by a history specialist across surveyed schools



In a clear majority of schools all lessons except those provided during cover were taught by specialist history teachers (Fig. 22). This trend was particularly strong at GCSE, with 92% of schools ensuring all GCSE classes were conducted by specialist staff members. In 91% of schools history specialists taught 75% or more of all history lessons, with this rising to 99% of schools at GCSE. Nonetheless these figures indicate specialist history teaching is on average lower in our sample than the government's 2023/2024 figures.[43]

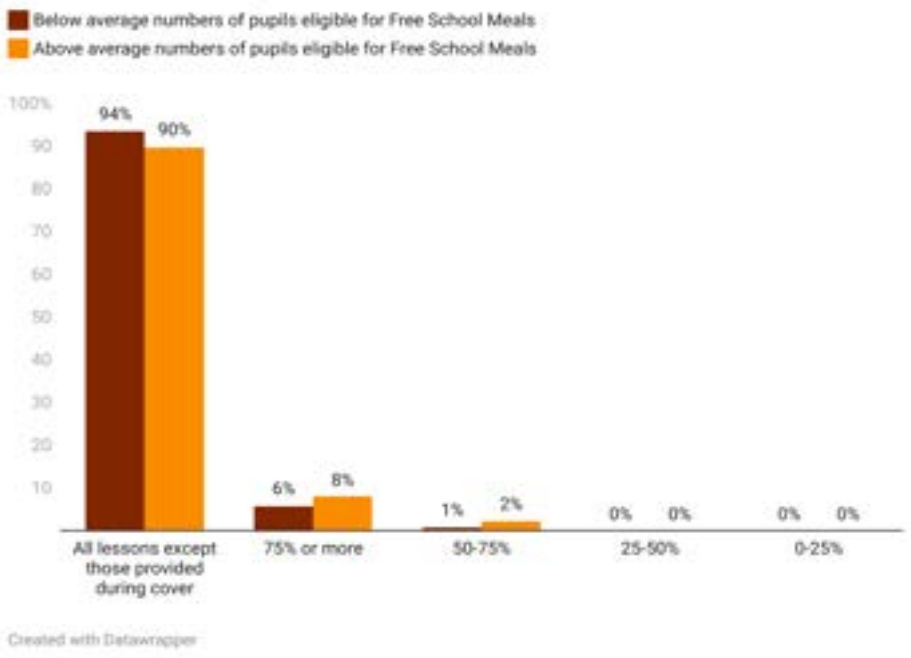
According to government data on average 24.6% of students in England were eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) in 2023/2024.[44] Using this figure we determined whether schools with above or below average numbers of students eligible for FSM were more or less likely to have specialist history teaching (Figs. 23 and 24).

Figure 23: Comparison of proportion of history lessons at KS3 taught by history specialists in schools with above and below average numbers of students eligible for Free School Meals



43. Gov.uk, 'School workforce in England', 6 June 2024, link
44. Gov.uk, 'Schools, pupils and their characteristics', 6 June 2024, link

Figure 24: Comparison of proportion of history lessons at GCSE taught by history specialists in schools with above and below average numbers of students eligible for Free School Meals



At both KS3 and GCSE, schools where a greater proportion of students were eligible for Free School Meals had a lower proportion of their history lessons conducted by subject specialists (Fig. 24). At KS3, 67% of schools with a below average percentage of FSM pupils had all history lessons taught by subject specialists with the exception of cover, compared with 57% of schools with an average or above average percentage of FSM eligible pupils, a difference of 10%. At GCSE this figure was 94% and 90% respectively, a difference of 4%. However, schools with a higher proportion of FSM eligible students were still overwhelmingly offering a high proportion of specialist teaching. 89% of such schools had over 75% of history lessons at KS3 taught by specialists, rising to 98% at GCSE.

Grammar Schools

We compared data from our main mixed sample of schools with data from our grammar school-only booster sample. In general we found limited differences in history provision between the main and grammar school sample.

Lesson Time

Schools in the main sample on average offered slightly more history lesson time per week. On average schools in the main sample offered 107 minutes a week of history lesson time compared with 102 minutes in the grammar school booster sample, a difference of 5 minutes per week.

Topics

On average, schools in our grammar school-only sample taught a higher proportion of the sample topics surveyed than those in our main sample. 40% of schools in our main sample taught 11 or fewer of the sampled topics, compared with just 22% of grammar schools. However, schools in our main sample were as likely as schools in our grammar schools sample to teach a very high number of the sampled topics. 17% of main sample schools taught 15 or more of the sampled topics, compared with 16% of our grammar schools sample.

Textbook Use

Schools in the separate grammar school only sample were on average more likely to use textbooks than those in the main general sample. A majority (53%) of grammar schools used a specific textbook as part of their KS3 history teaching, whilst only a minority of schools in the main sample (41%) did so.

GCSE Progression

Uptake of History GCSE within Year 11 cohorts was broadly similar across the main and separate grammar school samples, with the number of students taking History at GCSE being slightly higher on average at grammar schools. On average 50% of Year 11 students in the grammar school booster sample took history GCSE, compared to 40% in the main sample.

Exam Boards

Amongst schools in our grammar schools-only sample, the Edexcel exam board was less popular, with 49% uptake compared to 55% in the main sample. In contrast the AQA exam board was more popular, being followed by 44% of sampled grammar schools, 10% more than in the main general school sample.

Specialist History Teaching

Only 54% of schools in the grammar school sample had all lessons except cover taught by a specialist teacher at KS3, compared with 63% of schools in the main general sample. However schools in the grammar school sample were 9% more likely to have all GCSE history lessons taught by a subject specialist than those schools in the main general sample. At GCSE there were basically no differences in specialist teaching between the main and grammar school samples, with both groups showing a very high proportion of schools offered fully specialist history teaching at this level.

Chapter 4: History at Key Stages 4 and 5

At Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11) and Key Stage 5 (Years 12 and 13), History becomes an optional subject. Over two-thirds of children do not study History beyond the age of 14 – although, as set out in chapter 2, many will continue to be learn about it, more than in many other subjects, through books, television, museums and heritage sites.

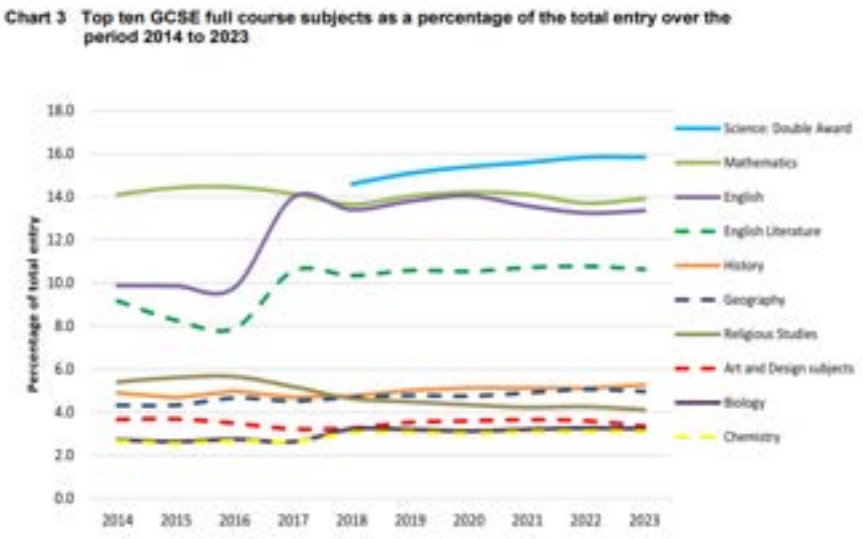
How many go on to study it – and what do they study?

Key Stage 4

The predominant qualification studied at Key Stage 4 in History is the GCSE, though a small number of students instead take other qualifications, particularly the IGCSE. History GCSE is widely taken, counts as a qualification for the purposes of the school accountability measure Progress 8 and is also one of the two humanities subjects (the other being Geography) that can be taken as part of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc).

Over the last decade, the proportion of the total number of students studying history GCSE has increased slightly (Fig. 25).[45]

Figure 25: Top ten GCSE full course subjects as a percentage of the total entry over the period 2014 to 2023

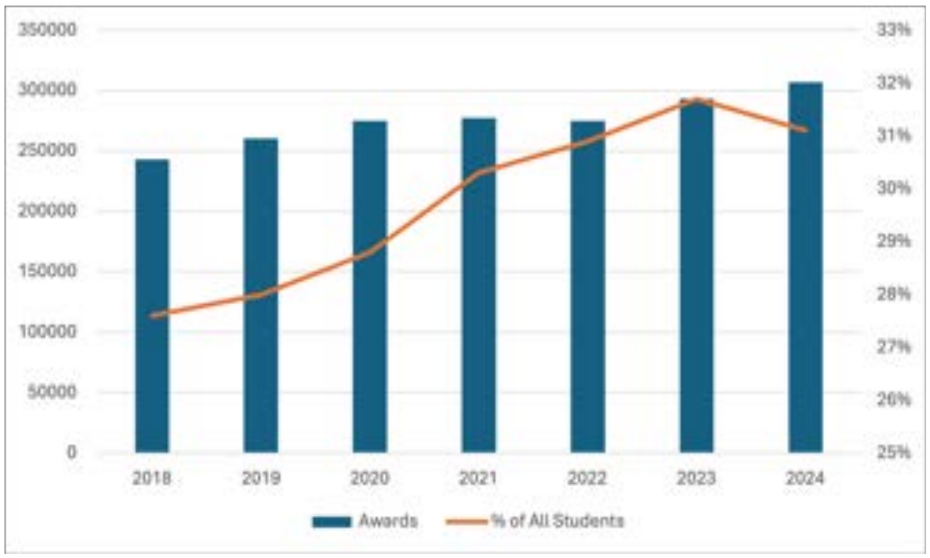


Focusing on the period from 2018 onwards, the period in which the current GCSE specification has been taken, we can see a steady increase

45. Joint Committee on Qualifications, GCSE, Project, and Entry Level Trends - UK (2023), Link

in GCSE history entrants, both in terms of absolute numbers and as a proportion of all students who take the subject. Throughout this period it remained the fifth most popular subject – after Mathematics, English Language, English Literature and Combined Science.

Figure 26: Number and proportion of pupils taking GCSE history, 2018-2024



Overall, in terms of numbers, history is in a healthy and stable position – indeed, in one that many subjects would envy.

What is studied at Key Stage 4?

As in other subjects, the National Curriculum offers high level guidance over History at Key Stage 4, including that:

GCSE specifications in history should enable students to:

- *develop and extend their knowledge and understanding of specified key events, periods and societies in local, British, and wider world history; and of the wide diversity of human experience*
- *engage in historical enquiry to develop as independent learners and as critical and reflective thinkers*
- *develop the ability to ask relevant questions about the past, to investigate issues critically and to make valid historical claims by using a range of sources in their historical context*
- *develop an awareness of why people, events and developments have been accorded historical significance and how and why different interpretations have been constructed about them*
- *organise and communicate their historical knowledge and understanding in different ways and reach substantiated conclusions*[46]

There are a number of more specific strictures – including that British history must form a minimum of 40% of the specification, and that it

46. Department for Education, GCSE Subject Content for History, Link

should include history from three eras, on three times scales, on three geographical contexts[47] – however, the curriculum deliberately provides a wide degree of flexibility over which specific topics, time periods, subjects and themes are studied.

As a result, the specific question of *what* is studied at Key Stage 4 is substantively determined by the exam boards and the choice of modules which they offer. All three principal exam boards in England – AQA, Edexcel and OCR – offer History GCSE and each offer a wide choice of modules for schools to choose between when deciding what to teach.

Policy Exchange is grateful to all three exam boards for agreeing to, in the public interest, sharing internal information about the number of pupils taking each module. It is thanks to this generosity that we are able to present that information here.

Of the three major exam boards, the number of entrants to GCSE History in 2024 were:

- AQA: 101,768
- Edexcel: 177,460
- OCR: 21,140 (3,352 taking History A: Explaining the Modern World and 18,098 taking History B: Schools History Project)

AQA

AQA requires pupils to take four modules, one from each of the following categories:

- Understanding the Modern World: Period Study
- Understanding the Modern World: Wider world depth studies
- Shaping the Nation: Thematic Study
- Shaping the Nation: British depth studies including the historic environment

The total number taking each module within this is shown in the figure below.

47. Ibid.

Figure 27: AQA GCSE history module options

Option	Component	Title	2018 entry	2019 entry	2020 entry (Projected)	2021*	2022*	2023	2024
Period Study	8145/1A/A	America: 1840-1895: Expansion and consolidation	9,263	9,215	12,198	6,775	5,530	7,390	5,890
	8145/1A/B	Germany, 1890-1945: Democracy and dictatorship	45,762	50,064	52,244	46,749	48,007	58,206	61,086
	8145/1A/C	Russia, 1894-1945: Tsardom and communism	4,085	4,037	4,026	3,188	2,786	3,811	3,524
	8145/1A/D	America, 1920-1973: Opportunity and inequality	26,263	27,720	27,896	25,532	26,250	30,222	31,268
Wider World Depth Study	8145/1B/A	Conflict and tension - First World War, 1894-1918	14,066	14,572	16,135	15,914	15,489	16,986	17,269
	8145/1B/B	Conflict and tension - the inter-war years, 1918-1939	35,377	37,510	41,011	40,055	40,023	47,250	41,750
	8145/1B/C	Conflict and tension between East and West, 1945-1972	20,011	21,148	21,792	21,584	20,763	23,041	23,397
	8145/1B/D	Conflict and tension in Asia, 1950-1975	15,233	17,020	16,755	16,472	16,685	17,755	18,220
	8145/1B/E	Conflict and tension in the Gulf and Afghanistan, 1990-2009	686	786	670	665	563	597	761
Thematic Study	8145/2A/A	Britain: Health and the people: c1000 to the present day	62,708	66,216	71,129	54,055	52,830	71,992	74,110
	8145/2A/B	Britain: Power and the people: c1170 to the present day	14,212	15,240	15,506	5,790	5,340	14,505	13,542
	8145/2A/C	Britain: Migration, empires and the people: c790 to the present day	8,453	9,580	9,729	5,055	5,930	13,132	14,116
British Depth Study	8145/2B/A	Norman England, c1066-c1100	30,788	32,038	34,072	13,950	11,703	30,339	29,208
	8145/2B/B	Medieval England: the reign of Edward I, 1272-1307	3,100	3,534	4,427	1,177	781	3,267	2,832
	8145/2B/C	Elizabethan England, c1568-1603	47,339	51,140	53,503	26,107	26,665	61,840	65,477
	8145/2B/D	Restoration England, 1660-1685	4,146	4,324	4,362	1,102	1,224	4,183	4,251

It can be seen in Figure 27 that some subjects are studied significantly more than others. In the period study, over 90% of pupils study Germany 1890 – 1945 or America 1920 – 1973, while for the British Depth Study, more than 90% study either Elizabethan or Norman En gland. For the Thematic Study, Health and the People accounts for approasdfgbhnjmk,l.;/' nk,l./ ximately three quarters of entries, while entries for the Wider World Depth Studies are more evenly spread, with the exception of the study of the Gulf and Afghanistan, 1990 – 2009, taken by fewer than 1% of pupils.

Pearson Edexcel

Edexcel similarly requires pupils to take four modules, one from each of the following categories:

- Thematic study and historic environment
- Period Study
- British Depth Study
- Modern depth study

The total number taking each module within this is shown in the figure below.

Figure 28: Edexcel GCSE history module options

Paper	Code	Title	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1 - Thematic study and historic environment	1HI0/A_10	Crime and punishment in Britain	49,839	54,453	57,259	42,950	41,958	56,612	56,269
	1HI0/A_11	Medicine in Britain	73,539	80,130	86,017	77,231	83,535	100,625	106,170
	1HI0/A_13	Migrants in Britain	0	0	0	0	215	5,228	10,542
	1HI0/A_12	Warfare and British society	7,272	7,205	6,454	2,634	2,099	4,849	4,479
2 - Period study	1HI0/A/B_P2	British America	2862	2,510	2,343	1,230	166	1,977	2,060
	1HI0/A/B_P5	Conflict in the Middle East	2259	2,345	2,164	1,118	639	1,814	1,990
	1HI0/A/B_P1	Spain and the 'New World'	985	1,162	1,222	1,014	516	1,296	1,612
	1HI0/A/B_P4	Superpowers relations and the Cold War	72111	79,147	86,012	38,082	39,352	108,527	117,827
	1HI0/A/B_P3	The American West	51706	56,624	57,989	16,883	14,792	53,700	53,971
2 - British depth study	1HI0/A/B_B1	Anglo-Saxon and Norman England	35773	40,694	42,600	35,781	35,438	47,163	48,544
	1HI0/A/B_B2	The reigns of King Richard I and King John	8558	7,175	7,753	5,623	5,014	6,230	6,552
	1HI0/A/B_B4	Early Elizabethan England	69156	76,598	83,259	70,894	76,076	98,722	106,528
	1HI0/A/B_B3	Henry VIII and his ministers	16436	17,321	16,118	12,866	12,876	15,199	15,836
3 - Modern depth study	1HI0/A/B_32	Mao's China	691	671	571	1,662	547	508	602
	1HI0/A/B_30	Russia and the Soviet Union	4,735	4,757	5,025	5,823	4,725	4,856	4,623
	1HI0/A/B_33	The USA	17,962	19,358	20,487	20,668	21,434	23,224	24,316
	1HI0/A/B_31	Weimar and Nazi Germany	107,262	117,002	123,647	125,000	129,632	138,726	147,919

As with AQA, we can see that some topics are significantly more popular than others – and that there is consistency between boards as to which these are. Elizabethan, followed by Norman England[48], remain the most popular options for the British Depth Study and Medicine dominates in terms of the options offered under the Thematic Studies, as does Weimar and Nazi Germany for Modern Depth Studies. However, there are also differences: The American West is the second most popular Period Study for Edexcel, accounting for almost a third of entries, while AQA's America: 1840 – 1895 is taken by comparatively few.

OCR

History A: Explaining the Modern World

OCR requires pupils to take three modules:

- Period study with non-British depth study
- Thematic study
- British depth study with a study of the historic environment

There are five options for the Period Study and three options for both the Thematic Study and the British Depth Study. In addition, OCR, requires each thematic study to be paired with a specific depth study – for example, Migration to Britain must be paired with The impact of empire on Britain.

The total number taking each module in 2024 is shown in the figure below.

48. The Edexcel option includes Anglo-Saxon England also.

Figure 29: OCR GCSE history A module options

Paper	Title	2024
Period study with non-British depth study	China 1950—1981	147
	Germany 1925—1955	1737
	South Africa 1960—1994	139
	USA 1919—1948	1001
	USA 1945—1974	318
Thematic study	Migration to Britain c. 1000 — 2010	1028
	Power: monarchy and democracy in Britain c. 1000 — 2014	1711
	War and British society c. 790 — 2010	603
British depth study with a study of the historic environment	The impact of empire on Britain 1688 — c. 1730 with Urban environments: patterns of migration	1028
	The English Reformation c. 1520 — c. 1550 with Castles: form and function c. 1000 — 1750	1711
	Personal rule to restoration 1629—1660 with Castles: form and function c. 1000 — 1750	603

Again, we see many entrants choosing to take options related to Weimar and Nazi Germany. In contrast to the other Boards, the USA 1919 – 1948 is relatively popular compared to the Cold War Era, and the Migration module is also comparatively popular (although it should be emphasised that the total numbers are considerably lower than for the other boards).

History B: Schools History Project

OCR requires pupils to undertake five elements:

- British Thematic Study
- British Depth Study
- Study of a Local History Site
- World Period Study
- World Depth Study.

The British and World Depth Studies must be from a different period.

Each exam centre must choose their own local history site, which must be approved by OCR. A consideration of the different local history sites is not included within this report.

The total number taking each module in 2024 is shown in the figure below.

Figure 30: OCR GCSE history B module options

Paper	Title	2024
British thematic study	The people's health	10793
	Crime and punishment	4532
	Migrants to Britain	2773
British depth study	The Norman Conquest, 1065—1087	7978
	The Elizabethans, 1580—1603	9977
	Britain in peace and war, 1900—1918	143
World Period Study	Viking expansion, c. 750 — c. 1050	2291
	The Mughal Empire, 1526—1707	171
	The making of America, 1789—1900.	15636
World Depth Study	The First Crusade, c. 1070 — 1100	1
	Aztecs and the Spanish conquest, 1519—1535	149
	Living under Nazi rule, 1933—1945	17948

As with other boards, we see the continued popularity of Health as a British thematic study and ofthe Normans and Elizabethans as British depth studies. The relative popularity of the Making of America is noteworthy and is perhaps explained by this syllabus offering no 'Cold War' options. Also of note is the strong popularity of Living Under Nazi Rule, taken by over 99% of pupils in 2024.

Overarching features and trends

Across the three major exam boards, a tremendous variety of different study options are available, covering many different countries, time-periods and themes. It is a credit to the system that there was one paper – on the First Crusade – taken by just one student in 2024 and, while this is an outlier, all exam boards maintain papers taken by fewer than 1000 pupils. This is a strong commitment to maintaining genuine choice of study material for which the boards should be commended.

At the same time, it is worth noting that the majority of pupils take a much smaller number of highly popular subjects. While the exact parameters of the paper varies between exam boards, over three-quarters of students study a paper related to Nazi Germany, over 60% study the Elizabethans and almost half study 20th century Russia, either as a study of the country or in a paper related to the Cold War.

One of the core paper formats across the exam boards at GCSE is the thematic study. These papers are designed to help students develop understandings of change and continuity over a broad swathe of time. However, in some cases these themes develop very specialist student knowledge without adding to their wider understanding of the past. Whilst thematic studies on the development of democracy are likely to help students develop a holistic understanding of the development of politics and society, specialist studies of healthcare, migration and warfare risk absorbing large amounts of study time in niche areas of historical interest.

Interest in the Middle East remains low, despite its regular prominence in current affairs, with fewer than 1% of pupils taking a module that focuses on it. Perhaps the most surprising omission is the lack of study of China – now one of the two most powerful countries in the world, and one whose importance will surely wax over the coming century. The option to undertake an in-depth study of China is offered on only half of the syllabuses examined – the Edexcel and the OCR History A syllabuses – and these options are taken, collectively, by fewer than 1,000 pupils – a quarter of 1% of the cohort.

There has been some discussion in popular history of whether the focus of History is altering, in response to demands to 'decolonise' the curriculum, or due to pressure from students following events such as the Black Lives Matters protests in 2020. Whilst this is undoubtedly impacting, to an extent, how history is taught (see Chapter 3) or the materials used, in terms of subjects studied at GCSE it is having a smaller effect. Although Edexcel did introduce a new paper on Migration in 2022 – now taken by

over 10,000 students (around 6% of its total entries), the total number of students studying migration across all four exam boards remains at just under 10% of all entries – making it a not insignificant, but still a minority, focus of study.

Overall, the choices offered by the exam boards – and the choices made by schools and pupils – are broad and sensible, equipping pupils with both the breadth and depth of history that one would expect, and in a way that is both responsive to new themes whilst recognising the enduring importance of long-standing areas of importance. There are, however, some areas where the balance of choices made are surprising – of which the low levels of study of China and the Middle East are perhaps the most significant.

Putting British history back in the spotlight

The diversity of modules offered to schools at GCSE gives students access to a rich and varied GCSE offering. However, the period and depth study structures employed by all three exam boards mean that the GCSE primarily develops student's knowledge in a few specific areas. Although all boards require students to study British history across at least two modules, this means students only develop expertise in a few isolated areas of our country's past – with a high proportion of students studying the Elizabethans, the Normans or health. Given that key events in British history, such as the Glorious Revolution or the Act of Union, are covered by fewer than half of pupils in Key Stage Three, this means many students will complete a GCSE never having even encountered these topics within their school history studies, with the 18th century being particularly under-represented.

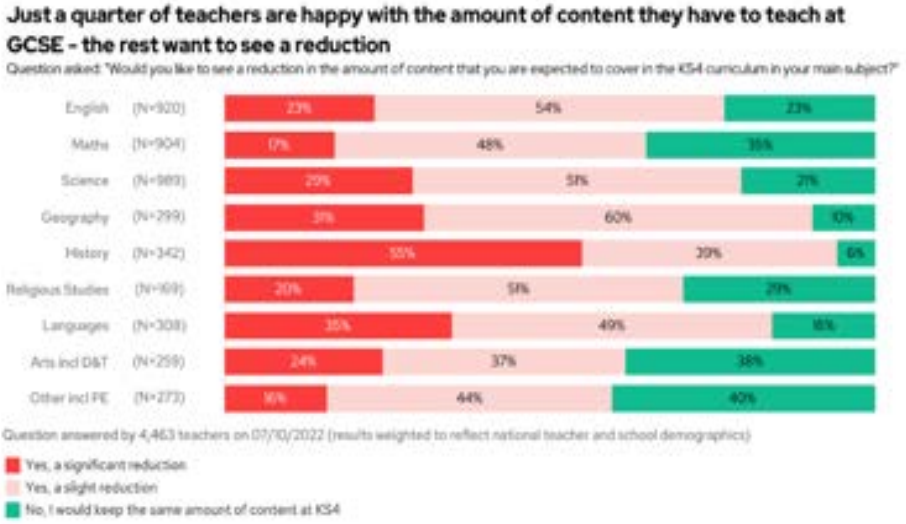
Whilst specialisation is an inherent necessity in a subject as broad as history, this has therefore come at the expense of students developing a coherent chronological understanding of the narrative of Britain's wider past. As Nick Gibb, former schools minister argued '*breadth is in many ways more important than depth – it gives students the context to orientate themselves when encountering the past throughout their lives*'. Although the thematic study seeks to address this, the themes themselves – health, crime and punishment, migration, warfare and politics – with the exception of the latter - also develop highly specialist knowledge that does not equip students with a more holistic understanding of change over time.

This is concerning. As an entry level qualification, GCSEs in all subjects should, in a similar manner to KS3, seek to develop student's general knowledge of key ideas and concepts that will make them informed citizens in later life. The current GCSE programme, whilst serving as an excellent introduction to history as an academic subject through the study of varied engaging topics, does not provide the chronological sweep to give student's a general sense of their national past.

At the same time the history GCSE programme has been criticised for being over-burdened with content. Polling by Teacher Tapp has found that history teachers were significantly more likely than other subjects to

want to see reductions of content in the GCSE, with 94% feeling some reduction was required.[49]

Figure 31: Teacher Tapp polling showing teacher attitudes to the quantity of GCSE content across subjects



As a result, there have been ongoing calls for the number of modules covered at history GCSE to be reduced from 4 to 3. A former Trust CEO we spoke to said '*reducing the number of topics from four to three would enable teachers to focus on greater depth and more secure knowledge*'.

Policy Exchange proposes to address this critique by replacing the fourth full unit with a shorter British history-focused survey paper designed to build on and consolidate student learning at KS3, covering British history from 1066 to 1989. 'Britain and the world' would be a mandatory module and would require students to consider change and continuity over time in a number of core themes – including the development of democracy, economy and society, and Britain's relationships abroad.

To reduce the teaching burden of this new unit its core specification content would closely follow the KS3 National Curriculum. As such much of the content would revisit topics many schools teach at KS3 with a small number of additions – but with questions set and assessed at the standard one would expect of KS4.

To offset the breadth of this paper, students would not be expected to demonstrate the same level of detailed factual knowledge expected in other modules within the GCSE. In addition to some short answer questions to test student's broader chronological understanding of the past, exam questions would be structured to allow students to draw on their overall knowledge of British history and apply it to address questions related to the broader themes. For example, a question, 'To what extent could the Glorious Revolution be considered the most significant event in the development of British democracy', an effective answer might be expected to compare and contrast it with other key events in British history, such as Magna Carta or women's suffrage, to show their understanding of the

49. Teacher Tapp, 'What changes would teachers make to their subject's KS4 curriculum?', 23 January 2023, link

broader theme.

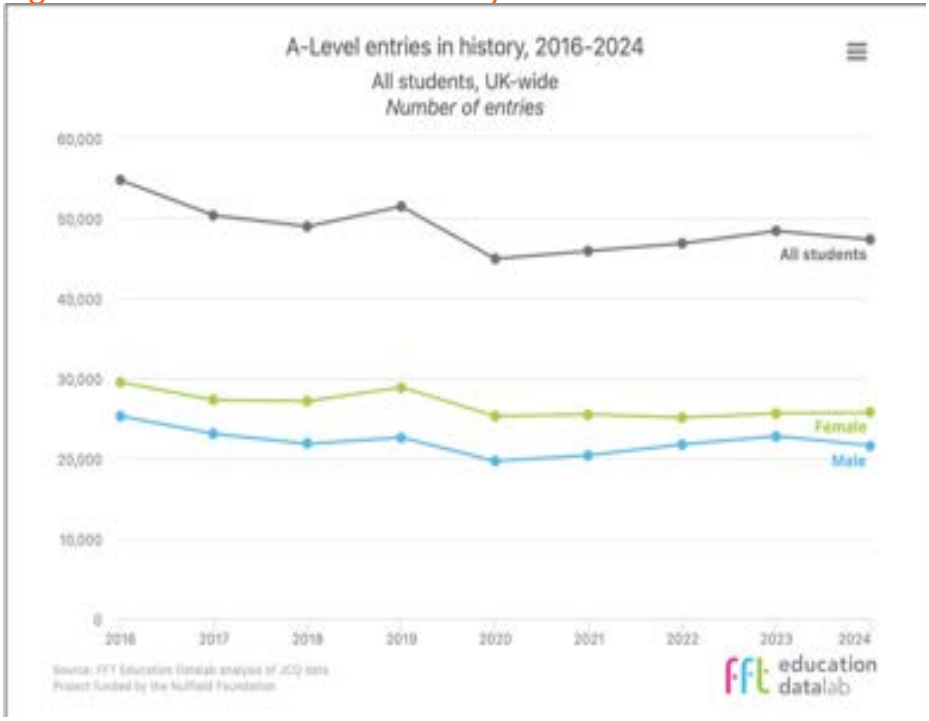
The goal would be that, in total, including consolidation time and exam practice, this unit would require approximately 15% of the teaching time within the GCSE, and would be weighted accordingly.

This new paper would ensure that all GCSE history students developed a basic general understanding of key elements of Britain's national past and how the country has evolved over time.

Key Stage 5

The primary qualification at Key Stage 5 is the History A-Level, taken by 47,297 pupils in 2024. Although the numbers taking History A-Level have been in gradual decline, it remains the 5th most popular A-Level (Fig. 31).[50]

Figure 32: A-Level entries in history 2016-2024



What is studied at Key Stage 5?

As before, Policy Exchange is grateful to all three exam boards for agreeing to, in the public interest, sharing internal information about the number of pupils taking each module. It is thanks to this generosity that we are able to present that information here.

Of the three major exam boards, the number of entrants to A-Level History in 2024 were:

- AQA: 20,367
- Edexcel: 13,382
- OCR: 10,190

50. Royal Historical Society, 'Student numbers for history A-Levels, GCSEs and Scottish Advanced Higher, Higher and National 5 exams, 2024', 28 August 2024, Link

AQA

AQA requires pupils to undertake a breadth study, a depth study and a historical investigation (a personal study into a topic).

Significant choices are available for each module. The numbers taking each since 2018 are set out below.

Figure 33: AQA A Level history module options

Breadth Study

Component	Title	2017 entry	2018 entry	2019 entry	2020 (Projected)	2021	2022	2023	2024
1A	The Age of the Crusades, c1071 - 1204	815	815	685	559	559	523	497	413
1B	Spain in the Age of Discovery, 1469 - 1598	398	359	339	284	166	206	204	145
1C	The Tudors: England, 1485 - 1603	8,477	8,766	9,545	8,106	8,522	8,344	8,829	8,745
1D	Stuart Britain and the Crisis of Monarchy, 1603 - 1702	1,878	1,844	1,966	1,645	1,533	1,562	1,530	1,395
1E	Russia in the Age of Absolutism and Enlightenment, 1682 - 1796	166	158	135	101	121	82	93	76
1F	Industrialisation and the People: Britain, c1783 - 1885	920	865	755	640	611	710	752	653
1G	Challenge and Transformation: Britain, c1851 - 1964	899	868	856	698	781	657	792	831
1H	Tsarist and Communist Russia, 1855 - 1964	3,730	3,758	4,148	3,505	3,395	3,286	3,623	3,315
1J	The British Empire, c1857 - 1967	1,392	1,526	1,582	1,417	1,684	1,754	2,153	2,120
1K	The Making of a Superpower: USA, 1865 - 1975	1,626	1,648	1,677	1,453	1,458	1,476	1,546	1,589
1L	The Quest for Political Stability: Germany, 1871 - 1991	923	967	1,041	1,008	1,049	1,118	1,038	1,085

Depth Study

Component	Title	2017 entry	2018 entry	2019 entry	2020 (Projected)	2021	2022	2023	2024
2A	Royal Authority and the Angevin Kings, 1154 - 1216	454	422	379	282	311	177	249	167
2B	The Wars of the Roses, 1450 - 1499	930	1,022	1,128	923	803	944	891	800
2C	The Reformation in Europe, c1500 - 1564	121	90	89	59	30	27	35	17
2D	Religious Conflict and the Church in England, c1529 - c1570	755	708	801	668	602	593	573	492
2E	The English Revolution, 1625 - 1660	1,211	1,166	1,210	971	906	871	926	860
2F	The Sun King: Louis XIV, France and Europe, 1643 - 1715	163	170	146	180	181	116	138	138
2G	The Birth of the USA, 1760 - 1801	560	577	360	322	346	379	451	386
2H	France in Revolution, 1774 - 1815	972	894	945	814	709	769	805	838
2J	America: A Nation Divided, c1845 - 1877	674	612	567	497	499	459	465	406
2K	International Relations and Global Conflict, c1890 - 1941	220	181	223	222	193	182	172	199
2L	Italy and Fascism, c1900 - 1945	360	355	430	296	348	330	480	353
2M	Wars and Welfare: Britain in Transition, 1906 - 1957	922	934	959	869	660	731	823	800
2N	Revolution and Dictatorship: Russia and the Soviet Union, 1917 - 1953	3,031	3,041	3,342	2,886	3,083	3,192	3,312	3,163
2O	Democracy and Nazism: Germany, 1918 - 1945	3,217	3,389	3,798	3,230	3,303	3,221	3,554	3,520
2P	The Transformation of China, 1936 - 1997	183	226	256	217	219	260	298	337
2Q	The American Dream: Reality and Illusion, 1945 - 1980	1,582	1,566	1,680	1,362	1,512	1,423	1,666	1,718
2R	The Cold War, c1945 - 1991	2,451	2,723	2,827	2,397	2,532	2,632	2,616	2,640
2S	The Making of Modern Britain, 1951 - 2007	3,386	3,453	3,548	3,197	3,378	3,375	3,553	3,504
2T	The Crisis of Communism: The USSR and the Soviet Empire, 1953 - 2000	132	45	47	24	56	37	64	27

As at GCSE, we see a wide range of possible options, with some topics considerably more popular than others, and with these remaining relatively consistent over the years. The Tudors is the single most popular paper – more than twice as popular as any other single module – and the Reformation the least, studied by just 17 pupils. A variety of papers on Russia and the Soviet Union, the Cold War, 20th Century Germany and British History from 1850 onwards constitute the majority of the remaining more popular modules.

Pearson Edexcel

Edexcel requires pupils to study three different modules: a breadth study with interpretations, a depth study, and a module that comprises themes in breadth with aspects in depth, in addition to a coursework assignment.

A variety of choices are available for each option, with the most choices available for the depth study. The numbers taking each since 2017 are set out below.

Figure 34: Edexcel A Level history module options

Breadth study with interpretations

Paper	Code	Title	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1 - Breadth study with interpretations	9HI0_1A	The crusades, c1095–1204	417	457	465	424	435	390	346	297
	9HI0_1B	England, 1509–1603: authority, nation and religion	588	555	614	407	375	394	328	355
	9HI0_1C	Britain, 1625–1701: conflict, revolution and settlement	2,432	2,443	2,576	2,303	2,306	2,301	2,318	2,185
	9HI0_1D	Britain, c1785–c1870: democracy, protest and reform	443	366	431	313	318	343	281	288
	9HI0_1E	Russia, 1917–91: from Lenin to Yeltsin	2,883	2,884	3,268	3,144	3,169	3,179	3,402	3,448
	9HI0_1F	In search of the American Dream: the USA, c1917–96	2,323	2,370	2,492	2,213	2,302	2,341	2,625	2,525
	9HI0_1G	Germany and West Germany, 1918–89	2,316	2,230	2,511	2,332	2,273	2,313	2,211	2,218
	9HI0_1H	Britain transformed, 1918–97	1,830	1,866	1,972	1,821	1,895	1,989	2,111	2,066

Depth study

Paper	Code	Title	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
2 - Depth study	9HI0_2A/1	Anglo-Saxon England and the Anglo-Norman Kingdom, c1053–1106	417	295	276	424	435	276	199	195
	9HI0_2A/2	England and the Angevin Empire in the reign of Henry II, 1154–89		154	177			102	139	93
	9HI0_2B/1	Luther and the German Reformation, c1515–55	588	449	508	407	375	329	292	318
	9HI0_2B/2	The Dutch Revolt, c1563–1609		97	83			49	29	27
	9HI0_2C/1	France in revolution, 1774–99	2,432	830	753	2,303	2,306	577	643	648
	9HI0_2C/2	Russia in revolution, 1894–1924		1,562	1,749			1,636	1,581	1,458
	9HI0_2D/1	The unification of Italy, c1830–70	443	227	243	313	318	208	180	169
	9HI0_2D/2	The unification of Germany, c1840–71		132	180			120	95	114
	9HI0_2E/1	Mao's China, 1949–76	2,883	2,072	2,304	3,144	3,169	2,397	2,539	2,631
	9HI0_2E/2	The German Democratic Republic, 1949–90		747	876			651	735	716
	9HI0_2F/1	India, c1914–48: the road to independence	2,323	902	942	2,213	2,302	910	985	985
	9HI0_2F/2	South Africa, 1948–94: from apartheid state to 'rainbow nation'		1,414	1,482			1,346	1,534	1,462
	9HI0_2G/1	The rise and fall of fascism in Italy, c1911–46	2,316	1,920	2,150	2,332	2,273	2,019	1,918	1,921
	9HI0_2G/2	Spain, 1930–78: republicanism, Francoism and the re-establishment of democra		285	294			221	225	216

Themes in breadth with aspects in depth

Paper	Code	Title	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
3 - Themes in breadth with aspects in depth	9HI0_2H/1	The USA, c1920–55: boom, bust and recovery	1,830	908	878	1,821	1,895	1,009	960	981
	9HI0_2H/2	The USA, 1955–92: conformity and challenge		912	1,033			929	1,087	1,019
	9HI0_30	Lancastrians, Yorkists and Henry VII, 1399–1509	818	792	937	777	912	886	842	901
	9HI0_31	Rebellion and disorder under the Tudors, 1485–1603	2,064	2,035	2,201	2,002	2,096	1,867	2,018	2,043
	9HI0_32	The Golden Age of Spain, 1474–1598	34	32	27	24	16	33	17	47
	9HI0_33	The witch craze in Britain, Europe and North America, c1580–c1750	1,279	1,262	1,304	1,136	1,278	1,302	1,308	1,299
	9HI0_34/1	Industrialisation and social change in Britain, 1759–1928: forging a new society	635	68	57	582	598	98	84	69
	9HI0_34/2	Poverty, public health and the state in Britain, c1780–1939		563	566			578	665	640
	9HI0_35/1	Britain: losing and gaining an empire, 1763–1914	4,036	1,765	1,900	4,064	3,879	1,920	2,063	2,049
	9HI0_35/2	The British experience of warfare, c1790–1918		2,199	2,350			1,912	2,057	2,094
	9HI0_36/1	Protest, agitation and parliamentary reform in Britain, c1780–1928	2,303	1,528	1,732	2,254	2,204	1,689	1,806	1,865
	9HI0_36/2	Ireland and the Union, c1774–1923		493	569			503	500	471
	9HI0_37/1	The changing nature of warfare, 1859–1991: perception and reality	1,010	22	35	886	783	31	38	44
	9HI0_37/2	Germany, 1871–1990: united, divided and reunited		973	960			693	657	632
	9HI0_38/1	The making of modern Russia, 1855–1991	126	96	108	117	141	91	65	51
	9HI0_38/2	The making of modern China, 1860–1997		30	26			55	53	72
	9HI0_39/1	Civil rights and race relations in the USA, 1850–2009	1,327	1,061	1,230	1,115	1,166	1,163	1,092	1,020
	9HI0_39/2	Mass media and social change in Britain, 1882–2004		55	64			78	62	36
Coursework	9HI0_04/T	Coursework	13,232	13,171	14,329	12,797	13,008	13,250	13,622	13,382

No single option dominates Edexcel entries as strongly as the Tudors does for AQA. 20th Century Russia and Germany remain popular options, as does 17th century Britain. Significant numbers also study Mao's China, Fascist Italy and South Africa. A wide variety of modules of British history, from the Tudors, through constitutional developments of the 17th century,

to Empire and more modern political reforms, are studied by a relatively large number of pupils.

OCR

OCR requires pupils to study three different modules: a British period study and enquiry, a non-British period study, and a module on thematic study and historical interpretations, in addition to a topic-based essay.

A variety of choices are available for each option. The numbers taking each in 2024 are set out below.

Figure 35: OCR A Level history module options

A Level entries, 2024					
British Period Study and Enquiry		Non-British Period Study		Thematic study and historical interpretations	
Y101 - Alfred and the Making of England 871-1016	216	Y201 - The Rise of Islam c.550-750	1	Y301 - The Early Anglo-Saxons c.400-800	12
Y102 - Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest	476	Y202 - Charlemagne 768-814	30	Y302 - The Viking Age c.790-1066	99
Y103 - England 1199-1272	81	Y203 - The Crusades and the Crusader States 1095-1192	604	Y303 - English Government and the Church 1066-1216	76
Y104 - England 1377-1455	36	Y204 - Genkis Khan and the Explosion from the Steppes c. 1167-1405	24	Y304 - The Church and Medieval Heresy c.1100-1437	19
Y105 - England 1445-1509: Lancastrians, Yorkists and Henry VII	908	Y205 - Exploration, Encounters and Empire 1445-1570	16	Y305 - The Renaissance c.1400-c.1600	30
Y106 - England 1485-1558: the Early Tudors	1936	Y206 - Spain 1469-1556	92	Y306 - Rebellion and Disorder under the Tudors 1485-1603	583
Y107 - England 1547-1603: the Later Tudors	1303	Y207 - The German Reformation and the rule of Charles V 1500-1559	103	Y307 - Tudor Foreign Policy 1485-1603	67
Y108 - The Early Stuarts and the Origins of the Civil War 1603-1660	1596	Y208 - Philip II 1556-1598	24	Y308 - The Catholic Reformation 1492-1610	84
Y109 - The Making of Georgian Britain 1678-c.1760	31	Y209 - African Kingdoms c.1400-c.1800: four case studies	329	Y309 - The Ascendancy of the Ottoman Empire 1453-1606	32
Y110 - From Pitt to Peel: Britain 1783-1853	483	Y210 - Russia 1645-1741	36	Y310 - The Development of the Nation State: France 1498-1610	9
Y111 - Liberals, Conservatives and the Rise of Labour 1846-1918	104	Y211 - The Rise and Decline of the Mughal Empire in India 1526-1739	0	Y311 - The Origins and Growth of the British Empire 1558-1783	48
Y112 - Britain 1900-1951	503	Y212 - The American Revolution 1740-1796	1017	Y312 - Popular Culture and the Witchcraze of the 16th and 17th Centuries	971
Y113 - Britain 1930-1997	2510	Y213 - The French Revolution and the rule of Napoleon 1774-1815	1307	Y313 - The Ascendancy of France 1610-1715	85
		Y214 - France 1814-1870	42	Y314 - The Challenge of German Nationalism 1789-1919	383
		Y215 - Italy and Unification 1789-1896	257	Y315 - The Changing Nature of Warfare 1792-1945	264
		Y216 - The USA in the 19th century: Westward expansion and Civil War 1803-c.1890	509	Y316 - Britain and Ireland 1791-1921	174
		Y217 - Japan 1853-1937	22	Y317 - China and its Rulers 1839-1989	218
		Y218 - International Relations 1890-1941	159	Y318 - Russia and its Rulers 1855-1964	3139
		Y219- Russia 1894-1941	1513	Y319 - Civil Rights in the USA 1865-1992	3290
		Y220 - Italy 1896-1943	193	Y320 - From Colonialism to Independence: The British Empire 1857-1965	246
		Y221 - Democracy and Dictatorships in Germany 1919-1963	2139	Y321 - The Middle East 1068-2011: Ottomans to Arab Spring	358
		Y222 - The Cold War in Asia 1945-1993	570		
		Y223 - The Cold War in Europe 1941-1995	994		
		Y224 - Apartheid and Reconciliation: South African Politics 1948-1999	207		

As with Edexcel, there is a wide diversity of topics studied. The majority of entries study one of the British period studies from the Tudors onwards, and both Russia and 20th Century Germany remain popular, but significant numbers also study Civil Rights in the USA, the American and French Revolutions, and a wide diversity of other topics, including Empire, Witchcrazes and the Crusades.

Overarching features and trends

Compared to GCSE, the A-Level syllabuses feature not just a greater variety of options, but a much greater spread in regards to what schools choose to teach. Periods from 1500 onward – and, in particular, 1800 onwards – remain the most popular, but there is a wide diversity of both periods and themes studies. Each of the exam boards provides a number of modules taken by fewer than 500 pupils – and some by fewer than 100 pupils.

There are notably more modules – and more pupils taking these modules – on European history, from the Early Modern period to the present day, as well as on a greater diversity of countries around the world, including South Africa, the Middle East and India. China is comparatively better studied, with over 5% of pupils studying a module that focuses on that country (compared to 0.25% of entries at GCSE) – though it still remains significantly less popular than America, Russia or German history.

Modules dating from before 1000AD remain amongst the least popular, even where they are offered.

One area of concern is that, despite this widening of themes and periods within A level modules, many schools appear to choose to repeat topics which have already been extensively covered at GCSE. The popularity of topics such as the Tudors and 20th century Germany at both GCSE and A level suggests many students may be studying very similar content at both qualifications. For instance, the AQA's GCSE topic on Elizabeth is by far its most popular GCSE British breadth unit, as is its A level Tudors breadth unit which has significant chronological overlap. Whilst revisiting topics in greater depth can be positive, this constrains the breadth of history some students are exposed to over the course of GCSE and A level to a few, relatively narrow themes.

Chapter 5: History Teaching Resources

A curriculum can only be as strong as the mechanisms in place to deliver it. The act of translating a well-formulated History curriculum or scheme of work off of the page and into the minds of a classroom of students relies on the capabilities and knowledge of the individual history teacher and the tools at their disposal. High quality teaching is essential. Yet it is also vital that teachers have access to well-structured and effective classroom resources to support their delivery. Amongst those we interviewed there was a view that the quality of resources used in schools was generally improving. A former Trust CEO we spoke to said '*materials have been getting better as resources and education more generally are better informed by the evidence on cognitive science and learning*'.

In many cases these teaching materials will be developed by the teachers themselves. The UK Government's 2019 Teacher Workload Survey found that of the 49.1 hours a week worked on average by secondary school teachers, 7.3 of these, or almost 15%, were spent on planning or lesson preparation, part of which will include producing resources.[51] Robert Peal, Head of the West London Free School and author of Knowing History, argued '*there are major workload issues associated with departments creating their own resources*'.

The alternative is for teachers to identify and use supplementary resources designed by others to support their teaching. Navigating the supplementary resource market is complicated by its fractured and informal nature. At one end teachers have access to traditional resources such as major textbook series, materials from the Historical Association and multi-media tools from organisations such as the BBC. Since the pandemic, Oak National Academy has emerged as a significant centralised provider of lesson resources. At the other a wide array of crowd-sourced resource banks, such as Twinkl, School History and TeachIt allow educators to share their own resources (often for a price) with their professional peers. Growing concerns around quality have also seen the expansion of 'complete curriculum programmes', offering schools fully coherent curriculums and schemes of work as opposed to isolated resources through a subscription model.

To demonstrate the diversity of resources used in classrooms, in the following section we present examples of different kinds of teaching resources drawn from the internet, textbooks and responses to Freedom of Information requests to schools. These are intended to be indicative of

51. Department for Education, 'Teacher Workload Survey 2019', 11 October 2019, link

the resource landscape and are not designed to provide comprehensive insight into what is on offer.

Textbooks

Figure 36: Sample spread from 'Revolution, Industry and Empire: Britain 1558-1901', Aaron Wilkes, Oxford University Press.[52] The resource summarises the key features of the Religious Settlement and its consequences at a level appropriate for KS3 and is followed by several pupil activities based on the preceding content.

52. Oxford University Press, 'KS3 History 4th Edition: Revolution, Industry and Empire: Britain 1558-1901 Student Book', link

Figure 37: Sample page from 'Democracies In Change: Britain and the USA in the twentieth century' .[53] The resource provides a thorough introduction to the growth of spectator sport in Britain the inter-war period. It includes highly detailed factual information, such as attendance figures, as well as a primary pictorial source to support student learning.

As a resource, textbooks represent an integrated resource package. Typically publishers will produce a chronological series of titles focusing on different periods. Within each textbook will be a series of explanatory and age-appropriate readings, relevant source materials and pupil exercises based on the content.

Unlike most history resources, textbooks undergo extensive quality assurance processes. Most textbook series are produced either by major publishing houses or exam boards and are generally written by or in consultation with history specialists. As a result textbook design is typically of a reliably high quality, and material is designed to effectively build on student's prior knowledge and develop their understanding over the course of the book. In Figure 36 for example, the activities in the bottom right increase in difficulty, from recall and comprehension to challenging students to consider the success of Elizabeth's 'middle way'.

However, the cost of textbook series can deter their regular and widespread use. In an era of constrained budgets many teachers are reluctant or unable to spend significantly on external resources. Policy

53. Hodder, 'Democracies In Change: Britain and the USA in the twentieth century'

Exchange's own research identified earlier in this report that just 41% of schools use textbooks routinely as part of normal lessons. When upfront costs are substantial, such as when purchasing textbooks, many teachers are deterred by fears that resources will rapidly become out of date.[54] There is also observed hostility to the widespread use of textbooks, with many teachers feeling they infringe their autonomy and that over-reliance is a sign of laziness. 44% of teachers in a 2021 study agreed there is stigma associated with teaching from textbooks.[55] The Independent Teacher Workload Review Group, in their 2016 report on planning and teaching resources, identified this issue, noting that:

> *'there seems to be an underlying mistrust of textbooks, related to notions of professionalism, which assume it is more professional to trust a random resource, downloaded from the internet after many hours of searching, rather than a carefully curated, fully researched textbook'.*[56]

Complete Curriculum Programmes

Figure 38: PowerPoint slide from an Opening Worlds unit on Viking York aimed at primary school age children.[57] This slide is preceded by a narrative about the lives of two fictional Viking children, Helga and Arne. This activity challenges students to extrapolate broader historical lessons from the fictional narrative.

54. TES Magazine, 'Why edu-Twitter is a must-use tool for any teacher', 8 July 2021, link
55. Public First, 'How teachers use textbooks', May 2021, link
56. Independent Teacher Workload Review Group, 'Eliminating unnecessary workload around planning and teaching resources', March 2016, link
57. Opening Worlds, 'Vikings 2: Changing rulers, changing worlds – sample resources', link

Figure 39: A starter quiz activity from an Oak National Academy lesson on the English Civil War, aimed at KS3 students.[58] The activity is designed to prompt students to recall knowledge from the preceding Oak lesson on the causes of the Civil War.

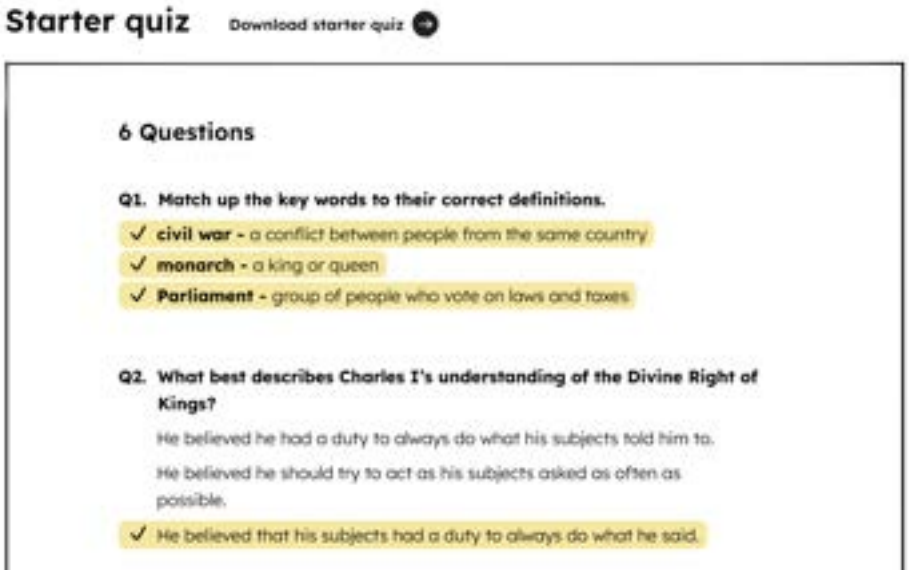
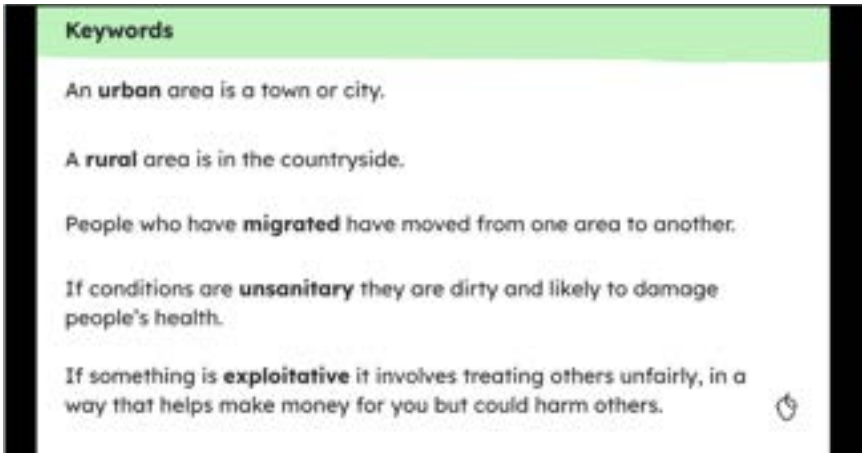


Figure 40: A keyword bank from an Oak National Academy lesson on the Industrial Revolution, aimed at KS3 students.[59] The slide aims to explicitly teach technical vocabulary that will be used in the course of the lesson.



Complete Curriculum Programmes offer fully devised curricula and units that can be adopted by a school department in place of an internally devised curriculum and are generally offered through a subscription model. Such programmes extend further the holistic integrated offering of textbooks by providing fully resourced and sequenced lessons, including PowerPoints, worksheets and in some cases delivery advice and instructions for teachers.

Like textbooks, Complete Curriculum Programmes typically receive significant investment and as a result resources are of high quality and utilise evidence-informed pedagogy. Complete Curriculum Programmes are not quality assured and notionally could be released by anyone prepared to

58. Oak National Academy, 'Royalists and Parliamentarians', link
59. Oak National Academy, 'The Industrial Revolution and urban migration', link

produce the content required. However, almost all are produced by highly regarded institutions or subject specialists that are regarded as authorities. For example, Opening Worlds places significant emphasis on developing literacy through the provision of age-appropriate readings throughout its history curriculum. Demand for Complete Curriculum Programmes has grown rapidly. For example Opening Worlds is now used by over 360 English primary schools.[60] The expansion of such programmes may in part be as a result of the Ofsted framework's curriculum focus, particularly on sequencing and content selection. These changes may have incentivised schools to explore high-quality, professionally designed programmes by subject experts that were seen to closely adhere to best practice in these areas.

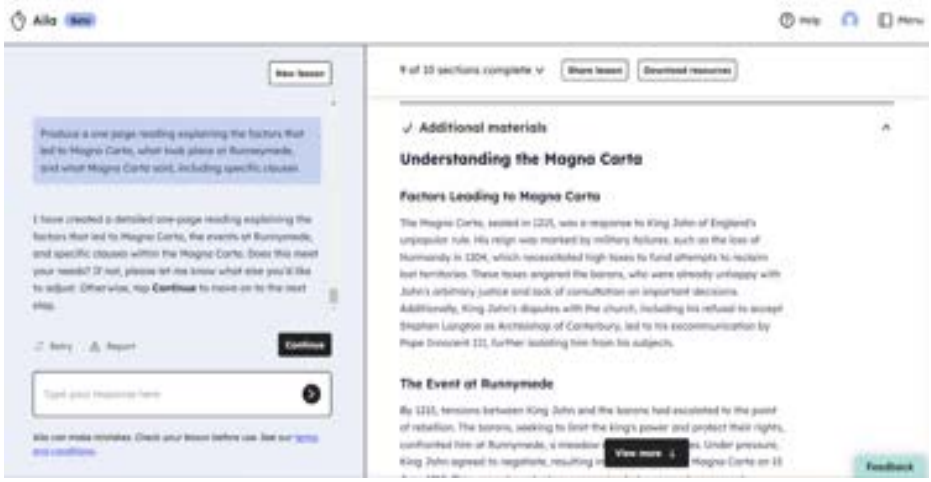
Oak National Academy is relatively exceptional amongst Complete Curriculum Programmes for being freely available to all, without requiring an account. Oak was established to provide learning-from-home content during the Covid-19 pandemic and now offers hundreds of lessons in all major subject areas through partnership with the UK government and Department for Education.[61]

Unlike many other externally available resources, which are almost inherently standalone and can therefore integrate poorly into wider schemes of work, resources produced as part of Complete Curriculum Programmes are sequenced to build upon prior knowledge and serve as a foundation for future learning. For example, Figure 38, designed to support knowledge recall, is only possible because it is assumes prior knowledge from the previous lesson in this unit.

Despite these advantages the funding model of many Complete Curriculum Programmes can deter wider uptake. Schools are understandably reluctant to develop reliance on subscription services that require a year-by-year commitment for sustained access. Like textbooks, Complete Curriculum Programmes also face some opposition and stigma amongst teachers, who view them as an abdication of their planning and curriculum design responsibilities. This is despite such programmes, such as Oak National Academy and Opening Worlds, generally being well regarded by educators.

60. Opening Worlds, 'What is Opening Worlds?', link
61. Oak National Academy, 'Who we are', link

Figure 41: An AI-designed material from Oak National Academy's Aila AI generator. From a short, teacher-written prompt the AI has generated a high quality, age-appropriate reading that could be used by KS3 students to support their learning about Magna Carta.



Oak National Academy has recently launched Aila, an 'AI powered lesson assistant'.[62] Aila seeks to address this stigma and simplify lesson planning by enabling teachers to generate their own custom lessons using Oak's lesson structure, on which the AI has been trained. With this tool teachers can rapidly develop and tweak lesson plans, learning objectives, PowerPoints and additional lesson resources, such as the narrative comprehension below.

Third Sector Resources

Figure 42: A pictorial source and caption as part of the Imperial War Museums' lesson resource series 'Living in the trenches'.[63] The series provides teachers with access to high quality primary source material from the museum's collection.

62. Oak National Academy, 'Introducing Aila', link
63. Imperial War Museums, 'Classroom resource: Living in the Trenches', link

Figure 43: An 'African Kingdoms timeline' produced by the British Museum, aimed at KS3 and KS4 students.[64] The resource uses age-appropriate language and relevant visual sources to document the development of several kingdoms across the continent.

64. The British Museum, 'African kingdoms timeline', link

Figure 44: A spread from the Black Country Living Museum's schools booklet 'Coal, Iron and Steam'. The information provided is clear and well supported by primary sources. However the activities shown are relatively simple and require students to guess the correct answer without sufficient foundational knowledge.

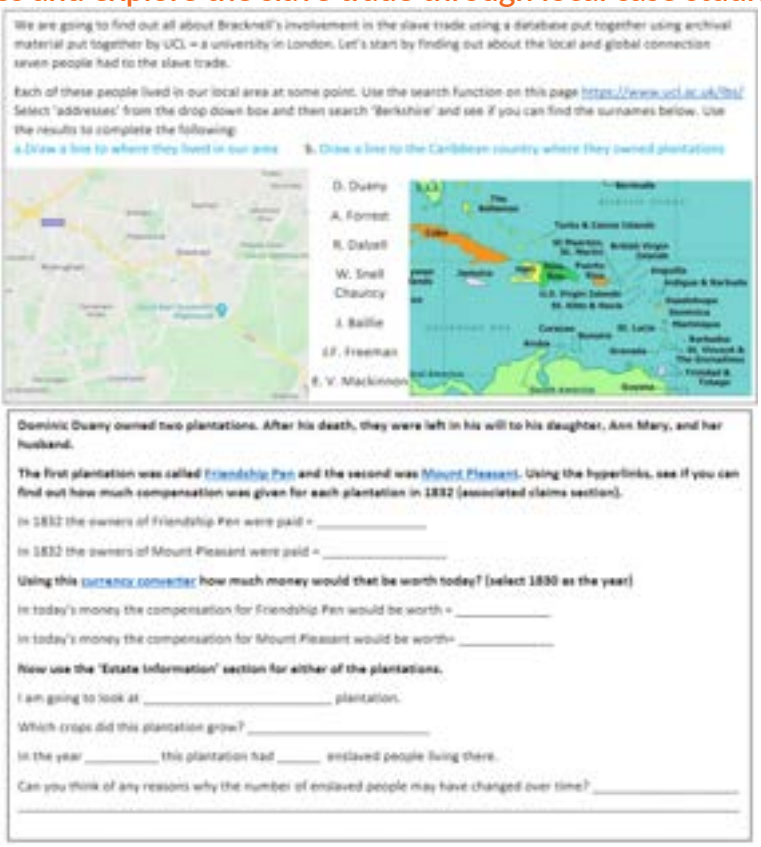
Policy Exchange's 2018 Report 'Completing the Revolution' called for third sector institutions and organisations, such as museums, historical trusts and charitable organisations, to play a greater role in creating classroom materials.[65] Heritage institutions employ specialists well placed to generate high quality classroom resources and are likely to impose internal quality controls to protect their reputations. Such organisations can make a valuable contribution by utilising their collections to make high quality primary source materials available for classroom learning, such as the resource series in Figure 42. Expanding access to artifact images and written sources can enrich student engagements with the past.

However, it is important to note that the production of educational resources is very rarely the focus of such heritage organisations. As a result, classroom material offerings may be limited by the resources organisations can devote to this work, as well as by the diversity of their own collections. Yet where they are offered, the particular expertise of heritage institutions and the collections they have at their disposal can be used to produce unique and high-quality resources that supplement what teachers can produce for themselves.

65. Policy Exchange, 'Completing the Revolution: Delivering on the promise of the 2014 National Curriculum', 9 March 2018, link

School-Made Resources

Figure 45: A worksheet for an online research task for KS3 students looking at links between local historical figures and the slave trade. The activity enables students to engage with historical data sources and explore the slave trade through local case studies.



We are going to find out all about Bracknell's involvement in the slave trade using a database put together using archival material put together by UCL – a university in London. Let's start by finding out about the local and global connection seven people had to the slave trade.

Each of these people lived in our local area at some point. Use the search function on this page https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/ Select 'addresses' from the drop down box and then search 'Berkshire' and see if you can find the surnames below. Use the results to complete the following:

a. Draw a line to where they lived in our area b. Draw a line to the Caribbean country where they owned plantations

D. Dueny
A. Forrest
R. Dalzell
W. Snell
Chauncy
J. Baillie
J.F. Freeman
E. V. Mackinnon

Dominic Duany owned two plantations. After his death, they were left in his will to his daughter, Ann Mary, and her husband.

The first plantation was called Friendship Pen and the second was Mount Pleasant. Using the hyperlinks, see if you can find out how much compensation was given for each plantation in 1832 (associated claims section).

In 1832 the owners of Friendship Pen were paid = _____

In 1832 the owners of Mount Pleasant were paid = _____

Using this currency converter how much money would that be worth today? (select 1830 as the year)

In today's money the compensation for Friendship Pen would be worth = _____

In today's money the compensation for Mount Pleasant would be worth= _____

Now use the 'Estate Information' section for either of the plantations.

I am going to look at _____ plantation.

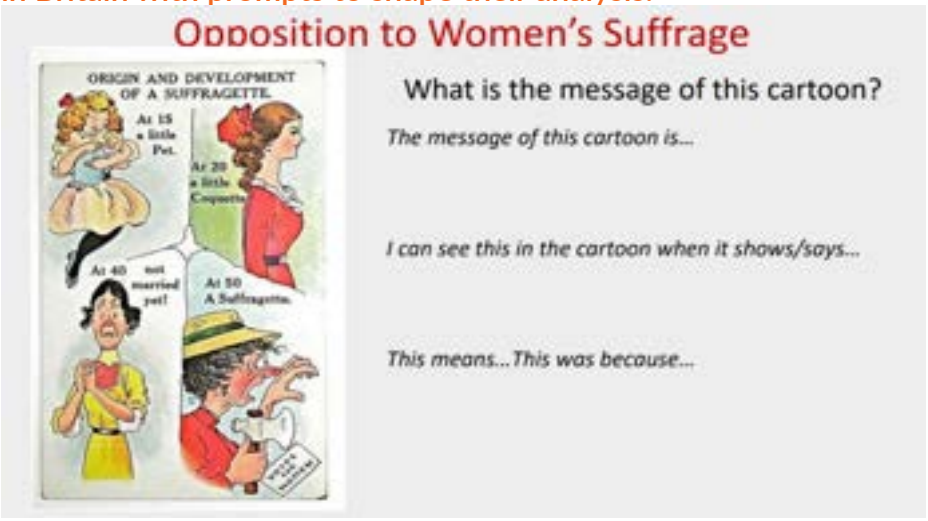
Which crops did this plantation grow? _____

In the year _____ this plantation had _____ enslaved people living there.

Can you think of any reasons why the number of enslaved people may have changed over time? _____

_____

Figure 46: A scaffolded source analysis task aimed at KS3 students. Students are supported to analyse a primary source about the presentation of women during the Women's Suffrage movement in Britain with prompts to shape their analysis.



Opposition to Women's Suffrage

What is the message of this cartoon?

The message of this cartoon is...

I can see this in the cartoon when it shows/says...

This means...This was because...

Figure 47: A PowerPoint slide about Columbus's expeditions aimed at KS3 students. Although the content is broadly strong, the slide is over-loaded with information and contains several grammar mistakes.

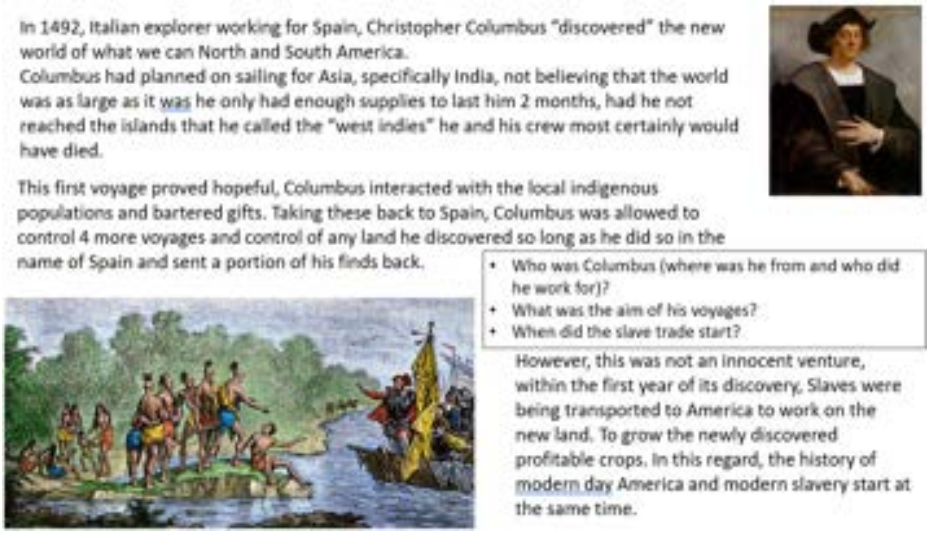


Figure 48: A worksheet for KS3 pupils comparing the relative power of kingdoms in the 1470s. Without substantial context it is unlikely that students will have the knowledge to make informed comparisons across such extensive cultural and spatial divides.

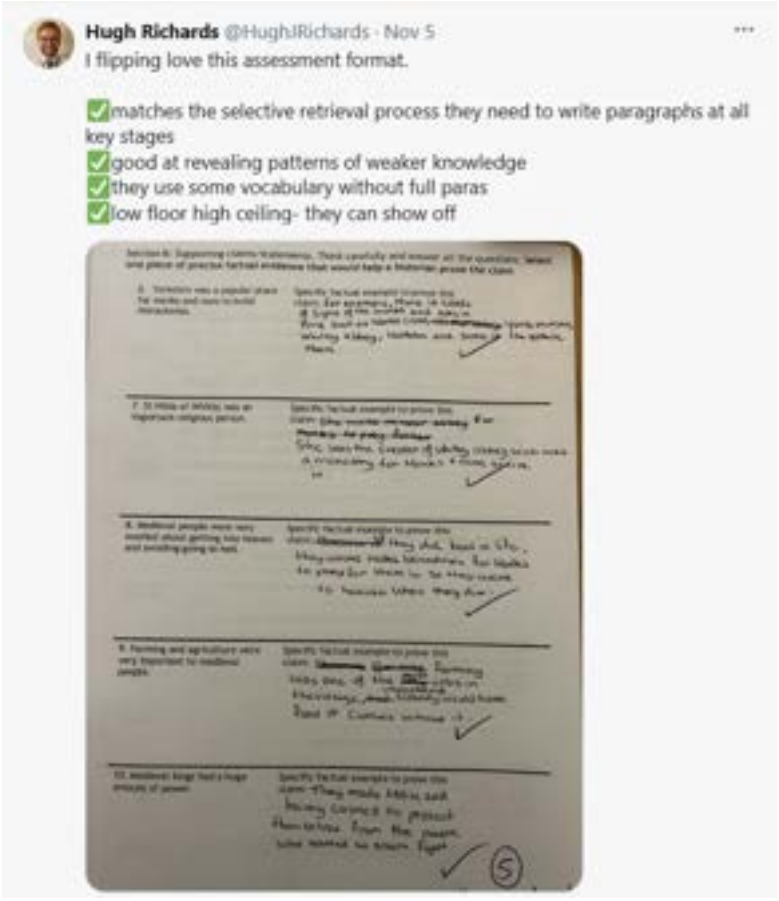
The vast majority of resources used in English schools continue to be produced by teachers and history departments themselves. Subject specialists are able to design materials specifically to complement their curriculum goals and schemes of work. Teachers are therefore able to easily adapt resources to the specific needs and abilities of individual classes and can use their personal subject knowledge to enrich resources. Figure 45 exemplifies how a teacher has been able to plan an engaging activity linking the slave trade to the school's local area. This can give

history teachers a valuable sense of autonomy in their own classrooms.

However, resources made at this level are unlikely to undergo any form of quality control beyond the school's history department. This in turn can lead to wide variation in quality. Teachers are unlikely to have specialist knowledge across the full span of the curriculum and therefore there is likely to be some internal variation in quality. Curriculums that are repeated over subsequent years are unlikely to see materials significantly revised, which means teacher-made resources are less likely to keep up with pedagogical and historiographical innovations. For example Figure 47 is too text-heavy to be well aligned with current pedagogical best practice on cognitive load.

Creating resources from scratch is also a major burden on teachers. The UK Government's 2019 Teacher Workload Survey found 40% of teachers felt '*too much*' time was being spent on lesson planning and preparation, including designing materials.[66] As Policy Exchange identified in its 2018 report, '*Completing the Revolution: Delivering on the promise of the 2014 National Curriculum*', '*the workload demand attendant on teachers creating almost all of their resources themselves is intolerable*'.[67]

Figure 49: An example of a KS3 history assessment format shared on X/twitter.[68] The resource scaffolds student's writing and avoids the imposition of GCSE-style assessment in KS3 by using an innovative format.



66. Department for Education, 'Teacher Workload Survey 2019', 11 October 2019, link
67. Policy Exchange, 'Completing the Revolution: Delivering on the promise of the 2014 National Curriculum', 9 March 2018, link
68. X/Twitter, Hugh Richards, 5 November 2024, link

In recent years frustration with paywalls and the rise of social media has seen the growing importance of 'Edu-Twitter' and latterly Bluesky, which TES Magazine has described as 'a massive resource and reference library' where colleagues freely share lesson materials.[69] The increasingly democratic nature of educational discourse and debate, fuelled through innovations such in social media, was welcomed by former schools minister Nick Gibb:

> *'It is them [teachers] leading the debate about curriculum content and teaching methods and pedagogy, and I don't think that was happening before. We now have a proper debate within the profession, and that is one of the things I am most proud of.'*[70]

Whilst materials shared on Twitter obviously do not undergo quality control, those sharing resources tend to be highly regarded subject specialists showcasing best practice, with many of the resources being of high quality. However most resources on EduTwitter are shared as screenshots rather than downloadable files. This means they primarily serve as inspiration and teachers must still invest significant time to create their own equivalent materials.

Online Resource Sharing Platforms

Figure 50: A KS3 writing activity from the resource bank Twinkl in which students must write a first-person account of attending a VE Day street party.[71] This is effectively a creative writing task, lacking a substantive historical component and promotes an unhelpful conception of historical empathy across space and time.

69. TES Magazine, 'Why edu-Twitter is a must-use tool for any teacher', 8 July 2021, link
70. TES Magazine, 'Gibb: 'I will never cease to be deeply involved in education policy'', 14 November 2023, link
71. Twinkl, 'VE Day Diary Worksheet', link

Figure 51: A KS3 reading and supplementary storyboard activity on the lives of children during the Industrial Revolution. The narrative is high quality, but the subsequent storyboard activity does not enable students to demonstrate or apply their understanding of what they have read and is essentially just a creative exercise.

How were children used in the Industrial Revolution?

Task 3: Storyboards

Read Tommy's and Daisy's stories again and create a visual storyboard for each child.

Tommy's story

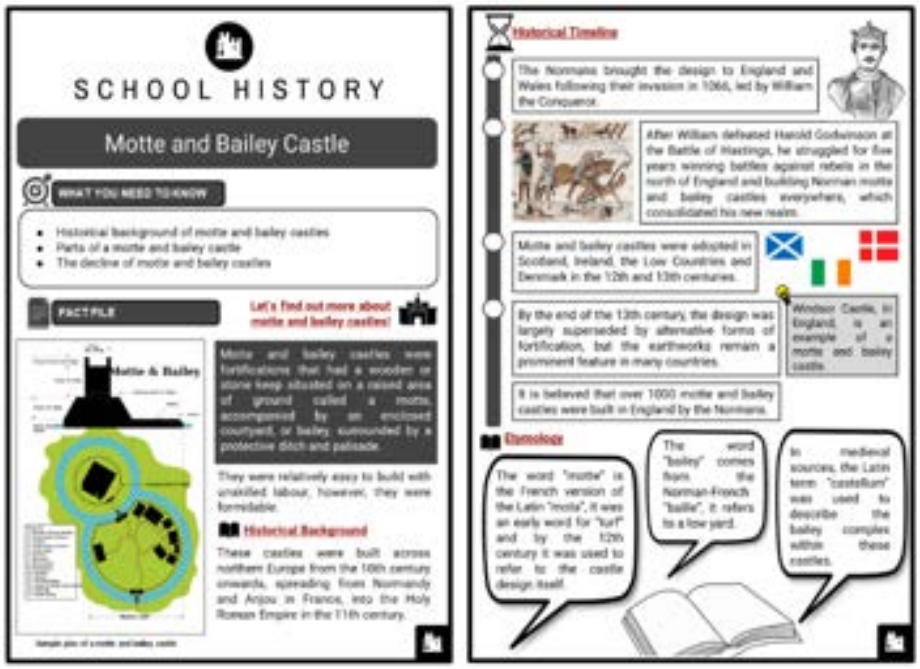
Tommy - the coalmine boy

Tommy has worked in the mines since he was eight and starts work at 6am. He and the other workers get into a creaking lift and drop down below the ground - they will not see the sun for hours. They must make sure they have all their equipment - tools and lamps - and their lunches. Once they are the bottom, Tommy and the others must walk miles to where they will mine the coal out of the rock - the 'coalface'. This is a dark, dangerous and dreary walk.

Now Tommy is older and stronger, he does some of the mining. When he breaks some coal away from the rock, he throws the lump to the 'bearers' - younger boys and girls, who carry bags of coal back from the coalface to the lift. That is all they do all day - carry bags of coal backwards and forwards, sometimes loading them onto wagons, but sometimes carrying them for miles. If the bearers are lucky enough to load bags into wagons, it is then the job of 'drawers' to take the wagons through the mines and to the lifts for removal.

Tommy will work on mining the coal for between seven and nine hours. During this time, the coal dust gets in his lungs and makes him cough, and his eyes start to hurt from working in dark conditions. These can lead to illnesses - breathing in too much coal dust gives you 'black lung', which can kill you eventually as your lungs get stuck with the dust. Many of Tommy's friends suffer from nystagmus - a condition which makes your eyes hurt all the time, from having to squint and work in the dark constantly. Whilst down in the mine, Tommy also frequently gets bumped, and his joints ache from the continual manual labour. He is also constantly in fear of dangers like flooding, poisonous gas leaks and cave-ins. The mines do employ other young children as 'trappers'. Trappers move and waft trapdoors in key ventilation areas to try and keep the air moving around. This prevents build-ups of poisonous gas and keeps the air a bit fresher - but it is not a great system and is certainly not foolproof.

Figure 52: A KS3 resource from School History explaining the development and key features of early castles.[72] The resource is well designed, explaining key terms and using images effectively to support understanding.



Internet resource banks are some of the most frequently used and easily accessible supplementary resources. The Department for Education's 2018 report, '*Use and perceptions of curriculum support in schools*', found that educators were most likely to find such resources through internet searches, and their perceptions of such resources were strongly influenced by the recommendations of subject colleagues.[73] Online resource sites typically charge a small fee to access individual resources, or operate an affordable subscription model that is significantly lower than those for Complete Curriculum Programmes. Generally the resources produced are standalone and do not form part of broader lesson or unit resource sequences.

There is no quality assurance as to what resources can be shared online, although some sites operate their own restrictions. As a result there is wide variation between and within sites in terms of the quality of materials. Some, such as Figure 52 are of good quality, whilst others, such as Figure 50, are poorer than what most teachers would produce themselves. Despite the numbers of resources available on such sites there is a clear shortage of high-quality material for certain topic areas. The DfE's 2018 report found that history was one of five subjects for which finding resources was difficult and that many of the resources that did exist were outdated.[74]

72. School History, 'Motte and Bailey Castles Facts & Worksheets', link
73. Department for Education, 'Use and perceptions of curriculum support resources in schools', July 2018, link
74. Ibid.

Chapter 6: Training History Teachers

The Changing Landscape of Teacher Training

In England the majority of teachers train and qualify after obtaining an undergraduate degree, often in the subject they intend to teach. In 2022/23 80% of new teachers trained on postgraduate courses, with the remaining 20% training through integrated undergraduate programmes.[75]

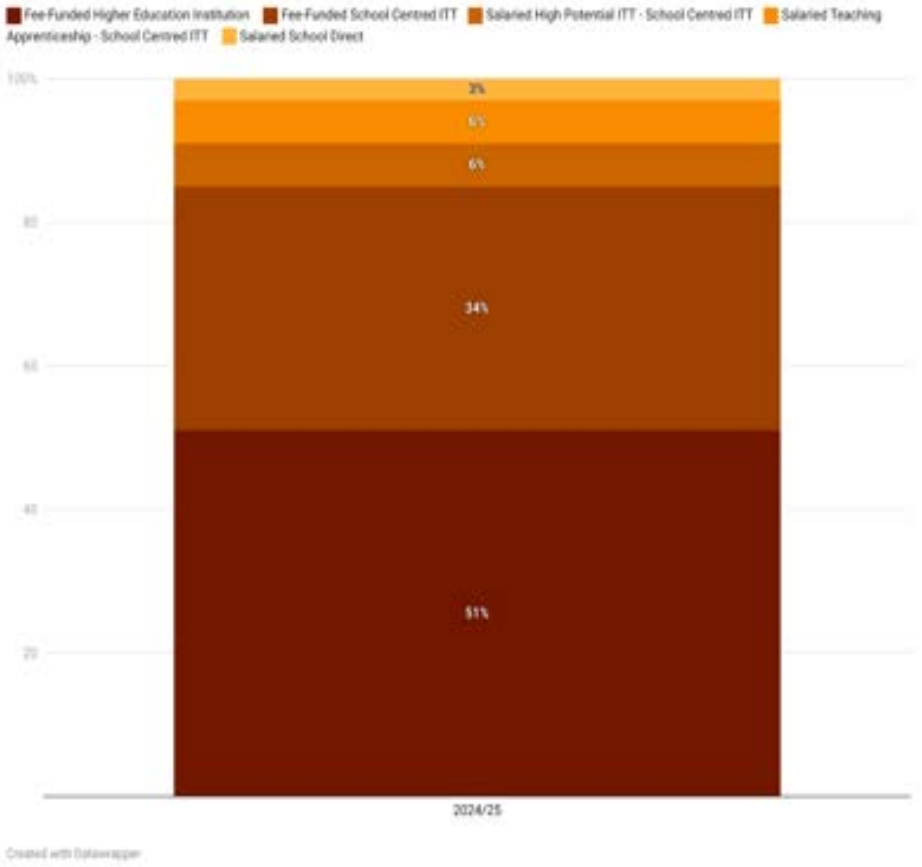
Historically the provision of postgraduate teacher training in England has been dominated by universities and teacher training colleges (HEIs). These institutions have traditionally offered one year training courses, for which students pay fees, with graduates obtaining Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and a qualification in education - typically a Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) - at the end of their studies. As part of their training, trainees on these courses spend a minimum of 24 weeks on placements in partner schools.[76]

In recent years, however, the government has expanded the number of teacher training routes to encourage more people into the profession. The biggest expansion has been in 'school-led' routes. These programmes reverse the basic training principles of traditional taught courses. Instead of being based in universities or colleges with placements in schools, trainees are based in schools and spend some time each week in training away from the classroom. Programmes may be salaried or fee-funded. Examples of such programmes include School Direct, School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT), and the High Potential ITT programme, operated by Teach First. Since 2018 the government has offered teaching apprenticeships as a salaried postgraduate training route.

As a result over time the number of teachers training through traditional HEIs has significantly declined. Whereas 67% of trainees undertaking ITT in 2013/14 trained through fee-funded HEI, this fell to a low of 44% in 2019/2020.[77] It has since recovered to 51%.[78]

75. House of Commons Library, 'Initial teacher training in England', 24 April 2023, link
76. Ibid.
77. Department for Education, 'Initial teacher training census for the academic year 2015 to 2016, England', 19 November 2015, link
78. House of Commons Library, 'Initial teacher training in England', 24 April 2023, link

Figure 53: Percentage of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) trainees by training programme 2024/25[79]



Significant changes to teacher training followed the ITT Market Review, announced by the government in 2021. The review initiated a reaccreditation process for all existing ITT providers in 2022, resulting in a decline in the number of accredited providers from 226 to 179 for 2024/25.[80] One of the key features of the re-accreditation process was a renewed focus on the Core Content Framework (CCF), with ITT providers expected to ensure their curriculum '*explicitly delivers the requirements and principles*' of the CCF.[81] The accreditation places specific emphasis on the inclusion of evidence-based teaching techniques, including '*wherever appropriate reflecting cognitive architecture in curriculum design*'.[82] A new obligation for ITT programmes to incorporate a specific 'intensive placement' was also introduced.

One of the major implications of the ITT Market Review and reaccreditation process has been an increase in the consistency of ITT provision across providers. This has been particularly notable in the central role given within ITT provider curriculums to evidence-based teaching approaches, informed by cognitive science. Examples include the widespread teaching of scaffolding techniques to steadily develop student's independent practice and routine reference to the educational principles of Barak Rosenshine, who is explicitly referenced in the CCF.[83]

However, the extensive demands of the CCF have arguably reduced

79. Gov.uk, 'Initial Teacher Training Census', 5 December 2024, link
80. Education Policy Institute, 'The reaccreditation of ITT providers: Implications for STEM subjects', 8 December 2022, link
81. 'Initial teacher training (ITT) market review report', link
82. Ibid.
83. Department for Education, 'ITT Core Content Framework', link

the time and capacity for ITT providers to cover content beyond its scope. This has in many cases impacted the amount of subject-specific training and pedagogy delivered by ITT providers, despite the Market Review affirming the importance of subject-specific training, noting '*subject-specific approaches must be delivered by suitably qualified experts*'.[84]

Pedagogy

Pedagogy is a term for the method or practice of teaching. The Department for Education defines pedagogy as '*the "how", or practice of educating*'.[85] Pedagogy refers to the instructional techniques teachers use to convey information, support learning and check for understanding in their lessons.

Teacher Training: School History's Weak Link?

As has been demonstrated in previous chapters, the state of history in English schools is broadly encouraging. Most students have sufficient time within their weekly timetables to engage substantively with the subject and experience a broad curriculum which includes strong coverage of key events in British and wider history. Student learning is generally supported with good-quality resources and many choose to pursue history to GCSE or A level, through rigorous programmes of study.

Despite this strong picture, there is widespread concern amongst experts around the quality of teacher training that history practitioners receive. Christine Counsell, former leader of the University of Cambridge's Secondary History PGCE programme, said:

> '*Secondary teacher training should be very subject specific. For at least a decade, there has been a trend towards highly generic programmes in which trainees spend far too little time studying the subject-specific dimensions of teaching. In the last three years, this problem has become more serious because recent reforms have privileged the generic over the subject-specific to an alarming degree. The huge variation in quality of secondary subject training is now nationally worrying.*'

Echoing her concerns, Amanda Spielman argued '*ITT education can be very bad quality – and schools-based routes are not guarantees of quality*'. Heather Fearn, subject expert, felt '*training is too generic and focused on teaching skills rather than subject specialism*'.

Two recent trends in teacher training have had troubling consequences for the subject-specific competence of new teachers. Firstly, the shift in training from university to non-university routes has meant more teacher training takes place on-the-job in the classroom. This has meant less theoretical subject-specific training, with trainees spending more time in schools, often receiving proportionally more training in more generalist areas of teaching such as behaviour management and support for SEN students. Simultaneously, as noted above teacher training has evolved to

84. 'Initial teacher training (ITT) market review report', link

85. Department for Education, 'Pedagogy in early childhood education and care (ECEC): an international comparative study of approaches and policies', July 2015, link

incorporate a greater focus on cognitive science techniques and evidence informed teaching pedagogy. Whilst neither of these trends are problems in themselves, they have squeezed the amount of teacher training time devoted to developing subject-specific knowledge and teaching skills. The current Early Careers Framework has been criticised for creating a '*one-size-fits-all system*' that relegates the importance of subject-specific pedagogy.[86]

Devising an effective curriculum to support the subject-specific training of history teachers in the limited time available is complex. Teacher training providers must balance developing teacher's own subject knowledge with teaching subject-specific pedagogy, such as how to teach source analysis. The breadth of content that teachers may be expected to cover in schools also poses a challenge, as the flexibility of the 2014 National Curriculum has enabled schools to develop very different history curriculums. Whereas it is safe to assume that a maths trainee will one day need to know how to teach algebra, or a science trainee the structure of a plant cell, history tutors will have less confidence that training teachers on the Glorious Revolution, for example, will be relevant in their future careers. Trainee teachers will also arrive with their own subject specialisms and areas of weakness in their historical knowledge. It is therefore difficult for ITT providers to identify subject strengths and weaknesses across a full cohort. Unlike in 5 other subjects, there is currently no government funded Subject Knowledge Enhancement (SKE) course for history that could shift this vital content into a separate training programme from the ITT.[87]

Different teacher training providers have surmounted these challenges with relatively greater or lesser success, resulting in a highly variable landscape of training quality. The risk is that, in some programmes, teachers do not receive sufficient grounding in history teaching to develop their own professional sensibilities and rigorous approach to teaching the past. Where this does not take root, new teachers can be over-dependent on simply mimicking their training and the approaches that they have been exposed to during this process.

The Content and Quality of Subject-Specific Training for History in HEI ITT programmes

Methodology

Using the government's teacher training course portal Policy Exchange identified 37 universities offering a specific Postgraduate Certificate of Education programme in History. Freedom of Information (FOIs) requests were submitted to each of these institutions.

86. House of Commons Education Committee, 'Teacher recruitment, training and retention', 17 May 2024, link
87. Get Into Teaching, 'Subject knowledge enhancement (SKE)', link

What we asked university ITT providers:

Please provide any information that you hold in relation to the questions below:

1. *Documents outlining the module structure and content of any history-related subject specific units offered to history trainees as part of your PGCE programme.*
2. *Documents relating to any teaching materials or resources you use as part of your history subject training within your PGCE course, including lecture slides, reading lists and exemplar resources for trainees that specifically relate to the teaching of history.*

Of the 37 institutions to which we submitted FOIs, 3 failed to respond. Of the 34 that did respond 21 provided a limited or detailed response whilst 13 refused to provide any information.

Figure 54: Summary table of responses received from university history PGCE providers who received Freedom of Information requests

Of the 21 who did respond, 4 provided only limited information that was typically publicly available on their website. The other 17 provided substantial information on the composition and content of their history PGCE programmes.

Figure 55: Summary table of level of detail in responses received from university history PGCE providers who received Freedom of Information requests

Findings

The way in which history-specific training is structured within HEI PGCE programmes is highly variable

Amongst the institutions analysed there was wide divergence in the emphasis placed on subject training and how this was integrated into their PGCE programmes. This suggests universities are placing considerably different emphasis on the importance of subject-specific training within their PGCE programmes.

In many cases institutions dedicated a specific module to subject coverage. This typically represented approximately 25% of the modules covered and an equivalent number of credits.

Figure 56: The University of Hertfordshire's History PGCE modules include a 30-credit module on 'History subject and curriculum knowledge'[88]

Level 7

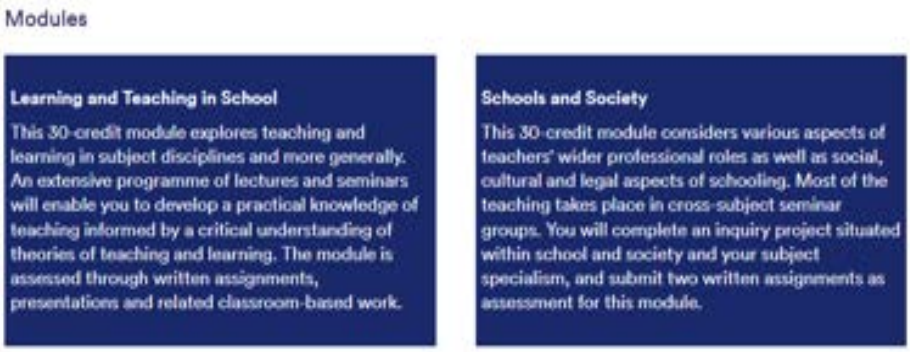
Module	Credits	Compulsory/optional
Professional learning and development	30 Credits	Compulsory
History subject and curriculum knowledge	30 Credits	Compulsory

However, in several institutions there was no specific module covering subject knowledge. In some cases it was not clear which modules incorporated subject-specific content.

Figure 57: Bath Spa University's History PGCE modules include no specific reference to subject training.[89]

In other cases it was clear that subject-specific training was part of a module, but that this was included alongside other areas of training.

Figure 58: Nottingham University's PGCE programme consists of two modules, one of which, 'Learning and Teaching in School', 'explores teaching and learning in subject disciplines are more generally'[90]



The amount of time trainees spend receiving subject-specific training on history PGCE courses is limited

Where universities provided subject handbooks, timetables or data on levels of training in response to the Freedom of Information request, these were assessed to determine the amount of time devoted within the

88. https://www.herts.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate-masters/secondary-education-history
89. Bath Spa University, 'PGCE Secondary History', link
90. University of Nottingham, 'Initial Teacher Education: Secondary PGCE', link

programme to subject specific training. By accounting for the number and length of subject-specific sessions it was possible to calculate the aggregate number of subject specific training days offered as part of the history PGCE programme of 11 of the universities in the study.

On average trainees received only 17.8 days of subject-specific training over the year-long PGCE course. This will in part be due to the constraints imposed by extensive school placements, during which trainees do not attend university training. The programme with the smallest amount of subject specific training offered the equivalent of just 9.5 days over the programme, whilst the course with the most training offered 37.5 days. There is therefore significant variation between PGCE programmes with regards to the amount of history-specific training trainee teachers receive.

This review also found that certain sessions or days which had been highlighted as subject-specific in reality appear to be only tangentially related to history. Such sessions were therefore omitted as part of our review of subject training time. In some cases references to doing something 'in history' appeared to be an attempt to make more generic training appear part of the subject-specific offering.

Figure 59: A session as part of Sheffield University's History PGCE is entitled 'an introduction to planning for and managing behaviour in the History classroom'. In reality behaviour management techniques do not vary notably between subjects and so this session likely consisted primarily of generalist training.

Friday 8 September	EPS2 - Equalities and Fairness	See EPS programme
	EPS groups	
	6. Expectations of students and ourselves: an introduction to planning for and managing behaviour in the History classroom.	You will gain an introductory understanding into some key principles and practicalities of behaviour management in the History classroom, and will adapt your plans for your Peer Teaching episode in response to this session. You will also use this session's materials as a checklist for observation during your primary placement

Figure 60: A day long session offered by Worcester University's History PGCE on 'Teaching For Learning' (T4L). Teaching For Learning techniques are generally generic across subjects and therefore, despite being identified as subject training, this is unlikely to be subject-specific.

Tue 16th Jan	1,2,3	ITAP – T4L	Exploration of using T4L in the History classroom – pedagogies and practice		

This is concerning. It is difficult to envisage how a subject like history, which is both wide-ranging in substantive content and includes a considerable amount of technical disciplinary knowledge, can be covered in this time. Even if trainees have relevant graduate-level training in history, as previously noted this is likely to be specialist in a small number of historical areas. Pedagogical approaches to history, such as second order concepts, are unique to teacher training and will need to be covered from scratch. The significant levels of variation in the amount of subject training

history trainee teachers receive is therefore likely to result in uneven skills and knowledge on entering the classroom.

Subject training focuses on disciplinary rather than subject knowledge

Most PGCE courses which provided materials included some form of 'how to teach' sessions that were subject-specific. However, these sessions disproportionately focused on equipping trainees with disciplinary knowledge as opposed to developing their substantive factual knowledge of different historical topics.

This is problematic. Whilst trainees must undoubtedly learn the pedagogical techniques to deliver effective history lessons, including sessions on skills, new history teachers also need to be confident in teaching specific aspects of the past. This includes training in how to identify which core concepts should be highlighted as part of topics and how to do this most effectively. For instance, it is useful for training to highlight that shifting notions of legitimacy and political authority is a core theme of the English Civil War and that it is therefore vital for students to understand the concept of the Divine Right of Kings and why this was controversial. The lack of 'how to teach' training in PGCE courses means many teachers may not be confident distilling key aspects of the past into a form that is appropriate for a KS3 class.

Figure 61: As part of York University's PGCE history course there are day-long sessions focusing on the use of evidence in history and the second-order concepts of causation and consequence. In both of these sessions the intention is to equip trainees with general disciplinary knowledge in history that can be applied to different historical topics.

PGCE Week 5

Monday 2 October

AM: Effective teaching of evidential thinking using sources

PM: Planning to teach for evidential understanding

Friday 6 October

AM: Effective teaching of cause and consequence

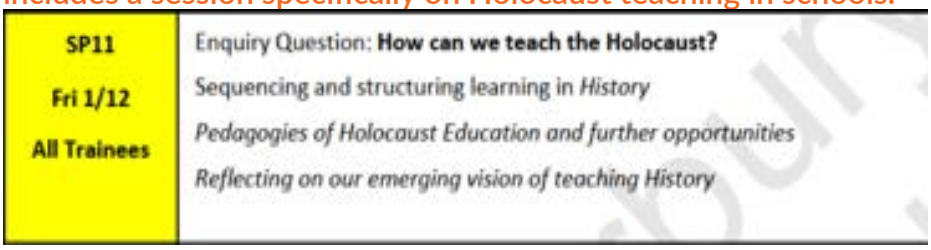
PM: Planning to teach causation

Figure 62: Roehampton University's History PGCE includes a session on teaching essay writing, a key disciplinary skill in history, to students.

Wed 19/03	**Subject 17:** The art and science of the essay: teaching pupils to understand essay questions and to write well. A level History teaching and learning

The exception to the bias towards disciplinary over subject training was the Holocaust, with most PGCE providers offering sessions on how to teach this event. This may reflect the fact the Holocaust is the only mandated historic topic in the National Curriculum and therefore the only topic that all trainees can anticipate going on to teach.

Figure 63: Canterbury Christ Church University's PGCE course includes a session specifically on Holocaust teaching in schools.



SP11 **Fri 1/12** **All Trainees**	Enquiry Question: **How can we teach the Holocaust?** Sequencing and structuring learning in *History* *Pedagogies of Holocaust Education and further opportunities* *Reflecting on our emerging vision of teaching History*

Some providers offered a variety of sessions designed to expand both trainees own subject knowledge of particular historical topics and their understanding of the best pedagogical approaches through which to teach these to students. However, this was highly variable, with some providers offering little to no training designed to improve trainee's substantive knowledge.

Figure 64: Unlike most courses, Sunderland University's History PGCE devotes significant time to educating trainees on teaching specific historical periods and events.

17/11	KS3 focus: teaching medieval history Crusades/medieval monarchs
24/11	KS3 focus: teaching Renaissance History Tudor monarchs
1/12	KS3 focus: teaching 17th century History: Stuarts and English civil war

Figure 65: In addition to the session shown on ancient history at KS3, Birmingham University's History PGCE course also includes sessions on teaching medieval and local history.

1- Dec	Teaching Ancient History at Key Stage 3 Creating Impactful Schemes of Work Professional Enquiry in Subject Context (SEND and Inclusion)

Chapter 7: Diversify or Decolonise?

As discussed in chapter 1, a key function of school history is to help students cultivate a sense of identity through an understanding of their community's, society's and nation's shared past. As Benjie Groom, History Subject Lead at Oak National Academy said *'History provides students with a sense of where we as people and society come from, a sense of identity'*. Amanda Spielman, formerly His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools, said that history was necessary to *'Build children's understanding of their country – and bring them to the place where they value being part of it.'* Building a historical awareness of Britain's history is an integral part of identity and citizenship.

Developing a shared sense of that past is especially important. In a similar vein Sir Trevor Phillips said that *'shared understandings of the past are a necessary precondition for interaction'*. For people to have a coherent sense of British identity this inherently needs to be shared – by people living in different places and in diverse communities. That is not to say there is no place for local history, or that different people may not be interested in different things – but students must have an awareness of the same events, processes and themes to be able to engage and share an understanding of the national past.

As such a number of expert teachers, historians and cultural commentators interviewed as part of this project warned against the dangers of teaching political narratives or intentionally teaching different groups of students different versions of the past. As former schools minister Nick Gibb argued *'history should not be shaped to modern needs. It is impossible to predict what will be relevant over a person's lifetime and so it is better not to attempt to do so at all'*. Sir Trevor Phillips said *'nationally, history needs to be taught consistently to achieve unity'*. Lord Sewell argued *'history should not be a self-esteem course – it should explain how the human story gets remade across space and time'*.

The movement to diversify school history

Even prior to the New History of the 1970s there had been movements within history teaching to expand the geographical scope of the history curriculum in English schools to include more global studies and diverse perspectives. The increasing diversity of British society has fuelled campaigns to diversify the history curriculum to incorporate other cultures, ethnicities and places. As Sir Trevor Phillips and Mike Phillips argued in their 1998 book, *'Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain'*:

> *'In the last fifty years the minority to which we belonged had become an authentic strand of British society. If we were engaged in a struggle, it wasn't about our 'acceptance' as individuals. Instead, it was about our status as citizens, and it seemed obvious that if our citizenship was to mean more than the paper on which it was written, it would be necessary for the whole country to reassess not only its own identity, and its history, but also what it meant to be British.'*[91]

As a result of growing awareness of these issues, school history has adapted and expanded. For example, the 1999 and 2007 National Curriculums placed greater emphasis on the importance of teaching topics such as the British Empire and slavery which are of particular resonance to Britain's non-white communities. These changes have presented valuable opportunities for British students to learn about more contested aspects of Britain's past and engage more substantively with historical topics from the wider world.

However, the death of George Floyd and the subsequent momentum gained by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in 2020 substantially expanded and radicalised proposals to 'diversify' and 'decolonise' school curriculums. A campaign by The Black Curriculum to lobby the government to make black history mandatory in schools attracted significant coverage and support.[92] The National Education Union has called for *'teaching which fully examines British imperialism and racism'*.[93] Demands for a more inclusive curriculum that considers the experiences, amongst others, of women, ethnic minorities, and LGBT people has necessitated curriculum innovation. For instance, in response to BLM more than 660 schools in England adopted *'a diverse and anti-racist curriculum'* produced by Hackney Borough Council entitled *'The Diverse Curriculum'*.[94] Under extensive pressure, some schools made hasty changes to their curriculums which have brought highly contested narratives from the academy into mainstream teaching.

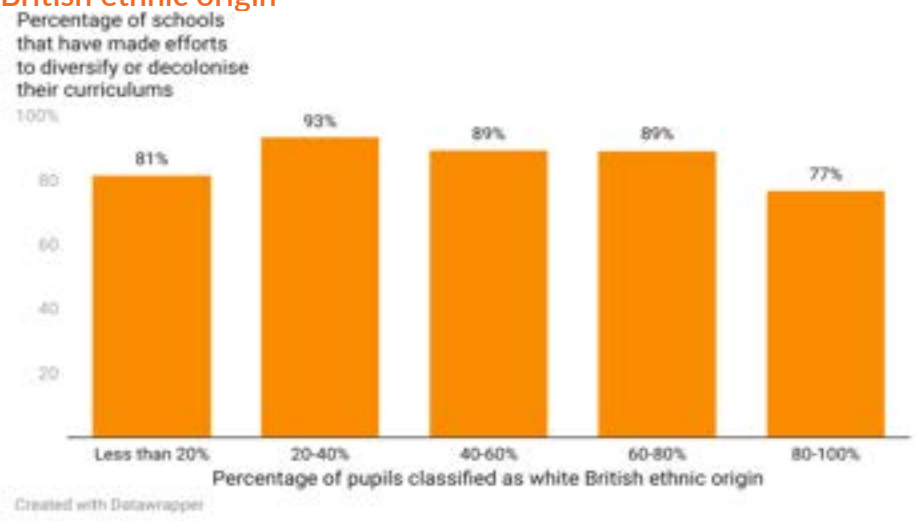
Concerns about the impact that these changes have had on school history in England formed a significant part of Ofsted's 2023 history subject report *'rich encounters with the past'*. A key concern raised repeatedly by the report was how contested histories were presented to students. The report found that *'in some schools, historical content was framed in ways that strongly suggested there was a particular 'right' answer to complex historical questions'*. The report warned against teaching *'only the negative experiences of a particular group, creating problematic singular narratives of victimhood'*.

What changes have been made?

As part of our Freedom of Information request project, surveyed schools were asked whether, in their opinion, they had made efforts to 'diversify' or 'decolonise' their curriculum. 83% of schools that responded to the question said they had done so, compared to 17% who said they had not (Fig. 23).

91. Phillips, T. and Phillips, M. 'Windrush: The Irresistable Rise of Multi-Racial Britain', (1998), London, Harper Collins
92. The Black Curriculum, 'Email the Minister of State for School Standards', link
93. National Education Union, 'Decolonising education', link
94. The Guardian, 'Hundreds of schools in England sign up for anti-racist curriculum', 26 March 2021, link

Figure 66: Schools that have diversified or decolonised their History curriculums by percentage of pupils classified as of white British ethnic origin



In general schools with more ethnically diverse student bodies were not significantly more likely to have made efforts to diversify or decolonise their curriculums (Fig. 24).

Some of the changes made have been high quality. One example has been the widespread introduction of KS3 units based around Peter Frankopan's book 'The Silk Roads', which challenges Anglo-centrism in the early medieval world by situating Britain at the periphery of trade routes centred on Asia.

Yet in too many cases changes made in response to pressure to diversify have had the effect of distorting student's views of the past. Whether by displacing vital traditional curriculum topics, thereby leaving students with a poorer and more disconnected chronological understanding of history, or by presenting politically charged and often critical narratives of Britain's past as fact, these changes have been to the detriment of quality history teaching in schools. Despite exclusive polling for Policy Exchange finding that 60% of Britons feel their country has been a force for good in the world and 72% feeling children should be taught to be proud of their country, too many school history curriculums now include units which focus one-sidedly on the perceived ills of Britain's national past.[95]

The Quality of Classroom Resources Supporting Diverse History Curriculums

As previously noted some aspects of diverse history, such as the slave trade, have encouragingly now been core topics in English schools for several decades and are backed by a wide range of high-quality resources. Figure 67, for example, chooses to introduce Queen Matilda, an important but overlooked figure of the British medieval period, to explore the important role of queens in this period. Other resources take great care to present contested histories impartially. Figure 68, by highlighting the divergent worldviews of Native Americans and colonists, enriches student

95. Policy Exchange, 'A Portrait of Modern Britain: Ethnicity and Religion',14 October 2024, link, p. 24

understandings of how conflict arose without prejudice to either group.

Figure 67: A KS3 resource designed to teach students about the role of Matilda and her gender as a cause of the Anarchy. The source effectively highlights an important female figure to teach an important but overlooked period of British history.

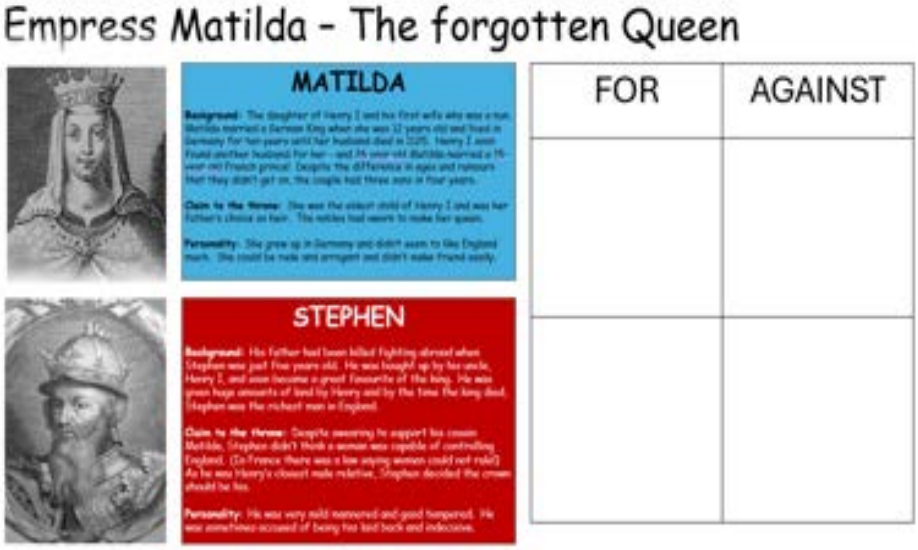
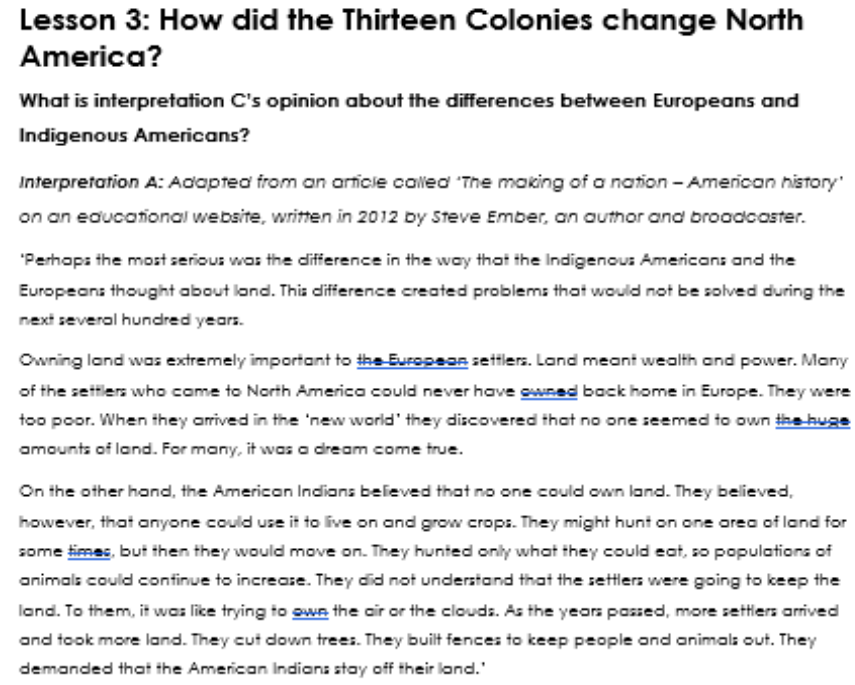


Figure 68: A resource targeted at KS3 students on the development of Britain's American colonies. The source effectively and impartially presents the different attitudes and perspectives Native Americans and European colonists had on land ownership.



Lesson 3: How did the Thirteen Colonies change North America?

What is interpretation C's opinion about the differences between Europeans and Indigenous Americans?

Interpretation A: *Adapted from an article called 'The making of a nation – American history' on an educational website, written in 2012 by Steve Ember, an author and broadcaster.*

'Perhaps the most serious was the difference in the way that the Indigenous Americans and the Europeans thought about land. This difference created problems that would not be solved during the next several hundred years.

Owning land was extremely important to ~~the European~~ settlers. Land meant wealth and power. Many of the settlers who came to North America could never have ~~owned~~ back home in Europe. They were too poor. When they arrived in the 'new world' they discovered that no one seemed to own ~~the huge~~ amounts of land. For many, it was a dream come true.

On the other hand, the American Indians believed that no one could own land. They believed, however, that anyone could use it to live on and grow crops. They might hunt on one area of land for some ~~times~~, but then they would move on. They hunted only what they could eat, so populations of animals could continue to increase. They did not understand that the settlers were going to keep the land. To them, it was like trying to ~~own~~ the air or the clouds. As the years passed, more settlers arrived and took more land. They cut down trees. They built fences to keep people and animals out. They demanded that the American Indians stay off their land.'

Figure 69: A still from a video produced by Royal Museums Greenwich on the East India Company's links to Deptford.[96] The museums have used their collection, in the form of short explanatory videos, to create a high-quality unit on the East India Company.

However, in other cases, the materials are of highly variable quality. This is often particularly the case where topics were rapidly initiated into curriculums in light of the Black Lives Matter protests and, as a result, teachers, textbook publishers and third sector institutions have had to work quickly to produce new resources to support these curriculum areas.

The following resources are examples of teaching materials designed to support the teaching of diverse topics, either found online or provided by schools as part of our Freedom of Information project.

The worst resources actively misrepresent the past to students to create false narratives of diversity or oppression. Figures 70 and 71 all present highly contested and controversial interpretations of events as fact and without balance, despite the views expressed lying outside the mainstream of historical opinion. In both Figures 71 and 73 key contextual information appears to have been intentionally omitted to enable the figures discussed to make a modern political point, despite obscuring the historical reality. The biases in these resources are therefore likely to leave students with significant misconceptions about the past.

Other activities are wholly inappropriate and are designed to emotionally confront students rather than offer any substantive historical learning opportunity. The exercise in Figure 72 provides students with no proper understanding of historical or modern-day racism and does not equip them to evaluate these phenomena in a rigorous way.

96. Royal Museums Greenwich, 'Investigating the East India Company', link

Figure 70: Page extracts from the book 'Brilliant Black British History', which won the British Book Awards Children's Non-Fiction Book of the Year in 2024.[97] The book asserts that early black Britons built Stonehenge and that west African kingdoms that sold other Africans to European slavers were unaware of their role in the global slave trade. Both of these claims are hotly contested and outside mainstream historical thinking but are presented as fact.

About 12,000 years ago, modern humans settled in Britain. They were Black – like all Western Europeans in those days. About 6,000 years ago, people with brown skin migrated to Britain. They brought farming and built Stonehenge, in Wiltshire. The first white Britons migrated to Britain about 4,500 years ago. Britain was Black for 7,500 years before that!

The factory owners got rich because some Africans wanted their fancy new goods. Those Africans did not know the fate of the people they sold.

The plantation owners got rich because they did not pay their workers. They also grew addictive crops like sugar, coffee and tobacco, which Europe just wanted more of.

People all over Britain owned stolen people on plantations in the Americas. They were paid for the work of those stolen people!

Figure 71: A slide from the Classical Association's 'Queering the Past' project that forms part of a lesson entitled 'Elagabalus: The Genderqueer Ruler of Rome'.[98] The Classical Association has been recognised by the government as 'the national subject association for Classics' and offers bulk school-wide memberships to teachers.[99] The slide in question misleads readers by omitting that Nero had Sporus castrated and forced him to play the role of his former wife, whom he had killed. These actions appear to have been entirely non-consensual and sexually violent and therefore should not be inaccurately and inappropriately described as a form of 'gender transition'.

Trans Surgeries in Nero's Times?

Elagabalus is not the first case of an emperor offering a reward for a surgeon who could surgically create a vagina for him.

Another historian, Suetonius, had previously written about Emperor Nero requesting such a procedure for his spouse. Nero had married a castrated ex-slave known as Sporus (whom he re-named Sabina after his recently deceased wife). According to Suetonius, Nero had offered a reward to any surgeon who could transform his wife into what he defined as a 'natural woman'. Suetonius uses the Latin word, *transfigurare*, meaning 'to transform', which is an early example of the prefix trans- being used in connection with gender transition.

Nero's wife Sporus/Sabina must have existed, as so much is written about her. Most of it was written, however, by cisgender men who wanted to mock this story of gender transition.

Bust said to be of Poppaea Sabina whom Sabina/Sporus greatly resembled. If you want to find out more about Trans identity, the use of the prefix 'trans', and their relationships to ancient Rome, click on the rainbow.

97. Bloomsbury, 'Brilliant Black British History', link
98. Classical Association, 'Queering the Past(s)', link
99. Department for Education, 'Teaching Latin and the classics: support available for schools', 4 March 2025, link

Figure 72: A resource produced by Babcock LDP for Devon County Council as part of their anti-racism resources for teachers across the county to use in the curriculum. The resource advises students on how to replicate Jane Elliot's controversial 1968 'Blue Eyes/ Brown Eyes' experiment in order to teach concepts of racism, prejudice and discrimination. The repetition of this experiment is likely to be distressing for young students without substantively improving their understanding of racial issues.

Babcock ldp

Anti-Racist Activity KS2

Blue Eye Brown Eye - Teacher's Notes

Introduction: *Before your pupils can participate in any in-depth anti-racism education, it is vital that they have a clear understanding of what racism is. The following activity will help you to educate your pupils about the meaning of racism and clear up any myths that the young people might have about the term.*

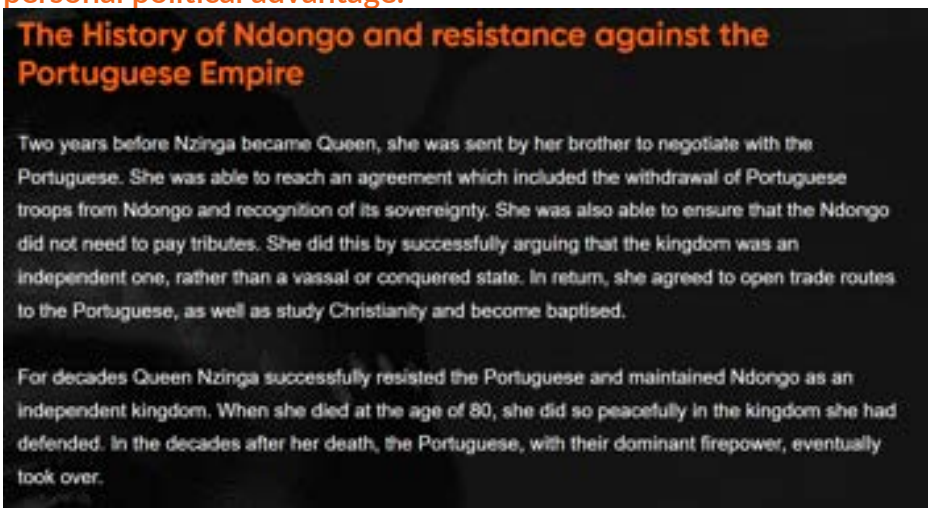
Objective:
To engage pupils in discussion and debate about prejudice, discrimination and human rights issues.

Aims:
- To talk openly about racism and the deep hurt it can cause.
- To educate learners about the impact of racism.
- To increase understanding of issues of equality and diversity.

Overview:

The 'Blue Eye / Brown Eye' was an experiment first performed in the USA by Jane Elliot in 1968. The experiment was performed by Elliot on the day after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, to demonstrate what prejudice was to her third grade class.
This activity enables pupils to experience, first hand, what prejudice is like. Pupils are involved in a classroom "experiment" (or role-play) in which those with blue eyes are treated very differently to those with brown eyes. The activity compels pupils to question discrimination and to discuss fundamental human rights. Within this activity, pupils develop skills in participation, communication, enquiry and decision-making.

Figure 73: A slide from a lesson on Queen Nzinga Mbande produced by CARGO Movement, an organisation sponsored by Arts Council England and the National Education Union.[100] In addition to the resources CARGO makes freely available online, its online course in partnership with the University of Bristol on utilising its classroom resource packages has been enrolled into over 1000 times.[101] The lesson in question misrepresents Mbande as a hero of anti-slavery and anti-imperialism, when in fact she actively participated in the slave trade and collaborated in the trade with Portugal to secure personal political advantage.



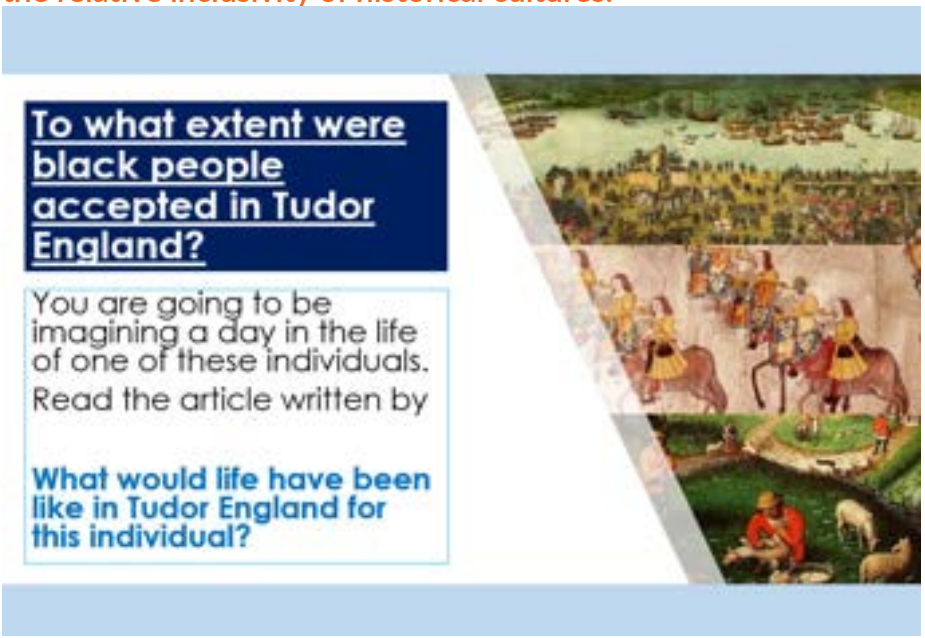
Other resources do not achieve the levels of impartiality expected when attempting to expand the diversity of the curriculum. Some organisations have concluded that diversifying or decolonising the curriculum requires a negative reappraisal of historical events and institutions such as the British Empire, such as in Figure 74. By only reflecting their own viewpoint such resources are likely to mislead students about the contested nature of historical legacies.

Other resources make well-meaning attempts to expand diversity within the curriculum, but at the cost of an effectively structured and well-rounded historical offering. In the last five years some high-quality original scholarship focused on diversity, such as Miranda Kaufman's 'Black Tudors', have been used to produced standalone lessons or units in schools, as demonstrated by Figure 75. Whilst historically interesting and valid areas of inquiry, focusing in on such isolated examples means students inherently have less time to study historical events and processes of broader significance, including diverse topics such as empire and slavery. This in turn can unbalance student's overall historical learning, particularly in the already compressed and overburdened KS3.

100. CARGO Movement, 'Queen Nzinga lesson', link
101. Future Learn, 'Practical Skills for Teaching Inclusive History: CARGO Classroom', link

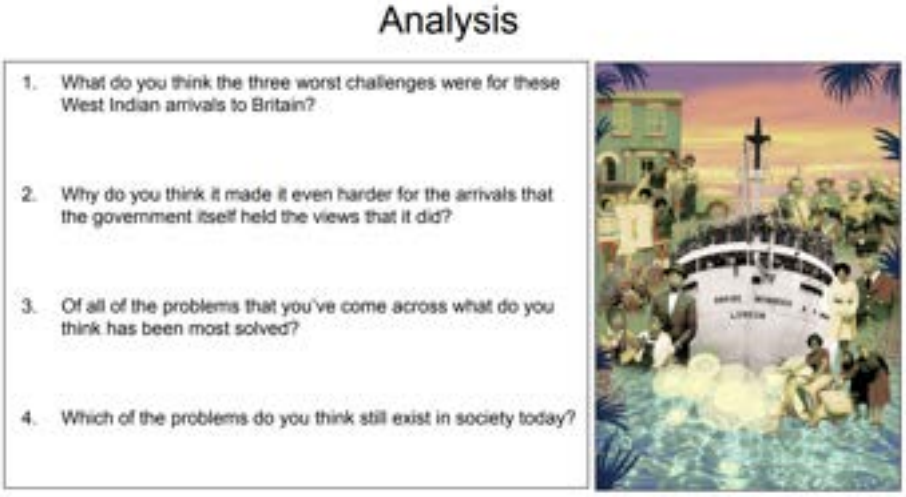
Figure 74: One of a series of flashcards designed by the organisation Black Curriculum to explore 'The British Empire Experiences of African and Caribbean People'.[102] In 2021 The Black Curriculum worked with over 100 schools and 2000 teachers.[103] The cards present a biased, negative perspective on the empire, oversimplifying concepts such as indirect rule, whilst denying students balanced information to make their own judgements.

Figure 75: A teacher-made KS3 resource designed to teach about the experiences of Black Tudors. Resources such as these may lead to misconceptions amongst pupils about the diversity of Britain in this period. Framing the exercise around the idea of 'acceptance' also requires students to engage in ahistorical conjecture about the relative inclusivity of historical cultures.



102. The Black Curriculum, 'The British Empire Experiences of African and Caribbean People – Information Cards', link
103. The Black Curriculum, 'The Black Curriculum Evaluation: Key Findings', December 2023, link

Figure 76: A teacher-made plenary resource for KS3 students to consolidate what they have learned about Windrush over the course of the lesson. By only considering the difficulties and negative experiences of Windrush migrants this resource provides students with a biased impression of their experiences.



How have these changes come about? The role of history teacher training

How have these radical changes to many school curriculums become so rapidly embedded? One potential explanation is the role of teacher training. Teaching remains a high-turnover profession, with nearly a third of teachers (31.3%) leave teaching within the first five years.[104] This means that new (and newly trained) teachers are constantly refreshing the workforce of English schools. Whilst this can bring significant benefits, such as teachers trained in the latest evidence-based pedagogical approaches, it means teaching staff on average across all subjects have less experience and less accumulated subject knowledge. It also gives teacher training providers expansive influence to rapidly shape fashions in teaching. Concerningly, the importance of teachers being politically impartial has also been eroded. The 2019 ITT Core Cotent Framework, as previously discussed, makes no reference to the importance of impartiality, including in the '*Professional Behaviours*' teacher standard.[105]

As part of our Freedom of Information requests to the 37 providers of history PGCE courses, we analysed the documents provided for any references made to teaching diverse or decolonised histories.

Our requests found that trainee history teachers are routinely being taught to diversify or decolonise school history curriculums, despite the latter, in particular, being a contested political term. Of the 17 universities that provided detailed responses to the FOI request, 13 (76%) made reference to diversifying or decolonising history in their PGCE programmes. 7 (41%) specifically referred to decolonising the curriculum.

104. Education Policy Institute, 'Six charts that explain the state of the teaching workforce in England', 13 June 2023, link
105. Department for Education, 'ITT Core Content Framework', 2019, link

Figure 77: Edge Hill University's History PGCE course handbook specifically states that 'the History PGCE curriculum is decolonised and explores areas such as controversial issues and issues of social justice and diversity to be addressed in the classroom'.

- How the curriculum enables trainees to develop their sense of social justice, including the importance of inclusion and representation in their subject

The History PGCE Curriculum is decolonised and explores areas such as controversial issues and issues of social justice and diversity to be addressed in the classroom which is closely aligned with the Edge Hill ITE Pillars and which are interwoven throughout to capture the complexity and diversity of past societies or lived experiences. The expectation is for trainees to influence significant debate about History education; therefore, the curriculum builds on strong substantive knowledge, thorough conceptual understanding of History as a discipline; a clear grasp of how to plan for and assess pupil progress in History; well-practised procedural skills; and an awareness of the importance of History education for social and epistemic justice (Herman, 2015, p.147). For example, trainees explore the influence of national and local identity; protected characteristics; hinterland knowledge; parallel histories; four nations approach and decolonisation pedagogies such as CARGO methodology to ensure that the history taught is inclusive and representative of diverse pasts that is beyond tokenism, to overcome sweeping generalisations or misconceptions (Ford and Kennett, 2018). For example, the role of women in medieval societies such as Crusader Queens therefore looking beyond an Anglocentric view of the past exploration of Matilda, Bloody Mary and Elizabeth I (Priggs, 2020; Harris, 2013). Forms of knowledge and pedagogies explored throughout the PGCE History curriculum aim to support trainees to relate the curriculum content to pupils' identity and experiences. In this view, curriculum content should also be designed so that pupils 'see themselves' in their History curriculum.

Figure 78: A session offered as part of Brighton University's History PGCE course. Several providers offered specific sessions on 'diversifying' or 'decolonising' the history curriculum as part of their training for trainees.

20.10.23	9-2	Subject Study – decolonizing the history curriculum and exploring diverse histories	

In some cases trainees were encouraged to question what their placement schools were doing to diversify or decolonise their curriculum, effectively training new teachers to challenge existing department policies in the name of decolonisation.

Figure 79: Liverpool Hope University's PGCE History course includes a task where students are told to question their school mentors on steps taken to decolonise the curriculum.

In School Task / Assessment:
Following expert input, take opportunities to practise, receive feedback and improve at scaffolding reading/writing/speaking/ thinking. Make reference to this on E-Profile lesson observations.

To speed things along, be thoroughly prepared to summarise your work at university this week to your mentor.

- Discuss with your mentor the department's approach to teaching representative, diverse history lessons. What topics have they worked on recently, are currently working on or intend to add in the future to further diversify their curriculum and prevent generalisations about the past?
- Discuss the school curriculum and the debates surrounding diversifying, decolonising the curriculum to make it more inclusive and to reflect on latest historical research.
- Discuss where we can include an environmental lens to further enhance the curriculum.

In several cases providers devoted significant time over separate sessions to cover different aspects of how diverse history might be included and taught in history. This included running specific sessions on the inclusion of black history, LGBT+ history and climate history.

Figure 80: Liverpool John Moores' University PGCE History course includes a variety of sessions on the teaching of diverse histories.

- Teaching Climate and Environmental Histories
- Decolonising the History Curriculum and Missing Stories
- Teaching Emotive and Sensitive Topics: The Holocaust
- Teaching Emotive and Sensitive Topics: The Transatlantic Slave Trade
- Widening the Lens: Teaching Global Perspectives (Pre-Colonial Africa)

Figure 81: Training sessions provided as part of Worcester University's PGCE History programme specifically reference protected characteristics such as disability, gender and race and migration and refugees as part of their diverse approach to the History curriculum.

Week 20 Mon 8th Jan	1, 2, 3	Developing thinking about diversity in the History Curriculum	During this session trainees will consider a range of diverse issues that ensure an inclusive curriculum. This will include LGBTQ+ history, disability, gender and race. We will look at enhancing subject knowledge in these areas and strategies on how to develop the curriculum to ensure inclusivity. We will explore how trainees can make planning more efficient, effective. Trainees will also start to develop their understanding of medium and long term planning.
Tue 9th Jan	1, 2, 3	Migration and refugees - cross curricular opportunity with Geography, RE and MFL	A visiting speaker will explore the context and current situation in terms of migration and refugees.

It is concerning that such a significant proportion of the already limited subject-specific time within PGCE courses is being spent on the topic of diversifying or decolonising the curriculum. This is particularly true in light of the fact that, as previously identified, many courses offer only limited training on how to teach other, broader substantive historical topics.

In line with the focus many of the courses surveyed placed on decolonising the curriculum, several recommended readings had a particular ideological bias towards certain representations of the past and decolonisation of the curriculum in particular that were not balanced by alternative viewpoints presented to students on reading lists.

Several readings highlighted how to approach decolonising or diversifying a history curriculum, often from the perspective of specific underrepresented groups. For example, as shown in Figure 81, Liverpool Hope University's reading list includes an article entitled '*Decolonise, don't diversify: enabling a paradigm shift in the Key Stage 3 history curriculum*', instructing teachers on how to go further in 'decolonising' their curriculums in response to the Black Lives Matter protests of 2021.[106]

106. Historical Association, 'Decolonise, don't diversify: enabling a paradigm shift in the KS3 history curriculum', 15 July 2021, link

Figure 82: Liverpool Hope University's PGCE History course includes a reading list entitled 'research/evidence' to support its training session entitled 'Curriculum design: How can we diversify and decolonise the curriculum?'

Research /Evidence	**Reflective Reading:** To consolidate understanding: • (March 2024) 'What have historians been arguing about...climate history' Teaching History 194. Historical Association. • (2023) What have historians been arguing about... gender and sexuality' Teaching History 191. Historical Association. • Morgan, V. (March 2024) 'Equestrian comrades and an octopus of mud: bringing environmental history into the classroom'. Teaching History 194. Historical Association. • Folorunsho, E. (2023) 'Teaching Black British History' in What is History Teaching, Now? Pages 403-413 • Preye-Garry, J. (2023) 'From Representation and diversity to decolonisation' in What is History Teaching, Now? Pages 475-482 • Carter, R. (2023) 'LGBTQ+ History ' In What is History Teaching, Now? Pages 483-488 • Lyndon-Cohen, D. (2021) 'Decolonise, don't diversify: enabling a paradigm shift in the Key Stage 3 history curriculum' Teaching History 183. Historical Association. • Smith. S (2023) 'Constructing a diverse and representative curriculum' in What is History Teaching, Now? Pages 369-382.

Figure 83: Canterbury Christ Church University's History PGCE reading list includes a section entitled 'Exploring diversity/ Diversifying the curriculum', including readings on the inclusion of queer and gypsy/Roma history in the school curriculum.

Exploring Diversity/ Diversifying the curriculum

Arday, J. (2021) The Black Curriculum: Black British History in the National Curriculum, Download here: https://theblackcurriculum.com/research-review

Byrom, J. and Riley, M. (2007) Identify Shakers: Cultural Encounters and the Development of Pupils' Multiple Identities. *Teaching History*, Sense and Sensitivity Edition March

Cane, L. (2024) Triumphs Show: Recovering the queer history of Weimar Germany in GCSE history, *Teaching History*, 195.

Harris, R. (2013) The place of diversity within history and the challenge of policy and curriculum, *Oxford Review of Education*, 39.3. p. 400-419.

Harris, R. and Clarke, G. (2011) Embracing diversity in the history national curriculum: a study of the challenges facing trainee teachers, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 41, 2, p. 159-175.

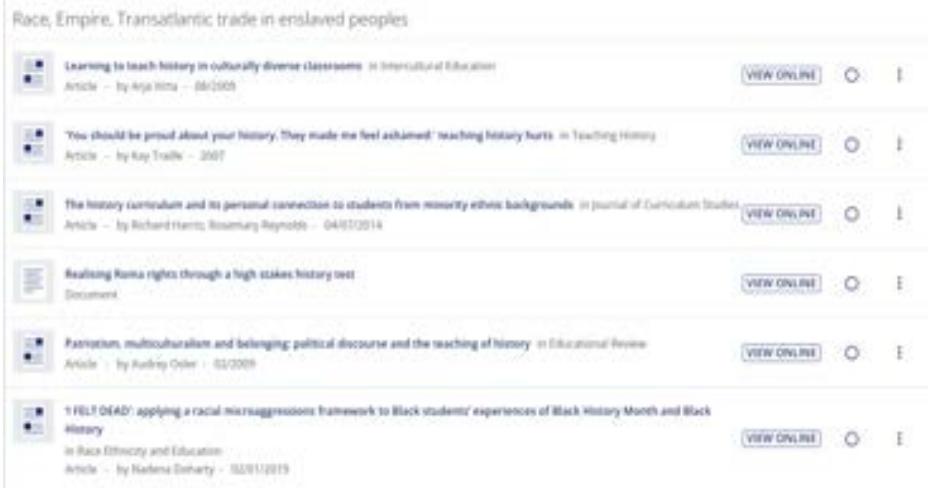
Hibbert, D and Patel, Z. (2019) How can Yasmin Khan's use of evidence enable us to teach a more global World War II?, *Teaching History 177*.

Jennings, N. (2024) 'If we've been getting their name wrong, how else have they been misrepresented?': Year 7 challenge stereotypes abut the Mexica, *Teaching History*, 193.

Kerridge, R. and Snelson, H. (2022), 'We are invisible!' Ensuring Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children do not feel unseen in the history classroom, *Teaching History*, 188.

Some recommended readings specifically framed diversifying the history curriculum as a moral imperative to ensure it was inclusive to students of different backgrounds.

Figure 84: Nottingham University's history PGCE reading list 'Race, Empire, Transatlantic trade in enslaved peoples' includes several readings which indicate that adapting the curriculum is important to accommodate diverse students in the classroom.[107]



An article recommended by Nottingham University in the list above, '*I Felt Dead*': *applying a racial microaggressions framework to Black students' experiences of Black History Month and Black History*', argues that students of African and Caribbean dissent are routinely subject to '*racial microaggressions*' exacerbated by an '*ideology of white supremacy*' in the history National Curriculum.

In too many university-based teacher training programmes, trainee teachers are being taught that good history teaching necessitates an ongoing process of curriculum innovation to deliver 'decolonised' curriculums. As these teachers enter the classroom, this is obviously affecting what students are taught and how this information is delivered.

107.University of Nottingham, 'History PGCE Thematic Bibliography', 2024/2025, link

Conclusion

This report has sought to demonstrate the vital role history as a subject plays in schools. Taught well, it helps students to develop a rich knowledge of their nation and the wider world, and their place within it.

History in English schools has much to commend it. It is taught by passionate and engaged specialists with a distinct disciplinary professionalism and approach that cannot be found as clearly in many other subjects. Most schools provide sufficient time for students to engage with a broad and challenging curriculum and cover a wide range of British and wider world topics within this. History remains a popular subject at both GCSE and A level, where rigorous exam specifications allow students to learn topics in impressive detail and develop their historical skills. Many of the resources used in schools are high quality, particularly those produced in the supplementary market such as text books and complete curriculum programmes. All this means that history as a subject in schools has a strong foundation from which to develop student's knowledge of the past.

However, there are areas where there is room for improvement. History at GCSE and A level is too specialised and repetitive – students should, particularly at GCSE, also have the opportunity to develop a clear sense of the broader 'sweep' of British history. Although schools with high numbers of students eligible for Free School Meals on average teach more history at Key Stage 3, their students are less likely to persist with the subject to GCSE. There is too much variation in the quality of both teacher training and resources – in too many schools, these weaknesses have enabled divisive and controversial viewpoints to be taught as fact. The recommendations set out in this report seek to address these challenges and ensure that history remains one of the strongest subjects in England's schools.

£10.00
ISBN: 978-1-917201-52-0

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