

Home » Publications » History in British Education » History in Schools and Higher Education: Issues of Common Concern (second conference)

The 11-19 curriculum and qualifications

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I am going to begin by talking quite broadly about what actions we are taking post [14-19 White Paper](#) on reforming the curriculum qualifications 14-19, and move onto the exact implications for history.

Curriculum changes following the 14-19 White Paper

At Key Stage 3 there has been a refocusing on the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and ICT. These subjects are fundamental to the entire reform programme and soon it will be impossible to get a GCSE grade C or above in English, mathematics or ICT without having mastered the functional core. We have been asked to free up some time to make the curriculum more flexible so that those students who are behind when they enter Key Stage 3 can catch up and those students who are racing ahead can have an enriched curriculum. Flexibility already exists within the curriculum, although people do not necessarily understand the freedoms that they have and the best ways to take advantage of them. In rewriting the curriculum, we aim to make that flexibility, and how to use it, more apparent to teachers.

Key Stage 3 tests will continue; we have been asked to strengthen teacher assessment, especially in the foundation subjects, of which history is one, by providing a bank of standardised tests, activities and tasks that can be used throughout the Key Stage. These are teacher support materials to help both assessment for learning and assessment of learning, and then, at the end of Key Stage 3, to allow the development of a pupil profile so that there is a better understanding of what capabilities individual students have when they leave Key Stage 3.

A new system of diplomas is also being introduced. At the moment we are consulting on 14 vocational areas for those diplomas and there are certainly places where history fits into the diplomas, for example, in travel and tourism. The diplomas will be available from levels 1-3 and the first five are being introduced in 2008; they also include the functional skills, relevant vocational disciplines and a lot more applied learning. The vocational diplomas are being led by employers, and being developed by local combinations of [Sector Skills Councils](#) working with the [Qualifications and Curriculum Authority](#) (QCA) and others.

The proposals around changes to A levels include:

- incorporating Advanced Extension Award (AEA) standard questions in A level papers
- making Higher Education (HE) modules available for students who are still in secondary education
- introducing an extended project which could be an essay, but it could be an artefact which could be the equivalent of an AS level and could - being careful to stress 'could' - replace the fourth or fifth AS that students take
- reducing the number of assessment units from six to four

Much of this will be difficult to do. Those of you currently immersed in A levels will know that it is already difficult to produce papers that are sufficiently stretching but not too daunting for candidates who will get grades A-E; introducing another grade on top of that will be challenging. It may, however, be easier in history than in some other subjects since history relies on the quality of the outcome - the quality of the student's response - rather than the difficulty of the question itself.

The extended project would not have to be in just one subject. It could be interdisciplinary. It is something that HE are very interested in and we need to work on developing a set of standards around the extended project that will allow us to read across various types of evidence. The challenge comes through trying to be flexible and fair, and designing some kind of standards across the project.

At GCSE level, we have been asked to look at coursework, particularly in order to ensure that students are not doing repetitious make-work coursework. Returning coursework to what it was intended to be when first conceived presents another challenge. It was originally planned as work of the course reflected in a large paper or an artefact that could be externally moderated or assessed. But over time coursework has developed into something more rigid than that. We are going to look once more at GCSE coursework to see whether interdisciplinary work can be incorporated. New GCSEs are going to be introduced in English and maths - English in 2008, maths in 2009 - in order to reflect the functional skills.

Implications for history

Starting with Key Stage 3 history, the White Paper tells us that will have to review Key Stage 3 History - a timely recommendation since the last time it was reviewed was in the lead up to 2000. The minimum that we have to achieve from the new review is to make existing flexibility much more apparent. Too many teachers tell us that they feel they are 'not allowed' to do this or that, and they are 'not allowed' to be innovative; in fact they are, but we need to get that across through the programme of study and to make it much clearer so that schools can redevelop a curriculum to meet the needs of their own students. As a minimum we have got to link the programme of study much more explicitly to the broader range of the curriculum.

Our other aim at Key Stage 3 is to address some of the problems that we have identified. There are concerns, for example, that by 14 a lot of students emerge from their study of history without a sufficiently confident overview of the past; they are quite good at knowing certain topics in great depth, but not how all the bits fit together, making the programme of study feel rather disjointed.

There is no remit for us to review GCSE history within this White Paper. As mentioned before, there will be implications for all subjects if a decision is made. But at the moment we have to assume that we are only going to review Key Stage 3 and A level. Having said that, we are very lucky in history that we have a unique opportunity through the GCSE pilots which we are doing with [OCR](#). At a recent meeting around 70 schools were recruited to pilot this brand new history qualification: the first really new GCSE history for over a decade. The first teaching on the pilot will start in September 2006, and we will evaluate this new specification throughout its two-year duration. We hope then to be able to then roll it out nationally, not instead of existing GCSEs but certainly as an alternative.

The new GCSE is an excellent opportunity to develop new content areas – for example, it contains a large amount of medieval history which is the first time that students have an opportunity to study medieval history beyond age 14. It will also introduce new approaches to assessment, such as better and more effective ways of assessing historical interpretations and source work. It will not simply focus on written outputs, but will employ different means of assessment, perhaps through the other types of output that are prevalent at Key Stage 3. It will also find ways of reintroducing narrative within GCSE which, I think, is currently lacking in some specifications.

Finally, the new GCSE offers an opportunity to link history to related vocational areas of learning. Within the pilot, this aspect appears on a very small scale, keeping it largely within the heritage and media industries, but, beyond that, when it is rolled out nationally there will be opportunities to link to all sorts of other areas. Vocational learning is going to expand post-14 and history needs to be part of that.

The lessons we learn from the pilot may then form the basis of a future review of all the existing GCSEs, although it may be prudent to wait for this pilot to have gone through its first two years before making a strong case for changing existing GCSEs. A further reason for holding back on changing GCSEs is that if a new Key Stage 3 is introduced in 2008 and new A levels come in 2008, it would be unfair to expect schools to have to cope with new GCSEs at the same time; we are mindful of trying to stagger change and phase it in slowly.

As far as Key Stage 3 history review is concerned, we have set up a series of meetings this term with teachers so that we can begin to evaluate the existing programme of study. We want to take the opportunity this term of sharing our ideas about what the relevant issues are, hearing what teachers have to say, and coming to some agreement about how to take it forward and how Key Stage 3 might change. We are also in the process of setting up a key development and advisory group that will meet throughout the whole process. This term's work will be about evaluation, and at the end of it we aim to produce a report which will go to our Key Stage 3 team at the [QCA](#) which will become part of a larger report to the [Department for Education and Skills \(DfES\)](#), making recommendations about what we ought to do with Key Stage 3 history. Having heard back from the DfES, the next two terms' work will focus on constructing a new version of the national curriculum for history.

Regarding A levels, again there will be a series of consultation meetings with teachers, key stakeholders and Awarding Bodies. However, here our timetable is much tighter. With Key Stage 3 the aim is to have a new history curriculum by September 2008 which will be phased in year by year; so schools will teach Year 7 from 2008, Year 8 in 2009 and Year 9 in 2010. The new A levels will be introduced September 2008 but in order to give Awarding Bodies the time to develop new specifications, we have to get the revised history criteria agreed and signed off by April 2006. The autumn term's work will be to develop a draft set of criteria, with the Awarding Bodies, key stakeholders and teachers, which will be put out to wider consultation in January, February and March 2006. Once they have been agreed and signed off, the Awarding Bodies can begin to do the work on the new A levels. In particular we aim to reduce the number of units from six to four and to include AEA-type questions. But the specific challenge for history is content; several speakers today have commented on the perceived narrowing of content at A level over recent years. We must, therefore, look at ways of broadening that experience, perhaps focusing once again on seeing A level as a two-year course of study rather than as an examination. We also need to address the quality and type of assessment, building on Key Stages 3 and 4 to give a sense of coherence – ideally from 3–19 but particularly from 11–19.

Finally, the extended project holds real opportunities for history. Of course, all subjects want their students to be involved in this innovation, but history in particular is well placed to play a role in delivering the extended project.

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