



Department  
for Education

# History

**GCSE subject content**

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# Contents

The content for history GCSEs	3
Introduction	3
Subject aims and learning outcomes	3
Subject content	4
Scope of study	4
Historical knowledge, understanding and method	6

# The content for history GCSEs

## Introduction

1. The GCSE subject content sets out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all GCSE specifications in a given subject. Together with the assessment objectives it provides the framework within which awarding organisations create the detail of their specifications, so ensuring progression from key stage 3 national curriculum requirements and the possibilities for progression to A level.

## Subject aims and learning outcomes

2. GCSE specifications in history should support students in learning more about the history of Britain and that of the wider world. The study of history at GCSE should inspire students to deepen their understanding of the people, periods and events studied and enable them to think critically, weigh evidence, sift arguments, make informed decisions and develop perspective and judgement. This, in turn, will prepare them for a role as informed, thoughtful and active citizens. The discipline of history and a knowledge and understanding of the past will also help them to understand their own identity and significant aspects of the world in which they live, and provide them with the basis for further wider learning and study.

3. 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

## Subject content

4. GCSE specifications in history must reflect the aims and learning outcomes. GCSE specifications in history should build on the national curriculum programmes of study for history at key stage 3.

5. This content sets out the full range of content for GCSE specifications in history. Awarding organisations may, however, use any flexibility to increase depth, breadth or context within the specified topics or to consolidate teaching of the subject content.

## Scope of study

6. GCSE specifications should include history:

- from three eras: Medieval (500-1500), Early Modern (1450-1750) and Modern (1700-present day)
- on three time scales: short (depth study), medium (period study) and long (thematic study)
- on three geographical contexts: a locality (the historic environment); British; and European and / or wider world settings

British history<sup>1</sup> must form a minimum of 40% of the assessed content over the full course.

7. Depth studies should focus on a substantial and coherent short time span and require students to understand the complexity of a society or historical situation and the interplay of different aspects within it. Depending on the particular society or historical situation selected for study, these aspects may include (but are not restricted to) social, economic, political, religious, technological and military factors. For European or wider world depth studies the complexity may stem from the number and diverse interests of the different nation states involved.

8. Period studies should focus on a substantial and coherent medium time span of at least 50 years and require students to understand the unfolding narrative of substantial developments and issues associated with the period.

9. Thematic studies should require students to understand change and continuity across a long sweep of history, including the most significant characteristics of different ages. They should reveal wider changes in aspects of society over the centuries and allow comparisons to be made between different periods of history. These aspects should include (but are not restricted to) some or all of the following: culture, economics, politics, religion, science, technology and war.

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<sup>1</sup> Reference to British history here and elsewhere in the document means British history and/ or the history of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland as appropriate to the historical context and focus of the study.

10. The study of the historic environment should focus on one particular site in its historical context. The study should examine the relationship between a place and historical events and developments. The focus of study may range in scale from, for example, a particular building or part of a building to a city or rural landscape/ setting. There is no requirement that students visit the site. This study may be linked to any other part of the course or may stand alone.

11. The course and each element within it must form a coherent and substantial study of history in which the elements are reasonably balanced across the full range of assessed content.

12. GCSE specifications in history should require students to study:

- at least one British depth study chosen from the historical eras defined above
- at least one European or wider world depth study chosen from the historical eras defined above. This should focus on the history of a nation or group of peoples or on international relations between several nations. It must not merely study British overseas involvements

13. British and wider world depth studies may not be taken from the same era of history or from the same overlapping fifty-year period.

- a period study into British, European or wider world history from any one of the historical eras defined above. One depth study may be from the same era as the period study
- the historic environment through the study of a particular site in its historical context
- one thematic study involving the study of people, events and developments drawn from all three eras defined above. Where appropriate, it may also draw on earlier times

14. While some overlap is likely, the thematic study must differ significantly in focus from the people, issues and events covered in the depth and period studies.

## Historical knowledge, understanding and method

15. GCSE specifications should, through these studies, require students to develop and demonstrate:

- knowledge and understanding of the key features and characteristics of the periods studied: the chronology, individuals, events, developments and issues in the specified content
- understanding and appropriate use in context of historical terms including first order historical concepts such as 'constitution', 'nation', 'revolution', 'society'
- the ability to create their own structured accounts, selecting organising and communicating their knowledge and understanding in written narratives, descriptions and analyses, reaching substantiated conclusions when appropriate
- understanding of the key features and characteristics of the periods studied in relation to second order historical concepts of continuity, change, cause, consequence, significance and similarity and difference within situations
- understanding of the relationships between different aspects within the periods studied, making connections, drawing contrasts and analysing trends. Examples of the related aspects include all or some of the following examples: between local, regional, national and international history; between cultural, economic, social, political, religious and military history; and between short and long term timescales
- the ability to understand and use critically and constructively a range of contemporary source material appropriate to the period (including written historical sources whose precise provenance is given) to frame their own valid historical questions and make their own valid historical claims
- understanding of how evidence is used rigorously to make historical claims, discerning how and why different interpretations of the past have been constructed



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