

## Revising your Key Stage 3 history curriculum- some thoughts

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### Why provide this guidance?

Much of what I say here will echo advice I gave in a supplement from the Historical Association that was sent to all schools in December 2013 (“Teaching history – Curriculum evolution”). By adding these thoughts to the SHP site, however, I can make available certain documents in WORD format that people say they have found to be helpful, notably the guide to content/progression. The other advantage in re-stating the advice now is that we know more about the future of GCSE and it is possible to begin to plan for a more coherent 11-16 (or 11-18) history curriculum in readiness for the appearance of actual specifications from Awarding Organisations.

### Substantive historical content: what’s changed?

The 2014 programme of study for history is included in *Resource 2: National Curriculum for History, DfE 2014*. The DfE website seems strangely reluctant to show all three key stages together in the downloads that it makes available but this version does show Key Stage 3 history in the context of earlier study. Secondary teachers will note the considerable continuity at Key Stage 3 but may not be aware that pupils in primary schools are no longer required to study the Tudors, the Victorians or Britain since the 1930s. Primary history must include some study of an aspect or theme that extends study beyond 1066, but in general they will arrive in secondary schools from 2015 having concentrated largely on events before 1066.

*Resource 3: Key Stage 3 Changes 2014* sums up changes in the overall purpose and place of history and the required substantive content from September 2014.

The first page shows a comparison of the statements about the place of history in the curriculum. The 2014 version is more concise but retains just about everything from the 2008 statement. There is, however, a more immediate emphasis in 2014 on the importance of the students building “a coherent knowledge and understanding of Britain’s past and that of the

wider world”. The 2008 version required something similar (“a chronological framework”) but from 2014 there is clearly to be extra emphasis on this. This can be seen in the way each of the preambles for key stages 1, 2 and 3 re-state this message in their opening phrases. It is clear that we will need to PLAN for this secure chronological knowledge and understanding. In the past I think it is fair to say that we have not given this sufficient attention and may have simply hoped or trusted that it would develop almost as a by-product of doing interesting work in our history classrooms.

The second page of the file shows my attempt to match up old and new requirements for the teaching of substantive historical content. The fact that I have paired some old and new aspects is not to suggest that nothing needs to change. I’m simply trying to show where a broad continuity may exist.

After some early scares about the degree of prescription, the geographical and social narrowness of focus, and the actual periods to be studied set out in the DFE’s first draft, the final 2014 programme is actually less prescriptive in some senses than the 2008 model. While the 2008 programme set down in some detail a set of themes or narratives that should be taught from British and World history, the 2014 requirements just provide several overarching headings for areas of study. The bullet points that are listed below the headings in the 2014 document are examples and are not part of the statutory requirement. Having said that, they do help to capture some central features of what is distinctive and significant in each period and if you choose not to teach about every single point, you will need to be sure that your own chosen content is historically sound and coherent and matches the statutory heading.

Note that the linking paragraph between the preamble and the listed areas of study requires you to “combine overview and depth studies to help pupils understand both the long arc of development and the complexity of specific aspects of the content”. History departments could have some fascinating and enjoyable challenges in the next few years as they develop regular sweeping overview activities that aid chronological and period knowledge by increasing pace while reducing detail. (Of course, other enquiries will be rich in detail and the end product should be that our students move confidently between overviews and depth in their grasp of history).

## Historical concepts and methods: what's changed?

Even in its earliest, rather alarming, published draft, the aims of the new curriculum always included a strong formulation of the nature of the discipline of history. This is given in the final four bullets of the “Aims”. The ideas have also been given extra clarity in the preambles that appear at the start of the requirements for each key stage. In essence they represent a fairly familiar and helpful statement of what it means to “get better at history”.

**Resource 4: Progression** rearranges the 2014 history requirements in two ways. In each case normal print is always directly taken from the 2014 requirements, while text in italics is purely advisory.

The first page shows what must be taught at each key stage both in terms of the required “content” and in the expected development of historical knowledge, understanding and method.

The second page concentrates on progression in what the 2008 curriculum called the concepts and processes of history. Each of the aspects listed down the left hand side is explicitly required within the 2014 history curriculum. The table shows in broad terms what progress in each aspect may look like. These have been linked (with some colour-coding) to the curriculum’s stated aims, taking the development of “historical perspective” to be the goal of all that we do. The lower half of the page draws on past national curriculum wording about conceptual development, as the preambles in our 2014 document are less explicit about this. This representation in this table is a personal view, but colleagues have told me that they find it helpful.

## Specific observations and suggestions arising from the changes

- a. Don’t ignore the changes at Key Stage 2. If possible liaise with the teachers at your partner primary schools to find out how their own planning is to be changed. (See the next paragraph for example) ...
- b. In teaching some British history that pre-dates 1066, you could do some really good work on the Anglo-Saxons or on the Neolithic Revolution, but SHP has always valued thematic studies as an effective way of strengthening chronological knowledge and

understanding. You could study the long-term migration of people into and out of Britain (as in the 2008 programme) while a study of the changing landscape could combine a thematic and a local study. Under the new 2014 curriculum alongside the new GCSE criteria, it is quite possible that many children will do what we might call “a development study” at Key Stage 2, Key Stage 3 and at GCSE. We could hardly have imagined this a year ago.

- c. Be sure that your study of wider world history will reveal inter-connections between societies. One area of study not listed in the official list that you might consider is the Ottoman Empire. The First World War and many current global tensions stem from the Ottomans’ decline and the increasing involvement of the west.
- d. Don't forget your own curriculum priorities arising from eg
  - The local context and community
  - School and departmental self-evaluation and reviews
  - Your plans for GCSE (See more on this below)

### **How might we organise all this?**

The original draft proposals for the 2014 curriculum included a requirement that the events should be studied sequentially and chronologically. That has disappeared, but whichever approach is adopted, there must be a real, explicit emphasis on developing the secure chronological knowledge referred to in the “purpose” statement. So you might consider teaching the work ...

- a. Chronologically by “units” – but note that the word “Unit” is never used. They are not necessarily to be seen as discrete blocks
- b. Chronologically but adapted eg you could devote a section of the course to the 18th century rather than split it across two other “units”
- c. Geographically, so that Year 7 has a strong local feel, Year 8 is based on national/British developments and Year 9 has a global perspective.
- d. Thematically. This may appeal to departments that may have moved to planning by the themes set out in the 2008 curriculum.
- e. Optimising continuity with GCSE. I hesitate to suggest this, but where schools insist on having a two year Key Stage 3 for history, it may now be possible to do a thematic



study, a local study and a wider-world study in Year 9 as these are all required in Key Stage 3 and at GCSE.

Within the overall structure, of course, SHP always advocates the study of history through challenging, but intriguing historical enquiries with particular people, places and moments at the heart of the study. This has proved to be a highly effective way of blending the discipline of history, rich historical knowledge, effective pedagogy and the students' interests and needs. The rest of this SHP website has plenty of evidence to support this claim!