

History in the balance

History in English schools 2003–07

The report evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of history in primary and secondary schools. It does so at a time of changing contexts and lively debate on the future of the subject. The Every Child Matters agenda to maximise pupils' potential raises significant questions about what is taught and how. There is also much public and political interest in issues of citizenship, the understanding of British values and social cohesion. In reflecting on evidence from inspection, the report considers how history teaching might respond to these challenges.

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Executive summary

This report draws on evidence from whole-school inspections and focused history inspections during the period 2003 to 2007. It also draws on other sources of evidence, including a range of publications and discussions with representatives of subject associations, teacher trainers, teachers and others with an interest in history teaching.

Part A of the report focuses on the progress achieved by pupils in history, and the main factors that explain this. Achievement is generally satisfactory in Key Stages 1 and 2 and good in Key Stages 3, 4 and post-16. An area of particular concern is Key Stage 2, where too much history teaching and learning lacks progression and rigour. This is serious because this key stage constitutes the largest single part of the National Curriculum.

In primary schools, especially at Key Stage 2, the curriculum is demanding, yet few teachers are specialists and so find it difficult to develop the subject over four years with appropriate progression. Limits to what is possible on initial teacher training (ITT) courses for post-graduates and in induction years for newly qualified teachers together with the lack of easily accessible continuing professional development exacerbate the problem.

In primary and secondary schools, teachers need to encourage more independent learning, to improve assessment, and to provide more effectively for different groups, such as minority ethnic, and gifted and talented pupils.

In primary and secondary schools, important weaknesses in the curriculum, largely as a result of the way it is interpreted, have an impact on standards. Too great a focus on a relatively small number of issues means that pupils are not good at establishing a chronology, do not make connections between the areas they have studied and so do not gain an overview, and are not able to answer the 'big questions'.

Part B of the report considers several broader issues, some of which are relevant to the current revisions to the National Curriculum. The debate about standards in history continues, and this report offers a view as to whether the standards required by public examinations have been sustained.

History currently has a limited place in the curriculum. In primary schools, this has been because of the necessary focus on literacy and numeracy. However, schools are beginning to reconsider subjects like history and their role in the wider curriculum, for example in supporting literacy. But in secondary schools, only just over 30% of pupils study the subject in Key Stage 4 and fewer still post-16, which means that a substantial number never consider important historical issues when they are mature enough to do so. The report considers reasons for this and how it might be tackled.

The report explores the connections between Every Child Matters and history teaching, and how creating a more relevant curriculum could make the subject more useful and popular.

Finally, schools' implementation of the requirements for National Curriculum citizenship and the public debate about Britishness have raised questions about the role of history in schools, and how history teachers could respond.

Key findings

- Pupils' achievement is satisfactory at Key Stages 1 and 2. Pupils know about selected periods and themes, but they are often weak at linking information together to form an overall narrative or story. They are also often weak in important history skills.
- In primary schools, there is often little assessment by teachers of pupils' performance and teachers are not always clear about the standards expected; as a consequence, pupils' progress is faltering.
- There is not enough curriculum liaison between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. Secondary schools find it difficult to know where to begin their teaching because of variations in the quality of provision in primary schools.
- Pupils' achievement in secondary schools and colleges is good and, in terms of examination performance, standards compare well with other subjects. At best, pupils know a lot and are able to pose questions, seek evidence, evaluate it and communicate it well in different ways. They understand important concepts and are adept at history skills. However, only just over 30% of pupils study the subject at Key Stage 4 and fewer still post-16.
- The National Curriculum and examination specifications have provided a successful curriculum which has been faithfully delivered by teachers and by leaders of the subject in schools.¹ However, changing circumstances mean that curriculum change is necessary to meet pupils' needs more effectively.
- Many aspects of leadership and management in history have been good. Some coordinators in primary schools have recently introduced significant innovations such as improved links between history and literacy. Most heads of department in secondary schools are committed and have improved monitoring and self-evaluation.
- Areas for development in many schools include assessment, more opportunities for pupils to take greater responsibility for their learning, making the curriculum more responsive to the needs of pupils, and the use of information and communication technology (ICT).

¹ The National Curriculum for history is available from www.nc.uk.net/webdav/harmonise?Page/@id=6004&Subject/@id=3251.

- This is a time of considerable curriculum change in history. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) has just completed the review of AS and A levels and Key Stage 3, and is currently reviewing Key Stage 4. A new pilot GCSE has started and the Ajebo report has proposed compulsory British history at Key Stage 4.²³ These developments raise the issue of coherence across the subject.

Recommendations

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), the QCA and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) should:

- revise the curriculum to deal with the concern that young people study a few unconnected topics and so gain only a limited understanding of chronology and often cannot answer the 'big questions' of history
- in revising the history curriculum, balance a compulsory core of knowledge and skills with more flexible elements to respond to local needs
- in revisions, pay attention to coherence and progression across all phases and all initiatives
- ensure the history curriculum reflects the principles of Every Child Matters, providing young people with the historical knowledge and skills to understand the world in which they live and prepare them for adulthood
- reconsider provision for history post-16, making courses available that reflect better the way in which history is presented by the media, heritage, tourist and other industries.

Training providers and the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) should:

- improve the initial and induction year training of primary teachers in history
- provide more opportunities for high quality continuing professional development in history.

Schools should:

- within the context of their overall priorities for improvement, evaluate their current provision for history, considering how it can best meet the needs of all pupils in helping them understand the world in which they live

² Details of the GCSE pilot are available from www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/GCSEHistoryPilot.html.

³ *Diversity and citizenship curriculum review* (the Ajebo report) (DfES-00045-2007), DfES, 2007; available from

<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-00045-2007>.

- establish a clear rationale for linking discrete history topics which enables pupils to establish a chronology, create a narrative and understand the wider implications ('the big picture') of what they have studied
- clarify their understanding of the principles and aims of the National Curriculum, particularly in primary schools, and develop progression in pupils' knowledge and skills, as well as workable assessment to support this
- improve the quality of teaching to encourage pupils' greater independence in learning history
- ensure that one key stage or phase of education links well with others to provide better coherence and progression
- improve links with other subjects where appropriate, particularly literacy, numeracy, ICT and citizenship.

Introduction

1. There is much to celebrate about current history provision in our schools, but there is no room for complacency. This report summarises Ofsted's evidence on the main aspects of history in English schools today. It paints a picture of broadly satisfactory provision in Key Stages 1 and 2 which improves in Key Stages 3 and 4 and post-16. It analyses successful practice and areas where the subject needs to do better.
2. But at its heart is a real concern. Though the number of pupils studying history compares well with some other subjects, nevertheless just over 30% of young people study history in Key Stage 4 and even fewer post-16. The critical issue is why this is so, particularly in an era when many people, including politicians, say that it is important for everyone to understand the past in order to understand the present.
3. One reason is that history is not compulsory after the age of 14 in English schools, unlike the practice in most of Europe. Indeed, most of the history that pupils are taught is at primary school. Second, there is the pressure of other subjects in a crowded curriculum, all with valid claims. The interest in vocational subjects is particularly noteworthy. Third, there is the nature of the curriculum itself. The present National Curriculum, GCSE and A-level curricula have many strengths but they do not attract enough young people to take up history as an optional subject.
4. At the heart of what Ofsted does and at the heart of government policy is Every Child Matters and what young people need to become successful, well equipped adults, capable of sustaining themselves and their families.⁴ This report argues

⁴ *Every Child Matters*. Cm 5860, HMSO, 2003. The five outcomes sought by the government from the policy are that young people should: **be healthy**, enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle; **stay safe**, being protected from harm and neglect; **enjoy and achieve** by getting the most out of life and developing the skills for adulthood; **make a positive contribution**

that school history needs to focus on these issues. Principally, it should help young people to understand why things are the way they are and that history relates clearly to the present. Additionally, the report emphasises the need for school history to be inclusive, exploring more fully the story of the United Kingdom in its diversity and its relationships with Europe and the rest of the world.

Part A: History in primary and secondary schools

Pupils' achievement in history

Key Stages 1 and 2

5. In Key Stage 1, pupils are expected to develop an understanding of the passing of time and what life was like in the past, learning about the differences between past and present, why things happened and how we know. This lesson gives a good picture of Year 1 pupils as young historians:

The aim of the lesson was to encourage pupils to be 'history detectives', looking at objects that people used in their homes in the past. Pupils were very interested and their behaviour was excellent. Learning was very effective because of the questions they asked about the objects. Good teaching elicited the questions from the whole class before pupils were divided into groups to work with sets of objects, supported by the teacher and a teaching assistant. All pupils, including one with Down's Syndrome, participated in the group work and showed their understanding of the objects and how they differ from today's equivalents. There was a good deal of purposeful discussion. The most able pupils produced labelled pictures of the objects which they used to create a time line. Overall, this was a good lesson with a strong focus on developing enquiry skills, observation, questioning, and the concepts of 'now' and 'then'.

6. Overall, pupils' achievement in history at Key Stage 1 is satisfactory. In 2003/04 and 2004/05, the last years for which national data are available, pupils' achievement was satisfactory in half of schools and unsatisfactory in only a very small minority. In the remainder, nearly half, it was good. In good schools, pupils showed a solid grasp of the language of time, such as 'old' and 'new', 'before' and 'after'. They could describe artefacts and pictures. They were able to tell stories of the past, relating their understanding of episodes such as the

by being involved with the community and society, and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour; **ensure their economic well-being** by not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving their full potential in life. Available from www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims/background/. Further comment on Every Child Matters can be found in this report in paragraphs 74 to 77.

Great Fire of London. At best, pupils were able both to talk and write about the history they had studied. They also showed great enthusiasm for history, and especially for history visits and visitors.

7. Over recent years, Key Stage 1 has shown more improvement than Key Stage 2. Ofsted's 2004/05 history report explained this as follows:

‘There are various reasons for this but probably the most important has been the flexibility in the Key Stage 1 curriculum, which encourages teachers to build the curriculum around pupils to support their particular needs and interests, while at the same time starting to introduce them to basic historical method and skills which will serve them well later on. These good qualities are also features common in relevant teaching and learning in the Foundation Stage.’⁵

For instance, in the best schools, teachers use history regularly and in a planned way as a means of teaching literacy and, to a lesser extent, numeracy and ICT. The flexibility available also allows teachers to teach to their strengths and produce a curriculum with which they are confident.

8. In Key Stage 2, the overall picture is also of satisfactory achievement, although underachievement is slightly higher than in Key Stage 1. Ofsted's 2003/4 history report said that primary history ‘continues to disappoint’, a comment that applied particularly to Key Stage 2.⁶ The disappointment is that history should be much better in this key stage, because more is expected of pupils and because it constitutes nearly half the National Curriculum in history - four years.
9. Ofsted's evidence, reflected in its 2004/05 history report, is that pupils in Key Stage 2 often do lots of things in history and that they enjoy the subject but this is not always translated into sufficient progress. Although pupils often know something about selected periods or events – for example, children in Victorian times, Henry VIII and his wives, or the Aztecs – they are weak at linking this information to form an overall narrative or story. In addition, while they often write, draw, discuss, make things and investigate, these skills are not developed progressively and so they do not improve across the key stage. One required skill, ‘interpretation’ (which deals with how the past is represented and interpreted in different ways), is barely developed at all. The reasons for this are considered later.

⁵ *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2004/05; school subject reports: History in primary schools*, Ofsted, October 2005; available from <http://live.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/annualreport0405/4.1.5.html>.

⁶ *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2003/04; school subject reports: History in primary schools*, Ofsted, February 2005; available from http://live.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/annualreport0304/subject_reports/primary/history.htm.

10. This picture of pupils enjoying history but underachieving is well illustrated by this example:

This history lesson in a Year 5/6 class was linked to pupils' work in English on *The Secret Garden*. The objective was to research and then write about what people wore then and now. The lesson began with the teacher reading excerpts from *The Secret Garden* and then showing various artefacts, photographs on the interactive white board, items of clothing and crochet work. This led to pupils asking relevant questions which the teacher answered. The teacher gave clear instructions about the writing and how resources were to be used. Overall, the teacher had worked hard to plan, structure and resource the lesson and pupils responded very well. But these were very able children and too much was decided for them. In addition, the resources were too limited, restricting pupils' horizons, and their ability to ask questions and find out answers.

11. The more pedestrian work seen in weaker primary school practice contrasts with the very good or outstanding work seen in others. For instance, part of a lesson in a Year 3 class involved pupils looking at old and modern objects which the teacher had brought from home. The lesson aimed to help pupils understand that there are different points of view. The inspector noted the following:

Detailed plans identified learning objectives that were aimed clearly at developing historical skills. Excellent, well chosen resources included artefacts and pictures which pupils had to interpret. Pupils had to think; there were many 'what' and 'why?' questions, some of which the teacher answered and others which she directed back to pupils to decide. Pupils also had to date and sequence objects. They were very interested in each other's views and in the fact that it was sometimes difficult to know the truth. Challenge was evident. Differentiation was by outcome at the beginning of the lesson but, subsequently, there was successful differentiation by task; the teaching assistant worked with one group. Pupils were beginning to think like historians and were beginning to justify their views. Their progress was good.

As in Key Stage 1, successful schools also interrelate the teaching and learning of history with literacy and other subjects to the extent that when certain topics are studied, history provides the context for other work.

12. The consequence of such mixed provision is a wide variation in pupils' standards by the end of Key Stage 2. This is a key reason why history teachers in secondary schools are able to say that pupils have had an uncertain experience and thus, in some cases, to write off what pupils have achieved to date. Too many secondary schools assume the worst, and thus begin their courses with a 'What is history?' unit that is redundant for some or many, but rarely all, pupils.

Key Stages 3 and 4 and post-16

13. In Key Stages 3 and 4 and post-16, the situation improves and overall achievement is good.
14. In 2003/04 and 2004/05, in just under three quarters of schools, pupils' achievement in Key Stage 3 was good and in just under a quarter it was very good or excellent; in a very small number of schools it was unsatisfactory. Achievement improved in Key Stage 4 and again post-16, where it was good in over three quarters of schools. In terms of outcomes, test and examination results showed the same pattern.
15. In terms of examination performance, standards in history compare well with other subjects and have been improving over time. In GCSE in 2006, 66% of pupils achieved grades A*–C compared to about 62% in all subjects. At A-level, 75% of candidates achieved grades A–C compared with an average for all subjects of 71%.⁷
16. In schools where pupils demonstrate high achievement, they have:
 - a good knowledge of historically significant events, people, and concepts
 - a good understanding of the connections between events and the ability to establish a chronology and overarching narrative or story
 - an understanding of the contemporary relevance of historical events and their links to the present
 - an ability to pose relevant questions and hypotheses about historical events
 - skill in increasingly purposeful and analytical enquiry
 - an ability to seek out and evaluate evidence
 - an understanding that historical events can be viewed in different ways
 - an ability to communicate judgements effectively using a range of modern media, including speaking, writing, pictorial representation, other forms of display, video, and sound recording
 - an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and how to improve.
17. Good achievement and high standards were observed across a range of topics. This example is from a Year 8 lesson on the Great Plague in which pupils developed their knowledge and their skills in questioning and using resources:

Pupils used a range of evidence to come to conclusions about the death of an individual from plague. The lesson began with a brief discussion led by the teacher. She used PowerPoint well. She asked lots of questions; pupils

⁷ GCSE and equivalent examination results in England 2005/06 (revised); available at www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000702/index.shtml.

GCE/VCE A/AS and equivalent examination results in England, 2005/06 (revised); available at www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000703/index.shtml.

were desperate to answer. Questions were open-ended and offered substantial challenge; pupils' answers were perceptive and searching; they defined the agenda for subsequent research. Pupils then worked in groups; they were very positive and worked maturely together; they enjoyed helping each other. They worked through printed resources carefully to find answers to the questions they had set. Some resources were also available on a single computer; pupils used the resource well, although not all could gain access. The teacher visited individuals and groups throughout the lesson, ensuring that all pupils succeeded and made progress; thus, inclusion was a strong feature. By the end of the lesson, pupils had a good range of answers to the questions they posed. In particular, they had a clear understanding of the causes of the plague and the relative merits of different 'cures' of the time.

18. In this Year 10 lesson, the inspector was particularly impressed by the quality of the planning, organisation and teaching, the range of resources, the support from staff, pupils' response and the progress they made. The inspector's summary judgement was: 'Outstanding overall. Clear objectives, a lot of learning plus fun. Very well planned both in terms of pedagogy and practicalities. Pupils responded well and learnt.'

This was a joint lesson involving two classes, two teachers and two support staff. It was the final lesson in a series. It began with a lively question and answer session recalling previous lessons which prepared pupils for learning and contributed to the very good atmosphere. The teacher then explained the lesson's objectives very clearly, linking them to GCSE outcomes. The task was to answer the question "Why didn't the Romans overcome crime?" Pupils worked in groups. There was good negotiation of a behaviour code and rules for collaborative work, giving responsibility to pupils. The result was very effective work, with pupils using the well selected resources to identify and link issues, support discussion and reach conclusions. There was a purposeful, productive buzz during the group activities. The adults were very helpful, moving round the groups, offering advice and making challenging suggestions to encourage pupils to find out more and develop ideas. Some pupils acted as 'reporters' with the objective of preparing an article for the school magazine. Their questions to their peers also offered surprising challenge. Feedback from the groups was handled with pupils dressing in Roman clothes and speaking as if in the Senate. This was also effective in terms of showing how pupils had progressed well in developing their knowledge and, more particularly, their understanding of Roman politics and society.

19. Some outstanding work was seen in sixth forms in schools and colleges. The recent Ofsted survey of high-performing colleges praised the quality of students' writing; the depth of students' understanding of complex issues, including the way this was reflected in the high quality of coursework; their

ability to collaborate to achieve better coverage and appreciation of issues; and their imaginative use of ICT. All these elements are present in the following example:

The aim of the session was to develop e-essay skills in preparation for an impending assessment. The topic to be explored was, 'Do you agree with the view that Perkin Warbeck posed the most serious threat to Henry VII's throne?' The class was divided into small groups of five to six. Each group had to decide on its overall argument and determine the structure of the essay, working out the main points to be used in each paragraph and the evidence to be used. Paragraphs were divided between group members with one responsible for the introduction and conclusion. In each group, one member had the additional responsibility to collate the materials into the full essay format. The class relocated to a computer area directly outside the classroom where all students had their own computer work base. When the collation had been done, the group sat around the collator's work-base to discuss the essay and make any necessary changes. Each group then emailed the essay to the whole class for peer group marking against the examination board's marking scheme. This was a very intensive task conducted with remarkable energy. The work produced was of a high standard; discussion was excellent and well focused. The follow-up lesson explored students' views on the question and what they had learned about essay style.⁸

20. These examples identify some of the good history practice taught within successful schools. However, this is not to say that secondary school history is without weaknesses. Considerable scope exists for improving standards in a range of areas. For instance, successive Ofsted reports have commented critically on the fact that, as in Key Stage 2, pupils study relatively few topics in depth at the expense of developing an overview of history. A comment in Ofsted's 2004–05 history report summed this up very well:

...young people's knowledge is often very patchy and specific; they are unable to sufficiently link discrete historical events to answer big questions, form overviews and demonstrate strong conceptual understanding. They often do not know about key historical events, people and ideas, and there is often unjustified repetition of topics at different stages of pupils' school careers. One much cited example is the repetition of work on Nazi Germany. The option choices made by schools and colleges in GCSE and AS/A level mean that the content of post-14

⁸ *Sharing good practice: a survey of history in colleges* (HMI 2367), Ofsted, 2006; available from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2367.

history continues to be dominated by 16th-, 19th- and 20th-century topics, most notably the Tudors and 20th-century dictatorships.⁹

21. Consequently, young people's sense of chronology is relatively weak and they are generally unable to reflect on themes and issues or relate a longer narrative or story of the history of Britain, Europe or elsewhere over an extended period of time.
22. There are also other issues at these levels, including continued weaknesses in exploring historical interpretation, evaluating sources, using ICT, and exploiting the full range of media which are used so successfully by historians outside school.

Teaching and learning

Key Stages 1 and 2

23. Earlier, this report described achievement in Key Stage 1 and 2 as satisfactory. Where achievement is better than this, it is due very largely to the quality of teaching.
24. In Key Stage 1, the best teaching has clear historical objectives and lessons are planned to link the development of historical understanding with other subjects, including literacy, drama and art, as in the following example:

When the inspector entered, the pupils were sitting on the carpet around the teacher. She was gently exploring whether they understood the concepts 'old' and 'new' and the differences between the present and the past. The pupils responded very well to this. Virtually all were keen to contribute to the discussion. Two teaching assistants gave gentle prompts to two children who, as a result, were eager and able to contribute. Next, the teacher showed a basket of toys. She explained that she wanted the children to help her sort them into old toys and new toys and then put them into two labelled hoops on the floor. The teacher took each toy in turn from the basket and then selected a child to begin a discussion on whether the toy was old or new and why. This worked well as all the children were keen to express an opinion and she found ways of enabling this. She was careful to include the pupils with learning difficulties. When it was their turn to give an opinion, she (and the other pupils) paced the moment well so that the pupils did not feel under pressure. As a result, they did well.

⁹ *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2004/05; school subject reports: History in secondary schools*, Ofsted, 2005; available from <http://live.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/annualreport0405/4.2.7.html>.

What was really good about this lesson was the way the teacher encouraged pupils to look carefully at each object and describe it, including some of the fine detail – for example, that it was cracked or the paint on it was peeling or a bit was missing. Not only was she teaching them to handle evidence, but she was also teaching them new words. At the end of this part of the lesson, the teacher produced a board on which she had already pinned cards showing the words the children had used. Encouraging a combination of phonic strategies and whole word recognition, she asked individuals and all pupils to say the words aloud. Pupils were set appropriate tasks, including drawing selected toys in their books and writing brief descriptions. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties, learnt a lot in this lesson – speaking, listening, handling and interpreting evidence, developing vocabulary, drawing, writing and working together.

25. Very good teaching in Key Stage 2 also continues to make links with other subjects but there is a stronger focus on developing subject knowledge as pupils learn about specific events and periods of history. An encouraging feature in successful schools is the improved use of ICT, both as a resource and as a learning tool, as in the following examples:

One lesson involved a skilful presentation of printed resources, film, and a set of tables and maps which were manipulated on an interactive whiteboard by the teacher and pupils, so facilitating understanding.

In a Year 5 lesson, an excellent discussion took place, based on a painting, with a series of questions and answers (projected on a white board), of a rich Victorian mother and child observed from a distance by a poor child. Using the whiteboard meant that the single set of resources could readily be seen and used by all pupils, and provided a focus for discussion of the political message of the source.

Some Year 3 pupils drew pictures on the computer of a Roman centurion, using a web-based source which they switched to and from to make accurate observations.

26. More adventurous use involves pupils compiling history programmes on a theme using PowerPoint, including sound, or making sound recordings as part of local history projects. The use of the Internet, in school and at home, is also found increasingly in all key stages, although without careful guidance pupils sometimes get lost or otherwise submerged in too much material. Overall, the use of ICT in primary (and secondary) history is developing well after a slow start.
27. But the quality described above in Key Stage 2 is not present in enough lessons. In Key Stage 2, the demands made on teachers' subject knowledge are significant, both in terms of the defined and substantial knowledge content and

in teaching complex skills to an increasingly high standard over the four years of the key stage. Largely because of insufficient training, some teachers find it hard to respond to this. For instance, a general weakness in teachers' planning is insufficient attention to progression, especially in developing pupils' skills and understanding. The focus for much of the planning and the teaching is on pockets of knowledge at basic levels. Thus, the notion that pupils can progress and do better over time in history is not well established in all schools.

28. Closely related to this is the general weakness in assessing pupils' work in history. Ofsted's 2003/04 history report commented that less than a quarter of primary schools assess pupils' progress well and provide them with good feedback. Commonly, teachers are unclear about the criteria for good history and so do not know how well pupils are doing. Therefore, they have no solid basis on which to judge the quality of their teaching and learning. This affects all pupils, including potentially higher attainers.
29. Some teachers argue that they already have enough to do to assess pupils in the core subjects, yet in schools where history is successful, it has been possible to devise workable assessment systems which provide helpful information. This helps teachers to adjust their teaching to satisfy as many needs as possible.
30. At the heart of the issue is the fact that most teachers of history in primary schools are non-specialists. Some have a background in history to A-level and beyond, but many will not have studied history at all, post-14. Post-graduate initial teacher training courses for new primary teachers and the subsequent induction year provide very limited experience of teaching history. This is compounded by only limited continuing professional education in history for serving teachers. Those initiatives that do exist do not penetrate sufficiently. Teachers often say that good ideas and materials are available – for example, the QCA's *Innovating with History* website – but because of lack of time or, more usually, because there is no local specialist to help explore the ideas and give them confidence, the impact on the quality of teaching is relatively limited.¹⁰
31. Because of their limited training and subsequent lack of confidence, teachers have been unwilling to be innovative with the curriculum. Often, sequences of lessons follow the route through the National Curriculum proposed by the QCA schemes of work.¹¹ It was always intended that teachers should adapt and

¹⁰ *Innovating with history: how to develop pupils' understanding of chronology at Key Stage 1 and 2*; available from

www.qca.org.uk/history/innovating/improving_learning/chronological_ks12/index.htm#contents.

¹¹ The QCA schemes of work website is www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes3/.

extend these, according to the needs of particular groups of pupils, but too often they are not used imaginatively.

32. In summary, while there is much to praise about history teaching and learning in primary schools, the overall picture is that teaching and learning in Key Stage 2 are still not good enough, and the resulting standards are not high enough. As indicated earlier, this is serious, given that almost half the compulsory curriculum in history is taught in Key Stage 2.

Key Stages 3 and 4 and post-16

33. In Key Stages 3 and 4, the overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Ofsted's 2004/05 history report noted that teaching in 80% of lessons was either good or excellent. This compares with 72% for all subjects combined.¹² Post-16, it is even better. Good history teaching has a number of important characteristics. Although this is not an exclusive list and does not apply only to secondary schools, effective teachers:

- have good subject knowledge, including a map of the past that enables them to make connections and contrasts for pupils between the periods and places they are studying, and between the past and the present
- have a good understanding of the debates among school historians, such as those on interpretation, progression, causation, historical significance and the relevance of history to pupils' lives today
- plan effectively to deal with the National Curriculum and GCSE, AS and A-level requirements
- create good relationships with pupils and establish good class management, based on mutual enthusiasm for the subject and confidence in pupils' learning
- use effective teaching methods that encourage pupils to take responsibility, capture pupils' imagination and engage them
- make effective use of support staff who themselves fully understand the purposes of the work
- use activities and resources, including ICT, that involve pupils and enable them to take increasing responsibility
- question skilfully and effectively to assess pupils' progress and extend their thinking and understanding
- enable discussion and debate amongst pupils
- assess pupils' work effectively and systematically and use the information to plan to meet individuals' needs
- provide specific, accurate and positive feedback.

¹² *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2004/05; school subject reports: History in secondary schools*, Ofsted, 2005; available from <http://live.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/annualreport0405/4.2.7.html>.

34. Secondary history teachers are passionate about their subject and keen to share it with young people. Although this report has criticised aspects of primary ITT, secondary ITT providers are generally very effective. This is well illustrated in this excerpt from a report on one course:

The quality of (secondary) history training is very high. Trainees are very positive about the overall quality of their course and, relative to other subjects, there is a high success rate. Trainees say that sessions are inspiring; they are very well prepared, challenging in the extreme, intellectually engaging and absolutely relevant to the needs of trainees in addressing subject issues. One trainee said, 'I learned more in 12 weeks of the PGCE than in three years as an undergraduate.' There is a high level of challenge through the course. For example, in their micro teaching, pairs of trainees are expected to tackle the teaching of a difficult concept; and trainees have to produce four [enhanced] plans in each placement which not only demonstrate planning in the detail, but also explain and justify the plan.

Good mentor training sessions address classroom management issues and planning, self-evaluation and target-setting. Schools also have a role in taking forward subject knowledge development which some of them discharge well. When schools have fallen short in some respect, as in one case this year, they are recommended for deselection.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, schools are usually able to recruit history teachers with great potential and new ideas to bring to their departments.

35. But there are also weaknesses in teaching and learning in Key Stages 3 and 4. Inspectors' most common criticism is the predominance of direct input by teachers, with pupils having little to do beyond sitting and listening. There is a place for good exposition by teachers, but too often pupils are not given enough opportunity to ask questions, identify evidence and work out the story for themselves. This is often exacerbated by classroom layouts that do not lend themselves to pupils being active learners, working independently or in groups. One way of challenging secondary teachers is to ask them to look more closely at the very best primary practice, where teachers seldom talk directly to the class for more than 10 minutes before the pupils get down to work. There is also much that they could learn from the work of the recently published report on independent learning by the 2020 review group.¹³

¹³ *2020 vision: report of the teaching and learning in 2020 review group* (ISBN 978-1-84478-862-0), DfES, 2007; available from <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-04255-2006&>.

36. Another issue is the ability of teachers to meet the different needs, backgrounds and abilities of pupils. Successive Ofsted history reports have noted improvement in history teachers' capacity to respond to the different levels of ability in classes, but weaknesses still remain. In part, this is because of the limited development of independent learning already referred to. Another reason is teachers' interpretation of the National Curriculum and what to focus on. As in Key Stage 2, teachers have not always chosen to focus on the aspects of history that are most relevant to their pupils.
37. One group of pupils whose needs are often not met is the gifted and talented. Recognising high-achieving historians and providing suitable support for them are familiar problems for schools. Many schools do too little, because they give insufficient consideration to the characteristics of high achievement. Some departments point to the lack of useful examples and case studies to demonstrate what high achievement actually looks like in history and how this can be nurtured over time. However, good work is being done to show how imaginative and effective curriculum planning and teaching can be developed to cater for able historians, with examples underpinned by a rich vein of research into children's thinking about history.¹⁴ These positive points are well illustrated in this example of a Year 8 lesson, in a top set, on why the Royalists lost the Civil War:

The lesson was very well planned. The teacher began the lesson with a series of questions about the Civil War to aid recall from previous lessons. Pupils' responses were excellent. The teacher then asked the pupils to discuss, in pairs, the answers to the questions and put them in hierarchical order in terms of their influence on who won the war.

The teacher then asked some provocative, open-ended questions, designed to encourage pupils. They responded well, advancing some very good ideas, for example, about the impact of the personality of Charles I and about the influence of the Divine Right of Kings. The ideas were full of insight, reflecting pupils' very good knowledge and understanding of Catholicism and Protestantism and the political interplay between Catholics and Protestants. Pupils also had a subtle understanding of the role of other elements, such as the rise of the merchant class.

The teacher continued to use the very effective group work and asked the pupils to consider the linkage between the various suggested causes of the Royalist defeat, for example, merchants-parliament-religion. She also used homework effectively, which was to write paragraphs on the

¹⁴ 'Teaching the most able', *Teaching history*, 124, September 2006; available from www.history.org.uk/Secondary_Teaching_History.asp?Section=Secondary_Teaching_History.asp&offset=0&maincat=.

different influences and to begin or end each paragraph with an explanation of a link between them. A brief look at exercise books showed that pupils had used this technique before to very good effect.

38. What made this lesson impressive was the depth of knowledge and understanding of causation which the pupils brought from earlier lessons, their highly positive attitudes, their willingness to be intellectually assertive, their use of their knowledge, and the ease with which they communicated their findings. The teacher acted as a subtle facilitator, but it was pupils who did most of the work. Their progress was outstanding.
39. Another key issue, as in Key Stages 1 and 2, is the need to improve the way assessment information is used to improve teaching and learning. The problems were highlighted in Ofsted's 2004/05 report and remain the same.¹⁵ Essentially, although the quality of marking and assessment is improving, weaknesses remain. In particular, in too many schools, pupils are not given clear enough indications of how well they are doing. This occurs mainly in Key Stage 3. Although, increasingly, pupils tell inspectors which level they have reached, sometimes this is meaningless because they are not sure what this represents and what they need to do to improve.
40. Part of the problem is the National Curriculum level descriptions which many teachers and others find difficult to interpret and turn into workable criteria against which to assess. This is made worse by the absence of effective monitoring to ensure consistent and accurate assessment. In 2004/05, Ofsted reported that these problems also undermine the accuracy of overall teacher assessments and annual reporting of levels to the QCA. Ofsted's report went on to recommend a review of the history attainment target and level descriptions to make them more functional and so improve the feedback to pupils.¹⁶ The QCA is now undertaking a review and we await the final outcome.
41. Some teachers and others argue that National Curriculum levels should not be used for within-key-stage assessment as they were not designed for this purpose. Experience has shown that they can be made to work and have benefits, particularly when they use language with which pupils are familiar in all subjects. Another advantage is that, when used in all subjects, they can help schools monitor overall progress closely. However, to reach this stage, the levels need to be translated into learning objectives that pupils can understand, and the assessments themselves need to be informed by teachers' shared understanding of the standards implied. Schools that are far advanced in this

¹⁵ *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2004/05; school subject reports: History in secondary schools*, Ofsted, 2005; available from <http://live.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/annualreport0405/4.2.7.html>.

¹⁶ See note 15.

respect have compiled portfolios of exemplar work, moderated against National Curriculum levels, which can be used for discussion and benchmarking.

The curriculum

42. Over the years, Ofsted's history reports have recognised the strengths of the present National Curriculum and the curriculum as it extends beyond age 14. But the reports have also been consistent in reporting a number of fundamental weaknesses in the way the curriculum is translated into teaching programmes in schools.
43. The 'importance of history' statement in the National Curriculum handbook emphasises the need for pupils to study what past societies were like and 'as they do this, ... develop a chronological framework for their knowledge of significant events and people'.¹⁷ In Key Stage 2, pupils should be learning about change and continuity and investigating the past both 'in depth and overview'. By Key Stage 3, they should be 'making connections between events and changes in the different periods and areas studied and by comparing the structure of societies and economic, cultural and political developments'. Yet inspection shows that pupils of all ages tend to study particular issues in depth but are seldom encouraged to form overviews or draw wider implications. Consequently, they often have little sense of chronology and the possibility of establishing an overarching story and addressing broader themes and issues is limited.
44. In addition, although the National Curriculum seeks to provide a course which, over the seven years of Key Stages 2 and 3, covers British history comprehensively, along with key aspects of European and world history, in practice some of these events and themes are treated very lightly, if at all. Moreover, some aspects that are taught in depth, such as the First and Second World Wars and the Holocaust, are not set in broader contexts; for example, the stories of Germany and Japan focus entirely on their role in war without reference to developments since then. It is perhaps unsurprising that both the Japanese and German governments have recently expressed concerns that emphasis is given only to negative aspects of their histories.
45. The focus on limited areas of history without overall coherence is well illustrated by the following two examples of actual curricula. The first is from a primary school.

¹⁷ The National Curriculum for history is available from:
www.nc.uk.net/webdav/harmonise?Page/@id=6004&Subject/@id=3251.

Year	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Three	A Roman case study	What was it like for children in the Second World War?	What can we find out about Ancient Egypt from what has survived?
Four	An Anglo Saxon case study	Why did Henry VIII marry six times? Differences between the lives of rich and poor people in Tudor times	A Viking case study
Five	What was it like for children living in Victorian Britain?	How did life change in our locality in Victorian times?	Who were the Ancient Greeks?
Six	How do we use Ancient Greek ideas today?	How has Britain changed since 1948	What can we learn about recent history from studying the life of a famous person?

46. It is fair to ask, on what principles was this Key Stage 2 history curriculum constructed? An immediate look suggests that there is no coherence: pupils dart in Year 3 from the Romans to World War II to Ancient Egypt, and in Year 4 from the Anglo-Saxons to the Tudors and the Vikings. Of course, it may be that the ordering of topics can be justified; for example, by the appropriateness of resources for a particular age group, links with other subjects, the association of a unit with a school visit, and so on. It is possible, too, that the school makes good use of timelines to contextualise the topics and to develop pupils' chronological vocabulary and understanding. However, there is no evidence here to suggest this.
47. The message for primary schools is that they need to reconsider their curriculum and respond positively to the challenge from *Excellence and enjoyment* to be more creative in devising a more coherent curriculum that links more closely with pupils' needs and prepares them for adult life.¹⁸ As this report has already indicated, inspection evidence suggests that teachers in Key

¹⁸ *Excellence and enjoyment: a strategy for primary schools* (ISBN 1-84185-993-1), DfES, 2003; available from www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/literacy/63553/.

Stage 2 have been relatively slow to explore the freedom available to provide a high quality, relevant curriculum that is, progressive, challenging and fun.

48. However, innovation also carries some dangers. A solution that appears increasingly popular in primary schools is to return to integrated subjects taught via a series of topics. One topic noted on a recent inspection was 'The sands of time'. History's place in this, based on the Egyptians, was clear and there was nothing wrong with the principle of subjects supporting each other. Unfortunately, the school had not planned its history across all topics to see if it added up to a coherent whole, with progression and relevance in both historical knowledge and skills. This translated into the following judgement in the published inspection report:

Plans are well in hand to revise other subjects and staff are beginning to deliver the curriculum creatively. In particular, they are beginning to link work in different subjects under the umbrella of a unifying theme to help pupils make connections. In principle this is a good idea but... there needs to be greater clarity in the objectives and standards expected in each subject before integrating further.

49. The second example is from a secondary school which had just introduced a two-year Key Stage 3 programme. Although this is therefore atypical, it emphasises the problems of coherence in the history curriculum also found in three-year programmes.

Year	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Seven	Life in the Middle Ages in Britain and comparison with the Islamic world	The impact of religion – Martin Luther King; Luther; local witch craze	The impact of World War II on British society
Eight	The English monarchy from 1066 to James I – Norman control; medieval monarchs and reasons for relative success; Henry and reasons for marriages; the problems facing James I	The Civil War; Cromwell; the Glorious Revolution; the French Revolution	Nineteenth century: the shift of power from monarch to people; the building of Empire; role of women. Challenges to democracy: Hitler. Why did the Holocaust happen? Decolonisation and the role of monarch as head of the Commonwealth

50. Again, this raises questions about the principles upon which the curriculum was based. It appears to provide a core of British history and, through terms such

as 'comparison' and 'relative', it looks as if contrasts and connections might be developed. Also, some units have themes such as religion, revolution and power. But, unless these are made very explicit, the curriculum is likely to appear to pupils as an unconnected journey as they move from the Middle Ages to Martin Luther King and then the Second World War.

51. The way in which many schools interpret the National Curriculum also means that they fail to tackle other important needs. So, for example, the curriculum is heavily based on aspects of English history. Those parts of the curriculum relating to Scotland, Wales and Ireland are very largely ignored, as are major European and world themes. Importantly, too, in many schools the stories of the people who have come to Britain over the centuries are ignored, even though these include the personal histories of some of the pupils. This is well summed up in the following quotation from the QCA in 2005:

'Too little attention is given to the black and multiethnic aspects of UK history. The teaching of black history is often confined to topics about slavery and post-war immigration or to Black History Month. The effect, if inadvertent, is to undervalue the overall contribution of black and minority ethnic people to the UK's past and to ignore their cultural, scientific and many other achievements.'¹⁹

52. Appropriate curriculum innovation could go a long way towards raising standards, helping mutual understanding, and countering prejudice and racism. More pupils would feel that their backgrounds and heritage were being valued.
53. Linked to this is the fact that the topics teachers choose to emphasise are not necessarily those that will best help young people to understand the contemporary world. This criterion has not featured prominently in teachers' thinking when they are devising what to teach and where to place emphasis. Yet school history has a triple job: it has to help young people learn how to be good historians; it must help young people learn about the past; and it must help them prepare for their futures. These points are discussed further in Part B.

Leadership, management and self-evaluation

54. A very clear finding from Ofsted's inspections over recent years is that history benefits from increasingly expert and effective leadership and management.
55. In the best primary schools, coordinators really coordinate. The curriculum is well mapped out; standards and the progress that pupils are expected to make

¹⁹ *Annual report on curriculum and assessment in history, 2004/5*, QCA, 2005; available from www.qca.org.uk/15728.html.

over the primary years are clear; teachers are well supported with ideas and resources for teaching; and there is a practical assessment system in place. The coordinators monitor well what is happening in their subject. Above all, the best are confident in their knowledge of history and pass this confidence on to their colleagues. As a result, inspectors write judgements such as this:

Leadership and management in history are good.

The new subject leader has made a good start in bringing clear direction for the subject in the school and developing good plans for further development. She has worked extremely hard, with the good support of other colleagues, to raise achievement and standards in history. This is beginning to impact positively on key aspects of planning and teaching.

Subject self-evaluation is good. The school accurately identifies and exemplifies its many strengths and areas for development.

56. In secondary schools, the influence of whole-school self-evaluation and the availability of an increasing amount of assessment data have had a considerable impact on heads of history departments. They now analyse their department's performance more accurately and are much more aware of its contribution to the whole school's performance. The better schools and departments are very quick to respond to patterns of results. Heads of department and other senior managers regularly monitor teaching and learning and analyse pupils' work. Overall, teachers are now open about sharing their work with each other, with positive results.
57. Consequently, judgements such as the following from an inspector's report following a visit to a history department are not uncommon.

Leadership and management are outstanding.

This is a reflective and collegiate department that works together very well. It is delivering a very high quality learning experience for pupils despite the difficulties presented by substandard accommodation. As a result, the quality of pupils' historical knowledge, understanding and performance in skills such as the interpretation of evidence is very high.

The delegation of responsibilities is clear and the departmental self-evaluation form shows a clear understanding of the department's strengths and areas for development.

There is a very clear focus on high standards but not at the expense of enjoyment of history.

58. In primary schools in particular but also in secondary schools, the best subject leaders have placed considerable emphasis on linking history to other subjects and skills, notably literacy. This is often done well without sacrificing history's

own objectives or those of the linking subject. Thus, the history report on one school said:

The subject leader and literacy coordinator have placed great emphasis on developing all aspects of literacy in history, not just writing. This focus has contributed strongly to raising standards. These developments have been encouraged and supported by the school in general.

59. However, not all leadership and management are good. In those primary schools, especially, where the subject is less successful, the reasons for weaker leadership and management are the same as the factors affecting the quality of teaching in Key Stage 2: history coordinators have not necessarily been trained in the subject; the focus in primary schools in recent years has been on developing leadership and management in the core subjects; and there are still not enough opportunities for professional development in history.

Part B: Issues in history

Are standards being maintained?

60. One very public issue linked to standards is the debate over their alleged decline in GCSE, AS and A-level examinations in history over past decades. The most recent detailed study of this, including issues of grades, their utility and the grading of pupils' work, is by the QCA. Its independent monitoring indicates no fall in standards over the years.²⁰
61. It is safe to say that inspection of GCSE and A-level history classrooms confirms a full range of standards, with some pupils producing history work of a very high quality. This compares favourably with the days when some older inspectors learnt their history at school by copying copious notes dictated by a teacher and then regurgitating them in examinations. The range of competences now shown by the best pupils as they pose questions, handle evidence, reach their own judgements and communicate these effectively is impressive.
62. Of concern to some people is the replacement of essay questions with questions of different types for different purposes. This includes questions that require short answers. But short does not necessarily mean easy. Producing a succinct, high quality, short answer to the point is no mean feat and, arguably, more representative of modern communication in the professional world than hastily written longer examination essays. For instance, the ability to respond

²⁰ There are various studies, such as *Five year review of standards: GCSE history*, QCA, 2001; available from www.qca.org.uk/downloads/5783_gcse_hist.pdf.

well to this short-answer question for just seven marks is a considerable challenge, given that it would also sustain the most profound of PhD theses:

'Explain why the Labour Government was defeated in the 1951 General Election.'²¹

63. There is also something of a myth in the view that the longer answer has disappeared. For example an article in a daily newspaper in May 2006 reported, 'The dying art of the essay is to be resurrected in tough new examinations designed as an alternative to the devalued A-level.'²² Such an assertion hardly seems well founded when considering the following question, worth 60 marks, taken from OCR's A-level specimen questions:

"Stalin's dictatorship owed more to the traditions of autocratic rule, as practised in pre-Revolutionary Russia, than it did to either Marxist theory or Lenin's methods." Discuss this interpretation of Russian history with reference to the period 1855–1956.'²³

64. Answering this question to a high quality requires knowledge, an ability to think critically and quickly, and considerable writing skill. If standards are to be maintained, it is very important that essay writing continues so that pupils can present an extended, informed and debated narrative through writing or other media.
65. The very best examples of assessments demonstrating the qualities of 'the complete historian' use the medium of coursework. The following example shows how coursework can provide the opportunity for an A-level pupil to satisfy all the requirements – posing an issue or question, identifying sources of evidence, evaluating them, reaching judgements, and communicating findings in a coherent, extended narrative. It is the one real opportunity for pupils to show they are independent learners; and it allows a curriculum that responds to the needs and interests of pupils. It is also very good preparation for adult professional life, and for higher education, where coursework is a common method of assessment. These points are illustrated well by an examiner's comments about a pupil's A-level coursework, shown by a teacher to an inspector:

²¹ General Certificate of Education; History 5041; Alternative U; Britain, 1929–1998. Mark Scheme 2006 Examination; January series. AQA, 2006. Available from www.aqa.org.uk/qual/gceasa/qp-ms/AQA-HS25U-W-MS-JAN06.PDF.

²² Julie Henry, 'The essay returns as public schools create alternative A-levels', *Daily Telegraph*, 13 May 2006; available from www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2006/05/14/nexam14.xml&sSheet=/news/2006/05/14/ixuknews.html.

²³ OCR specimen materials: *Themes in history 1793–1996 (2591)*. OCR, 2000; available from www.ocr.org.uk/publications/publications.html.

“Despite superficial similarities in forms of domination the two regimes were in essence more unlike than like each other” (I. Kershaw). To what extent do the terrors of Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Russia support this assertion?’

This is an excellent, analytical examination of the proposal framed by the candidate. The candidate compares, with reference to the totalitarian model, the terrors of Stalin’s Russia and Hitler’s Germany, the factors which influenced them and the individuals involved, to determine to what extent they can be considered to support Kershaw’s assertion that the regimes were, fundamentally, ‘more unlike than like each other’. The candidate has identified the issues which need to be examined and has used a wide variety of texts, well beyond A-level material, to examine the proposal put forward by Kershaw. The candidate addresses a wide range of arguments proposed by historians and the status of this evidence has been considered in order to make judgments and reach conclusions. The overall conclusion integrates and draws together arguments which have been established in the essay. The candidate’s ability to analyse complex historical ideas has been matched by an ability to write a cogently argued essay. An outstanding piece of A-level work.

66. The government and the QCA are rightly concerned that coursework is open to cheating and also that pupils receive different degrees of support from teachers, parents and the internet. Inspection evidence shows that it is critical for teachers and pupils to receive unambiguous guidance so that practice is uniform. Evidence also shows that the most effective supervision involves teachers commenting critically on draft work and discussing comments with pupils. Apart from fulfilling a teaching role, this is also a simple check on cheating as it is usually very clear when the quality of drafts does not match what pupils are able to discuss.
67. Given these conditions, coursework can play an important part in promoting continued high standards. It is therefore welcome that coursework remains compulsory in A-level history; and, by the same token, that the decision has been made to allow what is currently called ‘controlled assessment’ in GCSE.

The relevance of history and its limited place in the curriculum

68. The biggest issue for school history is its limited place in the curriculum.
69. History, along with some other subjects, has been relatively neglected in primary schools in recent years as schools have focused on literacy and numeracy. History’s limited role is also apparent in secondary schools. In Key Stage 4, only just over 30% of pupils study history and fewer still post-16. In addition, there is evidence that the subject is becoming even more marginal with some schools’ introduction of the two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum and the increased interest in vocational subjects.

70. The heart of the problem is twofold. First, there is the obvious fact that there is much to fit into the school curriculum, with limited time available for individual subjects. It is therefore important for historians to be realistic and to make the best use of the time available – whether teaching history as a discrete subject or in conjunction with other subjects. But, second, it is also important to acknowledge that some policy developers, senior school managers, parents and pupils do not perceive history as either relevant or important compared with other subjects.²⁴ Many see it as ‘bookish’, aimed only at the more academic pupil and too concerned with detail about the Romans, or the Tudors, or Hitler to be really helpful in developing pupils’ understanding of today’s world. One headteacher interviewed during an inspection offered a view of what needed to be done to make history more relevant. He had little time for the subject, but acknowledged that it could be useful to his pupils if teaching focused on ‘functional’ history that would help them understand how values have developed, would tell the stories of the communities they will work in, and would fill in the historical background to what they read in newspapers and elsewhere.
71. School history also lends itself to criticism because it fails to reflect enough the way the subject is studied, enjoyed and communicated in contemporary society at large. It is true that pupils do things other than write about history, but it can be argued that there are not enough of these other activities which are common practice outside school. The obvious examples are better use of ICT for research and communication; photography, sound recording and video; presentations and exhibitions reflecting the reasoned choices made by museums and heritage sites; and drama and dance. These are not trivial means of communicating history; they require not only good quality history but also good communication skills, as some of our most successful, revered, contemporary British historians have shown.
72. This criticism of history is particularly evident post-16, where there is considerable interest in vocational aspects of the subject. One example of this type of provision could be giving pupils of all abilities on courses for the National Diploma in Health and Social Care the opportunity to study the history of public health reform; or an alternative A-level or similar course could cover how history is used and communicated by the media, heritage and tourist

²⁴ It is important to emphasise that where the term is applied to history in this report, ‘relevant’ does not necessarily mean ‘recent’. So, for instance, a study of the history of human rights in Britain would properly include Magna Carta, the introduction of permanent professional courts and developments in common law at the time of Henry II, and their long-term implications. Arguably, these are at least as important in establishing values and principles as the recent history of protecting the rights of minority ethnic groups and other minority groups.

industries. Courses such as these would also have the merit of providing an appropriate route for pupils currently taking the new history pilot GCSE.²⁵

73. Support for such initiatives from teachers in colleges was shown in Ofsted's 2006 report on post-16 history:

'[Amongst teachers interviewed] there was strong support for the continuation and strengthening of an "academic" syllabus option for the more able learners who, for example, wished to continue their study of history at university. The majority of teachers supported, in addition, the idea of an alternative A-level history syllabus that offered a more flexible structure both in approach and assessment. Such a syllabus they agreed would promote the use of for example, television and film footage, as well as linkage with museums and the heritage industry. They particularly supported the notion of greater flexibility of assessment methods.'²⁶

Unfortunately, there are currently no plans for such courses. The subject does not figure in the government's 14–19 plans for specialised diplomas, and the 2006 changes to AS and A-level history specifications, although worthy in themselves and faithfully meeting the parameters set by the QCA's new subject criteria, do not constitute any fundamental revision of history post-16.

Tuning history in to Every Child Matters

74. The Green Paper *Every Child Matters* was published by the government in 2003. It set out proposals for reforming the delivery of services for children, young people and families, including all aspects of education. The Green Paper indicated how it would support all children to develop their full potential and help them become happy, successful adults in Britain in the 21st century. It formed the basis for the Children Act 2004.²⁷
75. Every Child Matters has had a significant impact on Ofsted's inspection work. Virtually all the judgements inspectors make on inspections are linked directly or indirectly to its aims.
76. Although the majority of schools are putting Every Child Matters principles into practice in many ways, the wider implications for subjects, including history, have been relatively little explored. As a minimum, history departments in secondary schools have been asked to consider the five outcomes the

²⁵ Details of the GCSE pilot are available from www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/GCSEHistoryPilot.html.

²⁶ *Sharing good practice: a survey of history in colleges* (HMI 2367), Ofsted, 2006; available from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2367.

²⁷ *Every Child Matters*. Green Paper presented to Parliament by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury by Command of Her Majesty (Cm 5860), HMSO, 2003; available from www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims/background/.

government hopes to achieve from the policy and to say how the subject contributes. The problem is that while departments have listed some useful contributions – for example, the fact that history can contribute to the emotional health of individuals and societies by acknowledging their histories, thus showing them respect – this has had little impact on the history actually taught in schools.

77. A more fruitful approach to Every Child Matters for history is to consider the aims of the policy as a whole, namely, developing potential and preparing young people for their futures. This means not only providing high quality history but also history that gives pupils the knowledge, insight and skills that help them understand the world in which they live. Yet the reality is that schools and some curriculum developers have barely begun to consider this, although it is beginning to have an impact, for example in the new Key Stage 3 curriculum.

History, citizenship and the ‘Britishness’ debate

78. Another contemporary issue facing historians is the debate about the contribution that history can or should make to National Curriculum citizenship by ensuring that pupils understand critical aspects of Britain’s heritage and values, often summed up as understanding ‘Britishness’. This issue has been sharpened by publication of Sir Keith Ajegbo’s report, which recommends the introduction of a history element to the citizenship curriculum in Key Stage 4. Sir Keith’s view is well summed up in this excerpt:

‘While it is important for young people to explore (contemporary) issues as they affect them today, it is equally important that they understand them through the lens of history. It is difficult to look at devolution without understanding how we became the United Kingdom. Can immigration be debated properly without some knowledge of the range of people who have arrived on these shores over centuries? We are certainly not advocating that Citizenship education should be conflated with history. However, we are strongly of the opinion that developing an appreciation of the relevant historical context is essential to understanding what it means to be a citizen of the UK today.’²⁸

79. Considerable uncertainty exists among history teachers about the concept of ‘Britishness’, what it means and history’s links to it. While not all teachers have thought about it, others recognise the dangers of schism in the country and see that sharing histories could help to heal this. On the other hand, some teachers

²⁸ *Diversity and citizenship* (the Ajegbo report), DFES, 2007; available from <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-00045-2007>.

have concerns about overt political interference in the curriculum. Generally, insufficient awareness exists of the moderate, plausible and sensitive expositions that have actually been put forward to explain Britishness by politicians and others.

80. The roots of recent interest in the concept of Britishness lie in concerns about the failure of all young people to understand how the UK works and to appreciate its values, their limited involvement in the community, the impact of migration into the UK, nationalism in the different parts of the UK, the evolution of the European Union, globalisation and the dominance of US culture, and terrorism. Daily papers are regularly concerned that young people do not know enough about the Britain's past and its implications for the present.
81. Prominent politicians, other policy makers and bodies such as the Commission for Racial Equality have commented on the role that history has to play in exploring 'Britishness'.²⁹
82. With the perspective of Every Child Matters and meeting young people's needs, inspectors share this view of the importance of history. This report has already been critical of the tendency to focus in depth on selected topics which are perhaps not the most important in terms of helping young people understand their world. It has also stated that history departments seldom give clear enough emphasis to the study of issues of immediate importance, such as how the UK was formed; why, over time, Britain has fought wars; the struggle to establish and maintain a parliamentary democracy; and the evolution of human rights. A curriculum that does not meet both individual and societal needs renders the subject irrelevant.
83. The Ajegbo report requires a response from history teachers and from others who devise the curriculum. To date, many secondary history departments' responses to citizenship requirements have been minimal, and they might be criticised for this, given that most history teachers are well qualified to deal with political studies. Typically, history departments have completed audits claiming that their existing syllabus deals with citizenship through the study of events such as the signing of the Magna Carta or the English Civil War. While such studies undoubtedly provide a context for citizenship and help to develop political concepts, they miss the point that citizenship in the National Curriculum is about the present, how and why it has become what it is, and future change.

²⁹ For example, 'A politician's view', a speech by Michael Wills MP at the Institute of Historical Research, London, October 2005 (not available via the Institute's website); 'The future of Britishness', a speech by Gordon Brown MP at the Fabian Society, London, January 2006 (<http://fabians.org.uk/events/new-year-conference-06/brown-britishness/>); and 'Bringing down the barriers to cohesion', a speech by David Cameron MP to residents of Lozells, Birmingham, 29 January 2007 (www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=134759).

Historians could have tackled this by making substantial references to the present, demonstrating the relevance of topics being studied to the here and now; or they could have started an enquiry by referring to a current issue, then worked backwards to investigate its origins.

A basis for curriculum change

84. The need for curriculum change was both recognised and fuelled in Ofsted's 2004/05 annual report on secondary history, which acknowledged the need to make the school history curriculum more relevant to young people. So it commented:

'In summary, history in secondary schools is successful, but the National Curriculum and the principles on which it is based date from the 1980s. There are now new pressures and priorities which sit alongside many of the old which remain pertinent. It is therefore right that we should begin to reconsider the whole history curriculum to make it as useful as possible to young people.'

But it also offered a gentle reminder about the need to preserve the integrity of the subject:

'However, the essential caveat in addressing issues is that history must not lose its integrity and become distorted for different purposes. History's main contribution to the UK's democracy has always been its plurality and unpredictability - different historians coming at events and people from different perspectives, using evidence critically and with integrity, and presenting different views. Above all else, history needs to provide young people with the ability to make up their own minds.'³⁰

85. In essence, therefore, drawing on this as well as earlier comments, any future history curriculum should:
- enable pupils of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to do as well as they can
 - provide critical knowledge and understanding
 - encourage proficiency in historical skills and understanding of historical concepts
 - be coherent across all four key stages and post-16
 - link different histories together to provide young people with a sense of chronology and overarching narrative
 - help young people understand the historical background to the Britain, Europe and world in which they live

³⁰ *The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 2004/05*, Ofsted, 2005; available from <http://live.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/annualreport0405>.

- reflect pupils' common British culture while, at the same time, recognising diversity
- ensure that the history in one key stage or phase of education links as seamlessly as possible with the history in others to provide coherence and progression
- link well with other subjects and help to develop pupils' more general skills, especially literacy, numeracy, ICT and citizenship
- give pupils opportunities to explore how history is used and presented in the modern world by the media, tourist and heritage industries.

86. Specifically for post-16 education, to the above can be added a curriculum that:

- provides pupils of all abilities and backgrounds with opportunities to explore historical topics in depth to a high level
- provides pupils with opportunities to develop further their understanding of the nature of the subject and the work of different historians.

87. Finally, it is important that, in any new curriculum, the right balance is struck between a compulsory core of content and optional history. Too much of the former is likely to mean a curriculum that fails to meet the local needs of pupils in different schools. Too much of the latter would mean that we would fail to share history which most people would consider as essential common knowledge for all pupils living in the country today. It would also create difficulties for continuity and progression. Achieving this balance will be difficult but Ofsted's evidence is that schools successfully going down more creative paths can do so.

Notes

This report draws on evidence from section 10 and section 5 school inspections over the period 2003 to 2007.³¹ It also draws on a recent survey of post-16 history by Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI).³² A third source of evidence is the subject inspection programme for history over the period 2003/07. This comprises visits by HMI and Additional Inspectors to selected primary and secondary schools. A fourth source is expert information and opinion from academics, policy-makers, school leaders, teachers, trainee teachers and pupils of history.

³¹ All schools are subject to regular inspection and section 10 inspections included detailed inspection of all subjects in a school by subject specialists. From September 2005, section 10 inspections were replaced by shorter section 5 inspections. There is no detailed inspection of subjects in these inspections, although they involve subjects including history when appropriate.

³² *Sharing good practice: a survey of history in colleges* (HMI 2367), Ofsted, 2006; available from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2367.

At the time of writing this report, the QCA is currently reviewing the curriculum and, given the content of its Futures initiative and secondary curriculum review, is acutely aware of the issues.³³ In respect of history, above all, this means making the school history curriculum more responsive to the needs of young people by helping them understand the present. In addition, the GCSE pilot in history has also just started, with some interesting innovations, particularly in relation to how history is presented. The Ajegbo report, with its proposals for compulsory British history linked to citizenship at Key Stage 4, was published during the drafting of this report.

Further information

Diversity and citizenship curriculum review (the Ajegbo report) (DfES-00045-2007), Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2007; available from <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-00045-2007>.

Every Child Matters (Cm 5860), HMSO, 2003; available from www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/aims/background/.

Excellence and enjoyment: a strategy for primary schools, DfES, 2003; available from www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/literacy/63553/.

Five year review of standards: GCSE History, QCA, 2001; available from www.qca.org.uk/downloads/5783_gcse_hist.pdf.

GCSE pilot: www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/GCSEHistoryPilot.html.

Innovating with history: how to develop pupils' understanding of chronology at Key Stage 1 and 2; *Innovating with history: how to develop pupils' understanding of chronology at Key Stage 3*; available from www.qca.org.uk/history/innovating/improving_learning/index.htm.

National Curriculum for history; available from www.nc.uk.net/webdav/harmonise?Page/@id=6004&Subject/@id=3251.

QCA Futures: www.qca.org.uk/10969.html.

Secondary curriculum review: www.qca.org.uk/secondarycurriculumreview.

Sharing good practice: a survey of history in colleges (HMI 2367), Ofsted, 2006; available from www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/2367.

³³ More details about 'Futures: meeting the challenge' are available from www.qca.org.uk/10969.html. More details about the secondary curriculum review can be found at www.qca.org.uk/secondarycurriculumreview.

Teacher assessment activities for foundation subjects; available from www.qca.org.uk/13116_16119.html.

The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools for 2004/05, Ofsted, 2005; available from <http://live.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/annualreport0405>.

The Annual Report on curriculum and assessment in history, 2004/05, QCA, 2005; available from www.qca.org.uk/15728.html.

2020 vision: report of the teaching and learning in 2020 review group (ISBN 978-1-84478-862-0), DfES, 2007; available from <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-04255-2006&>.