



# **OFFICE FOR STANDARDS IN EDUCATION**

## Inspecting post-16

# history

# with guidance on self-evaluation

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## Introduction

This booklet aims to help inspectors and staff in schools and colleges to evaluate standards and quality in history for students post-16. It complements the *Handbook for Inspecting Secondary Schools* (1999), the supplement *Inspecting School Sixth Forms* (2001) and the *Handbook for Inspecting Colleges* (2001). It replaces the earlier guidance *Inspecting Subjects and Aspects 11–18* (1999).

This guidance concentrates on issues specific to history. General guidance is in the *Handbooks*. Use both to get a complete picture of the inspection or evaluation process.

This booklet is concerned with evaluating standards and achievement, teaching and learning, and other factors that affect what is achieved. It outlines how to use students' work and question them, the subject-specific points to look for in lessons, and how to draw evaluations together to form a coherent view of the subject.

Examples are provided of evidence and evaluations from college and school sixth-form inspections, with commentaries to give further explanation. These examples are included without any reference to context, and will not necessarily illustrate all of the features that inspectors will need to consider. The booklets in the series show different ways of recording and reporting evidence and findings; they do not prescribe or endorse any particular method or approach.

Inspectors and senior staff in schools and colleges may need to evaluate several subjects and refer to more than one booklet. You can download any of the subject guidance booklets from OFSTED's website [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

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OFSTED's remit for this sector is the inspection of education for students aged 16–19, other than work-based education. In schools, this is the sixth form provision. In colleges, the 16–19 age-group will not be so clearly identifiable; classes are likely to include older students and, in some cases, they will have a majority of older students. In practice, inspectors and college staff will evaluate the standards and quality in these classes regardless of the age of the students.

This booklet concentrates on the most commonly found courses in history for students 16–19. However, the principles illustrated in this guidance can be applied more widely.

As the inspector with responsibility for history, you are most likely to encounter courses at Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced level (A level) for the General Certificate of Education (GCE). There may also be students working for the Advanced Extension Award (AEA) in history.

At an early stage in your inspection of A-level history, you should note students' previous experiences and attainment in history. Many, but not necessarily all, will have a qualification from a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) history course. There is usually no requirement for students to have studied history for GCSE, but institutions are likely to advise that students need a grade C or above in English, or its equivalent, in order to benefit fully from the post-16 course. Therefore, some students may have gained the highest grade in GCSE history, while others may not have built upon the knowledge, skills and understanding reached by the end of Key Stage 3. The range and composition of teaching groups may, therefore, reflect a very wide spectrum of previous attainment in the subject.

Establish what teachers know about students' previous experience of history and how the department organises its work to induct and support them. Teachers' planning and approaches to teaching should indicate awareness of students' diverse and specific needs. For example, there may be those who are gifted or talented or those with English as an additional language, those with special educational needs or students who have joined the class from different institutions or after some time out of formal education.

Typically, those students with a GCSE qualification in history will have some awareness of important historical concepts: the nature of evidence and the use of sources, chronology, continuity and change, causation, and similarities and differences. To a lesser degree, they will have gained some understanding of different interpretations of the past. They will possess skills in source evaluation and competencies in preparing answers to structured questions and in writing short essays based on documents, data, maps and other pictorial stimuli and evidence. Students may have widely differing knowledge of periods of history and the people and topics they have studied. Although some will be able to build on the work done for GCSE, much is likely to be new for most students. As a basic minimum, students commencing post-16 history courses will need an enquiring mind, an interest in the past and its relevance to the contemporary world, and an ability to marshal their knowledge into an argument in order to communicate their ideas effectively.

## Common requirements

All inspectors share the responsibility for determining whether a school or college is effective for all its students, whatever their educational needs or personal circumstances. As part of this responsibility, ensure that you have a good understanding of the key characteristics of the institution and its students. Evaluate the achievement of different groups of students and judge how effectively their needs and aspirations are met and any initiatives or courses aimed specifically at these groups of students. Take account of recruitment patterns, retention rates and attendance patterns for programmes and courses for different groups of students. Consider the individual goals and targets set for students within different groups and the progress they make towards achieving them.

You should be aware of the responsibilities and duties of schools and colleges regarding equal opportunities, in particular those defined in the Sex Discrimination Act 1957, the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. These Acts and related codes of practice underpin national policies on inclusion, on raising achievement and on the important role schools and colleges have in fostering better personal, community and race relations, and in addressing and preventing racism.<sup>1</sup>

As well as being thoroughly familiar with subject-specific requirements, be alert to the unique contribution that each subject makes to the wider educational development of students. Assess how well the curriculum and teaching in history enable all students to develop key skills, and how successfully the subject contributes to the students' personal, social, health and citizenship education, and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Judge how effectively the subject helps prepare students aged 16–19 for adult life in a culturally and ethnically diverse society.

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<sup>1</sup> See Annex *Issues for Inspection arising from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson Report)* in *Evaluating Educational Inclusion*, OFSTED, 2000, p13.



## 1 Standards in achievement

### 1.1 Evaluating standards and achievement

From the previous inspection report, find out what you can about standards and achievement at that time. This will give you a point of comparison with the latest position, but do not forget that there is a trail of performance data, year by year. Analyse and interpret the performance data available for students who have recently completed the course(s). Draw on the school's *Pre-Inspection Context and School Indicator* (PICS) report or, in the case of a college, the *College Performance Report*. Also analyse the most recent results provided by the school or college and any value-added information available. When numbers are small, exercise caution in making comparisons with national data or, for example, evaluating trends. For further guidance on interpreting performance data and analysing value added, refer to *Inspecting School Sixth Forms*, the *Handbook for Inspecting Colleges* and the *National Summary Data Report for Secondary Schools*.

Where you can, form a view about the standards achieved by different groups of students. For example, there may be data which enable you to compare how male and female students or different ethnic groups are doing, or how well 16–19-year-old students achieve in relation to older students.

Make full use of other information which has a bearing on standards and achievement, including success in completing courses, targets and their achievement, and other measures of success.

You should interpret, in particular:

- trends in results;
- comparisons with other subjects and courses;
- distributions of grades, particularly the occurrence of high grades;
- value-added information;
- the relative performance of male and female students;
- the performance of minorities and different ethnic groups;
- trends in the popularity of courses;
- drop-out or retention rates;
- students' destinations, where data are available.

On the basis of the performance data and other pre-inspection evidence, form hypotheses about the standards achieved, whether they are as high as they should be, and possible explanations. Follow up your hypotheses through observation and analysis of students' work and talking with them. Direct inspection evidence tells you about the standards at which the current students are working, and whether they are being sufficiently stretched. If the current standards are at odds with what the performance data suggest, you must find out why and explain the differences carefully.

In your observations, be alert to any differences in the standards of work of different groups of students.

When you are observing history lessons, analysing students' work or talking to them, ask yourself:

- *Do the students show knowledge and understanding of the study of significant events, individuals and issues?*
- *Can they discuss historical issues from different historical perspectives – for example, cultural, economic and political?*
- *Are they aware of developments affecting different groups within the societies studied?*
- *Do they assess the significance of events, individuals, ideas, attitudes and beliefs, and how they influenced behaviour and action?*
- *Do they know and understand historical interpretations of the events and individuals they are studying, and do they realise their implications?*
- *Can they use, analyse and evaluate historical sources in context?*
- *Do they discuss and show their understanding of historical terms and concepts?*
- *Do they use a range of historical concepts in appropriate ways, such as presenting a case in debate or drawing up an account?*
- *Are there any language issues? How developed are students' reading skills and their powers of debate and argument?*

For the full A level, students need to study the history of more than one state, including a substantial element of British history and the study of change over a period of at least 100 years. They should make links and draw comparisons between different aspects of the period, society, theme or topic studied. They should investigate historical questions, problems or issues, using historical sources and interpretations to explain, synthesise and make judgements.

## 1.2 Analysis of students' work

Analyse samples of students' work in their files – for example, their notes, essays, coursework and any personal studies or investigations, together with any self-evaluation.

The analysis of work is important for judging the nature of the demands made on the students and their progress over time. Hence, it can give valuable insights into their achievement.

**Example 1: evidence from analysis of work of Year 13 history students in a school sixth form; GCSE grades: 1A, 1B, 4 Cs.**

*Written work in files consists of substantial range of notes, essays, data analysis, some via ICT, and some detailed map work on WWI and WWII. Notes are full and well organised under highlighted sub-headings, with bullet points, emphasis through underlining and cross-references to duplicated resource materials. Good indication of students' initiative in taking command of their work. Evidence of seminar-style lessons common, as in several observed. Files include examples of work completed in Year 12.*

*Students complete concise, well-focused notes. Pieces of more extended writing – essays, speaking notes, reviews – are fluent, mature and use historical terminology well. They are analytical and well organised. Some good causal links established. Evidence is balanced to formulate judgements and support a case: sources are tested for provenance and reliability. Notes show ability to digest, précis and synthesise information and arguments from wide reading around the subject, including journals and periodicals - for example, Past and Present, The Historian and History Today. Some effective critiques of the view of different historians and key debates: the standard of living debate, the Versailles settlement, and appeasement.*

*Students producing work of grade A–C standard, with most around grade B. Students' personal studies show secure research skills and well-informed historical enquiry, firmly based on SHP work in KS3/4. One or two examples of indiscriminate Internet and CD-ROM extracts (mainly from Year 12), not processed further, but otherwise files show that there has been very good progress in analysis and evaluation during both years of the course. This suggests that achievement is very good. Biographies of Chadwick and profiles of the work of Owen and the factory reformers reflect confidence with a range of documentary evidence, including parliamentary reports, a few well-chosen visits and notes from a sixth-form history conference at the university. Overall, students' written work shows good levels of organisation, coherence and a clear sense of direction in assisting their overview of the period and topics studied.*

Dyslexic student supported well in his personal study of Mussolini, although no classroom learning support assistant; two other students with learning difficulties fully supported with word processing laptop facilities, although they clearly do not spell accurately.

The whole reflects very high expectations and clear organisation of the course, with close marking and probing comments from the teacher, assisting very clear progress and increasing sophistication: for example, feedback on essays focuses on structure, the use of quotations and the importance of conclusions.

### **[Attainment well above average (2)]**

#### **Commentary**

Most of the students show very good levels of understanding across a range of topics and demonstrate very good skills of working with primary and secondary historical sources. Their work is highly organised and reflects good powers of research, analysis and synthesis of a wide range of information. There is evidence that students benefit from very good teaching and their own initiative to access a more varied and sophisticated bank of sources than is usual. They are able to draw very effectively on advanced skills to interpret and evaluate the resulting data and information. They provide analysis, avoid narrative and form their own ideas about the historiography of the topics under study. This suggests very good achievement.

### **1.3 Talking with students**

Conversations with students about their work will give you further valuable evidence about their attainment and also their achievement.

#### **Example 2: evidence from a discussion with 8 AS-level students in an FE college; average attainment in GCSE.**

- Students are all clear that the teaching challenges them to work and to think, and that they have many opportunities to develop their study of history and to make progress.
- They clearly put considerable time and great intellectual effort into preparing the structured discussions or presentations they make – for example, on Roosevelt's diplomacy 1938–41. Their plans reflect wide reading, a secure and developing knowledge base, and a readiness to take risks in stating their opinion based on their research, which they are keen to talk about.
- They agree that their presentations have been well received by the class, which has boosted their confidence and, in their teacher's estimation, has enabled them to approach a B grade in this assignment.
- Two students are still finding the transition from GCSE to AS level challenging, but they have the motivation and historical curiosity to overcome a lack of confidence.
- Their own notes are substantial and show greater spontaneity and initiative in recent assignments – for example, when researching Roosevelt's response to Japan's plans for a Greater South East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, for which they visited the specialist American history library in Bromley.
- Their description of their preparations for presenting the topic indicates a willingness to tackle a complex and unfamiliar issue. It shows that they persisted with difficult reading, including the analysis of weighty texts, detailed newspaper accounts and other contemporary sources, such as evidence on the conflicting views of different ethnic groups in the United States at the time.
- They are clearly diligent and painstaking in their researches on the factual content. This has given them the spur to understand and form their own balanced opinions in considering the views of various historians on issues surrounding neutrality and isolationism.

### **[Attainment above average (3)]**

#### **Commentary**

Students' endeavour has greatly assisted their knowledge and understanding of these abstract concepts, enabling their marshalling, analysis and synthesis of a wide range of evidence. Their knowledge and understanding of the topic and their effective focus on an explanation of the relevant context indicate above average attainment and good achievement given their average GSCE results.

#### 1.4 Lesson observation

**Example 3: evidence from an AS-level history lesson in a school sixth form; 50 min observation; 10 students present: 2 A\* grades in GCSE, 6 Bs and 2 Cs.**

**Urban living conditions in industrial Britain 1780–1880.**

The teacher conducts an effective opening question and answer session to establish a context for discussion, using hard-hitting newspaper accounts of present day Hunslet and Tower Hamlets. Students are able to discuss a variety of problems caused by urbanisation, including housing, health and working conditions. They draw searching parallels with their detailed knowledge of early 19<sup>th</sup>-Century urbanisation in Leeds and London. A few of the students use their knowledge and understanding of geographical and scientific factors, such as demography, transport and public health problems to link them closely to housing and working conditions. When asked, these students are able to explain the change from laissez faire to state intervention during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. They are beginning to demonstrate the sound historical reasoning and the understanding of the links and connections which characterise a synoptic approach to the subject, but in generalised terms.

In their three groups, students work efficiently and collaboratively to identify the major health problems in Leeds and London in the 1830s and 40s. Higher attainers have some success in using contemporary accounts, together with parliamentary reports and data, to establish the extent of vested interests, the strength of public reaction and the nature of government policy. In general, however, students are not confident in analysing a wide range of evidence and forming coherent main points for whole-class debate.

One student with dyslexia is able to contribute fully on the discussion of the work of Chadwick and Simon, making some effective points from his reading. The two students from another school, both with grade C at GCSE, demonstrate limited previous learning in comparison with home-based students. They show uncertainty and present less logical points. Overall, the group covers a range of predicted AS grades of B–E, bunched around grade C. They do not argue in a sustained, authoritative, well-informed and convincing manner. For example, they are not knowledgeable or perceptive on the standard of living controversy. No student is currently close to grade A.

#### [Attainment average (4)]

##### Commentary

Despite some stronger competencies – for example, the ability of higher-attaining students to take an overview and to make links with other subjects – attainment overall is no better than average. Most students have satisfactory skills of source analysis and historical knowledge of the period, but are less confident in synthesis and presentation of an argument. Achievement appears to be unsatisfactory overall, with two students showing little progress since GCSE, and most of the others not fulfilling their potential. However, the dyslexic student contributes effectively from his reading.

**Example 4: evidence from a second year A-level history lesson in a tertiary college; 50 min observation; 5 students present.**

**Hitler's economic policy to 1939.**

This well-prepared and carefully structured seminar-style lesson enables students to demonstrate very high standards, all but one predicted A–B grades at A level, the other grade D. Progress in discussion of the topic reflects a very good rate of learning and assimilation, with students achieving well in relation to their recorded performance in GCSE. This progress is further reflected in a scrutiny of their course files and notes. Their planning notes for this lesson show detailed, discriminating and well-organised textbook research on the relationship between Hitler's plans for territorial expansion and his economic policies. All students have synthesised evidence from complex documentary sources well, such as Hitler's appeal to the German people and his speech to the Reich governors in 1933. They set the evidence in the context of their secure knowledge of Weimar and the depression, but also cite Hitler's need to reassure the army leaders and other élites. They have clearly absorbed the teacher's instructions

*about the need to work as historians. They use evidence effectively, show confidence with causation and understand her warnings on the provenance, context and limitations of their sources.*

*The highest-attaining student, identified by the school as gifted and predicted grade A, uses her far-ranging reading (referring in passing to Bullock, Fest, Kershaw, the diaries of Goebbels and Speer and the Irving trial) to show flashes of real insight. She is eloquent in developing her views on the significance of Hitler's memorandum of August 1936 and changes in his aims and priorities throughout the period. Each of the other students contributes to a confident debate based on independent but well-substantiated argument, which aids their arrival at a balanced conclusion concerning improvement and deterioration, including the impact on people's lives. The grade D student is less confident, but is able to make valid points succinctly when drawn in. He has taken careful notes, which show a developing understanding of Hitler's aims and the evidence for factors influencing them. No slacking evident, rather an urgency from students, and some impressive individual achievement and sustained argument, which assists the group in arriving at a well-considered conclusion.*

#### **[Attainment well above average (2)]**

##### **Commentary**

Four of the five students show very good skills of research, synthesis of evidence and judgement on reliability of sources. They have a very good understanding of this topic. The students are able to demonstrate confident, independent, well-informed thinking, and to articulate this well to others, reaching a considered and agreed conclusion. They make effective selection and use of a complex range of evidence, citing specific detailed documents. This reflects very good progress in their development of historical method and debate.

**Example 5: evidence from a second year A-level history lesson in an FE college; 60 min observation; 12 students present; most of group had grade C in GCSE history, with a few As and Bs.**

*Revision class planning an essay on Elizabeth I and the threats to her religious settlement.*

*Teacher explains the imminence of the mock exam and attempts to focus on the declared insecurities of several students about their essay writing techniques. It quickly becomes clear that a few students are floundering. They identify only one or two challenges to Elizabeth; these limitations are due to poor preparation and a lack of historical knowledge and understanding rather than their writing skills. An examination of earlier work in their files shows competently structured essays based on well-researched evidence and evaluative argument, which reflects secure grade C standards for most. Attempts by the teacher to spark discussion and make use of a recent film and television series on Elizabeth I are not supported by students' contributions. Their knowledge is limited. For example, most have not seen the programmes or the film, and few are able to draw on their earlier work on the Act of Supremacy and Uniformity, the Puritan challenge and Elizabeth's treatment of the Catholics. Some have simply not prepared the task.*

*Although several students are able to recall the links between major events, the emphasis on the most significant of these is insufficient and there is little reference to the political dimensions of the plots, Mary Stuart, the role of Cecil or parliament. Students' knowledge of the relevant documentary sources and chronology is mainly sound but, when asked, they find it difficult to prioritise threats to the religious settlement or to identify foreign policy implications.*

*Despite persistent prompting by the teacher, only the two higher attainers construct an overview of the question set them and show the interdependency of different events and the implications of religious conflict for Elizabeth's realpolitik. The draft opening and closing paragraphs of the others are generalised and superficial in argument. Their essay structure is based on narrative and description, and is largely lacking in impact. They indicate some limited recall but little precise analysis. Consequently, their arguments are shallow and their assertions unsupported. On this showing, most students are working below par, at around grade D, with three higher attainers providing fluent and coherent drafts at grade B. Teacher expresses his disappointment with students' responses and their unsatisfactory achievement, and sets further reading.*

#### **[Attainment below average (5)]**

### **Commentary**

Despite sound teaching, there are clear indications of work which is below expectations, and unsatisfactory achievement. This is due to a combination of poor preparation and limited knowledge and understanding. The students' attitudes and commitment have a negative impact on their understanding and consequently their performance in well-chosen set tasks. Ill-informed work results in superficial, low-scoring responses, lacking the analysis and prioritisation which might assist an overview. The students are, therefore, likely to encounter difficulties in reaching higher grades.

## 2 Teaching and learning

### 2.1 Evaluating teaching and learning

Effective teaching of history to post-16 students will build on the skills, knowledge and understanding which they gained at Key Stage 4. In particular, its characteristics might include:

- skilful presentation of confident, accurate, up-to-date knowledge and understanding of the topic under study, including recent research, which inspires and enthuses students and draws them closer to the subject (*subject knowledge, methodology*);
- support for students' development as historians, in their identification with the discipline, their use of evidence and their respect for it, their sense of chronology and causation, and their ability to pose historical questions and think historically (*subject knowledge, expectations, methodology*);
- encouragement of the recognition of different interpretations of historical events, periods, movements and the impact of individuals, including an awareness of historiography (*subject knowledge, methodology*);
- balanced use of the imparting of information to students, their direction to historical sources and their use, and their own individual enquiry (*planning, subject knowledge, organisation*);
- effective explanation and sensitive handling of controversial and philosophical issues in such a way as to develop further students' maturity and insights (*subject knowledge, expectations, methodology*);
- provision of a range of questions, tasks and resources which stimulate, challenge and extend students' skills, knowledge and understanding to a high level (*subject knowledge, planning, methodology, resources*);
- detailed and constructive comment on students' work, checks on their learning in lessons, and planned assessments with developmental feedback, so as to help them to be successful in organising and communicating what they have learnt (*organisation, methodology, assessment*).

Less effective teaching might reflect some of the following:

- lack of care or accuracy in the use of evidence or historical terminology (*subject knowledge, expectations*);
- reliance on spoon-feeding information and notes, which may limit historical enquiry, debate and conceptual understanding (*methodology, expectations, resources*);
- over-dependence on a textbook or photocopied sheets, which confines students' information and wider reading in the subject (*subject knowledge, expectations, resources*);
- provision of out-of-date or partial information which fails to reflect the current thinking and techniques in the subject (*subject knowledge, resources, expectations*);
- over-emphasis on particular units of work to the detriment of the full range of broader interpretations (*subject knowledge, planning, organisation*).

Effective teaching leads students to:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the events, people and issues studied, together with their significance (*subject knowledge, assessment*);
- understand and use historical conventions and terms in the analysis and interpretation of key features and concepts (*subject knowledge, methodology, organisation, expectations*);

- develop overviews of the passing of time, historical comparisons and the place of local, national, European and world events (*subject knowledge, methodology*);
- conduct independent historical investigations of information, data and a range of complex sources to reach substantiated conclusions (*subject knowledge, planning, methodology, organisation, resources, assessment*);
- organise and communicate their findings in a variety of ways, including writing, speaking and through information and communication technology (ICT) (*planning, organisation, methodology, resources, assessment*).

In your evaluation of students' learning and teachers' teaching, incorporate a careful balance of the observation of post-16 history lessons in each year group. Focus both on AS and on full A-level students and courses. Discuss with students their personal study or investigation and any issues arising from your analysis of a sample of their work.

The following examples provide evidence of effective and less effective teaching. They emphasise the central importance of the link between teaching and its effects on students' learning.

## 2.2 Lesson observation

**Example 6: evidence from an AS/A-level history lesson in a sixth-form college; 70 min observation, 10 students present.**

**Essay preparation on 'The aims of the Great Powers in 1815 were bound to fail'. Fourth lesson.**

*Students' learning is reinforced and extended by the teacher's very confident and extensive knowledge of the aims of the major European powers in the post-Napoleonic era and the context of the Congress of Vienna. They are confident in using important phrases such as 'repression of liberalism' and use a good range of political historical vocabulary in discussion – for example, 'legitimacy', and 'balance of power'. Searching questions result in the oral contribution of all students, four with real animation, encompassing recall, analysis and evaluation of points others have raised. The teacher's clear expository style – for example, his swift definition of British interests – gives students initial interest and a good focus on an opening paragraph which leads them to develop the essay structure further. By the end of the lesson, they have drafted outline paragraphs showing developed conceptual understanding of the peace settlement and how long it could be expected to last. The teacher's critiques sharpen their understanding further and pick up the need to support their weak geographical knowledge – for example, on the location of the Black Sea and geopolitical implications.*

**[Teaching and learning very good (2)]**

### Commentary

The level of the teacher's subject knowledge is high and promotes learning very effectively. The students develop confidence with historical vocabulary and concepts very well at this stage in the course. They are already showing confidence with oral contributions and also essay construction. Their understanding and interest are further sharpened by the teacher's challenging questions and evident high expectations of their input.

**Example 7: evidence from a second year A-level history lesson in a school sixth form; 70 min observation, 2 students present.**

**The career of Sir Robert Peel.**

*The small size of the group and the contrast in the students' attainment – one a potential grade A, and one a borderline D/E – present challenges to the teacher, but in a very positive, inclusive working atmosphere. Both students have used the previous lesson and homework to prepare a CV of Peel, against the background of political developments since the 1830s, including the Tamworth Manifesto. They use their preparation in a mutually collaborative and supportive way, which also demonstrates good knowledge and understanding. The teacher paces*

*the discussion carefully to suit the needs of both students, using half a dozen well-chosen questions, as if from a backbencher. Students' comments on Peel's class and his early career, his attitude to Reform, and his leadership reflect sound research and use of recent biographies. Teacher explores further their knowledge and understanding of conflicting evidence, and manages the development of the lesson very well. For example, he asks reinforcing questions of the lower-attaining student, while he probes into greater conceptual detail for the grade A student and elicits a thoughtful grasp of important political issues of the early Victorian period. The lower-attaining student is also able to contribute successfully from his research. The textbook is used effectively for quotations to strengthen previous learning and support the points made from the research task – for example, in relation to the 1841 statistics on patterns of voting for Peel. The teacher gives great encouragement to the knowledge and understanding of the lower-attaining student and succeeds in pushing these to a high level.*

### **[Teaching and learning very good (2)]**

#### **Commentary**

The effectiveness with which the teacher capitalises on the students' very good attitudes and learning habits is clear and assists the achievement of both of them. His expectations and determined challenge encourage both students to explore the issues. He manages the lesson very carefully but forces the pace effectively. For example, he emphasises the need to deal with conflicting evidence and difficult concepts, so raising the achievement and attainment of both students. The knowledge and understanding of the lower-attaining student are extended substantially, while the higher-attaining student demonstrates good command of the complex concepts of this course.

#### **Example 8: evidence from a Year 13 A-level history lesson in a school sixth form; 100 min observation, 12 students present.**

##### **Essay planning: 'What do German and Italian fascism have in common?'**

*Robust teaching results from good lesson planning and leads on well from the previous, introductory lesson to this new topic. Lesson opens with short, swift-paced brainstorming session. Teacher, an NQT, is confident and well informed. Uses six well-chosen slides of posters, uniforms and rallies as stimulus material. Encourages rapid student responses to well-directed questions. Builds up answers clearly on whiteboard, with students making substantial notes themselves. They offer good ideas, but demonstrate only limited knowledge of the reasons for the rise of Hitler and Mussolini, which is essential context for this new work. They use basic starter ideas researched at home following the initial briefing in the last lesson. This reportedly emphasised the nature of the paired independent learning task.*

*Students now move to the learning resource centre, where each of six pairs researches further from prepared resource boxes on different sections of the essay. The range of texts includes recent biographies and copies of papers from conferences involving leading historians of fascism. Students lose no time in digesting this additional information and entering initial draft sections for the school intranet. The intention is to build up a complete essay which can be downloaded by each of the students, edited, revised and evaluated as part of their work in the communication and ICT key skills requirements. This is much enjoyed by the pairs and results in productive learning. They are confident users of ICT and get on well with the task. However, their weak general knowledge and limited ability to absorb the far-ranging material means that they have to struggle to organise their ideas effectively.*

*The students show real enthusiasm and apply themselves well, but standards in history overall are no more than average and in line with those expected of Year 13 students by their second term. Achievement in this task, however, is increasingly good. One student demonstrates a high level of understanding of the nature of fascism, having downloaded Whisker's article on Italian Fascism from the Journal of Historical Review. He is also able to draw on his reading of recent texts by Whittam and Thurlow and uses Noakes and Pridham well. Others also work well, given their weaker starting points in terms of conceptual understanding and research skills. Teacher is alert to this and begins to intervene with support, advancing the learning and reinforcing main points. By the end of the session, students are able to print off a respectable outline draft from each pair's work to research further.*

### **[Teaching and learning good (3)]**

### Commentary

There is clear evidence of enterprising teaching and strengths in students' approaches to private study and independent learning. However, this example also shows clearly the limitations to the effects of well-planned, good teaching. Despite very good attitudes and excellent resources, students' standards of knowledge and understanding serve to hold down their achievement. The well-prepared and enthusiastic teaching, by a newly qualified teacher (NQT), is received well by students. It leads to a stimulating task, which develops their ICT skills and encourages their enthusiastic involvement, but from a restricted historical knowledge and skills base that prevents standards from being higher.

**Example 9: evidence from an AS-level history lesson in a school sixth form; 50 min observation, 14 students present.**

#### *Emancipation of Russian serfs.*

*Lacklustre and uninspiring teaching by deputy headteacher which aims to build students' confidence and knowledge of late 19<sup>th</sup>-Century serfdom. Heavy dependence on handouts. Students' recall of first lesson's key points is satisfactory, but there is rather a passive feel to this lesson. Students required to listen to a tape recording of the teacher reading an account of the economic and social problems of Russian serfs. Not a primary source and no reason given. Teacher asks the students to make notes, and they do so conscientiously, but there is no check on their understanding, and several continue writing through the further explanations. The students make isolated responses to the odd question, but these are lacking in enthusiasm and interpretation, as they are dependent on the worksheets. The teacher refers to a problem in booking the promised video on the Russian economy in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.*

*Students are attentive and gain some knowledge and understanding of the content of the Edict of Emancipation and the reforms of Alexander II, but much of this is limited in depth, with little sense of enquiry or challenge. The questions raised by students are not handled well by the teacher, who refers them to the textbook. Students concentrate well and appear to be self-motivated. When asked, they give sensible and lucid responses to questions about their course. Work in the files scrutinised indicates mostly C and some B grade attainment, but standards in the lesson are no more than average. They reflect a lack of expectation by the teacher who teaches a few periods per week, mainly in the sixth form, has not taught this course before and shows some insecurity with the period.*

**[Teaching unsatisfactory (5); learning satisfactory (4)]**

### Commentary

This example illustrates the dangers of senior teachers losing touch with their subject. There are weaknesses in the methods used and the expectations established by the teacher. These reflect an insecurity with new subject knowledge and out-of-date and narrow approaches to the subject. Students are learning at a satisfactory level despite limitations to the teaching. While workmanlike rather than overtly damaging, there is an indication of some underachievement arising from the teaching which is holding down standards. These should have been higher, given other evidence from a scrutiny of students' work.

**Example 10: evidence from an AS-level history lesson in an FE college; 70 min observation, 13 students present.**

#### *Study of the consequences of the Great Reform Bill of 1832, in preparation for coursework.*

*Students rather listless, demonstrating only limited involvement and concentration. This is despite teacher's well-prepared review of the origins of the Bill and some effective links with the previous week's visit to the House of Commons, where the students were guests of the local MP. A majority of the group, all male, demonstrate a poor work ethos. They are clearly tired and bored, and they have only a lukewarm rapport with the teacher. She tries hard to engage them, but lacks the skill to overcome the reticence of students who are only a few years younger than she is. These male students' responses to the teacher's questioning lack detailed explanation and reflect weak powers of comprehension and analysis of the sources she has given them to prepare. In contrast, the teacher is fully aware of*

each student's stage of learning. For example, one student has learning difficulties, particularly in spelling and literacy. The teacher has prepared a simplified, large typeface briefing sheet for him, which enables him to understand important dates and personalities more easily, and supports his modest contribution to group discussion. She briefly checks his understanding as the students split into their four groups to consider a well-chosen range of sources on the main consequences of the Bill.

Female students stand out through their relevant and accurate references to the major stages of events and the role of the personalities involved, but several male students have not completed the preparatory reading set. They do not have the necessary information to synthesise the data provided. This leads to halting discussion, which reflects the insecure powers of argument of several of the males – for example, in distinguishing between the views of different classes on the Bill. Only one group (all female) is able to reach an overview, reporting back in some detail. Others show a limited interest and a weak grasp of the topic, with poor conceptual understanding, although quite well supported by the teacher's comments when listening in. Her summing up draws most of the main points together for this below average group, but she has to work hard to salvage the lesson, given students' weak responses and limited progress on the task. She partially retrieves the situation by active intervention, but learning overall is unsatisfactory.

#### **[Teaching satisfactory (4); learning unsatisfactory (5)]**

##### **Commentary**

The teaching is well planned and resourced, and indicates secure subject knowledge, but it has a few weaker features. Knowledge of individual students' needs is secure – for example, with regard to learning difficulties – but the teacher is less successful at engaging all male students. She endeavours to compensate and in some respects redeems the lesson. Female students do well, but the unco-operative attitudes of the male students cause learning to be unsatisfactory overall.

### **2.3 Other evidence on teaching and learning**

Lesson observation is usually the most important source of evidence on the quality of teaching and learning, but the analysis of work and discussions with students can also yield valuable information. This is particularly important when the work includes a coursework component undertaken over time. Under these circumstances, the observation of individual lessons may give a very partial picture of the students' learning experiences and of the support provided by teachers.

The work analysis will give you a good feel for the overall rate of progress, and, therefore, the pace of the teaching and learning. It will show the range and depth of the work which the students are required to do. For example, it will indicate whether students routinely use new technology and a wide range of source materials, whether they are introduced to the recent work of well-known historians, including new research in the units under study, and whether they are challenged sufficiently to develop skills of analysis, interpretation and synthesis. This is particularly important when you are judging the quality of teaching and learning required for success in the AEA.

Discussions with students will give you a sense of their motivation and the range of their experiences. You can ask questions to show whether they understand clearly how well they are doing and what they must do to improve.



### 3 Other factors affecting quality

Evaluate the quality and impact of the curriculum, staffing, resources, accommodation, and leadership and management in history, and report on any factors which have a significant bearing on what the students achieve.

#### Curriculum

It is important that colleges and schools take care in the choice of the units to make up the course followed and that sufficient time is allowed for each, avoiding imbalances which could adversely affect students' knowledge and understanding. This is particularly important for their performance on a synoptic paper, where it is crucial for them to link together different strands of history and have confidence to take an overview.

#### Resources

Students should have good access to a range of texts including professional journals, up-to-date research and appropriate source material. Students' personal studies and investigations will often entail visits to museums, local record offices and sites of historical interest. Relevant evidence such as students' use of artefacts, photographs, maps, videos, audio tapes of interviews and other archival material, including ICT printouts, will need to be evaluated as part of the scrutiny of their work.



## 4 Writing the report

The following is an example of a post-16 subject section from a school inspection report. (It does not necessarily reflect the judgements in any or all of the examples given elsewhere in this booklet.) Where the subject is inspected in a college, it is likely that the evaluation will be given within a report on a broader range of humanities courses. The summative judgements in these reports use, for schools, the seven-point scale: *excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor*. For colleges there is the five-point scale: *outstanding; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; very weak*. The summative judgements *excellent/very good* used in school reports correspond to *outstanding* in colleges; *poor/very poor* used in schools correspond to *very weak* in colleges.

### History

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **good**.

#### Strengths

- The most recent results in A-level history were above the national average, with most students showing good achievement in relation to their previous attainment.
- Students produce well-balanced and convincing arguments, and show a good command of synthesis and analysis.
- The teaching of history is good overall: it is well planned and reflects strength of subject knowledge and a good understanding of the way students learn.
- The subject is well managed.

#### Areas for improvement

- Students' skills in whole-class discussion and debate are not as well developed as other aspects of their work.
- Students need to consult a wider range of resources and make more use of ICT.

Students' performance in GCE A-level examinations over the past three years has shown a steadily rising trend, and results are now above the national average. This shows an improvement compared with examination results in history at the time of the last inspection, when results were slightly below average. All students who took the examination this year achieved A to E grades, and 41 per cent gained A or B grades, a success rate which is also above the national average and is the best achieved by the school to date. This year, the proportion of the female students who achieved grades A and B was particularly high, but over the last five years there have not been any significant differences in the attainment of male and female students. All students commencing the course completed it satisfactorily, with the majority – especially those from a minority ethnic background – showing good achievement in terms of their previous attainment.

Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of samples of students' work confirm that standards are above average and achievement is good. Attainment is above what might be expected at this early stage in the Year 12 GCE AS-level course. The performance of the current Year 13 GCE A-level group is well above average, with several students on course to take the Advanced Extension Award in history. This represents higher standards than in the recent A-level results. There are several reasons for this. The current students had above average GCSE results and are achieving well, in line with the department's rising trend of success. They were the first group to benefit from new course planning, which has resulted in improved teaching. They commit themselves to the work fully: they are ready to go that extra mile in reading and research in order to succeed.

Students analyse historical sources critically and evaluate a wide range of evidence effectively to produce well-balanced and convincing arguments. Their written work is very carefully organised and structured to support lucid and coherent conclusions. Essays on the mediaeval papacy and the Counter Reformation indicated a good command of the higher order skills of analysis and synthesis, and reflected impressive insights into the periods. Students are able to articulate their views with confidence and persuasion in paired and small group discussion, as with their assessments of Charles V and Louis XIV, but many are less fluent in whole-class debate. Their work has not included sufficient use of information and communication technology (ICT), and at times depends unduly on the printed word, when alternative sources and media could be beneficial.

Students learn well in their courses in sixth-form history, and they show clear progress in their quality of thinking and writing. This good learning results both from the well-focused, experienced teaching in the department and from the extent of the students' own highly committed application to study, including their independent work at home and in the learning resource centre. The quality of teaching is good overall. It was very good in two of the five lessons observed, and good in two others, demonstrating clear strengths in subject knowledge and a good understanding of the way students learn. The teaching is very tightly planned, uses time in lessons well and confronts students energetically with issues surrounding evidence and with the significance of historical controversies. As a result, students make rapid increases both in the range of their knowledge and in the depth of their understanding. For example, one lesson used a very detailed time chart of the link between inflation and overseas expansion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This introduced students to important events, which they were able to locate within basic economic theories, and it contributed to their overview of this aspect of the subject.

Teachers' confident subject expertise allows them to choose well-structured learning tasks in which they share the objectives with the students. These form short, stimulating activities, such as brainstorming or paired discussion, following which students often move into small group work, analysing and annotating documentary sources. In other lessons, students analysed peace treaties, gave eye witness accounts, and made a spirited analysis of a poem on the battle of Lepanto. Students are encouraged to extend their repertoire of study skills. Effective approaches regularly used include memory-jogging exercises, tabulation techniques, time lines, 'spidergrams' and the highlighting of notes. Teachers make excellent use of video clips and slides of fine art and paintings, thus enriching students' appreciation of the period, places and personalities under study. Students are able to apply their broad range of study skills in their own researches in the sixth form learning resource centre, and their work there supports and extends what they learn in lessons, preparing them well for the demands of the higher order skills in the subject.

The rapport between teachers and students is extremely positive and underlies the very committed attitude of students to their work. They realise that they are being taught well and respond accordingly. Evaluation of their work is speedy and thorough, and in addition to routine marking makes very effective use of the feedback sheets for completed essays and source analyses. These often help students to focus further on individual weaknesses, such as the structuring of essays or the use of quotations and the importance of conclusions. Students receive such guidance readily, and improvements in students' written work were clear in the samples analysed – for example, from their work on the French Wars of Religion to their studies of absolutism.

The good achievement and good teaching can be attributed to the fact that the subject is well managed by a very experienced head of department. She has developed a scheme of work of high quality, which reflects both recent changes in the subject and the team approach evident in the way history is taught in the school. Teachers regularly observe one another's lessons and discuss successful methods of teaching. The head of department has been particularly successful in acquiring a sophisticated range of resources for the school, and several leading historians have contributed to the conferences which she has organised for the borough's sixth formers. She is starting to exploit the possibilities of ICT. She has a clear view of the priorities for the subject and is committed to the maintenance and further improvement of the high standards established in recent years.



## Notes

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