



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



*Rewarding Learning*

# **GCE AS and A level subject criteria for history**

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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 AS and A level subject criteria set out the knowledge, understanding, skills and assessment objectives common to all advanced subsidiary (AS) and advanced (A) level specifications in history. They provide the framework within which the awarding body creates the detail of the specification.

Subject criteria are intended to:

- help ensure consistent and comparable standards in the same subject across the awarding bodies
- define the relationship between the AS and A level specifications, with the AS as a subset of the A level
- ensure that the rigour of A level is maintained
- help higher education institutions and employers know what has been studied and assessed.

Any GCE specification that contains significant elements of history must be consistent with the relevant parts of these subject criteria.

## 2. Aims

- 2.1 AS and A level specifications in history should encourage students to:
- develop their interest in and enthusiasm for history and an understanding of its intrinsic value and significance
  - acquire an understanding of different identities within society and an appreciation of social, cultural, religious and ethnic diversity through the study of aspects of British and non-British history
  - build on their understanding of the past through experiencing a broad and balanced course of study
  - improve as effective and independent learners and as critical and reflective thinkers with curious and enquiring minds
  - develop the ability to ask relevant and significant questions about the past and to research them
  - acquire an understanding of the nature of historical study, for example that history is concerned with judgements based on available evidence and that historical judgements may be provisional

- develop their use and understanding of historical terms, concepts and skills
- make links and draw comparisons within and/or across different periods and aspects of the past
- organise and communicate their historical knowledge and understanding in different ways, arguing a case and reaching substantiated judgements.

## 3. Specification content

### Breadth and depth of content

- 3.1 AS and A level specifications in history should be of sufficient length, depth and breadth to allow students to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding specified below, and must include a rationale for the specification of periods and/or themes which indicate how the following criteria for content are addressed.
- 3.2 AS and A level specifications in history should provide a broad, coherent, satisfying and worthwhile course of study for all students whether they progress to further study in the subject or not.
- 3.3 There are no prior knowledge requirements for AS and A level specifications in history.
- 3.4 Both AS and A level specifications should require students to study:
- the history of more than one country or state or the history of more than one period
  - aspects of the past in breadth (through period(s) or theme(s)) and in depth
  - significant individuals, societies, events, developments and issues within a broad historical context
  - developments affecting different groups within the societies studied
- a range of appropriate historical perspectives, for example aesthetic, cultural, economic, ethnic, political, religious, scientific, social or technological.
- 3.5 In addition, A level specifications should require students to study:
- a substantial (a minimum of 25 per cent) and coherent element of British history and/or the history of England, Scotland, Ireland or Wales
  - change and/or development over a period of time sufficient to demonstrate understanding of the process of change, both long term (at least 100 years) and short term.

## **Knowledge, skills and understanding**

3.6 A2 students will build on their learning at AS by drawing on and evaluating a greater depth and range of increasingly more sophisticated content and evidence, demonstrating a more complex understanding of historical concepts, producing responses that are more analytical, and judgements that are more effectively substantiated.

## **Knowledge and understanding of the past**

3.7 A level specifications should require students to:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of historical themes, topics, periods and debates
- demonstrate their breadth of historical knowledge and understanding by making links and drawing comparisons between different aspects of the period, society, topic and theme studied
- demonstrate their understanding of key historical terms and concepts
- analyse and evaluate the causes and consequences of historical events and situations, and changes and developments in the periods and themes studied
- assess the significance of individuals, societies, events, developments and/or ideas in history
- develop an understanding of the nature and purpose of history as a discipline and how historians work.

## **Historical interpretation**

3.8 A level specifications should require students to:

- comprehend, analyse and evaluate how the past has been interpreted and represented in different ways, for example in historians' debates and through a range of media such as paintings, films, reconstructions, museum displays and the internet.

## **Historical enquiry**

3.9 A level specifications should require students to:

- investigate specific historical questions, problems or issues
- use historical sources critically in their context, deploying appropriate information and reaching substantiated conclusions.

## **Organisation and communication**

3.10 A level specifications should require students to:

- organise and communicate their historical knowledge and understanding in different ways, arguing a clear, logical and precise case and reaching substantiated judgements.

## **4. Key skills**

4.1 AS and A level specifications in history should provide opportunities for developing and generating evidence for assessing relevant key skills from the list below. Where appropriate these opportunities should be directly cross-referenced, at specified level(s), to the key skills standards, which may be found on the QCA website ([www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk)).

- Application of number
- Communication
- Improving own learning and performance
- Information and communication technology
- Problem solving
- Working with others

## 5. Assessment objectives

5.1 All candidates must be required to meet the following assessment objectives. The assessment objectives for AS and A level are the same. The assessment objectives are to be weighted in all specifications as indicated in the following table.

<b>Assessment objectives</b>		<b>Weighting</b>
<b>AO1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recall, select and deploy historical knowledge appropriately, and communicate knowledge and understanding of history in a clear and effective manner.</li> <li>• Demonstrate their understanding of the past through explanation, analysis and arriving at substantiated judgements of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• key concepts such as causation, consequence, continuity, change and significance within an historical context</li> <li>• the relationships between key features and characteristics of the periods studied.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	60–70%
<b>AO2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As part of an historical enquiry, analyse and evaluate a range of appropriate source material with discrimination.</li> <li>• Analyse and evaluate, in relation to the historical context, how aspects of the past have been interpreted and represented in different ways.</li> </ul>	30–40%

5.2 Assessment objective 2b should have a higher weighting at A2 level than at AS level.

5.3 The assessment objectives apply to the whole specification.

## 6. Scheme of assessment

### Internal assessment

- 6.1 All A level specifications must have internal assessment at AS **or** A2 comprising 15–20 per cent of the A level and assessing the skills of historical enquiry.
- 6.2 Specifications must make clear how reliability and fairness are secured, by setting out requirements that ensure the robustness of each stage of the internal assessment, ie:
- the specific skills to be assessed
  - setting of tasks
  - extent of supervision in carrying out of tasks
  - conditions under which assessment takes place
  - marking of the assessment and internal standardising procedures
  - any moderation process.

### Synoptic assessment

- 6.3 All specifications should include synoptic assessment at A2. The synoptic element will be assessed through all assessment objectives and can be defined in the context of history as follows:
- the drawing together of knowledge and skills in order to demonstrate overall historical understanding. It involves the explicit assessment of understanding of the connections between the essential characteristics of historical study including at least two of the perspectives and/or concepts included in sections 3.5 and 3.8 above.

Examples of synoptic assessment tasks might include:

- a personal study investigating a valid historical issue such as an assessment of the contribution a key historical figure or event has made to cultural, social, political or economic developments of the time, or an evaluation of the range of perspectives, or economic developments of the time or an evaluation of the range of perspectives in contemporary accounts of a key historical event
- an essay question which focuses on the process of historical change across the full breadth of the period studied or on links between a range of historical perspectives (political, cultural, social, etc).



### **Quality of written communication**

6.4 AS and A level specifications will be required to assess the candidates' quality of written communication in accordance with the guidance document produced by QCA.