Research and analysis

Research review series: history

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Introduction

The study of history can bring pupils into a rich dialogue with the past and with the traditions of historical enquiry. The past and changing accounts of the past have shaped the identities of diverse people, groups and nations. Through history, pupils come to understand their place in the world, and in the long story of human development. The study of history challenges pupils to make sense of the striking similarities and vast differences in human experiences across time and place.

School history also shows pupils how accounts of the past arise and are constructed. Pupils learn how evidence for a claim can be constituted and the conditions under which valid claims can be made. They learn how historians and others construct accounts about the past, building on and challenging or refining the work of others. Pupils learn how argument and debate can be underpinned by shared principles of enquiry, and how this can drive and test new knowledge and insight about shared pasts.

In this report, we have:

- outlined the national context in relation to history
- considered curriculum progression in history, pedagogy, assessment and the impact of school leaders' decisions on provision
- summarised our review of research into factors that can affect quality of education in history

The review draws on a range of sources, including a programme of research from our Research and Evaluation team and our previous research, including the 'Education inspection framework: overview of research' and 'Principles behind Ofsted's research reviews and subject reports'.[footnote 1] This is supported by research into history education, including the work of academics and professionals and also the published reflections and research of history teachers. Much of this work is on a small scale but is invaluable in understanding how history teachers have wrestled with the challenges of curriculum design in history and built on each other's work.

The research that underpins the education inspection framework (EIF) highlights the impact of curriculum design on pupils' outcomes. In making judgements about the quality of education, inspection will consider the quality of curriculum design and its impact on pupils. This review focuses on how the work of practitioners and academics has considered quality in the distinctive context of history education. This review will inform our approach to considering the quality of subject education in schools. Our findings from research into practice in schools will be published as a later subject report.

National context

In England, pupils begin their formal history education at key stage 1. What children learn in the early years foundation stage (EYFS) is crucial knowledge for them to build on in the future. The knowledge and vocabulary that children develop, particularly through the 'understanding the world' area of learning, enable them to access history content at key stage 1.[footnote 2]

Schools are required to offer a broad and balanced curriculum to all pupils, as set out in the Education Act 2002 (for maintained schools) and the Academies Act 2010. This expectation is at the heart of the EIF.

All pupils are required to study history from key stage 1 to the end of key stage 3. In primary schools, pupils might study history for between 1 and 2 hours per fortnight. This time might be organised into 'blocks' where pupils study history for a number of weeks before studying another subject. In key

stage 3, pupils are likely to study history for between 2 and 4 hours per fortnight. Although teachers have previously expressed concerns about the limited time given to history, particularly in primary schools, a 2019 survey suggested that these concerns have eased and that more schools may now be ensuring that the study of history is given adequate time in the curriculum.[footnote 3]

Across these phases, the national curriculum sets out ambitious goals for history education in terms of broad substantive concepts that pupils should learn and disciplinary knowledge about how historical accounts are created.[footnote 4] The national curriculum identifies broad areas of content that pupils should study. However, schools have significant freedom to design their own curriculum offer in history.

History remains a popular choice at both GCSE and A level, with a slight increase in entries for the June 2021 series at both stages. There are 278,880 provisional entries for GCSE history, and 41,585 entries for A-level history. Both of these figures represent a small increase on the previous year.[footnote 5] Pupils who choose to study history at GCSE are likely to have at least 4 hours of history lessons per fortnight, although often they will have more history time than this. At A level, pupils are likely to have at least 8 hours of taught history lessons per fortnight.

Curriculum

Summary

Pupils make progress in history through building their knowledge of the past, and of how historians study the past and construct accounts. Teaching supports pupil progress by embedding frameworks of content and concepts that enable pupils to access future material. Abstract concepts are best learned through meaningful examples and repeated encounters in different contexts. There are a range of important considerations for curriculum designers to ensure a broad curriculum for all pupils.

Context: teachers as curriculum makers

Freedom in curriculum design

The history curriculum content in schools is significantly shaped by decisions made at school level. Many history teachers value this freedom with curriculum design,[footnote 6] which allows them many possible routes to constructing a high-quality curriculum. This freedom has also allowed many history teachers to significantly shape wider history curriculum debate through their publications in which they analyse and compare practice.[footnote 7] There is evidence, however, that some history teachers, as a result of wider constraints and pressures, do not take effective advantage of this freedom and stay limited by narrow repertoires of content and out-of-date scholarship.[footnote 8]

However, constructing a high-quality curriculum is a significant challenge. Across a history curriculum, curriculum designers and teachers must deploy a wide range of criteria when making content choices. The published work of history teachers suggests many ways of approaching these complex choices in order to achieve appropriate blends of content across a curriculum.

This review works on the basis that curriculum design is strongest when it reflects the range of considerations outlined below, rather than giving undue emphasis to any individual aspect of a high-quality history education.

Curriculum decisions occur at different levels

Curriculum decisions in history occur on many levels. Schools choose broad topics to teach in their history curriculum. Within these broad topics, teachers must select content from an extraordinary range of possible material to create 'planned routes' through particular topics.

However, teachers make further, equally important curriculum decisions through their emphasis on particular content within and across lessons. For example, in a lesson on religion in Anglo-Saxon England, a teacher may choose to give particular time and attention to teaching features of monasteries. They may also return to this content in future lessons to secure pupils' knowledge further (see 'Learning through meaningful examples and repeated encounters'). This kind of content emphasis is yet another curriculum decision that will significantly influence the curriculum content that pupils learn. Many of these decisions are made 'live' in any given lesson, usually without systematic planning or discussion with colleagues.

A high-quality curriculum requires careful decisions on all 3 of these levels:

- topic choices
- content choices
- decisions on further detail and emphasis within the broad content selected

Also, teachers make additional 'live' curriculum decisions as they teach lessons. The micro-choices they make can add additional detail to their oral storytelling or to particular aspects of source material that they choose to explain and emphasise. This 'live' decision-making by individual teachers is likely to be better judged and managed when underlying rationales for content selection are fully understood and when teachers have had opportunities to regularly discuss content selection and its purposes, as well as the marriage of disciplinary and substantive content. Curriculum decisions require a sound rationale for content selection and emphasis. Studies of history teacher development show the importance of a culture of challenging debate around content choice for the renewal of strong history curriculums.[footnote 9]

The rationale for curriculum decisions on all of these levels will be considered as part of our evaluation of the quality of subject education in history.

Based on the above, high-quality history education may have the following features

- Teachers have regular opportunities to discuss content selection and its purposes, in order to support decisions about content selection and emphasis in teaching.

Securing pupils' progression in history through effective curriculum design

Pupils' progress through the curriculum depends at each stage on the range and depth of their existing knowledge and how secure it is in their minds. This knowledge is what allows pupils to understand and learn new material. Some knowledge is likely to be particularly important to future learning. Pupils are likely to benefit when curriculum design, teaching and assessment prioritise this knowledge.

Pupils are best able to learn this enabling knowledge when it is taught through repeated encounters with meaningful examples.

Progress in history

Pupils make progress in history by developing:

- their knowledge about the past (this knowledge is often described as ‘substantive knowledge’)
- their knowledge about how historians investigate the past, and how they construct historical claims, arguments and accounts (often described as ‘disciplinary knowledge’)

History teachers and history education researchers have long noted the complex interplay between substantive knowledge and disciplinary knowledge.[footnote 10] Deploying both substantive and disciplinary knowledge in combination is what gives pupils the capacity or skill to construct historical arguments or analyse sources. This is because knowledge of the past must be shaped by disciplinary approaches in order to become historical knowledge. Similarly, acquiring disciplinary knowledge is made purposeful and meaningful to pupils when it is related to particular historical problems where pupils have sufficient knowledge of the period, setting and topic to reason, to make inferences and to grasp the terms that others are using in any debate.

How the terms substantive and disciplinary knowledge have been understood

In offering these terms in a 2018 article, Counsell was showing how subjects such as history have been influenced by wider traditions, notably distinctions between ‘syntactic’ and ‘substantive’ knowledge developed by Schwab. Schwab used syntactic to denote big ideas about a discipline’s structures, concepts and processes.[footnote 11] Counsell instead used the term ‘disciplinary’ because this (together with the term ‘second-order’ discussed below) reflects the more common usage among history teachers over the last 2 decades. Counsell also drew on much more recent work from the sociology of knowledge, especially Young’s concern that pupils in school should learn that academic knowledge is provisional and revisable.

This provisional and revisable character has much in common with history teachers’ longer-established traditions concerning construction of claims and evaluation of evidence.[footnote 12] History teachers’ tradition of placing substantial emphasis on this disciplinary aspect of pupils’ learning is particularly associated with the Schools Council History Project and its successors which, from the 1970s, sought to embed the methods and approaches of historical enquiry and argument into the teaching of history. Many history teachers have continued to build on this work by using their own practice to theorise new possibilities for various types of historical analysis and reflection in the classroom (see ‘Developing disciplinary thinking through disciplinary concepts’).

Ever since the disciplinary dimension of the subject found its way into common school practice, teachers have used their own practice to explore the relationship between substantive and disciplinary knowledge. For example, in 2014, drawing on many other history teachers’ published works, Hammond explored this through a close analysis of pupils’ essays. Hammond sought to explain what differentiated the strongest examples of historical argument from weaker ones. She suggested that pupils, when constructing historical arguments, were drawing on ‘layers of knowledge’ about the past.[footnote 13] Hammond was making this point in response to inadequacy of a typical approach at the time – drilling pupils in appropriate wording to meet examination requirements. Her argument was that this was missing out much more fundamental foundations that needed to have been laid long before and that did not resemble direct preparation for the final performance in an exam.

Hammond was building on the work of others, who challenged a tendency to falsely separate pupils’ ability to analyse and their knowledge of the past. McAleavey drew attention to this in his 1998 survey of developments in approaches to teaching pupils about sources and evidence.[footnote 14] Later, LeCocq showed how she had designed a Year 10 lesson to develop pupils’ analysis and their historical knowledge simultaneously.[footnote 15]

History teachers have continued to explore both the function of different forms of knowledge in pupils' historical analysis and ways of developing that knowledge. In 2017, Counsell summarised significant literature in this area and further refined the thinking about the role of knowledge in pupils' capacity to learn and do in history.[footnote 16] Counsell distilled this by describing knowledge as 'generative' (it supports pupils to generate and remember new knowledge; it is 'sticky').

Based on the above, high-quality history education may have the following features

- Teaching and curriculum design reflect the relationship between substantive and disciplinary knowledge.
- Teaching develops pupils' historical knowledge and their historical analysis simultaneously.

Prioritising content in the curriculum

Some content may have a particularly important role in pupils' future learning. By identifying and prioritising this content, curriculum design and teaching can support pupils' progress in history.

Generative knowledge and content emphasis

Teachers and curriculum designers may prioritise knowledge that they feel will have the greatest impact in supporting pupils to learn more in the future. Given the complex interactions between types of knowledge, identifying knowledge that will be particularly generative is unlikely to be simple. Counsell remarks that:[footnote 17]

> teachers' planning challenge is not so much stacking up content in aggregate as anticipating how one layer of substantive knowledge will later accelerate another.

Despite this complexity, we highlight some principles below that history teachers have used successfully to guide their decisions about which content to prioritise.

Content that is prioritised is often referred to as 'core knowledge'. Core knowledge is the knowledge that, within a particular lesson or topic, curriculum designers and teachers deem most important for pupils to secure in their long-term memory. No particular content is innately or always 'core'. 'Core' is merely a status conferred on content by curriculum designers and teachers. These decisions focus curricular and pedagogical thinking and can support individual teachers in making better 'live' and ad hoc curricular decisions.

High-quality curriculum design is likely to be characterised by a strong and sophisticated rationale for emphasising particular content. This rationale will include the role of content in enabling future learning, while also balancing the considerations below regarding curriculum breadth and coherence.

Fingertip and residue knowledge

Teachers have found various ways of characterising the role that different types of knowledge play in relation to others. Counsell examined this, drawing on her own practice and that of others observed as a teacher educator, to create the distinction of 'fingertip' and 'residue' knowledge.[footnote 18]

Some knowledge might be particularly important for what pupils are learning in their current topic or lesson. Some knowledge might be particularly important for pupils' outcome tasks at the end of a topic. This might include detailed and secure knowledge of events and individuals. This knowledge will need to be secure and well-organised in pupils' minds for them to be able to draw on and transform it to construct historical arguments. They will need to be able to access it readily – to be at their 'fingertips'. Hammond reflects on the impact that this 'fingertip knowledge' had on the quality of argument in her pupils' written work, a finding which is echoed by King.[footnote 19] The range and security of this knowledge reduces demands on pupils' working memory and therefore enables thinking and historical analysis.[footnote 20]

'Fingertip' knowledge has an important role in current learning (usually for the duration of the immediate topic). The importance of memorising this knowledge may not extend beyond that topic.

Counsell also theorised that, over the longer duration, pupils' in-depth knowledge of topics may also leave a 'residue' of wider knowledge, such as a broad knowledge of the institutions of a period.[footnote 21] This residual knowledge may also include knowledge of substantive concepts or chronological knowledge. This knowledge is likely to be highly generative.

Based on the above, high-quality history education may have the following features

- Teachers and curriculum designers identify knowledge that is particularly important to secure for all pupils.
- Teaching develops the security of pupils' 'fingertip knowledge' of topics, in order to support historical analysis and argument.

Categories of generative knowledge in history

Pupils' progress in history is not so straightforward that this generative knowledge can be easily identified. However, there are some forms of knowledge that are worth considering. These are particularly likely to enable pupils' future learning. Two examples of this are:

- 'substantive concepts' (abstract concepts such as invasion, tax, trade, monarch or empire)
- chronological knowledge (knowledge relating to broader developments and the features of historical periods)

Progress through substantive concepts

Planned, systematic encounters with substantive concepts in specific contexts are likely to be highly generative. A number of practitioners have explored how the ongoing development of an increasingly secure and sophisticated understanding of substantive concepts can support pupils' progress.[footnote 22]

Substantive concepts occur frequently

Many of these concepts feature regularly throughout the study of history in a range of contexts. As a result, they are particularly important to pupils' understanding of new material. A pupil might come across the terms 'invasion', 'monarch' or 'tax' in every year of school history. They will then be able to

draw on their secure knowledge of these concepts repeatedly in a number of different contexts.[footnote 23] Pupils who do not have knowledge of these concepts will be less able to understand and learn new material. For instance, if a teacher tells pupils that 'the Saxon invasions took place across the fourth and fifth centuries, and Anglo-Saxons created competing kingdoms in England', a pupil who has no knowledge of the term 'invasion' (or 'kingdoms') will not be able to understand the meaning of this account. As a result, they will learn less about the Anglo-Saxons than a pupil who has this knowledge.

Abstract ideas are best learned through repeated encounters in specific, meaningful contexts (see 'Learning through meaningful examples and repeated encounters').

Substantive concepts must be historicised (put into a historic context or discipline)

Substantive concepts are not simply 'definitions' of important terms. They have particular meanings in different contexts. First, they have a particular meaning when used in the context of a historical narrative or argument. Second, they often have meanings that are specific to particular periods or places.

One example of this is 'revolution'. When historians use this term, it implies a judgement about the nature, pace or extent of change. Pupils require disciplinary knowledge to make sense of these judgements, which are not captured by simply knowing a definition of the term. These terms also mean different things to different people and meant different things at different times in the past (for example, who or what might be characterised as 'revolutionary' by different people at different times).

To learn about the past, pupils will often need knowledge of the particular meaning of some specific concepts in different time periods. For example, they might need to understand what 'socialist' specifically meant to people (even different groups of people) in Bismarck's Germany in order to learn accurately about aspects of the period. Bridges and Olivey have explored the importance of historical context in the learning of concepts.[footnote 24]

Balancing incidental and directed learning of substantive concepts

Often, a lack of security in one of these concepts is a barrier to pupils' comprehension of new material, and therefore limits the potential for further learning about both the wider context being studied and the concept itself.[footnote 25] Bridges and Palek, following the work of Hammond, reflected on the impact of pupils' security of conceptual knowledge on their ability to learn more complex material.[footnote 26] Left unchecked, these gaps in pupils' knowledge are amplified as this lack of enabling knowledge is compounded over time.[footnote 27] The importance of these concepts suggests that teaching should aim to explicitly develop knowledge of concepts that may be particularly important to support pupils to learn later content.[footnote 28]

This systematic approach, planning specific opportunities to develop knowledge of concepts, will work for a small number of particularly important concepts. However, it is not sufficient to secure knowledge of the vast range of concepts that pupils will need to understand at some point in their history education. Pupils will also have to learn many concepts incidentally, without explicit teaching or emphasis.[footnote 29]

As pupils' understanding of the past, and of other concepts, develops, so will their capacity to learn new concepts more readily. A pupil who already knows of 'kingdoms' will have some of the knowledge structures in place to learn more readily about 'empires', for example. As pupils' capacity to learn develops as a result of their expanding knowledge, this 'sticky' knowledge will have a snowball effect.[footnote 30] Curriculum designers and teachers can increase these opportunities for

incidental learning through selecting appropriately challenging vocabulary and texts.[footnote 31] They could make sure they incorporate appropriately challenging vocabulary in their discussions with their classes and provide pupils with the opportunity to read appropriately challenging texts. This will support pupils to develop new knowledge, supported by what they already know.

To secure pupils' progress, a high-quality curriculum is likely to prioritise developing knowledge of concepts that will have the maximum impact on all pupils' capacity to learn the future curriculum. This might include:

- pre-teaching or earlier encounters with concepts
- assessments to check pupils' security with these concepts
- intervention to address gaps or misconceptions

However, any direct teaching of substantive concepts should bear in mind the principles above (particularly the importance of learning through meaningful examples).

Curriculum design and teaching are likely to be most effective when they combine a systematic approach to some identified concepts with wide-ranging opportunities for incidental learning. They may also require specific support for some pupils to ensure that they develop the range of knowledge required to allow incidental learning (see 'Supporting pupils in history, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities').

Based on the above, high-quality history education may have the following features

- Specific opportunities are planned for pupils to develop their knowledge of some particularly important substantive concepts.
- The curriculum ensures that pupils regularly encounter a wide range of important substantive concepts.
- Pupils have opportunities to read or hear appropriately challenging texts.

Chronological knowledge

Chronological knowledge is also highly generative. Understanding the broad characteristics of historical periods gives context to what pupils learn and can increase pupils' familiarity with new material. Securing overview knowledge of the past supports pupils to develop this knowledge into coherent narratives that are more memorable for them. Learning this chronological knowledge through meaningful examples is likely to be effective (see 'Learning through meaningful examples and repeated encounters').

Overview and depth

Banham suggested that teachers could develop pupils' understanding of 'the overview lurking in the depth'.[footnote 32] In Banham's example, by studying the reign of King John in detail, pupils were more able to develop their understanding of the broader features and institutions of the medieval period. Knowledge of these different scales appears to be mutually reinforcing.

Developing pupils' mental timeline

Cumulatively, pupils' knowledge of periods and events will form a network of knowledge that might be conceptualised as a 'mental timeline'. This is an example of a complex schema, which might include components such as:

- broad characterisations of particular periods
- understanding of general features of periods
- knowledge of the chronological order of broad periods
- knowledge of particular dates and events
- knowledge of broad developments, links or themes across periods

A secure mental timeline makes pupils' existing historical knowledge more secure, and therefore makes new knowledge easier to learn. Dawson explored a range of approaches to teaching history that emphasised securing these different aspects of pupils' chronological knowledge.[footnote 33]

Pupils with a secure mental timeline have an organising framework for events or periods that they have studied in depth. This gives context and meaning to those events or periods. It supports pupils to relate developments, events and periods to a broader framework, giving their knowledge coherence. This in turn makes this knowledge more secure in pupils' minds.[footnote 34] A number of authors have explored the relationship between pupils' knowledge of historical overviews and of other aspects of the past.[footnote 35] Ford shared one example of developing coherent narratives in pupils' knowledge shaped around competing visions for America. Importantly, this narrative was drawn from historical scholarship.[footnote 36]

Understanding the broad features or characteristics of historical periods also establishes a meaningful context for what pupils will go on to learn. A pupil will be able to learn more readily about the Norman Conquest if they have prior knowledge of general patterns of trade, migration and political structures in the medieval period. Again, teaching these through meaningful examples is likely to be effective, although teachers may choose to emphasise broader features of periods to support memorisation of these.

When curriculum design does not take this chronological knowledge into consideration, pupils' understanding of the past is likely to be disconnected or episodic.[footnote 37] Pupils may know about events and periods in history but not the connections between places or times in the past. Alternatively, their knowledge might be disconnected from other frameworks, such as an understanding of the discipline of history. In both cases, individual parts of pupils' knowledge are likely to lack the meaning that can be conferred by relationship to other parts or broader frameworks. As well as lacking meaning, this knowledge would be less securely remembered and less easily recalled and drawn on in future learning.

Based on the above, high-quality history education may have the following features

- Teaching and curriculum design secure pupils' chronological knowledge.
- There are opportunities for pupils to study aspects of the past in overview and in depth.
- Teaching helps pupils to develop coherent historical narratives and organising frameworks for their knowledge of the past.

The importance of context and repetition when learning new concepts

Summary

Meaningful examples and secure contexts make new information more familiar to pupils and therefore easier to learn. Contextual information in history reduces the abstraction of complex ideas and content. Pupils' prior knowledge also makes new information meaningful. Knowledge is generative, it enables future learning.

Learning through meaningful examples and repeated encounters

New knowledge is hard to learn when it is highly abstract or unfamiliar to pupils.[footnote 38] Specific examples can make the unfamiliar elements of new material more meaningful.[footnote 39] It is much easier for pupils to learn about how King Aethelbert might have weighed up the decision to convert to Christianity as king of Kent than for pupils to learn about a more abstract idea such as 'the interrelationship between politics and religion in successful early medieval kingship'. Through specific examples such as this, pupils will have an access point for making sense of more abstract ideas.

In one recent example from the work of history teachers, Olivey shares how he attempted to support pupils to build a more nuanced understanding of the concept of class. Olivey's approach was to focus on developing rich and complex knowledge of the period in order to give a meaningful context to this abstract idea.[footnote 40]

These meaningful examples are just as important in pupils' earliest learning about abstract ideas and concepts. Initial encounters with complex or abstract ideas allow pupils to begin to associate these with specific examples or instances.[footnote 41] Our previous research explains how new knowledge that pupils learn becomes integrated within and across schema, which are complex structures in long-term memory that link knowledge and create meaning.[footnote 42]

For example, through an encounter with the abstract concept 'kingdom':

> Mercia was one of the Saxon kingdoms. It stretched from…

pupils may start to develop a schema for this concept, which may incorporate an idea like 'a kingdom is a geographical area'.

These early schemas, particularly for younger pupils, will be very simple and may not be entirely precise. Their role, however, is simply to enable future learning.[footnote 43] When the pupil encounters the concept again in a new context:

> Offa ruled over his kingdom. He was very powerful

their prior knowledge supports them to assimilate new knowledge about the concept ('kingdoms are ruled over by powerful people').

Over time, through repeated encounters with meaningful examples in specific contexts, pupils will develop more secure and more sophisticated schema for such concepts.[footnote 44]

As pupils' knowledge of these concepts grows, so does their capacity to understand and learn more complex material.[footnote 45] In this way, pupils' learning (both in history-specific and wider contexts) is connected from their earliest education through all later stages. We discuss curriculum at specific school stages in 'Curriculum design at different stages of education'.

Memorisation and security of knowledge

Repeated encounters with concepts also increase the security of pupils' knowledge. Ensuring repeated encounters with important concepts is one way in which curriculum designers and teachers can prioritise content to support pupils' progress (see 'Prioritising content in the curriculum'). The importance of teaching for memory is explored in the 'Teaching for memory' section.

Knowledge is generative

Curriculum content increases in range, depth and complexity as pupils move through their history curriculum. At each stage, pupils need more, and more secure, knowledge in order to understand new material, assimilate it into their existing knowledge and mental frameworks, and learn and remember it long-term.[footnote 46]

Knowledge is generative: it enables further learning.[footnote 47] Pupils use their knowledge in directly discernible ways when they produce an outcome task such as an essay. However, pupils also draw on this prior knowledge much more often, and less visibly, when they make sense of new material.[footnote 48] As they know more, they are able to learn even more, and more complex ideas, about the past. Therefore, this expanding knowledge is progress, but it is also a driver of further progress.

Prior knowledge makes abstract ideas more meaningful to pupils, and therefore easier to comprehend and learn.[footnote 49] Pupils may have direct knowledge of an aspect of new material, or they may have knowledge of a similar event, period or state of affairs. Fearn's analysis of her pupils' writing suggested that even prior knowledge that is only very indirectly related to the material pupils are learning made the material more meaningful for them, and therefore easier to learn.[footnote 50]

As an example, the concept of 'taking power' has complex connotations, including specific connotations when used in historical narratives. If a pupil does not have enough prior knowledge, they will struggle to understand this concept (another way of saying that it will be abstract). This may hinder their ability to make sense of a statement like 'Saxons took power in England'. However, a pupil's understanding of similar historical events from previous topics (such as the Roman invasion of Britain) might ensure that the concept of 'taking power' has some meaning for them.

Knowledge connects in unseen, complex and unpredictable ways

These connections between historical knowledge are often complex, unseen and unpredictable.[footnote 51] When a pupil understands new material in history, the knowledge that they draw on to do so might not be obvious, straightforward or as intended by the teacher. Hammond gave a classic exploration of some of these complex connections in her analysis of Year 11 pupils' essays.[footnote 52] In most cases, pupils will draw on a wide range of knowledge that they have developed in a range of contexts. This will include knowledge from across their study of history, but also knowledge gained in other school subjects and outside of school.

A curriculum cannot guarantee the precise knowledge that pupils will acquire. However, curriculum design and teaching can significantly influence pupils' prior knowledge.

This can be done in 2 complementary ways:

- by ensuring that pupils have wide-ranging opportunities to develop the depth and breadth of their historical knowledge (see 'Balancing incidental and explicit learning of substantive concepts')
- by identifying some knowledge that is particularly important and that will therefore be the focus of explicit teaching to support memorisation[footnote 53]

The role of background content in developing pupils' knowledge and understanding

In some subjects, pupils must develop fluency and automaticity of recall in a number of specific components. In these subjects, the 'core' knowledge is very much the focus of teaching. In these subjects, it may be effective to reduce the demands on pupils' working memory by removing material that is not considered core content.

However, such an approach in history is likely to be counterproductive. Paradoxically, pupils often need to encounter lots of contextual or background material (sometimes referred to as 'hinterland') in order to make sense of, and learn, core knowledge. Counsell warns of the danger of reducing content to propositions and thereby rendering it less meaningful and less able to be learned.[footnote 54] This relates directly to a number of the principles explored above but has broad implications for curriculum design and teaching. We explore these implications here.

For example, a Year 5 lesson on the Saxon conversion to Christianity might be designed to secure understanding about the concept of monastery and some overview details of changes to Saxon kingship. Yet, in the lesson, pupils may be exposed to a wide range of other information about the period that is not directly teaching them this core content and that teachers do not intend for pupils to recall securely or directly. This hinterland might include information about Hilda, the abbess of Whitby, and the church council that met at her abbey and the complex debates about the date of Easter. It may include information about monks travelling across the north of England, braving long and dangerous journeys. It may include a long description of the physical appearance of Holy Island and the land bridge that disappears under the tides. Pupils may see these locations on a map and hear about the North Sea and Scandinavia. They may be told the story of Augustine and Aethelbert in rich detail, going far beyond the core knowledge identified. They may be told that the version of the story we have was actually written later by a monk called Bede. They may learn about Queen Bertha and Augustine preaching in Kent. They may learn about King Aethelbert's gifts to Augustine, and how Augustine was able to set up a school and library at Canterbury with books sent from Rome by the Pope.

There are a number of reasons why teachers may choose to include such a range of background details in such a lesson, but chief among them is the fact that this extra detail is likely to help, not hinder, pupils' learning of the core knowledge.

This rich background develops pupils' understanding in the following ways:

Hinterland information provides meaningful examples and secure contexts for learning

Pupils learn abstract and complex ideas through meaningful examples (see 'Learning through meaningful examples and repeated encounters'). In the example above, the rich imagery of the monastery on Holy Island supports pupils, through meaningful examples, to make sense of the power and wealth of the church. Through the details of life at the monastery, pupils might learn about religious devotion in the early medieval period. Descriptions of journeys build pupils' sense of scale, connectedness and travel in the past. The idea that the Pope sent books from Rome gives pupils access to the complex relationship between the Pope and the peripheries of Christendom. All of these details make the more abstract new information more likely to be meaningful for pupils.

Hinterland information can connect and organise information into coherent narratives

New information is easier to comprehend and remember when organised as a story.[footnote 55] Stories provide an organising framework for knowledge. They also give familiarity to the unfamiliar through features that are grounded in pupils' lived experience and their knowledge from reading more

widely – features such as agents, causation and conflict. In stories, the connections between parts, and between parts and the whole, are often clear – this connects potentially disparate or abstract ideas into a coherent whole. Stories exemplify complex and abstract ideas in meaningful, human-scale ways.

The use of stories in history is not straightforward. Over time, pupils will need to develop an understanding of how historical claims and arguments, implicit and explicit, shape historical narratives. However, stories may be an effective way of organising new or complex content for pupils.

Hinterland information can develop familiarity or initial schemata for later learning

In the example above, those fascinating details about the monastery on Holy Island might establish an early schema for monasticism that will be the crucial focus of a later topic. The role of the Pope might be incidental to the immediate focus of this lesson but of central importance to a Year 8 topic on the Reformation. Vivid descriptions of trade in the African port of Adulis or a typical Viking journey to Constantinople, in Years 4 or 5, might make a profound difference to pupils' access to vocabulary or comparable stories in Year 6 when pupils examine migration or trade in other settings.

As discussed previously, even the most basic schema for a concept may have enormous power in enabling pupils' comprehension. Even brief encounters with this hinterland in earlier topics might actually therefore be essential to pupils' capacity to make sense of future learning.[footnote 56]

Hinterland information can broaden curriculum content and demonstrate the diversity of past experiences

In the example above, pupils might well be able to learn the identified core knowledge about Saxon religion without ever learning about Hilda of Whitby. However, this content might begin to establish an understanding of the complex role of women in medieval religion and politics or the geographical diversity of the country and therefore broaden pupils' understanding of the past.

Based on the above, high-quality history education may have the following features

- Pupils are supported to learn new content by meaningful examples and understanding of the specific historical context that makes ideas and concepts more familiar.
- Pupils have repeated encounters with a wide range of important concepts in a number of different contexts.
- Teaching emphasises some content and concepts for direct and explicit teaching, but it also ensures wide-ranging opportunities for incidental learning.
- Teachers and curriculum designers recognise the crucial role of contextual and background information in learning new material.
- Pupils encounter rich stories and contextual details about the past, which make abstract ideas more meaningful.

Securing progression in disciplinary knowledge

Summary

Curriculum design and teaching should ensure that pupils progress in their disciplinary knowledge. Pupils learn about how historians study the past and construct accounts through specific examples. They need secure substantive knowledge about relevant historical contexts in order to make sense of this. Generic or reductive approaches to teaching disciplinary knowledge are likely to encourage misconceptions for pupils.

Disciplinary knowledge in history

Disciplinary knowledge is knowledge of how historians investigate the past, and how they construct historical claims, arguments and accounts. For ease, we use the term 'historical enquiry' to refer to the complex tools, methods and assumptions that historians draw on. It is important to note that 'historical enquiry' describes the way that historians approach the study of the past. It should not be confused with the use of 'enquiry' to describe a pedagogical approach (such as 'enquiry learning').

Developing pupils' disciplinary knowledge is not fundamentally different to developing their substantive knowledge of the past. However, it comes with added complexities that might be considered in curriculum design and teaching. The literature suggests the importance of careful sequencing, including developing secure substantive knowledge of topics to support pupils' learning of disciplinary knowledge in these specific contexts. Another common consideration is the role of historical scholarship in shaping approaches to disciplinary knowledge.

This knowledge of historical enquiry frames what pupils learn about the past, supporting them to consider the status of historical claims. It enables them to place their historical knowledge in a broad context. It helps to insulate pupils from the potential harm of a narrow or distorted view of the past by exploring how historical narratives are constructed. It introduces pupils to the subtle and sophisticated disciplinary conventions that bind and govern historical claims and accounts. Chapman captures the essence of this when he describes how the disciplinary traditions of history ensure that: [footnote 57]

> historians are expected to make their assumptions, concepts and methods explicit, so that they can be critically assessed by an academic community of practice and to present arguments for interpretive decisions that they make.

Because the literature recommends a number of specific approaches to teaching particular aspects of disciplinary knowledge, we summarise these approaches below, alongside the recommendations regarding curriculum design.

Complexities in developing pupils' disciplinary knowledge

Common misconceptions and learning disciplinary knowledge

Wineburg suggests that historical enquiry is very far from pupils' everyday modes of thinking.[footnote 58] A number of history teachers have highlighted significant preconceptions and misconceptions that pupils bring to their thinking about historical enquiry.[footnote 59] For example, pupils may perceive historical enquiry to be a form of 'fact-finding' in which historians are searching for a particular document or piece of evidence that will reveal or validate a singular truth about the past.

The nature of historical enquiry – for example that it is concerned with constructing accounts – is highly complex. Moving pupils closer to this complex understanding, and countering these potential misconceptions, requires pupils to gain increasingly sophisticated knowledge over time, through meaningful examples that accurately represent the complex nature of historical enquiry.

The interplay between substantive and disciplinary knowledge

The distinction between substantive and disciplinary knowledge may be useful for some aspects of curriculum design and teaching. However, these are closely related. In fact, each is meaningless without the other.

It is through disciplinary methods, approaches and assumptions that pupils are able to construct substantive knowledge of the past. Although these disciplinary aspects may not always be explicitly taught, they underpin any knowledge of the past that is taught to pupils.

Substantive aspects of the past also shape these disciplinary tools, approaches and assumptions. Particular sources of evidence, or types of sources, are available to historians of particular times and places. These shape the methods, approaches and assumptions of historians in ways that are specific to particular contexts. If a medieval historian decides to attend to the question of what the experience of education was like for medieval noblewomen, it is meaningless to describe this decision as ‘disciplinary’ or ‘substantive’. The historians’ disciplinary tools, methods and assumptions (including about the kinds of things that are of interest in history) are interacting with their in-depth understanding of this particular context to frame an enquiry about the past.

This complex interaction between disciplinary and substantive knowledge highlights one way in which teaching disciplinary knowledge might be particularly complex. Pupils must have secure and detailed prior knowledge of at least 2 different domains – the specific substantive context or topic and the relevant disciplinary knowledge – to understand and learn more complex disciplinary knowledge.

Some principles for developing pupils’ disciplinary knowledge

Avoiding generic approaches

One way in which teaching may encourage misconceptions is through ‘generic’ or ‘one-size-fits-all’ disciplinary approaches. Because the disciplinary approach is always shaped by the substantive context, it is often inaccurate or misleading to teach pupils that historical enquiry can be reduced to simple rules, tricks or heuristics. For example, if pupils are taught to use a heuristic such as the ‘5Ws’ (who, what, when, where, why) to consider any historical source, they are likely to develop misconceptions about the complex relationship between sources, evidence and historical claims and accounts.

If teachers validate misconceptions – for example by using a mark scheme that rewards ‘giving a judgement’ rather than focusing on the historical quality of that judgement – then pupils are more likely to develop these misconceptions (see also ‘Assessing disciplinary knowledge’).[footnote 60] Teachers should be aware of potential misconceptions and address these in their teaching.

Pupils will learn about historical enquiry most effectively through specific examples of how historians have approached this in particular contexts. This will balance pupils’ understanding of some of the commonalities in historical enquiry across contexts with knowledge of the distinctiveness of historical enquiry in particular contexts.

The importance of secure substantive knowledge

Pupils’ capacity to learn and use disciplinary knowledge, including in the construction of their own historical arguments and accounts, is highly dependent on the depth and security of their substantive knowledge of the period or events being analysed.

For example, if pupils do not understand enough about the events they have studied to construct reasonable claims about causation, then they may shape their arguments in other ways and therefore develop misconceptions. They may, for example, claim that the assassination of Franz Ferdinand was the most important cause of the First World War because it was the closest in time to

the outbreak of the events they have studied or because they have more secure knowledge of this specific event than of other aspects of the topic. In doing this, they are using analytical tools that are not appropriate in the disciplinary context. As a result, pupils may build misconceptions into their schema for how historians form arguments about causation. For this reason, practitioners commonly recommend careful attention to developing pupils' breadth and depth of substantive knowledge to enable them to construct historical arguments or accounts.[footnote 61]

Developing disciplinary knowledge over time

Pupils develop their disciplinary knowledge in the same way as they build their knowledge of substantive concepts. Over time, they will develop increasingly secure and sophisticated schemata about complex disciplinary ideas such as 'how historians construct claims from evidence' or 'how causal arguments are presented in narrative accounts'. These disciplinary concepts are highly abstract. Therefore, teaching is likely to be most effective when pupils have repeated encounters with these ideas through meaningful examples in specific contexts (see 'The importance of context and repetition when learning new concepts'). Bradshaw gave one example of how his department planned for pupils to develop increasingly secure knowledge of concepts relating to historical significance.[footnote 62]

Bradshaw also suggests the importance of pupils' substantive knowledge in supporting their historical analysis.[footnote 63] A secure understanding of a specific substantive context and secure, relevant disciplinary knowledge support pupils to construct arguments and accounts that, in some ways, reflect the work of professional historians (at a developmentally appropriate level). For example, pupils in Year 9 might construct a causal argument about the causes of the outbreak of the First World War by drawing on a rich and secure understanding of these events and an understanding of how historians select, shape and present causal arguments. Pupils in Year 5 might draw on knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon period and their knowledge of how historians make claims about the past to assess some claims about the period from a range of evidence.

Without enough knowledge, pupils may make guesses or fill in gaps with their own 'everyday thinking' (see 'Common misconceptions and learning disciplinary knowledge'). Without teachers' support, these guesses could create or reinforce misconceptions about historical enquiry.

Conway explicitly sought to identify pupils' misconceptions at the start of a topic on historical significance. He found that these could be a barrier to pupils' historical analysis and aimed to address these in his teaching.[footnote 64] This suggests that opportunities for pupils to 'do' history must be carefully planned and sequenced to ensure that pupils have appropriately secure knowledge. In the earlier stages of pupils' education, teachers may focus on teaching them about aspects of disciplinary knowledge in order to prepare them to construct their own arguments and accounts in future.

Stanford explores the complexity of progression in disciplinary knowledge.[footnote 65] Reflecting on his own practice in relation to developing pupils' causal arguments, he theorises that the underlying 'causal models' that might be used to present a reasonable account of particular events differ in complexity. Stanford uses the helpful metaphor of 'moving parts', of which some causal problems may have more or fewer than others. As a result, teachers and curriculum designers may need to take account of these differing levels of complexity so that pupils build on their existing understanding to make sense of increasingly complex causation problems and arguments.

The relationship between school and academic history

Using the work of academic historians to inform teaching and curriculum design is likely to be an effective way of ensuring accurate representations of the discipline and avoiding misconceptions. There is a sophisticated and extensive body of literature exploring how teachers might best translate the complex tools, conventions and assumptions of academic history into curriculum design, teaching and pupils' understanding (see 'Developing disciplinary thinking through disciplinary concepts'). Some practitioners have also recommended that pupils engage regularly with original historical scholarship.[footnote 66]

Metaphor, models and analytical language

Much of the practice detailed in 'Developing disciplinary thinking through disciplinary concepts' offers powerful ways of framing abstract disciplinary concepts for pupils. Woodcock gave one example of teaching the language of historical analysis explicitly.[footnote 67] Using diagrams, models or metaphors can also support pupils to shape knowledge into forms of historical analysis and argument because analogies support pupils to understand complex ideas.[footnote 68] In her study, Foster gave an example of using a 'road map' to support pupils to express complex ideas about change and continuity.[footnote 69]

Enquiry questions

Enquiry questions are a sophisticated device for shaping curriculum content. High-quality enquiry questions organise historical content to enable pupils to develop disciplinary and substantive knowledge simultaneously, with their understanding of each supporting the other. In a 2000 article, Riley explored how enquiry questions can powerfully shape historical learning.[footnote 70] Disciplinary enquiry questions give meaning to historical content and support pupils to engage with that content with disciplinary rigour. They also allow teachers to clearly signpost forms of historical analysis or aspects of the past that teachers want pupils to think and argue about.

Enquiry questions are a curricular tool to organise content. They should not be confused with the term 'enquiry', which is used to describe pedagogical approaches (such as 'enquiry learning'). Using enquiry questions does not imply any preference of pedagogical approach.

Enquiry questions usually focus on a particular area of disciplinary knowledge. They are likely to be most effective when applied across a series of lessons. This allows pupils to develop the depth and breadth of knowledge they need to think and argue about the question. Pupils are then able to adapt and develop their judgements as their understanding deepens across a series of lessons. The impact of this iterative process has been suggested by a number of history teachers reflecting on their own enquiry planning.[footnote 71]

Enquiries are likely to develop more accurate disciplinary knowledge when they are designed to engage with the past in ways that reflect the complexities of academic history, challenging misconceptions and modelling accurate disciplinary knowledge. This may include enquiry questions that are designed to reflect genuine academic debates in history.[footnote 72] The careful crafting of enquiry questions is a complex process and requires extensive historical and pedagogical knowledge. [footnote 73]

Developing disciplinary thinking through disciplinary concepts

A range of disciplinary concepts for developing pupils' rational and critical thinking about the past began to emerge in the 1970s.[footnote 74] Through further research into how children's ideas about the past change, these concepts gradually became known as 'second-order concepts'.[footnote 75]These concepts gave teachers a shared language related to disciplinary knowledge. Their use has

helped teachers to shape historical content in ways which develop pupils' disciplinary knowledge. They are a tool for teachers to use to balance between the complexity of academic history and the needs of the classroom. These concepts are useful only when applied in ways that are faithful to academic history, and to specific historical contexts and enquiries.

The main second-order concepts in common use by history teachers in England, and which figure in England's national curriculum for history,[footnote 76] are:

- cause
- consequence
- change and continuity
- similarity and difference
- historical significance
- sources and evidence
- historical interpretations

While these are all often called second-order concepts, increasingly a distinction is drawn between the first 5 (cause, consequence, change and continuity, similarity and difference, and historical significance) and the last 2 (sources and evidence and historical interpretations). The former are now generally used by history teachers to classify types of historical argument taught to pupils; the latter focus more on the processes by which evidence is established and accounts are constructed. All, however, are used extensively by history teachers to engage in what Fordham terms 'curricular theorising'. This is history teachers' published work through which they advance and challenge new shifts in characterising and teaching historical argument.[footnote 77] Debate continues about the role they play in developing pupils' historical understanding. For example, recently, there have been calls for 'historical perspective' to be considered as a distinct second-order concept.[footnote 78]

Cause

Teaching pupils the art of causal reasoning and the shaping of arguments about causation relates to the way historians analyse how and why events or states of affairs occurred or emerged. A question such as 'why did a World War begin in 1914?' for example, set in Year 9, would be providing opportunity for pupils to develop and demonstrate their causal reasoning, and to build on earlier work on causal argument in Years 7 and 8 and in key stage 2. Pupils in Year 4 might draw on their detailed knowledge and vocabulary concerning the Roman Empire to answer the causation question: 'Why did the Roman Empire collapse in the fifth century?' or 'Why did the Byzantine Empire survive and grow in the sixth century?'.[footnote 79] Extended answers such as these require pupils to select and combine information that might be deemed a cause and to shape it into a coherent causal explanation. The Historical Association has summarised the key developments in history teachers' curricular work on the teaching of causal arguments in its 'What's the wisdom on' series.[footnote 80]

Teaching pupils about how historians construct causal arguments requires attention to the distinctive features of this type of historical argument. Over time, and through repeated encounters with these types of questions, pupils will develop schemata that allow them to recognise and deploy, with growing fluency and flexibility, the complex ways in which historians build these arguments.[footnote 81] History teachers have engaged in multiple debates, practical explorations and research about teaching causal reasoning, mostly building on, developing or challenging popular works by Chapman and Chapman and Woodcock.[footnote 82]

The work of history teachers on causal argument is rich and evolving rapidly as history teachers work together to raise standards by reflecting on historical scholarship itself, especially new and diverse works by current scholars. Stanford, for example, challenged history teachers' over-use of certain

causation questions, such as 'Why did William win the Battle of Hastings?', suggesting that such questions are not only out-of-step with recent historical scholarship but also do not fit into a logical progression from simpler to more complex causal arguments across the key stage.[footnote 83]

Many history teachers are using changing trends in historical scholarship to update their practice around teaching historical causation. Holliss, for example, drew on Clark's 'Sleepwalkers', a study of the causes of the First World War that amounts to a major challenge to the common Year 9 practice of rehearsing 4 long-term causes of the war (militarism, nationalism, imperialism and alliances).[footnote 84] The teaching of disciplinary knowledge is less likely to be formulaic, to be reductive or to develop misconceptions when curriculum designers and teachers maintain a strong link to the work of academic historians.

In order to build effective causal arguments, pupils require secure substantive knowledge of the event or process before seeking to explain the causes of the event or process (see 'The importance of secure substantive knowledge').[footnote 85] Without this, pupils' own causal judgements will be ill-informed or might encourage misconceptions about the discipline. An effective causation enquiry is likely to develop rich and secure substantive knowledge of the specific event or process across a series of lessons. This allows pupils to think about the overarching enquiry question in more complex ways (see 'Enquiry questions').

Well-planned teaching tools, such as models and diagrams, can support pupils to develop understanding of causal arguments. Chapman explored a range of these approaches in a 2017 chapter.[footnote 86] These include ways of teaching pupils about patterns that they can use to arrange and link causes and to develop their understanding of how historians express causal relationships.[footnote 87] Some teaching activities might support pupils to overcome specific common misconceptions about causation. For example:

- decision-making simulations to overcome the common misconception that historical events were inevitable
- activities that explore the nature of causal relationships to support pupils to understand causes as relationships between events, developments or states of affairs

It is crucial that teaching activities directed towards disciplinary knowledge do not encourage a 'formulaic' approach. For example, a task that requires pupils to identify links between causes is unlikely to develop pupils' understanding unless they already know enough to be able to overcome their potential 'everyday' thinking about causes (see 'Common misconceptions and learning disciplinary knowledge'). This prerequisite knowledge includes detailed substantive knowledge of the specific context and disciplinary understanding of how causal links are used by historians to develop their arguments. Chapman, for example, developed a theoretical model to support teaching about causation which emphasises the importance of pupils' secure knowledge of narratives of events to support historical analysis.[footnote 88]

Consequence

Enquiry questions that explore a problem to do with the consequences of an event or development are less common in history teachers' practice in England than enquiry questions on causation. Much less has been written by history teachers about consequences, but this has begun to grow in recent years. The Historical Association has recently summarised practice in this area and provided advice.[footnote 89]

For pupils to discern, summarise, characterise or classify consequences of an event or development is very challenging. This is unlikely to be worthwhile or successful unless pupils are working with broad, secure knowledge of pertinent developments in the period. They might prepare for this

analysis of consequence by formulating simple hypotheses about the likely impact of a major event.[footnote 90] Pupils might then be given the opportunity to test those hypotheses as they gain further knowledge. Later, they can reflect back on secure knowledge about a period and attempt to discern and classify different types of consequences. For example, pupils in Year 5 who have studied both the Byzantine empire and the Islamic empire across their earlier key stage 2 work can reflect back on the consequences of growing trade for the spread of religion in the eastern Mediterranean, North Africa or the Middle East.

One history teacher, Navey, has carried out useful work theorising the nature of pupils' work with historical consequences.[footnote 91] Navey used 2 works of historical scholarship that deal with the Black Death – one was an international study drawing on a wealth of studies across Europe, Asia Minor, the Middle East and North Africa and the other an intimate account of what happened when the plague hit the village of Walsham in Sussex. From both works, Navey built an analysis of what pupils need to do when they are analysing consequences. Navey's model is transferable into many contexts in primary and secondary history.[footnote 92]

It is particularly important that teachers do not try to create enquiry questions that require pupils to solve a problem of a causation and a problem of consequences at the same time. Pupils are more likely to practise a type of argument effectively when they stay focused on thinking and arguing about one thing at a time. They either need to be thinking and arguing about the causes of an event or development (in which case, the event or development is taken as a given while pupils question, rearrange, characterise and classify information that might be deemed causes) or they need to be tackling the much more open-ended question of the consequences of that event or development.[footnote 93]

Change and continuity

The second-order concept of change and continuity relates to historical analysis of the pace, nature and extent of change, or characterisation of a process of change. Questions in which pupils think and argue about change are often questions that naturally think and argue about continuity at the same time. The question 'how much change did the Norman Conquest bring?' is an example of a change and continuity enquiry that requires pupils to reflect on whether change or continuity best characterise comparisons of Anglo-Saxon and Norman England.

The Historical Association's 'What's the wisdom on' series summarised a range of approaches that history teachers have taken to teach pupils about change and continuity.[footnote 94] These often draw heavily on the original classification of types of change into 4 types, originally developed by Shemilt, which secondary history teachers have referred to and worked with since. These are: extent or degree, pace or rate, nature or type, and process. Some authors, however, have moved beyond that classification to examine more closely how contemporary historians work with change and continuity in their analyses.[footnote 95]

Enquiry questions are likely to be most effective when they clearly get pupils thinking and arguing about one aspect of change or continuity in a historical period.[footnote 96]

A range of approaches are likely to support pupils to understand aspects of change and continuity analysis, including:

- teaching historical language for expressing ideas about change
- using metaphor
- using visual representations of change or models to represent abstract ideas about change[footnote 97]

Teaching may directly address common misconceptions about historical change, such as a tendency to see change as a discrete series of events rather than as a process. Fielding found that some of her pupils' thinking about change was limited by this misconception.[footnote 98] Again, the indirect or direct use of historical scholarship in lessons or to inform planning can help to ensure that historical enquiry is represented accurately and in all of its complexity (see 'The relationship between school and academic history'). Hackett gave one example of this in a teaching sequence about the Norman Conquest.[footnote 99] Hackett also suggested the importance of secure knowledge of the substantive context in order for pupils to develop accurate disciplinary knowledge about change and continuity or to construct their own arguments.[footnote 100]

Similarity and difference

The second-order concept of similarity and difference relates to historical analysis of the extent and type of difference between people, groups, experiences or places in the same historical period.[footnote 101] A question such as 'how similar were women's experiences of the War of the Roses?' would encourage analysis of similarity and difference.

Learning about similarity and difference often involves detecting and analysing generalisations. A number of history teachers have supported pupils to carefully test the adequacy of generalisations.[footnote 102] Generalisations are powerful tools of historical description, but, as well as developing fluent recognition of such terms, pupils must also explore their limitations in capturing the complexity and diversity of past societies or lived experiences. An effective curriculum develops pupils' understanding of how historians approach similarity and difference in their analyses over time.

Pupils' knowledge can be developed by teaching about similarity and difference on different scales, including through individual stories. This allows pupils to challenge generalisations and develop an increasingly complex understanding of the past. Card gave one example of how she used a single image, and the related individual stories, to get pupils thinking about and challenging generalisations.[footnote 103] Again, pupils need secure substantive knowledge to make reasonable judgements about the appropriateness of generalisations (see 'The importance of secure substantive knowledge').

A number of history teachers have aimed to teach pupils detailed contextual knowledge in order to support their analysis.[footnote 104] High-quality teaching about similarity and difference reflects the approaches used by academic historians, including approaches to characterising and describing historical complexity. Benger offered one example of introducing pupils to a historian's use of 'thick description' to support pupils in their own historical analysis.[footnote 105]

Historical significance

The second-order concept of historical significance focuses on how and why historical events, trends and individuals are ascribed historical significance. A question such as 'Why has the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 been the focus of so much historical attention?' would encourage pupils to think about historical significance. Davies argued for the importance of pupils also learning about historical silence, which is the counterpoint of historical significance.[footnote 106]

It is a common misconception that significance is an inherent property of an event or phenomenon, rather than something that is ascribed by historians and others. Significance is best described as a 'meta-concept' – it stands in relation to historical content and disciplinary traditions. The complexities of this mean that pupils must, as with all second-order concepts, build up their understanding of historical significance over time through specific contexts.

Teachers can support pupils in early encounters with significance by focusing on particular factors or criteria that can lead to events or periods being considered significant.[footnote 107] Bradshaw suggests how pupils can develop an increasingly secure and sophisticated understanding of how and why significance has been ascribed from this.[footnote 108] Pupils require secure substantive knowledge in order to learn or understand disciplinary knowledge about significance. This includes knowledge about the event or period being studied and the period in which significance has been ascribed.

Sources and evidence

Pupils need to learn how historians use sources as evidence to construct, challenge or test claims about the past. A question such as 'why is it hard for historians to reconstruct the lives of people in the Indus Valley civilisations?' would encourage a focus on disciplinary knowledge relating to sources and evidence.

The Historical Association summarised history teachers' approaches to teaching about sources and evidence as part of their 'What's the wisdom on' series.[footnote 109]

Pupils commonly hold misconceptions about sources and evidence. Effective curriculum design rests on clarity about sources and evidence and how these relate to historical enquiry and historical claims. Pupils must learn that historical sources provide evidence in relation to specific questions. One common misconception among pupils is that 'bias' in a source is necessarily bad and means that a source is not useful. This needs to be countered by showing pupils that a source can only be deemed useful or reliable for a particular question. Bias might render a source extremely useful for discerning attitudes, beliefs or assumptions.

During the 1980s, many history teachers noted the problem of work with sources falling into this trap, alongside other problems of work with sources becoming formulaic, decontextualised and unconnected with historical knowledge. In 1993, Lang produced a study which became a classic, showing the dangers of assuming that bias renders a source useless. The fact that, 20 years later, history teachers, such as Hinks, were still writing about the problem of pupils sliding into unwarranted assumptions about bias shows that this remains a significant challenge against which teachers need to be on their guard.[footnote 110] Historical approaches to sources and evidence cannot be reduced to simplistic heuristics (see 'Avoiding generic approaches').

Some common approaches to teaching about sources and evidence are very likely to develop misconceptions. For example, explicitly teaching pupils to spot bias without showing the value of that bias or to make judgements about the inherent reliability of a particular source is likely to encourage these misconceptions. Any teaching approach that encourages pupils to make 'claims greater than the evidence will bear' is likely to encourage misconceptions about the relationship between claims and evidence.[footnote 111] This might include forming judgements from short or decontextualised source extracts or from a limited range of source material.

Effective teaching about sources and evidence teaches pupils to use sources to establish evidence for a specific historical question. The breadth of pupils' knowledge can be developed by encounters with a wide range of sources and source types, including objects, oral histories and artefacts, as well as written sources.[footnote 112] If pupils are given the opportunities to study individual sources in depth and to investigate collections of sources, they are likely to develop a broader and more secure understanding of how historians approach sources and evidence. Brown and Massey shared an example of this approach using the 'Wipers Times' newspaper with pupils.[footnote 113]

It is important that pupils can study rich anthologies of sources so that they can see how historians use source collections. It is also important to avoid studying only small snippets of sources (such as those that might appear in GCSE examinations) and instead study longer extracts and whole texts.

Similarly, pupils need to study diverse non-textual sources such as music, oral tradition, folksong or photography. Chapman has noted that the study of archaeological remains can be particularly powerful in teaching pupils that sources need to be interrogated with particular questions in mind. Chapman has provided many carefully structured and practical accounts of the reasoning processes involved in building pupils' concepts of evidence.[footnote 114]

Pupils should study sources with a rich and detailed knowledge of the context in which they were produced (see 'The importance of secure substantive knowledge'). Ormond has emphasised the importance of this contextual knowledge in enabling pupils to analyse visual sources.[footnote 115] Additionally, Sellin explored the relationship between contextual knowledge and source analysis, and argued that pupils need detailed factual knowledge to answer questions about sources effectively.[footnote 116] This is one reason why pupils cannot develop their knowledge about sources and evidence through activities that focus on teaching generic approaches to sources, including using GCSE-style source questions in key stage 3. When drawing inferences from sources, pupils will draw on their knowledge of the context that a source refers to. If pupils lack contextual knowledge, then they may develop misconceptions about the period or sources being studied.

Again, accurate disciplinary understanding is most likely to be developed when teaching is underpinned by knowledge of how academic historians use sources to establish evidence for claims and to produce accounts. Massey offered one example of her Year 12 pupils directly engaging with the work of historian Orlando Figes to learn about his use of sources.[footnote 117]

In summary, across each key stage, teachers need to attend to the range of sources to which pupils are exposed, ensuring that these are diverse in type and historical setting. They need to attend to the enquiry questions used, from time to time, to focus pupils' attention on particular evidential problems. At key stage 3 and earlier, they should avoid practising GCSE questions on sources. Such questions and their mark schemes are not designed to build or measure progress in any type of disciplinary thinking, including thinking about evidence. The Historical Association provided a thorough overview of developments in teaching about sources and evidence. This included comments on research and practical approaches that history teachers have tried out and extensively debated for their value in shaping pupils' thinking in this area.[footnote 118]

Historical interpretations

The study of historical interpretations relates to an understanding of how and why different accounts of the past are constructed. A question such as 'why do historians disagree about the causes of the Cold War?' would focus on disciplinary knowledge relating to historical interpretations. Experience of working with a wide range of interpretations, and examining their construction, audience, purpose and form, can support pupils with other aspects of disciplinary thinking, for example by teaching them about the relationships between sources, evidence, context and interpretations. The Historical Association has summarised the evolution of history teachers' approaches to teaching about historical interpretations as part of their 'What's the wisdom on' series.[footnote 119]

Aspects of current work on interpretations have been influenced not only by historical scholarship but also by Lee and Shemilt's research into children's ideas and misconceptions about accounts.[footnote 120] Lee and Shemilt built models to show more and less sophisticated conceptions of accounts. These models point to some of the problems that occur when pupils treat accounts as fixed or given. These misconceptions can be tackled by steadily introducing pupils to a wide range of interpretations, by ensuring that they study diverse, real interpretations (such as specific works of scholarship, popular accounts, folk histories, museums and films) and by building lesson sequences that focus on the context, purpose and processes of construction in those real accounts.[footnote 121]

Too often, schools label an enquiry an ‘interpretations’ enquiry purely because they are referring to a debate or inviting pupils to reach a judgement (such as whether or not King John was a failure, or ‘how bloody was Mary?’). Such work does not match the national curriculum’s focus on a study of interpretations. Pupils are only helped to build their disciplinary knowledge in this area of interpretations when they study specific interpretations, when they focus on their construction and origin and when they gain detailed knowledge of that interpretation itself. They will be producing interpretations in the course of other work – such as building causal arguments or analysing source material. In order to tackle interpretations, pupils must go beyond this. They must study specific interpretations by others. This study will, of course, further inform their own interpretative work.

Moreover, to engage critically with historical interpretations, pupils require secure substantive knowledge of 2 contexts – the events or period described in the interpretation, and the context in which the interpretation was constructed.[footnote 122] For example, to learn about how interpretations of the British Empire have changed over time, pupils would need secure knowledge of the aspects of the British Empire that are being interpreted, and also of the contexts in which these later interpretations were produced.

Based on the above, high-quality history education may have the following features

- Curriculum design and teaching are informed by knowledge of the rich traditions and complex methods and assumptions of academic history.
- Teaching identifies and addresses potential misconceptions about historical enquiry.
- Teaching and curriculum design accurately represent the complexity of academic history and avoid simplistic or reductive approaches to disciplinary knowledge that might encourage misconceptions.
- The curriculum is designed to develop the depth and complexity of pupils’ disciplinary understanding over time through meaningful examples.
- The curriculum introduces pupils to diverse interpretations, not only academic ones, but also popular and public forms of history, so that pupils understand fully the complex social processes that cause certain stories to be told about the past and others not to be told.
- Substantive and disciplinary learning are carefully integrated, strengthening each other rather than being taught in isolation.

Ensuring the breadth of the cumulative curriculum offer

Summary

Curriculum design should ensure that pupils learn about a range of historical periods, fields, places and societies. Curriculum design should also ensure the diversity of people, groups and experiences that pupils study.

Breadth: studying a range of historical periods

The importance of secure chronological knowledge is outlined in 'Chronological knowledge'. Any gaps in pupils' mental timeline of the past might be a barrier to future learning or comprehension. This points to the importance of pupils developing secure knowledge of a range of historical periods. Given the mutually reinforcing nature of historical knowledge in overview and depth, pupils can benefit from a curriculum that allows them to study the past on different timescales.

Distinctive learning opportunities in particular periods

Different periods of time and contrasting settings can contribute to pupils' understanding of certain recurring concepts (such as nation, institution, stability, prosperity, resistance or organised religion) in distinctive ways. Each period of historical time might contribute something unique to pupils' understanding of the past. Pupils who do not study the medieval period, for example, will not have the opportunity to learn in such a germane context about concepts such as the institutional power of the church, the development of towns and civic organisation or the logistics of medieval warfare. Primary school pupils who do not gain a sufficiently thorough understanding of trade, government and empire in the earliest civilisations will be less well placed to make sense of these terms in later civilisations and societies and to discern important contrasts. This is true even when different contexts might seem superficially to offer the same opportunities to learn about a particular concept or idea. These concepts carry different meanings in different periods and for different people and groups.

Pupils also need thoroughness in curriculum content over time if they are to be given the best chance to understand new and more complex material. This requires coherence on various scales and across differing contexts and timescales. For example, the national curriculum requires pupils to learn how British institutions, politics and government changed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Year 9 pupils are much more likely to understand and take in new material on campaigns to reform British political or social systems and the significance of actual reforms carried out (such as extensions to the franchise or changes in nineteenth-century public health) if they already have secure knowledge of how Parliament and representation, as well as popular and oligarchical expectations and attitudes concerning poverty or health, evolved in earlier centuries.

Rata demonstrates how multi-faceted and rich content selection needs to be for pupils to be able to grasp a complex and contested term such as 'liberal democracy', requiring pupils to see it evolve as an idea, to see it working in its operations and to understand its variance across different contexts. The same would be true for phenomena such as empire, colonialism, civil rights or taxation systems. Selection of content and its coherence in memorable, diverse narratives can play a vital role in enabling later understanding.[footnote 123]

Some historical methods, approaches and sources are also peculiar to the study of particular periods. For example, a study of medieval Africa allows children to study and make inferences from types of architecture and artefact that they would not see in Europe.[footnote 124] A study of the Inka civilisation in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries allows for the study of oral tradition and a special kind of knotted cord known as a 'khipu'. These sources have distinctive roles in enabling historians and anthropologists to work together to understand south American history before the European colonial era.[footnote 125]

Breadth: studying a range of historical places and societies

In a 2016 survey of history teachers, a perceived lack of geographical breadth in schools' history curriculums was a common concern.[footnote 126] Young and Muller argued that a curriculum should take pupils beyond their everyday experience. In history, this is likely to include the study of a wide range of historical places and societies.[footnote 127] Moreover, the national curriculum refers not only to diverse pasts but to the importance of history in developing pupils' identities. In modern multi-

cultural Britain, pupils' community pasts are diverse and often blended and complex. Wilkinson's research into the experience of Muslim boys shows the importance of young people from Britain's Muslim communities studying both traditional British political stories and Islamic civilisations and Muslim migration histories.[footnote 128]This allows them to build rich, secure positive identities as British Muslims whose various communities have made vital contributions to world developments, for example, in science and mathematics and whose diverse migration stories reveal interactions between Islamic and Christian communities across centuries.

A geographically broad curriculum explores local histories and the regional diversity of the British Isles, as well as the study of other places and societies beyond the British Isles. It also develops pupils' understanding of the interconnectedness of developments in different places; for example, how trade relationships connected parts of the medieval world, and how developments in one part of the world affect another.

It also allows pupils to engage with the past on different geographical scales, from local and regional to national and global perspectives. Like balancing overview and depth, balancing geographical scales is a powerful curricular tool. Pupils can examine the rich context of a particular place and the broader historical context. Through this, they strengthen and deepen their understanding of developments on both scales.

Apps gives the example of how 'widening' the places and times pupils studied when learning about early modern England creates and strengthens pupils' frameworks of temporal and locational knowledge about the past.[footnote 129] Apps shows, for example, how she taught her pupils about the connections between Elizabethans and the wider world, through trade, religion, cultural interaction, conquest and slavery. Scholarship, such as that by Brotton, provides teachers with plenty of rich stories for helping pupils contextualise England and the English within broader narratives. Similarly, high-quality work on the Reformation in Year 7 will show pupils connections with German, Swiss and Scottish reform, discouraging limited narratives that construe 'the break with Rome' as an entirely English development and show its complex religious, political and social dimensions.[footnote 130]

Geographical breadth also enables pupils to understand widely differing perspectives on events and developments, giving greater clarity and context. This is one rationale behind the hugely popular 'Meanwhile, elsewhere…' project, which developed in response to the work of Kennett and Bailey-Watson.[footnote 131] This includes the perspective of different places and their people. Priggs emphasised the important tradition of history teachers theorising about how to teach pupils about diverse cultures and civilisations in their own right.[footnote 132]

Breadth: studying a range of historical fields of enquiry

The national curriculum makes it clear that pupils should learn about different fields of historical enquiry, such as political, economic and social history.[footnote 133]

Learning about each of these fields offers pupils unique opportunities to learn about particular events or circumstances, concepts and disciplinary approaches. Evidence that such learning is having an impact can be found in pupils' secure (precise, fluent and flexible) use of a growing vocabulary of general and technical terms. For example, pupils can learn a wide vocabulary of terms through studying political history, such as taxation, consent, representation, patronage, Parliament, representation, faction or factionalism. Political history narratives also form one common organising framework for knowledge of the past (through chronological arrangements of political or national events or through ways that periods are classified, such as 'Elizabethan England'). Knowledge of political developments and features in these periods gives pupils crucial context for studying other aspects of the past.

Similarly, studying social and cultural history may develop pupils' knowledge of a range of other, equally important, substantive areas such as poverty, household structures and practices, material culture, leisure and work. Social and cultural history are also likely to develop pupils' sense of 'period', which assists with chronological security. Economic, religious and military history also offer unique opportunities to develop understanding of recurring terms (from 'military strategy' to 'fiscal policy', from 'religious toleration' to 'religious devotional practices') as well as the expectation in pupils that these terms constantly shift their meaning in diverse contexts.

Some history teachers, surveyed in 2016, were generally supportive of pupils studying a wide range of fields.[footnote 134] Moreover, these diverse sub-fields of history sometimes illustrate contrasting modes of historical enquiry or accounting by historians. Therefore, both pupils' knowledge of this varied content and the diversity in related disciplinary practices are likely to encourage flexible thinking and readiness to ask better disciplinary questions as pupils progress through their history curriculum.[footnote 135] In key stage 2, pupils' study of diverse civilisations such as the Indus Valley civilisation and the Mesopotamian civilisation allows primary teachers to lay the foundations for pupils to grasp how contrasting content and contrasting physical remains have fostered contrasting archaeological techniques and different kinds of accounts by historians.

Recent calls for renewed attention on cultural history in schools highlight the lag between developments in academic history and history education in this area.[footnote 136] The work of cultural historians brings exciting new dimensions to the study of the past and strengthens pupils' understanding of the past and of academic history. Cultural history approaches might be particularly powerful in overcoming common misconceptions about the past. They support pupils to follow the work of historians in reconstructing the attitudes and values of past societies.[footnote 137] Harris found that pupils also commonly expressed a desire to study more social and cultural history.[footnote 138]

Methodological approaches and schools of historical thought

As part of the development of pupils' disciplinary knowledge, the curriculum may also consider broader methodological approaches and schools of historical thought. This might include analytical frameworks and historical models such as feminist or postmodern historiographies, or historiographical traditions and approaches from beyond Europe. Whitburn, Hussain and Mohamud explored ways of widening pupils experience of historiographical approaches in a sequence of lessons that drew on African oral history traditions.[footnote 139]

Diversity and representativeness

The national curriculum highlights the importance of teaching pupils about the diversity of the past: [footnote 140]

> History helps pupils to understand the complexity of people's lives, the process of change, the diversity of societies and relationships between different groups, as well as their own identity and the challenges of their time.

A number of history teachers have contributed to the ongoing debate about how to manifest these aims in a history curriculum. Priggs' review of history teachers' published work on diversity helpfully distinguishes between 2 separate but related aims which are covered in this statement and which have influenced the thinking of history teachers about content choices.[footnote 141] One common rationale that Priggs identifies is an emphasis on ensuring that the diversity of the past is represented in the curriculum content that all pupils learn. A number of history teachers have explored particular aspects of the curriculum through this lens, using a range of approaches to capture the complexity and diversity of the past.[footnote 142]

The work of history teachers also suggests that attending to diversity in curriculum design enhances pupils' understanding of the past. Ford and Kennett highlighted the importance of pupils learning about the richness of the past to overcome sweeping generalisations or misconceptions.[footnote 143] Individual stories, case studies and family or local histories enable pupils to identify, challenge and move beyond generalisations and to consider similarity and difference in experiences.

History teachers have shared many examples of how stories have enhanced pupils' understanding of historical periods.[footnote 144] Pupils' learning is likely to be most effective when these stories are connected to overview knowledge of the past (see 'Chronological knowledge'). It is also important that representations of individuals or groups avoid tokenism. Boyd, offering fresh theorisation about the place of women's history in the school curriculum, outlined and illustrated her own model for considering how representations of people and groups can be integrated into the curriculum in her account of integrating women's history into a study of Norman England.[footnote 145]

Recent work has looked at how the work of academic historians can support teachers to frame the complexity of the past. For example, Hibbert and Patel encouraged pupils to consider the relationship between historical methodologies and the construction of historical narratives using the work of historian Yasmin Khan.[footnote 146] Olivey emphasised how the work of academic historians helped to refine his enquiry planning and ensured nuanced representations of working-class people and their agency in nineteenth-century Britain.[footnote 147] Davies used the work of academic historians to shape the approach to teaching about transatlantic slavery. Broadening the disciplinary and temporal scope of pupils' enquiry supported them to develop a richer and more nuanced understanding of the period.[footnote 148]

Another rationale that Priggs highlights from the work of history teachers relates curriculum content to pupils' identity and experiences. In this view, curriculum content should also be designed so that pupils 'see themselves' in their history curriculum. Traille emphasised how curriculum content and teaching can influence pupils' sense of belonging and their motivation. From a qualitative research study into the experiences of Black pupils whose only experience of Black history was the transatlantic slave trade, Traille reported that these pupils experienced feelings of alienation and apathy.[footnote 149] The Royal Historical Society has also provided evidence that pupils are less likely to pursue history as a school subject beyond compulsory study if they feel that the content of the curriculum is narrow or omits or under-represents groups with which they identify.[footnote 150] However, curriculum designers should also be careful to avoid unintentionally narrowing the curriculum based on any pre-conceived ideas of what certain groups of children might need, which could lead to a narrow curriculum.[footnote 151] Furthermore, Traille has argued for the important role of the history curriculum in supporting pupils to understand their shared past.[footnote 152]

Based on the above, high-quality history education may have the following features

- The curriculum develops pupils' understanding of a range of historical time periods. This is not done by rushing through them in outline, but through careful interplay of depth and overview studies.
- Pupils study the past through a range of different timescales, including in overview and depth.
- Pupils learn about a wide range of places, societies and cultures in the past.
- Pupils build a coherent and thorough knowledge of British history. Studies of each time period are informed and strengthened by multiple reference points in other time periods.

- Pupils learn about a range of fields of historical enquiry, for example social, political, economic and cultural history.
- Disciplinary learning is responsive to and consistent with significant shifts in historical scholarship.
- The curriculum and teaching reflect the complexity and diversity of the past and explore a range of different individual and group experiences.
- Curriculum designers avoid negative representations of groups by considering the cumulative representation of groups across the curriculum.
- Curriculum designers avoid unintentionally narrowing the curriculum based on any pre-conceived ideas of what certain groups of children might need.
- The curriculum prepares pupils for life in modern Britain by developing pupils' understanding of the role, contribution and importance of different groups of people.
- The curriculum supports pupils to contextualise their own experience and identity within the history of their local community, Britain and the world.

Curriculum design at different stages of education

Summary

The EIF applies to education at all stages, from the early years to key stage 5. Similarly, the findings in this review are relevant to history education at all stages. However, this section looks briefly at how these findings might be viewed in the context of particular stages of pupils' education.

Developing early historical knowledge

Children are born with amazing capacities to learn. Children will begin to build knowledge of important concepts and ideas from a young age, and will continue to build on these foundations throughout their education. Early teaching should allow children to encounter important concepts and ideas in an age-appropriate way.

Children learn about the past throughout their education, and their understanding of new material about the past will be profoundly influenced by both their general vocabulary and their knowledge of historical concepts (see 'Progress through substantive concepts').[footnote 153] This suggests that an effective curriculum for younger children might develop their knowledge of a few concepts that are particularly important in their future learning in history. Children do not initially need comprehensive or complex knowledge of concepts. Early familiarity with these concepts will allow children to access more demanding content in future.[footnote 154]

Given how important meaningful examples are in supporting learning of new material (see 'Learning through meaningful examples and repeated encounters'), it is likely that connecting new concepts to a familiar context (such as family or local history) will support children's early development of concept knowledge, a view shared by Harnett.[footnote 155] The power of stories to support children to access unfamiliar content is also well established. This might include fictional stories that can develop knowledge of concepts (such as 'monarch' or 'government') even when these are not tied to specific historical contexts.[footnote 156] As in later stages, individual stories and rich hinterland content may establish a more meaningful context for children to learn new material, something that Townsend has explored in key stage 1.[footnote 157]

Effective teaching at this stage can also begin to develop children's chronological knowledge. Concepts such as 'the past' are highly abstract for young children. As such, knowledge of chronological concepts must be developed through repeated encounters with meaningful examples in familiar contexts.[footnote 158] Again, important progress can be made by children developing early schemata for concepts such as 'past' or 'ancient' and knowledge of some chronological markers, as this knowledge will be highly generative in future (see 'Chronological knowledge').[footnote 159]

History at key stages 2 and 3

From key stage 2, pupils should experience a broad history curriculum. The national curriculum for history outlines the breadth of historical knowledge pupils might learn across key stages 2 and 3.[footnote 160] The outlined content is consistent with many of the principles explored above. However, even in maintained schools, which follow the national curriculum, curriculum designers and teachers have significant control over the curriculum that is taught to pupils. This includes:

- the depth of historical detail studied by pupils
- the extent to which teaching and the curriculum develop coherent narratives for pupils
- the way in which content is framed

Pupils from key stage 2 will also begin to learn disciplinary knowledge. Although the national curriculum requires pupils to learn about the second-order concepts, it does not specify how these should be approached or what pupils should know at the end of key stage 2. Curriculum designers and teachers need to think carefully about the principles outlined in 'Securing progression in disciplinary knowledge' in the context of primary-age pupils, including:

- the likelihood of pupil misconceptions
- the need for secure substantive knowledge
- the importance of pupils developing disciplinary knowledge through specific, meaningful examples that represent academic history accurately

Ultimately, the history curriculum should ensure that pupils progress towards constructing their own historical arguments and accounts. However, the extent of pupils' prior knowledge needs to be taken into account so that disciplinary knowledge can build meaningfully on what pupils already know. This may mean that younger pupils will benefit from specific examples of how historians investigate the past and construct accounts. Teachers should carefully support pupils when they construct their own historical arguments, as doing this with limited knowledge can lead to misconceptions.

Where primary schools have a thematic or topic-based structure, it is important that history-specific curriculum goals are given appropriate emphasis within this. This is likely to involve planning for, and assessing, pupils' historical knowledge. To develop disciplinary knowledge, pupils need opportunities to learn about the past through the lens of the discipline. This could include building knowledge towards answering carefully designed enquiry questions that reflect the kinds of questions historians ask and so introduce pupils to disciplinary traditions.

At key stage 3, pupils may benefit from more time to study history. This, combined with their prior knowledge, will enable them to learn and understand progressively greater complexity both in the past itself and in changing traditions of historical enquiry.

History at GCSE and A level

Courses of study at GCSE or A level will follow examination board guidance, which specifies content to be taught in some detail. Despite this, curriculum designers and history teachers continue to have significant control over their curriculum. For example, while schools cannot influence the breadth of

content stipulated on an examination specification, they can greatly influence the breadth of the curriculum taught to pupils through decisions about the way this content is taught and contextualised.

Pupils' capacity to learn, and to construct their own historical arguments, will continue to depend in large part on the range, security and sophistication of their historical knowledge (see 'Knowledge connects in unseen, complex and unpredictable ways').

It is likely that pupils will be best prepared for the demands of GCSE and A-level study by beginning these courses with a wide-ranging and secure knowledge of the past.[footnote 161] Because of how knowledge interacts in history, this is likely to be more effective than narrow or direct preparation for examination requirements in earlier stages. It also ensures that the curriculum is appropriately broad.

Effective teaching at GCSE and A level prioritises developing wide-ranging and secure knowledge for all pupils, which they can readily deploy to answer historical questions. It is likely to place greater emphasis on this than on pupils' knowledge of examination practice or question types. Focusing too much on examination preparation is likely to narrow a school's curriculum.

As pupils advance in their study of history, they will develop increasingly wide-ranging and secure knowledge of the past. This enables pupils to engage with greater complexity in their learning, including in their development of disciplinary knowledge. However, this may require careful curriculum design to frame specified content in ways that enable pupils to develop their disciplinary knowledge. Foster and Goudie gave an example of how they crafted enquiry questions for a GCSE unit on Nazi Germany with reference to the work of academic historians.[footnote 162]

The range and security of A-level students' existing knowledge, and the depth and security of their knowledge of historical contexts studied at A level, are likely to enable these pupils to develop sophisticated disciplinary knowledge. This may include explicit teaching about the features and conventions of historical writing and the nature of historical argument combined with opportunities to read a range of genuine academic scholarship. A number of history teachers have shared approaches to teaching A-level students through the use of historical scholarship.[footnote 163]

Based on the above, high-quality history education may have the following features

- Curriculum design and teaching take careful account of pupils' existing knowledge.
- Pupils are given the opportunity to build the range, depth and security of their knowledge over time, so that they can increasingly make sense of complex material.
- Teachers and curriculum designers ensure that teaching for external examinations continues to develop the range, depth and complexity of pupils' substantive and disciplinary knowledge.
- Curriculum design and teaching ultimately enable pupils to construct their own historical accounts and arguments.
- Curriculum design and teaching identify and address pupils' misconceptions, including misconceptions about the discipline of history.

Effective teaching in history

Summary

Effective teaching ensures that pupils retain knowledge they have learned in the long term. This is supported by opportunities to revisit and practise with prior knowledge. Pupils are more likely to retain knowledge when they have engaged analytically with the content they study. Teachers can support learning through clear exposition, which takes into account what pupils already know and understand.

Teaching approaches and activities

Disciplinary knowledge in history is highly distinctive and is likely to require distinctive teaching approaches, as summarised in 'Securing progression in disciplinary knowledge'.

However, wider educational research offers a strong basis for a range of effective teaching approaches in history. These are often reflected in the published work of history teachers.

Teaching for memory

Evidence suggests that teachers can support pupils' long-term learning by drawing attention to particularly important terms and expressions, precise phenomena and broader frameworks in their teaching.[footnote 164] Teachers may need to require pupils to repeat challenging terms and practise them repeatedly with multiple variations so that pupils become confident and flexible in their use of these. Practising these terms will also help pupils to secure their mental frameworks of chronology or location. This thoroughness, combined with careful curriculum decisions about prioritising content, is likely to be effective in ensuring that all pupils are included in subsequent learning. New material and interesting debates will be more accessible and meaningful if no pupils are struggling with a term such as consensus or with recalling the date of the Great Reform Act.

Pupils are also more likely to remember content that they have engaged with analytically.[footnote 165] In history terms, this would seem to suggest that the approaches to develop pupils' disciplinary knowledge suggested above are also likely to secure pupils' substantive knowledge of the past. Recalling previously taught content (retrieval practice) and revisiting content in lessons (spaced practice) have also been shown to be effective in securing pupils' knowledge over time.[footnote 166] Donaghy suggested that the use of regular low-stakes testing improved his Year 10 pupils' retention of knowledge in history.[footnote 167]

Clear exposition that considers pupils' prior knowledge

Teachers' exposition is likely to be most effective when it is clear and carefully designed to account for pupils' existing knowledge.[footnote 168] Given the complex relationship between knowledge and comprehension in history (see 'Knowledge connects in unseen, complex and unpredictable ways'), it may be difficult for teachers to consider all the potential barriers to comprehension for pupils.

This may suggest the importance of securing particularly generative knowledge for all pupils (see 'Prioritising content in the curriculum') to support comprehension, as well as general efforts to reduce the use of vocabulary and concepts that are unfamiliar to pupils. However, this must be balanced by an awareness of the particular role of background material in history (see 'The role of background content in developing pupils' knowledge and understanding') and the need to provide opportunities for incidental learning of concepts (see 'Balancing incidental and explicit learning of substantive concepts').

Narrative and story

As discussed above, storytelling is a powerful vehicle for learning.[footnote 169] It is likely that historical stories are an effective way of teaching new content in history. Stories are likely to be particularly effective when teachers draw pupils' attention to particularly important content within them.

Developing pupils' knowledge of historical contexts

Pupils' learning within a topic is heavily supported by their knowledge of the historical context. Dawson highlighted the importance of pupils' 'sense of period' and Hill suggested approaches to 'world-building' to develop a rich knowledge of past places and societies. Both authors share a range of approaches to developing pupils' knowledge of a historical context, including the use of visuals, maps and aspects of material culture.[footnote 170]

Teaching chronological knowledge

Studying broader developments or overviews can support pupils to connect events together and secure coherent narratives of the past (see 'Chronological knowledge'). Using timelines in class may support pupils to organise their knowledge of events and periods, particularly when they connect elements of pupils' prior knowledge, secure coherent overviews or narratives and enable pupils to 'orientate' their knowledge in time through chronological markers or period characteristics.[footnote 171]

Reading extended texts

Extended texts are likely to be a common feature of history lessons. Summaries of texts might be a useful tool for contextualising reading and supporting comprehension. Background knowledge is likely to be a major influence on pupils' capacity to read and understand a text and so using texts effectively will depend on pupils' knowledge.[footnote 172] This knowledge might include general vocabulary, knowledge of history-specific content and also knowledge of disciplinary conventions, including historical writing genres.

To support pupils in reading the work of academic historians, Foster emphasises the importance of pupils' disciplinary knowledge, for example pupils' knowledge of these texts as a mode of historical argument.[footnote 173] A number of history teachers have demonstrated ways in which their own secondary pupils have benefited from regular opportunities to read the work of historians.[footnote 174]

Supporting pupils in history, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities

There is a lack of specific research on pupils with special educational needs and/or disability (SEND) and history education. However, the findings above provide some suggestions regarding effective support for pupils with SEND. Curriculum designers should take these into consideration alongside their knowledge of the individual needs of pupils.

All pupils are entitled to a broad history curriculum. Any adaptations made to support pupils' learning in history usually should not be to the overall curriculum content but rather to how the content is taught. In the case of pupils with the most complex learning needs, there may be occasions when it is appropriate to modify the curriculum. However, this will be the exception.

Ensuring that all pupils otherwise encounter the same content is particularly important given the role that hinterland information has in facilitating learning in history (see 'The role of background content in developing pupils' knowledge and understanding'). This suggests that significantly reducing content or complexity for some pupils might in fact limit their access to content or limit their ability to

learn. It is likely that pupils will benefit most from support that combines extra attention to securing the most generative knowledge (see 'Prioritising content in the curriculum'), while ensuring that all pupils are able to learn about events and periods in a rich context and through meaningful examples.

Based on the above, high-quality history education may have the following features

- Teaching draws attention to important content and terms, and frequently revisits these and builds in regular retrieval opportunities. This supports the secure retention that will unlock rapid later recognition of these terms.
- Exposition is clear and builds on pupils' prior knowledge.
- Teaching uses narrative, story and rich historical contexts to support learning of new material.
- Curriculum design and teaching are adapted appropriately to the needs of pupils.
- Adaptations for pupils with SEND are carefully considered and take into account the importance of background information in learning.

Assessment in history

Summary

Using a range of assessment approaches will most likely ensure that assessment captures the range of knowledge that pupils need. It will also address the various purposes of assessment in history. Formative assessment should allow teachers to draw valid inferences about what pupils know.

Formative assessment

Given the importance of pupils' knowledge in enabling progress, formative assessment is likely to be most effective when it prioritises assessing the range and security of pupils' historical knowledge.

As well as knowledge tests, assessment approaches might include assessing pupils' knowledge of important concepts or important chronological knowledge. Carr and Counsell gave examples from their practice of using timelines to assess pupils' chronological knowledge.[footnote 175] Formative assessment might also be informal and ad hoc, for example identifying misconceptions in a pupil's response. Regular low-stakes assessment may also result in pupils developing more secure knowledge through the 'testing effect'.[footnote 176]

Assessment design requires decisions about what content to prioritise. Assessment is most likely to be impactful when it focuses on important content – content that is highly generative or can most significantly limit progress when pupils lack security (see 'Prioritising content in the curriculum'). This might include knowledge of important substantive concepts and chronological knowledge, as well as the 'fingertip' knowledge required in a particular topic.[footnote 177] Brown and Burnham shared examples of how they designed assessments to suit these different purposes.[footnote 178]

To be effective, formative assessment must allow teachers to draw valid inferences about pupils' knowledge that they can act on. Formative assessment is effective when teachers subsequently address gaps or misconceptions that the assessment identified.[footnote 179] These inferences are

clearer when assessment checks knowledge of specific components and allows teachers to identify specific misconceptions or knowledge gaps.

External examinations, such as GCSEs, are summative assessments designed to assess pupils' broad knowledge at a particular moment in their study. They do not provide a good model for formative assessment. They are not designed to allow teachers to identify specific gaps in pupils' knowledge nor to show broadening understanding in disciplinary ideas such as evidence or various forms of historical argument.

Summative assessment

Summative assessment identifies whether specific curriculum goals have been achieved. Effective assessment is carefully designed to avoid distorting the curriculum through a pressure to 'teach to the test'. This is important for 2 reasons:

- First, a curriculum must attend to a range of broad aims, only some of which can be easily assessed. As such, 'teaching to the test' might encourage curriculum narrowing by distracting from, or even disincentivising, careful attention to these broader aims.
- Second, pupils' knowledge often manifests indirectly (see 'Knowledge connects in unseen, complex and unpredictable ways'). Pupils' performance in a summative examination will be the result of complex layers of knowledge developed cumulatively across many years of study. A narrow focus on examination content in earlier stages of learning is likely to be self-defeating, as it distracts from the importance of this wider knowledge and therefore limits pupils' capacity to learn and remember later content.

For the reasons above, it is likely that an undue focus on preparation for GCSE examination questions in key stage 3 study will result in a lower-quality curriculum that does not develop the breadth of knowledge that pupils need either for these examinations or to meet wider aims, such as those outlined in the national curriculum for history.[footnote 180]

Assessing disciplinary knowledge

Teachers can assess a fair amount of disciplinary knowledge through the same approaches they use to assess substantive knowledge. They might assess, for example, pupils' knowledge of sources of evidence used by historians for a particular enquiry or their knowledge of particular historical interpretations.

Pupils' disciplinary knowledge can also be assessed by their response to outcome tasks, such as writing an essay in response to a historical question. These tasks are a powerful learning tool: they require pupils to connect and transform knowledge to form arguments. This develops pupils' substantive knowledge of a period but also their disciplinary knowledge of how arguments are constructed and communicated.

However, if these tasks are used as a form of assessment, then it must be recognised that they are a very complex composite – that is, they draw, directly and indirectly, on pupils' knowledge of a very wide range of components (see 'Knowledge connects in unseen, complex and unpredictable ways'). It can be very difficult, for example, to unpick the relative role of disciplinary knowledge, substantive knowledge of the immediate topic and wider contextual knowledge in the quality of a pupils' response. This makes it much more difficult to draw valid inferences from these types of assessment. As a result, these assessments might be most effective when balanced with a range of other assessment approaches.

Appreciating the role of these related 'layers of knowledge' can also ensure that teaching does not encourage misconceptions by suggesting a generic approach to historical enquiry or argument. All historical enquiry is rooted in a specific historical context (see 'The interplay between disciplinary and substantive knowledge'). Effective feedback is likely to recognise the crucial role of substantive knowledge of the specific context or topic in pupils' capacity to construct historical arguments about that topic. This might be encouraged through the use of topic-specific mark schemes and feedback. These reflect the relationship between disciplinary knowledge and knowledge of the specific substantive context. Fordham and Brown and Burnham argued for the use of topic-specific mark schemes and shared examples of how they designed these for their own enquiries.[footnote 181]

Formulaic or generic 'skills ladders' or assessment criteria do not capture the important interplay between these different layers of knowledge. Because of this, their use may encourage misconceptions or make it more difficult for teachers to identify important gaps in pupils' knowledge.

Based on the above, high-quality history education may have the following features

- Formative assessments are designed to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge of specific content and concepts.
- Teachers draw valid inferences from formative assessment and can therefore meaningfully identify and address gaps in pupils' knowledge.
- Curriculum design and teaching are not distorted by 'teaching to the test' but rather focus on developing the range, depth and security of pupils' knowledge.
- A range of different assessment approaches are used together to assess pupils' knowledge.
- Mark schemes and feedback are topic-specific and recognise the interplay between different layers of knowledge in pupil outcomes.

Systems at subject/school level

Research highlights a small number of important school- or subject-level features that are likely to influence the quality of education in history.

First, it is clear that adequate curriculum time is a prerequisite for the delivery of a broad history curriculum. Ofsted's previous research has highlighted the negative impact of limited curriculum time on the quality of the history curriculum in schools.[footnote 182] Limited curriculum time may also influence the likelihood of pupils opting to study GCSE beyond the age of 14.[footnote 183]

Ofsted's previous research also identified the distorting effects of inappropriate whole-school systems on subject-level curriculums.[footnote 184] These might include progression models, teaching approaches or assessment systems that distort or undermine subject-specific approaches. This distortion is more likely when generic models are applied uncritically across subjects. This suggests that greater autonomy for subject leaders to design or adapt these is likely to support a higher quality of education.[footnote 185] At the same time, senior leaders have an important role in assuring themselves of the quality and breadth of the history curriculum in their schools. Counsell argued that senior leaders' understanding of the distinctiveness of progression in history is likely to affect the quality of this assurance.[footnote 186]

A crucial factor in the quality of history education that can be influenced at the school and subject level is the knowledge of curriculum designers and teachers.[footnote 187] This consists of:

- content knowledge (knowledge of history)
- pedagogical content knowledge (knowledge of approaches to teaching history)

Curriculum designers who lack adequate knowledge may struggle to balance the complex rationales for content selection and emphasis. They may also lack the extensive knowledge they need to design powerful historical enquiries. Byrom and Riley and Fordham have argued for the importance of rigorous and collegiate design of enquiries.[footnote 188] In some cases, decisions about curriculum content can be influenced by narrow rationales, such as pupils' attitudes to topics, teachers' subject knowledge and interests, and the content requirements of later external examinations. (This is not a uniquely English problem. Similar themes have been identified across English and New Zealand history curriculums and in curriculums in Scottish schools.[footnote 189]) These rationales may result in a school curriculum that fails to appropriately blend the wide-ranging criteria of a quality history education.

Both the quality and quantity of professional development are likely to have a significant impact on the quality of education, particularly when professional development pays attention to subject distinctiveness and develops both content and content pedagogical knowledge.[footnote 190] History teachers in primary schools, surveyed in 2019, commented on a lack of high-quality subject-specific training.[footnote 191] High-quality resources, such as detailed curriculum plans, teaching resources or textbooks, may support the quality of education. These may be particularly important to support teachers who have gaps in their subject knowledge.

Based on the above, high-quality history education may have the following features

- Adequate curriculum time is given to history to enable teachers to deliver a broad history curriculum that develops secure knowledge for pupils.
- Senior leaders assure themselves of the quality and breadth of the history curriculum. They understand how pupils progress in history, which allows them to support and challenge decisions at a subject level.
- Leaders are aware of and mitigate against the potential downsides of whole-school policies and their impact on the ability of teachers and departments to deliver a high-quality history education.
- Teachers and curriculum designers have secure and wide-ranging knowledge of the past, of academic history and of how to teach history to pupils. This is likely to be supported by high-quality, subject-specific professional development.

Conclusion

Effective curriculum design and teaching require balancing a number of competing priorities. What emerge clearly from this review are the scale and complexity of this task for the individual teacher, leader or school.

However, schools are not islands. Curriculum design in individual schools is supported by the research, theory and experience of academics, tutors and practising history teachers.

This review has highlighted the depth and sophistication of the existing and ongoing discourse of these professionals. Much of this thinking is readily available to teachers and curriculum designers due to the work of subject associations, the wide range of high-quality subject conferences and the generosity of many professionals across a range of platforms. This thinking will help to shape the way we look at subject education in schools in preparation for our forthcoming subject report. We hope that this research review may also draw attention to the richness of thinking among history educational professionals and offer further ideas, challenge and support to all those who are engaged in the crucial work of building pupils' knowledge and love of history.

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