

Building a better past: plans to reform the curriculum

David Nicholls summarises some of the problems facing history education and offers a commentary on various cases for reform. He argues that we need to look at provision holistically from 5 to 21 and urges collaboration across phases and sectors. By working more closely together, the history community as a whole – academic historians, school history teachers, history education academics, the heritage sector—could also do more to trumpet the value of an historical education to those who misunderstand its essential educative role. Such collaboration is essential if we are to ensure that the history community is able to set its own agenda and to influence government-initiated reform.

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Reform of the school history curriculum is once again on the agenda and is being taken forward on several fronts. Shortly before Christmas 2005, the body responsible for overseeing the schools' curriculum, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), published a report on the status of the subject that prompted media criticism of the over-emphasis in the post-14 curriculum on the Nazis and the Tudors. Moreover, politicians of both left and right, seizing on history as the solvent for the ills of society post 7/7, are pressing for change. What, then, are the main problems that the various proponents of reform have identified and what is being done to address them?

Summary of problems¹

The QCA has some worrying things to say about the health of history in our schools that point to a very uncertain future for it: 'In many primary and secondary schools, the subject is playing an increasingly marginal role ... and is often given low priority in school development plans. One reason may be a perception that it has only limited relevance to many pupils' future working lives.'² The report goes on to flesh out in some detail the problems that are bedevilling history at both primary and secondary levels.

Primary

On average, about 4% of curriculum time at primary school is allocated to history, but this can range from 90 minutes per week at best to just 30 minutes in some schools. Only geography is given lower priority in the overall curriculum. More than half of all schools surveyed taught history in blocks of time (alternating with geography) rather than weekly, possibly adversely influencing pupils' understanding of the subject. More time is devoted to history where it is incorporated in the literacy strategy but this approach is by no means universal. According to Ofsted (the government office responsible for monitoring standards in school education) 'primary history continues to disappoint, with lower achievement and weaker teaching than in most subjects.'³ Content knowledge is prioritised to the detriment of skills, but even so, knowledge by the end of primary school is often patchy. Formal assessment of pupils' progress is frequently lacking. This is exacerbated in many cases by a deficiency in initial teacher training and continuing professional development opportunities for primary teachers, most of whom are non-specialists. Achievement is now good or better in just under half our primary schools; it is unsatisfactory in one school in 20. There has been a steady improvement since 1998, but it is still lower than in most other subjects in the

primary curriculum. Much hinges on the effectiveness of the subject coordinator, who is often given insufficient time and resources to do the job properly. Planning across the key stages (which specify teaching and assessment requirements for different age groups) is variable with transition between them often not accomplished effectively. Despite good links between some secondary schools and their feeder primaries, in many cases there is little contact, with the result that there is content overlap between the two providers.

Secondary

Key Stage 3, governing the content of the curriculum between ages 11 to 14, is frequently seen as exemplary in terms of the quality and effectiveness of history teaching. Nevertheless, both Ofsted and QCA have pointed to some serious shortcomings. Pupils often fail to acquire a good overview as they progress through Key Stage 3. The focus on developing in-depth knowledge of specific topics is at the expense of making explicit links between the different periods studied and of developing chronological understanding. The quality of assessment is inconsistent: the Ofsted 2002/03 report said that procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress were unsatisfactory in 27% of schools and poor in a further 12%. In these cases departmental assessment policies are usually ineffective, with assessment data having little impact on curriculum planning, and with pupils receiving little or no feedback on how to improve. The use of information technology (IT), reported as 'ineffective' in 2004, is becoming more widespread, though a shortage of computers has been a major obstacle here. British history is given a disproportionate amount of curricular time to the neglect of imperial and world history, which tends to fizzle out around 1945, and of Europe, apart from the Nazis. A significant minority of schools is still not engaging with local history (35.5%) or with black and multi-ethnic history. Many teachers are finding teaching historical interpretation difficult and some do not stretch sufficiently their gifted and talented pupils. Lastly, the time allocated to history continues to be squeezed and is the most commonly cited reason for difficulty in covering the programme of study.

A survey carried out by Terry Haydn on behalf of QCA found that many pupils (perhaps over 40%) arrive at secondary school with negative perceptions of history and they quickly forget much of what they have learned. 68.7% described it as 'not very useful' (though they still ranked it sixth for usefulness, ahead of geography and languages). A clear majority, however, found it enjoyable at Key Stage 3 and about half had an interest in history outside the classroom. Research has shown that pupils invariably have little understanding of why they might benefit from studying history. Their perception that GCSE history is dominated by written work is a major deterrent to their taking the subject further, even when they have enjoyed it at Key Stage 3. Those who dislike history most think it boring and not useful in terms of future employment.⁴

At 14-19, the dominance of the Tudors and twentieth-century dictatorships has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished. In 2003, 58% of all candidates entered for GCSE history took a modern world history specification, a rise of 9% on the previous year. The quality of assessment has also come in for criticism, notably the failure to examine

historical interpretation and source evaluation properly; likewise the decline of opportunities, especially at GCSE, for more able candidates to display the full range of their narrative skills. The unitisation of A-level courses with the introduction of the Advanced Subsidiary qualification in 2000 fragmented the overall learning experience for pupils and reduced the time for wider reading and reflection, leading to 'a less thoughtful, less intellectual approach ... which fails to provide strong foundations for undergraduate study'.⁵ This, elsewhere, has been called a 'Yo Sushi' experience of historical understanding (see Figure 1).⁶ As with Key Stage 3, too little attention is given to the black and multi-ethnic aspects of British history. Although there are some high-quality continuing professional development (CPD) courses in history, provision varies across local authorities and many teachers do not have access to them. Finally, there are very few formal links between university history departments and schools, to the mutual detriment of both and of progression from secondary to higher education.

Progress to date

History teachers have a long tradition of working to improve the curriculum and, indeed, have been proactive in addressing the issues raised by QCA. In September 2002, the Historical Association (HA) organised the Past Forward conference to debate the future of the subject. It recommended that there should be:

- an entitlement to history for all pupils in the 14-19 curriculum;
- improved progression in history and better strategies for ensuring coherence and continuity, not least by reforming the current assessment regime which was strangling progression from Key Stage 3;
- closer links between schools and universities;
- improved opportunities for subject-focussed CPD;
- improvements in the provision of print and electronic resources.⁷

These recommendations were summarised in a policy document that formed the basis for meetings with the Education Secretary, Charles Clarke. Several concessions resulted. The first was the development of a 'Hybrid' GCSE aimed at, but not confined to, less academic pupils and incorporating practical and vocationally-related modules with innovative approaches to teaching and assessment based around museums, heritage sites and the media. It was piloted in 2006 in about fifty schools and colleges. It is too soon to draw any firm conclusions but the prospect of engaging more pupils with history through the hybrid programme seems promising. Secondly, the Education Department agreed to introduce a humanities entitlement for fourteen-to-sixteen year olds, which means that schools are now obliged to make available to them at least one course in humanities. Finally, it also agreed to part-fund the Historical Association to investigate the current state of school history, fourteen to nineteen, and make recommendations about its future. The HA embarked on a wide-ranging consultation exercise in January 2004, involving not just schools but universities and professional bodies.

The subsequent report mostly echoed the recommendations of the Past Forward Conference but also included some new ones.⁸ In particular, it advocated broader specifications at GCSE and AS/A2 levels to provide wider choice and avoid over-repetition of particular topics with, instead, greater prominence given to diversity and to local, national, European and global history. The criteria for examinations should be amended to reward better those who could make links between and across areas of content, including areas outside the examined course, and the current practice of examining short extracts of primary materials replaced with more meaningful exercises. One teacher felt that 'death by sources' still dominated public examination assessment to the extent that it even thwarted efforts to transform evidential work within ordinary teaching. The report pointed to the inadequate handling of conflicting historical interpretations at GCSE and A-level. It recommended research into how narrative might best be taught in order to engage students and raise standards and into the avoidance of overlaps in areas of competencies and content between history and other subjects and Key Skills.

Even before the report had been published, an informal advisory group had been convened by Gordon Marsden to consider the issues that were emerging, and it has continued in existence to explore ways of working through the Education Department to implement the report's recommendations. At the same time, momentum for reform was coming from coordinated activities and debates on the part of the leading professional historical organisations. A series of conferences (beginning in February 2005) has been organised under the auspices of one of these, the Institute of Historical Research (IHR), to bring together history enthusiasts from whatever background—school, university, media, museums and heritage etc—to promote the reform agenda.

The arguments developed by the advisory group and the elements of its recommendations put to education ministers and advisers include:

- Recognition of the central importance of subject-specific CPD as the necessary prerequisite for bringing about change in the ways history is currently taught, not just in schools but in universities as well. This could be facilitated for schools through their local university. Teachers' TV, the recently-established television channel targeted at schoolteachers, could also be used to deliver aspects of CPD such as knowledge updating.
- The presentation of awards to history teachers at a high profile 'Oscars' ceremony, pulling together existing prizes and introducing new ones to encourage and recognise activity not presently rewarded, such as contributions to the public understanding of history, best use of heritage, visual and museum sources, outreach or social inclusion, enterprising use of oral history or IT.
- Curriculum reform to include the reduction in A-level modules and more systematic teaching of British history but defined widely to include issues such as identity, citizenship and imperialism and its legacy.
- The piloting of projects organised through universities on important elements of the reform agenda such as the shape of a progressive curriculum from 3-19; dissemination of existing, or development of new, online materials; ways of teaching difficult topics like slavery or the Holocaust; the relationship between different parts of the curriculum, such as citizenship and history in schools and history and languages in universities.⁹

Meanwhile, QCA has published materials to assist with teaching history. The *Innovating with history* website (www.qca.org.uk/history/innovating), launched in autumn 2004,

Figure 1: 'Yo Sushi' history

'The structuring of history courses around an often unconnected set of narrowly drawn modules ... risks offering a "Yo Sushi" experience of historical understanding – with students gobbling up titbits as they come round on the module conveyor belt but able to make little connection to the broader picture once the dishes have done the rounds.'

Gordon Marsden MP.

aims to help primary and secondary history teachers to design courses that will raise standards by engaging pupils, improve progression and ensure history contributes more fully to wider curriculum goals. It includes examples of innovative and effective projects and advice on issues relating to historical interpretations. Guidance on developing pupils' chronological understanding at Key Stage 3 was published jointly with the Schools History Project in December 2004. Other materials can be found on the QCA's *14-19 learning* website.¹⁰

There has therefore probably never been a more propitious time for achieving improvements in the teaching of history. Britain's leading historical societies have for the moment the ears of ministers. But this may be only temporary and it is vital therefore to seize the day.

What is to be done?

There has undoubtedly been advancement in the last five years towards the reforms demanded by government agencies and by the history education community itself. The hybrid GCSE and the 14-19 humanities entitlement go some, if only a small, way to countering the deleterious effect of history's optionality at GCSE. The change to the A-level specifications from September 2007 to require four instead of six modules represents some progress away from a fragmentary to a more in-depth approach.¹¹ There is a

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healthy dialogue at last across the secondary and higher education sectors. There is the prospect of funding for CPD and for projects to improve online delivery and the teaching of difficult topics, to establish prizes to encourage and reward good and innovative teaching, and to disseminate best practice. This last has also been encouraged by the QCA's production of materials to assist teachers.

But, in truth, the reforms introduced thus far are very small beer when set against the more fundamental changes that are needed to refine the quality of history education. The humanities entitlement, for example, is of little value so long as pupils are not required to take it. There is concern among teachers at the restricted timescale for the introduction of the new A-level specifications. Some of the proposals, such as greater opportunity for CPD, are as yet aspirational and far from realisation in any systematic way throughout history teaching from primary to higher education. Indeed, there is the very real problem of how to offer CPD, especially in the face of the widening gap between universities and schools and the shrinkage in qualified suppliers (teacher-trainers, local authority advisers, education inspectors etc.) Above all, much more progress needs to be made with regard to curriculum content, issues of continuity, assessment, and skills.

Curriculum content

The limited amount of exposure that the majority of our children have to the teaching of history remains a serious shortcoming. It is virtually impossible to teach 'Our Island

Story', let alone the history of the rest of the world, in any meaningful way in the current national curriculum. The ambition to make history compulsory to age 16, as elsewhere in Europe is, sadly, probably no longer realisable—to the great detriment of the citizens of this country. It is a national disgrace that two-thirds of pupils currently desert the subject at the immature age of 14.¹² During the periodic brouhahas about the over-concentration on the Nazis, it is necessary to remind the media and politicians that this is in part a direct consequence of the optionality of the subject at GCSE as teachers compete for pupils by offering topics that appeal to them. The imbalances in curriculum content are also in part a product of available expertise and resources.

All parties to the debate on the future of history agree that there is a very real need for curriculum reform. At the start of 2006, the Fabian society sponsored a much-publicised conference on 'The future of Britishness' at which Gordon Brown, a history graduate himself, delivered the keynote address. In it, he signalled recognition at the highest levels of government of some key issues such as the strengthening of history in the curriculum, the central importance of British history within it and the rooting of the teaching of citizenship more closely in history (See Figure 2).¹³ In January of this year, the Education Secretary, Alan Johnson, signalled the government's intention to introduce a full GCSE and an A level in citizenship. At their core will be British history with a focus on religious, racial, social and political

diversity, the 'shared British heritage' and the teaching of core 'British values' such as tolerance, respect, freedom of speech and justice. Schools, said Johnson, 'should play a lead role in creating greater cohesion.'¹⁴ However, while an expanded citizenship curriculum clearly offers opportunities for history teachers, it needs to be viewed with extreme caution. There is a danger that it will enervate history and reduce the number of schools that teach it beyond 14 still further. Our training makes us particularly well-attuned to the lessons that history has taught about state interference in the curriculum. The decision in 1988 to include history in the post-14 national curriculum was effectively scuppered by wranglings over content, and the current debates echo those of the late 1980s/early 1990s. Ostensible support from across the political spectrum for more British history is undermined by the very different, politically-driven conceptions regarding its putative content, as is well-illustrated by disputes over imperial history, with one party wishing to highlight the grand achievements of the British Empire situated within a patriotic or 'Whiggish' narrative, and the other seeing it as a vehicle for addressing and explicating the multicultural and multi-ethnic dimensions of contemporary society. Whether or not there should be more British history—it is hardly neglected in the current provision—is a moot point.¹⁵ Moreover, focussing on politically determined topics (anti-slave trade, immigration etc) does nothing to address the very real need for a more comprehensive chronological narrative. We have, therefore, to be wary of attempts to press British history into the service of delivering a political agenda built around social cohesion

and national identity and resist the move to shoehorn British history into the citizenship curriculum. In sum, professional 'craft' input and control are vital to temper a 'state' determined (or at least overly influenced) curriculum.

We have to tread very carefully through this particular minefield, and do so in a strategic way. Our profession has the delicate task of cultivating the support of sympathetic politicians while not abandoning the demand for the substantive elements of the HA programme in return for headline-catching but marginal initiatives, such as History 'Oscars', or, far more serious, capitulating to major changes in curricular content driven by political rather than academic or pedagogic purposes.

Continuity and cross-sector dialogue

In any review of the 5-19 curriculum, issues of continuity and progression will inevitably be paramount. At primary level, the lack of expertise on the part of many of the teachers responsible for introducing young children to their first taste of the subject has been compounded by the decision of the Training Development Agency for Schools to cut the number of places for training primary history teachers by 4% in 2006-07 and by a further 3% in 2007-08. The cuts at secondary level have been even more swingeing—19% in 2006-07 alone, the biggest reduction of all subjects. However, secondary schools have had less of a problem in terms of filling posts with qualified history graduates than primary schools. The impact of the cuts on the latter is therefore likely to be particularly detrimental for they risk exacerbating the already serious problems highlighted in the QCA and Ofsted reports.¹⁶

Also, as we have seen, there is insufficient contact or planning to ensure continuity between primary and secondary levels.

The same story is repeated in continuity from school to university. Here, universities not only complain about the narrow knowledge base exhibited by most incoming students but are frustrated by their attachment to didactic forms of learning ('spoon-feeding') and their lack of ability in key skills such as reading, written and oral communication and numeracy.¹⁷ Despite initiatives to remedy this, like the IHR conferences, in other respects contact has diminished rather than increased in recent years as lecturers have withdrawn from the level of involvement they once had with A-level examining and other school-orientated work. Cross-sector dialogue has largely been confined to a few committed individuals. Far too many university lecturers are ignorant of what goes on at secondary level and they have mostly remained aloof from the debate on curricular reform. The pressure of meeting the demands of the Research Assessment Exercise (which allocates research funding on the basis of the quality and quantity of lecturers' published work and involves universities in periodic, time-consuming submissions), and the status of research generally as opposed to teaching in terms of career progression, remain major obstacles to encouraging the necessary engagement of lecturers with schools. The initiatives involving the subject associations are therefore in real danger of petering out.

Recent innovations, while welcome, have addressed specific problems related to discrete parts of the curriculum—most particularly the decline in history's share of the GCSE market. The content of the post-14 curriculum needs to be situated in the context of the curriculum as a whole—of a history education from 5-19 and of the overlaps that occur elsewhere with parts of the broader curriculum. There is still quite some way to go towards the realisation of a properly articulated 5-19 curriculum. If Marsden's advisory group is able to persuade the Education Department to fund a review,

Figure 2: Gordon Brown on school history

'... our success as Great Britain ... requires us to rediscover and build from our history and apply in our time the shared values that bind us together and give us common purpose. ... [T]errorism in our midst means that debates ... about Britishness and our model of integration clearly now have a new urgency. ... [W]e should not recoil from our national history – rather we should make it more central to our education. I propose that British history should be given much more prominence in the curriculum ... [and] that we look at how we root the teaching of citizenship more closely in history.'

**Gordon Brown,
Chancellor of the Exchequer at that time.**

it will, if suitably constituted, enable the history education community to address the various pinch points across each stage of a history education in a holistic way, rather than in the piecemeal, and thereby potentially problematic, manner of the recent interventions.¹⁸

Assessment

The emphasis on written work at GCSE and A-level continues to blight history teaching. However, this is not simply because of pupil prejudice on the grounds of a preference for something rather less demanding but a serious pedagogic issue. It is, of course, important to develop writing skills and knowledge of the past through memory-recall but not to the point of stifling interest and imagination—not when there is now such a wealth of tried-and-tested stimulating assessment methods.¹⁹ Nor is this a case of lack of enterprise on the

about the negative perceptions of the value of the subject that have already been developed by pupils before the age of 14. If we are to disabuse in an effective manner these adolescent misconceptions, we need to be much more savvy about the employability of history students.

The last few years have witnessed several initiatives to insinuate transferable skills teaching into the schools curriculum and, in its latest draft criteria for history specifications, QCA has identified five such skills that AS and A-levels should develop and assess: communication, IT, application of number, working with others, improving own learning and performance, and problem solving.²¹ The employability skills agenda has been the target of much criticism on the part of educators not least because of its instrumentalist and market-driven premises. However, a

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part of teachers, as is evidenced by some of the methods employed at Key Stage 3 where teaching and assessment are less results-driven. Mechanistic models of assessment post-14 stifle the opportunity for bright students to demonstrate wider knowledge. Moreover, the pressure on schools, partly from parents but also from Ofsted inspectors, to provide interim information on levels of attainment rather than at the end of key stages as was intended, is the source of much disgruntlement among teachers and perhaps accounts for some of the ineffectiveness in assessment practice reported by QCA. Shifting the emphasis back to exams may help reduce plagiarism but does nothing to improve pedagogy.

There is a particular need to allow greater flexibility to measure very different historical abilities—chronological understanding, writing narrative, handling historical interpretations, comparative understanding, reading and interpreting manifold sources, investigating evidence and presenting findings in various forms, and so forth. Moreover, assessment is a useful instrument for encouraging and measuring those generic skills that transcend history and apply across the curriculum. Assessment reform is fraught with pedagogic difficulties but the current regime should nevertheless be reviewed as part and parcel of the wholesale review of the 5-19 curriculum and, indeed, beyond for universities too are not immune from sterile assessment practices. It is fundamental to enhancing the quality and appeal of history teaching and an issue around which the history education community as a whole can with profit collaborate.²⁰

Skills for employment

While there has been much consideration of questions of knowledge-content, methodology and assessment in the debates on curricular reform, there has been less discussion of the vocational skills that a history education does or could develop and how these should be taught. This issue is particularly critical given the utilitarian pressure to demonstrate a link between education and employability and in the face of the evidence adduced in Haydn's report

pedagogy that addresses this agenda does not have to be so—properly developed it can be challenging, creating capable, reflective, critical learners. It can encourage questioning students rather than passive ones and active rather than received learning styles. And, crucially, it can demonstrate the relevance of a non-vocational subject like history to sceptical pupils.

Teaching employability skills therefore is not incompatible with good learning; but are we doing this, or doing it well? History does, in fact, teach students many skills vital to their future employment, notably the core academic skills of reading and writing. The discipline also burnishes their ability to work independently and to research and evaluate. It teaches how to make informed judgements on the basis of incomplete or contested evidence; how to recognise bias in arguments; how to solve problems. The profession needs to trumpet the strengths of the discipline in order to combat common prejudices about history's practical usefulness and to show that it is aware of, and willing to address, any outstanding shortcomings. It needs to stress as well the pedagogic problems involved in trying to cultivate sophisticated skills such as these in pre-GCSE pupils and the concomitant disadvantage to the two-thirds of them who abandon the subject at 14. That said, history could do more to prepare its post-14 students for some of the main skills required in their chosen careers—most notably, leadership, decision-making, teamwork and oral communication—and to match those most in demand by employers, such as numeracy and some computing skills.²² In this regard, the latest QCA proposals are largely spot on, but the test will come in delivering these. In this regard, experience to date is not encouraging. There are critical skills gaps in the transition from A-level to university and from both school and university into employment, with the former being especially pronounced. A review of skills development from 5-19 ought therefore to form part of the reform agenda, both to ensure that skills arise naturally out of content and to raise awareness among pupils and their parents of the practical value of a history education.

History students have very diverse employment aspirations, enter many different careers and some are eminently successful.²³ There is much virtue in keeping career options open and having, before specialising, a broad and humane education that trains the mind. This is one reason why making history optional at 14 is to be castigated. A history qualification is not a bar and can be a boon to career progress, but much more could be done to counsel students about the wide range of opportunities open to them. More attention to this might help re-educate some of the two out of three pupils who currently regard history as ‘not very useful’.

Why history matters

All this may seem little more than a catalogue of problems, conjuring up a future of doom and gloom, but this would be decidedly the wrong conclusion to draw. It is imperative to remind ourselves that history teaching, in the context of, and the constraints in which, it is obliged to operate, is in quite remarkably robust health. Ofsted reports confirm the quality of secondary history teaching: ‘in 80 per cent of lessons... the teaching has been judged good or better, meaning that history is one of the best taught subjects’. At A-level this rises to 91%. Moreover, history remains popular at GCSE and AS/A2 levels. GCSE entries fell in 2005 but were still 6.7% higher than in 1998, despite a reduction in overall market-share. AS entries meanwhile were up 39.8% since 2001 and A-level entries were up 3% on the previous year.²⁴ History is still the sixth most popular subject at A-level, albeit having slipped slightly from fifth place in 2004.

Because of the subject-matter, the focus here has inevitably been on the shortcomings in the curriculum and the movement for reform. However, it should not be read as a criticism of the discipline or its teachers, but rather in the spirit of something that history teachers can and should be proud of—namely, the generally high quality of most of what we do and our constant striving for improvement. We highlight problems because we are conscientious about resolving them. History remains popular with pupils because it is generally well-taught. So, when the newspapers and politicians single out the few flaws, we need to remind them of this. We need to be positive about our subject, to promote its educational worth in modern Britain and to counter prejudice against its perceived ‘usefulness’—a tall order when not just pupils but even government ministers²⁵ are ignorant of its vocational and broader value. In particular, we need to insist again and again on why history is important and what its students appreciate most about learning it—namely, its training of an analytical and critical mind, the understanding it gives of current events and of other cultures, the capacity to weigh arguments and respect different viewpoints and to engage in social intercourse. In other words, a history education teaches and, hopefully, inculcates humane values and this remains the main justification for its study. These things are beyond price and far outweigh any assessment of the worth of the subject constructed around its contribution to employability. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that the single most important reason why students choose history is their enjoyment of it. This is not to be sniffed at. The motivation that comes from enjoyment is a crucial

prerequisite for learning to take place. History is not confined to the classroom but suffuses our lives and is capable of providing lifelong enjoyment and, thereby, lifelong learning. ‘Doing history’ in the form of visits to heritage sites, tracing genealogy, watching history programmes on television or reading about the past is extremely popular and consumes a big slice of the daily lives of a large number of people, many of whom in adult life have come to regret abandoning the subject at 14.²⁶ It is a shame that, in this utilitarian age, history’s pedagogic status continues to be questioned and threatened and that we are forced constantly to take to the barricades to defend it—but those of us who love the subject and know the added value it brings to our and other peoples’ lives, know as well that it is a battle worth fighting.

REFERENCES

1. The points in this section are mainly taken from the (most recent) QCA, *History. 2004/5 annual report on curriculum and assessment* (Oct. 2005) with some supplementary material from QCA, *History. 2003/4 annual report on curriculum and assessment* (Oct. 2004). The reports are available at www.qca.org.uk.
2. QCA, *Report 2004/05*, p5.
3. Quoted in *ibid.*, p5.
4. Those who liked it most cited the personality of the teacher as the principal reason. By contrast, another study (by Maw) was far less positive about the level of pupil enjoyment. Details of these surveys can be found in Haydn, T. (October 2005) ‘Pupil perceptions of history at Key Stage 3’, available online at www.qca.org.uk/downloads/qca-06-2335-pupil-perceptions-history.pdf.
5. QCA, *Report 2004/05*, p11.
6. Marsden, G. (Winter 2005), ‘Only Connect’, *Fabian Review*, pp24-5.
7. Riley, M. and Harrism R. (eds) (2003), *Past Forward: A Vision for School History 2002-2012*, London: Historical Association, especially pp50-51.
8. Historical Association Curriculum Development Project: *History 14-19. Report and Recommendations to the Secretary of State: Executive Summary*.
9. The following information is based upon my attendance at meetings of Marsden’s advisory group.
10. Details of these initiatives can be found in QCA, *Report 2004/05*.
11. QCA (March 2006), *Draft GCE AS and A level Subject Criteria for History*.
12. It was reported at the IHR conference in February this year that there were now 1479 schools with no GCSE entry in history. In many European countries history is not taught before the age of eleven but is then compulsory to sixteen—surely a more sensible approach than persists in the UK? I would urge every teacher to sign the e-petition to 10 Downing Street (<http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/historyto16/>) and to encourage others to do so.
13. Brown G., ‘Keynote Speech’ at the ‘Who do we want to be? The future of Britishness’ Fabian Society New Year conference, Imperial College, London, 14 Jan. 2006. The full text of the speech is available online at www.fabian-society.org.uk/press_office/news_latest_all.asp?pressid=520.
14. *Guardian*, 26 January 2007.
15. Curriculum 2000 specified that 25% of GCSE should be devoted to British history, with a ‘substantial element’ at A-level – this on top of a curriculum already heavily weighted to British history at Key Stages 1-3.
16. Full details are on the Department for Education and Science website at www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/TIM/m002013/index.shtml.
17. Hibbert, B. (2002), ‘“It’s a lot harder than politics”...students’ experience of history at Advanced Level’, *Teaching History*, 109, *Examining History Edition*, pp39-43.
18. The QCA report illustrates well this approach, with key recommendations for reform targeted at the respective key stages. QCA, *Report 2004/05*, p23.
19. See, for example, Haydn, T., Hunt, M. and Arthur, J. (2nd ed., 2001), *Learning to Teach History in the Secondary School*, London: Routledge, especially Chapter 10.
20. A promising start was made at the IHR conference on progression and assessment, 25 October 2006—details on IHR website.
21. QCA, *Draft GCE AS and A Level Subject Criteria for History*, pp5-6.
22. Nicholls, D. (2005), *The Employability of History Students*, Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology, Glasgow.
23. See also, Nicholls, D. (2005), *The Employment of History Graduates*, Higher Education Academy Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology, Glasgow.
24. QCA *Report 2004/05*, pp5, 18.
25. In February 2006, Bill Rammell, the Minister for Higher Education, observed that the fall in university applications for subjects like history and the corresponding rise in vocational subjects was ‘No bad thing’. *Guardian*, 15 Feb. 2006.
26. History in its broadest sense is the biggest leisure activity in Britain with more than 70 million visitors to historical sites annually—a far higher participation rate than in sports like football and angling. In addition, history television programmes regularly attract audiences of around 3 million and the most popular are watched by in excess of 10 million, demonstrating a phenomenal public interest in the past.