

Edexcel GCSE (9–1) History: Historic Environment FAQs



The historic environment is a new requirement for GCSE History specifications from 2016, and we've been getting lots of questions about what the requirement is and how it works in the Edexcel GCSE (9–1) History specification. To help you, we've put all the answers all in one place.

What is a historic environment?

The DfE document which outlines the content requirements for the new GCSE History specifications says:

The study of the historic environment should focus on one particular site in its historical context. The study should examine the relationship between a place and historical events and developments. The focus of study may range in scale from, for example, a particular building or part of a building to a city or rural landscape/setting. There is no requirement that students visit the site. This study may be linked to any other part of the course or may stand alone.

So is it a local study?

The DfE requirements say that the historic environment may be linked to another part of the course or stand alone. This meant that each board could choose whether to make it a local study or to link it to another part of the course and name specific sites to be studied.

How is the historic environment approached in the Edexcel specification?

Based on what you told us, we chose to name specific sites and to link the historic environment to another part of the course. We felt this would be more manageable, so that courses cover only four distinct areas of content, not five.

In the Edexcel specification, the historic environment is linked to the thematic study in Paper 1. We have specified one site for each thematic study:

Thematic study	Linked historic environment
Crime and punishment in Britain, c1000–present	Whitechapel, c1870–c1900: crime, policing and the inner city
Medicine in Britain, c1250–present	The British sector of the Western Front, 1914–18: injuries, treatment and the trenches
Warfare and British society, c1250–present	London and the Second World War, 1939–45

For each site, there is content specified in the specification which must be taught. In the exam, students will answer a question that assesses knowledge plus a two-part question based on two provided sources. To see an example of this, [take a look at our Sample Assessment Materials](#).

Will the sites change?

No. In the Edexcel specification, there is one site for each Paper 1 option and these are fixed, so will remain the same for the lifetime of the specification. We felt it was important that centres would not have to re-resource or spend time re-planning every year. The choice of sites and the assessment model allow this: the sites are substantial enough and have a sufficient range of contemporary source material that we can ask questions on them for the lifetime of the specification.

Do we have to visit the site?

No. The DfE document explicitly states: “There is no requirement that students visit the site.” Some centres will choose to take their students to the site, but there is no expectation that this will happen.

Why isn't there a local option in the Edexcel specification?

We did investigate having a local study option, but as there is no longer controlled assessment, we had concerns about how a free choice of site could be assessed. In particular:

- The sites available and accessible to each centre would vary enormously in nature and some might lend themselves to the types of questions asked much better than others, raising a risk that some students would be advantaged or disadvantaged through the site chosen by their centre.
- In order to allow all students to answer on whatever site they had studied, only generic questions could be asked and it is likely these questions would become predictable and that answers would be formulaic.
- The nature of external assessment makes the challenge of reliability in marking greater than would be the case for internal assessment: markers would need indicative content on each site, as they may have no knowledge of the site studied in individual answers, and as this would not be a skills-based assessment, a generic mark scheme without indicative content would pose a risk to the validity and reliability of the assessment.

Why is there not more of a geographical spread in the choice of sites?

The sites were chosen for several reasons: each links coherently with the theme in the thematic study, they're sites that teachers told us would engage students and encourage them to choose GCSE History, and there are links with popular topics in the current specifications. Additionally, it was important to us that we keep these sites fixed and not change them each year, because we didn't want to force teachers to re-resource and re-plan each year. That meant we had to find sites that were substantial and for which there is a wealth of contemporary source material, so that we can ask questions on these sites for the lifetime of the specification. Remember, too, that there is no requirement to visit the site.

Where can I find more information on these sites?

The **Topic booklet** for each Paper 1 option includes a list of suggested resources for the historic environment site (as well as for the thematic study). These can be found under, **Course materials, on our website**. We'll also be uploading a **guide to teaching the historic environment** in due course.

The published resources being produced by Pearson and Hodder* will also incorporate the historic environment alongside the thematic study within each Paper 1 textbook. **Find out more about the published resources.**

If you have any other questions about the historic environment or about our new GCSE (9–1) History, get in touch with our experts at:

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