

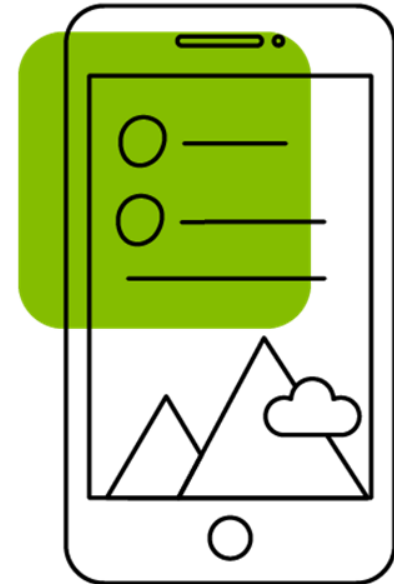
# GCSE History

Improving the assessment  
model



# Agenda

- GCSE History and the impact of Ebacc
- Summer 2024 exam series
- Summer 2025 exam series
- Summer 2026/27 exam series (tbc)
- Next reform
- Support materials



# Objectives

Objectives: This GCSE History event will allow delegates to:

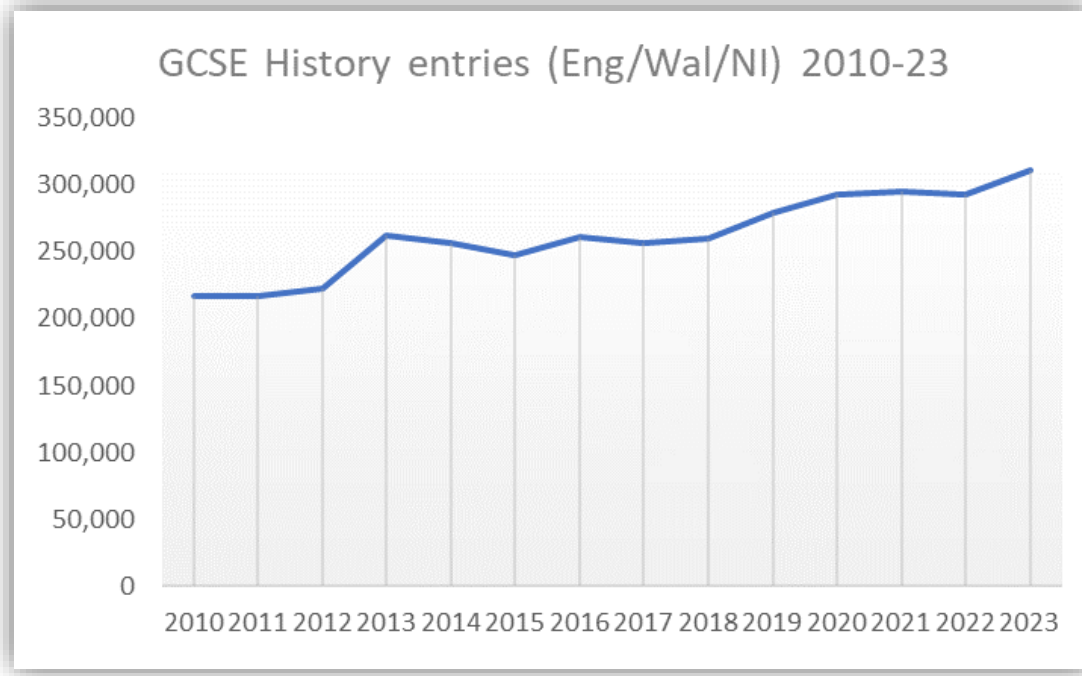
- find out more about the review we undertook and the improvements we are making from the summer 2024 series
- learn about the improvements we are making from the summer 2025 series
- find out about the new and updated support available, and tell us about their support and training needs



# GCSE History and the impact of Ebacc



# GCSE History entries: impact of Ebacc



- Since 2010 there has been significant growth in GCSE History due to the introduction of Ebacc (non-Ebacc subjects have seen a decline).
- Total UK GCSE History entries have risen from c.216,000 to c.310,000 since Ebacc.
- Cohort sizes have increased – Edexcel averages: 65 in 2018; 74 in 2023.
- We are seeing more lower-attaining students choosing to study GCSE History.

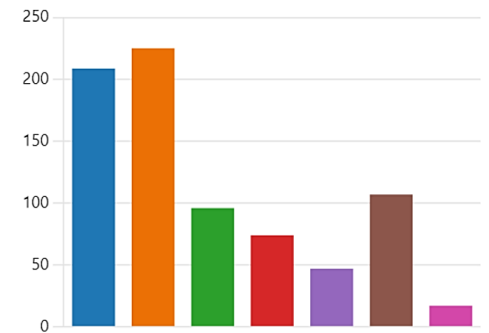
# GCSE History: the student experience

- The popularity of GCSE History is clearly positive! Feedback from our recent student survey suggests they are enjoying studying the subject from KS3 onwards.

1. Why did you choose to study GCSE History?  
Please select any relevant choices.

[More Details](#)

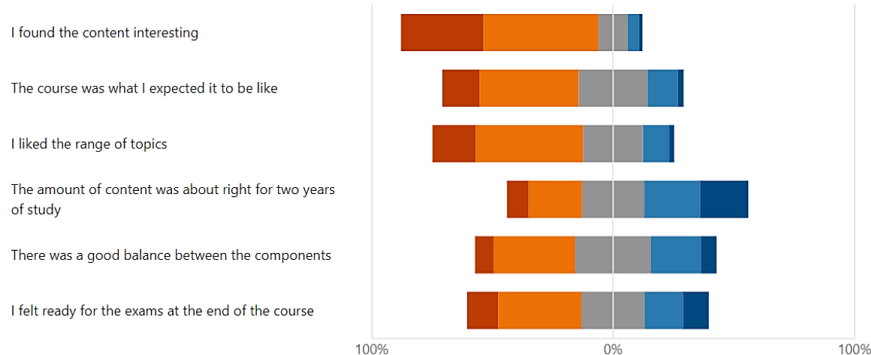
<span style="color: blue;">●</span> I enjoy reading about History	209
<span style="color: orange;">●</span> I enjoyed History at Key Stage 3	225
<span style="color: green;">●</span> I intend to study History at A level	96
<span style="color: red;">●</span> The skills I learn will help me pursue my career	
<span style="color: purple;">●</span> It fits well with my other subject...	47
<span style="color: brown;">●</span> I had to study History or Geogra...	107
<span style="color: pink;">●</span> Other	17



8. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about our GCSE History course?

[More Details](#)

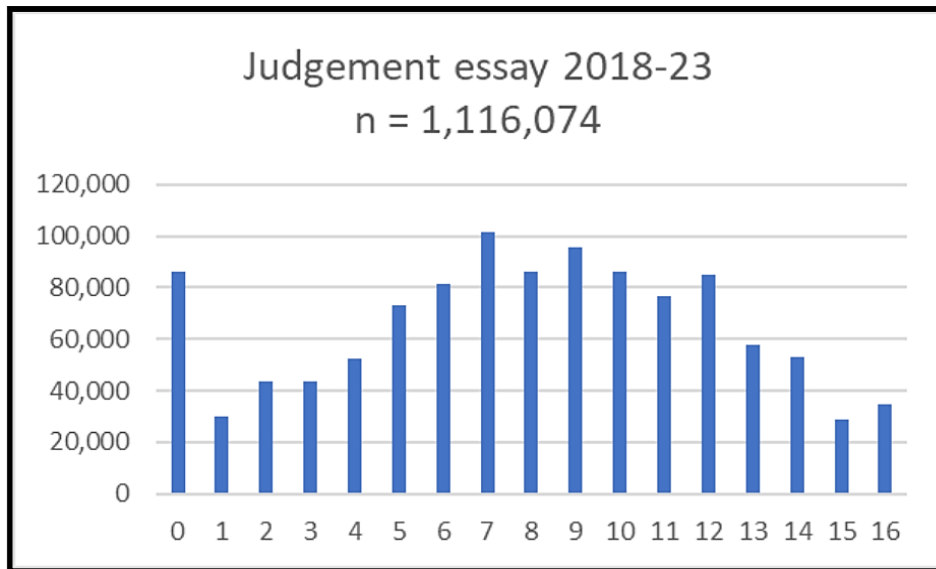
Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree



- However, students are less positive about the amount of content.
- We have also received a lot of feedback from teachers about the volume of content and about exams being too demanding for some students.

# GCSE History: the student experience

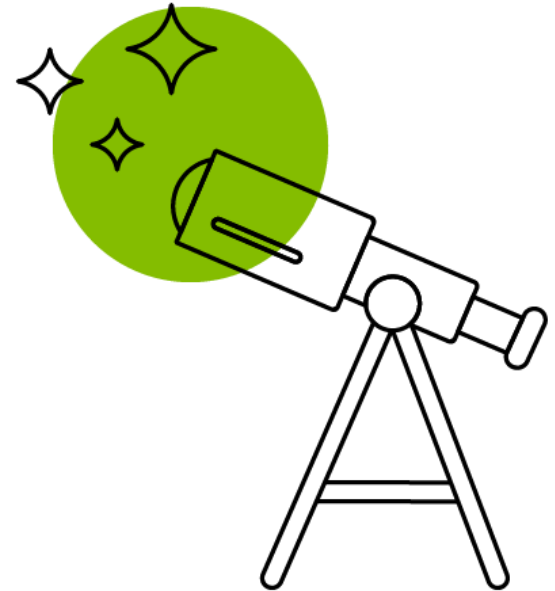
- The GCSE (9-1) reforms were designed to be more demanding, both in terms of content and assessment.
- The **increased content demands** means qualifications are sometimes being taught in a way that is less engaging and this can leave some students behind.
- The **increased assessment demands** means examiners see a lot of blank responses in exams, particularly in questions targeting AO1/2.



- This chart shows distribution of marks for all students on 16-mark 'judgement' essay questions (Paper 1 & Paper 2B).
- The number of students scoring zero marks is not in line with what we would expect from a 'normal distribution' curve.

# Summer 2023 post-series review

- Following the Summer 2023 exam series, we undertook a thorough and comprehensive review of our assessments.
- We sought the views of hundreds of students and teachers through our post-exam series surveys, and we are very grateful to everyone who provided feedback.
- We also carried out detailed analysis into how our different question types have performed since 2018 to identify areas for improvement.
- As a result of our research, we are now introducing some small changes which we feel will benefit all students and improve the overall exam experience.



# Improving the student experience

## Pearson Edexcel GCSE History Improvements

In response to your feedback, we are making improvements to our GCSE History qualification. We are confident that these small changes will make a big difference.

Summer 2024	Summer 2025	Summer 2026 (tbc)	Next reform
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>Additional review of all 17 papers:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• clarity of questions</li><li>• stimulus points that are accessible to a wider range of students.</li></ul></li><li>➤ <b>Removal of Level 2 stimulus points cap.</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>Improvements to the assessment model:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• better ramping on opening questions</li><li>• adding choice to Paper 3</li><li>• extra time on each paper</li><li>• minimising disruption for teachers and students.</li></ul></li><li>➤ <b>Language amendments.</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>Review of content:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ongoing research with teachers</li><li>• Minor amendments to improve the way topics can be taught</li><li>• For first teaching September 2024.</li></ul></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ <b>Making GCSE History more accessible to a wider range of students.</b></li><li>➤ <b>Making our qualification more diverse and inclusive.</b></li></ul>

**2025 now approved by Ofqual**



# Summer 2024 exam series



# Summer 2024 question paper review

- Following the feedback received on our Summer 2023 question papers we have carried out a review and additional checks on all 17 of the Summer 2024 question papers.
- We have reviewed the papers with a focus on the clarity of questions, the use of stimulus and the use of dates in questions.
- Our senior examiners and colleagues in the wider Pearson History team have worked to ensure the Summer 2024 papers are free from error and improve the student experience.
- The **only change** to the assessment in Summer 2024 concerns the **stimulus points** which are used in the following question types:
  - Explain why (12 marks) – Paper 1, Paper 2B, Paper 3
  - Judgement essay (16 marks) – Paper 1, Paper 2B
  - Narrative analysis (8 marks) – Paper 2P.

# 2024: Level 2 stimulus cap removed

Explain why the Nazi Party was reorganised in the years 1924–28.

You **may** use the following in your answer:

- elections
- the Bamberg Conference (1926)

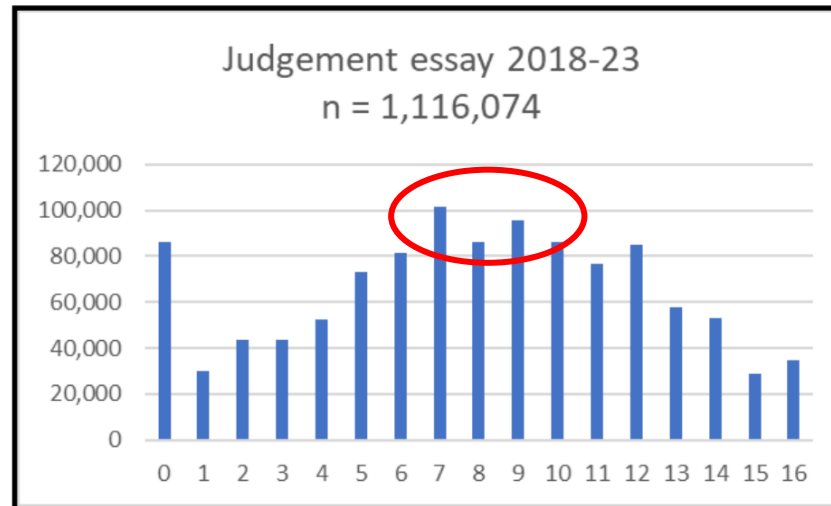
You **must** also use information of your own.

- In questions with stimulus points, students are required to address **three aspects of content** in order to reach the higher levels of the mark scheme.
- In previous exam series, students in Level 2 who did not go beyond the stimulus were limited by the following 'cap' at the top of the level:

2	4–6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An explanation is given, showing limited analysis and with implicit or unsustained links to the conceptual focus of the question. It shows some development and organisation of material, but a line of reasoning is not sustained. [AO2]</li><li>• Accurate and relevant information is included, showing some knowledge and understanding of the period. [AO1]</li></ul> <p><i>Maximum 5 marks for Level 2 answers that do not go beyond aspects prompted by the stimulus points.</i></p>
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# 2024: Level 2 stimulus cap removed

Impact of stimulus cap at Level 2 on 16-mark judgement essays:



- The mean mark is 7.91; however, the curve shows a slight dip at 8 marks where we'd expect to see a plateau. The peak at 7 marks is because a few Level 2 students were being capped by the requirement to 'go beyond the stimulus points'.
- The intention of the stimulus cap is to ensure higher-attaining students are rewarded for using wider contextual knowledge. The Level 2 cap is not supporting this intention and so we have decided to remove it at Level 2.

# 2024: Level 2 stimulus cap removed

- From Summer 2024, the **Level 2 cap will no longer exist on any question.**
- This means that Level 2 students can now achieve the top of the level without going beyond aspects prompted by the stimulus.

2	4–6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An explanation is given, showing limited analysis and with implicit or unsustainable links to the conceptual focus of the question. It shows some development and organisation of material, but a line of reasoning is not sustained. [AO2]</li><li>• Accurate and relevant information is included, showing some knowledge and understanding of the period. [AO1]</li></ul> <p><del>Maximum 5 marks for Level 2 answers that do not go beyond aspects prompted by the stimulus points.</del></p>
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- **The stimulus cap remains unchanged for higher levels (Level 3 and 4).**
- This should not affect how you prepare students for Summer 2024 exams: students should still aim to provide three aspects of content in questions with stimulus to access the top of Level 3 or get into Level 4 [causation and judgement essays].
- SAMs mark schemes were updated in September 2023 to reflect this change.

# 2024: Level 3 & 4 stimulus cap rephrased

- We have updated the wording of the stimulus cap in Level 3 and Level 4 of the mark scheme to make the requirement clearer to students.
- This does **not** affect how you prepare students for exams in Summer 2024.
- For example, this is the 12-mark causation question wording in the mark scheme:

Wording up to 2023	Wording from 2024 onwards
<i>Maximum 8 marks for Level 3 answers that do not go beyond aspects prompted by the stimulus points.</i>	<i>Maximum 8 marks for answers that do not address three or more aspects of content.</i>
<i>No access to Level 4 for answers that do not go beyond aspects prompted by the stimulus points.</i>	<i>No access to Level 4 for answers that do not address three or more aspects of content.</i>

# 2024: Example of mark scheme

Level	Mark	Descriptor
	0	No rewardable material.
1	1–3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A simple or generalised answer is given, lacking development and organisation. [AO2]</li> <li>Limited knowledge and understanding of the topic is shown. [AO1]</li> </ul>
2	4–6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An explanation is given showing limited analysis and with implicit or unsustained links to the conceptual focus of the question. It shows some development and organisation of material, but a line of reasoning is not sustained. [AO2]</li> <li>Accurate and relevant information is included, showing some knowledge and understanding of the period. [AO1]</li> </ul>
3	7–9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An explanation is given, showing some analysis, which is mainly directed at the conceptual focus of the question. It shows a line of reasoning that is generally sustained, although some passages may lack coherence and organisation. [AO2]</li> <li>Accurate and relevant information is included, showing good knowledge and understanding of the required features or characteristics of the period studied. [AO1]</li> </ul> <p><i>Maximum 8 marks for answers that do not address three or more aspects of content.</i></p>
4	10–12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An analytical explanation is given which is directed consistently at the conceptual focus of the question, showing a line of reasoning that is coherent, sustained and logically structured. [AO2]</li> <li>Accurate and relevant information is precisely selected to address the question directly, showing wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of the required features or characteristics of the period studied. [AO1]</li> </ul> <p><i>No access to Level 4 for answers that do not address three or more aspects of content.</i></p>

Our new guidance document contains examples of the mark scheme for the different question types.

# Review of stimulus points: 2024 and beyond

- We have successfully used stimulus in GCSE History questions since 2001.
- We commissioned an independent report – following feedback from teachers – on how stimulus points have been used in previous exam series.
- This report, together with statistical data such as mean marks and mark distributions, was discussed in depth with our senior examining team and they are committed to making improvements in the way we use stimulus.
- We're aware that many lower-attaining students fail to attempt essay questions and the main purpose of the stimulus should be to give such students more confidence to attempt these questions.
- As part of our review of the Summer 2024 exam papers we asked reviewers and examiners to focus on the stimulus provided to ensure they are accessible to a wide range of students, and we will continue with this emphasis in future exam series.

# Summer 2025 exam series



# Improving the exam experience

- As a result of our student and teacher research, we are implementing some small changes to the assessment model, which we feel will benefit students and improve the overall exam experience.
- In order to implement these changes as soon as possible we have not made significant amendments to the structure of question papers or assessment types.
- Our intention is to minimise any potential disruption to teachers, and to avoid any significant ‘knock-on’ issues arising with the published resources that schools have invested in.
- We are, however, confident that some minor changes can make a big difference.
- The following changes to assessment have now been approved by Ofqual and are being introduced for **first assessment Summer 2025**.
- These changes therefore apply to the current Year 10 (in academic year 2023–24).

# Summary of changes for 2025 and beyond

Paper/Question	Exams up to 2024	Exams from 2025 onwards
Paper 1 timing	1 hr 15 mins	1 hr 20 mins (+5 mins)
Paper 2 timing	1 hr 45 mins	1 hr 50 mins (+5 mins)
Paper 3 timing	1 hr 20 mins	1 hr 30 mins (+10 mins)
Paper 1 Q1	Q1 <b>two</b> features of... (4)	Q1a <b>one</b> feature of... (2) Q1b <b>one</b> feature of... (2)
Paper 1 Q5/6	Covering at least 200 years	<b>Either</b> a complete period <b>or</b> at least 200 years
Paper 2B Q1	Q1 <b>two</b> features of... (4)	Q1a <b>one</b> feature of... (2) Q1b <b>one</b> feature of... (2)
Paper 2B numbering	1a, 1b, 1c(i) or (ii)	1a, 1b, 2, 3 or 4
Paper 2P Q1	Q1 <b>two</b> consequences of... (8)	Q1a <b>one</b> conseq. of... (4) Q1b <b>one</b> conseq. of... (4)
Paper 3 Q2	Q2 Explain why...	Q2a <b>or</b> Q2b Explain why...

# More time in exams from 2025

- **Recent student and teacher surveys** have raised this as a key issue.
- **61% of teachers** (900+ responses) supported an increase in time on all three papers.
- Only **5% of teachers** wanted no increase at all.

1. Of the three papers, which paper **most** needs an increase in time available for students?

[More Details](#)

● Paper 1 Thematic study and Hist...	84
● Paper 2 British depth study and ...	109
● Paper 3 Modern depth study	122
● All of them	549
● None of them	43



# More time in exams from 2025

- **Paper 1:** the extra 5 minutes is intended to give students more reading time for the source question and/or for students to spend more time thinking / planning their extended writing responses.
- **Paper 2:** the extra 5 minutes is intended to provide a better split, 55 mins per paper. *NB Students don't have to spend an equal amount of time on each booklet.*
- **Paper 3:** the extra 10 minutes have the same rationale as Paper 1 – but with slightly more time because there is more material to read.
- **Total increase in time:** from 4 hrs 20 mins to 4 hrs 40 minutes. We continue to offer the most minutes per mark across GCSE History specifications.
- When making these changes we have been mindful of the assessment burden on students in what is a congested exam timetable, and these changes reflect the majority of teacher views in our feedback.
- By adding in this extra time, we do not expect students to write longer responses than they currently do.

# More accessible opening questions

- Teacher feedback and performance data suggest the opening questions on Papers 1 and 2 are not consistently accessible to a wide range of students. This is something we are keen to address to improve the accessibility of our papers.
- We are splitting both the ‘key features’ and ‘consequences’ questions into two separate parts.
- This will improve the ramping on these papers and provide students with more opportunities to show their knowledge.
- In addition, we are exploring the addition of extra supporting text to the consequences question to help students recognise the focus of the question.
- The changes to these opening questions do **not** require students to write any more in their responses – the space available is unchanged for each question.
- We’ll look at each question type in more detail in the following slides.

# Changes from 2025: key features

## Paper 1 Q1 and Paper 2B Q1

Instead of being asked to describe two features of one aspect of content, students will be asked to describe one feature each of two separate aspects of content.

The mark scheme still awards one mark for a feature and one mark for supporting knowledge.

1 (a) Describe **one** feature of life in the Whitechapel workhouses.

(2)

(b) Describe **one** feature of the Peabody Estate in Whitechapel.

(2)

1 (a) Describe **one** feature of the attempts to colonise Virginia in the 1580s.

(2)

(b) Describe **one** feature of the role of the Church of England in Early Elizabethan society.

(2)

# Changes from 2025: consequences

## Paper 2P Q1

Instead of being asked to explain two consequences of one event/development, students will be asked to explain one consequence each of two separate events/developments.

Students will have two opportunities to show their knowledge and analysis instead of one.

Each consequence is marked separately, with unchanged mark scheme level descriptors.

1 (a) Explain **one** consequence of the Fort Laramie Treaty (1851).

(4)

(b) Explain **one** consequence of the Homestead Act (1862).

(4)

In addition, we are exploring – where it will be of help to students – the addition of some extra supporting text to help students recognise the focus of the question.

If we can proceed with this, it would not always be used: for some consequences questions it won't be necessary.

# Changes from 2025: Paper 1 Q5/6

## Paper 1 Q5/6

- Judgement essay questions must currently cover at least 200 years: any question covering more recent events must therefore start in c1800, which can potentially make questions on the modern period more challenging compared to other periods.
- From 2025, judgement essay questions must cover **either** a complete period **or** at least 200 years. This will make it possible to ask questions about the modern period only (1900–present), enabling examiners to set a broader range of accessible questions.
- The first three periods are all at least 200 years long, and so unaffected.

**6** 'The main purpose of punishment during the period c1900–present was to deter people from committing crimes.'

How far do you agree? Explain your answer.

(16)

You **may** use the following in your answer:

- capital punishment
- the introduction of borstals

You **must** also use information of your own.

# Changes from 2025: Paper 2B numbering

## Paper 2B simplified question numbering

The change to the question structure of Paper 2B provided an opportunity to apply more consistent question numbering on this paper.

The original numbering was a hangover from the start of the specification when the Period study and two British depth studies were provided in the same booklet.

Up to 2024	From 2025
<b>Q1a</b> – describe two key features (4 marks)	<b>Q1a and 1b</b> – describe one key feature (2 × 2 marks)
<b>Q1b</b> – explain why (12 marks)	<b>Q2</b> – explain why (12 marks)
<b>Q1ci/ii</b> – judgement essay (16 marks)	<b>Q3/4</b> – judgement essay (16 marks)

# Changes from 2025: Paper 3 explain why

## Paper 3 Q2

On Paper 3 many students have told us they are required to learn and revise a lot of content that is not assessed, due to the skills-based enquiry focus of the assessment.

Students will now be given a choice of two explain why... questions to answer. This is to give them more opportunity to show their knowledge and improve the overall balance of content assessed on this paper.

The mark scheme requirements are unchanged.

**Answer EITHER Question 2(a) OR Question 2(b).**

**EITHER**

2 (a) Explain why there was opposition in Germany to the Treaty of Versailles (1919). (12)

You **may** use the following in your answer:

- military terms
- territorial terms

You **must** also use information of your own.

**OR**

(b) Explain why Hitler was able to create a dictatorship in the period February 1933 to August 1934. (12)

You **may** use the following in your answer:

- the Reichstag fire
- the Night of the Long Knives

You **must** also use information of your own.

**(Total for Question 2 = 12 marks)**

# Our approach to question setting

- The changes to our assessment model from 2025 – coupled with the extended length of the current specification lifecycle – provide an opportunity to remind teachers of important elements of how questions are set.
- Over the lifetime of the specification, our examiners aim to assess different parts of the specification content to ensure fair and even coverage.
- However, we want to remind teachers that examiners can set questions across **all** of the content that is available **each** exam series. They do not set questions only on parts of the content that have not been assessed before.
- If examiners were to set questions only on material that had not previously been assessed, there would be an element of predictability about which topics might be covered in exam questions, a predictability that would only grow over time. This would undermine the fairness of assessments.
- Questions in future exam series may therefore assess similar content. Depending on the question style, either similar or identical wording may be used. It is also possible that an individual source or interpretation may be used more than once in the lifetime of the specification.

# Specification language changes from 2025

Reminder of the language changes being applied (announced last year).

- Language changes only – no changes to content.
- These changes affect certain terms which are now considered outdated.
- The most significant changes concern the terms ‘slaves’ and ‘Plains Indians’, which appear in Period study options P1, P2 and P3.
- The term Indigenous peoples will be glossed in live exam series from 2025.
- In any exam series, students are credited for any relevant and appropriate terms that they use.
- Publishers have been notified and are planning to update resources in due course.

## Guidance available

- [Slides](#) from September 2023 event
- [Changes being made](#) (using track changes)
- [Rationale](#) behind the changes
- [FAQs](#)

# Changes from 2025: FAQs

The full FAQs document is on the Edexcel website [here](#).

- **Why are we making these changes now?**
  - Summer 2023 saw a return to the full GCSE History examination requirements for the first time since 2019. During the years of covid disruption our focus was on enabling optionality and related covid measures.
  - We don't know when the next major reform of GCSE History will take place and we want to implement some changes as soon as possible to improve students' experience of our assessments.
- **Why aren't we making more significant changes?**
  - More significant changes would require at least 2 years' notice. Our intention is to minimise any potential disruption to teachers and students, and to avoid any significant 'knock-on' issues arising with the published resources that schools have invested in.
  - We are, however, confident these minor changes can make a big difference to students.

# Changes from 2025: FAQs

- **When will we be updating the sample assessment materials to reflect the assessment changes for 2025?**
  - We are waiting until after the Summer 2024 exam series before we formally update the sample assessment materials. This is to avoid causing confusion to students sitting exams in Summer 2024.
  - All changes to assessment are clearly exemplified in the new guidance document. We are looking into providing updated Sample Assessment Materials earlier behind an Edexcel Online padlock, to help with for example with Year 10 mocks.
- **Will Pearson and other publishers be updating textbooks to represent these changes?**
  - We have kept endorsed publishers notified of these changes and they will be updating their resources in due course. We have also designed changes that will minimise disruption with how the current textbooks are used.

# Summer 2026/27 exam series (tbc)

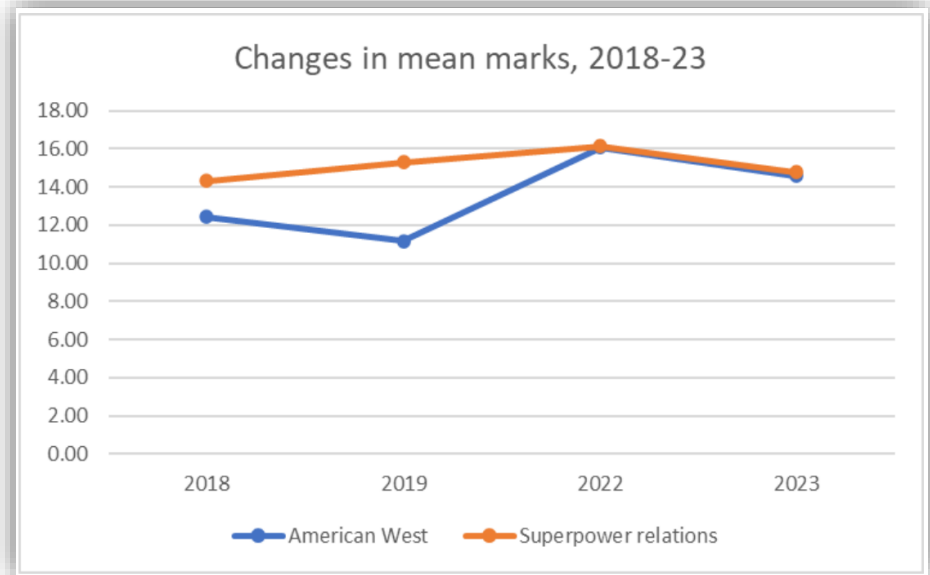


# Feedback on the amount of content

- We are aware that GCSE History teachers feel there is too much content.
- **We are listening!**
- The GCSE 9-1 specifications were designed to be more demanding in terms of content and assessment. We cannot make any changes to the total number of topics being studied or narrow the date ranges of topics.
- **Significant changes must wait until reform.**
- At present we are carrying out research with teachers to see if we can make minor amendments to topics to improve the way they can be taught.
- We are looking, for example, at areas where bullet points could be made less specific, where teachers could take a lighter-touch approach to teaching the content.
- We are also looking at making amendments that will make the content structure more logical, which in turn will enable examiners to ask more accessible questions.

# Feedback on the amount of content

- We did this successfully with the American West topic in 2021 and, whilst the disruption caused was minimal, we have since seen improved student performance on this option.
- The mean marks on American West have improved since 2018 and are now in line with those on Superpower relations.



- We will release updated schemes of work that will offer better guidance on delivering the content in the time available.

# Feedback on the amount of content

- Together with the minor amendments to the assessments outlined in this presentation we believe this would be the most appropriate way of updating the specification ahead of reform.
- Any changes to specification content need to be introduced ahead of first teaching for the first cohort being taught the amended specification content.
- With this in mind, any changes would be made for first teaching September 2024 (or possibly 2025), and first assessment Summer 2026 (or possibly 2027).
- We will update you on next steps later in the spring.
- We will notify teachers of any changes to content well in advance of two years' full teaching, so that there is time to incorporate the changes into your planning and update schemes of work.

# Next reform



# GCSE specification reform

Date	GCSE reform
2001	Linear GCSE with coursework
2009	Modular GCSE with controlled assessment
2016	Linear (9-1) GCSE – 100% externally assessed

- Specification reform usually takes place every 7–8 years.
- We are not aware of any plans to update the current GCSE 9–1 specifications; we do not expect any news until at least after the general election.
- We are talking to key stakeholders such as the SHP and HA about the current GCSE History subject requirements and how they could be improved at future spec reform.
- Key areas to focus on will be:
  - how to make the qualification more diverse and inclusive
  - how to make GCSE History more accessible to a wider range of students
  - how best to implement onscreen / on-demand assessment.
- We will keep you informed of any developments.

# Support materials etc



# Support materials

## Guidance on Pearson Qualifications Website

- Teacher guidance document on GCSE History changes (including example questions) – March 2024
- FAQs – March 2024
- Updated Getting Started Guide to reflect changes – April 2024
- Updated Topic Booklets and Paper Guides – April 2024
- Updated Sample Assessment Materials – Summer 2024
- Student guidance on new question paper structure, including command words – Summer 2024

## **Training**

- Supporting lower-attaining students – updated training pack (Feb)
- Student walkthroughs – set of recordings created with Harris Federation (April)
- Supporting higher-attaining students – new training pack (July)



Any questions?

# Find out more

For more courses see our [Pearson Professional Development Academy](#).



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