



## GCSE History assessment changes for 2025: FAQs

- **Why are you 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 didn't you wait till next specification reform?**

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.

We have kept the changes to a minimum to avoid disruption, and we are confident that teachers and students will get to grips with these assessment amends.

We are also thinking ahead to reform and will be developing and testing ideas that could be introduced then.

- **Why aren't you making more significant changes to the assessment model?**

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. More significant changes would require at least 2 years' notice.

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.

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. For example, moving question types between papers or making significant amendments to question types would have caused problems with how existing resources such as textbooks are used.

We are, however, confident these minor changes can make a big difference to students.

- **Who did you consult with?**

We drafted a list of proposed changes and shared these with several teachers and subject leads for comment. In addition, over 900 teachers responded to our survey on paper timings. A big thank you to everyone we spoke to for your help in developing and refining these proposals.

We also ran our first student survey after the summer 2023 series, and will repeat this for future series. The student survey was about their experiences with GCSE History and provided useful general insights.



- **When do these changes take effect?**

The changes to the assessment model have been approved by Ofqual and take effect for **first teaching September 2023** and **first assessment June 2025**. This is at the same time as the specification language changes announced in September 2023. These changes therefore affect the current Year 10 at the time of writing these FAQs (March 2024).

We are introducing these changes at the earliest possible opportunity. There was not enough time to design the changes, obtain Ofqual approval and apply these changes to the June 2024 exam series.

This table outlines the progression of specification Issues. Issue 4 applies to the June 2024 exam series. Issue 5 will apply to the June 2025 series, and Issue 6 (tbc) will then apply from June 2026 onwards.

Specification Issue	Which exam series is it for?	What changes does it cover?	What was/will be the release date?
Issue 4	June 2024	Removal of Level 2 stimulus points cap	September 2023
	June 2025	Specification language changes	
Issue 5	June 2025	Changes to assessment model	Summer 2024
Issue 6 (tbc)	June 2026 onwards	Specification content changes	Summer 2024

- **When will we see updated 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 releasing updated Sample Assessment Materials earlier behind an Edexcel Online padlock, to help for example with Year 10 mocks.

- **Why don't you split Paper 2 into two separate examinations on different days?**

This is an issue which divides teachers. No UK GCSE History specification has four papers, and we are reluctant to add a fourth paper to an already crowded exam timetable. The changes we are making to Paper 2 in terms of question ramping and extra time should help improve students' assessment experience.

- **Why aren't you addressing the 'volume of content problem' in 2025?**

We aren't making changes to specification content at this point, but we are reviewing it.

Making changes to specification content requires more lead-in time. We cannot amend content once students have started the course; for example, students sitting their GCSEs in June 2025 started a two-year course in September 2023.

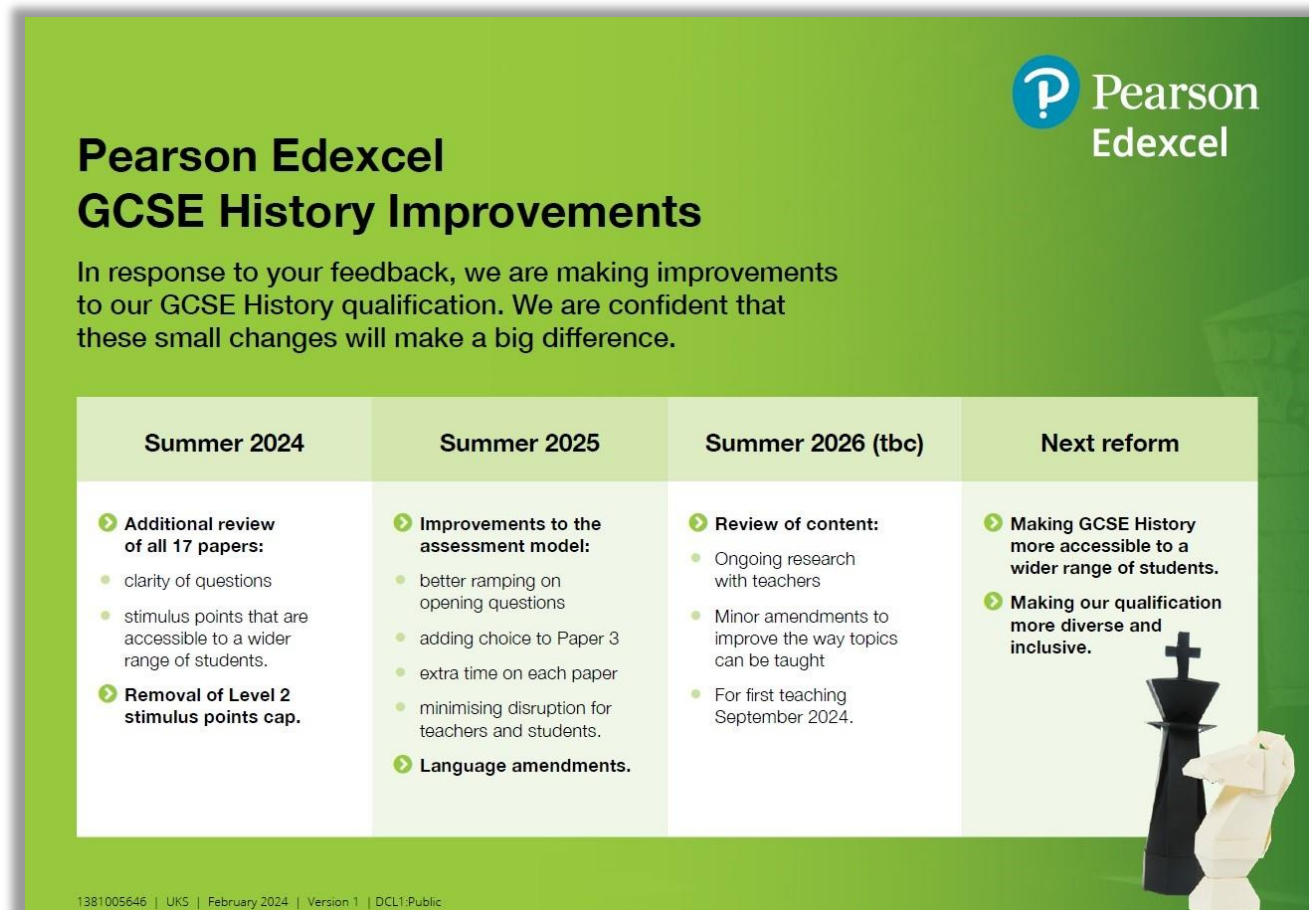
We cannot make any substantial changes to content in the lifetime of the current specification, because of the DfE subject content requirements, such as that the specification include a thematic study, two depth studies, a period study and a historic environment.

We are exploring some small content amendments for June 2026 (or possibly 2027). At present we are carrying out research with teachers on this issue 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.



- What is your timeline for making changes between now and next reform? Why aren't you amending the content at the same time as the assessment model?

This infographic outlines our timeline as we work towards next reform.



Making changes to specification content requires more lead-in time, but these changes to the assessment model could be made relatively quickly. We didn't want to delay the latter, and so have decided to implement the changes incrementally: the assessment model first in 2025, and content amendments to follow in 2026 (or possibly 2027).

The opportunity to make significant changes can only come at next reform, because these will require changes to the [GCSE History subject-level conditions and requirements](#).



- **What changes are you making?**

This table summarises the key changes. For more detail on these changes, including the rationale behind them, please refer to the guidance document on the 2025 assessment changes ([here](#)).

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 Describe <b>two</b> features of... (4)	Q1a Describe <b>one</b> feature of... (2) Q1b Describe <b>one</b> feature of... (2)
Paper 1 Q5/6	Covering at least 200 years	Covering <b>either</b> a complete period <b>or</b> at least 200 years
Paper 2B Q1	Q1 Describe <b>two</b> features of... (4)	Q1a Describe <b>one</b> feature of... (2) Q1b Describe <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 Explain <b>two</b> consequences of... (8)	Q1a Explain <b>one</b> consequence of... (4) Q1b Explain <b>one</b> consequence of... (4)
Paper 3 Q2	Q2 Explain why... (12)	Q2a <b>or</b> Q2b Explain why... (12)

- **What will exam questions look like? What about the mark schemes?**

The table above indicates what the new questions look like. Changes to the mark schemes are very minor, for example, to separate out the amended opening questions into two parts; there are no changes to the actual wording of the generic mark schemes, at any level. For examples of questions, please refer to the guidance document on the 2025 assessment changes ([here](#)), and to Issue 5 of the Sample Assessment Materials, which will be released in summer 2024.

- **Why have you added only a small amount of time to each paper?**

When making these changes we were mindful of the assessment burden on students in what is a very full exam timetable, and these changes reflect the majority of teacher views in our feedback. We think a total assessment time of 4 hours 40 minutes is reasonable, and did not want to approach 5 hours in total.

We have added more time to Paper 3 because there are more sources and interpretations compared to the sources on Paper 1.

We considered rounding Paper 2 up to 2 hours, so that students have 1 hour to complete each component, but with the extra time required for Papers 1 and 3, this was not possible without a significant increase in the total assessment time.



- **Are you expecting students to use the extra time to write longer answers?**

No – by adding in this extra time, we do not expect students to write longer responses than they currently do, and answer spaces for questions are unchanged.

The extra time is intended to give students more reading time for source and interpretations questions, and/or for students to spend more time thinking/planning their extended writing responses. On Paper 2, the extra time is intended to provide a better split between the two components of 55 minutes each. (NB students can choose to divide their time however they wish on Paper 2; our recommendation is that students divide their time equally because each component is worth the same number of marks.)

- **What will the Paper 1 Q5/6 change look like in practice?**

There is a new Crime and Punishment Question 6 in the updated Sample Assessment Materials that exemplifies the change by covering the years c1900– present.

Please refer to the guidance document on the 2025 assessment changes ([here](#)), and to Issue 5 of the Sample Assessment Materials, which will be released in summer 2024.

- **Why have you provided a choice of Explain why on Paper 3, but not on Paper 1 or Paper 2B?**

We considered adding choice to Explain why in all three places. However, we decided that the choice will be of most help to students on Paper 3, which is the only paper that currently offers no choice of question. On both Paper 1 and Paper 2B, students have a choice of 16-mark judgement essay questions, and on Paper 2P, students have a choice of two from three 8-mark importance questions.

Students generally do prefer choice – it is an important element of our assessment model – but we are mindful also that adding too much choice to a question paper can also make the paper layout more complicated and potentially less accessible for some students.

- **Why have you provided a choice of Explain why but not the enquiry package (section B) on Paper 3?**

Adding choice to the enquiry package would require students to spend a lot of time reading two sets of sources and interpretations before deciding which package to answer. Adding choice to the enquiry package would not make it more accessible for students.

- **Does the addition of a choice of Explain why questions affect how questions are set on Paper 3?**

No. There is no change, other than that the choice of Explain why questions means that students have more chance to show us what they know.

- **Why are you considering adding extra supporting text to the consequences questions? Why only some questions and not all? And when will you confirm if this is going ahead?**

We recognise that some students find the consequences question a challenging opening question on the Period study. We are exploring if we can further improve the accessibility and ‘ramping’ on this paper: the addition of some extra supporting text may help students recognise the focus of the question. For some consequences questions it won’t be necessary.

More work and research need to be done. If we can proceed, we will update the SAMs and confirm its introduction date accordingly.



- **Can you remind me where to find information about the specification language changes?**

The guidance on the specification language changes for Issue 4 of the specification comprises the [affected options with track changes on](#), the [rationale](#) behind the changes, and a set of [FAQs](#).

- **Do you expect grade boundaries to change as a result of these improvements?**

Grade boundaries vary from year-to-year, depending on how each paper performs. They are not decided until all the scripts have been marked. Grade boundaries are set to ensure standards are maintained each year.

We think that grade boundaries **may** increase slightly at the lower grades (1–4) as a result of improved ramping. However, we don't anticipate significant changes. We will share data with you as usual after each exam series.

- **What support are you offering?**

As well as this set of FAQs, a guidance document will go into more detail about each of the changes, including examples of what they will look like. This document is available on the website ([here](#)).

We ran a live online event on **Thursday 14 March 2024**, to run through the changes in a bit more detail and for you to ask questions and give us your feedback. A recording of the event, along with the slides, is available on the Edexcel website [here](#).

- **When will your free support materials be updated?**

These are being reviewed and updated, and we will notify you when the changes are complete; we are aiming for April 2024. Materials affected include the getting started guide, the paper guide, and the topic booklets.

We have a useful general guide to finding things on the website [here](#).

- **Are you updating past papers to reflect the changes?**

We are updating the Sample Assessment Materials, but it is not possible to update past papers. We are required to share them on our website as they were sat by students at the time.

If you would like to update past papers or questions for mock exams and practice papers, you can download and edit past papers (using appropriate software), e.g., to amend the paper timings, add a choice of explain why questions or separate out the key features and consequences questions into two parts. You can also continue to use [Exam Wizard](#), our free online exam preparation tool, to build practice papers.

- **How will these assessment changes affect my teaching?**

One key aspect of these changes is that we want to minimise potential disruption for teachers and students. You may wish to do some or all of the following to help with how you teach GCSE History:

- increase paper times for mock papers to match the new timings for live papers from 2025.
- review your guidance for students about how they allocate time on each paper – for example, some students may use the extra time on Papers 1 and 3 for understanding the sources and interpretations, whereas other students may use it to plan their extended writing answers.
- key features questions – students will have more opportunities to show their knowledge, and they will also need to show less knowledge about each aspect of content being assessed.
- consequences questions – as with key features, students will have more opportunities to show their knowledge, and they will also need to show less knowledge about the consequences of each event or development being assessed.



- **What about textbooks?**

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.

- **How will you be supporting students with these changes?**

Whilst we have kept the changes to a minimum to avoid disruption, we are aware that introducing changes to assessments in 2025 does carry some risk in terms of ensuring all students are aware of and understand the changes. We will ensure these changes are clearly communicated to all centres and we will create student-focused guidance in due course.

**If you have any questions, please contact Mark Battye, our History subject advisor:**

[History qualification page](#)

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