



GCSE History content changes for 2026: FAQs

- **Why are you making these changes now? Why didn't you wait till next specification reform?**

We have been aware from teacher and student feedback how challenging it is to meet the volume of content requirements in the time available in a two-year course.

Following a thorough and comprehensive review of our GCSE History assessment model, we are now ready to move on to the next stage of improvements, which focus on changes to the specification content.

We don't know when the next major reform of GCSE History will take place and we want to implement some changes now to improve students' experience of our qualification. We regularly review the performance of our qualifications, and because this qualification has been in use for a number of years now, we consider this to be a good point at which to review the content and make any adjustments to ensure that it is working as well as it can do for the remainder of its lifecycle.

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 content 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 specification content?**

We cannot make any substantial changes to content in the lifetime of the current specification, because of the DfE's [GCSE History subject-level conditions and requirements](#), such as that the specification include a thematic study, two depth studies, a period study and a historic environment.

Alongside this, we have not been able to remove significant chunks of content as this could undermine the coherence of an option's structure and focus, whilst also potentially causing disruption for both teachers and students. Significant changes must await reform.

In making these changes, we have also not adjusted our overall approach to how we present specification content: we think this detailed approach provides clarity about the content requirements, and we did not want to jeopardise that clarity in any way.

- **Who did you consult with?**

We drafted the content amendments in discussion with the senior examining team, and we then shared these drafts with a number of teachers for comment. We also ran a focus group with teachers. A big thank you to everyone we spoke to for your help in developing and refining these proposals.

- **Where can I find a summary of the updates for 2026?**

Our subject advisor has released a news item, which can be found [here](#). It includes a brief recording going over the changes, a summary of how we approached the content, and links to useful support items.



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

The changes to the specification content take effect for **first teaching September 2024** and **first assessment June 2026**. These changes therefore affect students starting Year 10 in September 2024.

This table outlines the progression of specification Issues. Issue 4 applied to the June 2024 exam series and was taken down from the website at the conclusion of that series. Issue 5 will apply to the June 2025 series, and Issue 6 will then apply from June 2026 onwards.

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

• **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.

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

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Making changes to specification content requires more lead-in time, but we were able to make changes to the assessment model relatively quickly. We didn't want to delay the latter, and so decided to implement the changes incrementally: the assessment model first in 2025, and content amendments in 2026.



- **What general principles have you applied to the content changes?**

The following broad principles were applied to the content review.

- All of the options were reviewed – except Migration (new in 2021) and American West (amended in 2021). Changes have been made to 14 of the 17 options following this review.
- Some options are subject to more change than others; for example, Paper 1 changes are largely to be found in the historic environments.
- There are three main types of amendment:
 - rewording to clarify the focus of the content and/or to flag where too much detail is not required
 - movement of content to make the structure and flow of ideas more logical
 - simplification of content, by removing unnecessary detail.
- No changes were made that would affect the subject conditions.
- We were not able to remove significant chunks of content from any of the options – this level of change could undermine the coherence of an option’s structure/focus and could prove more disruptive than beneficial for schools.
- No new content has been added, and no published resources have been made obsolete.

- **Why are the assessment amends for 2025 but the content amends for 2026?**

The nature of the changes to the assessment model meant they could be introduced more quickly. Making changes to specification content requires more lead-in time, and this is the earliest date by which we could introduce them. We didn’t want to delay the assessment changes by a year in order to introduce them at the same time as the content changes.

- **Why are there two specifications on the website?**

Issue 5 of the specification covers the assessment changes, which apply for first assessment June 2025.

Issue 6 of the specification covers the content changes, which apply for first assessment June 2026. (It also includes all the updates made for Issue 5.)

We therefore need to have both specifications on the website between June 2024 and June 2025. We have marked clearly which one is which.

- **Are you updating the Sample Assessment Materials as well for 2026?**

No. Issue 5 of the Sample Assessment Materials are available on the website, for first assessment June 2025. No changes are required following the content amends, and so no further update is required.

- **Can you remind me where to find information about the changes that apply to June 2025?**

The guidance document on the 2025 assessment changes is available on the website [here](#).

- **What support are you offering?**

As well as this set of FAQs, a series of guidance documents go into more detail for each of the 14 options being amended, including mark-up of the specification content and a rationale for each change being made. These guidance documents are available in a zipped file on the website [here](#).

Our subject advisor, Mark Battye, has recorded a session going through the changes, and this is available on the website via his update [here](#).



- **How do the guidance documents work?**

Content that has been removed, or moved (old position) is shown in red with a strikethrough the text.

Any new words or content that has been moved (new position) is shown in green.

All changes are explained in blue text underneath each key topic.

The topic guidance documents can be downloaded [here](#).

Option 31: Weimar and Nazi Germany, 1918–39	
Key topic 1: The Weimar Republic, 1918–29	
1 The origins of the Republic, 1918–19	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The legacy of the First World War: The abdication of the Kaiser; the armistice and revolution 1918–19. The situation in Germany at the end of the War: political unrest, abdication of the Kaiser, armistice and new republic.• The setting up of the Weimar Republic: The strengths and weaknesses of the new Weimar Constitution.
2 The early challenges to the Weimar Republic, 1919–23	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reasons for the early unpopularity of the Republic, including the 'stab in the back' theory and the key terms of the Treaty of Versailles.• Challenges to the Republic from Left and Right: Spartacists, Freikorps, the Kapp Putsch.• The challenges of 1923: hyperinflation: the reasons for, and effects of, the French occupation of the Ruhr.
3 The 'Golden Years' of the recovery of the Republic, 1924–29	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reasons for economic recovery, including the work of Stresemann, the Rentenmark, the Dawes and Young Plans and American loans and investment.• The impact on domestic policies of Stresemann's achievements in gaining international acceptance of Germany abroad: through the Locarno Pact and joining the League of Nations and the Kellogg-Briand Pact.
4 Changes in society, 1924–29	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changes in the standard of living: including wages, housing, unemployment insurance.• Changes in the position of women in work, politics and leisure.• Cultural changes: developments in architecture, art and the cinema.

Subtopic 1
1. We have amended bp1 and 2 to make it clear this Subtopic sets the scene for this option and that the events don't need to be ~~fully understood~~ rather it's about understanding the situation out of which Weimar came about.
2. Added 'Weimar' into bp2 for clarity.

Subtopic 3
1. Subtopic heading amended to include the phrase 'the golden years'. This does not imply a change in ~~teaching~~ but it is a phrase the students should be familiar with.
2. reference to 'the impact on domestic policies' removed from bp2 to simplify teaching and focus on how Germans viewed his achievements, not their impact on domestic policies.
3. Kellogg Briand Pact removed from bp2 to simplify teaching.

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

An updated Getting Started Guide is available on the website [here](#).

Other support materials are being reviewed and updated, and we will notify you when the changes are complete. Materials affected include topic booklets, schemes of work, knowledge boosters and the paper guides.

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

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

One key aspect of these changes is that we want to minimise potential disruption for teachers and students. Since no brand-new content has been added, all existing resources can be used. However, you may wish to use time before the end of the summer 2024 term to think as a department about how these changes may affect how you teach the course from September.

Prioritise the topic you will be teaching first from September, e.g. for most centres that is likely to be either the thematic study or the British depth study.

You may want to use these content changes as an opportunity to streamline or review how you teach the options. You may want to review your schemes of work or lesson plans to ensure they reflect the content changes – do the number of lessons change in any way?

Think about how these changes might affect your approach to:

- order of teaching content
- structure and focus of lessons
- use of resources.

Lesson resources: could you review your resources to ensure they are hitting the focus you need? Is this a chance to trim or re-organise your lesson resources?

Published resources: none are being made out-of-date by these changes, but you may wish to review books in light of the changes. Do any parts go into more detail than is needed?



- **What about textbooks?**

As with the 2025 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, and to avoid any significant knock-on issues arising with the published resources that schools have invested in.

- **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 and to content in 2026 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.

December 2024 – These FAQs have been updated, in response to content-specific questions from teachers. All new FAQs are below this point, organised by option.

General FAQs

- **Why have you not made any changes to the content in Migrants in Britain, the American West, or Conflict in the Middle East?**

Migrants in Britain was developed in 2021, and when we reviewed the content we did not think any changes were required.

The American West content was amended in 2021, along similar lines to the review that we have undertaken now, and therefore no further changes are required at this stage (although language changes have since been made for first assessment 2025).

Conflict in the Middle East was carefully reviewed by Parallel Histories in 2021.

- **Where changes have been made to clarify the content, e.g., where events don't need to be studied in depth, does this mean that these changes are therefore clarifying something that is already the case?**

Teachers should use Issue 5 of the specification for the summer 2025 series. The current topic booklets exemplify the level of depth required when studying events for this exam series.

Issue 6 of the specification is for first assessment summer 2026. Updated topic booklets will be issued shortly, with amended exemplification.

Making changes to specification content requires more lead-in time, and 2026 is the earliest date by which we could introduce them. We are not able to apply any of the 2026 content changes retrospectively to the 2025 series. However, we are committed to ensuring that our questions are fair and accessible to a wide range of students, and changes which clarify how content should be taught reflect this commitment.

- **Are you updating the specimen papers for 2025?**

No. The specimen papers were written ahead of first assessment in June 2018 to provide teachers with a second set of papers. Mock papers have been created by adapting the summer 2024 papers to match the 2025 assessment model, and so updated specimen papers are not required. Individual questions from the specimen papers can continue to be used as practice questions.



- **Will the approach to the key feature question change, now that students will be asked for one key feature each of two separate aspects of content?**

No, there is no change. Key feature questions will continue to be drawn from any part of the specification.

Medicine in Britain

- **How should I approach the teaching of Hippocrates, following his removal from the specification content? Students need to know about his importance, e.g. Hippocratic oath and influence on Galen.**

Hippocrates developed the Theory of the Four Humours, and the theory is important throughout the medieval and early modern periods. Galen's Theory of Opposites is an approach to treatment based on the Four Humours. Students therefore need to know the Four Humours but not necessarily Hippocrates.

The specification is a guide to what can be asked in exam questions; however, it is not designed to be a prescriptive list of what should be taught. You may therefore find it helps your students to continue teaching Hippocrates in a 'light touch' way, in order to develop students' understanding of his importance to the development of Medicine. Students could also include Hippocrates in an answer, if a question was set on, for example, medieval medicine.

The removal of people or events from the specification means that a question will not be set focusing on them. A question would therefore not be set directly on Hippocrates; students might include him as additional knowledge in an answer, and this would be rewarded if it was relevant to the question, but it would not be required. Stimulus points may name people or events not listed in the specification but, again, candidates are not required to use those aspects of content.

Anglo-Saxons and Normans

- **In Key topic 1, sub-topic 2, 'reasons for' has been added to the bullet point about the 'rising against Tostig and his exile'. Does this mean that only causation questions can be set on the rising against Tostig?**

That's correct. A high-tariff question can no longer be set on, for example, the consequences of the rising against Tostig, or his exile. By adding in 'reasons for', this limits the focus of a high-tariff question to be on causation. An AO1 key feature question could be drawn from this bullet point, as before.

- **In Key topic 2, the three Anglo-Saxon revolts and rebellions are now treated collectively rather than individually – does this mean that from 2026 we will not set a question on one of the three rebellions?**

The three bullet points have been merged into one to emphasise that the revolts and rebellions can be treated collectively rather than individually. An AO1 key feature question could be drawn from this bullet point, as before.

Please note also that the 'causes and outcomes' text has been moved from the sub-topic to the bullet point – this is to clarify that the revolts and rebellions only need to be studied in relation to causes and outcomes.

Henry VIII and his ministers

- **In Key topic 3, do students still need to learn about the Pilgrimage of Grace, 1536?**

Yes. The Pilgrimage of Grace is the heading of the last sub-topic. The specification requires students to know the reasons for and key events of the uprising. We have simply removed the reasons for the failure of the Pilgrimage of Grace and the significance of the uprising.

It is important that students are familiar with the wording in the key topic and sub-topic headings as well as the bullet points.



Early Elizabethan England

- **In Key topic 2, how should I review my teaching of the Spanish Netherlands? Are students expected to know about the build-up in the Netherlands?**

The focus of this paper is Early Elizabethan England, not events in Europe unless they affect England. Key topic 2 covers foreign relations with Spain in the period 1569–88.

Sub-topic 2 (bp 1) specifies ‘Political, religious and commercial rivalry with Spain’, so students need an awareness of events in the Netherlands that affected England, for example, the disruption of English trade in the Spanish Netherlands, but they do not need to know all the details of the Spanish Netherlands conflict.

Sub-topic 3, The Outbreak of War with Spain, 1585–88, is divided into two bullet points. The first covers reasons for deteriorating relations with Spain, and this specifies only English direct involvement in the Netherlands and the actions of Robert Dudley. The second bullet point covers Drake and the raid on Cadiz, as a key event leading to the outbreak of war.

Early events in the Netherlands will not be the focus of a question. However, students may still find it helpful to know about them in general terms, so that they understand that England’s direct intervention was the culmination of deteriorating relations. Events like the Spanish Fury did not involve England, so students do not need to understand it in detail, but you could cover it briefly as an example of an event that worsened relations between Spain and England.

We are updating the topic booklet, and this will include updated exemplification of content where required.

- **In Key topic 4, do students still need to learn about the second attempted colonisation of Virginia?**

The second colony is still in sub-topic 4 bp1, as part of the ‘reasons for the attempted colonisation of Virginia’. Any exam question about the attempted colonisation could cover both attempts (the second attempted colonisation itself is within the time period of the option). Mentioning the second colony in the teaching of the content will help students to recognise that this was an ongoing and significant project for Raleigh.

However, students no longer need to know the reasons for the failure of the second colony. The failure sits outside the time period of the option, and it is not clear why the colony failed, only that, by the time people from England went back to Virginia, the settlers had disappeared.

The topic booklet exemplification is being updated to reflect this.

Weimar and Nazi Germany

- **In Key topic 2, with the removal of ‘The early growth and features of the Nazi party’ (sub-topic 1) and ‘the roles of Brüning and von Schleicher in 1932’ (sub-topic 4), what specific content no longer needs to be taught? For example, do I still need to teach the following:**

- Nazi Party leadership (Hitler surrounding himself with key supporters, e.g., Rudolf Hess)
- Nazi Party organisation (e.g., new name for the party/new logo/party newspaper)
- Brüning’s resignation and banning of the SS
- Von Schleicher suggesting a new chancellor and him becoming chancellor in 1932.

The specification is a guide to what can be asked in exam questions; however, it is not designed to be a prescriptive list of what should be taught. You may therefore find it helps your students to continue teaching these pieces of content in a ‘light touch’ way, in order to develop students’ understanding of the events that took place and their context. Students could also include these details in an answer, if a question was set on, for example, Hitler’s role in the early development of the Nazi Party, or on how he became Chancellor.

The removal of people or events from the specification means that a question will not be set focusing on them. A question would therefore not be set directly on von Schleicher; students might include him as additional knowledge in a question on how Hitler became Chancellor, but it would not be required. The



stimulus points in Question 2 may name people or events not listed in the specification but, again, candidates are not required to use those aspects of content.

If a source or interpretation mentioned any of the pieces of content listed above, the context would be clear and candidates would not be expected to have any additional knowledge.

- **Where changes have been made to simplify content, e.g., the removal of the SD from Key topic 3, sub-topic 2, does this mean that students still need to know about this for the summer 2025 series? Could it appear in a source or interpretation from summer 2026?**

Yes. Issue 5 of the specification applies for summer 2025, and students should know the content included in it. The changes have been made for Issue 6 of the specification, and are for first assessment summer 2026. As advised above, where content has been removed for 2026, you may still find it helpful to teach it in a 'light touch' way to develop your students' understanding of what took place.

From 2026 onwards, if a source or interpretation mentioned any content that has been removed, such as the SD, the context would be clear and candidates would not be expected to have any additional knowledge.

If you have any further content-specific questions, please contact Mark Battye, our History subject advisor, and we will update these FAQs accordingly.

[History qualification page](#)

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