

Pearson Edexcel GCSE History: implementing change and preparing for future reform

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Work on developing the current GCSE History specification began nearly a decade ago now, and much has moved on since then in the study of history. This presentation is an opportunity to reflect on this and consider what changes may be on the horizon. As well as presenting some of our observations and ideas, we would like to consider a range of issues, such as selecting and structuring content; approaches to assessment; diversity, equity and inclusion; and how we support teachers and students as the study of history evolves.



Agenda

- Specification reform and topic choice in GCSE History
- Strengths and weaknesses of current GCSE History specifications
- Diversity, equity and inclusion in GCSE History
- Modelling new approaches to existing topics: American West and Elizabethan England
- How accessible is GCSE History?
- Further engagement with teachers and students

Specification reform and topic choice in GCSE History



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.
- Involves 2 government bodies: DfE & Ofqual.
- DfE's content requirements define the rules around content such as British History, periods which must be covered, nature of topics.
- Ofqual then accredit our specifications and sample assessment materials.
- Whole process from initial criteria discussion to accreditation by Ofqual takes up to 2 years and involves hundreds of stakeholders including teachers, examiners, universities, subject associations and awarding organisations.



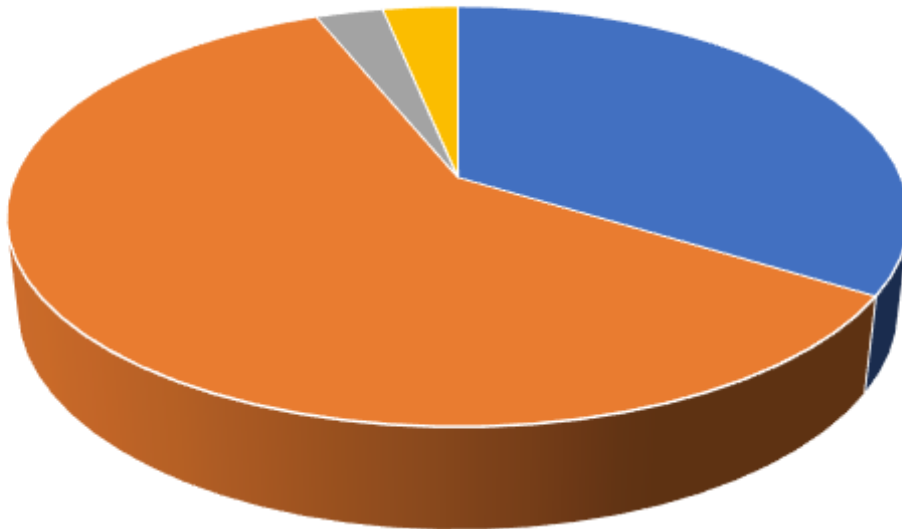
What determines the choice of topics?

- In History there is no prescribed content so it's up to individual awarding bodies to decide exactly which topics to include to meet the DfE's content requirements.
- We work with key stakeholders to help make these decisions.
- Topics are chosen for potential to engage/ interest students and we test a broad range.
- Designing new specifications is a balancing act - difficult decisions need to be made.
- Practical reasons limit the choice of topics such as need to keep question papers clear and simple for students to navigate.
- Teachers and students now expect every topic to have published support.
- We try to ensure continuity with previous specifications; teachers have invested a lot of time, money and expertise in these topics and want to continue teaching them.
- We are always looking for new topics to keep specifications fresh and choose new topics for their potential to engage and interest students.
- Brand new topics rarely become popular as existing popular topics dominate.

Which topics are currently popular?

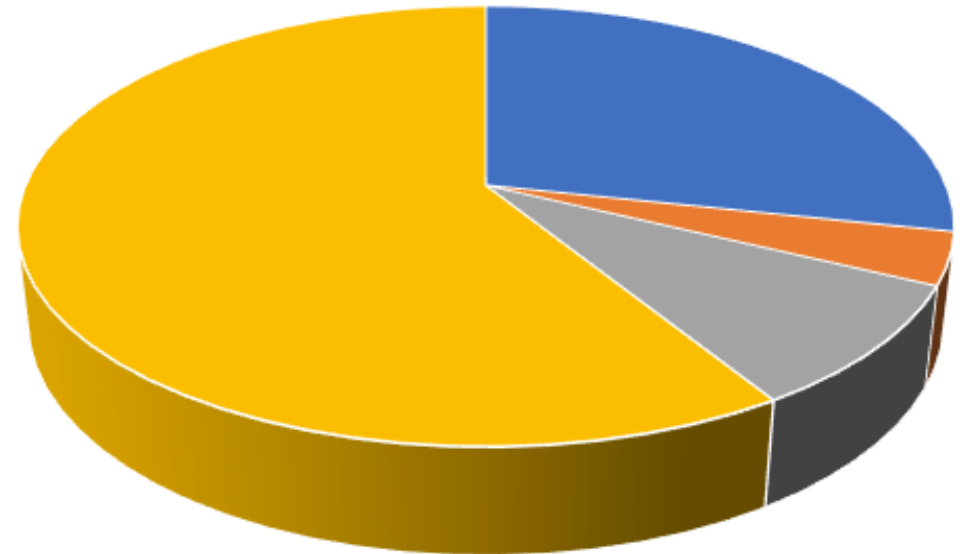
- Summer 2023 entries for British topics:

Thematic Study



- Crime and Punishment
- Warfare and British Society
- Medicine in Britain
- Migrants in Britain

British Depth Study

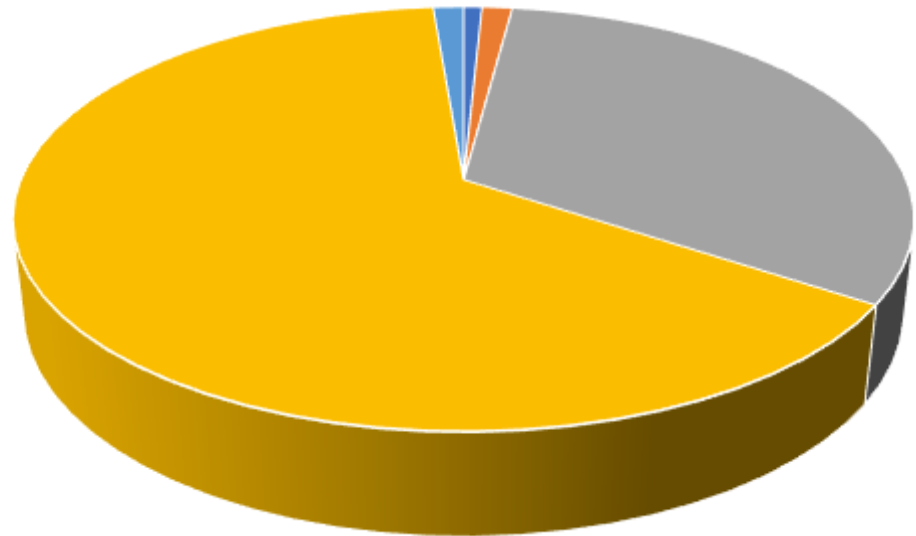


- Anglo-Saxon & Norman England
- Henry VIII
- King Richard and John
- Early Elizabethan England

Which topics are currently popular?

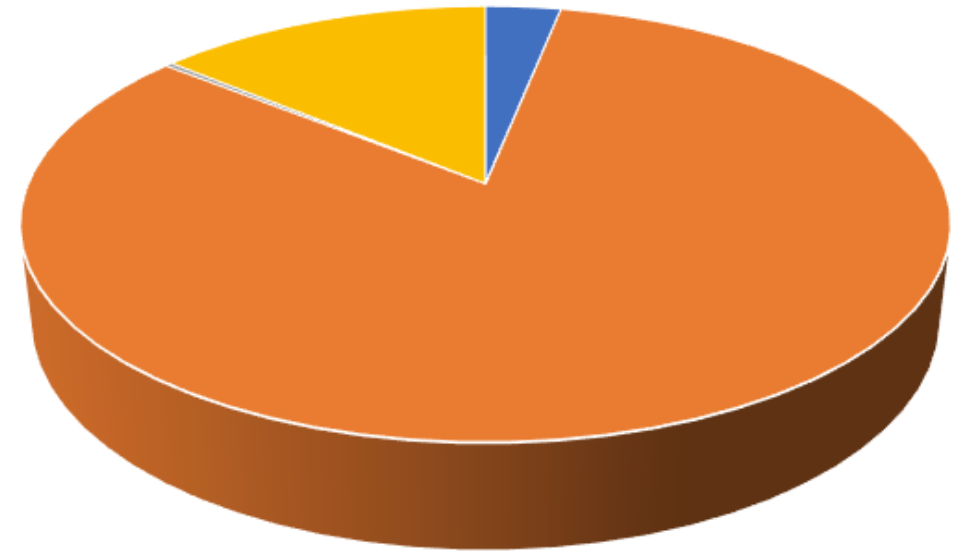
- Summer 2023 entries for non-British topics:

Period Study



■ Spain and New World ■ British America ■ American West
■ Superpower Relations ■ Conflict in Middle East

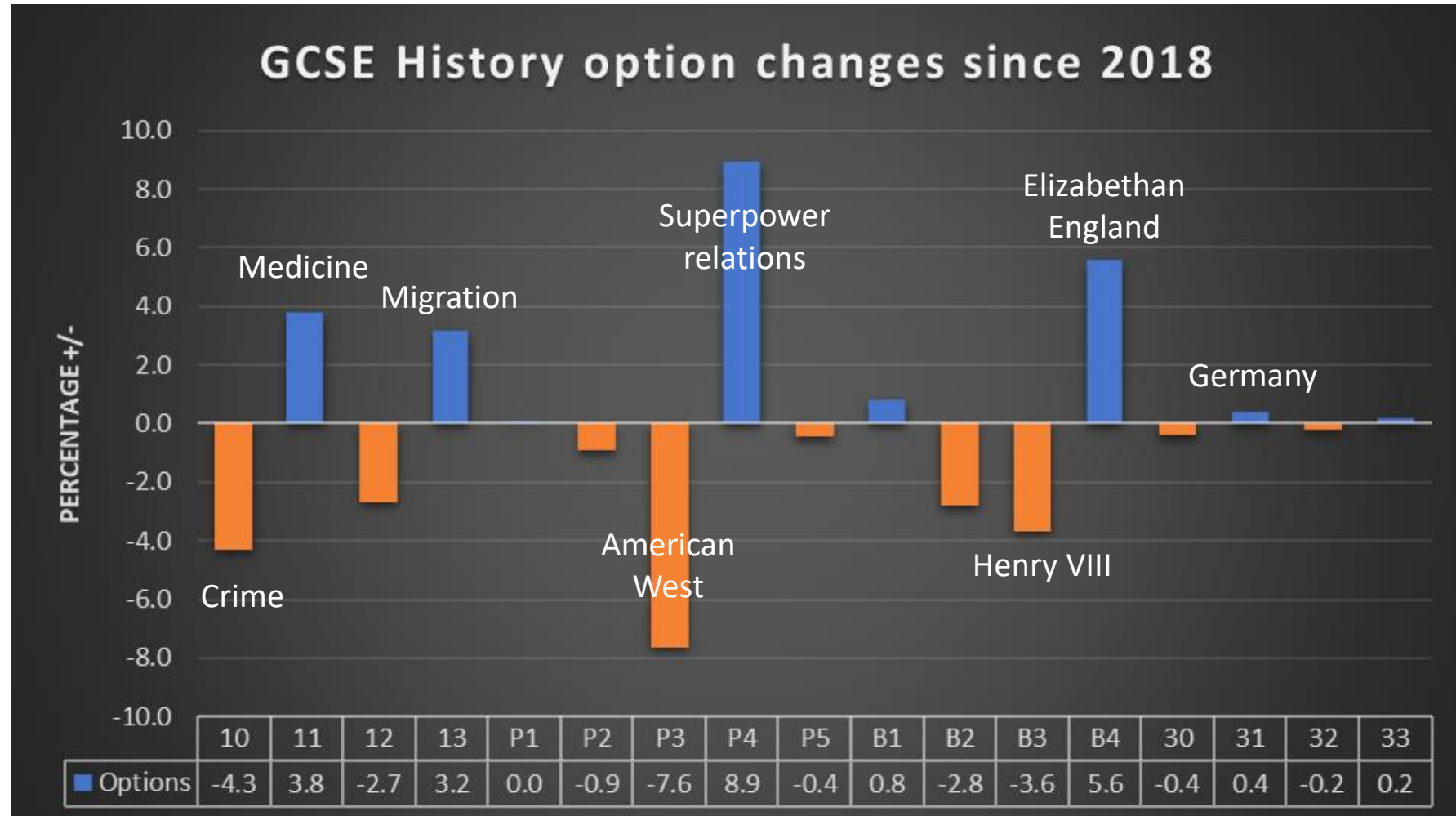
Modern Depth Study



■ Russia ■ Weimar & Nazi Germany ■ Mao's China ■ US Civil Rights & Vietnam

Changes in popularity of Edexcel topics

- Centres have gravitated towards the bigger topics since 2018: Medicine, Superpower relations and Early Elizabethan England.
- Germany hasn't grown because it was already so large.



GCSE History topics: all exam boards

- The following data shows entries for each GCSE History option for 2019 (JCQ data).
- Edexcel's new Migration thematic study will push Migration further up the list in more recent data.
- Popular topics like Germany dominate in all exam boards' specifications.

2019 entries across boards (Eng)	Type	Edexcel	AQA	OCR A	OCR B	Total	Percentage
Germany 1890-1945/1918-39/1925-55/1933-45	Non-Br depth/Period	116,464	49,798	3,430	15,805	185,497	73.3%
Medicine/Health	Thematic	79,675	67,332		10,400	157,407	62.2%
Elizabeth I/Elizabethans	British depth	76,253	51,244		7,930	135,427	53.5%
Cold War 1941-91/Conflict and tension 1945-1972	Period/Non-Br depth	78,583	20,245			98,828	39.1%
Anglo-Saxons/Norman Conquest	British depth	40,452	32,084		7,755	80,291	31.7%
American West 1835-95/1840-95/C19 Making of Am	Period	56,493	9,128		14,160	79,781	31.5%
Crime and Punishment	Thematic	54,260			4,280	58,540	23.1%
USA 1919-48/1920-73/1954-75/1945-74	Non-Br depth/Period	19,293	27,475	1,860		48,628	19.2%
Conflict and tension 1918-1939	Non-Br depth		37,688			37,688	14.9%
Power	Thematic		15,545	2,525		18,070	7.1%
Henry VIII	British depth	17,183				17,183	6.8%
Conflict and tension in Asia 1950-1975	Non-Br depth		17,081			17,081	6.8%
Conflict and tension 1894-1918	Non-Br depth		14,641			14,641	5.8%
Migration	Thematic		7,501	1,040	1,320	9,861	3.9%
Warfare	Thematic	7,127		1,925		9,052	3.6%
Russia 1917-41/1894-1945	Non-Br depth/Period	4,670	3,977			8,647	3.4%
Richard-John	British depth	7,174				7,174	2.8%
International relations 1918-75	Period			5,490		5,490	2.2%
Restoration England	British depth		4,338			4,338	1.7%
Edward I	British depth		2,711			2,711	1.1%
English Reformation	British depth			2,525		2,525	1.0%
British America 1713-81	Period	2,483				2,483	1.0%
Middle East 1945-95	Period	2,341				2,341	0.9%
Personal Rule to Restoration	British depth			1,925		1,925	0.8%
Viking Expansion, c750-c1050	Period				1,620	1,620	0.6%
Aztecs and Spanish Conquest 1490-1555/1519-35	Period/Non-Br depth	1,162			195	1,357	0.5%
Empire/Britain 1688-c.1730	British depth			1,040		1,040	0.4%
Conflict and tension in Gulf and Afghan 1990-2009	Non-Br depth		723			723	0.3%
China 1945-76/1950-81	Non-Br depth	635		70		705	0.3%
Brit Peace&war 1900-18	British depth				315	315	0.1%
Mughal Empire, 1526-1707	Period				220	220	0.1%
South Africa 1960-94	Non-Br depth			130		130	0.1%
1st Crusade, c1070-1100	Non-Br depth				0	0	0.0%



GCSE History topics: conclusions

Things to consider at reform in terms of topic choice:

- Some topics have always been popular, and continue to grow due to available resources, teacher expertise and general appeal to students.
- In contrast, brand-new GCSE topics will always struggle to grow in popularity.
- We will continue to test and develop new topic ideas to keep specifications fresh and relevant and welcome teachers' views on this.
- We are confident that Migration will become an established thematic study which rivals Medicine and Crime in terms of popularity.
- We think that new specifications will attempt to re-introduce modern British History.
- Re-introducing controlled assessment could allow specifications to offer a broader range of topics.
- Popular topics also need to evolve to become more diverse and inclusive.

Strengths and weaknesses of current GCSE History specifications



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Strengths of GCSE (9-1) History

- The introduction of compulsory early depth studies and thematic studies means students are now studying a **wider range of historical periods** including medieval, early modern and modern History. Less focus on 20th century across KS3/4/5.
- The **separation of sources and interpretations** into different assessment objectives has helped improve students' understanding of these important historical skills.
- The **historic environment** is an interesting addition to the specifications which has resulted in some innovative approaches to content and assessment across exam boards.
- The increased demand of the (9-1) GCSE in terms of content and assessment has really **stretched the most able students** and offered a solid foundation for further study.
- Having a single unified approach to GCSE (rather than multiple SHP and Modern World specifications) has meant we can offer **better, more focused support and resources**.
- Many **popular topics from old specifications** were included, meaning teachers felt confident in some areas and could use and adapt old resources.

Weaknesses of GCSE (9-1) History

- The requirement to study modern and early depth studies from different countries has resulted in the **Tudors and Nazis dominating** at GCSE. This is to the detriment of modern British History and early non-British History.
- The **increased British history requirement** (40%) affected thematic studies and led to a narrower approach to what is considered British history.
- There is **too much content** in the GCSE History specifications as a result of the requirement to study four discrete topics from different periods, the historic environment and a lack of internal assessment.
- The **lack of internal assessment** at GCSE is an issue – coursework enables a broader range of topics to be offered and is good preparation for further study.
- The current specifications focus too much on high politics and **lack diversity**.
- The current assessment is **not suitable for lower-attaining students** and question papers need to better-reflect the wide level of attainment at GCSE.

GCSE History: some **possibilities** for the future?

Building on current strengths and addressing weaknesses:

- **Thematic studies** – could be retained – likely to include some non-British History and could cover a broader timescale eg Roman Britain to present.
- **Historic Environment** - could be internally assessed (eg controlled assessment) with more flexibility to consider local history or wider-world depth studies. 'Off the peg' topics could be offered to help increase range of topics available.
- **British History** – could allow a more flexible approach to topic choice eg a choice from medieval, early modern and modern British topics.
- **British History** – should include Britain's engagement with the wider world.
- **Diverse content** - all topics should be more diverse in terms of the type of History included (social, economic, political) and interactions with other countries.
- **Volume of content** – needs to be carefully reviewed.
- **Tiering?** Strong consideration should be given to tiering in Ebacc subjects.
- **More innovative assessment?** Eg pre-release, on-demand assessment, anthologies etc.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in GCSE History





Pearson's commitment to DE&I

- We are committed to ensuring that future specifications, assessments and teaching materials are more diverse and inclusive.
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion will be at the forefront of our minds when creating new specifications (and publications) for all subjects.
- Pearson has introduced a new global content and editorial policy to ensure all future products adhere to Pearson's DE&I commitments and sustainability principles.
- Set up advisory panels for each subject to help develop our vision for future and ensure we take a better approach at next spec reform.

Current progress

- Introduced new Migration thematic study which already has over 5,000 entries.
- Partnership between Pearson and The Black Curriculum to support the teaching of Black History in schools with a particular focus on our new migration option at GCSE.
- Creating lots of free resources: blogs, case studies, KS3 History topic of the month.
- Reviewing language used in current specifications for first teaching Sep 2023.

Why do current specifications lack diversity?

1. A top-down political approach focusing on conflicts and international relations has long been the favoured approach to GCSE History in this country... The old Modern World specifications dominated over SHP and Social & Economic approaches.
2. At reform we weren't sufficiently alive to issues of a lack of diversity in History... main focus of the community was lack of early periods and overlap of content across KS4/5.
3. Controlled Assessment/coursework was removed in the 2016 reforms which narrowed the range of topics on offer. The old specifications were more geographically diverse.
4. 2016 GCSE reforms represented a significant change and teachers told us they wanted as much continuity as possible with existing topics in terms of content/approach.
5. Increased content, periods and number of components at reform meant existing topics had to be squeezed into smaller chunks, meaning fewer opportunities for richer, more nuanced history.
6. Our views on diversity were too traditional eg we thought that it meant having topics on China, Middle East etc alongside topics like Elizabethan England, Cold War and Germany. We weren't sufficiently alive to the idea of making all topics more diverse.

Teacher research on diversity

Feedback from teachers through surveys and interviews:

- Current GCSE History specification includes **too much political history**, taking a top-down approach which emphasises elites and (usually) white male leaders.
- Diverse history shouldn't be a 'bolt on' but should be delivered as an **integral** part of a topic where it appears.
- 80% want to see **more DE&I embedded into existing topics** and more social history
Eg Cold War (Asia, Africa, Middle East), American West (more women, indigenous voices)
- 45% of GCSE teachers want **brand-new topics with greater diversity**.

Challenges to overcome at reform:

- In past teachers have requested continuity with previous specifications – will teachers embrace change in future? Without a statutory requirement teachers need to make an effort to be more diverse.
- Finding brand-new topics that are more diverse which could become established GCSE topics appealing to a broad range of teachers and students. Topics like South Africa, India have been in old specifications and had tiny entries.

Treated Spaces: American West review

- **Treated Spaces** reviewed our American West specification content and textbook.
- Our current approach is old-fashioned and reflects the era of Western TV and films.
- Too much focus on the settler perspective and 'Great American West' epic narrative.
- Indigenous perspectives should have more weight, and the range of Indigenous experiences recognised.
- Terms such as 'Plains Indians' are problematic: we are reviewing the use of this term and will amend the specification soon.
- New specs should reflect recent scholarship eg cultural exchanges and more nuanced picture, 'settler colonialism', industrialisation over gunslingers and cowboys, environmental degradation.



We need to take more inclusive approach using modern scholarship to bring the topic into the twenty-first century.

Modelling new approaches to existing topics



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Modelling a new approach to American West

- **Nicole Ridley** teaches History and Sociology and is Subject Lead for PSHE at Malet Lambert in Hull, part of the Education Alliance Multi-Academy Trust. @RidleyHistory
- She wrote a case study for us on 'Women in the West' inspired by recent academic research: <https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/GCSE/History/2016/Teaching-and-learning-materials/Women-in-the-West-case-study.pdf>
- Having reviewed the **Treated Spaces** report we decided to remodel our existing American West topic to see what it **could look like** in a new specification.
- Nicole has redesigned how she teaches the American West and introduced more women into the course, so we commissioned her to carry out this work.



A new approach to American West

- Working title: *Indigenous resistance and American expansion, c1830–1899*.
- Key topics focusing on resisting early expansion and dispossession, industrialisation and surviving assimilation.
- Indigenous perspectives brought to the fore.
- Focus on specific Indigenous groups to show range of experiences eg Cherokee, Navajo and Lakota.
- More recent scholarship reflected, eg New Western History.
- More inclusive approach eg case studies which spotlight individuals such as Nancy Ward, Olive Oatman, Clara Brown, black cowboys.

Draft Key Topic 1: Resisting early expansion and dispossession c1830–51

Lesson	Content
1. The ways of life of Indigenous peoples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the Cherokee and look at the political, economic, <u>social</u> and cultural features of their life, including education and religion. • <i>Case study: Nancy Ward</i>
2. Top-down reasons for expansions c1830–c1841	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key features of American culture, <u>e.g.</u> fixed President, large army, cultural values of capitalism and land. • The appointment of Andrew Jackson, his opinion on removals, and American competition with other world powers.
3. The consequences of top-down expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Removals Act 1830 • Cherokee resistance • The Trail of Tears, 1830–37 • The 'permanent Indian frontier'
4. Bottom-up reasons for participation in expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Doctrine of Discovery • Financial crisis, 1837 • Competition and immigration • The discovery of gold, 1848 • Cheap land • The Oregon Trail and government incentives
5. The journey West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mormon migration 1846–7 as an example of the challenges faced moving West. • Conflict with the Indigenous peoples whose territories they move through. • <i>Case study: Olive <u>Oatman</u></i>
6. The legal dispossession of tribal lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early reservation policy, the impact of the removal on tribal sovereignty, especially when there is conflict with settlers. • Culminating in the Horse Creek Treaty (Fort Laramie 1, 1851) and the 1851 Appropriations Act.

Modelling a new Elizabethan England

- We then asked one of our examiners, Sally Thorne, to re-model Elizabethan England to see what it could look like in future.

Ideas behind the re-model

- Less focus on high politics and more focus on social history – more engaging history and more opportunities for including diverse histories.
- Include the 1590s, rather than end in 1588 – richer social history, more scope to look at developing links abroad
- Consider more recent scholarship.
- Improve the content structure eg world building at start.



A new approach: Elizabethan England 1558-1603

Key topic 1: Elizabethan society	
1 Elizabeth as Queen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elizabeth's legitimacy and gender. Her character and strengths. The problems of marriage and the succession.
2 The Tudor Court and society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elizabethan England: society and government. The structure of the Elizabethan court; the Great Chain of Being. Demographic change, including population growth and urbanisation. Diversity in Elizabethan England.
3 Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reasons for the increase in poverty and vagabondage during these years. Changing experiences of those living in poverty.
4 Leisure and the arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pastimes and the theatre. The Elizabethan 'golden age' of art, architecture and music.

Key topic 2: Elizabethan beliefs	
1 The 'settlement' of religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Religious divisions in England in 1558. Elizabeth's religious settlement (1559): its features and impact.
2 The Catholic challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The nature and extent of the Catholic challenge, including the role of Mary, Queen of Scots. Catholic attempts to replace Elizabeth: the Revolt of the Northern Earls, 1569-70, the Ridolfi, Throckmorton and Babington plots. The government response to Catholic challenge.
3 The Puritan challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The nature and extent of the Puritan challenge. The government response to Puritan challenge.
4 Other religious beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Witchcraft; John Dee and astrology. Tudor England and Islam.

- Key topics thematic: Society, beliefs & aspirations.
- 'World building' in first key topic: Society.
- Opportunities for more inclusive history in the 1590s eg trading beyond Europe (Key Topic 3).
- More social history and less high politics; more diverse histories eg diversity in Elizabethan England (KT1), Tudor England and Islam (KT2), Diego the Navigator (KT3).

Key topic 3: Elizabethan aspirations	
1 Explorations and voyages of discovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Factors prompting exploration, including the impact of new technology on ships and sailing and the drive to expand trade. Drake's actions as a privateer and explorer, including his work with Diego the Navigator. The search for a northern route to the far east.
2 English trade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trading relations within and beyond Europe, including Spain and the Netherlands, Russia, the Ottoman Empire and the Caribbean. John Hawkins and the origins of transatlantic slavery.
3 English naval power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Spanish Armada. The development of English sea power.
4 Early colonisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The English in Ireland: Plantations and the Nine Years' War. The English in North America: the experiences of colonists in Virginia.

Next steps...

We'd welcome your feedback on these content models and if you want to get involved in our research, please email teachinghistory@pearson.com

Feedback on current draft content models

Refine models further following teacher / academic feedback

1

Further content remodelling

Select further topics to remodel eg Cold War, Medicine, A level Empire

2

3

Review assessment model

Test new question types and ideas with teachers and students

4

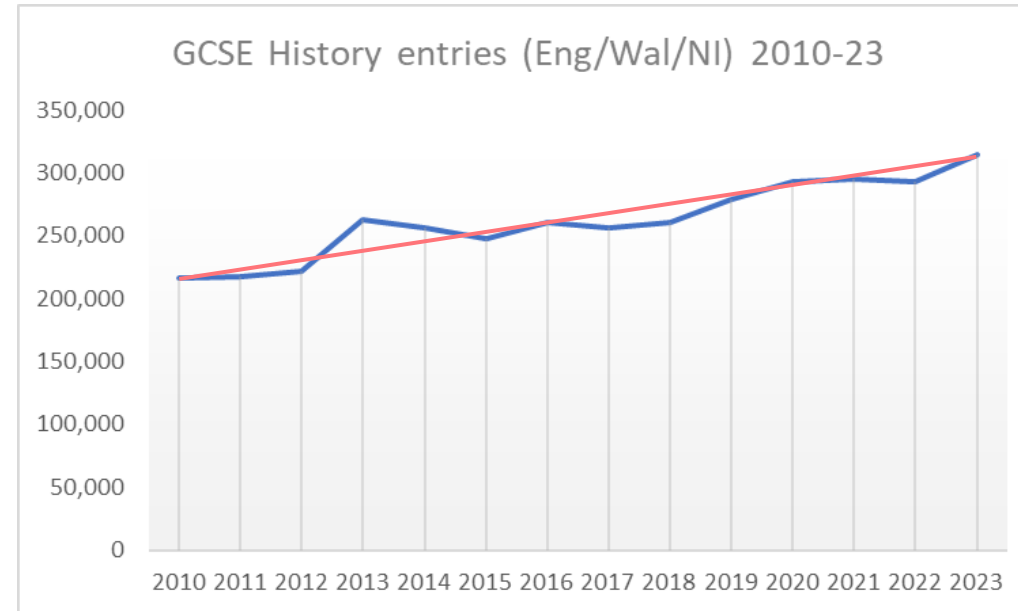
Revisit content models

Ensure new ideas around content and assessment are aligned and work well together

How accessible is GCSE History?



Making GCSE History accessible to all



- Since 2010 there has been significant growth in GCSE History due to introduction of Ebacc (non-Ebacc subjects have seen a decline).
- First full cohort following introduction of Ebacc (2013) saw a 7.5% increase in Modern World entries and 12.5% increase in Schools History Project entries.
- Total UK GCSE History entries have risen from 216,436 to c.315,000 since Ebacc.
- As a result, we are seeing more lower-attaining students choosing to study GCSE History.

Why reformed GCSE is so challenging

In 2016 the GCSE reforms resulted in the following key changes for History:

- More challenging content and assessment with new 9-1 grading replacing A*-G.
- 100% externally assessed – no coursework or controlled assessment – this meant one extra examined topic in GCSE History. Many subjects lost coursework = more exams.
- Linear assessment: all exams taken at end of course.

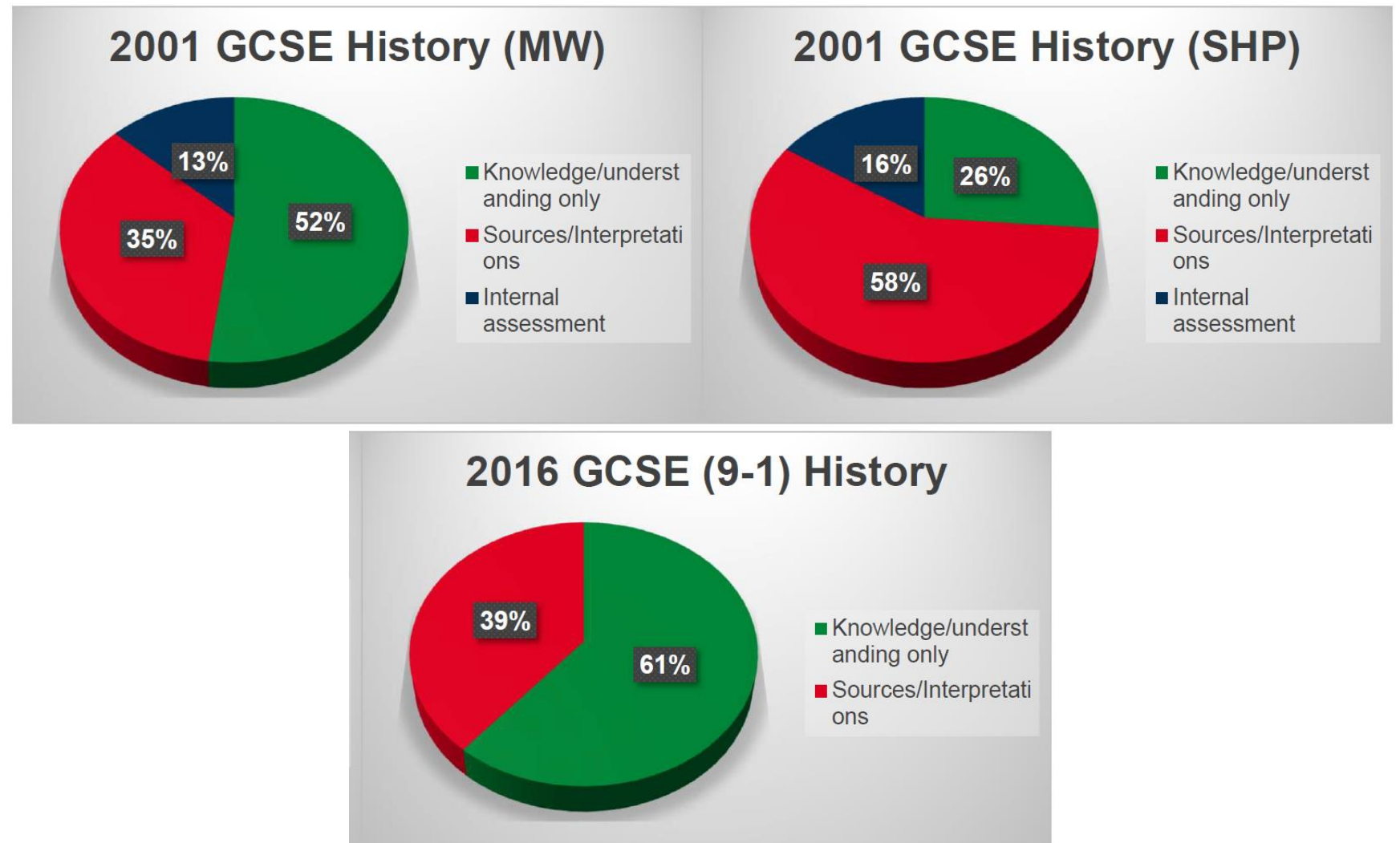
Typical GCSE student exam timetable Summer 2023:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
R. Studies P1	Biology P1	Eng. Lit P1	History P1	Maths P1		
	Chem. P1 R. Studies P2	Eng. Lit P2	Physics P1			
Half term						
Eng. Lang P1	Maths P2 R. Studies P3	Spanish P1/3 History P2		Biology P2		
Eng. Lang P2	Chem. P2 Spanish P4	Maths P3	History P3	Physics P2		

A comparison of GCSE assessments over time

These charts represent the proportion of separate questions which target:

- Only knowledge and understanding in an exam (no sources)
- Question includes sources and/or interpretations
- Question internally assessed eg through coursework

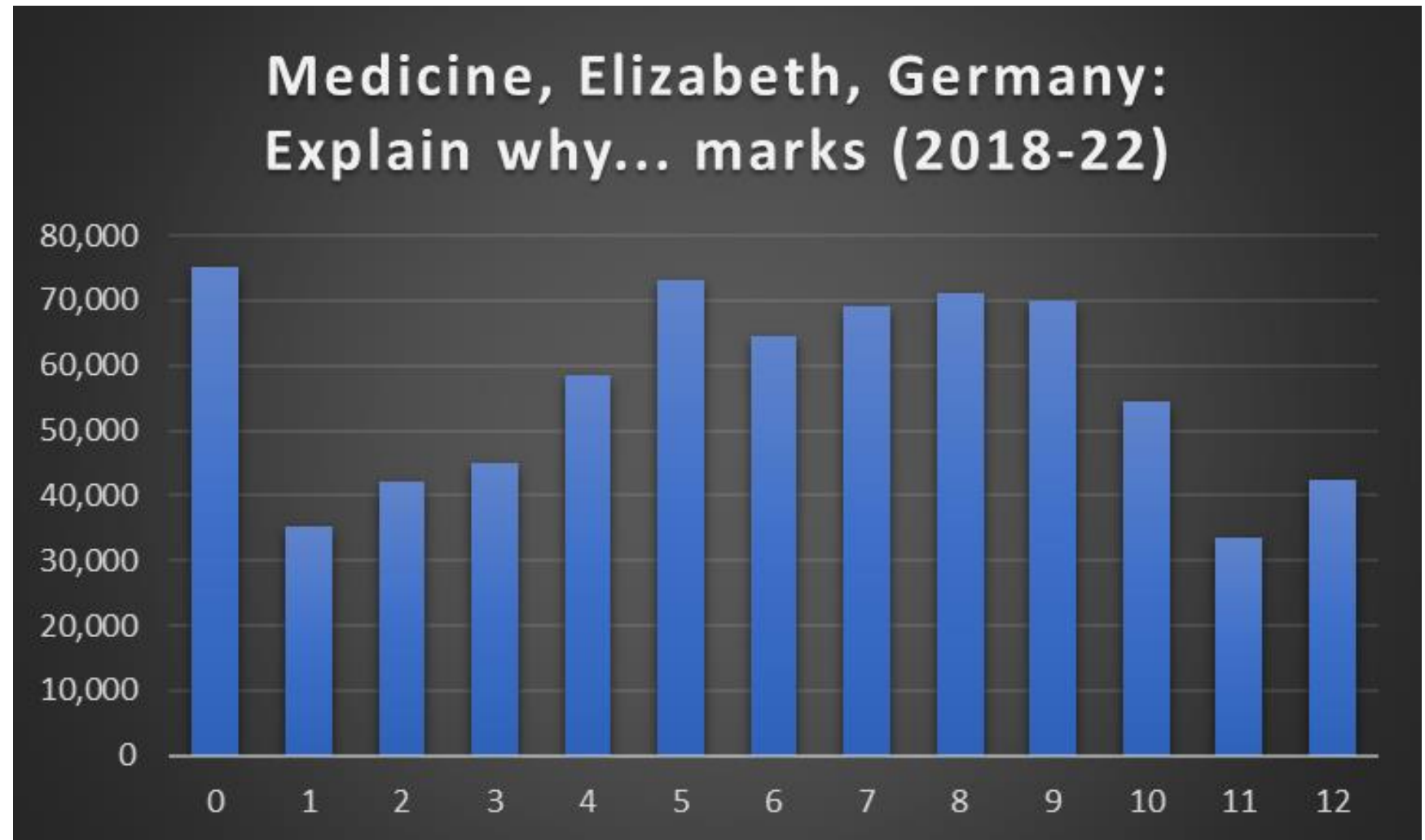


Why reformed GCSE is so challenging

- Since 2016 we have received a lot of feedback from teachers about the volume of content and that exams are too difficult for some students.
- The increased content demands means qualifications are being taught in a way that is less engaging and leaves some students behind.
- In 2019 the National Education Union polled their members about their perceptions of how recent GCSE reforms have impacted on students:
 - 61% saw a worsening of student engagement in education as a result of the reforms
 - 73% believed that student mental health has worsened since introduction of 2016 GCSE
- Examiners see a lot of blank responses in exams, particularly in questions targeting AO1/2. This was true even with covid optionality in Summer 2022 exams.
- Summer 2023 has seen a return to the full examination requirements for the first time since 2019 - we have received a lot of feedback from teachers about how challenging this has been.

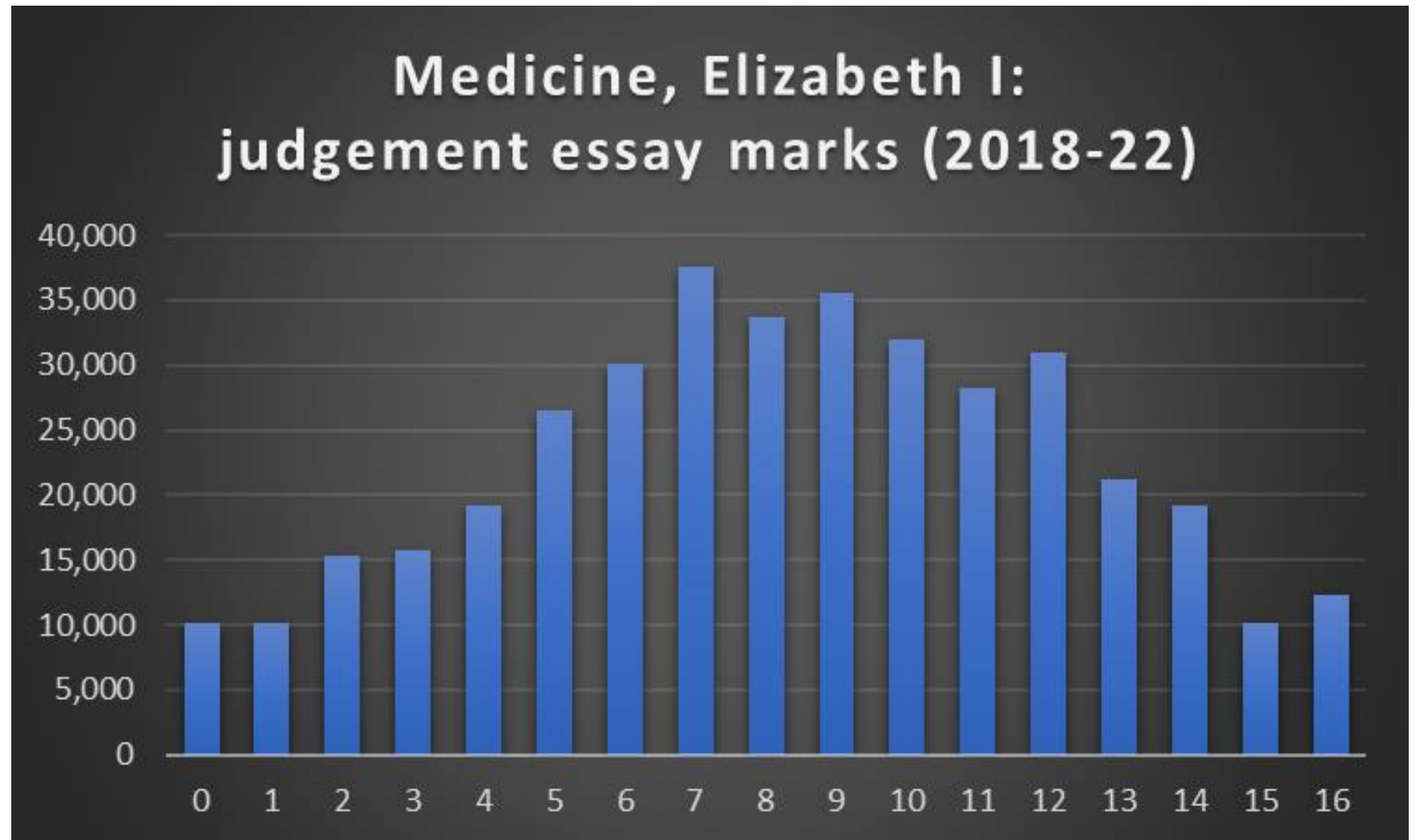
Responses per mark on 'Explain why' questions

- This chart shows the total number of responses on 12 mark 'Explain why' questions 2018-22.
- Approximately 10% of the marks were zero.



Responses per mark on 'judgement' essays

- This chart shows total number of responses on 16 mark 'judgement' essays 2018-22.
- There is a choice of essay question which explains why fewer zero marks than the 12 mark question.





Feedback from teachers on our assessment

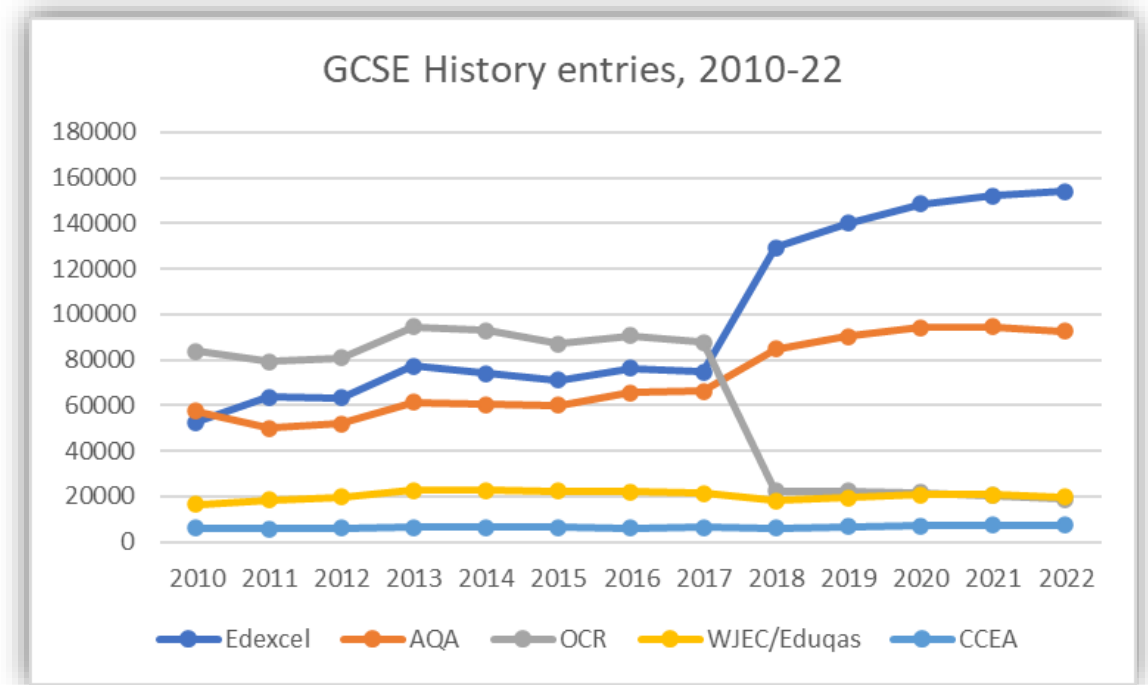
We are undertaking a rigorous review of our assessment in response to teacher feedback:

- **Opening questions on Papers 1 and 2:** some teachers feel that these opening questions are not consistently accessible to a wide range of students.
- **More time in exams:** student surveys have raised this as an issue to address.
- **Paper 3 assessment:** some students resent covering lots of content which is not assessed due to the skills-based enquiry focus of the assessment.
- **Choice of questions:** we know students prefer a choice of questions and it can help improve the range of content being assessed. However, we need to be mindful of the need to keep question papers clear and simple for students to navigate.
- **Stimulus points:** we have successfully used stimulus in questions since 2001. We are reviewing them to ensure they are useful to as wide a range of students as possible.

We may have to wait until reform to address some of these issues, however we will try to incorporate improvements before reform where possible (*subject to Ofqual approval*).

Edexcel GCSE History: the positives

- Our GCSE History specification is very popular: entries grew significantly in 2016 and have grown every year since.
- Student surveys have told us that Edexcel GCSE History provides good progression to A level and has deepened students' interest in History generally.
- Most students surveyed said they like the different types of questions in our papers and they like having a choice of question when available.
- Students told us they know what they need to do in order to answer the different question types.
- Most students surveyed enjoyed studying GCSE History and found it a rewarding experience.



GCSE History is a challenging qualification. We appreciate fully the hard work which students put into their studies and revision, as well as the dedication and support which teachers provide.




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Further
engagement
with teachers
and students



Next steps... further planning for reform

- We have recently reviewed our History specifications for sensitivity of language and identified a number of terms which are now considered outdated and problematic (eg 'Plains Indians', 'gypsies', 'slaves').
- We are therefore planning to update some of the language in our specifications for first teaching September 2023, first assessment Summer 2025. Textbooks will also be updated at re-print to reflect these changes.
- News on these changes will be sent to centres before September 2023.
- Later this year we will begin testing potential new assessment models with teachers and students. If you'd like to be involved and help provide feedback please email us at teachinghistory@pearson.com
- We are also planning to do more work on re-modelling content by getting feedback from teachers and students, re-modelling more topics eg Cold War, Medicine.
- Please encourage your students to complete our Summer 2023 student surveys: <https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/news-policy/subject-updates/history/june-2023-history-subject-update-no-2.html>




Any questions – get
in touch!

History Subject Advisor

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- Telephone: [0344 463 2535](tel:03444632535)
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GCSE History entry code calculator	GCSE History entry code calculator
October 2022 History subject update	The GCSE History entry code calculator has been updated for Summer 2023. Please select your paper choices through the form and your code will be generated automatically at the end. 
Edexcel GCSE History Summer 2022 Pre-recorded Feedback	
Update on Summer 2023 assessment arrangements from DfE and Ofqual	> Use entry code calculator



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