

GCSE History Qualification Outline – Consultation Version



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This document provides an overview of the proposed WJEC GCSE History qualification.

It is based on Qualifications Wales's Approval Criteria (key sections are included in Appendix 1). Our qualification **must** meet these requirements.

The qualification outline will provide a guide for the development of the Specification and Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs).

Qualification Overview

The GCSE History qualification will support the Curriculum for Wales by:

- Supporting the statements of what matters¹ by giving learners the opportunity to:
 - gain a deeper understanding of the concepts underpinning humanities, and their application in local, national and global contexts
 - gather, justify, present, analyse, and evaluate a range of evidence
 - draw informed conclusions, but also understand that some conclusions can only be partial or inconclusive and open to different interpretations
 - critically review the ways events and experiences are perceived, interpreted and represented
 - learn how various worldviews and factors can influence their own and others' perceptions and interpretations, exploring how and why interpretations may differ
 - develop an appreciation of identity, heritage and cynefin, including the history of Wales and the World
 - develop an understanding of the complex, pluralistic and diverse nature of societies, past and present, in particular the stories of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people
 - build an understanding of the causes, consequences and significance of the changes and interrelationships that have shaped societies at different levels of development
 - understand how societies are and have been organised, structured and led, in learners' own locality and in Wales, as well as in the wider world
 - explore the connections and interdependence between such societies in the past and present, in the context of a globalised world
 - understand the interconnected nature of economic, environmental and social sustainability; justice and authority; and the need to live in and contribute to a fair and inclusive society that confronts and addresses racism
 - critically reflect on their own and others' beliefs, values and attitudes
 - consider the impact of their actions when making choices and exercising their democratic rights and responsibilities
 - justify their decisions.

¹ <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/humanities/statements-of-what-matters/>

- Supporting the principles of progression² by encouraging learners to:
 - ask increasingly sophisticated enquiry questions
 - find suitable information, making informed predictions and hypotheses, and making judgments about reliability and utility
 - engage with an increasing breadth and depth of knowledge and underlying concepts to build an increasingly clear and coherent understanding of the world around them
 - work with an increasing number and sophistication of sources of information, and a growing understanding of how to resolve contradictory or conflicting accounts
 - transfer existing skills and knowledge into new, and increasingly unfamiliar contexts, making links within and between periods and places, identifying similarities and differences, changes and continuities
 - identify connections between new and previous learning. With greater understanding of the world, of other people and their values, in different times, places and circumstances.

The construct of GCSE History qualification is based on the Welsh Government subject specific considerations for History³. The qualification will:

- provide opportunities to understand different periods, events, people and cultures in history, exploring these at a local, national and global scale
- provide opportunities to understand the significance of people, events and developments in history and how these can be interpreted in different ways: in different places and at different times
- equip learners with the skills to understand, interpret and evaluate historical evidence in order to make informed judgements
- equip learners with the skills to make sense of their place and the place of others within the framework of human experience
- provide opportunities to develop curiosity and empathy as well as the ability to filter and critically analyse the breadth of information available to us, to make informed and balanced judgements that foster a sense of cynefin and one's place in the world.

The GCSE History qualification will also be based on the following historical concepts listed within the Approval Criteria:

- continuity and change
- similarity and difference
- significance and impact
- cause and consequence

² <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/humanities/principles-of-progression/>

³ <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/humanities/designing-your-curriculum/#specific-considerations-for-this-area>

Each of these concepts support the Welsh Government's 'Designing your curriculum' guidance as well as those within the statements of what matters and progression steps for Humanities.

Proposed Qualification Structure

Unit 1: An in-depth study on Welsh history

Written examination 30% of qualification

Unit 2: An in-depth study on European or World history

Non-examination assessment 20% of qualification Marked by WJEC

Unit 3: A study of an extended period
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Written examination 30% of qualification

Unit 4: Wales and Britain/the UK

Non-examination assessment 20% of qualification Marked by centre and moderated by WJEC

This will be a unitised qualification.

Aside from Unit 4, which is a terminal unit, there is no hierarchy implied by the order in which the units are presented. Therefore, the order does not imply a prescribed teaching order.

For each Unit, centres will have the choice to study one of the following periods in history:

- medieval
- early modern
- modern

Centres will not have the choice to repeat a period in Units 1, 2 and 3 but will be able to choose a period to repeat in Unit 4.

Unit 1 - An in-depth study on Welsh history

The purpose of this unit is:

- to provide an insight into the development of Wales at a specific point in time.

Unit 1 will be assessed via an examination, available in the summer series. An examination will be made available for the first cohort in summer 2026. It will include a mix of question types that will target AO1, AO2 and AO3; the focus is likely to be on having equal weightings.

The duration of the examination is likely to be 1 hour. Centres can choose one of the three periods of study: medieval, early modern or modern, not repeating a period of study studied in Unit 2 or 3. Centres will choose one of two foci within the period.

Unit 2 - An in-depth study on European or World history

The purpose of this unit is:

- to provide an understanding of an issue in European or world history in depth via the study of historical sources and interpretations.

This unit will take the form of non-examination assessment available in the summer series. This unit will target AO2, AO3 and AO4. The focus is likely to be on AO4 receiving the highest weighting because of the enquiry nature of the non-examination assessment, with AO2 and AO3 likely to be equally weighted. Centres can choose one of the three periods of study: medieval, early modern or modern, not repeating a period of study studied in Unit 1 or 3. Centres will choose one of two foci within the period.

The non-examination assessment will follow a multi-stage enquiry process using stimulus materials provided by WJEC; these will be released in September of the academic year the non-examination assessment is being submitted. Stimulus materials will change annually and will be first made available in September 2026 for submission in September 2027. It is likely that there will be a low level of control at the research and investigation stage and a high level of control during the formal assessment stage. The non-examination assessment will be set and marked by WJEC. The time allowed to write up the assessment will be approximately 2 hours. The non-examination assessment **must** be submitted digitally.

Unit 3 - A study of an extended period

The purpose of this unit is:

- to provide an overview of an extended period enabling learners to explore key concepts.

Unit 3 will be assessed via an examination, available in the summer series. An examination will be made available for the first cohort in summer 2026. It will include a mix of question types that will target AO1, AO2 and AO3, the focus is likely to be on having equal weightings.

The duration of the examination is likely to be around 1 hour 30 minutes to reflect the extended period coverage of the unit. Centres will choose from the three periods of study, not repeating a period of study studied in Unit 1 or 2, and two foci.

Unit 4 - Wales and Britain/the UK

The purpose of this unit is to:

- provide an insight into the development of Wales and Britain/UK through the study of themed events within an extended timeframe.

The unit will take the form of non-examination assessment available in the summer series. The non-examination assessment will target AO2, AO3 and AO4. The focus is likely to be on AO4 receiving the highest weighting because of the enquiry nature of the non-examination assessment, with AO2 and AO3 receiving equal weightings. WJEC will set themes for the non-examination assessment. Themes will be made available in September of the academic year the non-examination assessment is being submitted; it will be first available in September 2026, for submission in the 2027 summer series.

There will be optionality in terms of period centres can choose to study. The significant difference with Unit 4 is that centres can choose to study a period that they have previously studied in Units 1, 2 or 3.

The non-examination assessment will follow a multi-stage enquiry process where learners develop their own historical hypothesis based on themes. We are currently considering nine fixed themes, with learners having the option to choose from three of the nine themes that change annually. The non-examination assessment will be set by WJEC, marked by centres and moderated by WJEC. The time allowed for the assessment is likely to be 6 hours including time to complete research. It is likely that there will be a low level of control at the research stage and a high level of control during the formal assessment stage. The non-examination assessment **must** be submitted digitally.

Consideration of manageability, engagement, validity and reliability

In developing this proposed qualification outline, we have considered manageability, engagement, reliability and validity, and how to balance these considerations in the context of the requirements of the Approval Criteria.

The Approval Criteria require 40% of the qualification to be assessed by non-examination assessment; one non-examination assessment (Unit 2) will be set and marked by WJEC and the other non-examination assessment (Unit 4) will be set by WJEC, marked by centres and moderated by WJEC. This poses some potential manageability challenges. We propose to minimise manageability challenges by releasing stimulus materials for Unit 2 and set themes for Unit 4 to centres in September of the academic year the non-examination assessments are to be submitted, allowing centres the flexibility to spread the assessments and to undertake the non-examination assessment at a time that suits them.

We have also considered the assessment times that we are likely to allocate to both non-examined assessments to try to reduce the impact on teaching and learning. We believe 2 hours for Unit 2 is manageable for learners at GCSE level, and this length of non-examination assessment would enable us to develop a valid assessment that ensures sufficient content can be covered. We believe 6 hours for Unit 4, including research time, is also manageable for learners at GCSE level. This is a terminal unit that learners must undertake during the final year of their course and will allow learners to engage with a historical period in sufficient depth. Furthermore, the other non-examination assessment (Unit 2) will feature stimulus materials provided by WJEC, where all learners have equal access to the stimulus materials. This contrast in style of non-examination assessment provides a clear balance overall, which is considered an appropriate approach in terms of manageability. This will fulfil the requirement in the Approval Criteria to allow learners to engage with sources, and ensure the reliability, manageability and equity for centres.

To aid manageability we would foresee both non-examination assessments featuring a low level of control at the investigation stage to enable learners to undertake an authentic enquiry experience. However, to ensure reliability, we will provide guidance on what notes learners are able to use when responding to the non-examination assessment tasks and it is likely that a high level of control will be used during the formal assessment stage to ensure reliability. This will secure the requirement of the Approval Criteria that learners can demonstrate a range of appropriate enquiry and investigation skills including the ability to think critically and the ability to reflect.

We believe that our proposed qualification should provide opportunities for centres to develop an engaging programme of study for its learners, in line with the expectations of the Curriculum for Wales. Unit 1 will allow learners to study an in-depth period of Welsh History; Unit 2 will allow learners to undertake an in-depth study on European or World history; both units support the statement of what matters to 'develop an appreciation of identity, heritage and cynefin, including the history of Wales and the World'. Unit 3 allows learners to study a period that they have previously studied in increased depth, focusing on an aspect of history of particular interest to them. This supports the principle of progression to 'engage with an increasing breadth and depth of knowledge and underlying concepts to build an increasingly clear and coherent understanding of the world around them'. Unit 4 allows learners to develop their own hypothesis; this supports the principle of progression to 'find suitable information, making informed predictions and hypotheses, and making judgments about reliability and utility'.

We believe that the non-examination assessments we propose for Units 2 and 4, are a valid approach to assessing the purpose and content because they allow learners to demonstrate their skills in appropriate contexts. To ensure the reliability of the non-examination assessments, we will ensure each unit will target the same assessment objective weightings over time. For both non-examination assessment units, marking criteria will be developed and for Unit 4, teachers will be provided with a package of support to ensure consistent application of the marking criteria across centres and over time. We will moderate a sample of centre work to provide further assurance of reliability.

We believe that the purpose and content of Units 1 and 3 can be validly assessed by examination, and a mix of question types can help us maximise validity. When we develop assessments, we will ensure that all tasks target the relevant construct, that there is an appropriate balance of content covered over time and that there is alignment between assessment items and learning outcomes. Where appropriate we will use data available to us on how an assessment has functioned. To ensure reliability, we will make sure that the examined units target the same assessment objective weightings and have a consistent level of demand each series, marking criteria will be developed and assessors will be trained on how to apply them consistently.

We will continue to consider the balance of manageability, engagement, reliability and validity, at each stage of qualification development.

Key information from Approval Criteria

The following information has come directly from Qualifications Wales's [GCSE History - Approval Criteria](#) - our qualification must meet these requirements.

Purpose

1. **GCSE History** must:

- 1.1 be designed primarily for Learners between the ages of 14 and 16
- 1.2 build on the conceptual understanding Learners have developed through their learning from ages 3–14
- 1.3 support teaching and learning by providing appropriately broad, demanding, relevant and engaging content and assessment that relates to and supports the Curriculum for Wales, including its [four purposes](#)
- 1.4 allow Learners to develop a strong foundation of knowledge, skills and understanding which supports progression to post-16 study and prepares them for life, learning and work
- 1.5 provide meaningful, fair and accurate information on Learner achievement within a subject that highlights what Learners know, understand and can do

Aims

2. **GCSE History** must:

- 2.1 allow Learners to explore a range of knowledge, skills and understanding in relation to history
- 2.2 provide opportunities for Learners to be assessed in a variety of relevant and meaningful contexts

3. The **GCSE History** qualification must support Learners to:

- 3.1 develop their knowledge and understanding of specific historical events, periods and societies on a local, national and global scale
- 3.2 extend their understanding and appreciation of the identity, heritage and history of Wales and the world and to develop a sense of cynefin
- 3.3 become independent, critical and reflective historians through the skills of historical enquiry, questioning, and source analysis and evaluation
- 3.4 construct valid and realistic historical claims by using a range of sources in context to reach substantiated judgements
- 3.5 demonstrate critical appreciation of the concept of historical significance, including:
 - 3.5.1 why some people, events and developments are seen as historically significant
 - 3.5.2 why different interpretations have been constructed about historically significant people, events and developments
- 3.6 acquire an understanding of different identities, including their own, within a complex, pluralistic and diverse society

Assessment Objectives

The assessment of the knowledge, understanding and skills required in the qualification must target the following assessment objectives in line with the indicated weightings, within a tolerance of +/- 5 percentage points.

AO1	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the features and characteristics of the period studied	30%
AO2	Apply knowledge and understanding to historical concepts such as cause and consequence, continuity and change, similarity and difference, and significance	20%
AO3	Analyse, evaluate, or make judgements on source material, historical interpretations and historical debates, synthesising these strands where appropriate	30%
AO4	Select, use and apply skills and techniques in practice to undertake historical enquiries.	20%

Scheme of assessment

- The **GCSE History** qualification must be unitised.
- The qualification will not be tiered.

The **GCSE History** specification must include the following assessment arrangements:

11.1. two examination assessments that:

- 11.1.1. are set and marked by the awarding body
- 11.1.2. account for 60% of the qualification

12. The timing of the examinations must be prescribed by the awarding body.

13. There must be two non-examination assessments that account for 40% of the qualification:

- 13.1. one non-examination assessment set by the awarding body, internally marked by the school, and externally moderated by the awarding body
- 13.2. one non-examination assessment set and externally marked by the awarding body
- 13.3. both non-examination assessments must be able to be submitted digitally

One examination unit must be available in the summer of 2026 for the first cohort of *Learners* taking the qualification.