

Progression in history under the 2014 National Curriculum

A guide for schools

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The voice for history



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It is common to hear teachers talk of “Content” and “Skills” but words are slippery and, if used loosely, each of these terms can lead to confusion in planning for progression.

By “Content” teachers often mean the people, events and developments from the past that children will learn about. A better term for this aspect of the course might be “historical knowledge” although there is more to this than mere recall of the people and events studied.

The word “Skills” causes even more confusion if used as a blanket term to cover all the various processes that children need to develop if they are to get better in the subject. Some of these processes (such as researching and communicating findings) may be called skills but others are really thought processes that involve understanding history’s big organising ideas or “second order concepts”. (These include change, continuity, causation, consequence, similarity, difference and significance).

In the National Curriculum document the “Subject Content” section defines **all** these different aspects of history as it sets out how pupils’ learning should develop over each of the three key stages. A single page summary of all the content is shown on page 3 below as “aspects to develop”. The statements in the first two columns on the left show the broad areas of “historical knowledge” that must be developed, while the column on the right picks out the requirements of the preamble at the start of each key stage. These are largely concerned with what we might call “historical skills and concepts”, although - as we will see later – they are all underpinned by good historical knowledge.

Getting better at history requires all aspects of the discipline to be developed together. We may be able to set out separate summaries of the “historical knowledge” and “historical skills and concepts” in describing a course but they need to be carefully blended in all planning and teaching. This is rather like working with those well-known brands of glue that come in two tubes: one is a resin and the other is a hardener. On its own, neither one is effective. Only when the two are mixed does the product become what it claims to be – a powerful adhesive. Only when both aspects of history are carefully and thoroughly mixed in the appropriate balance is the subject discipline really being developed. It is as foolish to say that “It is the skills that matter” as it is to say that “It is the knowledge that matters”.

It is possible to discern a broad pattern of progression in National Curriculum history. The table on page 4 shows this and relates the different aspects of the content to the overarching aims set out in the first pages of the 2014 document. The lower section of the table (section 5) shows the key historical concepts that must be developed as part of the National Curriculum. These are very much part of the statutory curriculum but the wording used in the table to suggest progression in each concept is not now part of the statutory requirements. The phrases used there appeared in earlier versions of the curriculum and so, like all non-statutory requirements on pages 3 and 4, they appear in italics. Note that the table includes a column that draws on the Early Years Outcomes Non-Statutory Guide to show how work with younger children prepares for Key Stage 1 and beyond. These are only suggestions and many more extracts could have been used.

On page 4, it is very important to note the text above the table. Once again this is not part of the National Curriculum but it offers a reminder that progression in history will always involve the closer integration and more precise grasp of the various parts of the discipline.

When considering what knowledge must be developed in teaching the 2014 National Curriculum, it is tempting to look simply at the lists that follow the heading “*Pupils should be taught about*”. But mere, isolated “coverage” of these areas of study and the exemplars provided under them will not, on its own, develop the sort of knowledge that is needed. It is not enough for pupils to work their way through the listed material even if they experience highly enjoyable activities and display good levels of knowledge and understanding of the work put before them: something bigger has to happen.

We need to look at the preambles at the start of each key stage in the 2014 National Curriculum to see a summary of the *cumulative* effect of the teaching across the key stage. As the sentence that follows each of those preambles makes clear, planning must always have an eye on longer-term learning and the part that knowledge building plays in this.

One particularly important aspect of longer-term learning concerns the pupils’ chronological knowledge, both in terms of sequencing periods of history and of having a clear sense of characteristic features of those periods. If areas of study are simply taught in isolation by different teachers working with different classes, pupils may well fail to grasp how their knowledge of one period sits with their knowledge of another. Once again the sentences that sit between the preambles and the listed areas of study are clear about the need to link learning within and across key stages. This is likely to require imaginative work with timelines and big overarching stories of change and continuity and other activities that require pupils to draw on earlier learning, making comparisons and contrasts.

Another aspect of longer-term knowledge that should endure is the development of a range of historical terms in their appropriate context. Context is important: a word such as king or queen may appear to be an everyday term, but its precise meaning shifts depending on the period of history in which it is being applied, and in some cases a new word, (eg emperor) is needed. The subtleties of using appropriate historical terms and how they may or may not be applied in any period are developed only over time and by their careful introduction, reinforcement and review. The same is true, of course, of children’s grasp of history’s key concepts such as change, causation or historical significance (as listed in section 5 of the table on page 4). Such abstract ideas can only be learned through studying actual historical people, events and developments. It takes time and, once again, the effect is cumulative: as they work with these key concepts in a wealth of different historical contexts, children will progressively grasp the subtleties involved. The knowledge is “food for thought”.

To say that the learning is cumulative does not, however, mean that we expect children to retain in their memory everything that they learn from one area of study to the next. Albert Einstein was fond of quoting the unknown humourist who observed that education is what remains when we have forgotten everything we were taught in school. In some senses this is true of the way we develop our knowledge of history. It may help to distinguish between what can be called immediate “Now Knowledge” and enduring “Hereafter Knowledge”.

“Now Knowledge” is the knowledge needed to make the immediate learning flow and come to life. It should be characterised by a focus on particular people, places and moments. When we work on a particular historical issue we will be very aware of names, dates and events that are central to the enquiry and we draw on these as evidence of our understanding. Over time, much of the detail seems to slip away, but in some measure it lives on and builds up the unseen and almost instinctive layer of knowledge that quietly underpins all later learning. This is our “Hereafter Knowledge”. It gives us our chronological framework, enriches our historical language and our grasp of history’s key concepts. It informs all later learning, not only in history but in areas such as art or literature or science. It is the richness of the “Now Knowledge” that gives depth and resonance to the enduring “Hereafter Knowledge” of times, places, people and developments summarised in the preambles to each key stage. We must plan for both. Page 5 shows how careful planning should meet the aims of the history curriculum and ensure appropriate progression.

National Curriculum history – aspects to develop (September 2014)

Key Stage 1

Knowledge / understanding of British history

- ☐ Changes within living memory - used, where appropriate, to reveal changes in national life

See also wider world history

Local history

- ☐ Significant historical events, people and places in their own locality

Knowledge / understanding of wider world history

- ☐ Events from beyond living memory that are significant nationally or globally
- ☐ Lives of significant individuals in the past who have contributed to national and international achievements. Some should be used to compare aspects of life in different periods

The ability / disposition to:

- ☐ Be aware of the past, using common words & phrases relating to time
- ☐ Fit people/events into chronological framework
- ☐ Identify similarities / differences between periods
- ☐ Use wide vocabulary of everyday historical terms
- ☐ Ask and answer questions
- ☐ Choose and use from stories and other sources to show understanding
- ☐ Understand some ways we find out about the past
- ☐ Identify different ways in which past is represented



Key Stage 2 The following areas of study taught through a combination of overview and depth studies

Knowledge / understanding of British history

- ☐ Changes in Britain from the Stone Age to the Iron Age
- ☐ The Roman Empire and its impact on Britain
- ☐ Britain's settlement by Anglo-Saxons and Scots
- ☐ Viking and Anglo-Saxon struggle for the kingdom of England to the time of Edward the Confessor
- ☐ An aspect or theme of British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066

Local history

- ☐ A local study

Knowledge / understanding of wider world history

- ☐ The achievements of the earliest civilizations; depth study of one of:
 - Sumer
 - Indus Valley
 - Egypt
 - Shang Dynasty
- ☐ Ancient Greece – life, achievements, influence
- ☐ Non-European society that contrasts with British history. One of:
 - early Islamic civilizations inc study of Baghdad c 900AD
 - Mayan civilization c. 900 AD
 - Benin (west Africa) c. 900-1300

The ability / disposition to:

- ☐ Continue to develop chronologically secure knowledge of history
- ☐ Establish clear narratives within and across periods studied
- ☐ Note connections, contrasts and trends over time
- ☐ Develop the appropriate use of historical terms
- ☐ Regularly address and sometimes devise historically valid questions
- ☐ Understand how knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources
- ☐ Construct informed responses by selecting and organising relevant historical information
- ☐ *Understand that different versions of the past may exist, giving some reasons for this (Not explicitly stated but is natural progression between KS1 and KS3)*



Key Stage 3 The following areas of study taught through a combination of overview and depth studies

Knowledge / understanding of British history

- ☐ Development of Church, state and society 1066-1509
- ☐ Development of Church, state and society 1509-1745
- ☐ Ideas, political power, industry and empire 1745-1901
- ☐ Challenges to Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to present day(including the Holocaust)
- ☐ An aspect or theme of British history that consolidates and extends pupils' chronological knowledge from before 1066

Local history

- ☐ A local study

Knowledge / understanding of wider world history

- ☐ At least one study of a significant society or issue in world history and its connections with wider world developments
- (See also British history)*

The ability / disposition to:

- ☐ Extend and deepen their chronologically secure knowledge of history and a well-informed context for further learning
- ☐ Identify significant events, make connections, draw contrasts and analyse trends within periods and over long arcs of time
- ☐ Use historical terms and concepts in increasingly sophisticated ways
- ☐ Pursue historically valid enquiries including some they have framed
- ☐ Create relevant, structured and evidentially supported accounts
- ☐ Understand how different types of sources are used rigorously to make historical claims
- ☐ Discern how and why contrasting arguments and interpretations of the past have been constructed

Progression in history involves developing **historical perspective** through ...

- wider, more detailed and chronologically secure knowledge
- sharper methods of enquiry and communication
- deeper understanding of more complex issues and of abstract ideas
- closer integration of history's key concepts (see section 5 below *)
- greater independence in applying all these qualities



(NB All text in italics is non-statutory, including everything in the Early Years column, drawn from non-statutory guidance. Colour coding relates to aspects of the aims as shown on the next page.)

Work likely in ... Early Years → work likely at KS1 to → work likely at KS2 to → work likely at KS3

1. Chronological knowledge / understanding (including characteristic features of periods)	• Use everyday language related to time • Order and sequence familiar events • Describe main story settings, events and principal characters. • Talk about past and present events in their own lives and in lives of family members.	• Develop an awareness of the past • Use common words and phrases relating to the passing of time • Know where all people/events studied fit into a chronological framework • Identify similarities / differences between periods	• Continue to develop chronologically secure knowledge of history • Establish clear narratives within and across periods studied • Note connections, contrasts and trends over time	• Extend and deepen their chronologically secure knowledge of history and a well-informed context for further learning • Identify significant events, make connections, draw contrasts and analyse trends within periods and over long arcs of time
2. Historical terms eg empire, peasant	• Extend vocabulary, especially by grouping and naming, exploring meaning and sounds of new words.	• Use a wide vocabulary of everyday historical terms	• Develop the appropriate use of historical terms	• Use historical terms and concepts in increasingly sophisticated ways
3. Historical enquiry - Using evidence / Communicating ideas	• Be curious about people and show interest in stories • Answer 'how' and 'why' questions ... in response to stories or events. • Explain own knowledge and understanding, and asks appropriate questions. • Know that information can be retrieved from books and computers • Record, using marks they can interpret and explain	• Ask and answer questions * • Understand some ways we find out about the past • Choose and use parts of stories and other sources to show understanding (of concepts in part 5 below)	• Regularly address and sometimes devise historically valid questions * • Understand how knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources • Construct informed responses by ... • Selecting and organising relevant historical information	• Pursue historically valid enquiries * including some they have framed • Understand how different types of sources are used rigorously to make historical claims • Create relevant, structured and evidentially supported accounts
4. Interpretations of history		• Identify different ways in which the past is represented	• Understand that different versions of the past may exist, giving some reasons for this	• Discern how and why contrasting arguments and interpretations of the past have been constructed
* 5 – Questions relate to these key concepts that underpin all historical enquiry, developed through regular re-visiting in a range of contexts:				
5a. Continuity and change in and between periods	• Look closely at similarities, differences, patterns and change • Develop understanding of growth, decay and changes over time	• Identify similarities / differences between ways of life at different times	• Describe / make links between main events, situations and changes within and across different periods/societies	• Identify and explain change and continuity within and across periods
5b. Cause and consequence	• Question why things happen and give explanations	• Recognise why people did things, why events happened and what happened as a result	• Identify and give reasons for, results of, historical events, situations, changes	• Analyse / explain reasons for, and results of, historical events, situations, changes
5c. Similarity / Difference within a period/situation (diversity)	• Know about similarities and differences between themselves and others, and among families, communities and traditions	• Make simple observations about different types of people, events, beliefs within a society	• Describe social, cultural, religious and ethnic diversity in Britain & the wider world	• Understand and explain / analyse diverse experiences and ideas, beliefs, attitudes of men, women, children in past societies
5d. Significance of events / people	• Recognise and describe special times or events for family or friends	• Talk about who was important eg in a simple historical account	• Identify historically significant people and events in situations	• Consider/explain the significance of events, people and developments in their context and in the present.

Planning for progression and working towards the aims of the history curriculum

These are the aims of the 2014 National Curriculum for history. The colour coding matches aspects identified in the table on page 4.

The National Curriculum for history (2014) aims to ensure that all pupils:

- know and understand the history of these islands as a coherent, **chronological** narrative, from the earliest times to the present day: how people's lives have shaped this nation and how Britain has influenced and been influenced by the wider world
- know and understand significant aspects of the history of the wider world: the nature of ancient civilisations; the expansion and dissolution of empires; characteristic features of past non-European societies; achievements and follies of mankind
- gain and deploy a **historically-grounded understanding of abstract terms** such as 'empire', 'civilisation', 'parliament' and 'peasantry'
- understand **historical concepts** such as **continuity and change**, **cause and consequence**, **similarity**, **difference** and **significance**, and use them to make connections, draw contrasts, analyse trends, frame historically-valid questions and **create their own structured accounts**, including written narratives and analyses
- understand the methods of **historical enquiry**, including how **evidence** is used rigorously to make historical claims, and discern how and why contrasting arguments and **interpretations** of the past have been constructed
- gain **historical perspective** by placing their growing knowledge into different contexts, understanding the connections between local, regional, national and international history; between cultural, economic, military, political, religious and social history; and between short- and long-term timescales.

The first three aims are primarily concerned with building knowledge. The next two are concerned with understanding the big ideas and processes of history. The last of the aims effectively sets out the overall goal of history education: we want young people to gain an increasingly mature and informed historical perspective on their world. All the other aspects feed this one. This takes careful planning and will involve something like the "sandwich approach" shown below. As with all good sandwiches, the distinctions are lost and the full flavour emerges in the eating!

*Always engage pupils in a valid historical enquiry or puzzling key question through which the learning grows over the sequence of lessons. **Sometimes** your objectives will relate to pupils devising their own enquiry questions and ways of tackling them.*

Historical enquiry

*Always include objectives for building **knowledge of all the aspects shown here**. This "Now knowledge" will relate to the particular period and issue being studied while reinforcing knowledge from earlier work as appropriate to strengthen "hereafter knowledge". (See page 2 above)*

Knowledge of:

- People, events, situations and developments
- Chronology and characteristic features
- Historical terms

Understanding of:

- Evidence
- Interpretations
- Cause
- Change
- Similarity/Difference
- Significance

*Within any sequence of lessons, **always** include objectives for developing pupils' **understanding of** (usually) **one or two of the listed elements**. Your selection and precise focus for this will be reflected in the key question. (See "historical enquiry").*

Communication

*Always require pupils to organise and communicate their findings at the end of the sequence so their learning gains coherence. **Sometimes** your objectives will relate to helping pupils to communicate clearly. They should use their understanding of the history to help them decide how to organise and present their ideas most effectively.*