**Assessment without levels in history**

In the new national curriculum for primary and secondary history one of the key differences is that, for the first time since 1991, there are no level descriptions against which you can assess pupils’ progress. The new attainment target says simply that:

*‘By the end of each key stage, pupils are expected to know, apply and understand the matters, skills and processes specified in the relevant programme of study.’*

In the absence of level descriptions how should you assess pupils’ progress in history? The following guidance should help you both plan for assessment and assess pupils’ progress.

### Planning for assessment in history across a key stage

**Planning for** assessment is vital to keep the process manageable and to ensure that it helps pupils to make progress in their learning.

**Long term** assessment planning involves decisions about the type and frequency of assessment opportunities, both formal and informal, across the key stage. These decisions depend on a clear vision of what it means to get better at history, which involves a number of different elements: developing more substantive knowledge about the past, *in conjunction with* more secure understanding of how to use different historical concepts (such as change or cause and consequence) to ask and answer different kinds of questions about the past, *alongside* deeper appreciation of how evidence is used to make valid historical claims and of how and why different interpretations have been constructed. This means that long term planning for assessment must be linked to long term curriculum planning to ensure that there is scope to revisit each of the different elements over the course of each key stage, giving pupils scope to build on their previous achievements. School portfolios of pupils' work can help support the process of making end of key stage judgments about pupils’ achievement and help develop a common standard readily understood by all the teachers in your school.

**Medium term** assessment planning identifies opportunities to assess learning in greater depth through common assessment tasks and opportunities for self-assessment through a topic/enquiry or over a period of time. Feedback to pupils helps them to understand the standards and targets they are aiming for.

**Short term** assessment planning involves the identification of learning goals, which are shared with pupils. Feedback about their learning helps pupils to recognise their next steps and how to take them.

**Adhering to some key principles for assessment in history**

Try to avoid some of the assessment pitfalls seen in some schools and adhere to a few key principles when assessing your pupils in history.

* Make assessment integral to teaching and learning. Use it to get information about your pupils’ strengths and weaknesses across all aspects of their learning in history; use the results to inform your future planning and do give meaningful feedback to your pupils.
* Use a wide range of evidence to make judgements about your pupils’ progress – not just what is in their exercise books/folders or how they perform in specific tests/assessment tasks.
* Avoid creating your own set of levels to replace the previous level descriptions and don’t level individual pieces of work. Individual pieces of work should be marked with *task-specific* mark-schemes that focus on the most relevant learning outcomes for that particular task and that can make explicit the kinds of substantive knowledge on which pupils’ responses should be based.
* Work with your senior leaders to ensure that assessment in history is fit for purpose – be clear about why and what you are assessing, how you are going to assess, how it is reported and to whom. While task specific mark-schemes can be used to check whether individual students are demonstrating the specific kinds of knowledge and understanding expected of them in relation to that particular task, they cannot be used in isolation at specific points to demonstrate the achievement of an all-encompassing 'level'. While it is important to track pupils' achievements over time, this can be achieved by indicating how any particular result compares with expected outcomes for that particular task, (reporting such results as being 'below', 'at' or 'above' expected progress for example) rather than by linking them inappropriately to 'levels'.
* Build confidence in your approach to assessment in history by ensuring that there is a common understanding about the standards you aspire to amongst all the teachers who teach history in your school, your senior leaders, pupils and parents/guardians. Use in-school moderation of pupils’ work and where possible draw on the support of other schools/external agencies to establish credible standards in history.
* Make assessment manageable – only assess when it is worth doing, aids pupils’ progress and provides meaningful information to senior leaders, pupils and parents/guardians.

### What does progression in history look like in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3?

Just because the level descriptions no longer exist it doesn’t mean that we don’t know how pupils make progress in history. Our understanding about pupil progress is well established so you should have something to build on as you plan for the implementation of the new national curriculum.

Knowledge and understanding, skills and processes are interrelated in history.

### ****Building on pupils’ earlier experiences**** in the Foundation Stage

Many pupils will have attended nursery and reception classes where they had opportunities to find out and learn about the world in which they live, and to develop a range of skills. It is important to take account of the types of experiences below when planning for progression in Key Stage 1:

* talking about their families and past and present events in their own lives
* showing sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others
* showing respect for people of other cultures and beliefs
* listening and responding to stories, songs, nursery rhymes and poems
* **participating in play based activities**
* exploring objects and looking closely at similarities, differences, patterns and change
* comparing, sorting, matching, ordering and sequencing everyday objects
* talking about their observations and asking questions to gain information about why things happen and how things work.

**By the end of Key Stage 1 most pupils should be able to:**

* demonstrate an awareness of the past, using common words and phrases relating to the passing of time.
* show where the people and events they study fit within a broad chronological framework
* identify similarities and differences between ways of life in different periods including their own lives
* use a wide vocabulary of everyday historical terms
* ask and answer questions, choosing and using parts of sources, including stories, to show that they know and understand key features and sequences of events.
* understand some of the ways in which we find out about the past
* identify different ways in which the past is represented (*e.g. films, museum displays, Illustrations in books*)
* organise and communicate their understanding of the past in a variety of ways.

**By the end of Key Stage 2 most pupils should be able to:**

* demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of aspects of British, local and world history through describing the contribution made by people, events and developments in the past
* construct and tell coherent stories relating to shorter and longer periods of time
* understand some of the similarities and differences between different periods
* give some reasons for, and results of, main events and changes and provide explanations about why people in the past acted as they did
* provide reasons why some events, individuals, developments are seen as more significant than others
* find out about the past by asking and answering questions, selecting and using a range of sources of information thoughtfully to provide evidence
* give some reasons for the different ways the past is represented and interpreted
* record their knowledge and understanding about the past in a variety of ways using dates and historical terms appropriately.

**Progression within Key Stages 1 and 2 is therefore characterised by:**

* an increasing knowledge and understanding of local, British and world history within an increasingly secure chronological framework
* asking and answering more complex questions about the past
* making links and connections within and between different areas of the content specified in the history curriculum
* an increasing understanding of historical concepts such as continuity and change, cause and consequence, similarity, difference and significance
* an understanding of specific historical abstract terms such as ‘empire’, ‘civilisation’, ‘monarchy’, and ‘democracy’
* an increasing proficiency in the effective use of historical enquiry and selection of evidence
* an increasing awareness of the different ways the past is represented and interpreted
* using a greater depth and range of historical knowledge to provide more reasoned explanations
* becoming more independent in learning.

**By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils most pupils should be able to:**

* demonstrate detailed knowledge of specific periods of history studied in depth, and a wider knowledge of patterns of development over time, both located within a secure chronological framework that encompasses British, local and world history
* make meaningful connections between events and developments that they have studied within the history curriculum, drawing contrasts and analysing trends, both within periods and over long arcs of time
* identify and analyse patterns of continuity and change within and across periods, with reference, for example, to the extent, pace direction and nature of the change (whether it constituted progress and if so, for whom)
* analyse the causes and consequences of particular historical events, situations and changes, explaining the relationships between different causal factors and assessing their relative importance
* describe and analyse the nature and extent of similarity/difference between the experiences and ideas, beliefs and attitudes of different groups of people within particular past societies
* use a range of criteria to evaluate and explain the significance of events, people and developments in their historical context and in the present day
* use historical terms and substantive concepts in increasingly sophisticated ways, recognising that the meaning of specific abstract terms, such as 'empire' or 'parliament' is shaped by reference to particular historical contexts
* frame historically valid enquiries of their own related to one or more of the key concepts that underpin all historical enquiry (continuity and change; cause and consequence; similarity/difference; significance)
* pursue historically valid enquiries and create relevant structured accounts (in response) in which their explanation and analysis are supported by well chosen factual information and/or sources used effectively as evidence
* make valid historical claims on the basis of different types of sources that they have subjected to rigorous evaluation
* explain how and why contrasting arguments and interpretations of the past have been constructed.

**Progression within Key Stage 3**

In general terms progression within Key Stage 3 follows a similar trajectory to that identified for Key Stages 1 and 2. It is therefore characterised by:

* an increasing knowledge and understanding of British, world and local history located within an increasingly secure chronological framework, with a distinction between detailed knowledge of certain periods/topics that allows for appreciation of the complexity of past societies and an awareness of broader patterns of change and development
* use of this greater depth and range of historical knowledge to provide better structured accounts and more reasoned analysis and explanation
* a greater awareness of the links and connections that can be drawn within and between different areas of the content specified in the history curriculum
* an increasing understanding of historical concepts such as continuity and change, cause and consequence, similarity, difference and significance and an increasing ability to use them to analyse the past and construct different kinds of historical account
* a more developed understanding of specific historical abstract terms and of the ways in which our understanding of their meaning is shaped by the study of specific historical periods/events
* asking and answering more complex questions about the past, and an increasing awareness of what makes particular enquiries worth pursuing
* increasing proficiency in the selection and evaluation of sources, enhancing the validity of the historical claims that the pupils make
* an increasing ability to identify and characterise differences in the ways in which the past has been represented and interpreted and to explain why these different interpretations have been constructed

### In what ways can I assess pupils’ work?

### Ways of assessing students work in primary history

Opportunities to monitor pupils’ learning will occur during everyday classroom situations through:

* watching pupils as they work in history
* listening to pupils as they talk about their learning in history
* questioning pupils
* discussing and reviewing pupils’ work with them
* marking pupils’ work
* asking pupils to assess their work or the work of their peers.

**Ways of assessing pupils' work in secondary history?**

Just as at Key Stages 1 and 2, so opportunities for assessment will occur during everyday classroom situations, through:

* watching pupils as they work in history
* listening to pupils as they talk about their learning in history
* questioning pupils
* discussing and reviewing pupils’ work with them
* marking pupils’ work
* asking pupils to assess their work or the work of their peers.

Because of the range of elements involved in making progress in history, teachers will need to design a range of assessment tasks, some of which may have a very targeted focus, such as pupils' recall of essential factual knowledge, while others will be more integrated tasks, requiring pupils to use that knowledge in conjunction with history's key concepts to frame and answer valid historical questions and to create structured accounts, making connections, drawing contrasts and analysing trends.

Over the course of the key stage, the assessment tasks that teachers design will need to allow pupils to revisit different concepts (change, cause and consequence, similarity and difference, significance) in a range of historical contexts and to demonstrate their developing understanding of how evidence is used to make claims and how and why contrasting interpretations are constructed. There is no reason why assessment tasks should all take the form of exam-style questions. While they will include extended writing tasks in the form of essays, other meaningful outcome tasks might include historical narratives, explanatory diagrams, oral presentations, museum guidebooks or television documentaries.

Feedback Sheet:

Thank you for taking the time to provide feedback.

Please comment on your thoughts and opinions concerning the **content** as well as the **layout** and how **useful** this might be as a guide for teachers. If you have particular comments relating to specific points of content, please indicate the sub heading and paragraph your points relate to.

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