



Historical Association

The voice for history

## HA Young Voices: What do students think about school history? A summary of the full recorded presentation – summer 2023

### 1. Introduction

As part of our strategy, the HA wants to establish mechanisms to listen to young people's views about their experience of school history. So far we have gathered peer research from pupils in 15 different secondary schools across the country.

Students were asked to carry out research among their peers. This might have been friends either in their school or another school, classmates, a whole year group or even cross the entire school.

They were asked to find answers to the following questions through surveys and questionnaires:

- What sorts of things in history do the young people in your school/group most want to learn about?
- In what ways does history matter to the young people in your school/group?
- In what ways have your history teachers shown that they care about what history means to you?

Participating students then analysed the responses and prepared short, recorded presentations of their findings. The films are available to watch on the HA website.

### 2. Who was surveyed?

Teachers with connections to the HA were asked to encourage their students to take part. Small groups of students were supported by teachers to survey their peers. Most groups surveyed peers using online forms and also discussion with smaller groups. They also added their own views. It is not always possible to work out the number of people involved from a presentation. The data in the presentations is therefore an interesting blend of anecdote and survey data. The schools were reasonable geographically spread, from Scotland to Scilly.

The schools and their survey methods (where known):

- Avanti Grange (new school with one year group): surveyed all of Y7
- Carre's GS: surveyed whole school and got 300+ responses
- Dr Challoner's GS: surveyed Y7 and Y9
- Five Islands: 30 responses
- Horizon CC: unknown
- West Kirby GS: unknown

- King Edward HS for Girls: sent out a survey to all year groups 7-13.
- Orleans Park: surveyed across school and got 250 responses
- Pleckgate HS: surveyed Y9 and got 76 responses
- St Thomas Aquinas: surveyed 800 and got 100 responses
- King's Priory School: all Y7 and then school clubs
- Tormead School: surveyed Years 7-9 and got 232 responses
- Wembley MAT: surveyed 500 (2 classes per year group) and got 215 responses (most Y8 and least Y11)

### 3. What pupils want to learn about in school history

Broad themes emerged across the presentations and also via the survey data in a single school. Those mentioned very frequently are:

- To have learnt about a wide range of people and places from the past
- History from all parts of the world and not just history from England and Europe
- To know how Britain has come to be as it is today
- British Empire, colonialism and colonial legacies (including the role of Scotland)
- Ancient history
- Varieties of viewpoints and historiography
- Local history

Themes mentioned at least once:

- History of previously marginalised groups
- History of groups with which students identify
- Connections between countries.
- Black history
- Islamic history
- History of science and economics
- Women's history
- Natural/environmental history
- Military history

Specific topics mentioned were wide-ranging. A lot of the presenters observed that these were influenced by topics students had already learnt and enjoyed, including at primary level, or which they had knowledge of via public history. Some commented on how a range of topics were necessary to satisfy all people some of the time, as some students wanted more ancient history, and others more modern history. Topics included:

- Black Death beyond Britain
- WW1
- WW2 (although some wanted less WW2)
- Cold War
- Emigration from as well as immigration to Britain
- Holocaust
- Partition of India-Pakistan
- Russian-Ukrainian War
- Hitler and the Nazis

- Tudor social history
- TAST
- Medicine
- USSR
- History of football

Some presenters also said that students don't like topics to be repeated.

Topics mentioned as often hard and dull: Battle of Hastings, Tudor politics, Industrial Rev, Cold War, French Revolution.

### **Why history matters**

Some students surveyed did not think that it mattered, they did not like history, found it hard and/or dull and specifically did not like the amount of writing required to do well in exams.

The two dominant reasons for history mattering were:

- It explains how we are here/things are as they are today (from families to the world) and influences the future
- It can suggest what we need to learn to prevent mistakes

The other reasons people gave for school history mattering included:

- Understanding people and cultures in the past
- To dispel myths and misconceptions
- To challenge harmful viewpoints
- Valuable skills for future plans
- A chance to learn about untouched/unheard of aspects of history
- It's really interesting and enjoyable
- Learning about the good and the bad
- It teaches tolerance and challenges prejudice
- It develops empathy

### **History teachers and lessons**

There were a range of ideas expressed about what students like about history lessons. The most often mentioned were:

- Teachers responding to students, consulting them and teaching them topics they were interested in
- Having a choice about what to study
- Lessons full of discussion, debate, the chance to actively express own opinions, to understand others' opinions and have their perspectives changed as a result
- Interactive lessons with e.g. group work, role-play, film etc

Other likes that had a few mentions:

- Coursework
- Stories
- Depth not overview

- Going beyond the GCSE specs
- Free choice of coursework at A Level
- Being challenged and stretched
- Hearing about personal experiences

There was much appreciation of history teachers who show great enthusiasm, passion and knowledge. And of those teachers who go above and beyond to support students and to find inspiring resources, to put students in contact with interesting resources and ideas, to run clubs and bring in speakers. There was huge support for trips out of school to museums and sites.