

Figure 3: Dos and don'ts in developing assessment policy and practice



Begin with what you want pupils to learn and then consider how to design assessment systems and practices to reflect this. This will involve planning in the long-, medium- and short-term to ensure that assessment is fully integrated into planning for teaching and learning and may well mean adopting a 'mixed constitution' for assessment across the key stage.²²

Think deeply, as a department, about progression and reflect critically on current assessment practice. Although challenging, it is this process that distinguishes teaching as a form of professional practice. An unfortunate consequence of the level descriptions, for some, was that it closed down thinking about what progression looks like and how it might be assessed.

Collaborate with other schools and draw on existing good practice, such as that shared on the pages of *Teaching History*, in order to design assessment systems and develop practice. Not only will this help to share the workload, it will challenge and improve your thinking and help ensure that there is a clearer understanding of what 'expected progress' means in history.

Get involved at whole-school level. Don't wait to be told what system you will have to work within and then have to meet its requirements. By offering to help develop school practice, you are far more likely to influence policy in positive ways. Communicate with senior leaders to ensure that they understand what you need from assessment policy as history teachers.

Analyse and evaluate the quality of any new assessment system regularly and rigorously. Consider using (at least some of the questions checklist devised by Professor Robert Coe and shared on his blog to help you evaluate the quality of the assessment you design. It is certainly worth using this list to arm you against any 'weak' externally-imposed structures and systems.²³



Use the levels as they exist or create something largely similar to the levels. The level descriptions were never intended to be used for formative assessment or individual pieces of work. So, don't try creating a generic linear model of progression that fails to capture the complexity of historical progression and ignores the importance of historical knowledge.

Use GCSE mark-schemes from Key Stage 3 onwards. Such generic mark-schemes that reduce progress to small steps in a simplistic, linear way will simply encourage more teaching to the test. GCSE mark-schemes are weak models of progression that largely ignore substantive knowledge and the complexity of second-order conceptual development, so will not help pupil progress.

Use a single taxonomy (e.g. Bloom's) as a structure for assessment, as suggested by the NCTL's 'Beyond Levels' 2014 research report.²⁴ Designing assessments and creating displays about making steps from 'description' to 'explanation' and 'analysis' will be meaningless and confusing, particularly out of subject context. It would also be wrong: a rich description characterising a period might be far more complex than a simplistic causal analysis, for example.

Plan your assessment system around external, generic or whole-school structures and systems such as data tracking or league tables. These are not rooted in subject discipline and are too simplistic to be useful. Find a way to make this work after you have the rigour in place.

Use numbers or grades rather than descriptions in an effort to make things easy to do and easy to use. Data has its uses but carefully-crafted descriptions will enable you to capture the complexity of subject-specific progression. Perhaps Einstein had levels in mind when he (allegedly) said, 'Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted.'