**Historical Association   
Survey of History in Schools in England 2015***Authors: Dr Katharine Burn, University of Oxford and Dr Richard Harris, University of Reading*

**1. Summary**

**1.1 Data on which this report is based**

This survey was conducted during the summer term 2015. Responses were received from 455 history teachers working in a wide range of different contexts, including sixth form and tertiary colleges. The rapid expansion of the academies programme means that is no longer viable to draw the distinctions made in previous surveys between different kinds of schools within the non-selective state-maintained sector.

**1.2 Key Stage 3**

**Impact of the 2014 National Curriculum**

Despite the rapid increase in the number of academies, relatively few schools had exploited the free that they had to depart substantially from the National Curriculum for history. Around 80% of state-maintained schools (both comprehensive and selective schools) reported that their Key Stage 3 curriculum was at least broadly compliant with the 2014 Curriculum.

However, more than 60% schools reported that the revision of the National Curriculum, effective from September 2014, had prompted no more than ‘limited’ reform to their existing Key Stage 3 provision.

**Approaches to assessment**

More than a third of schools were continuing to use the level descriptions from the 2008 National Curriculum. Another fifth of schools (19%) had made some kind of adaptation to the NC levels but were essentially using a similar approach with a further 12% retaining the idea of levels but developing their own definitions of the standards. Some 15% of respondents were looking to base their approach on the grading system to be used at GCSE (running from 1-9), while 19% of respondents had taken the opportunity to develop an alternative approach. There was a strong indication that many schools were biding their time, waiting either for senior leadership teams to make whole school decisions or for the publication of GCSE specimen materials so that they had a more secure grasp of how the new 1-9 grades would be assigned and could base their system on those criteria. Individual comments revealed a wide diversity of practice with some departments embracing the freedom to develop bespoke systems responsive to the needs of the subject and others clearly driven by centralised school policies.

**Length of Key Stage 3 and format of teaching**

In a quarter of respondents’ schools the Key Stage 3 curriculum was allocated only two years – a similar proportion to that reported in 2014. The trend away from ‘alternative’ competency-based curricula and integrated humanities that has been evidence since 2011 had continued: around 90% of respondents reported that their schools taught history taught as a discrete subject in Year 7.

**Extent of specialist teaching**

No more than a third of schools reported that all their Year 7 classes were taught by specialist teachers. Around 40% of schools had up to a third of lessons taught by non-specialists, around 20% had between a third and two-thirds of lessons taught by non-specialists, while the remaining schools had over two-thirds of lessons taught by non-specialists. The lack of specialist staff may be a reflection either of difficulties in recruitment, or a reflection of constrained budgets within schools.

**Time allocated to history**

The amount of time given to the teaching of history in schools continued to vary, but the overall figures suggest that there may have been some increase in the time allocation.

**1.3 GCSE History**

**Reactions to the new GCSE specifications**

The most significant concern about the new GCSE specification – regarded as ‘serious’ by over 60% of respondents – was the lack of funding for new resources, which might suggested that departments would be likely to choose new specifications that offered continuity as far as possible within their existing courses. Concerns about the suitability of the course for lower attainers were expressed by 84% of respondents, including 50% who regarded that concern as ‘serious’. The other issues regarded as matters of 'serious concern' by at least a third of all respondents were the extent of the change that they faced in responding to the new specifications and the timescale on which they needed to respond.

Despite this sense of alarm, it is important to note that support for the kinds of changes being made, that had been evident in the previous year’s responses to the new national criteria, was still evident. The idea of a thematic study, which would be new to teachers who had previously followed Modern World GCSE courses, was seen as a matter of concern by only a third of respondents, with less than 6% regarding this concern as serious. About 40% of respondents stated that there were particular aspects of the new GCSEs that they welcomed, with the most popular features being the range and variety of topics and types of history included; the requirement to study pre-20th-century history (with specific praise for both the medieval and early modern periods) and the inclusion of the historic environment.

The most significant influences on departments’ decisions about which specifications to follow were reported to be their previous experience of a particular exam board; student interest in particular topics; the kinds of support materials that the exam boards were expected to provide and the precise nature or format of the questions they were proposing to set. Other factors that carried a similar weight were the cost of resources – expressed as a concern to minimise the need to buy new materials – and teachers’ own subject knowledge.

Almost two thirds of respondents expected that their new GCSE specifications would have a considerable or profound influence on their Key Stage 3 curriculum in subsequent years.

**The length of the GCSE courses offered**

The vast majority of respondents reported that their school offered a two-year GCSE programme. Only around half of the schools with three years allocated to Key Stage 4 offered a full three-year GCSE programme. Most of the others reported that they provided a ‘GCSE-style’ course developing the kinds of approaches that students would need (in relation to the use of sources, or thematic studies over time, for example) rather than immediately embarking on the GCSE content. Only eight respondents in total reported that their school was offering a one-year GCSE history course.

**The extent of non-specialist teaching at GCSE**

The vast majority of schools (81%) reported that all their GCSE teaching was being undertaken by subject specialists. It is a matter of concern that in a small proportion of schools (3%) over half of the GCSE classes are being taught by non-specialists.

**The degree of freedom that students can exercise in relation to GCSE choice**

While 57% of schools were reported to give their students an entirely free choice about continuing with history to GCSE – a figure that was very similar to that reported in the 2014 survey – there were a few more signs of coercion in 2015 than in previous years – with eight schools noting (for the first time) that history was a compulsory subject for all students. A further three schools reported that this was the case for *some*of the students in their school. It was encouraging to note that while 43 % of schools apply some coercion for some or all students – asking them to choose at least one subject of history or geography – very few schools (less than 6%) force students to choose *between* the two subjects. In most cases the students who wish to do so are given the chance to take both subjects.

It was also particularly encouraging to see that for the first time since 2011(when the HA first asked this question) the proportion of respondents noting that some students were actively *steered away* from history had fallen. This year's figure of 35%, compared with a figure of nearly 45% for 2014, suggests that the introduction of the Progress 8 accountability measure (to be reported for the first time in 2016) might be having an impact on the advice that schools were giving to students. However, about half the respondents thought that it was too soon to tell what the impact of Progress8 on GCSE take-up would be, with only 22% confidently predicting that it would be positive.

**1.4 A-level history**

**Factors that had influence schools’ choice of specifications**

The most commonly cited factors shaping departmental decisions about their new A-level specifications were their previous experience with an exam board and the teachers’ existing subject knowledge; both could possibly be seen as indicating a desire to minimise the amount of change, although the quality of support was another important distinguishing feature in choosing between different examination boards. Students’ own interests ranked as the third most frequently cited influence. Relatively few responses focused on the value of the topics chosen for developing young people’s understanding of the world today or as preparation for university. This suggests that logistical concerns, particularly at a time of financial pressures on schools, had tended to drive curricular decisions.

**Schools’ policies in relation to AS-level entry**

The majority of institutions (80%) reported that they were planning to enter students for AS, but this was rather more likely in sixth form colleges (89%) and comprehensive and academy settings (84%). A significant percentage of grammar and independent schools (38% and 32% respectively) were not planning to give students the option of taking AS, which implied that they expected all the students taking the subject to continue with it to the end of Year 13.

One of the other key questions related to schools' decisions about whether or not to co-teach AS and A-level students, given the different requirements of the examination at each level. Overwhelmingly schools reported that they intended to co-teach students, with 85% of respondents noting that this was their preferred option, probably out of a concern to make group sizes viable, but also in response to timetabling constraints.

**Teachers’ perceptions of the impact of the changes at A-level**

Most teachers were reserving judgement about the potential impact of the changes on student take-up and effective learning in history. Although 6% of respondents expected the impact of the change to be positive, the negative view also quite restricted (at around 12%) with the vast majority reporting little potential impact (26%) or concluding that it was still too soon to tell (56%).

The particular features that they welcomed were the opportunities to teach new topics, the retention of a personal investigation and – in those contexts where students were not taking AS-levels – the chance for more sustained teaching without interruption for exams in Year 12.

**1.5 Teachers’ concerns**

When asked about their most pressing concerns, the issue that dominated teachers’ responses was the range of curriculum change with which they were wrestling (a matter of concern to 88% of teachers). Linked with the curriculum changes were teachers' concerns about the extent of subject-specific CPD available to them (a concern for almost half the respondents) and their capacity to attend such provision even where it was being offered (a matter of concern to a similar proportion).

Lack of high quality applicants for history teaching posts was regarded as a concern by more than 20% of respondents, while 16% were concerned about the number of non-specialists teaching history.

**2. Nature of the survey**

The findings reported here are based on the response of history teachers in England to an online survey sent by the Historical Association to all schools and colleges teaching students in the 11–18 age range. The survey was conducted during the summer term 2015.

**2.1 Number of responses**

Responses were received from 455 history teachers working in a wide range of different contexts, including sixth form and tertiary colleges. While some responses – such as teachers’ concerns – were analysed at an individual level, multiple responses from teachers within the same school were eliminated to ensure that each school was counted only once in response to questions about the nature of provision for history at different key stages. These school-level responses were analysed in relation to different types of schools: state-maintained comprehensives, state-maintained grammar schools, independent schools and sixth-form colleges. In previous years, we have sought to draw a distinction between old-style academies (established under previous Labour governments in areas of socio-economic disadvantage) and new academies (established under the terms of the Academies Act of 2010 which allows high-performing schools to convert to academy status, as well as for sponsors to take over schools that are judged to be failing). However, the rapid expansion in the number of academies and respondents’ growing uncertainty (especially if they were relatively new to the school) about the nature of their school’s conversion to academy status meant that it was no longer feasible to maintain a clear distinction between different types of academy. Although free schools were included as a separate category, the number of responses from teachers in free schools was very limited and their responses have therefore been included within the broad ‘comprehensive/academy/free school' category (sometimes simply referred to as 'comprehensives').

**2.2 The range of schools represented**

Responses to questions about teaching history at Key Stage 3 (traditionally the first three years of secondary school for students aged 11-14, but now reduced in some schools to the first two years of secondary provision for students aged 11-13) were received from 382 schools. These 382 schools included 300 state-maintained, non-selective comprehensive schools, academies and free schools, 18 state-maintained grammar schools or academies, and 64 independent schools. Responses to questions about provision at Key Stage 4 (conventionally ages 14-16) were received from 378 schools; while 271 schools and sixth-form colleges reported on their AS and A level history provision.

**2.3 Ethnicity of respondents**

For the first time, a question was included about the ethnicity of respondents. Of the 455 respondents 430 (94.5%) describing themselves as White, including 404 White British and 7 White Irish. Thirteen respondents described themselves as being of mixed heritage (2.9%), three described their ethnic background as Black-Caribbean (0.7%) and two as Asian (0.4%). One respondent ticked the ‘other’ category rather than any of the other options listed and six respondents preferred not to disclose their ethnicity.

**3. Key Stage 3 history**

**3.1 Continuing impact of the revised National Curriculum**

The revised National Curriculum had been made a formal requirement for all local authority maintained schools from September 2014. Free schools and academies were not formally obliged to follow the new curriculum, and we were interested to determine the extent to which history departments in different kinds of school were complying with the national requirements.

*Figure 1: The extent to which respondents’ schools were following the National Curriculum for Key Stage 3*

As Figure 1 shows, only around 20% of respondents reported that they were following the new National Curriculum very closely, although the vast majority (around 80%) of respondents from the state-maintained sector reported that their curriculum was at least ‘broadly’ compliant with the new curriculum. Unsurprisingly, there was a marked difference between state-maintained and independent schools, with less than a third of the latter reporting even ‘broad’ compliance. Another third of independent schools were following a lower secondary curriculum that was entirely independent of the National Curriculum for history curriculum respondents; an approach adopted by only 3% of comprehensive schools/academies and only 6% of grammar schools.

Respondents were also asked about the extent of the changes that they had made to their previous curriculum in response to the formal introduction of the National Curriculum from September 2014. Figure 2 shows that although state-maintained comprehensive schools and academies reported the most change (with 8% reporting ‘extensive changes’) most had actually made relatively few alterations; more than 60% of such schools regarded the changes that they had made as no more than 'limited'. Some schools of every type had made no change at all to their curriculum, a response reported by 33% of independent schools, 17% of grammar schools and 8% of comprehensives.

*Figure 2: The extent of the change that teachers reported having made to their Key Stage 3 curriculum in response to the National Curriculum*

**3.2 Approaches adopted to assessment at Key Stage 3**

The survey also asked respondents about how they were now approaching the assessment and recording of students’ progress at Key Stage 3 since the formal abolition of the level descriptions that had been used within the 2008 curriculum.

*Figure 3: The approaches to assessment being used within Key Stage 3*

As Figure 3 reveals, over a third of all schools (35%) were continuing to use the National Curriculum level descriptions as they had been presented in the 2008 version. Another fifth of schools (19%) had made some kind of adaptation to the NC levels but were essentially using a similar approach with a further 12% retaining the idea of levels but developing their own definitions of the standards. Some 15% of respondents were looking to base their approach on the grading system to be used at GCSE (running from 1-9), while 19% of respondents had taken the opportunity to develop an alternative approach. While the independent schools (many of which may never have used the NC levels) were most likely to be using their own approaches to assessing and reporting progress, the grammar schools were more confident than the comprehensives and academies both in developing alternative systems altogether (17% of grammar school respondents compared with only 12% from comprehensives) and in looking to the new GCSE grades to provide them with some kind of measure (22% compared to 14%).

About a third of the respondents included a comment to try to explain the changes that they had implemented. While some had already made changes, there was a strong sense that many schools were biding their time, waiting either for senior leadership teams to make whole-school decisions or for the publication of GCSE specimen materials so that they had a more secure grasp of how the new 1-9 grades would be assigned and could base their system on those criteria.

Several teachers suggested that they were trying to achieve some kind of hybrid approach that linked the new GCSE system of nine grades with the previous National Curriculum descriptors:

*Adapted to pull in GCSE level descriptors and link to old NC levels.*

*[Teacher 278, free school]*

*We have made changes in line with the requests from senior team to link with the new GCSE grades but using key vocabulary of the old level descriptors.*

*[Teacher 346, grammar school]*

Others referred to different kinds of principle, such as the idea of ‘mastery’ learning or the use of ‘threshold’ measures (although the latter was not explained):

*A 'mastery' model . Students are described as [operating at] Foundation; Developing; Secure; Excellence across 3 areas: i) skills ii) concepts iii) knowledge It is a holistic model intended to track students over the whole Key Stage. We are moving away from formal assessments and providing students with class books and a separate folder for key homework tasks and extended pieces of class work. There will be a description of what we expect to see for each skill; concept; knowledge. The student keeps evidence for meeting the descriptors in their folder. Hopefully by the end of the key stage students will have a mastery of the 3 areas.*

*[Teacher 144, comprehensive school]*

*Moving from a level system to a threshold system though it remains in the design stages.*

*[Teacher 87, grammar school]*

While some teachers were very careful to explain how they were seeking to include consideration of students’ substantive knowledge within their assessment system, others referred exclusively to ‘skill’ development:

*We are implementing from September a system where students will gain a mark out of 25 for skills and a percentage per scheme for knowledge. Both of these will be linked to the individual's flight path.*

*[Teacher 368, comprehensive]*

*Our focus is changing in terms of progress and we aim to explore the idea of mastery of skills within levels, rather than needless progression up and through levels, which is meaningless to students... As a school we are moving towards an approach which allows for age specific skills within subjects. Rather than "I earned a level 6! Ok now how do I achieve a Level 7", students should be asking "I was able to evaluate sources in terms of their usefulness, now I need to focus upon the tone of the source as well as who it was written by".*

*[Teacher 135, comprehensive school]*

*We use our own system based on formative marking rather than using any sort of grade or level in normal work. In assessments we have created our own criteria for each skill which enables students to identify their progress without tying them to a 'level'.*

*[Teacher 288, independent school]*

In a few cases reference was made specifically to Bloom’s taxonomy, often in the context of a humanities-wide policy that emphasised progression from description to explanation and evaluations.

*Our levels are based on the range between identify, describe, explain, etc - Bloom's taxonomy.*

*[Teacher 400, comprehensive school]*

Two commercial providers were named: PixL was quite widely referenced usually in the context of a whole-school commitment to the package, while one teacher referred to Pearson's:

*Our school has paid into the PiXL resource of tracking skills across years 7. Years 8 and 9 will continue to use levels. There is the possibility of continuing to use PiXL from September 2016 for Year 8 as well.*

*[Teacher 117, comprehensive]*

*Based on Pearson's 12 steps - with 4 different strands.*

*[Teacher 204, comprehensive school]*

Explicit reference was also made in a few cases to specific ideas discussed within *Teaching History* articles: the work of Alex Ford on mastery[[1]](#footnote-1) and Michael Fordham’s[[2]](#footnote-2) encouragement to think in terms of a ‘mixed constitution’ that encompassed different kinds of assessment tasks including routine checks of students’ substantive knowledge. Another recurring idea that drew on a tradition of practice discussed in *Teaching History* was the use of task-specific mark-schemes as explained by Geraint Brown and Sally Burnham.[[3]](#footnote-3)

*We assess within the History department according to our own system of task specific mark schemes and a 'mixed constitution' of modes of assessment, varying from the more to less formal, ongoing and at the end of the year. We are currently required to report beyond the department, including to parents, in levels, including sub levels, but we no longer pretend as a department that this has any meaning or relates to the level descriptors. It has become merely a series of grades which are determined from our own assessment data through setting grade boundaries. The school has not really realised this yet, and parents certainly have not, but it has not made any actual difference. The senior team are intending to devise an alternative system to replace levels but have not started work on this yet.*

*[Teacher 318, comprehensive school]*

Several schools referred to systems in which the assessments represented progressively greater challenge each year: so the students were judged to be making effective progress by maintaining their grade/mark from one year to the next:

*We have been told as a school that from 2016 we will need to change Key Stage 3 progress and reporting and assessment to directly link with GCSE grades and that pupils should stay on the same grade throughout the whole of their secondary education, with challenge in the assessments increasing, correlating with 'age related' statements.*

*[Teacher 104, comprehensive school]*

*Knowledge-rich and task-specific mark schemes which are internally graded using 'ungraded' to 'outstanding' criteria. Students only see comments, not grades or levels.*

*[Teacher 26, independent school]*

There was considerable evidence of teachers’ frustration as they were forced to comply with systems that they clearly regarded as meaningless (particularly the notion of two sub-levels of progress that many schools had retained from the previous National Curriculum):

*We have been influenced by HA* Teaching History *articles... but still have to do stupid sub-levels for the senior leadership team, even though they say they are stupid, including the head who says its 'mad '. But he still makes us enter little boxes of sub-level data and is obsessed by 2 sub levels of progress. So now we just fill in boxes to lie and say what he wants...There is a tension between knowing what is good practice and the direction and demands of SLT the dept is enlightened and well read - the SLT will not challenge what they see as things they must do for OFSTED . Pressure on SLT to regain 'Outstanding' [judgment] are high - and to retain their jobs - so this sort of thing is imposed and stresses staff out.*

*[Teacher 374, comprehensive school]*

Some teachers, however, were clearly pleased with the scope that they had been given (despite the challenges) to map out together with colleagues their expectations and the kinds of development that they expected of young people:

*The winds of change are only just beginning to blow throughout the school, and fruitful discussions about assessment (with the possibility of a whole school assessment policy being re-drafted) are being had (thank goodness!)*

*[Teacher 253, independent school]*

*Our department have moved away from marking assessments with levels. Here are the steps: 1. Peer assess each other's work. 2. Self assessment 3. Teacher marks and sets a target or thinking question for the student to respond to in order to help the student to improve and progress. Sometimes, this can involve the student redrafting part of their answer. The department has introduced a culture of redrafting.*

*[Teacher 293, comprehensive school]*

**3.3 The length of the Key Stage 3 curriculum**

As in previous years we asked respondents to make clear how long their Key Stage curriculum lasted, distinguishing between two and three-year programmes. As noted above, due to the number of schools converting to academy status it was decided not to distinguish between comprehensive schools and academy schools in the data that were collected for 2015; in order to provide year-by-year comparison, the figures for comprehensive schools and non-selective academies have been combined for 2014 as well.

The figures in Table 1 show considerable stability between 2014 and 2015 except for grammar schools where there has been a noticeable increase in the number of responses indicating their school offers a condensed Key Stage 3. Overall the traditional three-year Key Stage 3 continues to be the dominant model, taught in around 75% of respondents' schools.[[4]](#footnote-4) What is obviously not clear, however, is how the pattern differs between comprehensive and academy schools; the original figures from 2014 showed a particular trend for academy schools to offer a shorter Key Stage 3 (50%) compared to comprehensive schools (13.7%).

*Table 1: The length of the Key Stage 3 programme in respondents’ schools in 2015 and 2014  
(Figures for 2015 are given in the shaded boxes; those for 2014 are given in italics)*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **3-year Key Stage 3** | | **2-year Key Stage 3** | |
| **2015** | **Comprehensives and academies** | 180 | 75.9% | 57 | 24.1% |
| *2014* | *Comprehensive and academies* | *174* | *75.6%* | *56* | *24.3%* |
| **2015** | **Grammar** | 9 | 56.3% | 7 | 43.8% |
| *2014* | *Grammar* | *5* | *62.5%* | *3* | *37.50%* |
| **2015** | **Independent** | 49 | 89.1% | 6 | 10.9% |
| *2014* | *Independent* | *34* | *89.5%* | *4* | *10.5%* |
| **2015** | **All schools** | 238 | 77.3% | 70 | 22.7% |
| *2014* | *All schools* | *213* | *77.2%* | *63* | *22.8%* |

**3.4 The organisation of history within the Key Stage 3 curriculum**

Although the provision of discrete history lessons at Key Stage 3 remains most likely in independent and grammar schools, the trend towards more comprehensive and academy schools teaching history as a discrete subject, which was noted last year, continues. Over the past five years of the survey there has been an increase in the proportion of **all** schools teaching history as a separate subject – from 77% of respondents in 2011 to 90% in 2015. As Table 2 shows, the proportion of comprehensive schools teaching history as a discrete subject shows a marked increase. The figure for 2015 (which includes comprehensives, academies and free schools) shows 88.4% of these schools teaching history as a separate subject, which is again higher than the figure for these schools combined (82.3%) in 2014. What is also notable is the near absence of history being taught through alternative curriculum models.

*Table 2: Survey findings over the last five years about the organisation of history teaching in different types of school   
Note: Figures from the 2015 survey are presented in the shaded rows and those for 2014, 2013, 2012, and 2011 are given in successive rows below.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **As a discrete subject** | **As a distinct subject within humanities** | **Within integrated humanities** | **Other** | **Total respondents** |
| **All schools** | 2015 | 310 (90.1%) | 22 (6.4%) | 11 (3.2%) | 1 (0.3%) | 344 |
| 2014  2013  2012  2011 | 228 (84.8%)  368 (82.1%)  179 (77.8%)  287 (76.5%) | 25 (9.3%)  44 (9.8%)  26 (11.3%)  40 (10.7%) | 9 (3.3%)  21 (4.6%)  19 (8.3%)  28 (7.5%) | 7 2.6%)  15 (3.3%)  6 (2.6%)  20 (5.3%) | 269  448  230  375 |
| **Comprehensive** | 2015\* | 237 (88.4%) | 22 (8.2%) | 9 (3.4%) | 0 (0.0%) | 268 |
| 2014  2013  2012  2011 | 83 (88.3%)  165 (80.5%)  90 (78.3%)  181 (72.7%) | 7 (7.4%)  21 (10.2%)  12 (10.4%)  30 (12.0%) | 2 (2.1%)  12 (5.9%)  10 (8.7%)  21 (8.4%) | 2 (2.1%)  7 (3.4%)  3 (2.6%)  17 (6.8%) | 94  205  115  249 |
| **Grammar** | 2015 | 16 (94.1%) | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (5.9%) | 0 (0.0%) | 17 |
| 2014  2013  2012  2011 | 7 (100%)  8 (100%)  5 (83.3%)  16 (100%) | 0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%)  1 (16.7%)  0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%) | 7  8  6  16 |
| **Independent** | 2015 | 55 (98.2%) | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (1.8%) | 56 |
| 2014  2013  2012  2011 | 35 (97.2%)  40 (97.6%)  22 (95.7%)  48 (92.3%) | 0 (0.0%)  1 (2.4%)  1 (4.3%)  2 (3.8%) | 0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%)  1 (1.9%) | 1 (2.8%)  0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%)  1 (1.9%) | 36  41  23  52 |
| **Academy  (old style)** | 2014  2013  2012  2011 | 17 (85%)  9 (47.4%)  5 (50.0%)  14 (56.0%) | 1 (5%)  3 (15.8%)  3 (30.0%)  4 (16.0%) | 2 (10%)  3 (15.8%)  1 (10.0%)  5 (20.0%) | 0 (0.0%)  4 (21.1%)  1 (10.0%)  2 (8.0%) | 20  19  10  25 |
| **Academy (new)** | 2014  2013  2012  2011 | 86 (76.8%)  146 (78.9%)  56 (74.7%)  28 (84.8%) | 17 (15.2%)  19 (10.3%)  10 (13.3%)  4 (12.1%) | 5 (4.5%)  6 (3.2%)  7 (9.3%)  1 (3.0%) | 4 (3.6%)  14 (7.6%)  2 (2.7%)  0 (0.0%) | 112  185  75  33 |

\* 2015 figures combine comprehensive schools and academy schools

**3.5 Comparison of provision in schools with a three-year and a two-year Key Stage 3**

In comparing the way in which history is offered by schools that continue to allocate three years to Key Stage 3 with the way it is offered in those that have reduced Key Stage 3 to only two years, it is clear that those schools which give longer to Key Stage 3 are also more likely to teach history as a discrete subject from Year 7, although the figures for 2015 show the gap is much smaller than that observed in 2014. It can also be seen that where schools do operate a two-year Key Stage 3 increasing numbers of them are now teaching history as a discrete subject (except in the case of grammar schools, although the figures for this category are too small to allow us to draw any strong conclusions). The number of schools offering alternative curriculum models for either a two- or three-year Key Stage 3 in 2015 is negligible.

*Table 3: Comparison of history provision in schools with a three-year and a two-year Key Stage 3*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Length of Key Stage 3** | **Year** | **As a discrete subject** | **As a distinct subject within humanities** | **Within integrated humanities** | **Other** | **Total responses** |
| **All schools** | 3 year | 2015 | 239 (90.5%) | 18 (6.8%) | 7 (2.7%) | 0 (0.0%) | 264 |
| 2014  2013 | 181 (86.8%)  312 (84.8%) | 20 (9.6%)  31 (8.4%) | 4 (1.9%)  16 (4.3%) | 4 (1.9%)  9 (2.4%) | 209  368 |
| 2 year | 2015 | 71 (88.8%) | 4 (5.0%) | 4 (5.0%) | 1 (1.3%) | 80 |
| 2014  2013 | 47 (78.3%)  56 (70.0%) | 5 (8.3%)  13 (16.3%) | 5 (8.3%)  5 (6.3%) | 3 (5.0%)  6 (7.5%) | 60  80 |
| **Comprehensive** | 3 year | 2015\* | 180 (87.8%) | 18 (8.8%) | 7 (3.4%) | 0 (0.0%) | 205 |
| 2014  2013 | 72 (88.9%)  142 (82.6%) | 5 (6.2%)  16 (9.3%) | 2 (2.5%)  9 (5.2%) | 2 (2.5%)  5 (2.9%) | 81  172 |
| 2 year | 2015\* | 57 (90.5%) | 4 (6.3%) | 2 (3.2%) | 0 (0.0%) | 63 |
| 2014  2013 | 11 (84.6%)  23 (69.7%) | 2 (15.4%)  5 (15.2%) | 0 (0.0%)  3 (9.1%) | 0 (0.0%)  2 (6.1%) | 13  33 |
| **Grammar** | 3 year | 2015 | 9 (100.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 9 |
| 2014  2013 | 4 (100.0%)  6 (100.0%) | 0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%) | 4  6 |
| 2 year | 2015 | 7 (87.5%) | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (12.5%) | 0 (0.0%) | 8 |
| 2014  2013 | 3 (100.0%)  2 (100.0%) | 0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%) | 3  2 |
| **Independent** | 3 year | 2015 | 49 (100.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 49 |
| 2014  2013 | 33 (100.0%)  39 (100.0%) | 0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%) | 33  39 |
| 2 year | 2015 | 6 (85.7%) | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (14.3%) | 7 |
| 2014  2013 | 2 (66.7%)  1 (50.0%) | 0 (0.0%)  1 (50.0%) | 0 (0.0%)  0 (0.0%) | 1 (33.3%)  0 (0.0%) | 3  2 |
| **Academy (old style)** | 3 year | 2014 | 9 (90.0%) | 1 (10.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 10 |
| 2013 | 5 (55.6%) | 0 (0.0%) | 2 (22.2%) | 2 (22.2%) | 9 |
| 2 year | 2014 | 8 (80.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 2 (20.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 10 |
| 2013 | 4 (40.0%) | 3 (30.0%) | 1 (10.0%) | 2 (20.0%) | 10 |
| **Academy (new)** | 3 year | 2014 | 63 (86.6%) | 14 (17.3%) | 2 (1.9%) | 2 (1.9%) | 81 |
| 2013 | 120 (84.5%) | 15 (10.6%) | 5 (3.5%) | 2 (1.4%) | 142 |
| 2 year | 2014 | 23 (74.2%) | 3 (9.7%) | 3 (9.7%) | 2 (6.5%) | 31 |
| 2013 | 26 (78.8%) | 4 (12.1%) | 1 (3.0%) | 2 (6.1%) | 33 |

\* 2015 figures combine comprehensive schools and academy schools

**3.6 The extent of non-specialist teaching at Key Stage 3**

Figures 5 and 6 show the proportion of history lessons that are taught by non-specialists in Year 7. This year group was specifically chosen since it is most likely that schools deploying non-specialists will assign them to the lowest year of secondary schooling, retaining specialist teachers for those years in which students make their GCSE options (Year 8 or Year 9) and for their teaching of GCSE classes. As can be seen there is no clear pattern across different types of school or in relation to the length of the Key Stage 3 curriculum.

*Figure 5: 2015: The proportion of history lessons in Year 7 taught by non-specialists in schools with a two-year Key Stage 3*

*Figure 6: 2015: The proportion of history lessons in Year 7 taught by non-specialists in schools with a three year Key Stage 3*

All types of schools report the use of non-specialist teachers for some history lessons. The profile for comprehensive, academy and free schools is similar in both two and three-year Key Stage 3 models: between 25% and 33% are able to have all their Year 7 classes taught by specialists, around 40% have up to a third of lessons taught by non-specialists, around 20% have between a third and two-thirds of lessons taught by non-specialists, while the remaining schools have over two-thirds of lessons taught by non-specialists. This is likely to be a particular concern in a shortened Key Stage 3 as secondary school is the only phase in a student’s schooling in which young people might expect trained specialists to teach them; hence in a two year Key Stage 3 where at least one year is taught by a non-specialist it is highly probable that students will have very limited expert teaching from those trained in the subject. As figures 5 and 6 show, both grammar and independent schools are also unable to provide specialist teaching for many of their students. The figures suggest that schools may be struggling to recruit specialist teachers either because there of a shortage of such teachers, or because financial constraints mean that schools are having to ask staff to teach outside of their specialism.

**3.7 Time allocation at Key Stage 3**

The amount of time given to the teaching of history in schools continued to vary, but the overall figures suggest that there may have been some increase in the time allocation. In 2012 just over 55% of respondents from all schools reported that pupils had more than 75 minutes of history per week; the comparable figure in 2014 was 58%, while the figure for 2015 is just over 64%. This trend is particularly clear in comprehensive and academy schools: for schools teaching a two-year Key Stage 3, the percentage who provide over 90 minutes of history teaching a week was only just over just over 35% in 2014 whereas the comparable figure for 2015 is 41.5%. In schools with a three-year Key Stage 3 the figures have improved from just less than 30% to just over 36%. As last year, there seems to be a pattern of schools with a more condensed Key Stage 3 offering more curriculum time to history to compensate for the loss of a third year of teaching (although, as noted last year, this is unlikely to result in students in a two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum actually having the same amount of time to study history as a student in a school with a three-year Key Stage 3). Comprehensive and academy school respondents are also more likely to report offering more than 90 minutes of history teaching a week than grammar and independent school respondents. More than 37% of comprehensive and academy school respondents report this allocation of time compared to just less than 30% for both grammar schools and independent schools. Overall the trend towards more timetabled history seems to be a clear development.

Overall, nearly 78% of schools reported there had been no actual change in the amount of time allocated to history, but this compares to a figure of 87% in 2014. It is clear that many schools have been re-examining their timetable provision. This is particularly evident in the grammar and independent schools where the responses show moves towards reducing the amount of time devoted to history; over a fifth of independent school respondents reported a decrease in curriculum time for history, with just over a tenth of the of grammar schools also reporting a reduction. Although 11% of comprehensive and academy schools also reduced the time for history, another 11% chose to increase it. This fluctuation would suggest that a number of schools are reshaping their curriculum provision in response to both to curriculum changes at Key Stage and GCSE and to the use of the EBacc as a schools accountability measure.

**4. GCSE History**

**4.1 Responses of schools to the new GCSE specifications**

**4.1.1 Nature and extent of concerns expressed about the new GCSE specifications**

At the time that the survey was conducted draft specifications for the new GCSEs (for first examination in 2018) had been published but not yet approved by Ofqual. The HA was aware that those schools with a two-year Key Stage 3 and three-year GCSE programme would begin teaching the courses in September (perhaps before the new specifications had received approval) and therefore asked them to identify how concerned they were about a number of features of the new GCSEs and the timescale for their implementation. The results shown in Figure 7 indicate that the most significant concern – regarded as ‘serious’ by over 60% of respondents was the lack of funding for new resources, which might well indicate that departments would seek to choose new specifications in relation to the degree of continuity that they provided with their existing courses.

*Figure 7: The extent to which the survey respondents regarded different features of the new GCSE specification as a matter of concern.*

Concerns about the suitability of the course for lower attainers were expressed by 84% of respondents, including 50% who regarded that concern as ‘serious’. The other issues regarded as matters of 'serious concern' by at least a third of all respondents were the extent of the change that they faced in responding to the new specifications and the timescale on which they needed to respond. Despite this sense of alarm, it is important to note that the strong support for the kinds of changes being made – support that had been evident in the previous year’s responses to the new national criteria – was still evident. The idea of a thematic study – which would be entirely new to the two-thirds of teachers who had previously been following Modern World GCSE courses – was only seen as a matter of concern by around a third of respondents, with less than 6% regarding this concern as serious. Inclusion of the study of the historic environment, which was also a very new feature for some teachers, was only regarded as a matter of serious concern by 13% of respondents.

**4.1.2. Aspects of the new GCSE specifications that were particularly welcome**

Respondents were also asked whether there were any aspects of the new GCSE specifications that they specifically welcomed and 149 teachers (about 40% of the respondents to questions about GCSE) suggested that there were indeed welcome aspects. That most frequently mentioned, cited by 40 teachers, was the range and variety of the topics and types of history now included. Another 29 teachers explicitly praised the fact that it was no longer possible to undertake a GCSE that included only 20th-century history and many more cited particular topics or periods that they were pleased to see included. Medieval history was most frequently mentioned but ‘Tudor’ or ‘early modern history’ also received strong endorsement. The inclusion of what was variously described as 'local history' or the 'historic environment' was specifically praised by 17 teachers and another 13 teachers expressed their pleasure in the inclusion of a thematic study. Several teachers who had previously wanted to combine some study of the 20th century with a long-term thematic study were now particularly pleased that they could do both.

Only a very few teachers commented positively on features of the new exams associated with the question styles or the ways in which particular objectives were to be assessed, but there were a small numbers of specific comments about improved approaches to the use of sources and work on interpretations:

*Better links to concepts especially interpretations. Exciting to be planning and teaching new material. Hopefully an end to ridiculous source questions.*

*[Teacher 350, comprehensive school]*

*The new skill aspect, in particular the source analysis questions requiring inferences, comparative analysis and questioning of evidence.*

*[Teacher 44, free school]*

While teachers are undoubtedly concerned about the extent of the demands of the course on their students – given the increase in the number of different elements – there was also some enthusiasm – most obviously expressed by grammar and independent school respondents – for the kinds of changes being introduced and a sense that GCSE would thereafter provide a better grounding in history:

*I do think the greater breadth of study from the Modern World course has the potential to create young people with a more rounded historical understanding, if done well.*

*[Teacher 286, grammar school]*

*Local study looks interesting. Breadth - good for the pupils - as we focus a lot on depth at the moment… The new local study looks like it will interest, and challenge the pupils. Yes, they might not do as well/might not be able to be so easily coached through it as they have been in the past - for purity, this is a good thing surely. But, ultimately, results are not as important to me as the overall student experience and quality of education, so I welcome this. (SLT may disagree!)*

*[Teacher 269, independent school]*

**4.1.3 Factors influencing history departments’ choice of GCSE specification**

Respondents were asked to indicate which factors (from a possible list of suggestions) had influenced or would be likely to influence their choice of GCSE specification.

*Figure 8: The factors that were reported as likely or actual influences on teachers’ choice of GCSE specifications*

As Figure 8 shows, the most significant influence was the department’s previous experience of a particular exam board. The second most influential factor overall was potential student interest in the particular topics selected. Student interest ranked only slightly higher than other factors associated with the exam boards: the kinds of support materials that they were expected to provide and the precise nature or format of the questions they were proposing to set. Other factors that carried a similar weight were the cost of resources – expressed as a concern to minimise the need to buy new materials – and teachers’ own subject knowledge. In selecting their particular courses, history departments seemed to pay more attention to the relationship between GCSE and A-level in terms of the substantive content of their courses than they did to the relationship between GCSE and Key Stage 3.

It is interesting to note that while teachers paid considerable attention to students’ interests, they seemed to pay rather less attention to the kinds of knowledge that might be regarded as most important for young people in making sense of the world today. This may be because most teachers regarded different topics as useful in different ways in relation to this purpose and did not think that it would help as a factor to take into consideration. Although there are some significant differences between the exam boards in their treatment of certain aspects within the national criteria for GCSE – such as the way in which the historic environment is treated (with one board leaving the choice to teachers) – such differences did not seem to impact significantly on teachers’ choice of particular specifications. It was very clear that in the vast majority of cases, heads of department rather than school leadership teams made the choice about which specification to follow.

Respondents were invited to add any further comments about their criteria for selection or to add any others which had not been mentioned. In most cases, teachers expanded on the reasons previously enumerated, but four respondents also noted the influence of the number of exams and/or the total time required by the exams. In just two cases teachers explained their assumptions that one particular board was likely to be ‘easier’ than another – an important assumption given the pressure they experienced to secure passes of at least a C grade.

**4.1.4 The impact that respondents expected the new GCSE specifications to have on their Key Stage 3 curriculum**

Respondents were asked about the extent to which they thought the GCSE specifications might change what they taught at Key Stage 3, once they began to take on board the implications of providing the foundations that students would need before embarking on the GCSE course.

As Figure 9 shows, the most common response – given by almost half of those completing the survey (49%) – was to suggest that it would have a ‘considerable’ influence, prompting them to ‘plan with a close eye on the kinds of demands that the new GCSE will make on students’. Another sixth of respondents thought that its influence would extend much further – ‘a profound’ influence – prompting them to re-plan key Stage 3 in response. Around one third of respondents expected the new specifications to exert a ‘limited’ influence on their curriculum for Key Stage 3. By this, they meant that they would essentially plan Key Stage 3 on its own terms, while giving some thought to issues of progression between the two. Only 3% of respondents thought that the new GCSEs would have no impact at all on their curriculum for Key Stage 3.

*Figure 9: The extent to which respondents thought the new GCSE specifications would prompt changes to their curriculum at Key Stage 3*

**4.2 The length of GCSE courses offered**

Of the 351 schools responding to the survey that answered questions about the nature of their GCSE teaching, 100 schools (28%) had a reduced (two-year) Key Stage 3 programme, while the other 251 (72%) allocated three years to Key Stage 3.

As Table 4 shows, within the standard two-year Key Stage 4 programme, the vast majority of schools (95.2%) reported that they taught history as a two year GCSE course. Only one school in this category chose to teach History GCSE in one year. Only three schools reported that they were teaching IGCSE and two of these were independent schools. Two comprehensive schools reported that they offered Ancient History at GCSE. Five schools reported that they taught some other kind of programme, which was either an entry level Certificate in history or the OCR Applied History GCSE course (which is a Level 2 qualification but not included within the EBacc).

*Table 4: The types of GCSE courses offered by schools with a three-year Key Stage 3*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **KS4 history courses offered by those schools  with a three-year Key Stage 3** | | | | | | | |
|  | **1 yr GCSE** | **2 yr GCSE** | **IGCSE** | **Ancient History** | **Humanities** | **Other** | **Total** |
| Comp/academy/free | 1 | 197 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 207 |
|  | 0.5% | 95.2% | 0.5% | 1.0% | 0.5% | 2.4% |  |
| Grammar | 0 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
|  | 0.0% | 100.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |  |
| Independent | 0 | 34 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 36 |
|  | 0.0% | 94.4% | 5.6% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |  |
| All schools | 1 | 239 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 251 |
|  | 0.4% | 95.2% | 1.2% | 0.8% | 0.4% | 2.0% |  |

Table 5 shows that of the 100 schools with a two-year Key Stage 3 programme – and therefore with up to three years to devote to GCSEs – only 50% devoted the full three years to GCSE study. Almost a third of the schools (32%) offered a ‘standard’ two-year GCSE programme, while 7% of the schools (all of them comprehensive schools) ran a one-year GCSE course. Again very few schools were teaching other kinds of history or humanities courses: four of the independent schools reported that they taught IGCSE, two comprehensive schools offered Ancient History while two comprehensive schools and one grammar school provided a Humanities GCSE course. Two schools – one a comprehensive and the other a grammar school – offered an alternative qualification.

*Table 5: The types of GCSE courses offered by schools with a two-year Key Stage 3*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **KS4 history courses offered by those schools with a two-year Key Stage 3** | | | | | | | | |
|  | **1 yr GCSE** | **2 yr GCSE** | **3 yr GCSE** | **IGCSE** | **Ancient History** | **Humanities** | **Other** | **Total** |
| Comp/acad/free | 7 | 27 | 42 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 81 |
|  | 8.6% | 33.3% | 51.9% | 0.0% | 2.5% | 2.5% | 1.2% |  |
| Grammar | 0 | 3 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 11 |
|  | 0.0% | 27.3% | 54.5% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 9.1% | 9.1% |  |
| Independent | 0 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
|  | 0.0% | 25.0% | 25.0% | 50.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |  |
| All schools | 7 | 32 | 50 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 100 |
|  | 7.0% | 32.0% | 50.0% | 4.0% | 2.0% | 3.0% | 2.0% |  |

It is clear that running a three-year Key Stage 4 programme gives schools flexibility to offer some GCSEs as one-year courses. The proportion of schools offering GCSE history in one year is higher than in 2014 (when it was 4.6%) but much lower than the proportion of respondents in 2013 (18.3%) that were offering a one-year GCSE programme.

We also asked specifically about what students do in Year 9 if their school allocates only two years to the key Stage 3 curriculum.   
  
*Table 6: The Year 9 curriculum offered by schools that teach only a two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **What do students do in Y9 if they do a two year KS3** | | | | | |
|  | Start GCSE | GCSE style practice | Accredited course | Alternative curriculum | |
| Comp/acad/free | 40 | 25 | 0 | 1 | 66 |
|  | 60.6% | 37.9% | 0.0% | 1.5% |  |
| Grammar | 4 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 7 |
|  | 57.1% | 28.6% | 14.3% | 0.0% |  |
| Independent | 0 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 6 |
|  | 0.0% | 66.7% | 0.0% | 33.3% |  |
| Total | 44 | 31 | 1 | 3 | 79 |
|  | 55.7% | 39.2% | 1.3% | 3.8% |  |

Only 79 schools provided an explanation of their Year 9 curriculum, which made it clear, as shown in Table 6, that a little more than half of schools (56%) start teaching the GCSE while a round two-fifths of them (39%) offer a GCSE-style programme, that is intended to serve as a foundation for the full GCSE that they will begin studying the following year. Only one school reported offering some other kind of accredited programme, while three schools (two of them independent schools) offered some kind of alternative curriculum for Year 9.

The survey also asked about what students did when they reached Year 11 if they had by then completed a two-year GCSE history course. Of the 12 schools to which this question actually applied, nine reported that the students had the chance to take GCSEs in other subjects, while two schools claimed to offer some kind of enrichment programme and one gave students the chance to embark on an AS-level course.

**4.3 The extent of non-specialist teaching at GCSE**

Although, as Figure 10 shows, the vast majority of GCSE teaching is being undertaken by specialist teachers, the proportion of schools in which this was reported to be the case (81%) was lower than among respondents to the 2014 survey. This proportion has tended to fluctuate somewhat – the proportions for 2013 and 2012 were 81% and 85% respectively – so we cannot suggest that there is any kind of trend here.

*Figure 10: The proportion of GCSE history classes taught by non-specialist teachers in different types of school.*

Although the proportion of classes taught by non-specialists is highest in grammar schools, the limited number of such schools among the respondents (16) means that we cannot attribute too much weight to these figures in themselves. As in previous years, we remain concerned about the small proportion of schools (just over 3%) where more than half of GCSE classes are working with non-specialist teachers.

**4.4 The degree of freedom that students can exercise in relation to GCSE choices**

As in previous years, the survey has sought to establish what degree of freedom students are given in relation to the decision about whether or not to take history for GCSE. Obviously the EBacc accountability measure is intended to encourage schools to promote a particular combination of subjects and the survey therefore asks schools about whether some or all students are required to take history and/or geography. The results for 2015 and 2014 are shown in Table 7. Unlike last year when no schools were reported as being required to take history, eight respondents reported in 2015 that history was a compulsory subject for all students. A further three schools reported that this was the case for **some** of the students in their school.

*Table 7: The kinds of choice that survey respondents report are given to students about taking history at GCSE*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **A requirement that all students  must take** | | | | | | **A requirement for that some students  must take** | | | | | | **A completely free choice about history** | | **Total** |
|  | History | | History **or** Geog | | History **&/or** Geog | | History | | History **or** Geog | | History **&/or** Geog | |
| **2015** | 8 | 2.1% | 10 | 2.7% | 83 | 22.3% | 3 | 0.8% | 5 | 1.3% | 50 | 13.4% | 214 | 57.4% | 373 |
| **2014** | 0 | 0% | 7 | 2.6% | 44 | 16.5% | 7 | 2.6% | 8 | 3.0% | 46 | 17.3% | 154 | 57.9% | 266 |

Overall, the proportion of schools exercising some degree of coercion was very similar between 2014 and 2015 – with around 43% of respondents each year reporting that their schools require some or all students to opt for one (or both) of the qualifying subjects. This means that in around 57% of respondents’ schools, students have a completely free choice about taking history. It is also gratifying to note that very few students are being forced to choose *between* history and geography. Fewer than 6% of the schools represented in the survey oblige students to make a choice between the two subjects.

In constructing the 2015 survey, we were also acutely aware that even as the EBacc accountability measure had prompted an uptake in particular GCSE subjects, so it also seemed to have communicated a message that grades below C were of limited value. Ever since the announcement of the EBacc, our analysis has showed an increase in the proportion of schools that are actively preventing or discouraging certain students from continuing with history. This has been a matter of grave concern to the HA, since the organisation is officially committed to ensuring that all young people have an equal opportunity to learn about history up to the age of 16. It was therefore particularly encouraging to see that for the first time since 2011 (when we first asked this question) the proportion of respondents noting that some students are actively steered away from history had fallen. This year's figure of 35%, compared with a figure of nearly 45% for 2014, shown in Figure 11, suggests that the introduction of the Progress 8 accountability measure (to be reported for the first time in 2016) may be having an impact on the advice that schools are giving to students.[[5]](#footnote-5)

*Figure 11: The proportion of survey respondents in recent years reporting that certain students are actively discouraged or prevented from opting for GCSE history*

In order to examine teachers' perceptions of the impact of the Progress8 measure on schools' decisions about how to advise students on their GCSE options, the survey included a specific question about the impact of the new accountability measure on GCSE history uptake.

*Figure 12: 2015 survey respondents' views about the potential impact of the progress 8 accountability measure on student learning and GCSE uptake.*

Figure 12 shows that although about half of the schools reported that it was simply too soon to judge its impact, another quarter of the respondents concluded that its impact was unlikely to be very pronounced. Only 22% of respondents thought that its impact would be positive, while a very small proportion (around 5%) described its impact as essentially negative. In most cases this was because history was losing out to other subjects (with more time given to core subjects such as maths and science, reducing the range of students' choices), although in one case the fact that a higher proportion of lower attaining students was taking history was seen as a new challenge that they had not faced before.

Teachers who reported that students were actively steered away from history GCSE were asked about the grounds on which such decisions were made and asked to indicate as many reasons as applied in their particular school. Figure 13 shows the number of teachers that cited each factor, making it clear that the most common reason for steering students away from the subject was poor literacy skills, which was cited by almost 20% of school respondents. The next most common reason was student's current level of attainment (cited by around 16% of respondents). In around 11% of schools, students who had been placed on a 'vocational pathway' had no opportunity to opt for history. EAL students' command of written English was regarded as a barrier that made the subject inaccessible for some students in around 8% of schools.

*Figure 13: The range of reasons given in the 2015 survey for actively preventing or discouraging some students from taking history*

Although teachers in schools that operated some kind of policy of steering students away from history were asked to explain what the minimum requirement was for continuing with the subject in terms either of students' prior achievements or predicted grades, very few of them actually specified a particular level or grade. Among those that did share the details, there proved to be a very widerange, spanning prior achievement from level 2 to level 7 (with reference to the previous National Curriculum levels) and expected achievement ranging from a grade D to a grade A.

**5. A-level history**

**5.1 The proportion of students within Year 12 and 13 taking A-level history**

Responses were received from 265 schools regarding developments at A-level. As shown in Figure 14, there is considerable variation between different types of school in terms of the proportion of Year 12 students who are studying history. Patterns of uptake are, however, more similar between different types of 11-18 schools than they are between any of those types of school and the sixth-form colleges, where the proportion of students taking history in Year 12 never exceeds 30%.

*Figure 14: 2015: The percentage of students studying A level history in Year 12*

*Figure 15: 2015: The percentage of students studying A level history in Year 13*

There is a large degree of continuity when looking at the numbers who continue to study history in Year 13 (shown in Figure 15); the figures are very similar to the patterns in Year 12. However, the introduction of the new AS and A-level specifications (with AS a separate qualification) may begin to affect these patterns from 2016.

**5.2 Developments in A-level provision**

Many of the questions in this year’s survey focused on the impact of recent changes to the AS and A-level specifications. Because the new requirements created the potential for significant change in terms of the content to be taught, one of the questions explored teachers’ rationale for the choices that they had made, offering respondents a range of possible reasons that might have influenced their subject choices and inviting them to identify all those that had applied in their case.

*Figure 16: The number of teachers reporting different factors as an influence on their choice of new A level specification and units*

As Figure 16 demonstrates, the most commonly cited reasons were schools’ previous experience with an exam board and teachers’ existing subject knowledge; both could possibly be seen as indicating a desire to minimise the amount of change, although the quality of support was another important distinguishing feature in choosing between different exam boards. Students’ own interests ranked as the third most frequently cited influence. Relatively few responses focused on the value of the topics chosen for developing young people’s understanding of the world today or as preparation for university. This suggests that logistical concerns, particularly at a time of financial pressures on schools, tend to dictate curriculum decision making – although students’ own interests (and therefore their enthusiasm for taking the subject) were also regarded as highly important: the third most commonly cited factor.

Teachers were given the option to explain their responses more fully, which 42 teachers did. Six responses focused on the need to be able to co-teach AS and A-level students together, while nine teachers were swayed by the structure of the courses and exams:

*We have gone for AQA because it only has two exams and there was a lot more freedom on which units could be combined.*

*[Teacher 119, sixth form college]*

Four other teachers made similar comments but were more concerned about the overall course coherence that would now be possible:

*The ability to put together a coherent course that spanned 200 years but where units would link and complement, rather than being widely adrift in time and space. As a result we have had to leave AQA, who had served us well under the previous specifications.*

*[Teacher 368 comprehensive/academy]*

Other responses picked up on the third priority – students’ interest – or were related to specific practical issues, such as the school’s collaboration or shared teaching with a partnership school or the availability of resources.

*Figure 17: The amount of change that respondents expected the new A-levels would mean for them*

As Figure 17 shows, there was some variation between different types of school in terms of the extent of the change that they thought the new AS and A-levels would mean for them, but overall around half of the schools thought that there would be substantial change to one or two of their modules or units, while around a third of respondents characterised the change as substantial across the whole programme. While only a tenth of comprehensives and grammar schools were confident that the new course would have strong similarities to their previous specification, the proportion in grammar and independent schools who felt similarly confident about the similarities was around one fifth.

The changes also meant that schools would have to make decisions about whether to continue offering students the chance to sit history at AS-level, now that it would no longer count towards their final overall grade. As Figure 18 shows, the majority of institutions (80%) reported that they were planning to enter students for AS, but this was rather more likely in sixth form colleges (89%) and comprehensive and academy settings (84%). A significant percentage of grammar and independent schools (38% and 32% respectively) were not planning to give students the option of taking AS, which implied that they expected all the students taking the subject to continue with it to the end of Year 13. The reasons behind these decisions were not explored within the survey, but the decision to continue with AS exams may well reflect advice from some universities that AS grades act as useful indicators of attainment and so would support university applications or provide a valuable, independent measure of progress. It is worth noting that, whatever the reasons for the decision to enter students for AS, it would mean an additional financial cost to schools and would undoubtedly have an impact on the amount of teaching time for students, while possibly creating extra pressure in terms of exam preparation.

*Figure 18: School decisions about entry for AS level history*

One of the other key questions related to schools' decisions about whether or not to co-teach AS and A-level students, given the different requirements of the examination at each level. Overwhelmingly schools reported that they intended to co-teach students, with 85% of respondents noting that this was their preferred option, probably out of a concern to make group sizes viable, but also in response to timetabling constraints.

Respondents also had the opportunity to say whether they felt the changes would have a positive impact on uptake and learning. A similar question was asked in 2014, when only 17% of teachers had reported that they regarded the developments, specifically the decoupling of AS and A2, as broadly positive in terms of students’ learning and the extent to which they would be well prepared for university. At that point 25% of respondents abstained from making a judgment, while 58% regarded the change as likely to have a negative impact. While the positive viewpoint was even more limited in 2015, with only 6% of respondents expecting the impact of the change to be positive in terms of student uptake and learning, the negative view also quite restricted (at around 12%) with the vast majority reporting little potential impact (26%) or concluding that it was still too soon to tell (56%).

*Figure 19: Respondents’ views on the impact of the new A-level specifications on uptake and learning*

Respondents were also given an opportunity to explain whether there were any particular elements of the new specification that they welcomed. The most popular type of comment, expressed by 39 teachers in total, highlighted the opportunity to teach new topics. Their enthusiasm either reflected the fact that the teachers were now able to teach a specialist or favourite topic, or that they were excited at the chance to teach something new. Ten of the teachers gave answers that referred to the new breadth of content that was possible:

*We like the breadth aspect of the course and the fact that it involves more than 'high politics' which we felt was a drawback to the previous pattern*.

*[Teacher 290, comprehensive/academy]*

*It seems more over-arching, rather than 'chunks' of often unrelated periods learnt in too much depth and then these become almost a memory test.*

*[Teacher 475, independent school]*

A further ten also welcomed the return to a linear A-level; several commented that this would provide a better teaching experience without the interruption of AS exams, although – as noted earlier – many schools still planned to enter students for the AS level exams, and so would not enjoy this extra time. Twelve other teachers also appreciated the retention of a personal investigation, particularly as students would have more freedom to pursue topics of personal interest.

**6. Teachers' concerns**

**6.1 The matters of most concern to teachers**

The final section of the survey asked teachers about the extent to which they were worried about particular issues that had been identified by the HA as matters of concern over the course of the year. Figure 20 presents teachers' responses, making it clear that the most serious issue by some considerable margin is the range of curriculum change with which teachers are wrestling. This is hardly surprising given the new AS-level courses to be taught from September 2015, with some schools still making changes at Key Stage 3 (following the formal introduction of the revised National Curriculum in 2014) and some faced with new GCSE courses at the same time for those following 3-year GCSE programmes. Linked with the curriculum change – associated with changes to public exam specifications – were teachers' concerns about the extent of subject-specific CPD available to them (a concern for almost half the respondents) and their capacity to attend such provision even where it was being offered (a matter of concern to a similar proportion).

*Figure 20: The extent to which teachers regarded certain issues as a matter of concern*

History has not been subject to the same kind of teacher shortages experienced in other subjects and the impact of the rapid expansion of School Direct provision which saw a third of places in university-led PGCE programmes cut from the allocations for 2015-16 will not be felt in schools for another year. The questions posed on this occasion were essentially intended to allow the HA to monitor the situation going forward (given the concern that we have raised about the lack of focused subject-specific provision in some school-based courses), but it is worth noting that lack of high quality applicants for history teaching posts was regarded as a concern by more than 20% of respondents, while 16% were concerned about the number of non-specialists teaching history.

For similar reasons, the survey included a question about whether the respondents’ school employed any history teachers without qualified teacher status (QTS). As Figure 21 shows, the proportions were higher in independent and grammar schools (27% and 18% respectively), but 9% of the comprehensives, academies and free schools also employed some history teachers without QTS. It is likely that some of these unqualified teachers were pursuing employment-based training routes.

*Figure 21: The proportion of respondents in each type of school reporting that they employ history teachers without qualified teacher status*

1. Ford, A. (2014) 'Setting us free? Building meaningful models of progression for a “post-levels” world’, *Teaching History* 157, pp. 28-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Fordham, M. (2013) 'O brave new world without those levels in't: where now for Key Stage 3 assessment in history?' *Teaching History Curriculum Evolution Supplement,* pp. 16- 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Brown, G. and Burnham, S. (2014) 'Assessment after levels', *Teaching History* 157, pp. 8-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It should be noted, however, that among respondents who went on to explain the nature of their Key Stage 4 programme, the proportion who reported having three years for GCSE was slightly higher at around 28%. (The discrepancy reflects the fact that some schools - within the independent sector or in areas that operate a middle school system - do not teach students in both age ranges.) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The survey was conducted before the Conservative government announced its expectation that 90% of all young people should be entered for the EBacc combination of subjects by 2020, which might also be expected to boost the number of students encouraged to take history even if they were not thought likely to secure a C grade (or equivalent in the new grading scale). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)