

# Findings from the Historical Association survey of secondary history teachers 2010

## Summary of key concerns about history teaching in English secondary schools

### 1. The changing face of history teaching at Key Stage 3 (11–14): an emphasis on generic skills at the expense of subject knowledge and a devaluing of history in the curriculum

History continues to disappear as a discrete subject in many schools. The proportion of academies that do not teach history as a distinct and discrete subject in Year 7 is particularly worrying. Just over 25% of academies – double the number of comprehensives and a significantly higher proportion than grammars and independents – now merge history into other subjects or focus on developing general ‘skills’ – depriving pupils of any coherent study of the forces that have shaped the development of the society in which they now live and its relations with the wider world. A significant number of teachers reported serious concerns that history was disappearing in their schools, with senior managers assuming that the study of the past had no value in its own right.

### 2. Subject specialist teaching disappearing at Key Stage 3

Non-specialist teaching in history – i.e. teaching from those with no training in the subject and often with no qualification higher than a GCSE – is becoming increasingly common, particularly in Year 7, but also throughout Key Stage 3. In 2009 just over 10% of academies reported that more than 60% of history in Year 7 was being taught by non-specialists; by 2010 such a high proportion of non-specialist teaching was found in 30% of the academies. Both grammar schools and comprehensives report a similar but proportionally smaller trend. Worryingly, this trend can also be seen in Year 9 in academies.

The extent of non-specialist teaching was reported as a current concern by 35% of all respondents and a further 31% thought it would become a serious concern.

### 3. Time allocation in Key Stage 3

A lack of time was the most frequently cited concern of history teachers. A significant proportion of schools provide less than an hour a week for history

teaching; many schools are reporting a cut in time allocation for history (118 schools in Year 7; 89 in Year 9).

The most drastic reduction in time, however, comes when schools opt to teach the Key Stage 3 curriculum in two years rather than three – effectively cutting a third of the time originally allocated to the study of history. The 2009 survey indicated that 5% of schools had adopted a two-year Key Stage 3 model. This figure has now doubled to 10% of schools. Academies are proportionately more likely to make history optional in Year 9, with almost a quarter of academies reporting that this is happening.

#### **4. Restrictions on who is allowed to study history at GCSE**

Seventeen percent of schools reported some kind of restriction preventing certain types of students from opting for GCSE history. Restrictions were applied in 18.7% of comprehensives and in 27.3% of academies. These restrictions were largely based on ‘ability’ and often expressed through ‘pathway’ systems that constrain students’ choices, limiting them to a particular menu of courses deemed most suitable for them. Many teachers expressed deep regret that history was effectively out of bounds for lower-attaining students and deplored the fact there was no more easily accessible course available.

*It is perfectly feasible for a pupil entering secondary school at the age of 11 to be taught an ‘alternative’ curriculum in Year 7 containing little explicit history; move into Year 8 to be taught history for just one hour a week for that one year; and then not be allowed to study the subject as an option in Year 9. Is this an acceptable historical education for a child in Britain today?*