

# Talking History

**Welcome to the fifth issue of *Talking History*, your History update.** We hope that you enjoy this issue, and, just as importantly, that you find it useful. We've designed it to provide helpful and relevant information for our History centres and our History community, and to highlight developments in the teaching of our History suite of qualifications that you might find interesting. We'd love to hear from you if you have a story to tell about your school or college and your History work. Please get in touch by emailing [general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk](mailto:general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk)

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# Focus on our Applied History Level 1/2 Certificate

## A motivating new course for your students

*"The pilot GCSE course had successfully engaged pupils of all abilities... [enabling them to] develop real historical skills that have had a dramatic impact on their enjoyment and understanding of history and most importantly on their ability to become a better historian."*

Many people involved in the GCSE History pilot were very enthusiastic about it and this new course carries forward the inspiring ethos of the pilot specification to provide an inspiring course for today's students. Here's a brief overview of it.

An inclusive qualification, our Applied History Level 1/2 Certificate is designed to motivate and interest all students by offering a varied course and creating a closer relationship between school/college History and the wider world.

It offers your students the opportunity to:

- **Learn about the key features and characteristics** of historical periods and the diversity of human experience in the societies studied
- **Develop a sense of personal identity** by considering stimulating and controversial issues
- **Understand, analyse and evaluate** how the past has been interpreted and represented in different ways, including in writing, in film and TV, and through heritage sector bodies such as museums (open-air and conventional), historical theme parks, galleries and sites
- **Realise just how important history is** for understanding and participating in their own communities and the wider world.

The range of optional units means that students can follow a course customised to their own needs, by opting for units with more of either a vocational or a general bias, or a balance between the two.

It offers you the opportunity to:

- Choose from a wide range of approaches to teaching, learning and assessment with this specification, and experience new methods of external and internal assessment (which can also be evaluated)
- Develop the extensive selection of optional units in ways that reflect local interests and needs.

To find out more about this newly accredited qualification, please visit: [www.ocr.org.uk/appliedhistory](http://www.ocr.org.uk/appliedhistory)

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# Reflections on... Teaching Alfred at A2

At OCR, we're part of the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate which has been evolving for more than 150 years.

When History A was launched in 2008, one of the changes was the moving of the study topic on Alfred from AS, where it had been a document study, to A2, where it's now a popular coursework option. With medieval options in every unit, we are unique in providing the facility to structure an entirely medieval history A Level. However, there's always much discussion provoked whenever Alfred's place in History specifications is changed. Now, a couple of years into the coursework, Eric Boston, Head of History, Head of Academic Support and Head of the Oxbridge Programme at CATS, reflects on teaching Alfred at A2, the sources used to consider the interpretations of his reign, and the debates that his students engage with...

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One of the joys of teaching Alfred the Great is that students can access all the key sources in one easily manageable volume, that of Lapidge and Keynes. This does allow them to get close to the originals and to look at the kind of evidence used by historians in agreeing or disagreeing about Alfred when reconstructing his reign. This is important since the more perceptive ones begin to understand how and where and indeed why historical debate is generated. Even the less able can sense something of where historians find their evidence and how far they stick closely to the written sources. Again, good and able students begin to look for other evidence forms, not least archaeological. How the original sources have been interpreted and presented can feature in their discussions and explorations.

It has been some time since I taught Alfred and it has been good to return to that format, not least in our multicultural college environment. Interestingly, some of the students know enough

to seek parallels with Carolingian rulers and contexts, so enabling them to at least consider antecedents and precedents. A few become involved with the Alfredian Renaissance, looking at the Carolingian Renaissance and wrestling with the purpose and importance of the king's translations in the pursuit of a conscious revival of learning and education. Once again, Lapidge and Keynes provide the invaluable sourcebook.

Occasionally, a student has become interested in the debate about the nature and authenticity of Asser; A.P. Smyth has been consulted, albeit with words of warning along the way. Rather more students want to assess the issues of potential court-based propaganda in Asser and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and they have some success in trying to relate the presentation of events to both the cultural revival under way and to how historians view the importance of the sources. In doing all this, of course, they address some fundamental issues of historical evidence and methodology. They often say: *"if we didn't have Asser and the Chronicle, how would we know about Alfred?"*







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Engaging the educational, cultural and religious arenas is important and serves to provide the basis for discussion as to whether Alfred was more a Christian king than an outright warrior king, or whether he was both, the 'great' all-rounder king. This debate enables some to look at the interesting ideas and views of J.M. Wallace-Hadrill. The latter provides a neat link to the Anglo-Saxon Age written many years ago by my old supervisor, Vivian Fisher; a book that took him 20 years to write and even then he was not wholly satisfied with the end product. Fisher and Wallace-Hadrill shared very close views on kingship in the period. The great value of Fisher's book is that it is steeped in the primary sources and his admiration for much of what Alfred did comes through strongly.

Fisher had distinct views about the emergence of Anglo-Saxon England and many of those views mirrored the classical writing of Sir Frank Stenton, still an inspiring author, though one whom very able students find challenging because of the distance in time since he wrote and the qualities of his prose. He still offers much. So, too, in his own inimitable way does David Starkey, who has said that he would have liked to meet Alfred; students enjoy the TV programme as well as the accompanying chapter in his book on monarchy.

Other historians whom the really able like to read are Chris Wickham (much of value in his wonderful *The Inheritance of Rome*) and Patrick Wormald (the powerful chapter in *The Anglo-Saxons*) while Michael Wood (*In Search of the Dark Ages*) receives much attention from all students for the readability of the text. David Pratt's *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* is a seminal work and very testing reading but the really able student can access areas of it and benefit from its wisdom, a virtue much advanced by Alfred himself in his writings.

At core, in assessing Alfred, it is important to try to penetrate any myths and to try to place him firmly in his context and question the nature, extent and character of his achievements. We try to dent his reputation. Students examine the nature of the Viking threat, Alfred's responses, the importance of his leadership and military reforms, trying to assess whether the threat was exaggerated at the time and later; they try to assess the nature of his kingship, the balance between the military and the religious; they do read his translations and the best ones do seek links to political ideas (wisdom, obedience, virtue, the place of learning in the kingdom); they examine aspects of his reputation and, of course, question his 'greatness' (David Horspool's book, *Why Alfred Burned the Cakes*, has a good readership).

Overall, the option to study Alfred at A2 has worked well, engaging all ability ranges, so providing for differentiation. The range of sources allows easy access and study, and the primary and secondary sources do provide a good basis for clear debates, which, in turn, create genuinely exciting investigations.

Eric Boston set document questions on Alfred for OCR for several years under the last specification, and is a current Senior Examiner for various units, including coursework. He has lectured on Alfred to various Historical Association branches. Eric would welcome contact from any teachers delivering the Alfred component of coursework ([eboston@catscambridge.com](mailto:eboston@catscambridge.com)).





# Close-up on Entry Level History

If you haven't come across our Entry Level History yet, here's a brief look at the qualification.

The specification and support materials can be found here:

Entry Level is a qualification at a level below that of Foundation Tier GCSE, and it's designed for a range of students, including adult returners, students on taster courses, those with learning difficulties and underachievers. Entry Level Awards aim to be accessible and relevant and let students gain recognition for their achievements.

## A flexible choice in so many ways

Your school could teach Entry Level History alongside the GCSE, or enter an entire cohort for it. Because the Entry Level Certificate is so flexible, you can adapt to the individual interests and strengths of your students and choose from a variety of delivery approaches, depending on their ability. There's also a wide range of accepted formats in which students can submit their work.

The qualification is designed to:

- Let students demonstrate how they can express and communicate their knowledge and understanding of history
- Explain and analyse key concepts such as continuity and change over time; and how aspects of the past have been interpreted and represented in different ways.

## A great opportunity

The Entry Level Certificate provides:

- A stand-alone qualification for those not planning to continue their studies
- A good stepping stone to further attainment
- A way of recognising the skills learned.

It gives students the chance to study the key features and characteristics of chosen periods and the relationship between them.

## A successful start

Summer 2011 saw the first session of the new Entry Level Certificate in History (R434). It proved a successful alternative for students who might have found the GCSE too challenging, and the new specification allows even greater flexibility than the legacy Entry Level.

History teachers who have taken up the course are willing to share their thoughts on the new qualification.

## Making History accessible

We have used the OCR Entry Level, and the pupils who take this course love history but find the language and work for the full GCSE challenging, whereas the Entry Level gives them the opportunity to learn history that is accessible.

The small projects and source-based tasks, and studying an individual, give the pupils a chance to demonstrate a wide range of skills.

## Vicki Buchalik

Head of History  
Greendown  
Community School



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### A complement to GCSE History

We have been using OCR's Entry Level for eight years here at Campsmount Technology College. I find it a really useful course to complement GCSE Modern World History for those students who enjoy the subject of History but need more support in accessing the questions, skills and content. OCR's Entry Level enables me to allow all students to take History as an option at Key Stage 4, and help them to achieve recognised accreditation no matter what their previous attainment or achievement has been, or their predicted grade.

The example tasks supplied for Entry Level History by OCR are exceptional, which gives students the additional support and guidance they require to gain accreditation. The example tasks are easily adaptable for use in classrooms, which provides students with appropriate questions that fit into our OCR GCSE Modern World scheme of work, making planning for differentiation very easy and very effective. The example tasks are based on relevant assessment objectives and are split into easily assessed and marked questions, cutting down on my workload and at the same time giving students the confidence they need to gain accreditation in this subject.

Students like the mixture of tasks and questions, especially the freedom or presentation when it comes to the study of an important individual from history. As students can present this in many different formats, it both challenges and engages all students, allowing them to use and develop further skills at the same time. As the subject of History offers no tiered paper, I fully recommend the OCR Entry Level History course as a way of engaging and challenging students who take the course.

#### Andy Jones

*Head of History*

Campsmount Technology College

### A word from the Principal Moderator

It has always been pleasing to moderate the Entry Level History course, because they cannot fail to illustrate the skills and interest that often shine through the student's work. The course manages to combine a huge level of choice and yet still offers assistance to those who want it. Many centres have produced really interesting material for their students to attempt. Students cannot access the full GCSE for a huge variety of reasons and yet Entry Level seems to be able to offer something to that complete range. It maintains a level of interest even for individual student who are working alongside their GCSE classmates.

#### Mike Endy

*Principal Moderator*

Entry Level History







# Liverpool University supports OCR GCSE Ancient History

In August this year, Liverpool University will be running a three-day summer school to support teaching of our GCSE Ancient History. Here, Professor Tom Harrison explains why they are so impressed with this new qualification.

Classics and Ancient History at Liverpool are distinctive in a few ways: the resources we have (our own in-house museum, for example), the hands-on teaching we offer (with the opportunity to read ancient languages from inscribed stones or from papyri, or to help stage a Greek tragedy within the classroom), and our National Student Survey results (of 98% and 97% overall satisfaction in the last two years). But perhaps the most distinctive feature of Liverpool Classics is that Greek and Roman cultures are seen as part of a larger, interconnected ancient world. Ancient History at Liverpool includes not only Greek and Roman history but also that of Iron Age Europe, Persia and the Near East, and – not least – Egypt. (Liverpool is, by some way, the largest centre for Egyptology in the UK.)

It is because of this breadth of approach that we are so impressed by the similar breadth of the new GCSE qualification in Ancient History offered by OCR. The GCSE, like the A Level that follows, offers students the chance to grapple with the testimonies of ancient writers and develop the kind of skills of primary source-criticism that universities (and employers) look for. Uniquely, however, it gives students the opportunity to see how the Greek and Roman worlds operated not in isolation but *in relation* to their neighbours. The GCSE is only young, but we are sure it has a great future ahead!

**Thomas Harrison**  
*Archaeology, Classics and Egyptology*  
University of Liverpool

## Summer School for Teachers of Ancient History GCSE (7–9 August 2012)

This carefully planned summer school, organised by the University of Liverpool in collaboration with us, is designed to support existing teachers of our GCSE in Ancient History and to help equip other teachers (including those undertaking training) who are planning to teach it in the future. A large number of full and half-bursaries are available, funded by the university's Postgate Fund.

Briefly, its practical agenda includes:

- **Individual sessions** on every option within the GCSE
- **Workshops** on teaching strategies for the GCSE
- **A handling session** in the university's Garstang Museum of Archaeology
- **Evening guest lectures.**

You'll find more details and the booking form by clicking on the button below.

If you have any queries, please email the Summer School Director, Professor Tom Harrison at [tehh@liv.ac.uk](mailto:tehh@liv.ac.uk)



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# In the spotlight... An innovative A Level in Humanities that's now accredited

**We've been collaborating closely with higher education (HE) on an innovative A Level qualification in the Humanities. This qualification has two key features – its interdisciplinary approach and the development of skills needed in HE.**

The starting point was the feedback frequently heard from universities that first-year students arrive ill-equipped in the crucial skills of independent working, research and essay writing. The Humanities disciplines are excellent at developing these skills, and so the idea for this new qualification was born.

## **An exciting step forward**

We undoubtedly benefited from close collaboration with HE during the development phase. At a day spent at the University of Essex, Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities (CISH), our team were able to talk to faculty members and students taking the university's BA Humanities course.

Margaret Kerry, Qualifications Team Manager for History and Social Science, explains: *"This was extremely fruitful as we were able to hear from people practising within the disciplines what their needs and aspirations were. This led to a member of the academic staff joining the development team for a period – an innovative step forward that produced some very interesting direction and content for the specification. The specification was completed and submitted for accreditation to Ofqual with strong endorsement from HE."*

## **So what's meant by an interdisciplinary approach in this context?**

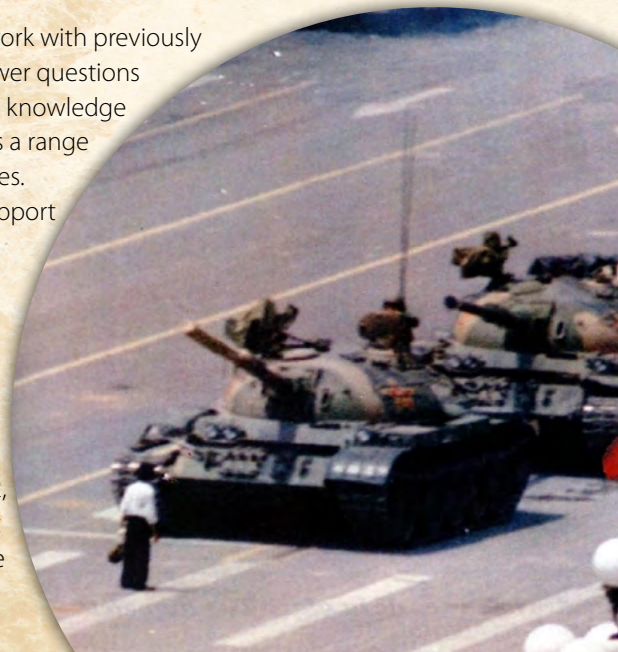
Most areas of education are structured in terms of subject specialisms, a structure that has great strengths. In reality, however, most subject areas recognise the contribution of other disciplines to their discipline and make use of a variety of approaches as needed.

## **Looking through different 'lenses'**

This qualification encourages students to move to an interdisciplinary way of thinking for investigating multi-faceted and complex issues. One way of conceptualising this is to use the notion of 'lenses'. Students can look at a particular event or change in a multi-dimensional way, using the 'lens' of a geographer, a historian, a psychologist, and so on. This adds depth as well as breadth to their understanding of complex processes or outcomes. The qualification naturally has a strong emphasis on skills. Students develop the ability to interrogate, interpret and evaluate a range of information to produce well-reasoned explanations supported by evidence.

At AS, students must work with previously unseen sources to answer questions that bring into play the knowledge they've acquired across a range of Humanities disciplines. They're expected to support their conclusions with evidence and express themselves in a well-structured essay-type answer.

For students who progress through to A2, there's an independent research enquiry where they can demonstrate



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the independent learning, research and report-writing skills that are highly valued by both HE and employers. This enquiry can be based in their own local area, or be more wide-ranging. Whatever enquiry question they choose, it must be located within a broader regional, national or international context.

### **Find out more today**

The qualification will be available for first teaching from September 2012. It will be supported by detailed schemes of work and glossaries for each theme, and a guidance document on developing skills, as well as a range of INSET events. For further information, please contact Margaret Kerry at OCR ([margaret.kerry@ocr.org.uk](mailto:margaret.kerry@ocr.org.uk)).

Download our newly accredited specification now at:  
[www.ocr.org.uk/humanities/alevel](http://www.ocr.org.uk/humanities/alevel)

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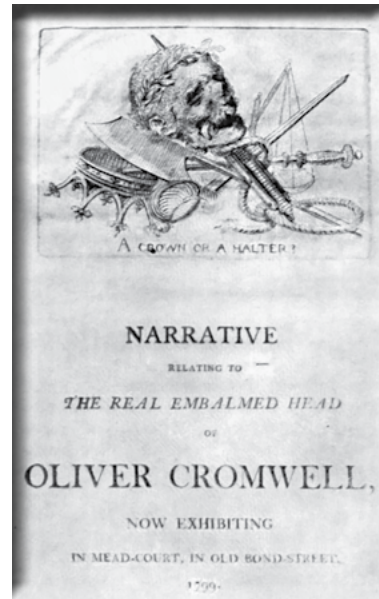
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