

Talking History

Welcome to the fourth 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 GCSE and A Level History 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

In this issue . . .

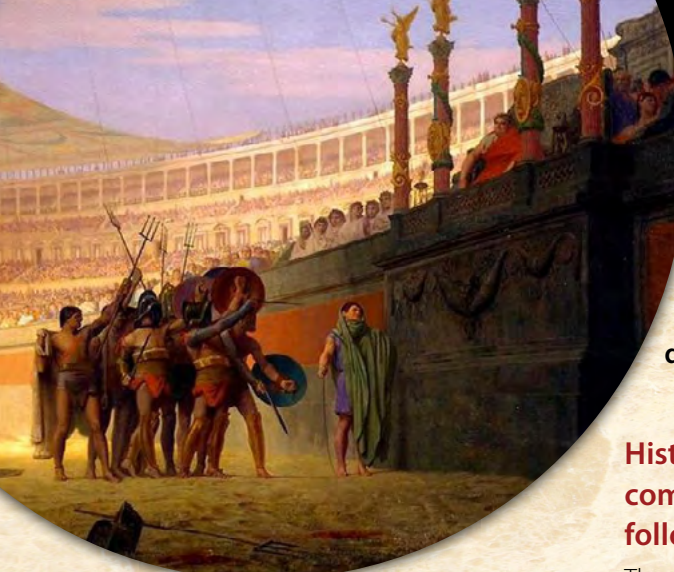
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Focus on our innovative A Level History B

Our A Level History B specification was developed for first teaching in 2008 and, by shifting the emphasis of A Level History firmly to the “why” and “how”, alongside the more traditional “what”, of the historian’s work, represents a distinct and exciting development in the study of history at AS/A Level.

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History B has been well received in the History community and has attracted a committed following of schools.

The qualification’s designed to:

- Provide a genuine alternative to the existing A Level qualifications
- Increase the level of continuity in the approach to history from GCSE to A Level to undergraduate level
- Update the approach of A Level History teaching to reflect more recent developments in the study of history more widely.

Exciting and emotive content

At the heart of the specification is the notion that all versions of the past and all judgements about the past are provisional and not exclusive. Students investigate this by a thorough study of the use of sources in history and how historians work.

History B encourages students to think carefully about the nature of history. It does this by taking them from the concepts involved in historical explanation and how sources are used in history in AS, through to how to make judgements about historical significance and how and why historians produce different versions of the past in A2.

Producing maturity and thoughtfulness

The hallmark of the specification is that students have time, and are encouraged, to think about:

- What they’re doing
- How it’s best done
- Why they’re doing it.

This is supported by a unique assessment structure at A2 that comprises a three-hour open book examination, and coursework. It’s producing a level of maturity and thoughtfulness by the end of the course that serves as excellent preparation for higher education (HE).





Concepts for the future

There's also more tangible evidence of the continuity to HE. Students are introduced to:

- Examples of different versions of the past, and investigate why and how these have been produced
- Different schools of historians, and to different methodologies and approaches such as Marxist history and history from below
- Ideas such as postmodernism.

They therefore start to become familiar with many concepts they're likely to revisit in undergraduate courses. In the coursework, they also develop the skills of independent research and producing a lengthy piece of work. This is an essay investigating different notions of historical significance in which students reach and support their own conclusions. They have to track and consider their own progress along the way in a research diary.

This is good preparation for the study skills required in HE. Students have freedom of choice over the topic of their coursework, and this has helped encourage an enthusiasm for research and wide reading that should be welcomed by HE.

Knowledge is still vital

This approach doesn't mean that clear and detailed knowledge and understanding of chosen periods of history are neglected. These are still necessary – and they provide the bedrock that allows students to reflect more about the nature of the subject.

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Spotlight on A Level History B, Unit F987, Historical Significance



Our exciting A Level History B's coursework unit F987 is different to anything else currently offered in A Level History in the way it brings together the skills and understandings of the other three History B units. In fact, this difference is in line with the specification as a whole.

As the synoptic unit in History B, F987 synthesises the aspects of history as a discipline that are the focus of the other three units – explanation, evidence and interpretation – by considering the often-ignored concept of significance.

A different approach

Historical significance as used in History B involves a broad judgement about an individual, event, idea or site. Learners must demonstrate the significance of their subject through:

- Recognising that significance can be considered in at least two dimensions – across time (impact at the time) and over time (impact on the longer-term course of events)
- Using criteria against which to measure significance in each dimension – extent of immediate impact (across time) and relationship to prior and subsequent events (over time)
- Acknowledging that more than one view of the significance of individuals, events, ideas or sites is likely.

Original and creative analysis

Understanding this last point, that significance is negotiable rather than carrying an intrinsic and identifiable value, has resulted in some original and creative analysis by learners. A recent article on significance included the observation that:

Teachers, students, and people in general, no less than historians, confront the study of the past with their own mental framework of historical significance shaped by their particular cultural and linguistic heritage, family practices, popular culture influence, and last, but not least, school history experience.[1]

How to create exciting studies

History B learners can address this through their 'school history experience'. By establishing and defining their criteria to assess significance across two dimensions – at the time and over time – and by using their sources critically, learners have the opportunity to create exciting studies in a way that they can appreciate is genuinely building on their AS and other A2 work.

The result, in the best pieces of work, can be to produce conclusions synthesising measures of contemporary and longer-term significance (the latter sometimes ranging over several centuries)



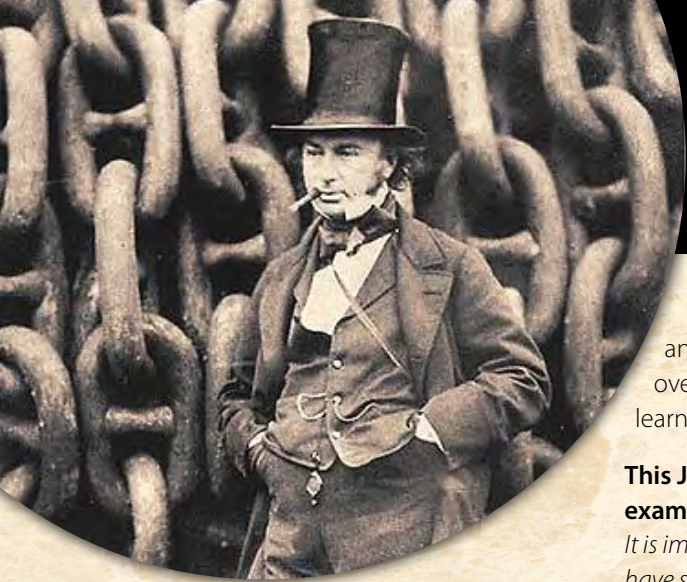
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and that are genuinely the learners' own. Freedom of choice over subject matter, which many History B centres give their learners, can further enhance this.

This January's Principal Moderator's report gives one such example, quoting from a study of the Viking invasion of York:

It is important to remember that many of these factors would only have seemed truly relevant at the time to those who were directly affected – in most cases the leaders in any given area. It is entirely possible that thousands of peasants and farmers may have been totally unaffected by changes of leadership, even one as seemingly huge as unification. This does not mean that they were insignificant but it does clearly demonstrate how significance depends largely on who is being studied. In the case of the invasion of York, it may be that its long-term significance relates to how it continues to influence us today. The average peasant may not have given much thought to the unification of the country at the time, but over the generations its significance has grown, affecting a much larger group of people than just the elite, who would have been affected immediately... The whole grammar system on which the English language is based, placing emphasis on word order rather than word endings, is the product of a gradual fusion of Old English and Old Norse, another result of the Anglo-Scandinavian culture. The new system must have spread through the Danelaw and the rest of England with the culture it accompanied, only becoming accepted as 'standard English' in the twelfth century... It seems clear that much of the evidence, both archaeological and documentary [evaluated in detail in the body of the study], disputes the clear-cut, traditional argument that York's significance was finite and local. Depending on the social groups and areas studied, the invasion can be interpreted as significant to varying degrees at the time and in the immediate aftermath. However, study of the invasion's economic, social and linguistic consequences reveals that some of them, including some which may not have seemed significant at the time, have become immensely significant over time...

How the research diary can help

As hinted at in that extract, critical use of sources must support and drive all analysis and argument in F987. Another individual feature of this unit can help with this: the research diary. The diary is assessed with the essay, and has a maximum of 1,000 words to the essay's 3,000. While not an opportunity for source analysis to be separated out from the main body of the study, it does provide the chance for further reflection on both the sources used and the process as a whole. In turn, this underlines the feeling of doing real history provided by this unit. It's fitting perhaps therefore to finish with some learners' words from their research diaries, as the Principal Moderator noted in his January report:

One candidate shared a very valuable research technique that's worthy of a wider audience: Looking back, I should have evaluated and criticised my sources more as I was reading them, so that my initial reaction was recorded, rather than having to find the sources again in order to forge an opinion.



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Finally, the research diaries gave an unusual but charming glimpse of the reactions of learners to their first experience of historical research:

I have learned a lot about a period I had never been taught about and ... about how to relate skills learned from other modules to my own independent work. I very much enjoyed the independence and freedom of the module and not having to stick to a limited curriculum...

Find out more

For more on History B's Historical Significance coursework unit, please see the Principal Moderator's January report where there's also a Teacher Guide and access to a free coursework consultancy service for History B centres. If you would like to know more please contact OCR by email, stating that your enquiry is about A Level History B unit F987.

Principal Moderator's January report

general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

[1] Canadian Social Studies, Volume 39 Number 2, winter 2005

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Can our Archives help you?

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

With our sense of history, we recognise that the Archives of our parent body Cambridge Assessment, which have been developed during this time, are an invaluable resource. For example, you can read examination syllabuses from before the introduction of a national curriculum which were the most comprehensive statement about what 16- and 18-year-olds should learn in British schools.

What are you interested in?

You can visit the Archives on most weekdays by prior appointment. The Archives Service is managed by a small part-time archive team (run by Gillian Cooke, Cambridge Assessment Group Archivist).

If you're interested in how education has changed, the extensive series of regulations, specifications, question papers and Examiners' reports will provide you with key primary sources. Question papers on practical science examinations, English Literature and 'lost' subjects such as Euclid, Navigation and Hygiene all reflect contemporary educational thinking and attract researchers throughout the world.

A familiar theme...from 1883

Often, the continuities of theme running through the examinations are as fascinating to subject specialists as the differences and changes. Examiners in December 1883, for example, complain of History candidates who were "woefully ignorant of the rest of English History...outside the set period".

As well as examination-related publications, the Archives also include a range of administrative, executive and subject development papers and reports that show how decisions were made and trends developed.

Find out more

You'll find details of some of our archive holdings on the Janus website, and the Cambridge Assessment website.

Janus

Cambridge Assessment

If you have a specific query or would like to visit the Archives, please email archives@cambridgeassessment.org.uk.

Hygiene exam 1919



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Key dates for your calendar

The following table is a handy reference to upcoming key dates relating to results and post-results services:

Restricted release of results to centres only by EDI and OCR Interchange on	7 March 2012
Release of results to candidates on	8 March 2012
Requests for priority scripts to be received by OCR by	16 March 2012
Enquiries about Results applications (including Missing and Incomplete Results) to be received by OCR by	17 April 2012
Requests for non-priority scripts to be received by OCR by	18 April 2012
Certificates will be despatched by	31 May 2012

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For a full list of key dates





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OCR A2 Level History A (F965):

Get started - getting to grips with delivery and assessment

OHIR7

Dates

- | | |
|----------|------------|
| 8 March | London |
| 9 March | Exeter |
| 15 March | Birmingham |

Who should attend

New Practitioners
Experienced Practitioners seeking a refresher

Overview

This full day course will:

- Examine core unit themes and concepts
- Give guidance on the structure and delivery of the specification
- Explain the assessment requirements
- Review exemplar candidate work from previous series.

Note: The focus for the day will be the application of our mark scheme to the Interpretations and Investigations coursework tasks. If you are confident in this, you may prefer the Get Ahead course.

OCR A2 Level History A (F966):

Get ahead - successful delivery of the Historical Themes Unit F966

OHIR9

Dates

- | | |
|----------|------------|
| 12 March | London |
| 16 March | Birmingham |

Who should attend

New Practitioners
Experienced Practitioners
Experienced Practitioners seeking a refresher
Heads of Department

Overview

This full day course will:

- Provide an overview of key issues relating to the planning and delivery of this specification
- Provide feedback on 2011 examinations using 2011 script evidence
- Discuss ideas and approaches for successful teaching
- Review exemplar candidate work from previous series
- Enable delegates to network and share ideas for best practice.



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OCR AS/A Level History A (H506):

Get started - an overview of our A Level History A qualification

OHIS1 – **Register your interest**

Who should attend

New Practitioners

Overview

This full day course will:

- Provide an overview of key issues relating to the planning and delivery of this specification
- Discuss ideas and approaches for successful teaching.

Note: This course is intended for anyone who wants a basic overview of the A Level History A qualification.

OCR AS/A Level History B (H508):

Get ahead - examination feedback from previous series

OHIS2

Dates

15 March Birmingham

Who should attend

New Practitioners

Experienced Practitioners

Experienced Practitioners seeking a refresher
Heads of Department

Overview

This full day course will:

- Provide an overview of key issues relating to the planning and delivery of this specification
- Provide feedback on 2011 examinations using 2011 script evidence
- Discuss ideas and approaches for successful teaching
- Review exemplar candidate work from previous series
- Enable delegates to network and share ideas for best practice.



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OCR GCSE History B (J417):

Get ahead - examination feedback from previous series

OHIR2

Dates

5 March	Manchester
12 March	Cambridge
15 March	Birmingham

Who should attend

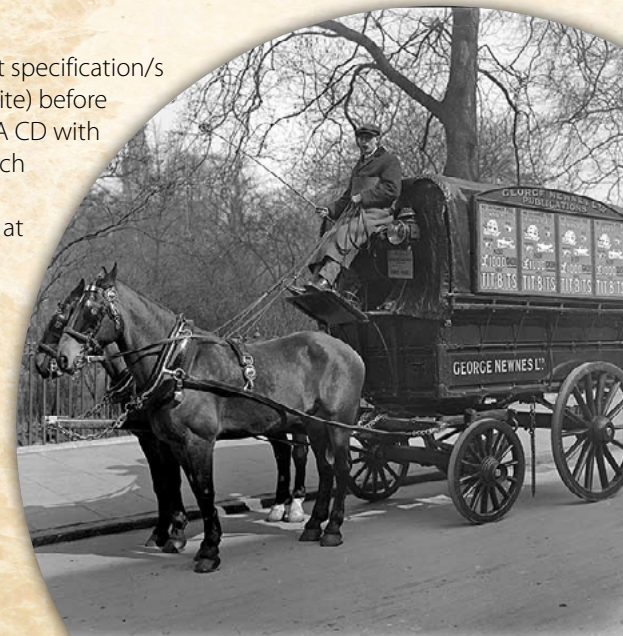
New Practitioners
Experienced Practitioners
Experienced Practitioners seeking a refresher
Centres new to the subject

Overview

This full day course will:

- Provide feedback on the examinations and controlled assessment from previous series
- Discuss ideas and approaches for successful teaching
- Improve delivery and understanding of the controlled assessment unit/s
- Provide an opportunity to share ideas and good practice with other teachers.

Please read the subject specification/s (available on our website) before attending the course. A CD with exemplar scripts for each component, including controlled assessment at A, C and F will be provided on the day.



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General qualifications

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