



# Background Paper and Brief for the Review of Junior Cycle History



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# 1 Junior cycle history: The road ahead

## 1.1 Introduction

A new specification for junior cycle history will be introduced in 2018. The curriculum specification and assessment guidelines for the subject will be published a year earlier in September 2017. This paper provides a background for the development of the specification for junior cycle history.

The paper will form the basis of a consultation which seeks to elicit the views of a range of interested parties including practising teachers and students on the learning and teaching of history and to contribute to the development of a new junior cycle specification for the subject. The paper addresses themes including

- the role of history within a broad educational experience
- perspectives on international good practice in history education at this level
- the current status of history in junior cycle
- existing approaches to learning and teaching in junior certificate history
- connections between junior certificate history and history learning in the Primary School Curriculum and senior cycle
- issues that should be addressed in the development of the new junior cycle history specification.

## 1.2 History in society and in the curriculum

The ongoing process of junior cycle reform in Ireland presents a timely opportunity to reflect on current thinking about the nature and purpose of post-primary history education. The following introductory observations to this background paper are intended to set the context for a wider review of the status of history education in Ireland that is to follow.

## History in society

A notable feature of modern culture, both in Ireland and internationally, is the level of popular or general interest in history. This phenomenon is notable in various respects. Bookshops devote much space to works dealing with historical themes, while historical fiction has emerged as a much-read genre. Historical magazines and journals also fill the newsstands. Television programme makers are conscious of general interest in history among the viewing public, with a significant amount of airtime now afforded to documentaries and dramatic re-enactments of historical figures and events, while increased interest in genealogy and family history is also evident in television schedules. Popular cinema upholds the profile of historical interest, with big-budget biopics and blockbuster interpretations of historical themes continuing to attract cinema-goers in their droves. Historical and heritage tourism is thriving, with sites of historical interest attracting many visitors, while related interpretive centres are often developed in association with such sites. The internet is a repository of much historical richness, allowing access to a wide array of historical themes and sources, while availing of technological advances to present historical knowledge and understanding in innovative ways, such as the use of interactive techniques and visual aids. Local history and heritage societies also continue to thrive, with research on aspects of local history generating a rich and varied body of literature.

Interestingly, the increasing popularity of history as a subject of intellectual curiosity or a means of recreation or leisure for many people also reflects a diverse range of themes of historical interest. The dominance of political or military themes that characterised the educational experience of history for many people in previous decades has been challenged by an increased interest in exploring the lives of ordinary people as distinct from those in positions of power and influence. This focus of enquiry has been characterised in historiography as 'people's history' or 'history from below' (which was the title of EP Thompson's seminal essay published in *The Times Literary Supplement* in April 1966) and has led to wide-ranging enquiries into the history of the previously marginalised or excluded. Much contemporary historical research deals with the lives and experiences of ordinary people, and is often focused through specific thematic prisms such as class or gender, marking a considerable shift from an experience of history centred in the main on established figures of authority, power and influence.

The upsurge of interest in history has been complemented by, and indeed aided by, significant advances in means of accessing sources of information. The digitisation of records of different types has transformed the manner in which sources can be accessed. For instance, numerous newspapers of record have made their past editions available online, while the digitisation of Irish census records for 1901 and 1911 has generated enormous levels of interest, providing further evidence of the

appetite for history in the population at large and in particular, genealogical history. Equally, online technology has enabled speedy access to archival records from across the world at the push of a button, with official records, such as government papers as accessible as unofficial ones, such as letters, diaries, memoirs and photographs.

### 1.3 Public engagement with history: State commemoration of the 1916 Easter Rising

The current centenary of the 1916 Rising has provided a timely opportunity to witness how contemporary Ireland demonstrates a consciousness of its historical inheritance, with a vast and diverse range of commemorative events taking place throughout the state at local and national level. The commemoration of the Rising is in the context of a broader framework of commemorations remembering key events that took place between 1912 and 1922 that are considered to be significant in terms of the establishment of an independent Irish state. In 2011, an expert advisory group was set up to advise the government on how to approach the so-called 'Decade of Centenaries' from a historical perspective. The 1916 Rising is considered the centrepiece of this decade-long programme. The official website of the state's commemorative programme states that in developing its programme of events, the expert advisory group was mindful that the programme should 'encompass the different traditions on the island of Ireland and . . . enhance understanding of and respect for events of importance among the population as a whole' and that it should also 'foster deeper mutual understanding among people from different traditions on the island of Ireland'.

The tone of the year's celebrations has been set by the official overarching themes represented as 'Remember, Reflect, Reimagine', where the Irish people are encouraged to engage in

Remembering our history and in particular the events of 1916

Reflecting on our achievements as a Republic in the intervening century

Reimagining our future for coming generations ('Ireland.ie', 2016)

Thousands of events have taken place during the year, with the events and personalities of the Rising commemorated in music, dance, song, poetry and art in the context of the state's commemorative themes. Reflecting the large general interest in history mentioned earlier, the centenary has generated a range of books, articles, documentaries and dramatic representations exploring the Rising and its significance from various perspectives. A notable feature of the year has been the extent to which a keen appetite for historical debate and discussion has been evident, with the legacy of the

rising and the extent to which the ideals expressed in the proclamation have been realised by successive generations.

A further point of interest is how history has been envisaged by the state as a vehicle to promote certain values and attitudes. The official programme to mark the state commemoration of 1916 declares that the celebrations of 2016 ‘will belong to everyone on this island and to our friends and families overseas – regardless of political or family background, or personal interpretation of our modern history’. It also signifies its intention that the Irish people in celebrating the centenary ‘will engage with the different traditions on our island and recognise the different narratives of today and we will seek to imagine the future in ways that strengthen peace and reconciliation and respect all traditions as envisaged in the ideals of the Proclamation’. Thus, it is evident that the state envisaged that public engagement with the history of the Rising would lead to a positive and affirming civic experience.

## 1.4 Implications for how we define school history: Two contrasting views

The prominence accorded by the state during the 1916 commemoration to the promotion of historical awareness and debate among citizens, and the association of that debate with the fostering of positive values of tolerance and respect, provides an interesting insight into questions about the role of history as a discipline, and how we define history. In the context of history education, these questions generate different views. How does one preserve the integrity of history as a discipline where objectivity and a dispassionate interrogation of events and issues are paramount while simultaneously promoting, even on a subtle level, such values as positive citizenship, patriotism and even democracy? The tension in this debate is of course not confined to Ireland. One arena in which these tensions were explored was the UK in the early 1990s, in the context of the framing of history as a foundation subject in the newly-created National Curriculum, and it is interesting to consider contrasting viewpoints on the purposes of school history at this time by two distinguished thinkers in this area.

In his 1992 article ‘The Purpose of School History: Has the National Curriculum Got it Right?’, John White considers the role of history in the framework of a broader educational experience. White argues that

The main reason for teaching history in schools is as a necessary element in the cultivation of those personal qualities in students like self-knowledge, self-

determination and concern for the well-being of others, which fit them to be citizens of a liberal democratic society. (White, 1992, p. 19)

He contends that as 'future autonomous, other-regarding democratic citizens, children need to be brought up with a certain degree of attachment to a sense of national community where they must see themselves as bound to other members of the community by common ties, including . . . a shared history' (p. 17). In critiquing alternative views, he challenges in particular Peter Lee's preferred aim of 'history for its own sake', where he quotes Lee directly as stating, 'history changes our view of the world, of what the present is and of what human beings are and might be . . . (it) expands our whole picture of the world and of what ends might be possible' (1992, p. 11). This view, characterised as 'the transformative aim' of history (1992, p. 11), does not convince White; he is not persuaded by Lee's contention that the fulfilment of this aim solely constitutes 'genuine history' (p. 14). White contends that he sees no good reason for the expansion of knowledge or understanding for its own sake as a basic objective in education; he advocates instead the central aim of education as 'the promotion of the student's well-being as an autonomous person within a liberal-democratic community' (1992, p. 17).

Responding to White's article in 'History in Schools: Aims, Purposes and Approaches. A Reply to John White' (Lee, 1992), Lee is critical of the 'narrow conception of history' represented by White as a means of providing information for personal and social functioning that is contrary to 'the wider conception of history as a way of looking at the world, past and present, distant or recent, European or "world"' (1992, p. 31). Lee argues that

pupils need to understand long-term change, to grasp the difference between short and long-term importance, to see how different kinds of significance can be attributed to the same changes in different temporal and spatial contexts. They need to examine radically different ways of life from ours, and to understand alternative individual ideals...(Lee, 1992, p. 31)

Lee rejects White's proposition that the central aim of teaching history is the cultivation of liberal-democratic values. Acknowledging that such an aim could be argued as acceptable as an aim of education in general, he says that

it cannot be an aim of history. History has no allegiance to 'liberal-democratic community' as an ideal. It is concerned to explore communities of every kind, both in their own terms and in ours, where 'ours' is never to be taken as a single fixed perspective belonging to any one nation, class, race, culture or community. It emphasises that any such ideal is in any case continuously undergoing change... (Lee, 1992, p. 29)

Lee warns against extending the aims of history beyond what can be delivered by history, including more general educational personal and social goals, and reiterates the transformative aim of history,

which carries with it such personal and social goals as are built into learning history. Indeed he maintains that 'if priority is given to intrinsic historical aims, the transformation aim becomes a realistic possibility, and this in turn means that there is some chance of achieving the wider educational aims' central to White's argument (Lee, 1992).

It is hoped that these reflections on the primacy of history in society, its use in promoting certain values designed to ensure social cohesion, its nature and purpose as a school subject, its role in the context of a broader educational framework with general aims and goals, its relationship to citizenship education and the tension evident in contrasting views of its aims will inform the remainder of this paper, and will stimulate some further thought and discussion during the consultation phase in the design of the new junior cycle history specification.

## 2 International practice in history education

### 2.1 Introduction

This section is intended as a brief overview of some international practices in relation to presenting history on school curricula and of particular perspectives in relation to the teaching of history.

### 2.2 The value of learning history

There is a high level of agreement internationally on the value of learning history. In England, the history programme at Key Stage 3 (roughly corresponding to the third year of junior cycle) states that history teaching should 'equip pupils to ask perceptive questions, think critically, weigh evidence, sift arguments . . . develop perspective and judgement, [help students] understand the complexity of people's lives, the process of change, the diversity of societies' (Department for Education, 2013, p. 1).

In advice on the teaching of history in Scottish schools, The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) in 2011 recognised history as a key element in the education of post-primary students. Its opening comment asserted that

History not only has the capacity to fascinate . . . and stimulate learners' imaginations; it also teaches key transferrable skills. . . . History, with its emphasis on proof, the rigorous testing of evidence and assumptions, clarity of thought and expression, and the development of coherent argument, is a critical part of fit-for-purpose school education (RSE, 2011, p. 1).

Along a similar line, the New South Wales history syllabus asserts its purpose as stimulating

students' interest in . . . exploring the past, to develop a critical sense of understanding of the past and its impact upon the present, to develop the critical skills of historical enquiry and to enable students to participate as active, informed and responsible citizens. (Board of Studies NSW, 2013, p. 12)

Most importantly, it sees history as explaining how people and events have shaped our world which will help students 'locate and understand themselves . . . in the continuum of human experience' (Board of Studies NSW, 2013, p. 10).

What is notable about these statements is that the subject is viewed as a subject with practical applications, which involve equipping students with practical skills for the acquisition and application of knowledge with a view to their playing a positive future role in society.

A Eurydice report on the design of history syllabuses throughout the European Union entitled *History in the Curriculum* is interesting in that it illustrates the relative importance our European partners place on the teaching of history as a component of their education systems. Of 23 countries surveyed, 15 included history as a stand-alone subject and 8 included the teaching of history as part of an interdisciplinary, social-studies type programme (Eurydice, 2010). That several countries choose to view history as a social science illustrates that while they recognise history in itself as an important element of education, they also recognise that learning and teaching of the subject can be part of an overall picture where history, geography and citizenship are interdependent. Indeed, this has been the approach adopted by the International Baccalaureate for many years.

In Belgium, the Flemish community places an emphasis on students learning 'knowledge and skills regarding time, historical space and sociality' (Eurydice, 2010, p. 3). Students in the Czech Republic are expected to 'independently search for, obtain and explore information' so that they understand that 'history is not a closed part of the past . . . but also involves asking questions through which the present looks into the past to find its contemporary character and possible future' (Eurydice, 2010, pp. 5-6). In Finland, the aim is stated as 'to guide students in becoming responsible players who know how to treat the phenomena of their own era and the past critically' (Eurydice, 2010, p. 9). Hungary identifies 'respect for the values, history and traditions of other peoples' as a key goal (Eurydice, 2010, p. 19). Iceland's history curriculum aims to 'encourage broad-mindedness' (Eurydice, 2010, p. 20) and Italy aims to promote 'autonomous enquiry' among students so that they can

gather historical information [from a variety of sources and] organise them in a text . . . make historical connections and argue their own reflections, use their knowledge and skills to orientate themselves in the present, understand different cultures and opinions, [to] understand the fundamental problems of the contemporary world. (Eurydice, 2010, pp. 27-28)

The Royal Society of Edinburgh had a particularly interesting perspective regarding the value of teaching history. It asserted that history is 'the subject most vulnerable to tendentious distortions for ideological purposes, a disciplined approach to History should be an important element in the

education of all citizens' (RSE, 2011, p. 2). The misuse of history for purposes of indoctrination and evasive propaganda is a very real danger. As such, it can be argued that every citizen should have some level of exposure to the process of interpreting information about the past.

These examples serve to highlight an important fact. The study of history is seen by most countries as an important component in the all-round education of young people. The evidence above shows us that, in a globalised society which has had to overcome the legacy of conflict and political and consequent social upheavals, history is seen as essential in using events in the past to create an understanding of the present and to contribute to a tolerant, prosperous future.

## 2.3 Skills development and acquisition

In the area of skills acquisition, *History in the Curriculum* provides evidence that, while different countries may place different emphases on the importance of students studying history, there is a degree of uniformity evident in what it is intended to achieve. Through studying history it is envisaged that students will develop

- the ability to explore different source materials
- an understanding of chronology
- an informed interest in the world around them
- the capacity to form varied perspectives on the same events
- knowledge and understanding of events in the past and how they relate to current times
- the ability to communicate their findings both orally and in written formats.

The history curriculum in England at Key Stage 3 has a strongly national agenda and in that context aims to develop in students

- a coherent, chronological narrative
- a clear understanding of abstract terminology
- an understanding of concepts such as continuity and change; cause and consequence; similarity, difference and significance

- the ability to make connections, draw contrasts, analyse trends, frame historically valid questions, create clear structured written accounts and analyses
- an understanding of historical enquiry, how evidence is used to create contrasting arguments and perspectives (Department for Education, 2013, p.1).

These objectives enable students to access and further their learning in other areas of the secondary school curriculum.

In New South Wales also, the study of history is seen as essential in the development of positive attitudes and values as well as skills in problem-solving, research, critical thinking, critical analysis, interpretation of various sources, the construction of reasoned explanations based upon analysis of sources and key skills in literacy (Board of Studies NSW, 2013, p. 10).

## 2.4 Assessment

The Royal Society of Edinburgh's advice paper on the development of the Scottish *Curriculum for Excellence* asserts that a well-developed assessment structure 'is necessary to make precise general statements of intent in a curriculum policy, and ensure that aims are being achieved' (2011, p. 6).

Furthermore:

effective learning in History occurs where attention is paid to both skill development and accurate content. Historical analysis . . . and achievement of intellectual rigour are . . . fundamental to the integrity and purpose of the discipline . . . Scotland's learners . . . should be expected to work at the highest standards appropriate to their level within the school system (RSE, 2011, p. 7).

'Appropriate to their level within the school system' is a key guiding phrase here.

In England, the Historical Association's *Survey of History in Schools in England* identifies a distinct difficulty. Teachers noted how the uptake of history at GCSE level was declining in favour of vocational subjects which 'have no exam content and minimal skill requirements . . . [while] History is still a very difficult subject to pass...' (Historical Association, 2010, p. 23). At issue here are two things. Firstly, history, as a subject requiring the attainment and retention of both knowledge and relatively advanced intellectual skills, is losing ground to perceived 'easier' subject options. The second issue

appears to relate to the assessment approaches in use not promoting the subject as an accessible, key component of students' learning and educational skills acquisition.

## 2.5 Autonomy for schools and teachers

A large degree of autonomy for schools and teachers has been evident in the curricula of many of the European countries for a number of years. *History in the Curriculum* indicates that in 8 of the 23 countries surveyed, the Departments of Education issue guidelines and/or learning targets for schools but that it is largely up to individual schools and/or regions to decide the content of their syllabus (Eurydice, 2010).

In the development of the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland, the concept of a 'passport for learning' was considered, which would take account of history that had been studied as part of the Primary School Curriculum and which could then be used to construct appropriate learning programmes at secondary level (RSE, 2011, p. 6). In the final analysis, the Scottish Ministry for Education opted to provide non-statutory guidance of a similar type to that in England.

Teacher autonomy in, for example, having the opportunity to construct courses in accordance with their own expertise, the learning interests of their students and their particular school context is also prevalent. Indeed, this is current practice in both Primary School Curriculum History and the Leaving Certificate History syllabus in Ireland. The opportunities such an approach can offer teachers, in terms of continuing professional development and in ensuring that learning in History never becomes stale, are enormous. The benefits to students in terms of the development of their interest, understanding and skills, are significant. It could also emphasise the high degree of expertise and professionalism of teachers. However, teachers do face a challenge in constructing first-year history programmes where there is an absence of knowledge of the incoming students' prior learning. The *Framework for Junior Cycle* provides an opportunity for considering greater autonomy for schools and classroom teachers in areas such as course design, thematic selection, and learning activity.

## **Chapter summary**

International opinion regarding the importance of history in the education of young people for their own and for society's benefit generally is consistent. The study of history supports young people in developing their understanding of the world around them and the factors that affect it, and links to concepts of lifelong learning and personal empowerment to assist students to take their place in that world.

A key component of the study of history internationally, is the development of the practical skills of a historian. This equips students with the knowledge of how to locate information, and develops in them the capacities to analyse, synthesise and communicate their findings effectively. Such skills are seen as developmentally and practically useful to students as they progress in education.

Approaches to assessment are varied and there is significant tension between the desire for rigorous assessment procedures which validate high standards of study and achievement, and a desire to make history an accessible course of study for all students and the differentiated assessment methodologies this necessitates.

Autonomy for schools and teachers in the selection of appropriate course materials to achieve state-mandated objectives is an approach adopted in a number of jurisdictions. The flexibility this affords to teachers allows them to make the study of history directly relevant to their particular students with the objective of their full engagement and participation with the subject.

## 3 The Junior Certificate History syllabus

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the aims and content of the Junior Certificate History syllabus<sup>1</sup>. It will also set out the various teaching methodologies that the syllabus identifies as both appropriate and practicable. Finally, this chapter looks at the assessment methodologies chosen as a method of judging student learning.

### 3.2 Junior Certificate History: aims

The Junior Certificate History syllabus states that:

History should introduce young people to the job of the historian, and to the sources and techniques which historians use . . . It should also provide young people with a wide tapestry of events, issues, people and ways of life through which they can . . . perceive patterns such as cause and consequence, change and continuity. It is in the past that they will find the roots of the contemporary world. (Department of Education and Science (DES), 1989, p. 2)

The syllabus presents history as a subject with a practical value which assists students in forming a better understanding of the world in which they live. Particular emphasis is laid on how events and developments do not happen in isolation; rather they build upon previous events, innovation or experience.

In addition, the syllabus indicates that its goals should be achieved through flexible approaches in the classroom and that history should be studied from a variety of perspectives. It also stresses that there should be a special emphasis on a chronological approach and that the syllabus should reflect the educational development of 12- to 15-year-olds, in that the content and historical skills covered should become progressively more complex over the course of junior cycle.

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<sup>1</sup> Some students currently experience history as part of Environmental and Social Studies (ESS). This paper will not refer to that syllabus to any significant extent. ESS will be phased out in the coming years.

In addition to students acquiring knowledge and understanding of the modern world through study of the past, the syllabus envisages that they should develop

- conceptual understanding and the ability to think independently
- the skills of a historian
- positive attitudes [including] a commitment to objectivity and fairness
- the ability to judge people and events in the context of their values and time
- an interest and enthusiasm for history and a value [for] their heritage.

(DES, 1989, p. 3)

These general objectives are identified as essential in the development of young people as well-rounded individuals capable of taking an active and decisive role in the world around them. It is worth noting that the phrase 'develop the skills of a historian' is not qualified by the Junior Certificate History syllabus in an age-appropriate manner for 12- to 15-year-olds.

The practical skills in which students are intended to develop include the ability to

- locate historical evidence
- analyse source materials
- develop clear historical chronology
- distinguish between opinion and fact, identify bias and propaganda
- appreciate the importance of objectivity.

The latter three are demanding for young students of this age cohort.

The syllabus envisages that students would also come to understand the differences between

- change and continuity
- cause and consequence
- comparison and contrast
- conflict and conciliation

- power and authority
- culture and civilisation.

(DES, 1989, p. 4)

All of the above are to be developed through

- research and writing
- selection of relevant information
- note-taking, categorising, summarising
- critical examination of source materials
- synthesising information and/or arguments from different sources
- presenting and communicating their findings in written, graphic and oral formats.

(DES, 1989, p. 4)

Finally, the syllabus envisages that students will

develop the disposition to be thorough, to accept historical context . . . Ensure that historical narrative is consistent with the evidence, recognise evidence may be open to more than one valid interpretation, recognise that historical knowledge is . . . incomplete and therefore subject to revision or reinterpretation. (DES, 1989, p.4)

Even from this limited outline of the existing syllabus, it is obvious that its scope is ambitious. However, there is a question as to whether the range of learning identified is appropriate for 12- to 15-year-olds. Certainly, a significant number of the skills outlined can be said to be high-level and challenging.

### 3.3 Junior Certificate History: content

The Junior Certificate History syllabus is divided into three sections:

- a. How we find out about the past: the archaeologist and historian, prehistoric man and early Christian Ireland; our roots in ancient civilisation; Ireland in medieval Europe; the Renaissance.

- b. Studies of change: exploration; the Reformation; plantation in Ireland; revolutionary movements; from farm to factory.
- c. Understanding the modern world: political developments in Ireland in the late 19th and 20th centuries; international relations in the 20th century; social change in the 20th century.

In the area of differentiation, little distinction between the material to be covered by students studying Higher or Ordinary levels until the final stages of third year is envisaged. This was originally intended to ensure that, as far as possible, segregation of students (those studying Higher level or those taking Ordinary level) would not occur too early in the cycle thereby ensuring 'that the syllabus does not demand streaming' (DES, 1998, p. 2).

### 3.4 Junior Certificate History: Teaching methodologies

The teaching methodologies employed by teachers tend to be influenced by a wide variety of factors to do with school and teacher context as well as the demands of the course in question. In advising on possible teaching approaches consistent with the syllabus, the *Revised Guidelines for Teachers* published in 1998 made a number of suggestions that teachers might employ. These included:

- students burying a time capsule
- adopting a detective approach and building a story from clues using 'actual artefacts from different times'
- examining and classifying evidence
- development of family trees
- exploring medieval society through the surviving features (castles, monasteries, churches, etc.)
- the use of worksheets and task cards to consolidate the learning done on field trips
- the use of paintings to draw comparisons between trends in Renaissance art, sculpture and architecture
- a biographical approach in dealing with persons of specific historical importance
- the development of timelines to assist students in sequencing events into a coherent narrative
- the use of role-play and debate

- resources-based analysis of contemporary illustrations, maps, statistics, and film
- the compilation of oral history and project work.

(DES, 1998, p. 5)

A significant number of these approaches are of a practical nature indicating the history syllabus's emphasis on practical skills development and on bringing the subject alive for students; showing students that history is all around them and that they are a part of it, playing an important role in every aspect of school life.

### 3.5 Junior Certificate History: Assessment for examination

Junior Certificate History has examinations at Higher and Ordinary levels (2.5 hours and 1.5 hours respectively), set and graded by the State Examinations Commission. Each examination consists of questions relating to pictorial sources, written source evidence, short-answer questions, biographical essay-style questions, with the final two sections of the Higher level paper consisting of a mix of short questions, paragraph-style and evidence-based questions. It is well structured in terms of its building in complexity from lower-order style questions towards higher-order questions as the examination content progresses.

In the examination students are expected to demonstrate, among other things, a knowledge and understanding of:

- historical trends, issues and events specified in the syllabus
- the influence of and interaction between individuals and institutions
- the nature and use of historical sources

and skills that would enable students to, among other things:

- use historical terms in their correct context
- interpret and critically examine primary and secondary source materials
- synthesise information

- present and communicate information in written, graphic, and oral formats
- apply their understanding of historical concepts in dealing with historical issues.

(DES, 1989, p. 9)

These represent a wide variety of skills for 15-year-old students to have mastered within three years, even to a relatively low level. It is interesting to note also, that the Junior Certificate History syllabus states that, 'Provision may be made for a school-based component for those schools which wish to avail themselves of this option' (DES, 1989, p. 9). While this may have facilitated a more complete assessment of the skills of a historian as envisaged and hence, a more holistic picture of a student's overall ability and achievement, this expansion of the assessment schedule did not materialise. In the context of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* there is an opportunity to explore how a range of approaches can address the assessment of a more comprehensive range of learning than has been possible in the existing system.

### **Chapter summary**

The Junior Certificate History syllabus is an extensive and ambitious course. It seeks to introduce to students the role of a historian and illustrate how an understanding of past people and events have helped shape the world around them. It also aims to facilitate students in developing an understanding of their place in the world and in the roles they can play within it.

In terms of skills development, the Junior Certificate History syllabus is very ambitious. The course aims to show students where source materials can be located, develop in them an ability to distinguish between reliable and unreliable evidence and understand the value of multiple source materials pertaining to the same topic. Perhaps most significantly, the course aims to develop among junior-cycle students the ability to synthesize information from varied sources and communicate their findings in written, visual and oral formats. These are all challenging and high-level cognitive skills.

The extent to which the aims of the syllabus and high-level skills development envisaged are appropriate for the age cohort in question, or indeed, can be said to be inclusive of varied ability levels is open to question. The high volume of course material to be covered presents significant practical difficulties for teachers attempting to achieve a balance between covering the course and developing the envisaged skills among their students. Certainly, assessment methodologies as they are currently constituted, cannot, in any real sense, accurately assess the wide variety of learning outcomes originally envisaged by the syllabus.

## 4 History in schools

### 4.1 Introduction

To generate a picture of the reality of history learning and teaching in classrooms, this section of the paper draws on subject inspection data since 2004 and on the most recent SEC Chief Examiner's Report, as well as a critical analysis of aspects of current practice.

### 4.2 Looking at history

The paper *Looking at History* (2006) was compiled on the basis of 50 subject inspection reports undertaken between 2004-2006. It must be pointed out here that while this research provides the most comprehensive picture available of practice in history learning and teaching, it is a decade old. While much of what is described in the 2006 report will be identifiable in the 2016 classroom, it is likely that a good deal has changed in everyday learning and teaching in the interim.

The report was published in order to assist schools and teachers specifically to improve history throughout the range of areas outlined (DES, 2006, p. 2). The areas analysed were

- 1) subject provision and whole-school support
- 2) planning and preparation
- 3) teaching and learning
- 4) assessment and achievement.

#### 4.2.1 Subject provision and whole-school support

In terms of subject provision and whole-school support, *Looking at History* found that:

- an allocation of three class periods per week was the norm for junior cycle
- in most schools, history was compulsory at this level

- teachers responded very favourably to the support of the History In-service Team (HIST)<sup>2</sup>
- where practicable, the provision of a designated history room or teacher-based classrooms had facilitated a wide variety of teaching methodologies and the slow but sure growth of the use of ICT in teaching history.

Recommendations included the provision of history in all Transition Year programmes; the release of teachers for continuing professional development (CPD); the further development of school libraries and contact with external support agencies; and greater access to the computer room (DES, 2006, p. 14). By and large the report can be interpreted as being generally satisfied with whole-school provision for history.

#### **4.2.2 Planning and preparation**

In the area of planning and preparation, the report stated that ‘Most teachers . . . presented satisfactory evidence of individual planning’ and it applauded ‘as good practice . . . an increasing number of schools [engaging] in subject planning more formally than previously...’ (DES, 2006, p. 22). The report stated that formal subject-planning meetings are a valuable support in developing collaborative planning to assist the teaching and learning of history. However, the recommendations indicated that there was scope for significant improvement in this regard. It appears that individual teachers have been working well in planning classes and preparing work for their students, but this has not always been followed through on a subject-wide basis. The electronic development and storage of planning documents was identified as an adaptable and easily disseminated aid to planning and preparation on an individual and department-wide basis (DES, 2006, p. 22) and represents a relatively straightforward solution to issues of communication and planning within schools.

#### **4.2.3 Teaching and learning**

In terms of teaching and learning, there were a number of positive findings identified. Interestingly, ‘a wide variety of effective strategies’ were observed (DES, 2006, p. 33). It was noted that while most questioning was teacher-led, that differentiation was clearly observed through effective combining of lower- and higher-order questions. There was a strong emphasis on comprehension of difficult terms

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<sup>2</sup> The History In-service Team was established in 2003 to design, facilitate, and evaluate CPD offered to teachers at the time of the introduction of the revised Leaving Certificate History syllabus.

and of dates. Successful efforts in making historical material relevant to the students' own context and contemporary experiences were noted. Effective use of support materials was observed and where ICT was a regular part of classroom interaction, it was with very positive outcomes. In addition, while it was noted that the chalkboard/whiteboard remained the main resource used by teachers; when it was clearly structured and reinforced by student engagement, questioning and note-taking, it was very effective. On the other hand, the report points out that there was 'limited evidence of group work, pair work and other innovative methods' (DES, 2006, p. 33). It also warned that, 'Over-indulgence in the mere reading aloud of textbook extracts is not encouraged as a method'. While it seems that this was not a common practice, its presence in the list of recommendations is an indication that, in some cases, uni-dimensional teaching methodologies were witnessed (DES, 2006, p. 34).

While it is clear that classroom teaching was often effective it is also apparent that in 2006 the learning environment for history did not always have active learning approaches as its basis.

#### **4.2.4 Assessment and achievement**

In the areas of assessment and achievement, *Looking at History* noted that 'teachers . . . maintain good records of students' attainment and report on progress in a structured and regular manner to parents or guardians' (DES, 2006, p. 41). Furthermore, the 'most common assessment strategies . . . were oral questioning, the assignment or homework, and . . . occasional short written tests' (DES, 2006, p. 41). It was noted that project work was infrequently used by teachers as a means of exploring and assessing Junior Certificate History and that the revised Leaving Certificate was providing good opportunities for exploring this mode of assessment and that 'the work done by teachers to facilitate students' research and project work is applauded' (DES, 2006, p. 41). This statement is interesting and indicates that when the terminal assessment requires some form of research and project work, teachers have the expertise to facilitate this form of learning.

The report recommended that 'varied assessment methods, including visual methods [be encouraged] particularly where it assists students with lower literacy levels', and noted that 'the inspectors strongly support the personal correction of homework' and the inclusion of teachers comments as formative assessment methods. In addition, the use of common end-of-term examination papers for all classes in a particular year group was recommended as a method of gauging student progress across a school.

The encouragement of students capable of sitting Higher level papers to do so was also cited as important (DES, 2006, p. 41).

These recommendations are clear indication that history assessment methodologies in 2006 needed to be broadened to include as wide a variety of learners as possible. Furthermore, classroom teachers were encouraged to place greater emphasis on the development of learning and practical historical skills through formative assessment techniques than was being done.

### 4.3 An analysis of subject inspection reports

Another analysis of the reference to Junior Certificate History in 18 subject inspection reports dating from 2004 to 2014 provides a more up-to-date picture of learning and teaching. Below is a table indicating the key areas of effective teaching, planning and practice the inspectorate appears concerned to support in history teaching and the performance of the sample across three grading categories.

	Very good	Good	In need of development
Quality of teaching and learning	11	5	2
Teacher-student rapport	5	12	1
Whole-school support	5	11	2
Department planning	4	7	7
Variety of teaching methodologies	5	11	2
Use of ICT & visual materials <sup>3</sup>	5	2	4
Formative and summative assessment <sup>4</sup>	2	9	4

It should be noted that the subject inspection reports relate not only to Junior Certificate but also Transition Year and Leaving Certificate learning and teaching activity.

<sup>3</sup> Seven subject inspection reports made no reference to ICT or visual stimulus materials.

<sup>4</sup> Two subject inspection reports made no reference to assessment strategies.

The table above indicates a number of interesting trends in the teaching of history at Junior Certificate level. Most commendable is that 16 of 18 reports indicated a good or very good standard of teaching and learning in the classes observed. It is reassuring that the quality of learning observed is high, as is the positive teacher-student rapport. The variety of teaching methodologies employed by teachers is also seen as positive as is the use of visual stimulus materials, and a majority of inspections reported favourably on the assessment of student learning. It must be added that the inspection reports suggest that a greater focus on formative rather than summative assessment is required. Perhaps most disappointing is the large number of history subject departments where planning was highlighted as an area for concern, with particular emphasis on development of yearly schemes of work. There were supports available for planning function at that time and in fact this finding refers to a period during which the Schools Development Planning Initiative (SDPI) and the HIST programmes were in operation. However, the former agency was involved in providing general planning templates while the HIST's primary focus was not intended to be on subject-department planning.

## 4.4 Chief Examiner's Reports

There have been three Chief Examiner's Reports for Junior Certificate History produced since the introduction of the new syllabus in 1989, those being in 2001, 2005 and 2008.

### 4.4.1 Ordinary level

What is most striking about the Chief Examiner's Reports relating to this level is the consistency of their findings across the years. All three reports state that low-scoring candidates attempted little beyond sections one and two of the examination. These candidates also 'showed little or no knowledge of content and demonstrated few or no historical skills' (State Examinations Commission (SEC), 2001, p. 7; 2005, p. 10 & 2008, p. 8). Each report also notes how candidates had found it difficult to 'cope with the more abstract material' (SEC, 2001; 2005; 2008).

The recommendations of all three reports are again broadly similar. Students are encouraged to answer all questions, refer to personal opinions (direct quotations from sources were seen as a poor substitute) and even though social change is the primary focus of the topic, the report chooses to emphasise that 'the concept of change should be intrinsic to . . . the social History of Ireland' (SEC, 2001, p. 8; 2005, p. 11; 2008, p. 9).

#### 4.4.2 Higher level

At Higher level, the picture is somewhat better. Each of the three Chief Examiner's Reports points out that 70% of students achieved a grade C or better and that grades E, F and NG tended to occur in 'clusters' indicating that examination candidates may have been entered for the inappropriate level.

Key recommendations of the reports include that:

- teachers pay particular attention to the issues of chronology and historical context
- when writing about historical figures, the focus should be on their career, works and achievements
- candidates should specify the changes that have taken place over the course of social history and how these affected people's lives.

(SEC, 2001, p. 16; 2005, p. 23; 2008, p. 16)

#### 4.5 Critique of key issues

The extent to which 12- to 15-year-olds can realistically be expected to study human history, from prehistoric man to late 20th century social history in a time allocation that frequently consists of three classes per week, is a key question. In this context, even the most committed and talented teachers have in many instances great difficulty in achieving the syllabus aims as envisaged. While it strives to provide a much-needed overview to students, such an extensive course of study often only allows for superficial coverage of each topic and seriously impinges upon the development of the relevant historical skills. It can be argued that a course, purposefully limited in terms of range, would facilitate greater depth of study and allow sufficient time for the development of a select number of the historical skills.

The Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills in its document *Looking at History: Teaching & Learning History in Post-Primary Schools* indicated a recurring concern among teachers regarding 'covering the syllabus content and . . . research work within the expected time limits' (DES, 2006, p. 3). Furthermore, the emphasis on students developing the practical skills of an archaeologist/historian is often facilitated by having access to historical sites of importance. It is clear that students engaged in well-planned visits to sites of either local or national historical importance would undoubtedly enhance their learning and appreciation of history. However, in a crowded

curriculum with school principals facing similar requests from other subject departments at both junior and senior cycle, teachers can often face difficulties in facilitating their own or their students' release from class. In addition, the development of the practical skills inherent in examining source documents necessitates ready access to a wide range of such materials. Prior to the development of the internet (broadband connections were not introduced until the early 2000s) this would have been extremely difficult for teachers in rural areas and indeed this difficulty persists in relative terms depending on available broadband speeds.

In a general sense, the Junior Certificate History syllabus of 1989 presents teachers with continuing significant practical challenges. While teachers and schools make great effort to overcome these challenges, a number of the aims of the Junior Certificate History syllabus have proved impracticable.

There is evidence of significant efforts by teachers in this regard. In a study entitled *Gender Perspectives and Junior Cycle History*, 249 respondents to a survey about teaching methodologies indicated that textbooks, used regularly by 97% of teachers, were the dominant resource used in classrooms. Other resources employed included; videos used by 89%, maps and charts by 66%, overhead projectors by 59%, resource packs by 50%, documents by 49%, facsimile material by 42% and slides by 23%. Also, the internet had been used by 62% of teachers and CD-ROM by 29% (Raftery et al., 2004, p. 32). Unfortunately, the study did not enquire about the frequency of the use of such resources but it does indicate that teachers do attempt to make the most of varied teaching methodologies where adequate resources are available.

While it is a somewhat dated study (2004), *Gender Perspectives and Junior Cycle History* enquired more deeply into teachers' approaches to planning for teaching history. The top four considerations referred to in deciding on methodologies to be adopted were identified as

- the desire to widen pupils' knowledge of history (26%)
- the likelihood of the topic occurring on the examination paper (25%)
- the level of the ability of pupils (21%)
- the teachers' own familiarity with topics (13%).

(Raftery et al., 2004)

Narrative comments included concern about the amount of material to be covered within stringent time constraints and as a result 'textbooks remain[ed] the primary teaching tool for history teachers' (Raftery et al., 2004, p. 35). Teachers were primarily motivated by making course material accessible for their students and preparing students for the state examinations. In this research, it is difficult to identify significant concern for the development of practical, historical skills as envisaged by the Junior Certificate History syllabus. However, given the large amount of course material to be covered within significant time constraints, the effective development of such skills remains a challenging goal.

It should also be noted that the absence of established and readily accessible banks of ready primary and secondary source materials also represented, until the relatively recent advent of the use of internet sources, a significant difficulty for many teachers.

## Chapter summary

Analysis of Subject Inspection Reports shows that teaching and learning outcomes are generally positive with much excellent practice observed. But it also indicates that the use of active and varied teaching and learning methodologies needs support as does the use of formative assessment approaches.

It is arguable that the broad and ambitious aims of the Junior Certificate syllabus have not been achieved to the extent intended. It is pertinent to ask whether Junior Cycle History should seek to develop in students a very wide range of high-level historical skills as well as studying the history of mankind from the Stone Age to the Anglo-Irish Agreement? The volume of content contained in the Junior Certificate History syllabus makes it extremely difficult for teachers to achieve the desired quality of engagement by students in particular topics of study, especially where time allocation is frequently of the order of three lessons per week. In addition to poor access to documentary evidence (until the development of broadband internet connections), a crowded curriculum where history competes for time with other subjects, makes it extremely difficult for teachers to visit historical sites and achieve the practical emphasis on history as a living subject.

These factors support the view that there has been something of a disjoint between curriculum as intended and the curriculum as experienced over the past 27 years.

It is noteworthy that reform of the Leaving Certificate syllabus has led to progress in this area at senior cycle and that this is a cause for confidence in the capacities of teachers and students to meet similar challenges at junior cycle.

## 5 Continuity in the students' experience of history

### 5.1 Introduction

Primary and post-primary education is often characterised in terms of a learning continuum, where students develop knowledge and skills appropriate to their age and stage of educational development. The objectives, content, methodologies and desired learning outcomes of each stage build upon the learning experiences of the previous stages.

### 5.2 History in the Primary School Curriculum

History in the Primary School Curriculum is presented as part of an inter-disciplinary area called Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE). Its aims are, generally, to allow a child to 'explore, investigate and develop an understanding of the natural, human, social and cultural dimensions to local and wider environments' (DES, 1999a, p. 2). Through learning and practising a wide range of skills, students are envisaged as acquiring 'open, critical and responsible attitudes . . . to live as informed and caring local and wider communities'. (DES, 1999a).

The importance of history in the pursuit of these aims is that, 'Historical education enables children to investigate and examine critically significant events in their own immediate past' and that it 'develops an understanding of the actions, beliefs and motivations of people in the past and is fundamental to an informed appreciation of contemporary society and environments' (DES, 1999a, p. 3). In addition, history is seen as having an important role in the development of important values and attitudes which cultivate an atmosphere of equality where 'prejudice and discrimination are challenged while respect and mutual understanding are promoted' (DES, 1999a, p. 4).

What is particularly interesting about the treatment of history in the Primary School Curriculum is that it is not seen as a single continuous narrative of the past, but rather 'our attempt to reconstruct and interpret elements of the past which are of interest [and relevance] to us' (DES, 1999a, p. 6). The development of an understanding of time, chronology, change and continuity, cause and effect are seen as important but should be approached at a level appropriate to children's age, and skills should be developed that are appropriate to their developmental stages (DES, 1999a, p. 6).

Personal engagement by the learner is key, and the curriculum points out that as '[primary school children will understand] the immediate past more readily than . . . distant ages . . . the History curriculum places a strong emphasis on the study of personal and local History' (DES, 1999a, p. 7). This necessitates a significant degree of autonomy for teachers in the selection of course content and topics relevant to their particular school and pupil contexts. Indeed, the Primary School Curriculum points out that

These studies can never be exhaustive, and this curriculum seeks to provide flexibility for schools and teachers in the selection of content while ensuring . . . a broad and balanced range of topics (DES, 1999a, p. 8).

In terms of skills development, the curriculum is clear regarding their importance, as all history is based on 'evidence' (DES, 1999a, p. 8). While the concepts of time, sequence and chronology are identified as important, there is an acknowledgement that children of this age have an imperfect understanding of time and that teachers should attempt to develop these concepts gradually. Other skills are similar to those highlighted by both the Junior Certificate History syllabus and international practice. These include locating, selecting and analysing a wide range of source materials; recognising the limitations of source materials and understand that they can be interpreted in a number of ways or completely differently in the light of new evidence; synthesising evidence to create an 'imaginative reconstruction' of the past and its communication to others; exploring how actions and experiences of people in the past have influenced subsequent generations and how they may have shaped our current surroundings (DES, 1999a, pp. 8-9). What is most significant here is that the Primary School Curriculum sees these as a series of blocks which will be put in place through flexible curriculum content and a flexible timeframe.

In terms of assessment, the Primary School Curriculum describes the need to measure and report on a child's progress while seeking to 'avoid distortion of the curriculum by assessment techniques' (DES, 1999a, p. 76). The point is made that the development of skills are concerned with a process, activity and application of the skill and the degree to which the skills have been developed is not readily assessed through final written products, such as tests, extended paragraphs etc. Rather, 'the level at which a primary school child applies historical skills is demonstrated best in the context of activity and discussion' (DES, 1999a, p. 77). Again, here we see an emphasis on age-appropriate assessment methodologies. What is of significance here is that the curriculum views history as a tool for an organic learning process rather than as an end in itself.

The curriculum emphasises the need for a wide degree of flexibility and autonomy in content selection for teachers: assessment tools must be varied with 'teacher observation; teacher-designed tasks and tests; work samples, portfolios and projects [and] curriculum profiles' (DES, 1999a, p. 79) being employed to assess student achievement/progress and teachers' professional integrity must be trusted in providing fair and balanced feedback to parents.

It is interesting how the Primary School Curriculum places an emphasis on personal and local history, close to the experience of the child and appropriate to their developmental stages and that they should also be introduced to elements of national and international history. This attempt to provide a manageable scope to the study in association with the strong emphasis on skills development (and assessment) highlights areas of clear discontinuity with the experience the learner currently encounters in junior cycle. While it does offer opportunities for teachers to invoke local sites or artefacts in teaching the course, Junior Certificate History, with its strict chronological approach and content-rich syllabus, is frequently at odds with what the young person will have experienced of history up to their entry to first year of post-primary.

As the Primary School Curriculum provides the basis and background for the Junior Certificate student's learning in this context it is critical that the sectoral gap between primary and junior cycle should not involve as sharp a discontinuity between content, learning and assessment of history for learners.

### 5.3 The Leaving Certificate History syllabus

Leaving Certificate History underwent a complete review of structure, content, skills to be developed and assessment procedures in 2004. For the preceding decades, history at senior cycle was approached through the chronological study of Irish and European history from the years 1870 to 1970. Such was the amount of content that there was little scope for the introduction of source materials, student exploration and analysis, synthesis of source materials and perspectives, etc. Indeed, prior to the 2004 revision the Leaving Certificate examination took the form of five essay questions which tended to mitigate against desired teaching and learning approaches and may have encouraged rote memorisation and the reproduction of prepared answers. Where this happened, it

was the very antithesis of what most commentators view as the value of teaching history as part of general education.

The revised Leaving Certificate History syllabus places an emphasis on history as a dynamic process incorporating the development of historical skills and thinking through processes of investigation and the need to look at history from different perspectives. Rather than narrow down the course, it is extended from 1815 to 1993. In addition, an emphasis is placed on social, economic, cultural, religious and scientific developments (DES, 2004b, p. 2). Significantly however, in order to compensate for this, the time periods of the two sections of the course, Irish history and the history of Europe and the wider world, are divided into six topics for Irish history and six topics for Europe and the wider world. Students are required to study just two topics from each of the two sections. It should be noted that the revised Leaving Certificate syllabus does also allow for an early-modern field of study, although it is an option taken up by few schools.

This structure has enabled students to study a wider variety of history topics than previously, yet not be overloaded. It has also allowed for a large degree of autonomy for teachers and/or students to choose their areas of study in accordance with their particular contexts and interests. Most importantly, the purpose of the new course is to develop ‘independent thought, a spirit of inquiry and critical thinking, prepare students for further education and . . . working life, and prepare students for their role as active and participative citizens’. These were narrowed down to three e’s: enquiry, evidence, exploration. (DES, 2004b, pp. 3-4).

Three of the required four topics are assessed by inviting students to respond to questions by using an historical argument, with the marking scheme allocating 60% of available marks for content, and 40% for student analysis and overall understanding. One of the four topics is prescribed by the State Examinations Commission as one which will be examined by way of a documents-based question, as part of the Leaving Certificate examination paper. This aims to assess a student’s skills in comprehension, analysis, comparison of source materials and overall contextualisation of the topic in question. This is important in that it can be seen as building upon the source-based questions of the Junior Certificate History examination and assessing a student’s capacities in the key skills of a historian at work.

The final component of the Leaving Certificate assessment is a student's completion of a research study report, worth 20% of their overall grade. A student selects a topic of history which is of personal interest to them and, under the guidance of their teacher, they complete an independent study which is submitted prior to the Leaving Certificate examinations in June. This study requires students to demonstrate an awareness of the

- role of evidence in historical research and historical writing
- main varieties and repositories of historical evidence
- different stages of historical research
- pursuit of objectivity
- historian's readiness to revise their understanding of events in the light of new evidence or new insights and how these are integrated into a body of evidence
- complex nature of historical change and the challenge of explaining its dynamics.

The structure, content and assessment procedures for Leaving Certificate History and its overall balance have been well received. Its avoidance of large amounts of content specification within topics allows for in-depth study of particular topics and teacher-led exploration employing a wide variety of methodologies. The Leaving Certificate student has the opportunity to develop an understanding of how different events influence the world around them, how nothing from the past happens in isolation, how to locate information, how to identify bias and propaganda, how to synthesise information and communicate it effectively. All practical skills which will potentially be of lifelong use to students.

## 5.4 Junior Certificate History

The aims and objectives of teaching history in the Primary School Curriculum, Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate share many common features. There is divergence however in relation to the amount of content, the appropriateness of the skills sought in relation to students' stages of development and the assessment procedures. The Primary School Curriculum and Leaving Certificate provide for a large degree of teacher and student autonomy in the selection of course content and have a pronounced focus on acquiring specified skills, values and attitudes. At Leaving Certificate, the acquisition of knowledge and development of skills are allowed to proceed in tandem, and the content, while specified, is not overly extensive. This is arguably not the case with Junior Certificate History.

For students of this age to study in any coherent way Irish and world history from the Stone Age to the late 20th century in three years is demanding. The assessment procedures for Junior Certificate History are such that the motivation for teachers to attempt to develop the historical skills outlined previously in the syllabus aims is limited. Junior-cycle students are expected to develop high level historical skills which cannot be formally assessed to any significant degree within the existing system. This shortcoming, allied to the expectation that they acquire a vast amount of factual knowledge, raises serious questions as to the direction a new junior cycle history specification should take.

The *Framework for Junior Cycle* provides an opportunity and structure for the issues of continuity, skills-focused rather than a content-led syllabus, facilitation of a greater variety of teaching and learning methodologies, and the inclusion of assessment procedures that are in harmony with the stated aims and objectives to be addressed.

## Chapter summary

With developments since the introduction of the Junior Certificate, it is arguable that Junior Certificate History has lost alignment with the courses followed by learners in both primary school and Leaving Certificate. The latter offers a significant degree of teacher autonomy in the selection of course content from a menu provided. Furthermore, the assessment of both provides for significant direct classroom facilitation and teacher input, as students work on projects which facilitate in-depth exploration of events which interest and/or are of relevance to them. An important consideration here is that such project work allows history to be explored at a depth appropriate to the developmental stages of the students in question. It should also be noted that both primary and Leaving Certificate courses allow for both student and teacher-led exploration of history and that such a dual approach is likely to be most effective in achieving the balance of teaching methodologies necessary to effectively include as many students as possible in the learning that takes place.

The extent of flexibility afforded to the teacher in the development of the new junior cycle history experience of his/her students is worth considering given that such an approach has been employed as part of the new Primary School Curriculum since 1999 and at Leaving Certificate since 2004.

The *Framework for Junior Cycle* presents history with a ready structure around which a new Junior Cycle History specification and assessment procedures can be constructed. The greater emphasis on development of skills for future learning envisaged by the Framework presents the opportunity to re-orientate the knowledge/skills balance evident in the existing syllabus and examinations.

## 6 History specification in the new junior cycle

While some may have distinct characteristics, arising from the area of learning involved, all junior cycle specifications for subjects and short courses will have a number of features in common. They will

- be outcomes-based
- reflect a continuum of learning with a focus on learner progression
- set out clear expectations for learning
- provide examples of those expectations
- include a focus on all eight key skills
- strive for clarity in language and for consistency in terminology.

To improve the connection with learning and teaching in primary school, these features are shared with the Primary School Curriculum. The specification for each junior cycle subject and short course will include:

1	Introduction to junior cycle	This will be common to all specifications and will summarise the main features of the <i>Framework for Junior Cycle</i> .
2	Rationale	This will describe the nature and purpose of the subject as well as the general demands and capacities that it will place on, and require of, students.  The text will, as appropriate, aim to draw attention to challenges and any access issues associated with study of the subject for students with specific needs or disabilities.
3	Aim	A concise aim for the subject will be presented.

4	Links with:  Statements of learning  Key skills	How the subject is linked to central features of learning and teaching at junior cycle will be highlighted and explained.
5	Overview:  Strands  Learning outcomes	An overview of the subject will illustrate how it is organised and will set out the learning involved in strands and learning outcomes.
6	Expectations for students	These will be linked with groups of learning outcomes and will relate to examples of student work. The examples will be annotated, explaining whether the work is in line with, ahead of, or behind expectations for students.
7	Assessment and reporting	This section refers to both formative and summative assessment. It outlines the assessment component/s through which students will present evidence of learning on an ongoing basis, and for the purposes of recording achievement for the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) <sup>5</sup> .  This description of assessment is supplemented by separate assessment guidelines for use in second and third years.

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<sup>5</sup> The JCPA is the new award for all junior cycle students. It will replace the current award, the Junior Certificate.

## 7 Brief of the review of junior cycle history

The review of junior cycle history will lead to the production of a specification in line with the template above.

The principles of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* will inform and underpin the key decisions made in the development of the specification for history. The specification will be at a common level. It will be designed to be taught and assessed in a minimum of 200 hours and structured or organised around strands and learning outcomes.

The key skills of junior cycle will be embedded in the learning outcomes of the specification, as appropriate.

The specification will be developed in alignment with the statements of learning, including that the student

- listens, speaks, reads and writes at a level of proficiency that is appropriate to his/her ability
- creates, appreciates and critically interprets a range of source materials
- has an awareness of personal values and an understanding of the process of moral decision-making
- appreciates and respects how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which he/she lives
- values local, national and international heritage, is assisted in understanding the importance of the relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change
- is assisted in understanding the origins and impacts of social, economic and environmental aspects of the world around him/her
- observes and evaluates empirical events and processes and draws valid deductions and conclusions
- uses technology and digital media tools to learn, communicate, work and think collaboratively and creatively in a responsible and ethical manner

- values what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in local and national contexts.

It will be completed for autumn 2017.

The development of the new specification will

- take account of current research and developments in the field of history education, emerging understandings of the content and nature of education in history in relation to students' stages of development, and the need for alignment with the ongoing development of the numeracy and literacy strategy.
- address continuity and progression. It will consider whether history should be taught from a broader, general base in first year with a particular focus on consolidation of learning from primary school and on the development of students' understanding of cross-curricular links, skills and attitudes that history can form when combined with other subjects. For example, the representation of information in pictorial format in art, an understanding of social and political change through geographic maps/charts and the promotion of concepts such as democracy and human rights through CSPE.
- allow for in-depth exploration of selected topics and the practical development of 'the skills of a historian' appropriate to 12- to 15-year-old students.

More specifically, the development of the new specification will consider

- the aims for junior cycle history should be set out in line with best international practice and devised to match the stage of conceptual and imaginative development of 12- to 15-year-olds
- how the new specification will align with both history in the Primary School Curriculum, the Leaving Certificate History syllabus, and the new Leaving Certificate Politics and Society course.
- whether history should be studied as a chronological continuum or whether content should be organised into 'fields of study' from which a number of topics should be selected for study and assessment

- how the specification, in its presentation and language register, can be strongly student-centred, having a clear focus on what the students can do to develop and demonstrate their historical skills, capabilities and achievements
- how practical, inquiry-based learning will be promoted by the recommended methodologies
- how it will assist students' understanding of how events in the past have helped to shape the world today
- how it will assist in the development of student self-directed learning
- modes of assessment to be in line with the aims of the course and student capability
- how it can develop students' conceptual, collaborative and communication skills
- how it might assist in the development of a large bank of appropriate source materials, which teachers could develop to suit their school circumstances
- how the specification will develop a students' ability to interrogate varied source materials
- how the specification will develop students' understanding of key concepts such as impartiality, verification, bias, propaganda, historical deduction and synthesis
- the use of technology and digital media tools in junior cycle history learning and teaching
- how history can assist in the development of the concept of lifelong learning.

The work of the History Development Group will be based, in the first instance, on this brief. In the course of its work and discussions, elaborations of some of these points and additional points may be added to the brief.

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