

IGCSE History (0470)

The syllabus says that students should be taught either the 19 or 20th century Core, and at least one Depth Study. Do I have to teach all of the content of the Core and Depth Study I choose, or can I leave some of this content out?

Ideally you should cover all the content of the options you choose, but we recognise that some teachers have a limited amount of teaching time, and may find it hard to cover all this content in the time available. In that case, the decision to omit certain topics would have to be made bearing in mind the question choice offered in the examination. For the Core, you would obviously have to cover the Paper 2 topic. In addition, Section A of Paper 1 offers four questions on each of the 19th and 20th centuries, of which candidates must answer two. It follows that it would be safe enough not to teach one Key Question, and possibly two, whilst still giving students some question choice in the examination. For 20th century candidates, their four Section A questions will always be split 2/2 on the inter-war/post-war Key Questions, which means that teachers who are prepared to sacrifice question choice altogether need cover only half the Core. Cutting content on the Depth Studies is far more difficult. Here the Section B, Paper 1 question choice is only one from two, which makes it impossible to omit more than one Key Question. However, those opting for Paper 4, Alternative to Coursework, will face a single compulsory question on their Depth Study, which means that for them the only safe course is not to omit anything.

How many Depth Studies should I teach? The syllabus says at least one, but is there any advantage in doing more than one?

There is no advantage in doing more than one, and our advice would be to do just one. However, the IGCSE History syllabus aims to be flexible and to accommodate as much teacher choice as possible. When the syllabus was put together, some teachers commented that teaching just one Depth Study would, for them, make a rather narrow course. The syllabus, then, leaves the choice open. If you teach more than one, your candidates will have a greater choice of questions on Papers 1 and 4. Incidentally, we are sometimes asked if candidates may answer questions on different Depth Studies in Papers 1 and 4. The answer is, of course, yes. If you opt for coursework, your candidates can submit work on either one or two Depth Studies. To sum up, one is sufficient, but you can do more if you wish.

In Section A of Paper 1, candidates have to answer two questions. Must they choose two on the 19th century, or two on the 20th? Or can they do one from each century? I am unsure about this as the syllabus clearly states that candidates should study either the 19th or the 20th century Core.

Again, in the spirit of flexibility and choice, we permit candidates to answer any two questions in Paper 1, Section A. It is true that the syllabus states what the teaching course should be, but we know that some teachers like to 'mix and match' options in their own ways. An obvious variant on the stated Cores is to start a course with the origins of the First World War, and then to run this on to the rest of the 20th century content. Perhaps it is also worth mentioning that there is nothing to prevent teachers preparing candidates for the 20th century questions on Paper 1, but the 19th century option on Paper 2 (or vice versa).

Do I have to make a special study out of the nominated topic for Paper 2? If so, why do you have to change the topic every year, as this means we have to put together different resources each year for Paper 2, which could be quite expensive?

It is not our intention that teaching for Paper 2 should be any different from the teaching of the rest of the Core. The normal level of knowledge students should have of the Core content is more than enough for them to be able to cope with the source-based questions of Paper 2. Neither would we expect candidates to be taught sources skills only on the Paper 2 topic; rather, these skills should be integrated into the course as a whole. The issue of additional resources does not then apply. Whatever standard resources you have for teaching the Core should be adequate for covering the Paper 2 topic. Most modern textbooks have plenty of source material on which students can practise their skills. Finally, given that the Paper 2 topic is not an in-depth study, and can be taught the same as any other aspect of the Core, why not change the topic every year? To do otherwise would make for some very predictable and dull question papers!

In Paper 1, source material is included in the questions, but students are not expected to interpret it. Do some students and teachers find this confusing?

In Paper 1 the sources are simply stimulus. The syllabus makes it very clear that Objective 3 (interpretation and evaluation of sources) is not tested in Paper 1, so nobody should be confused. However, this leaves a serious point unresolved – what exactly is the function of the stimulus material when it comes to answering the question? When the syllabus was last revised, the suggestion of dropping the stimulus material, i.e. of having structured questions as they are now but with no stimulus, was made to schools. On balance, the reaction to this proposal was negative, as the stimulus material was felt to make the questions more attractive and accessible, even if the sources were not essential to the answering of the questions. We therefore decided to retain it. Our question setters are now instructed that, for every Paper 1 structured question, the stimulus must be of some help in answering at least one sub-question, but that all questions must be answerable without using the stimulus at all.

Is there any advantage to be gained from opting for coursework rather than the Alternative to Coursework paper?

As far as grades earned by candidates are concerned, the answer has to be no, or the examination would be unfair. In order to create an acceptable level of comparability between these two examination components, decisions about which grade boundary marks to adopt for them are made in the light of the performance of the two groups of candidates, i.e. those doing coursework and those not, on Papers 1 and 2. In fact, the proportion of candidates taking coursework has always been much lower than that taking Paper 4 (the split is approximately 80%/20%), which means that the grading standard is first established on the basis of candidates taking Papers 1,2 and 4, with the performance of coursework candidates subsequently related to these standards. The advantages to be gained from opting for coursework, or indeed for Paper 4, are therefore matters relating to the choices of individual schools and teachers. Coursework allows teachers to be involved in the assessment process, to set their own tasks, to devise their own schemes of work, and gives students the chance to show their achievements outside the examination room. On the other hand, it increases the amount of work the teacher has to do, and places heavy burdens on students where coursework has to be completed in several examination subjects. There are good arguments both ways.

If I choose the coursework option, how can I be sure that my students' work will be acceptable to the external moderator? If it was not acceptable, what would happen to it?

There are several points to make here. CIE makes every effort to ensure that coursework tasks will be acceptable. No teacher is permitted to choose the coursework option unless the school has at least one teacher in that subject who has been trained by CIE in the setting and marking

of coursework. This should guarantee that a school's coursework is at least of a minimum acceptable standard. If a teacher wishes to set his/her own coursework tasks, then CIE urges that the tasks should be sent in for vetting before the work is done by the students. CIE will forward any such correspondence to coursework consultants who will prepare comments on the work, and, if necessary, give advice on how it could be improved. For schools that wish to use the coursework option, but do not want to set their own work, CIE has prepared approved coursework tasks and marking schemes on most of the Depth Studies, which are available on request. These measures together have, over the years, ensured that it is almost unknown for inappropriate work to be sent to the external moderator. What they cannot guarantee, though, is that the level of marks awarded in any individual school will be exactly in line with marks in another school. Each year the coursework marks of some schools have to be adjusted, up or down, as a result of external moderation. This is only to be expected. Where such changes are made, reasons are given by the moderator in the report sent to the school.

Most of my students are not First Language English speakers, and their written English is not fluent. Does the marking of the examinations disadvantage them in any way?

A majority of IGCSE History candidates are not First Language English speakers, so examiners are very experienced in assessing the work of candidates whose English is in some way deficient. They are instructed to be sensitive in the interpretation of what has been written, and to give the benefit of any doubt to the candidate. No marks are given for spelling, grammar, expression or any other non-historical criterion. In fact, the vast majority of candidates have no trouble making themselves understood. For a small minority, however, weaknesses in their English prevent them being able to express their answers as effectively as possible. They may not understand the questions with the necessary precision. The History they produce is weakened by their lack of ability to express what it is they have to say, and this will possibly depress their grades. It must be stressed however, that they are being assessed on the History they produce, and not on their English.