

Section 8. History progression statements

Introduction

In this section, consideration is given to the notion of articulating statements that outline the way in which progression and differentiation are achieved in history programmes. Their purpose is to assist with curriculum development, demonstrating how work is made more challenging for students from level to level, bearing in mind the key curricular dimensions of content selection, skills development, learning and teaching approaches and assessment strategies. They help to define the distinctions between course units that might be described as, say, introductory, intermediate and advanced, the characteristics of which in degree course documentation often remain unstated, and have value both in helping course teams to maintain a reasonable degree of consistency at each level of provision and in enabling students to understand what more is required of them at each stage as they progress.

Progression statements relating to the history programmes at Birmingham University, Indiana University and the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) have been selected to illustrate the types of approach adopted. In the Birmingham case, there are two statements that relate to different curricular dimensions. In the other two cases, more general frameworks have been devised, which outline progression through each level of undergraduate provision, extending to the post-graduate phase in the University of Central Lancashire example.

Also included in this section are details on the additional competencies that, according to the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe project, should be acquired in studying history at master's level compared with undergraduate level. This aspect of the project parallels the attempts made by the QAA qualifications framework, which is outlined in Section 3, to differentiation levels of provision, though not within undergraduate programmes.

Details of the Tuning Project can be found at <http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningeu/>

The descriptors can be printed out in pocket guide form at <http://www.clio.net/pocketguide/>

The Birmingham University statements

Two sets of outline progression statements for the BA History course appear on the web site of the University's history department. Both outlines are given below. They can be viewed at <http://www.history.bham.ac.uk/undergrad/mm/overview.htm> by taking the Teaching Approach and Teaching Delivery links.

Progression in the acquisition of knowledge and skills

First Year: Year 1 represents a foundation year in which fundamental skills for historical inquiry are established and core knowledge secured. Students also study a 'Module Outside the Main Discipline' which offers the opportunity to extend the range of their conceptual training and discipline knowledge.

Second Year: During Year 2 the focus is on enhancing confidence in synthesis and analysis of historical evidence, extending the range of historical interests, and developing research skills. All programmes participate in a Group Research project which provides a valuable opportunity for students to engage directly with primary source evidence as well as design, execute and present a piece of historical research. Students also gain from the experience of collaborative work and benefit from the two-day second year conference at which groups present their findings. Single honours students receive individual support in defining a personal research project on which they will work for their final year dissertation.

Third Year: Final Year students are encouraged to extend their research skills and deepen their knowledge by focusing on specific areas of interest. Final year students are also encouraged to develop a capacity for historical reflection, consolidating and extending their appreciation of recent historiography and methodological issues, and articulating their intellectual skills as an historian. For single honours students, the programme culminates in the preparation of an independent piece of historical research (the Dissertation) which encapsulates the skills gained throughout the programme and applies them to an area of interest which is precisely defined.

The Programme Overview gives more detail of the modules offered at each level of provision. It can be found at <http://www.history.bham.ac.uk/undergrad/mm/overview.htm>

Progression in teaching

First Year: You will tend to find yourself in large lecture groups for your core modules, but also participating in smaller seminar groups to support those modules. Research seminars are taught solely by seminar with about 10 students in each group.

Second Year: The opportunity for specialisation means that more of your time will be spent studying in small groups. The core knowledge modules (such as Historical Perspectives, Foundations of Modern Britain) retain large lecture formats for some elements of their teaching, but are supported by seminar discussion in small groups. Group Research is undertaken with a group of 4-6 students, and History options are typically taught in classes of about 10-20. Dissertation preparation is pursued independently with the individual support of a supervisor.

Third Year: Historical Reflections is the one core module in which the whole cohort attend lectures together, but the specialised nature of advanced study means that small group teaching and independent study become the norm by level 3: the dissertation is pursued in partnership with your individual supervisor, special subjects typically run in groups of about 10-15 students, and Reviewing History tends to work with about 4-6 students in each group.

Points arising

1. The progression in learning and teaching clearly reflects that in the acquisition of knowledge and skills, demonstrating a shift towards small group and independent study, which prevail at level 3.
2. Insights are provided into some of the skills that are seen to have particular value at each level of provision, including reflection and articulation of acquired skills at level 3. The implication is that a high degree of maturity is expected of students by the time they reach the final stages of their courses, requiring them to appreciate the nature and value of historical study and of the historical skills they have developed.
3. The statements are of particular value in helping prospective students to appreciate the nature of the intensifying demands that the programmes will make on them.
4. Used in conjunction with the department's module descriptors, the statements help to demonstrate more fully the nature of the progression that occurs. Thus, the third-level core module Reviewing History, notes that, during their second-year studies, students learn how to review an individual book, giving them practice in 'distilling the core arguments from a text, identifying the evidence on which it is based, commenting critically on the achievements of the author and suggesting where improvements, if any, might be made'.

At third-level, and building on this base, students move to the more demanding task of writing a review article, requiring them to deal with several books (and perhaps articles) relating to a given theme.

Reviewing History can be found at

<http://www.history.bham.ac.uk/undergrad/mm/reviewinghistory.htm>

The UCLan history progression framework

This framework has been devised over a lengthy time period to assist with coherent development with the UCLan history programmes. It seeks to summarise the nature of the provision made at each level, especially in relation to the growing use that students make of primary evidence in undertaking historical investigation.

Stage 1 (level 1)

At this stage, the programme aims to provide:

- insights into the nature and importance of history as an academic discipline;
- a thorough grounding in the types of history, the sorts of historical issues and the approaches to historical study that students will encounter at Stage 1 and beyond (levels 2 to 4);
- for single-honours students especially, a broadening of their historical studies, both temporally and geographically, thereby creating the opportunity to foster new historical interests, as well as providing an informed basis for subsequent programme orientation.
- a discrete, coherent programme of study for those who do not wish to take history beyond level 1.

Modules

- All students take Understanding History and The Modern World since c.1750 modules. The former, assessed by coursework, focuses on introducing the skills required for historical study at degree level, such as evaluating the reliability of evidence, encouraging students to reflect on the nature of history as an academic discipline and the benefits they can derive from historical study, including those relating to employability. The latter, assessed by seen examination and coursework, is concerned to introduce content issues, focusing on key developments in world history during the modern period and linking with issues that remain of major concern.
- Additional modules for single-honours students and joint-honours students that:
 - a) provide opportunity to study a period of history in some depth, including non-European and early modern history;
 - b) focus on developing historical skills in particular contexts, through such modules as Film and History and Introduction to Family History

Stage 2 (level 2)

Modules at second level are divided into:

1. Survey-orientated

Building on the knowledge and understanding students have acquired at level 1, these modules extend and deepen the factual background and historiographical understanding that students need to undertake the specialist modules that characterise level 3 provision. The surveys span quite lengthy time periods and may focus on a particular theme or offer more general coverage. Broadly-based examinations or coursework essays are used to assess students' general understanding of the modules they choose. Offerings include Civil Rights and Vietnam: The USA, 1954-1975 and Social History of Medicine, 1700-1990.

2. Skills-orientated

Again building on level 1 work, these modules are concerned with the practical use of primary source material, once more with subsequent provision in mind. Examples include Community History and History Around You: Approaches to Industrial Archaeology. Students aiming to submit a history dissertation are required to take the Sources and Methods in History module, a key feature of which is the effective planning of historical investigations. Staff research expertise is used to develop that of the students, helping them to work purposefully with different types of primary material, both documentary and non-documentary. Small-scale, closely-guided assignments requiring the use of primary evidence, are undertaken for assessment purposes. A suite of vocationally-related half modules enables students to gain experience of using historical evidence in work-related situations, including Insight into Museums.

The distinction between the two types of module is one of degree. Discussion of primary sources and their use takes place in survey-orientated modules and may feature in the examination component of the assessment. And the work undertaken in skills-orientated modules is rooted in historiographical concerns. However, in the skills-based modules, assessment in part depends on students demonstrating they can deploy primary evidence effectively in undertaking coursework assignments.

Stage 2 (level 3)

At level 3, students take:

1. Taught modules

These are characterised by:

- subject matter based on areas in which staff have particular research and publication strengths;
- assessment by coursework alone, with the requirement for students to demonstrate the effective use of primary source material in all modules they take.

Both long-period thematic surveys (eg. Technology and Its Social Impact in Britain, c.1650-1851) and short-period in-depth modules (eg. The Great Famine in Ireland, c.1845-1852) are included at this level.

2. Dissertation module

Building on both the skills-orientated and survey-orientated modules undertaken at level 2, this module gives students the opportunity to undertake a much more substantial piece of work than hitherto. They are required to demonstrate an ability to inform historiographical issues by the effective deployment of primary evidence. Progression is further achieved by giving students a far wider choice than at level 2 with regard to both subject matter and approach.

Level 4 (MA level)

Students take:

1. Taught modules

The characteristics of level 3 modules still apply, with teaching being more strongly focused on the use of primary material to inform historiographical debate and theoretical perspectives. In-depth case studies give students opportunity to engage directly and critically with the research activities of their tutors. Modules relating to dissertation preparation are also undertaken. They deal with research methods, the nature of history as an academic discipline and the historiographical aspects of individual dissertations.

2. Dissertation module

Progression is partly achieved by requiring students to undertake a far more substantial and detailed piece of work than at undergraduate level. They need to offer critical analysis of historiographical issues and/or theoretical perspectives; to inform their discussion of such issues by substantial use of primary evidence; and to demonstrate that, in a lengthy piece of work, they can mount a relevant, sustained and well-informed line of argument.

Points arising

1. The framework aims to provide guidance for the history course team on how a reasonable degree of consistency can be achieved in progression terms as the history programmes develop. It is not intended to be overly restrictive and it is subject to periodic alteration. Thus, a recent change has been made with regard to assessing second-level survey modules, with a choice of examinations or coursework being allowed to assess students' overall understanding.
2. The level 2 Sources and Methods in History module is a dedicated pre-dissertation module. However, linking with the point made in the Skills Development component of Section 5 (point 4), the other skills-orientated modules at levels one and two, at

least one of which must be taken, also help to develop the investigative skills that students require to undertake a dissertation.

3. The framework needs articulating in a more user-friendly form for students and prospective students. In doing so, questions arise about how detailed the framework should be in order to communicate the key points effectively to students and how it should be introduced to them. There is certainly a case for reminding them at the start of each stage about what is expected of them at that stage in relation to what has gone before.
4. As with the Birmingham approach, though to some extent in different ways, the development of historical research skills leading students to increasingly inform their studies by deploying primary evidence is a key progression element.
5. Devising a four-level framework that includes taught MA courses has the value of focusing attention on the value added of provision at this level. But it also raises the question of the value of preparing such statements for research degree provision, the next stage in the educational process.

The Indiana progression framework

The Indiana University historians have highlighted several key skills that history undergraduates need to acquire as they move through their programmes of study. These skills relate to:

- Assignments/evaluation
- Nature of historical discipline & analysis
- Dealing with evidence: primary sources
- Dealing with evidence: secondary sources
- Dealing with evidence: textbooks
- Argumentation
- Research
- Writing for History

With regard to each of these skills, they have articulated the increasing sophistication that is expected of students as they move from one level of provision to the next. In doing so, they state the levels of thinking expected of students. Additionally, they have identified the bottlenecks and difficulties that students experience in mastering the skills at each level.

The levels of thinking expected are:

- Level 1 comprehend/recognise
- Level 2 interpret/apply
- Level 3 explain/evaluate
- Level 4 create

Two examples of their approach are.

Dealing with evidence: secondary sources

100- level

Expected thinking:

- Identify author's arguments and discriminate between the argument and the evidence.

Bottlenecks & difficulties:

- Understanding the relationship between argument and evidence.
- Recognizing what an author's goals and assumptions are.

200-level

Expected thinking:

- Students will learn to distinguish between an author's main arguments and secondary points.

Bottlenecks & difficulties

- Distinguishing main and secondary points in readings.
- Understanding what critical reading entails.

300-level

Expected thinking:

- Should be able to evaluate the validity/strength and problems of an author's argument and evidence.

Bottlenecks & difficulties

- Evaluating an author's claim using the evidence and by comparing that author's work with the work of others in the field.
- Understanding why they need to evaluate different arguments about a problem of the past. This is related to the problem of not understanding the interpretative nature of History as a discipline.

400-level

Expected thinking:

- Synthesize major debates and issues contained in scholarly writings.

Bottlenecks & difficulties

- Evaluating an author's claim against the evidence s/he is providing and in the light of other works on the subject matter.
- Understanding why they need to evaluate different arguments about a problem of the past. This is related to the problem of not understanding the interpretative nature of History as a discipline.
- Developing their own voice when producing an argument in the face of articulate secondary sources.

Argumentation

100- level

Expected thinking:

- Students will be expected to recognize broad arguments about historical change based on and supported by course materials.

Bottlenecks & difficulties:

- Uncertainty of what a historical argument really is and what historians mean by evidence and examples to support a claim.

200-level

Expected thinking:

- Students should be able to produce arguments based on primary and secondary documents.
- Students will recognize the different elements behind the construction of historical explanations/conceptual frameworks/interpretations/arguments.
- Evaluate which argument is a more plausible one.

Bottlenecks & difficulties

- Not knowing what information to extract from primary and secondary sources.
- Recognizing what they could and could not argue according to the available evidence.

300-level

Expected thinking:

- Produce explanations based on evidence to address historical problems
- Imagine counter-arguments.
- Develop their own voice when constructing arguments

Bottlenecks & difficulties

- Thinking that there is one “correct” answer to the historical problem studied.
- Not having the confidence to recognize what they could and could not argue themselves according to the available evidence.
- Trying to accommodate different views when constructing their argument, even if they are contradictory or do not fit together. They do not necessarily evaluate each of them individually in order to come up with their own.
- Finding their position amidst possible arguments.

400-level

Expected thinking:

- Develop an argument based on original research

Bottlenecks & difficulties

- Thinking that their role is to collect information, not to necessarily provide an argument for the historical problem studied.

- Reflecting and evaluating their arguments in the light of other possible arguments.
- Evaluating their work.

Points arising

1. The framework provides a remarkably detailed and wide-ranging analysis of the type of problems that history undergraduate students commonly experience at different levels of provision as they proceed through their programmes of study.
2. Recognising and articulating the difficulties students experience in achieving increasing levels of sophistication plainly has advantage in devising remedial measures aimed at helping them to progress and has implications for the nature of provision offered by teaching team members at each level.
3. Key questions arise about the bottlenecks identified. For example, are some more fundamental in hindering students' progress than others? Why type of activities can students undertake to overcome the bottlenecks?

See Arlene Díaz, Joan Middendorf, David Pace, and Leah Shopkow, 'The History Learning Project: A Department "Decodes" Its Students', *The Journal of American History* March (2008), pp.1-15.

The Tuning Project competency levels

This project contributes to devising a framework of 'comparable and compatible' qualifications for higher education in those European countries taking part in the Bologna Process. The project team has delineated levels of achievement for students at the end of their undergraduate (first cycle) and masters level (second cycle) in several subject disciplines, including history. Whilst the project recognizes the importance of developing generic competences (or transferable skills) in degree-level teaching, the levels of achievement it delineates are stated in subject-specific terms. Those for history are set out below in a slightly amended form. As with the QAA qualifications framework (see Section 3) the descriptors for each level of achievement are seen as 'reference points for curriculum design and evaluation, not as straightjackets'. They are intended to allow 'flexibility and autonomy in the construction of curricula', whilst also providing a common language for describing curricula aims.

Undergraduate levels of achievement in history

This should include acquiring or experiencing:

1. A critical view of the human past, and the realization that the past affects our present and future and our perception of them.

2. Understanding of and respect for viewpoints moulded by different historical backgrounds.
3. A general idea of the diachronic framework of major historical periods or events.
4. Direct contact with the historians' craft that is, even in a circumscribed context, [in] contact with original sources and texts produced by professional historiographical research.
5. General knowledge of the methodologies, tools and issues of at least two of the broad chronological periods into which history is normally divided (such as Ancient, Medieval, Modern and Contemporary) as well as some significant diachronic themes.
6. The ability to complete, [and] present in oral and written form, a circumscribed piece of research, in which the ability to retrieve bibliographical information and documentary evidence and use it to address a historiographical problem, is demonstrated.
7. General knowledge and orientation with respect to the methodologies, tools and issues of all the broad chronological divisions in which history is normally divided, from ancient to recent times.
8. Specific knowledge of at least one of the above periods or of a diachronic theme.
9. Awareness of how historical interests, categories and problems change with time and how historiographical debate is linked to political and cultural concern of each epoch.
10. The ability to complete and present in oral and written form a medium length piece of research which demonstrates the ability to retrieve bibliographical information and primary sources and use them to address an historiographical problem.

The three-level approach

Based on the traditional three-year degree course, the requirement here is that 'successive levels should confront students with educational experiences of growing complexity'. The requirement might be met either through enhancing skills or introducing additional approaches deemed to be appropriate at a higher level.

The two-level approach

Influenced by established practice in the 'old' universities, this approach distinguished between an introductory first-level course, which prepares students from varying backgrounds for 'serious undergraduate work', and advanced course units, which are offered at any point thereafter.

Masters programme levels of achievement in history

He/she will have built further on the levels reached at the first cycle so as to:

1. Have specific, ample, detailed and up-to-date knowledge of at least one great chronological division of history, including different methodological approaches and historiographical orientations relating to it.
2. Have acquired familiarity with comparative methods, spatial, chronological and thematic, of approaching historiographical research.
3. Have shown the ability to plan, carry out, present in oral and written form a research-based contribution to historiographical knowledge, bearing on a significant problem.

Points arising

1. Whilst no division is made of the attainment levels within the undergraduate programme, planning the curriculum from the levels of competency anticipated at the final level has considerable use value. For example, if students are required to undertake a final year dissertation demonstrating a strong historiographical awareness and involving the extensive use of primary sources, what type of preparation will they require at previous levels if they are to do so effectively?
2. At master's level, the Tuning statement is less overt than the QAA qualifications framework with regard to students becoming engaged in original investigation. However, it does incorporate the notion of planning a piece of research at master's level, implying a higher degree of autonomy than would be expected with an undergraduate research project.