

APP in history revisited: The 12 important points you need to know, and 8 concerns to consider.

As we approach the introduction of APP in history, I thought I might offer a few further thoughts on this topical issue that I raised a few months ago.

Readers of Teaching History 137 (December 2009) will have read Jerome Freeman and Jo Philpott’s article which covers many of the important issues and raises a few questions. It also ‘leaks’ examples of the new APP framework for history with its 3 Assessment Foci.

Table to show links between Key Stage 3 History and the draft APP guidelines:

PRESENT ARRANGEMENTS	THE FUTURE UNDER APP
KS3 History – Key Concepts	APP History – Assessment Focuses
Chronology	AF1: Thinking historically
Diversity	
Change	
Causation	
Significance	AF2: Exploring interpretations
Interpretations	
KS3 History – Key Processes	AF3: Historical enquiry
Enquiry	
Evidence	
Communication	

What are the main messages?

1. APP should make teachers **less reliant on the use of specific assessment tasks and tests.**
2. Teachers should **draw on a wider range of evidence**, including oral work, direct observation of pupils at work and self-assessment. There is also talk of using information from other curriculum areas.

3. The **timing of the judgement** is crucial. Jerome states that APP guidelines can be applied to make a periodic assessment “when the teacher has enough evidence about what a pupil is able to do **independently** and in **different contexts**”. These twin issues of degree of independence and ability to apply are pivotal here and need careful consideration. How many different contexts for example? How much independent work, compared with other work. Elsewhere, Jerome refers to consistency. This presupposes that pupils will have lots of opportunities to apply these skills.

4. The idea of **sub-levelling abhorred by many of us has certainly not disappeared**. Instead, Jerome writes, “Where appropriate the NC level can be refined into ‘low’, ‘secure’ and ‘high’ within the level”.

5. It is suggested by Jerome that the **periodic judgement about levels should be made about twice a year**. What happens if your SLT wants it more frequently than that?

6. There is an assumption that there will be “**regular collaborative assessment and discussion**”. As always, this will be time consuming. When combined with a portfolio that genuinely tackles the issues, this will require considerable department time, especially in the early stages. Will SLT give any non-contact time for this? I think we all know the answer.

7. Most departments will probably start by **moderating just a very small sample** but will this cover all teachers, all abilities?

8. **There are three main assessment foci. But are they to be treated equally?** There is far more in AF1 than in AF2, and AF3 is more equivalent to the key processes. Should this pervade all work?

9. The Assessment Focus **criteria are not intended to be ‘dumbed down’ into a checklist of pupil speak**’ can-do statement, but should instead be used as a professional teaching aid, writes Jo Phillpot.

10. **The criteria are designed by teachers with the intention that they are used by teachers in their planning and reflection of pupil learning**. They are not designed to replace existing models of progression developed by teachers, writes Jo.

11. You will want to take this opportunity to **make the ‘learning journey’ explicit to the pupils**, explaining how the current work fits into their broader historical understanding.

12. Given the emphasis on variety of outcomes, you may want to spend longer thinking about what products are fit for purpose. Jo writes that she “**now places greater importance on the nature of pupil outcomes and how I am asking pupils to demonstrate their learning**”.

Questions and concerns

1. How long will it be before SLT are asking you to create sub-levels based on the 3 Assessment Foci?
2. To what extent will some teachers draw the targets they set for pupils from the crude AF criteria rather than more helpful models of progression they may have developed?

3. Will evidence from other curriculum areas really be worth the effort of collecting it?
4. How effective will internal moderation be? This is not 2 pieces of coursework for 40% of the cohort, but twice-yearly for all KS3 pupils in Y7, 8 and 9 (in a dwindling number of schools!).
5. How different will the outcomes actually be when it comes to moderation? Will we not simply carry on focusing on marking particular pieces of written work more carefully to criteria and then counter-balance that judgement with our more subjective view of pupil progress based on a wider range of evidence?
6. Who will monitor the balance of work for AF1, 2 and 3?
7. What work will need to be retained? Will a small sample be sufficient?
8. Will SLT support subjects by giving additional protected time for departmental discussion in the early stages at least?

There are many more issues to raise here, but let's keep it positive!!