

History Subject Area Group: *Common Reference Points for History Curricula and Courses*

Preliminary considerations

Defining common European reference points for History is an extremely delicate task. In contrast to the situation in some other subject areas, the ways in which History is conceptualised, structured and taught and its relationship to other disciplines are very different in the various European countries. The problems posed and the insights gained are nonetheless of more general use in defining strategies for other areas including those collaborating in the Tuning Project.

The Tuning Subject area group began its work on this theme attempting to define a «core curriculum» for History. The term itself is very much open to discussion in general; in the case of History it became quite immediately clear that at present it means, or is taken to mean, widely different things in different national and institutional contexts. For this reason the group has decided to utilise the insights that have come out of mapping existing curricula with the objective of taking them into account in the formulation of general guidelines and reference points for the disciplinary area.

In general terms we may say that «core curriculum» most often is taken to mean those contents and learning offers and outcomes which students are obliged learn, take up or achieve in order to receive a History degree. More specifically, it is usually taken to refer to those outcomes ***in the field of History*** which students must have achieved in order ***to***

receive a History degree. (In some cases it is mandatory for History students to take courses **in other related areas** such as Geography or Art History, or to achieve skills in other areas such as Informatics, Languages, or Pedagogy. These courses, although they may be part of the requirements for receiving a History degree, do not seem to be considered part of what is normally understood to be the «core curriculum» for History students. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to consider them too in any future recommendations).

It is equally or even more important for the History subject area to define «core curriculum» in another of its possible definitions, that is, the basic knowledge, skills and outlook which **any student taking a History course** should be given access to and hopefully make his or her own. This is because History is very often part of general education and the single student may be required or wish to take a small number of credits in History. This is quite as important for the subject area as the issue of curricula for History students.

On the basis of these preliminary considerations it seems appropriate to speak of «core curricula» in the plural, and to approach the topic first by mapping the present situation and considering the variety of logics and strategies represented.

Methodology

Because of the widely varying structure of the discipline as taught in the different participating countries, it seems reasonable first to try to understand where differences and analogies actually lie in the present systems. This endeavour regards both what is actually taught or learned, in terms of contents, skills and outlook, and how the teaching/learning experience is described and justified.

Other issues to be addressed are the progressive order —if any— in which certain contents are to supposed to be learned, the relationship of teaching/learning and research, and the specific issue of the History «core» for students whose main area of study is not History.

Further specific questions which should be investigated are, what are considered necessary or appropriate History studies for those who will become teachers at different levels? What are the related or even unrelated subjects, including ancillary subjects of various sorts which are recommended or required for History students? What linguistic knowledge, including that of ancient languages and of one's own language, is necessary or recommended? What is the place of the national or local history in the curriculum? Are there recommendations

which can or should be made about history teaching/learning in an informal or life-long learning context?

A final aspect which is tightly related to all the above is that of teaching, assessment and evaluation methods. For clarity these will not be discussed in detail here as they are considered in a separate line of the Tuning agenda.

Findings

The History subject area group dedicated an important part of the second Tuning meeting (held in Roskilde) to explaining and «mapping» possible ways of understanding the concept of «core» in the different participating universities. The results are contained in an annex to the minutes of that meeting. This endeavour continued in the third meeting (Gent) along with the discussion of the first draft of the present document. The second draft was prepared by incorporating the modifications suggested; furthermore a questionnaire for academics was prepared and circulated; a draft of a general formulation of outcomes to be expected at the various levels considered (first cycle, second cycle, courses of study in which history forms a relevant part, history courses for students of other subjects) was prepared and circulated.

The present version incorporates the results of the final discussion in the Tuning History Subject Area group, which took into account the comments and suggestions formulated in the Spring Plenary meeting of CLIOHNET, the Erasmus Thematic Network for History (www.clio.net).

The main conclusions which have emerged to date may be summed up as follows:

- Each national system must be seen as a coherent whole, in which the order, the contents, the teaching-learning and assessment methods are related to each other.
- A unanimous conclusion is the importance of defining the general ethical and heuristic reasons for studying-learning-teaching History.
- The elements that are in agreement (that is, which appear in all existing curricula) should appear in any proposed «core curriculum»: this would not be simply the minimum common denominator, but rather an agreement on necessary kinds of contents.
- It is important to point out the advantages the study of History offers to society and to individuals who study it as a degree programme or as part of their studies.

- The group underlines particularly the importance of **comparison** and **connection** (geographical, chronological) in historical teaching/learning and research.
- Other disciplines and competencies (the mother language, foreign language, Philology, Archaeology, Social Sciences etc.) are essential or advisable for the formation of a historian or more generally for the formation of a critical historical mentality.

Problems and insights

In general, it emerges from the survey carried out that there is something of a basic division between those systems in which the objective is first of all to transmit basic knowledge about different periods of history, often in a prescribed or in chronological order, subsequently dealing with more specific research topics and methodologies, and those which from the beginning seek to communicate a certain attitude or mindset, and deal immediately with research topics, giving less systematic attention to building up a framework of general knowledge. In the first case, with some degree of exaggeration, we might say that History is conceived of as an existing corpus of knowledge which can be arranged according to more basic or more specialised contents, and that the direct knowledge or experience of historiographical practice or research techniques should come in a second or third phase of studies. In the second case, notwithstanding quite relevant variations, we can say that history is understood to be a way of approaching reality which should be transmitted immediately, usually through actual examples of research or group work; whereas learning «basic» contents is less immediately important, either because it is considered the task of secondary school studies or because it is thought that the essential thing is that the student know how to find and acquire such knowledge when needed.

We can usefully conceive of this division in terms not of dichotomy but of a range of possible combinations, each with its specific characteristics. The range of combinations, which includes other factors as well, can be represented in simplified form: At one extreme we find several countries where either by law or in practice, courses of study are organised to begin with general mandatory studies in History according to large chronological divisions (i.e. Ancient, Medieval, Early Modern, Modern, Contemporary or recent), and where the student begins to have autonomous contact with original documents in the second part of the course of studies. At the other extreme we find two typologies: on the one hand Germany (where after the initial Grundstudium phase, the

teaching/learning offer is articulated on the basis of specialised themes according to the interests and expertise of the teaching staff) and Italy (where, until the current reform, courses did not need to be taken in a particular order and choice of subject matter was based to a large extent on research interests of staff although general knowledge had to be demonstrated at some point before receiving the final degree), and on the other Roskilde (not typical of Denmark insofar as it developed as an experimental University, but with some analogies to Uppsala), where the students from the very beginning of their University studies are asked to organise autonomous research groups in which themselves must define their theme, find the necessary materials to deal with it and prepare reports. All other systems fall somewhere between these extremes. In countries such as Germany and Italy where the existing system is very far from what we might consider the French or Spanish model, the tendency in adapting the systems to the Bologna-Prague process seems to be to define a progressive series of general contents, hence coming closer to the Franco-Iberian model. The traditional British and Irish system insists from the outset and in all courses on creating the necessary conditions for the student to accede to the historical perspective or mindset, which is considered to be of general ethical-political value for all citizens and not just those specialising in the subject.

We may note that such widely differing experiences and concepts of how the subject area is or should be organised make it necessary to build up new common reference points which take into account the various points of view. For this reason the UK benchmarking document is useful as a «checklist» to compare with the results of the autonomous work of the group rather than as a starting point to be modified on the basis of specific insights.

A general problem is that of articulating definitions and recommendations for «core curricula» in levels. This must be done for a variety of levels: first and second cycle both for History students and for students who will take History as a second or minor subject. Also, as stated above, it seems appropriate to consider general objectives for single courses offered to students doing general studies.

Suggestions and proposals

As stated above, in the various national systems history studies are organised according to different basic criteria. Since the general objective of any European core curriculum must be to use to maximum effect the rich diversity of the teaching/learning and research traditions, it is

obvious that the first principle is to preserve that diversity while giving teachers and students (and to the extent possible, the broader public) an awareness of it and hence of the specificity of their own national outlook.

All systems have drawbacks and advantages and in practice have their own ways of achieving an appropriate balance. Nonetheless we wish to formulate a general recommendation that various basic factors listed below be present in a balanced way, both in the first and the second cycle, and even in single courses designed for general students.

Hence:

I. Overarching objectives specific to History

1. It seems reasonable to propose that all history teaching, in whatever quantity and at whatever level, have certain general overarching objectives. These naturally can be pursued in any framework, but should not be ignored. These may be defined as acquiring a rational, critical view and insight into the past in order to have a basis for understanding the present and for informed citizenship.

2. It seems reasonable that all history teaching, in whatever quantity and at whatever level, have among its objectives that of furnishing some precise knowledge of events, processes of change and continuities in a diachronic perspective. It is essential that the student, however early put into contact with original research, be able to orient him/herself in the more general chronological framework of the past.

3. It seems reasonable that all history teaching, in whatever quantity and at whatever level, transmit so far as is possible an awareness of the basic tools of the historian's craft, a critical approach to historical documents and an awareness of how historical interests, categories and problems change with time and in diverse political and social contexts.

These general elements should be kept in mind whenever Historical studies are planned, executed or evaluated. At whatever level, it is important to transmit the concept that History is a perspective and a practice which has its own history, rather than a definitive corpus of knowledge which can be acquired incrementally, piece by piece.

II. Articulation in cycles

A particular problem appears to be defining realistic objectives or desired learning outcomes for the first and second cycle. It seems reasonable to calibrate the system starting from the objectives for the

second cycle and adjusting those of the first cycle appropriately in order to avoid unrealistic expectations for the first cycle and a lack of distinction between the two.

In this regard the definitions contained in the Scottish benchmarking document has been helpful; the differentiations contained in the legal definitions of the two levels in the new Italian system have also been of use. A draft formulation of the outcomes to be achieved at the various levels is annexed (Annex 1)

III. *Other disciplines in history curricula:*

Although this is not universally the case today, there is some degree of consensus that history students should have adequate knowledge of some other disciplines related to the historical sciences (such as, purely as examples, geography, archaeology, statistics, and/or other literary, scientific or technical subjects according to the branch of history pursued).

Although reality is today much different from the ideal, linguistic abilities also are of particular importance for history students. Appropriate levels of written and oral expression and understanding of one's own language are obviously essential, although in no country is such knowledge automatic. History teaching should include attention to the specific statutes of writing and oral presentation within the discipline. Students also need ideally to have knowledge of several languages in order to utilize fully the historiographical literature and to approach research in a critical fashion. Even if their area of interest is their own country in a recent period they will benefit by being able to compare other realities with their own. Specific objectives for language training for history students can be defined (reading ability, scientific historiographical vocabulary, understanding of the formation of national languages as an historical process, etc.).

IV. *National, regional, local History; European history; World History*

In some systems national history is taught along with general history; in others there is a strong separation, and the national history is taught in different courses by different professors, even belonging to separate departments. In either case the student should be given the opportunity to accede to the insights which can be gained by studying both, albeit in different proportions.

Something of the same nature can be said for the relationship between history regarding prevalently the regional, national, European

or broader world history. Mapping the strikingly different emphasis on history of different areas of the world in different universities and national contexts would provide interesting material for future analysis. In any case it is reasonable that the student have the opportunity to widen his/her horizons in both directions, as the comparative approach to the teaching/learning of History is invaluable whether on a micro or macro scale. This could take the form of a recommendation.

The question of how European history itself may best be taught/learned is a subject which is receiving specific attention from the History Thematic Network CLIOHNET and in the curriculum development programme being carried out by 38 Universities operating under the name of CLIOH.

In this regard it seems reasonable for Tuning and CLIOH to collaborate, to give greater force to their reciprocal activities, insights and conclusions. Synthetically stated, CLIOH has prepared and is preparing a variety of tools and materials which make up an «offer», an «arsenal» which teachers and students can use to create «CORE» modules (5 or more credits in general history for history and non-history students) which are based on the perception and the experience that the diversity of European traditions and historical narratives provides a privileged entrée into the way historical knowledge is constructed.

In addition to studying European history in this way, CLIOH proposes similar resources for teaching/learning about European integration and the ways the concept of Europe has been used and developed. Once again it seems reasonable to look for synergies with this pilot project in recommendations about teaching/learning European History in a comparative historical perspective.

IV. General skills

In defining the objectives of core curricula it is well to remember a series of skills and competencies which will be useful for all graduates, whether or not they will become professional historians. Such considerations will certainly have an effect on recommendations regarding teaching learning methods: self confidence, independent judgement, ability to make decisions, to gather information and to work with others for example can certainly be developed more effectively in some teaching formats than in others, and such aspects will need to be taken into considerations. Furthermore, the use of teaching methods which encourage capabilities not universally taken into account today (such as ability to work in teams, ability to organise

projects) as well as those which enhance qualities more generally assumed to result from the study of History (such as mental discipline, effective writing and speaking, precision and intellectual honesty) should in practice improve the quality of the transmission of disciplinary knowledge as well.

VI. *Lifelong Learning aspects*

This topic has not yet been thoroughly discussed by the group. Nonetheless it may be pointed out that the general criteria outlined above under point I in this paragraph (overarching objectives specific to History) should apply to the teaching/learning activities, informal and formal, which may be offered in any context including Life-long learning programmes. This point is important, because there may be a potential clash between «heritage» or «identity» history and the rational critical historical outlook which is being proposed here. This problem regards the entire field, but perhaps is particularly important in the context of cultural or educational initiatives taking place outside normal academic institutions.

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Annexes

1. Proposed formulation of appropriate achievement at different levels of History studies.
2. List of subject specific skills.

ANNEX 1

Proposed Formulation in general terms of the level of achievement which should be reached by History Students completing each level of History studies

Type of studies	Description of achievement
<p>History courses* for students of other subject areas</p> <p>*By course we intend a learning activity leading to assessment and credits.</p>	<p>A course (or courses) in History, which constitute a minor component of a degree in another subject should enable the student (to the extent possible in the time available) to develop a historical perspective on reality. This should include acquiring or experiencing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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, contact with original sources and texts produced by professional historiographical research.
<p>History as a relevant part of a degree in other or more general subjects (minor or double honours degree, degree in Letters, part of a teaching degree etc.)</p>	<p>All of the above remain the general objectives. The level expected will be higher, the contents more ample and detailed, the experience of different methodologies and historiographical tools greater according to the amount of historical studies permitted in the study course organization.</p> <p>In any case, to obtain mention of a relevant presence of historical studies in a degree, the student who has completed such a study programme should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have 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. 2. Should have demonstrated his/her ability to complete, present in oral and written form —according to the statute of the discipline— 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.

Type of studies	Description of achievement
History for first cycle History Degrees	<p>The general objectives remain as above: however the student at the end of a first level History degree should furthermore:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Possess 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. 2. Have specific knowledge of at least one of the above periods or of a diachronic theme. 3. Be aware of how historical interests, categories and problems change with time and how historiographical debate is linked to political and cultural concern of each epoch. 4. Have shown his/her ability to complete and present in oral and written form —according to the statute of the discipline— a medium length piece of research which demonstrates the ability to retrieve bibliographical information and primary sources and use them to address a historiographical problem.
History for a second cycle History Degree	<p>A student completing a second cycle degree in History should have acquired to a reasonable degree the subject specific qualities, skills and competences listed below (Annex 2)</p> <p>He/she will have built further on the levels reached at the first cycle so as to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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 —according to the statute of the discipline— a research-based contribution to historiographical knowledge, bearing on a significant problem.

ANNEX 2

List of Subject Specific Skills and Competences (on which the consultation with academics was based)

Skills referred to in definition of levels

1. A critical awareness of the relationship between current events and processes and the past.
2. Awareness of the differences in historiographical outlooks in various periods and contexts.
3. Awareness of and respect for points of view deriving from other national or cultural backgrounds.
4. Awareness of the on-going nature of historical research and debate.
5. Knowledge of the general diachronic framework of the past.
6. Awareness of the issues and themes of present day historiographical debate.
7. Detailed knowledge of one or more specific periods of the human past.
8. Ability to communicate orally in one's own language using the terminology and techniques accepted in the historiographical profession.
9. Ability to communicate orally in foreign languages using the terminology and techniques accepted in the historiographical profession.
10. Ability to read historiographical texts or original documents in one's own language; to summarise or transcribe and catalogue information as appropriate.
11. Ability to read historiographical texts or original documents in other languages; to summarise or transcribe and catalogue information as appropriate
12. Ability to write in one's own language using correctly the various types of historiographical writing
13. Ability to write in other languages using correctly the various types of historiographical writing
14. Knowledge of and ability to use information retrieval tools, such as bibliographical repertoires, archival inventories, e-references
15. Knowledge of and ability to use the specific tools necessary to study documents of particular periods (e.g. palaeography, epigraphy).
16. Ability to use computer and internet resources and techniques elaborating historical or related data (using statistical, cartographic methods, or creating databases, etc.)
17. Knowledge of ancient languages
18. Knowledge of local history
19. Knowledge of one's own national history
20. Knowledge of European history in a comparative perspective
21. Knowledge of the history of European integration
22. Knowledge of world history
23. Awareness of and ability to use tools of other human sciences (e.g., literary criticism, and history of language, art history, archaeology, anthropology, law, sociology, philosophy etc.)

24. Awareness of methods and issues of different branches of historical research (economic, social, political, gender related, etc.)
 25. Ability to define research topics suitable to contribute to historiographical knowledge and debate
 26. Ability to identify and utilise appropriately sources of information (bibliography, documents, oral testimony etc.) for research project
 27. Ability to organise complex historical information in coherent form
 28. Ability to give narrative form to research results according to the canons of the discipline
 29. Ability to comment, annotate or edit texts and documents correctly according to the critical canons of the discipline
 30. Knowledge of didactics of history
 31. Other (specify)
 - 32.
 - 33.
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