

# **Historical Association Survey of History in Secondary Schools in Scotland 2021**

***Joseph Smith<sup>1</sup>, Katharine Burn<sup>2</sup> and Richard Harris<sup>3</sup>***

## **Executive summary**

- This report details the results for teachers in Scotland of the Historical Association's survey of history teachers across the four nations of the UK. The survey was launched in May 2021 and remained open until the end of July.
- Seventy Scottish high schools responded to the survey out of a total of 357. This 20% sample size is very high for surveys of this kind.
- Despite the curricular entitlement to a 'broad general education' (BGE) until the end of S3, in 86% of Scottish schools, history became optional for students after either the first or the second year of high school.
- A minority of Scottish schools (36%) teach at least one lesson on the British Empire in the BGE. Where this is taught, it is five times more likely to be taught in one or two lessons than as a discrete topic. Just two schools out of 70 agreed that their teaching of the British Empire 'mainly focuses on the experience of empire on those who were colonised'.
- Sixty-three per cent of Scottish high schools teach about the transatlantic slave trade in the BGE.
- Around one-third of schools (34%) teach migration in some form in the BGE, but just three schools teach about migration from former British colonies
- A minority (43%) of schools teach about a non-European society in its own terms during the BGE course. Indigenous peoples of the Americas are the most common focus for non-European study.
- Just 17% of Scottish high schools teach about the Black British experience in the BGE, with just four schools teaching a whole topic about this.
- Black people have a greater presence in the senior phase of the Scottish history curriculum than in the BGE, with the transatlantic slave trade and the US civil rights movement being the most widely taught topics at this level. However, there are legitimate concerns with the Black experience being so narrowly focused on two traumatic periods, and also concerns about the absence of a Black *British* perspective.
- The histories of some historically marginalised groups were taught more than others. Women's history (taught in 87% of schools) and working/lower class history (84%) were more widely taught than LGBT+ history (41%) and experiences of people with disabilities (44%).
- Five per cent of schools agreed that they had made considerable changes to their history curriculum in the last five years to make it more inclusive. Among those who made some changes to their curriculum, a personal sense of social justice (88%) was the most common factor motivating them to do so. Conversely, 30% of participant schools said that they had made no changes to their history curriculum in the last three years to make it more inclusive.
- Lack of time, lack of money and lack of classroom resources were perceived as the main obstacles to making changes to the school curriculum, while the Internet and the support of subject associations were seen as the main ways of overcoming these obstacles.

---

<sup>1</sup> University of Stirling

<sup>2</sup> University of Oxford

<sup>3</sup> University of Reading

## 1. The nature and focus of the survey

The findings reported here are based on the response of history teachers to a survey distributed by the Historical Association to its members and promoted more widely via social media. The Scottish Association of Teachers of History (SATH) played an important role in distributing and promoting the survey in Scotland.

The survey's main focus was on the content of the history curriculum, with a particular focus on diversity. It was intended for secondary teachers, working in schools or colleges catering for any students in the 11–18 age range. The survey was launched in May 2021 (at the HA's Annual Conference, which was held online) and ran until the end of July. Responses were sought from members in all four nations of the UK, but this report focuses only on the 70 responses received from teachers in Scotland.

A separate report is being published for England. The numbers who responded from Wales (nine) and Northern Ireland (four) were too low to be able to make any meaningful claims about practice in those contexts.

### 1.1 The rationale for a focus on the diversity of curriculum content

The survey's focus on the teaching of diverse histories reflects one of the Historical Association's current strategic priorities to 'encourage and support diversity'. This involves commitments to 'encouraging a greater diversity of people to study history at a higher level' and to researching 'the barriers to teaching a more diverse curriculum' to direct the organisation in producing guidance and resources to overcome those barriers.

Although this focus was determined by the HA at a UK level, it is also priority in the Scottish context. In the wake of the 2020 Black Lives Matters protest, several petitions have been sent to the Scottish Parliament calling for the compulsory learning of the Black and minority ethnic experience in Scottish history.<sup>4</sup> In June 2020, CRER (Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights) wrote to the First Minister to recommend an addition to the Curriculum for Excellence's 'experiences and outcomes' for social studies to include: 'I understand Scotland's historical role in empire, colonialism and transatlantic slavery, and the diversity of Scottish society in the past.'<sup>5</sup>

The Deputy First Minister has acknowledged these increased calls for the diversification of the Scottish curriculum<sup>6</sup> and, at the end of 2020, the Race Equality and Anti-Racism in Education Programme: Stakeholder Network Group of the Learning Directorate of the Scottish Government was established.<sup>7</sup> The nature and structure of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence is important here. A Scottish Government reply to a recent freedom of information request around the teaching of Black History stated that:

'While Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is not prescriptive, so that learning can be tailored to the individual needs of learners, there are mechanisms in place to help to ensure that crucial issues such as race equality are routinely covered in the curriculum in schools across Scotland.'<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <https://archive2021.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/afroscotshistorycurriculum>; <https://archive2021.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/BAMEHistory>

<sup>5</sup> [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/b0353f\\_4512f355c85a40bdb08bd3384f65f5b0.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/b0353f_4512f355c85a40bdb08bd3384f65f5b0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://blogs.gov.scot/education/2020/07/14/black-history-in-scotlands-curriculum>

<sup>7</sup> [www.gov.scot/groups/race-equality-and-anti-racism-in-education-programme-stakeholder-network-group](http://www.gov.scot/groups/race-equality-and-anti-racism-in-education-programme-stakeholder-network-group)

<sup>8</sup> [www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202000098366](http://www.gov.scot/publications/foi-202000098366)

However, while the non-prescriptive nature of the Curriculum for Excellence opens space for the teaching of a diverse history curriculum, it also means that it is difficult to tell from the outside how this curricular freedom is being used. The survey therefore sought to understand more about the extent to which the Scottish history curriculum explores diverse histories and the context and legacy of the British Empire. Existing research into what history is taught by Scottish schools has been small-scale,<sup>9</sup> and so the opportunity to explore this question with a large-scale survey is both timely and essential.

The Scottish Association of Teachers of History (SATH) has also made a priority of these issues. The topics will be a major focus of the upcoming 2021 SATH Conference in November, with major contributions on the topic to be published in the 2022 SATH Yearbook.

### 1.2 School contexts and sample

Responses were received from 76 history teachers in Scotland, working in 70 different schools. Six of these 70 schools were fee-paying, 63 were comprehensive and one was a special school. Some responses (such as those asking teachers for their views or to give reasons for particular curricular decisions) were analysed at an individual level ( $n = 76$ ), but others (for example, reporting on the actual curriculum taught) were analysed in relation to the number of different schools ( $n = 70$ ). There are 357 high schools in Scotland,<sup>10</sup> and so this survey covered 20% of the total population – a very large sample size.

Since the overwhelming majority of schools (93%) in the survey were comprehensives, no attempt has been made to break the data down in terms of school type. Similarly, all but one of the 70 schools were co-educational, and White students were said to make up the majority of the school's intake in all but three schools.

### 1.3 Profile of responding teachers

Sixty-nine teachers gave details about the length of their experience. Fifty-three had been teaching for more than five years (77%) and a further ten (14%) had been teaching for between one and five years, with the remainder being NQTs (two) or in training (four). Of the 70 respondents who gave details about their position within the school, 18 were designated as the lead teacher or head of department for history.

All but one respondent self-described their ethnicity as White (94% White British, 3% White Irish). These figures are in line with the nationwide picture in Scotland, where 2% of teachers self-identified as minority ethnic in 2020.<sup>11</sup> Since 2018, there has been a concerted drive to increase minority ethnic representation in the teacher workforce, with a target of 4% by 2030.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Context – history in Scottish high schools

---

<sup>9</sup> Smith, J. (2019) 'Curriculum coherence and teachers' decision-making in Scottish high school history syllabi' in *The Curriculum Journal*, 30, no. 4, pp. 441–463.

<sup>10</sup> [www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2020/12/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-2020/documents/summary-statistics-schools-scotland/summary-statistics-schools-scotland/govscot%3Adocument/summary-statistics-schools-scotland.pdf?forceDownload=true](http://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2020/12/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-2020/documents/summary-statistics-schools-scotland/summary-statistics-schools-scotland/govscot%3Adocument/summary-statistics-schools-scotland.pdf?forceDownload=true)

<sup>11</sup> [www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-2020/documents](http://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-schools-scotland-2020/documents)

<sup>12</sup> [www.gov.scot/publications/teaching-diverse-scotland-increasing-retaining-minority-ethnic-teachers-scotlands-schools](http://www.gov.scot/publications/teaching-diverse-scotland-increasing-retaining-minority-ethnic-teachers-scotlands-schools)

Schooling in Scotland can be divided into two phases: a ‘broad general education’ (BGE), which spans the primary and lower secondary years, and a ‘senior phase’, in which pupils choose to study a smaller number of subjects in greater depth.

In the BGE, history is taught under the umbrella of social studies and is formally referred to as ‘People, past events and societies’. After the BGE, students can opt to study a subject specifically called history, which is assessed by the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Most students who opt for history are entered for National Level 5 (which includes an externally assessed examination) or National Level 4 (which is teacher-assessed). A small number of students are entered for National Level 3 or below.

The designation of the BGE was a major shift in Scottish education. Before the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), schools had narrowed students’ curricular choices considerably at the end of the second year of high school (S2). In contrast, policy-makers were clear that the new curriculum gave students an entitlement to a ‘broad general education’, which

‘stretches from age three to the end of S3... It is designed to provide the breadth and the depth of education which all young people will need in order to thrive now and into the future.’<sup>13</sup>

However, a variation of the two-year lower-school phase remains the norm in Scottish schools. A recent large-scale study ( $n = 107$ ) found that 65% of schools taught a two-year BGE and that such curricula were more common in urban areas.<sup>14</sup> This survey finds a similar picture, with 57 of the 70 schools responding to this survey (81%) making history optional after S2, while three allowed students to discontinue their historical studies after one year. In just nine schools was history compulsory until the end of S3.

No official figures exist for the numbers of students who continue their studies in history after it ceases to be compulsory, but Smith (2019) estimated this to be considerably less than 50%.<sup>15</sup> The reasons for this curriculum narrowing can be hypothesised: the cultural legacy of the former curriculum and the desire to increase the time spent preparing students for external examinations. Large-scale studies have found that schools in more economically deprived areas offer a narrower curriculum in the senior years of high school.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Education Scotland (2012) ‘CfE briefing 1’, <https://education.gov.scot/Documents/cfe-briefing-1.pdf>, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Shapira, M., Priestley, M., Peace-Hughes, T., Barnett, C. and Ritchie, M. (2021) ‘A coherent curriculum? An exploration of early secondary curriculum provision in Curriculum for Excellence.’ Presentation at 2021 BERA Conference.

<sup>15</sup> The 2018 SATH history teacher survey yielded a school-by-school average of 45%. In 2018, the number of students taking the National 5 qualification in history (14,473) was around one-third of those taking the same examination in English (44,477) (SQA, 2018). Since some students take the subject in S4, but do not sit the National 5 examination (and given the 45% indicated by the survey), we can infer that 40–50% is a fair approximation.

<sup>16</sup> Shapira, M. and Priestley, M. (2020) ‘Do schools matter? An exploration of the determinants of lower secondary school subject choices under the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence’ in *Review of Education*, 8, no. 1, pp. 191–238.

### 3. Teaching diverse histories within the high school BGE

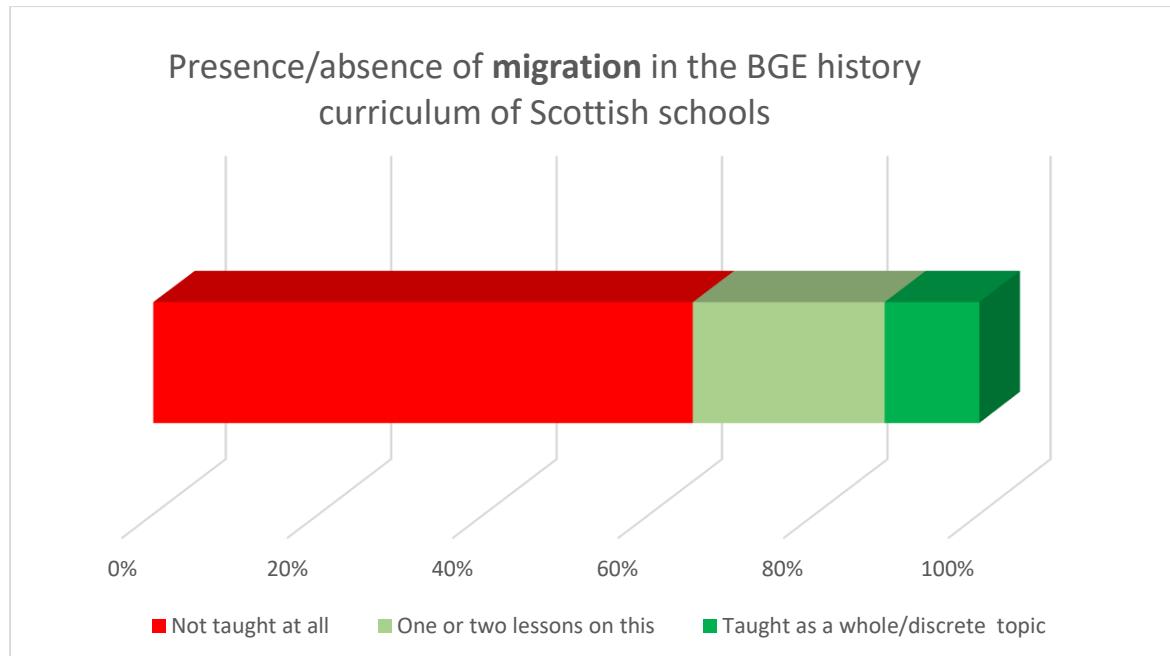
Given the focus of the survey on the teaching of diverse histories, respondents were asked about whether and in what ways they included teaching about various topics<sup>17</sup> within their BGE curriculum:

- Migration to Britain
- The British Empire
- The transatlantic slave trade
- The history of any non-European societies
- Black and Asian British history

#### 3.1 Teaching the history of migration to Britain

As Figure 1 shows, around one-third of schools (34%) teach migration in some form in the BGE; however, only 12% of schools taught this as a discrete topic. These numbers contrast with the English data from the same survey, where 72.8% of schools studied the history of migration in some form, with 40% teaching it as a discrete topic.

*Figure 1: The proportion of schools teaching the history of migration to Britain within the BGE*



Those who reported teaching about migration were asked to indicate the periods on which they focused and the regions from which the migrants that they studied came. Since this was a free-text response, answers varied considerably, from reference to single periods or topics – such as ‘Vikings’ or ‘Kindertransport’ – to lists variously structured by century period or theme – such as ‘1830–1939’. One school adopted a thematic approach looking at ‘Romans to the present day’. Table 1 contains double-counting, as some schools taught migration in more than one period.

<sup>17</sup> These topics were selected with reference to a range of factors: various petitions that had been presented to Parliament in recent months, calling for the teaching of more diverse histories, and recommendations from other organisations with which the HA is working to promote the teaching of more diverse histories (including the Royal Historical Society, the Institute for Historical Research, the Schools History Project and the Runnymede Trust).

*Table 1: Focus of schools' work on migration*

| <b>Focus of work on migration</b>                                     | <b>No. of schools</b> |
|---|-----------------------|
| Nineteenth/twentieth century  | 14                    |
| Between the fall of Rome and the Norman Conquest (especially Vikings) | 4                     |
| Roman Britain   | 3                     |
| Prehistory  | 3                     |
| Norman Conquest   | 1                     |
| Romans to the present day   | 1                     |

Schools were also asked from which parts of the world the migrants that they study came. Here responses had a clear Scottish (as opposed to UK-wide) focus. For example, there was an emphasis on the arrival of nationalities who came to Scotland in the nineteenth century – Lithuanians, Irish and Italians – and less emphasis on more recent ‘Commonwealth immigration’. The prevalence of these nationalities is perhaps explained by their presence in the SQA unit on ‘Migration and Empire’, implying that SQA syllabuses influence what is taught lower down the school.

*Table 2: Geographical regions taught in schools' lessons on migration*

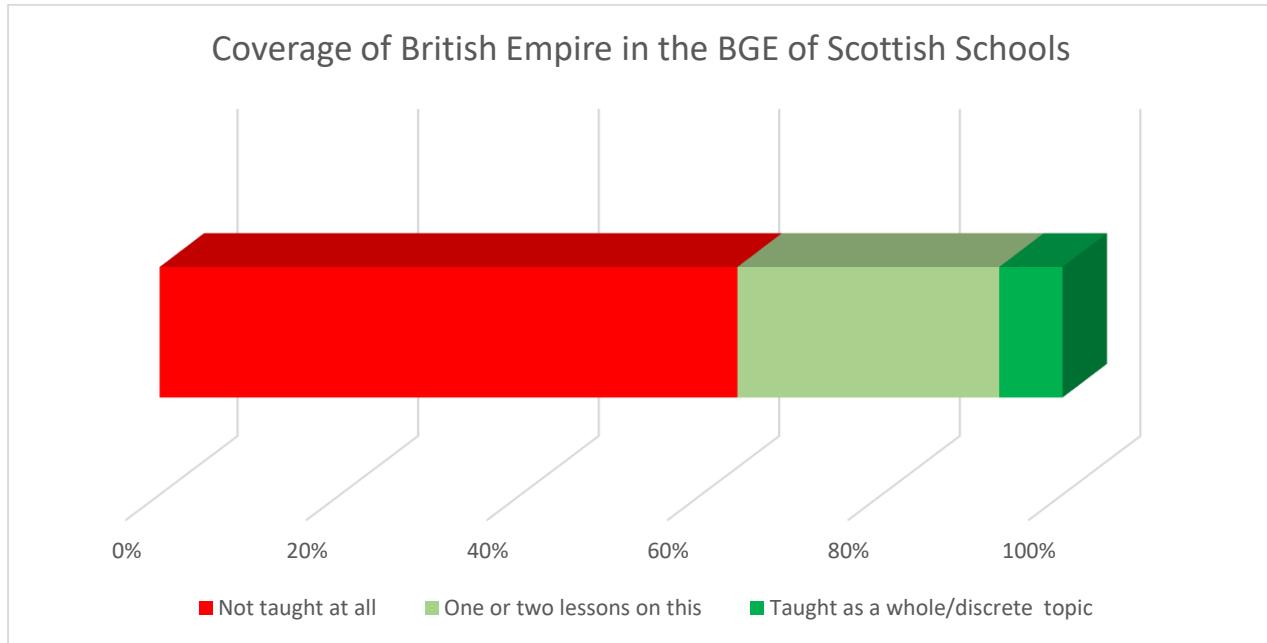
| <b>Country/region</b>                          | <b>No. of schools</b> |
|--|-----------------------|
| Ireland  | 10                    |
| Lithuania                                      | 6                     |
| Italy  | 5                     |
| Europe not specified                           | 3                     |
| Germany  | 3                     |
| Scandinavia/Vikings                            | 3                     |
| Romans (including Roman migration from Africa) | 3                     |
| Windrush (Commonwealth/West Indies)            | 2                     |
| British Empire                                 | 1                     |

There is a clear emphasis on migration within Europe, with just three schools exploring migration from former British colonies outside Europe. These figures contrast with data from England, where teaching about migration from the West Indies (36% of schools) and Africa (30% of schools) is more common.

### [3.2 Teaching the history of the British Empire in the BGE](#)

As Figure 2 shows, nearly two-thirds of Scottish schools (64%) do not teach about the British Empire in the BGE. Where the British Empire is taught, it is five times more likely to be taught in one or two lessons than as a discrete topic.

*Figure 2: The proportion of schools teaching the British Empire within the BGE*



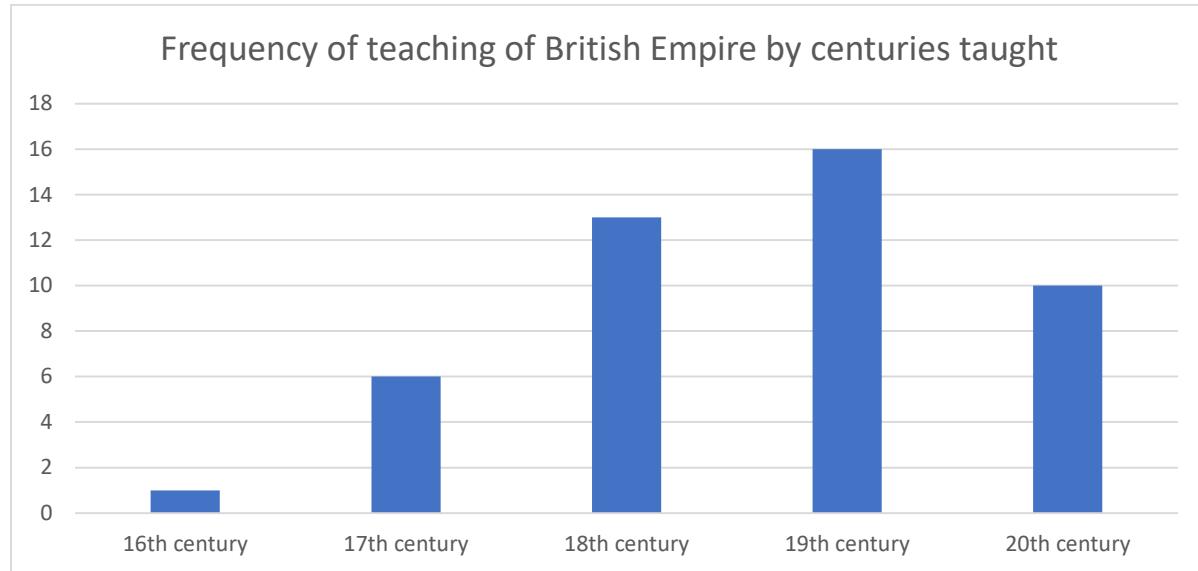
There was considerable geographic coverage of the Empire across the schools within the sample, but several topics were more common than others. Popular topics that included discussion of the Empire were the role of the Empire in the World Wars, the slave trade and the American Revolution.

*Table 3: Geographical regions taught in schools' lessons on the British Empire*

| Country/region                | No. of schools |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| North America (not Caribbean) | 9              |
| India                         | 7              |
| Australia/New Zealand         | 6              |
| South Africa                  | 3              |
| Africa                        | 2              |
| Slavery                       | 1              |
| Caribbean in slave trade      | 1              |
| Central America               | 1              |

Figure 3 shows that study of the empire in concentrated on the high-imperial period in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with much less coverage of either the origins of the empire or its decline. Three schools said that they taught specifically about the end of empire and decolonisation. However, there were anomalous results in this that make the data unreliable. For example, one of the three schools agreeing that it taught decolonisation gave the example of Africa in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries.

*Figure 3: Periods of the British Empire taught in schools*



*Table 4: Does your teaching about the British Empire include consideration of the experience of the impact of empire on the colonised and/or on Britain itself?*

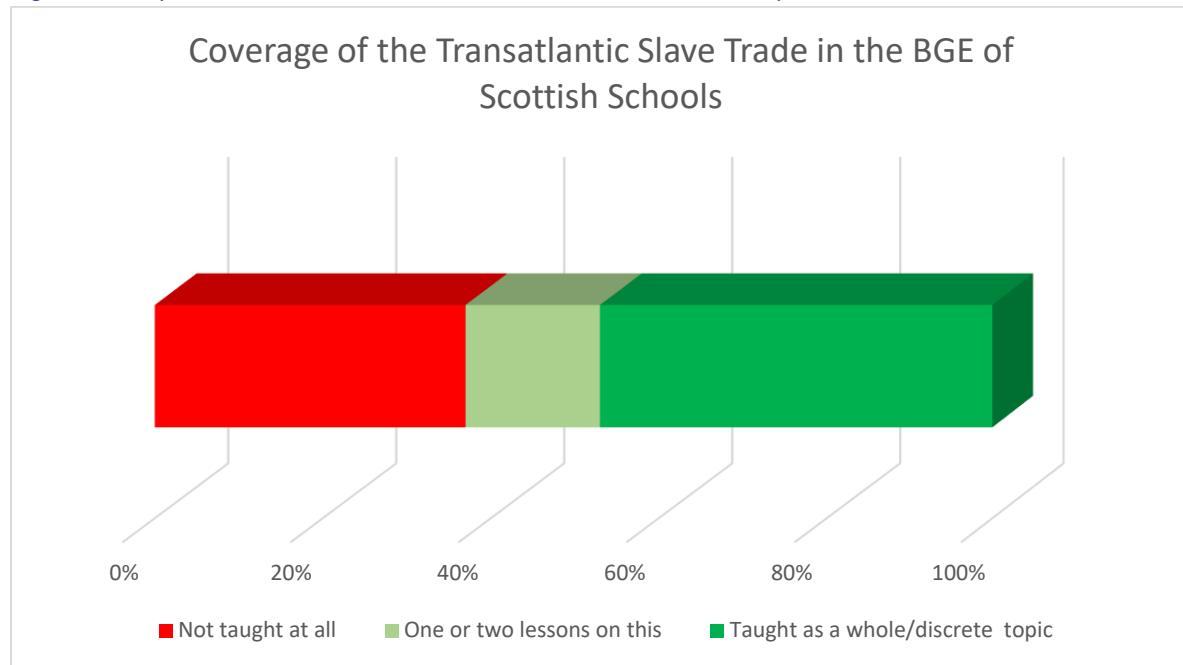
| Focus  | No. of schools |
|--|----------------|
| Our curriculum mainly focuses on the impact of empire within Britain   | 10             |
| Our curriculum includes a focus on the experience of the colonised and on the impact of empire within Britain itself | 13             |
| Our curriculum mainly focuses on the experience of empire of those who were colonised                                | 2              |

As Table 4 shows, even in the minority of schools teaching the British Empire, a focus on the impact of empire on Britain dominates. In just two schools out of the 70 surveyed was there a deliberate and sustained emphasis on the perspective of the colonised.

### 3.3 Teaching the transatlantic slave trade in the BGE

The transatlantic slave trade is not widely taught in the BGE of Scottish schools: 37% of schools do not teach it at all. However, of the 25 schools that did not teach the slave trade at BGE, 23 taught it at National Level. This suggests that curriculum decisions are motivated in part by a desire to avoid repeating topics between BGE and Nationals. While there are understandable reasons to avoid this duplication of content, the consequences of not covering this topic in the BGE arguably outweigh these. Nationwide, around 50% of students do not study history beyond the BGE – if these students are not taught about this topic in the first two years of school, then they will have no structured opportunity to learn about it.

*Figure 4: Do you teach about the transatlantic slave trade within your BGE Years S1 to S3 curriculum?*



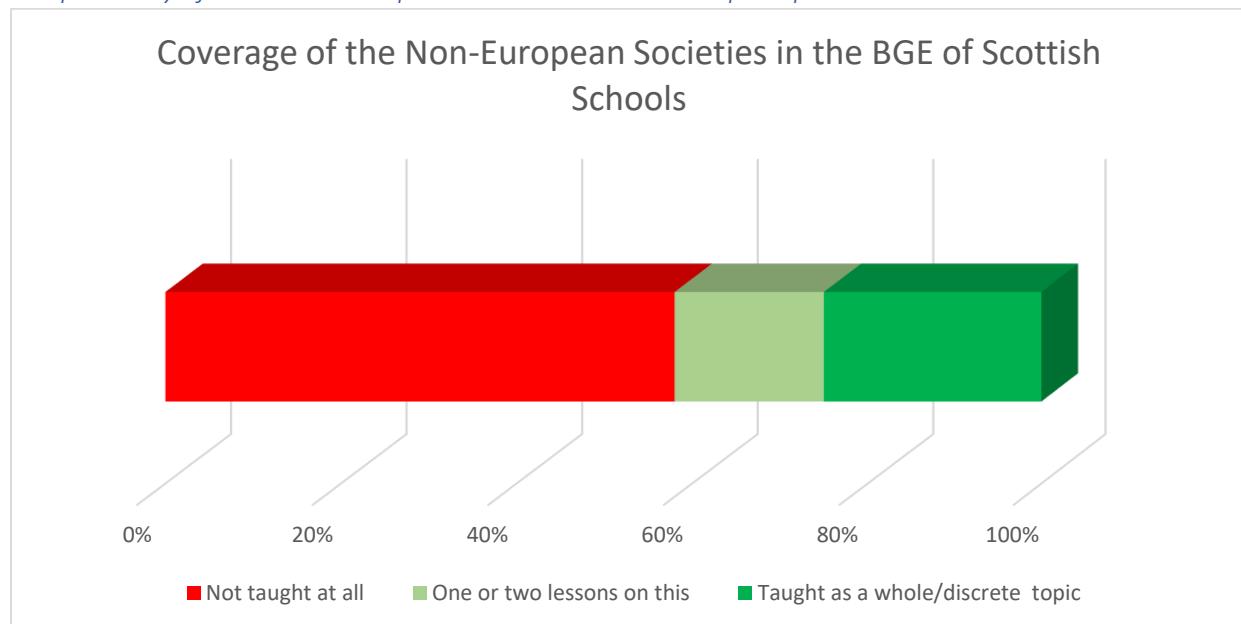
Where the transatlantic slave trade is taught, it is more likely to be in one or two lessons (47% of schools) rather than as a sustained topic (16% of schools). Such limited coverage runs the risk of superficiality and oversimplification. Table 5 shows the answers to a follow-up question around the content of study of slavery, and gives some indication of what schools include and exclude from the teaching of this topic.

*Table 5: Percentage of schools agreeing that they teach a specific area of the transatlantic slave trade (TAST)*

| Prompt  | Percentage of schools teaching TAST | Percentage of total schools surveyed |
|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Forms of slavery/slave trading that pre-dated or fed into the transatlantic slave trade | 53                                  | 33                                   |
| The development of the ‘triangular trade’   | 95                                  | 59                                   |
| The experiences of enslaved peoples   | 100                                 | 61                                   |
| Forms of resistance or rebellion by enslaved peoples                                    | 74                                  | 46                                   |
| Other forms of opposition to the slave trade, including the campaign for abolition      | 77                                  | 47                                   |
| Legacies of the trade in enslaved people  | 19                                  | 11                                   |

### 3.4 Teaching non-European societies in the BGE

*Figure 5: Does your BGE Years S1 to S3 curriculum include the study of any non-European societies independently of their relationships with Britain or other European powers?*



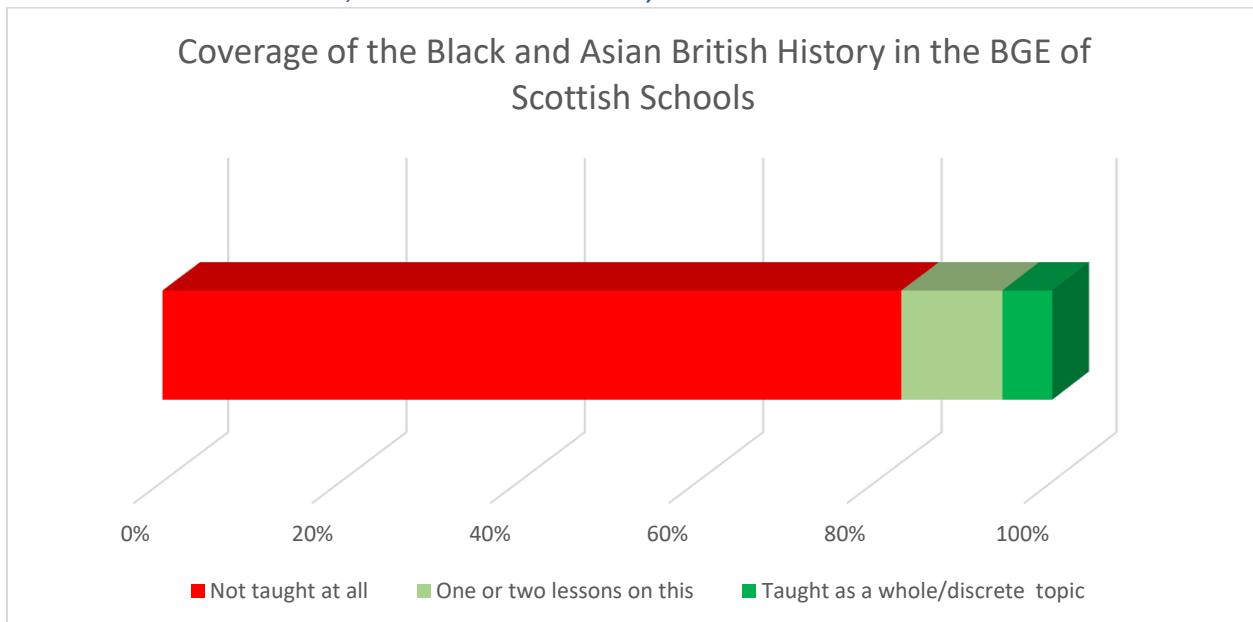
A minority (43%) of schools teach about a non-European society in its own terms during the BGE course. Of those schools that do teach a non-European society, more teach it as a discrete topic than as isolated lessons. There is no requirement to teach non-European history within the Curriculum for Excellence's 'experiences and outcomes' for social studies. However, students should be able to 'explain the similarities and differences between the lifestyles, values and attitudes of people in the past by comparing Scotland with a society in Europe or elsewhere' (SOC 3-04a), and those schools covering Fourth Level in the BGE should allow children to 'investigat[e] a meeting of cultures in the past and [be able to] analyse the impact on the societies involved' (SOC 4-05c).

*Table 6: Which specific societies do you teach about? (Multiple responses possible, coded by report author)*

| Non-European context                | Frequency |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| Indigenous peoples of North America | 7         |
| Mesoamerican civilizations          | 6         |
| Precolonial Africa                  | 4         |
| USA                                 | 4         |
| China                               | 3         |
| Ancient Egypt                       | 2         |
| Russia/USSR                         | 2         |
| Feudal Japan                        | 1         |
| Mongol Empire                       | 1         |

### 3.5 Teaching Black and Asian British history in the BGE

*Figure 6: Does your Key Stage 3/BGE Years S1 to S3 curriculum include specific study of any aspects of Black and Asian British history other than those already mentioned above?*



Only 12 schools out of the 70 surveyed said that they taught any additional Black and/or Asian British history, and four of these taught a discrete topic. However, when the data is analysed further, it seems that some respondents misread the question and offered American examples (highlighted in the table below).

*Table 7: Topics where Black and Asian British history were taught*

| Black and Asian British history            | Frequency |
|--|-----------|
| Black and Asian soldiers in the World Wars | 3         |
| Black Romans in Britain                    | 2         |
| Windrush migration                         | 1         |
| Civil rights in 1960s USA                  | 2         |

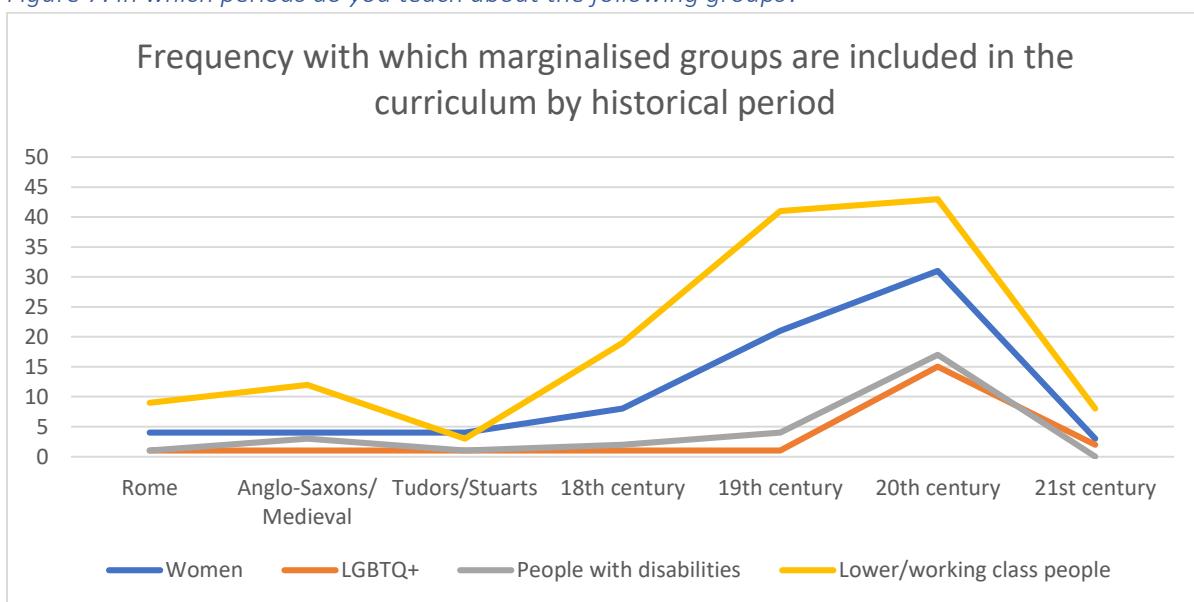
### 3.6 Teaching historically marginalised groups within the BGE curriculum

The histories of some historically marginalised groups were taught more than others. Women's history (taught in 87% of schools) and working/lower class history (84%) were more widely taught than LGBT+ history (41%) and the experiences of people with disabilities (44%). There were some anomalies in this data. For example, two respondents who answered 'not at all' to the question of whether they studied women in history later gave examples of women in their curriculum.

Table 8: In what ways do you teach the history of the following groups within your BGE curriculum?

|                          | As individual stories | As distinct units | As a defined theme or focus within particular units (e.g. women in Nazi Germany) | Fully integrated within our teaching of all topics | Not at all |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|--|--|------------|
| Women                    | 27                    | 8                 | 39   | 7  | 9          |
| LGBTQ+                   | 14                    | 1                 | 8  | 2  | 41         |
| People with disabilities | 10                    | 0                 | 12   | 2  | 39         |
| Lower/working class      | 21                    | 2                 | 29   | 11   | 11         |

Figure 7: In which periods do you teach about the following groups?<sup>18</sup>



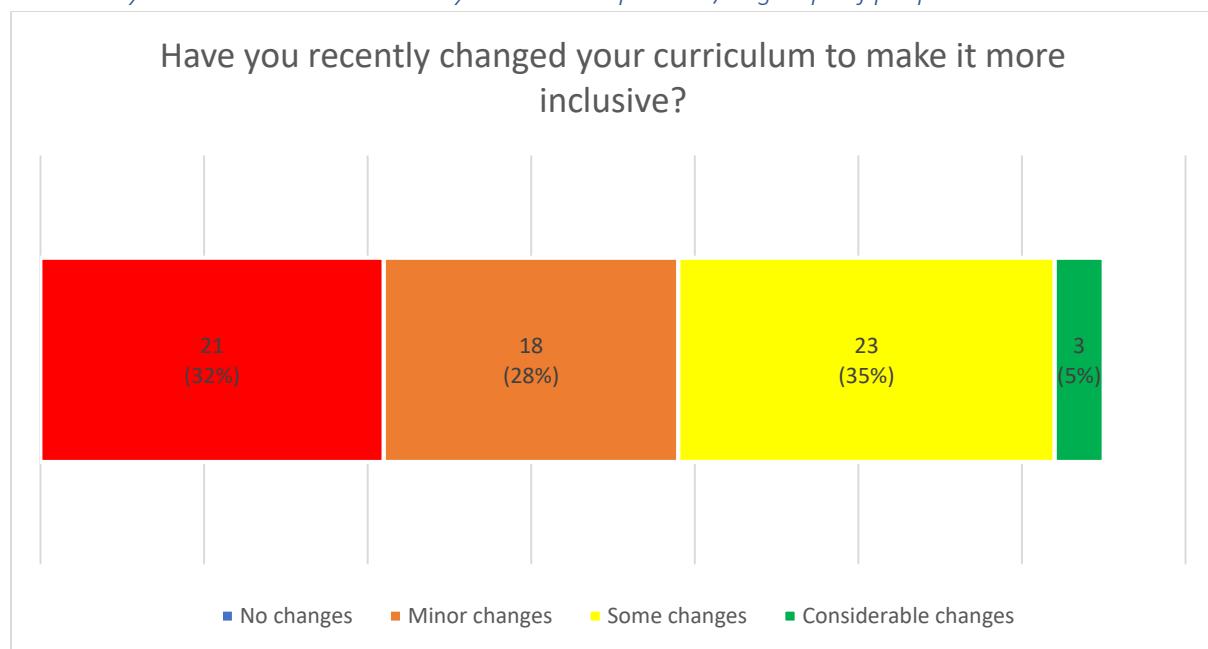
The data in Figure 7 indicates that the history of marginalised groups is more commonly taught in more recent historical periods. In one sense this is unsurprising, as these groups have become more visible in the historical records in recent years. However, the data suggests that women and working class histories continue to be taught through the prism of the struggle for suffrage and the impact of the Industrial Revolution.

<sup>18</sup> The options offered perhaps suited an English context better than a Scottish one. For example, there was no ‘Tudor period’ in Scotland, while ‘Anglo-Saxon’ poorly captures the diversity in Scottish society in this period. Similarly, the existence of ‘modern studies’ as a distinct and compulsory part of the curriculum means that these topics may be taught in a twentieth/twenty-first-century context elsewhere in the social studies curriculum.

## 4. Recent changes/development to school-based curricula

The curriculum in the broad general education phase is non-statutory, meaning that schools have considerable autonomy over what is taught. This question asked whether schools were using their curricular autonomy to develop more inclusive curricula.

*Figure 8: Have you or your department made any changes to the BGE Years S1 to S3 curriculum in the last three years to include more history about the topics and/or groups of people mentioned above?*

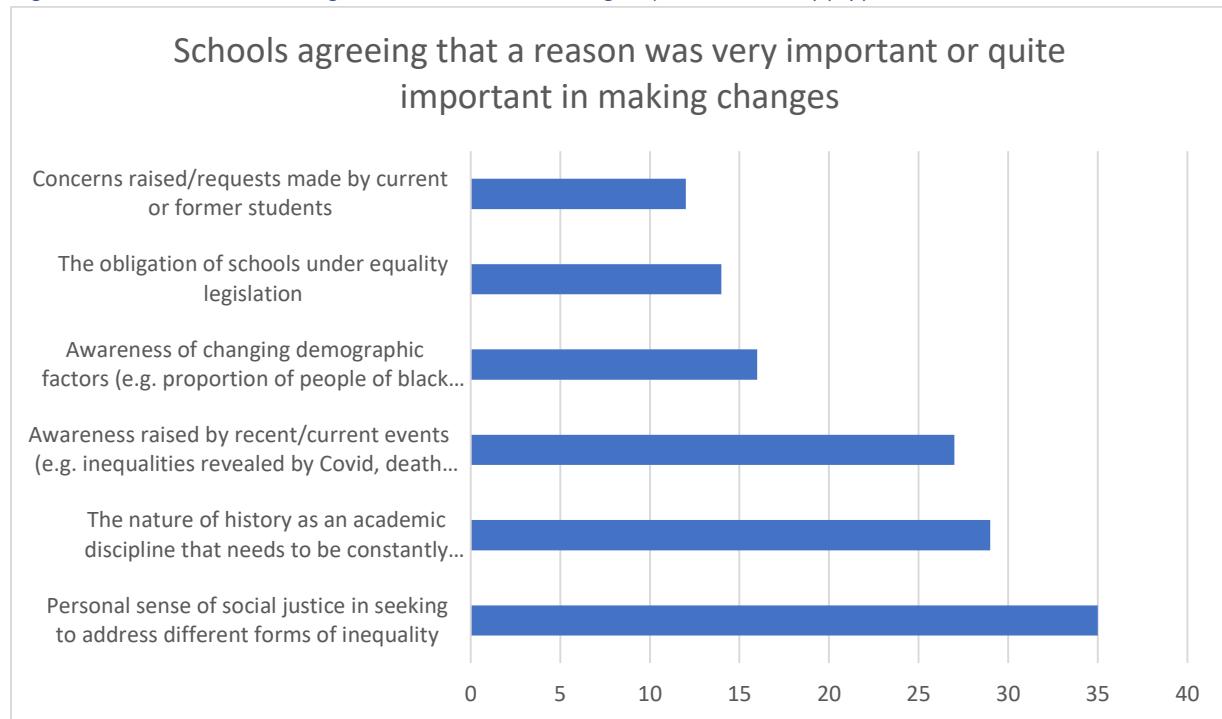


The data suggests that few schools (5% of those who answered) have made considerable changes to the BGE history curriculum to make it more inclusive. Examples of major changes in approach included:

- ‘Linking with the HET to improve learner experience of Holocaust topic, included stories of refugees’
- ‘Included Windrush immigration to our immigration unit, added a unit on Mansa Musa and Mali in our Voyages of Discovery Unit, and added lessons on LGBT and women’s rights in our 60s Unit’
- ‘Introducing teaching of Scotland’s role in the slave trade’

Schools that did make changes were asked to comment on the reasons for this using a pre-selected list of factors and a Likert scale. Figure 9 shows the reasons that schools identified as either ‘very’ or ‘quite’ important. The major motivating factor – identified by 88% of schools that answered the question – was a personal sense of social justice. This commitment to social justice among the Scottish history teaching community is in keeping with the GTCS Professional Standards, the first of which commits registered teachers to ‘the educational and social values of sustainability, equality and justice’. Less significant reasons related to equality legislation, demands of students and an awareness of demographic change.

*Figure 9: Factors motivating schools to make changes (tick all that apply)*

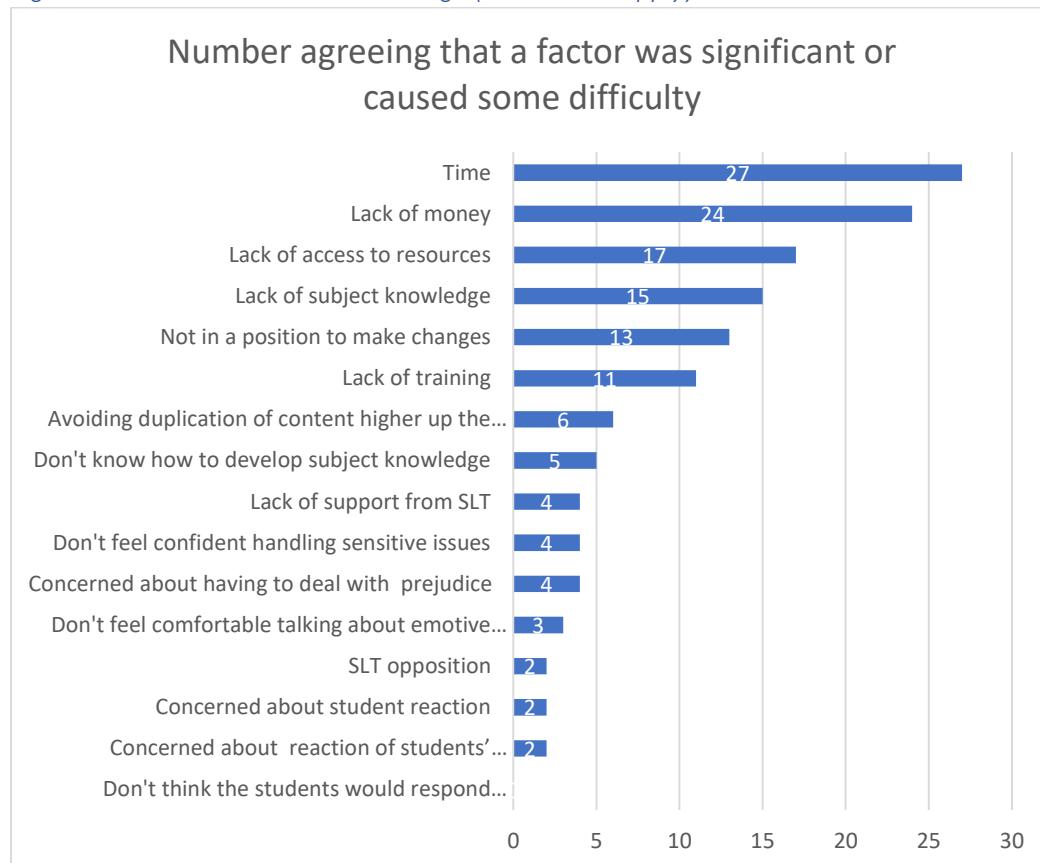


At the other extreme, 21 survey schools in Scotland (30%) have made no changes to their BGE history curriculum in the last three years. Schools were asked about the reasons for this, and 19 schools responded. Of these, five felt that ‘there did not seem to be any need to make changes’, while the remainder cited a range of barriers to making these changes. Of the 14 who cited barriers to change, nine were teachers who felt that they ‘were not in a position to make these changes’ (of whom only one was a subject lead). Of those who felt that they were in a position to make changes, lack of money, lack of time and lack of access to resources were given as the most significant barriers to changing their curriculum.

## 5. Barriers and support in changing the curriculum

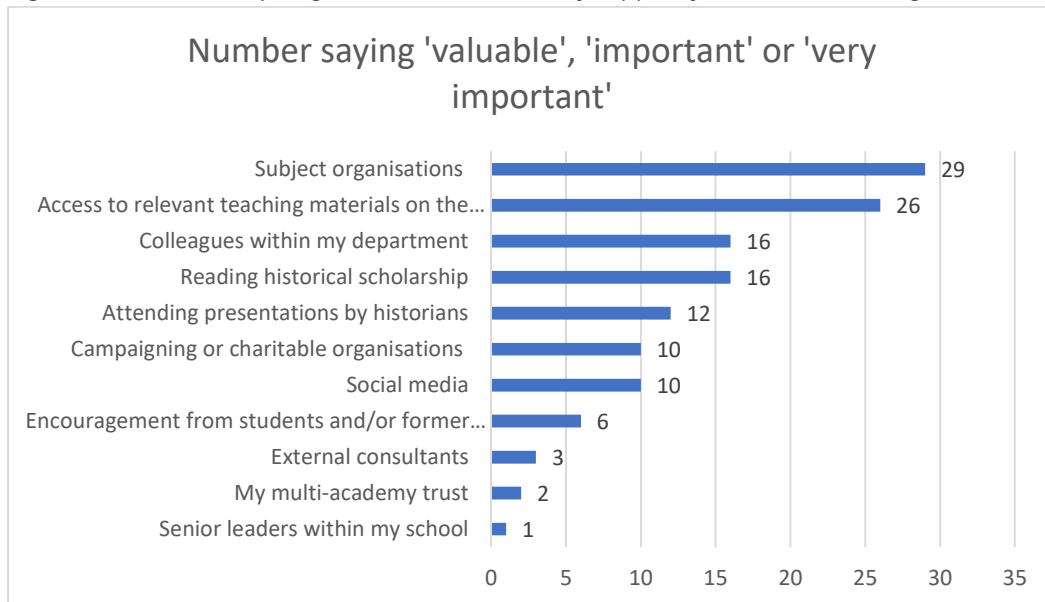
Respondents who had changed their curriculum were asked about barriers they had faced in making these changes. Figure 10 shows that the principal barriers were logistical/financial, as opposed to cultural or ideological. Few teachers anticipated objections to diversifying their curriculum from colleagues, students or parents, but many felt that time, money or resources were a significant barrier to change.

*Figure 10: Perceived barriers to change (tick all that apply)*



Subject organisations and the Internet were the main sources of advice and support for history teachers in Scotland. External consultants and senior leadership colleagues were the sources of advice consulted by fewest respondents.

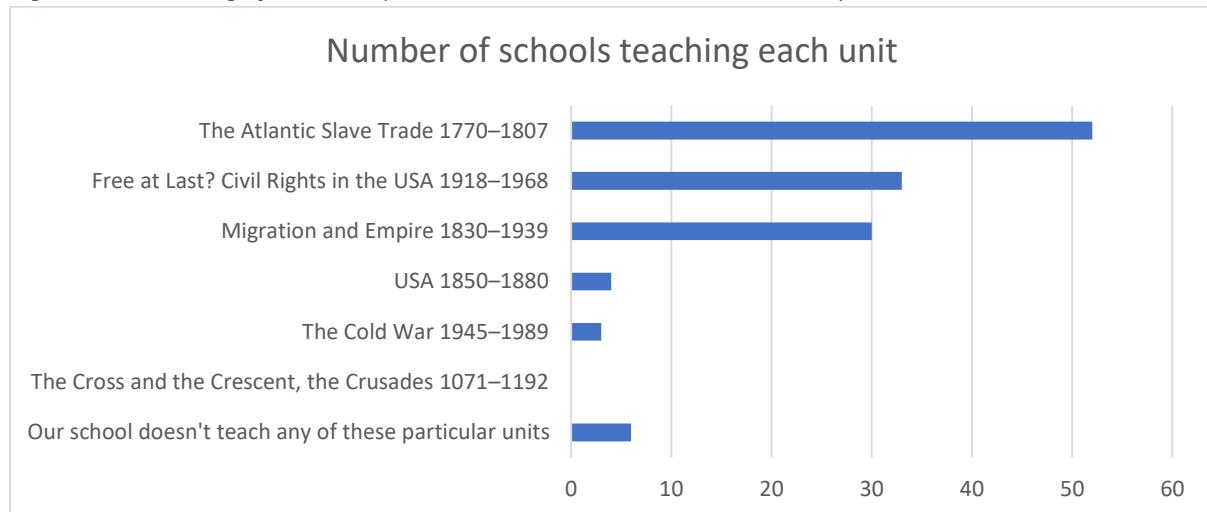
*Figure 11: Where did you get advice or sources of support from in overcoming these barriers?*



## 6. Topic choices in National 4 and National 5

Black people have a greater presence in the senior phase of the Scottish history curriculum than in the BGE, with the transatlantic slave trade and the US civil rights movement being the most widely taught topics at this level. However, there are legitimate concerns with the Black experience being so narrowly focused on two traumatic periods, and also concerns about the absence of a Black *British* perspective. ‘Migration and Empire 1830–1939’ is another widely taught topic that provides students with the opportunity to learn about Scottish emigration to the Empire, as well as the reasons for immigration to Scotland and the experiences of these groups. In terms of migration to Scotland, the SQA specification recommends a focus on the experiences of Irish, Lithuanians, Jews and Italians.<sup>19</sup>

*Figure 12: Teaching of non-European and diverse histories in the History Nationals course*



<sup>19</sup> [www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files\\_ccc/n5-course-spec-history.pdf](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/n5-course-spec-history.pdf), p. 9.

## 7. Representativeness of the students studying history beyond the BGE

### 7.1 Representativeness by ethnic background

Schools were asked ‘How well does the uptake of history in your school at National 5 reflect the ethnic background or heritage of your school population?’ In 81% of cases, schools felt that there was a very close match; 13% thought that some heritages were ‘somewhat underrepresented’, while 6% thought that some groups were ‘not represented at all’ or ‘significantly underrepresented’. Respondents were also asked what kind of imbalance they had identified. This question received 11 responses, but in six cases schools replied that the BAME student population was too small to give an answer. Scotland is significantly less ethnically diverse than other parts of the UK, with only 8.2% of the population in 2011 identifying as something other than ‘White Scottish or ‘White other British’, compared to 19.5% in England and Wales. However, ethnic diversity does vary considerably by region: only in Scotland’s four largest cities does ‘White British’ make up less than 90% of self-described ethnicity.<sup>20</sup>

Two schools identified an underrepresentation of Black students, a further two an underrepresentation of Asian students and one school just responded ‘non-White’. When asked about potential reasons for this imbalance, six schools replied. Two schools inferred that science subjects were more highly regarded in some minority ethnic communities, while two suggested that the topics might have put off some students. A further two schools did not want to speculate about the reasons for this.

### 7.2 Representativeness by gender

Sixty-six co-educational schools responded to this question and 56 (86%) felt that there was a close match between the gender balance of students opting for history and the school population at large. Of the remaining ten schools, five felt that boys were disproportionately represented and five felt that the same was true of girls. Of the three schools that attempted to explain this imbalance, one felt that the topics (appeasement and World War II) appealed more to boys, while two felt that the gender of the teaching staff was the most important factor.

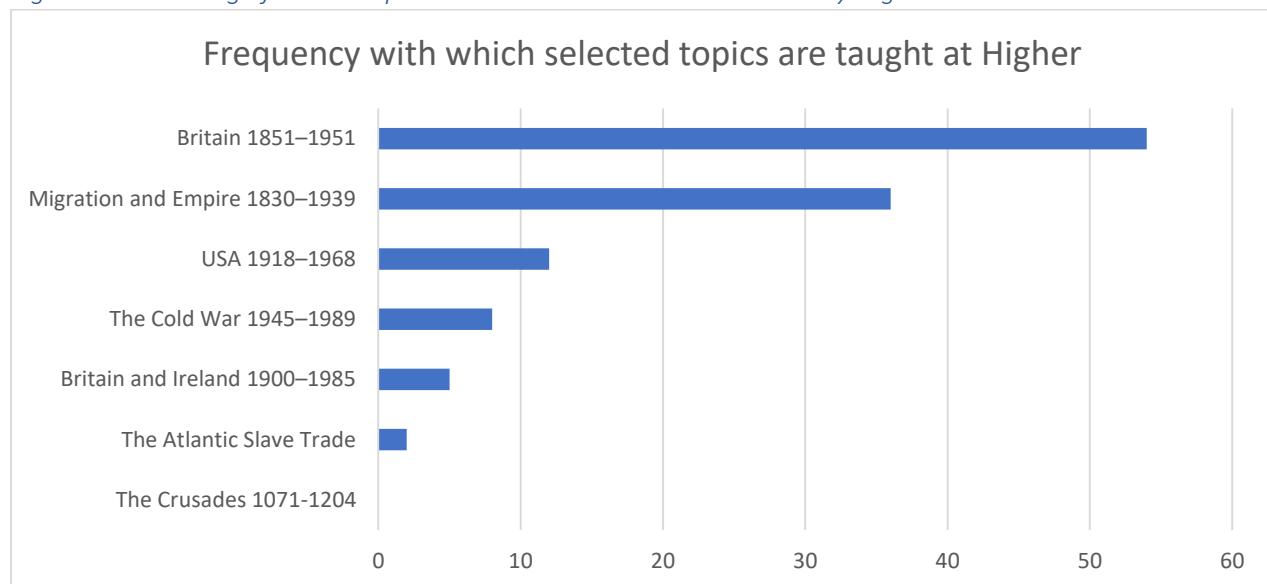
---

<sup>20</sup> [www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/census-results/at-a-glance/ethnicity](http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/census-results/at-a-glance/ethnicity)

## 8. History at SCQF Level 6 and 7

Sixty-five schools taught Higher history. Thirty-five schools ‘regularly’ taught Advanced Higher, 14 taught it ‘occasionally’ and 15 did not teach it at all. Figures 13 and 14 show that there is a continued bias towards the teaching of European history in the Higher and Advanced Higher courses. This bias is, in part, a function of the one-third Scottish, one-third British, one-third European and world structure of the examination syllabus.

*Figure 13: Teaching of non-European and diverse histories in the history Higher course<sup>21</sup>*



*Figure 14: Teaching of non-European and diverse histories in the history Advanced Higher course*

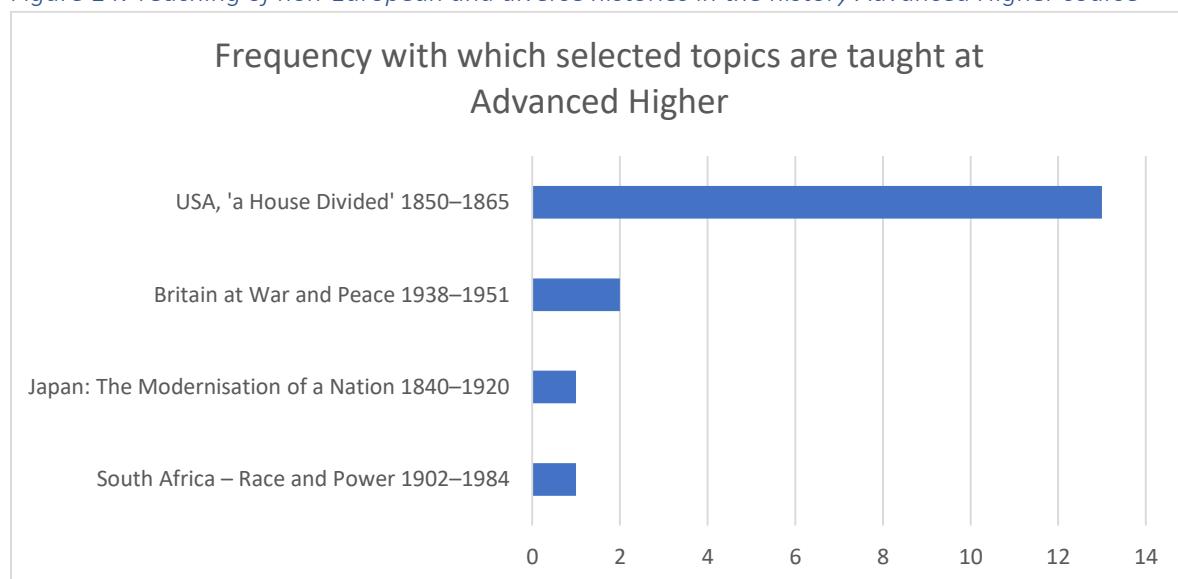
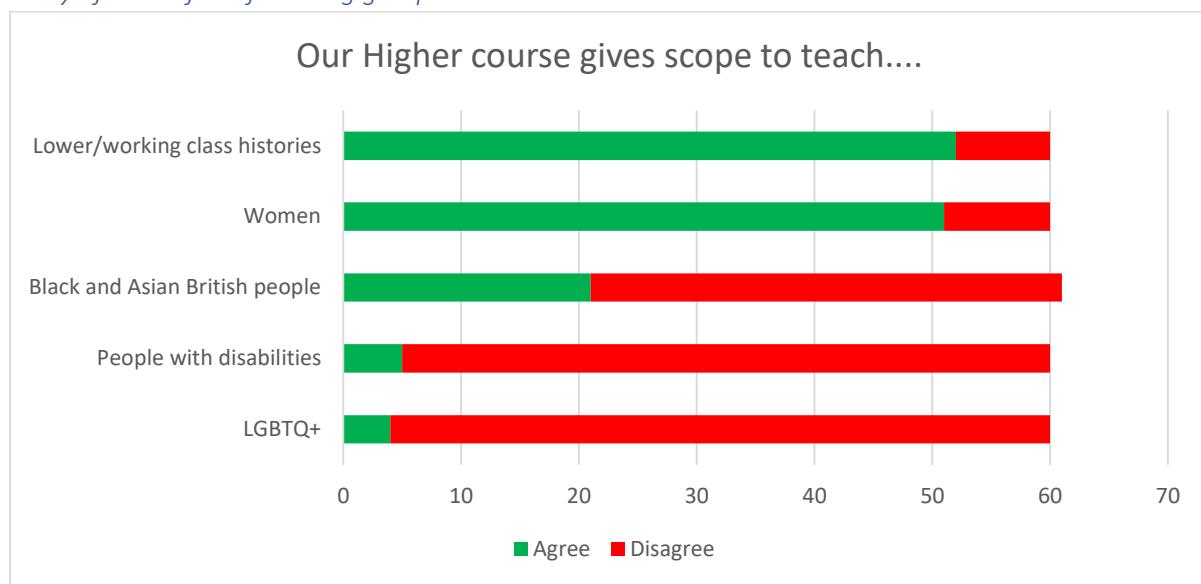


Figure 15 shows that schools do not think that the existing Higher examination provides sufficient scope to teach the histories of people with disabilities, Black British people or LGBTQ+ people. However, teachers are content that these courses allow adequate scope for teaching working class and women’s histories.

<sup>21</sup> Britain 1851–1951 contains a sustained focus on women’s suffrage.

*Figure 15: 'The history specification that we teach for Highers allows sufficient scope for us to include study of each of the following groups...'*



## 9. School-leaver preparedness for university

Schools were asked about the impact of Covid lockdowns and remote learning on the preparedness of school leavers for university study. However, the response rate to these questions was very low and no meaningful conclusions could be drawn. The main perceived disadvantage of lockdown was that students had missed experience of a formal examination (mentioned by eight schools). On the other hand, 21 schools felt that the experience of online learning meant that their students had been forced to improve their independent learning skills.