

# Our history lessons are 'worst in West'

## Failing curriculum needs overhaul, says academic

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**HISTORY** teaching in England is among the worst in the western world, a Cambridge University don has warned in a devastating report.

Youngsters are taught a 'miscellany of disconnected fragments' and examined on barely anything before 1870, he claimed, missing out on vast swathes of British, European and world history.

Professor Robert Tombs, a history fellow at St John's College, Cambridge, said it was 'difficult to name' a Euro-

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pean country that taught the subject so poorly. In the report, released today, the professor demanded an overhaul of the subject, and published an alternative curriculum featuring 36 key events in British history that all secondary school pupils should study. Very few

current GCSE courses examine history before 1870, he said, with more attention often paid to skills such as evaluating sources rather than acquiring knowledge.

While coverage is broader at A-level, he said the late middle ages and most of the 18th century are hardly touched.

'Over-specialisation on a few topics crowds out vast areas of history,' he said. 'Scant attention' is paid to the British Empire, despite its far-reaching implications in global history.

By contrast, countries including France, Germany and Australia are already teaching, or moving towards, a broad

chronological sweep of world and national history. Professor

Tombs also condemned 'dismal' marking, saying: 'Many examiners seem to know little about the topics they mark.'

The report, published by the Politeia think-tank, comes as the Government considers major curriculum reforms.

Education Secretary Michael Gove has announced a radical shake-up of all subjects. Proposals are being drawn up for introduction in September 2014.

In his report, Professor Tombs said history education in schools had 'little in common with real historical study'.

Pupils typically study a random array of topics including Tudor England, the native peoples of America, the Industrial Revolution in England and the Nazis.

Some study Hitler three times during their school career.

And rather than focusing on knowledge, examiners are more concerned with testing artificial historical 'skills' such as evaluating sources.

Pupils are also forced to study obscure topics in 'absurdly arcane' detail, he said.

Pupils taking an Edexcel GCSE unit on international relations, for example, need to know about Hungary's internal politics between 1953 and 1956, as well as 'scores of other topics'.

'It would be difficult to name a European country that teaches history in such a manner, one

which can leave the majority of school-leavers in the dark about the unfolding story of their past,' Professor Tombs said.

'Our present compulsory curriculum lags behind other countries in its neglect of swathes of European history.'

■ Exam boards are diluting the maths content of key A-levels in a bid to win business, a report by leading scientists has claimed.

Questions involving maths in biology, chemistry and physics exams are too easy and too few, found SCORE (science community representing education).

It suspects competing boards are avoiding setting exams that 'appear more difficult' in an attempt to appeal to schools.



## WHAT THE PROFESSOR WANTS US ALL TO KNOW

### ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL HISTORY, 40 TO 1500

- The legend of Boadicea (below)
- The destruction of Lindisfarne
- The kingdom of Alfred
- The Domesday Book
- Richard the Lionheart and the Crusades
- The legend of Robin Hood
- Cathedrals and religion
- The Black Death



- The killing of Wat Tyler
- Chaucer: English and European writer
- Henry V and France
- The Battle of Bosworth

### EARLY MODERN HISTORY, 1500 TO 1800

- The divorce of Henry VIII (below)
- Making an English bible
- The Armada
- The Three Kingdoms, England, Scotland and Ireland
- Gunpowder Plot



- Shakespeare and the Globe
- The trial of Charles I
- Witchcraft, magic and science
- The Siege of Drogheda
- The Great Fire of London
- 1688, European politics and the ambitions of Louis XIV
- The Boston Tea Party



### LATE MODERN HISTORY, 1800 TO 2000

- The Battle of Trafalgar
- Slavery and

- its suppression
- The power of steam
- The repeal of the Corn Laws
- The Indian Mutiny
- The changing role of Parliament
- Votes for women
- The Battle of the Somme
- The Munich Conference
- The Battle of Britain



- Creation of the welfare state
- The end of Empire