

SYLLABUSES AND QUESTIONS IN HISTORY

Group A: Syllabuses which include the Commonwealth in the Title

The coverage aimed at in these syllabuses, though not uniform, is extremely wide. Starting dates, where given, are 1492 (Oxford), 1558 (Cambridge), c. 1750 (JMB). Finishing dates are less specific. Two Boards state "the present day" (JMB and Oxford); Cambridge gives 1939; and the AEB gives a variety of dates according to the country included, the latest of which is 1953 (AEB). This latter syllabus includes the "English Speaking Peoples" in the title which means that the USA is included. The rubric for this paper allows candidates to answer without reference to the New Commonwealth.

While it is not unreasonable in History syllabuses to study the more distant periods, with this particular topic the result is to emphasize the Empire and the colonial period rather than the Commonwealth, especially the New Commonwealth.

Table 2: O Level Syllabuses in History
that Specify the Commonwealth in the Title

AEB 039	The Growth of the Commonwealth and English speaking peoples
Cambridge 232*	History of British Empire and Commonwealth
JMB (Alternative B)	British Empire & Commonwealth, from about 1750 to present day
Oxford 0 32**	British Empire and Commonwealth

* After 1978, only if special request and with an extra fee

** Not in the Autumn examination unless specially requested

(See also the appendix to this section)

Questions from Syllabuses listed in Table 2

It is noticeable that with all Boards questions stress the role of the British explorers, colonizers, soldiers and administrators, and tend to look upon the overseas territories concerned as the passive recipients of British enterprise. Favourite topics are the Durham Report, Raffles and Singapore, Edward Gibbon Wakefield and Australia, and the Boer War.

It is true that questions written from the perspective of the colonized country and the New Commonwealth can be found. But they are not common. In 1977 the Oxford Board set only two questions out of 20 on the New Commonwealth. These were:

Oxford 0 32, q. 17:

Describe the stages by which the government of India was

freed from British control between 1918 and 1947.

Oxford 0 32, q. 19:

Describe relations since 1945 between Great Britain and either (a) Uganda, or (b) Rhodesia.

The Cambridge paper - which ends in 1939 anyway - consists mostly of straightforward imperial history. The AEB paper includes separate sections on Canada and Australia, but not on Asia or Africa. However, this AEB paper does include two questions which show a commendable detachment.

AEB 039, q. 12 and q. 13:

What progress did India make towards self-government between 1858 and the Second World War?

What were the advantages and disadvantages of "Indirect Rule"? Illustrate your answer with reference to any one area of Africa.

The JMB paper includes only one question related to events since World War 2, although the syllabus claims to examine up to the present day.

JMB (Alt. B), q. 16:

Describe the changes in the British Commonwealth since 1956.

It was expected that because these papers contained the word "Commonwealth" in the title, they would be the most fruitful for the purposes of this review. In fact it was found that they paid little or no attention to the Commonwealth as it is today. Moreover, two other facts about these papers were discovered. First, very few candidates take them (see Table 2a below). Second, the future of the syllabuses is very much in doubt (see Appendix on page 14).

Table 2a: Numbers of Candidates Taking Papers Listed in Table 2 Compared with Total Number Taking History for each Board

Numbers taking History		Numbers taking a Paper which includes Commonwealth reference
AEB (6 papers)	16,797	249
Cambridge (10 papers)	23,220	84
JMB (9 papers)	42,725	308
Oxford (7 papers)	28,128	77

Group B - Syllabuses in which the Commonwealth is Implied in the Title

The syllabuses in this category are those in which, although there is no explicit mention of the Commonwealth in the title, the form of words adopted could not unreasonably lead to the expectation that Commonwealth material would be included. (Some syllabuses refer to the Commonwealth in the detailed description.) Such papers are usually entitled "World Affairs", "Europe and the Modern World", "Britain and World Affairs", or something similar.

Table 3: Papers in History
in which the Commonwealth is Implied

AEB 040	Special Periods and Topics - one option, Growth of the Commonwealth
AEB 041	Britain and World Affairs since 1914
AEB 058	History of World Powers and World Events in the 20th Century
Cambridge 235	World Affairs since 1919
JMB Paper G	Europe and the Modern World 1870 to the present day
London 263	World Affairs from 1919 to the present day
Oxford 038	World History
Ox. & Camb. H39	World History (either 1914-45, or 1939-70)
Ox. & Camb. H40	Special Subject, the Expansion of Europe to 1800
Ox. & Camb. H41	History General Paper
Welsh O g	History of the Modern World from 1919 to the present

Questions from Syllabuses listed in Table 3

Three main conclusions seem to be justified from an examination of these syllabuses and papers. The first is that Commonwealth countries were examined, but there was scarcely any mention of a Commonwealth relationship as such. Ex-colonial territories were examined either in their own right (e.g. as self-governing states like India or Tanzania) or else as colonies either past or present of Britain or some other European country.

The syllabus for the AEB paper 041, "Britain and World Affairs since 1914", states that the development of Empire to Commonwealth will be studied, with an analysis of the changing role of the Commonwealth in the post-war world. However, none of the questions set in Summer 1977 made any specific reference to the Commonwealth as such. Two questions were asked on India.

AEB 041, q. 8:

Describe Britain's policy towards India between 1918 and 1939.
Why did it fail to satisfy India's nationalists?

AEB 041, q. 14:

Describe (a) the reasons for, (b) the events leading up to, and
(c) the immediate results of Britain's withdrawal from either India
and Pakistan in 1947, or Palestine in 1948.

Another question, on modern Africa, included reference to Commonwealth countries and personalities together with non-Commonwealth topics.

AEB 041, q. 20:

Explain the importance in the history of modern Africa of four of the following (a) Apartheid, (b) the Mau Mau, (c) Pan-Africanism, (d) Nkrumah, (e) Mobutu, (f) Amin.

Likewise the Cambridge paper 235, "World Affairs since 1919", included several questions on Commonwealth countries without any mention of their Commonwealth connection.

Cambridge 235, q. 26:

Describe the part played by two of the following in the history of their respective countries: (a) Hastings Banda, (b) Kenneth Kaunda, (c) Jomo Kenyatta, (d) Julius Nyerere.

Cambridge 235, q. 29:

Describe the progress towards independence made by India in the period 1919-1947.

Cambridge 235, q. 32:

What led to the Emergency in Malaya (1948-1960)? Why was the Government of Malaya successful in overcoming the insurgents?

It should be noted that all three of these questions referred exclusively to Commonwealth leaders or countries without any reference to the fact.

The London syllabus 263, "World Affairs from 1919 to the Present Day", mentions the Commonwealth in the section which includes Britain (Section E, "Western Europe including Britain"), where the intention is stated of studying "the changing constitution of the British Empire and Commonwealth", although the paper set made no mention of the Commonwealth in this section. Again, however, questions were set on Commonwealth countries, though they were not described as such.

London 263, q. 2:

Trace successive efforts by the British Government to resolve the questions of the government of India in the years 1919 to 1939. Describe the further development of the problem during the Second World War, and give an account of the solution finally adopted in 1947.

London 263, q. 6 (three parts of the question related to a map of Africa):

(b) Select one only of the former High Commission Territories (marked T on the map) and give both its former name and its present day name.

(f) Why did the attempted Federation of countries X, Y, and Z break down in 1963?

(g) Outline briefly the history of country Z's relations with the UK since 1963.

Other questions on Africa in this section were on Italian and French colonization and the civil wars in the Congo and Nigeria.

The Oxford and Cambridge paper H39 offers "World History" either from 1914-1945, or from 1939-70. This paper deals largely with Great Power conflict. In 1977 it had a documentary question on Vietnam, included European fascism and World War 2, and had a section on the Middle East. Though there was substantial reference to China, there was little to Africa or India. The paper showed no awareness of the Commonwealth as an entity, or of any other international grouping for that matter. Again however, several questions mentioned a Commonwealth country or personality without describing them as such.

Ox. & Camb. H39, q. 1, (a question asking for short notes):
"the fall of Singapore" (in World War 2) was one of the alternatives given.

Ox. & Camb. H39, q. 2:
"Give an account of the work and importance in this period of two of the following..." included Gandhi as one of the options.

Ox. & Camb. H39, q. 9, (a question asking for short notes):
"Sir Robert Menzies, Ghana, the H.M.S. Tiger talks, the West Indian Federation..." were among the options given.

As a last example of this trend, the Welsh paper, on the "History of the Modern World from 1919 to the Present Day", offered two questions that dealt exclusively with Commonwealth countries without any reference to the fact.

Welsh O g, q. 5:
Either (a) Why was India given self-government by Britain?
or (b) Give an account of any one political figure of India or Pakistan since 1945.

Welsh O g, q. 8:
Give an account of the history of one of the following areas since 1945: Kenya, Ghana, Rhodesia, West Indies.*

The second main conclusion to emerge from the study of papers in this category, is that although the Commonwealth as a concept or an entity in international relations is hardly mentioned in questions, let alone stressed, there does seem to be a willingness to take account of other kinds of international grouping. Though more apparent perhaps with some Boards than others, questions could be found dealing with such international organizations as the League of Nations, the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the European Economic Community. Moreover, questions were also set on more general concepts such as Pan-Africanism, or the Third World.

The Cambridge paper 235, "World Affairs since 1919", is a good illustration. The syllabus for Section A of this paper (General Problems) mentions the League, UNO, NATO, the Warsaw Pact, the OECD, but not the Commonwealth. In 1977 two questions in the section asked about international organizations.

*The term Commonwealth West Indies would seem to be more appropriate here so as to prevent candidates from feeling obliged to trace the very different paths followed by Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico and the French and Dutch territories in addition to those islands (and mainland territories) with a Commonwealth connection.

Cambridge 235, q. 1:

How did the victorious powers deal with the possessions of Germany and Turkey outside Europe in 1919-20? Describe the work of the Mandates Commissions of the League of Nations.

Cambridge 235, q. 6:

Describe the work of the UN Agencies in helping to deal with the problems of the Third World.

Section E of the same paper (Africa and the Middle East) includes in its syllabus "Pan-Africanism and the Search for Unity", South Africa and its racial policy, and Rhodesia. Mention is made of the Organization of African Unity, but not of the Commonwealth.

Cambridge 235, q. 27:

Describe the working of apartheid in the Republic of South Africa.

Cambridge 235, q. 28:

What are the aims and membership of the Organization of African Unity? Describe the work of this body since its foundation.

Section F of the syllabus (Asia) states that (among other topics) the Indian sub-continent under British control, the 1947 partition, and the development of India and Pakistan since independence will be examined. The emergence of Malaysia and its difficulties is also included. In neither case is any mention of the Commonwealth made in the syllabus; nor did it appear in the questions set in 1977.

Cambridge 235, q. 29:

Describe the progress towards independence made by India in the period 1919 to 1947.

Cambridge 235, q. 33:

What problems has Pakistan faced in (a) Kashmir, and (b) Bangladesh?

One should not overlook, or fail to commend, the detached perspective of these questions which focus on the countries in their own right rather than as ex-colonial territories. However the countries are not seen as members of the Commonwealth or as having any other international relationships.

Included among the topics listed for study in the syllabus of the Oxford World History Paper (038, Paper I) are the League of Nations and the failure of collective security, and the United Nations and its attempts to keep the peace. The emphasis in the paper itself was largely on the great powers, their diplomatic relationships, and major international problems. The only Commonwealth area included in a question, apart from Britain, was the West Indies. The syllabus for Paper II of this examination includes the "European movement towards economic and political integration"; the questions in 1977 included the following on the League and the United Nations.

Oxford 038, q. 5:

What were the shortcomings of the League of Nations? In what ways was the United Nations Organization an attempt to remedy them?

Although the Commonwealth is not mentioned in the syllabus for this examination, there was one question on the relationship between Britain and India.

Oxford 038, q. 7:

Show the course and consequences of the withdrawal of British imperial power from India after the Second World War.

The Welsh Board paper "History of the Modern World from 1919 to the Present Day", also included a question on the United Nations.

Welsh O g, q. 8:

Give an account of the major achievements of the United Nations.

The third conclusion arising from this examination of World Affairs papers is that some attempt can be discerned in some papers to depart from British or European ethnocentricity and to adopt something of a world perspective. In particular recognition is found of a Third World entity. This is not a universal approach and it appears only partially in certain papers where non-European history may be seen to be added on to the syllabus rather than integrated into it. Nevertheless it is significant enough to be worth noting. However, it is again noticeable that the Commonwealth does not figure as a part of this enlarged world perspective.

The AEB paper O 41, "Britain and World Affairs since 1914", included a question already referred to: one which presupposes Africa as essentially a geographical regional concept.

AEB O 41, q. 20:

Explain the importance in the history of modern Africa of four of the following: (a) Apartheid, (b) the Mau Mau, (c) Pan-Africanism, (d) Nkrumah, (e) Mobutu, (f) Amin.

Paper O 58 of the same Board, "History of World Powers and World Events in the 20th Century" goes further in attempting an international outlook with questions on themes such as nationalism and poverty.

AEB O 58, q. 21:

How far is poverty in the Third World the result of the misuse of resources by the developed nations?

A similarly broadly based question is the following from the Oxford World History paper.

Oxford O 38 II, q. 8:

On what grounds is it suggested that there is a population problem in the world? What solutions to the problem have been proposed?

The London paper, "World Affairs from 1919 to the Present Day", shows an international perspective, especially in its General Section (Section F). The syllabus for this section includes topics such as international relations, institutions, and developments, underdeveloped territories, and technology. In 1977 the documentary question on this section was based on an extract from Tanzania's Arusha Declaration, and the sub-questions related to it approached Tanzania essentially as an example of an underdeveloped territory. There was also a question in the section on Africa and the Middle East (Section B), on colonialism, and the problems of independence. Questions related to Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth countries.

London 263, q. 8:

How and why did France come to be involved in a conflict with the FLN in Algeria after 1945? Explain the importance of this conflict, and of its eventual outcome for (a) Algeria, and (b) France.

A more international, thematic approach can also be seen in the Welsh Board's Modern World paper.

Welsh O g, q. 16:

Explain three of the following terms giving details or examples where appropriate: Marxism, OEEC, devolution, total war, the Third World, the Organization for African Unity (OAU).

Questions from other History papers

One final comment may be made. This investigation was primarily carried out into papers in which the title either included or implied reference to the Commonwealth. However, Commonwealth and Empire questions are also to be found, though not frequently, in some of the many papers on British or European history. Some random examples are:

Ox. & Camb. H31 (British Outlines 1914-1970), q. 7:

A documentary question consisting of an extract from an essay by Creech Jones arguing for a renunciation of the imperialistic relationship. The question asks, "Taking as examples three of her former colonies and dependencies, show how Britain renounced an 'imperialistic relationship'. Briefly consider the consequences (a) for the colonies, (b) for Britain."

Ox. & Camb. H28 (British Outlines 1660-1763), q. 8:

How did the British extend their influence in India during the period?

Oxford O 34 (British and Foreign 1868-1951), q. 7:

Show the importance in British imperial affairs of three of the following: the South Africa Act 1909, Mandated Territories, the Statute of Westminster 1931, the Ottawa Conference 1932, the Indian Independence Act 1947.

Oxford O 30 (D British History 1815-1951), q. 14:

What were the principal changes during the period 1914-1951 in relations between either (a) Britain and India, or (b) Britain and Palestine?

Oxford O 30 (C British History 1689-1815), q. 10:

What did Warren Hastings achieve in India? Why was he impeached?

London 262 (English and European History 1763-1954), q. 20:

Trace the main developments in the British Empire in the period 1919-1955 concerning (a) Dominion status, (b) India, (c) Palestine.

From this brief glance at British History papers it would seem that the British Empire is seen by examiners as an offshoot of British history and that the Commonwealth is not yet recognized as an international unit of world significance.

APPENDIX

1. To obtain the figures given in Table 2a, we wrote to the four Boards. As well as supplying the information asked for, two Boards were good enough to write a covering letter with further detail. The following extracts seem to make important points.

From the Secretary to the AEB: "In recent years the entry for the Commonwealth History Syllabus at O Level has been declining and as you can see is currently at a low level. The Board is currently undertaking a revision of all its O level syllabuses in History to take into account more recent scholarship and attitudes to the subject as well as the popularity and viability of the Syllabus. It is hoped that the revised syllabuses will be introduced for examination in June 1981 and I enclose a document listing briefly the Board's latest proposals although these are by no means finalized as yet. You will notice that the element of Commonwealth History included in the revised proposals is very small. To some extent the subject will be covered in the revised Syllabus 039, Option 18. Otherwise, interested Centres will have to submit their own Mode 2 style syllabus for examination in this subject."

From the Assistant Secretary to the Oxford Delegacy: "I regret to say that 032 has been falling in entry numbers for the last five or six years and we no longer set it in the Autumn. I am fairly certain that this syllabus will be deleted if examinations are reorganized for a common system at 16+."

2. The AEB were good enough to give details of the numbers of candidates who entered for each of the sections of their paper on "The Growth of the Commonwealth and English-Speaking Peoples". It shows that the two sections on European and British Overseas Expansion attracted more candidates than the other six together.

Section A	- Outlines of European Overseas Expansion to 1763	181
B	- Outlines of British Overseas Expansion from 1763-1945	81
C(1)	- Canada from Early Colonisation to 1931	25
C(2)	- Australia from Early Colonisation to 1931	11
C(3)	- South Africa from Early Colonisation to 1948	55
C(4)	- USA 1783-1865	49
C(5)	- USA 1863-1953	0
C(6)	- West Indian History 1494-1947	91