



# The History Virtual Academy Project:

Facilitating inter and intra-sector dialogue and  
knowledge transfer through online collaboration

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Project Summary**

The History Virtual Academy Project (HVA) is an on-going research and knowledge exchange project that has been through three iterations – in 2008, 2009 and 2011. It was funded, in its first two iterations, by the History Subject Centre of the Higher Education Academy (HSC) and jointly funded, in 2011, by Edge Hill University and the HSC.

In all three iterations, the HVA has involved the development of on-line discussion fora through which students in school and college sixth forms in different parts of England and university historians from a number of English universities have been able to engage in discussion focused on problems of historical interpretation.

The 2008 and 2009 iterations of the HVA have been described and evaluated in a previous HSC report (Chapman, 2009(a)). The 2011 iteration aimed to build on and expand the project by:

- involving a larger number of schools and colleges; and
- involving a larger number of university historians.

The 2011 iteration also aimed to maximise the collaborative nature of the HVA and facilitate the co-construction of the HVA discussion boards by including a face to face agenda setting and planning meeting.

## **1.2 HVA Project Aims, Outcomes and Research Foci**

The concern has been often expressed that 'links between schools and higher education are no longer as strong as they once were' (IHR, 2005), school history and academic history have been described as parallel 'worlds' (Booth, 2005), the difficulties that the transition from school and college study to higher education can pose for students are frequently highlighted (Derham and Worton

(eds.), 2010) and transition issues relating to understandings of the nature of history as a form of knowledge construction have been identified as particularly significant (Booth, 2005).

The HVA aims to contribute to the bridging of gaps between history in higher education and in school and college sixth forms and to bring together professionals working in university history, school and college history and history education research in order to innovate in practice, to foster dialogue, to enhance knowledge and understanding of historical learning, to enrich student experiences and to enhance student understandings of history in higher education.

The project has a knowledge exchange dimension, in that it brings together academic historians, school and college lecturers and education academics, to jointly construct and evaluate the discussion board exercises through which the project is delivered. The project aims to contribute to practice by enabling inter and intra-sector dialogue, thus breaking down barriers between institutions and education sectors.

The project has a knowledge creation dimension in at least three senses. The discussion boards generated through the project constitute complex data sets that can be systematically analysed to add to knowledge about historical learning in a number of senses. These knowledge generation dimensions of the project have implications for practice as well as intrinsic interest and the project therefore has considerable scope for generating impact on practice as well as research outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

The HVA aims to :

- add to emerging knowledge about the effectiveness and organisation of inter and intra-sector collaborative exercises;
- provide models and a knowledge base for the development of larger

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<sup>1</sup> Practical guidance for professionals seeking to address transition issues and foster links between schools / colleges and higher education that draws, among many other sources, on the 2008-09 HVA (Chapman, 2009(a)) is available in Lavender (2010).

scale collaborative projects in future; and

- build networks that can be drawn upon and developed further in future.

Outcomes from the project are of three types:

- knowledge exchange between history education, academic history and school and college history, achieved through the process of co-constructing, delivering and evaluating the discussion boards;
- learning enrichment for the students involved through the provision of the discussion boards and through the opportunities for learning and for interaction between students and between students and academic historians that the discussion boards represent; and
- knowledge creation achieved through the analysis and reporting of the discussion board data sets developed through the project that this report begins.<sup>2</sup>

Knowledge exchange outcomes are reported in Section 2 and 4.2 of this report and instantiated through the report in its entirety, impacts on student learning experiences are discussed in Section 3 of this report and preliminary knowledge creation outcomes are reported in Section 3 of this report. Student perception data is reported in Section 4.1 of this report where the 2011 HVA is evaluated.

As noted at Section 1.5 below, this is a preliminary report only: the process of analysing the 2011 HVA data sets will be continued through work by the project team on research papers and other publications.

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<sup>2</sup> The 2008 and 2009 iterations of the HVA are reported in Chapman, 2009(a) and 2011(b) and have been disseminated through conference presentation to the Schools' History Project in July 2009, the History Educators International Research Network in September 2009, the History Subject Centre in March 2010 and the Lebanese Association for Educational Studies in March, 2011 (Chapman 2011(b)). Aspects of the 2008, 2009 and 2011 iterations were presented to the annual conference of the International Society for History Didactics in September 2011 in a paper exploring the value of inter-sector collaborations (Chapman, 2011(c)).

### 1.3 Project Participants

Participation in the three iterations of the HVA is summarised in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1. Institutions and Participants in the 2008, 2009 and 2011 HVAs**

(a) Institutions

	2008	2009	2011
Participating schools and colleges	2	3	9
Sixth form colleges	1	2	3
Comprehensive schools	0	0	3
FE colleges	0	0	1
Grammar schools	1	1	2
Participating universities	2	3	5

(b) Participants

	2008	2009	2011
Number of active student log ins	15	30	91
Participating teachers and lecturers	2	3	9
Participating academic historians	2	2	6
Participating history education academics	1	1	1

Sixth form staff and students participating in the 2011 HVA iteration were Katy Allen and her colleagues and students at Lancaster Girls' Grammar School, Libby Bond and her students at Lampton School, Dr David Brown and his colleagues and students at Farnborough Sixth Form College, Dr Jane Facey and her colleagues and students at Esher Sixth Form College, Matt Harwood and his students at Preston College, Daniel Magnoff and his students at Coombe Girls School, Dr Elisabeth Pickles and her colleagues and students at Highworth Grammar School, Rick Rogers and his students at Benton Park School and Judith Smith and her colleagues and students at Godalming College.

Academic participants in the project were Antony Bounds, History Subject Centre, University of Warwick, Dr Alyson Brown, Edge Hill University, Professor Justin Champion, Royal Holloway, University of London, Dr Marcus Collins,

Loughborough University and Roger Spalding, Edge Hill University.

The HSC grant holder and HVA project leader is Dr Arthur Chapman, Edge Hill University, and the research team are Dr Robert Poole, University of Cumbria, and Gill Elliott, Edge Hill University.

The 2011 HVA builds on previous iterations of the project and aims to continue to build an on-going community of practice: Katy Allen, Arthur Chapman, Robert Poole and Judith Smith took part in the 2008 and 2009 iterations and Jane Facey took part in the 2009 iteration of the project.

#### **1.4 Ethical Considerations**

In constructing and delivering the 2011 HVA the project team were guided by the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011). This project was approved at research proposal stage by Edge Hill University Faculty of Education's Research Ethics Committee and is subject to ethical review.

#### **1.5 The Scope of this Report**

This report represents a preliminary analysis of the HVA discussion boards that ran in March / April 2011. It begins the process of analysing the data sets generated by these discussion boards and reports the conclusions of a planning meeting, in March 2011, that developed the 2011 HVA and a meeting, held in May 2011, that began the process of evaluating the 2011 HVA. The report will be followed by papers, currently in preparation, that will report comprehensive explorations of the 2011 data sets and also by further iterations of discussion boarding projects that aim to build on and to refine the approaches developed by the HVA project to date.

## **2 Knowledge exchange: professional development and collaboration**

### **2.1 Co-constructing the HVA**

The 2011 HVA was co-constructed at a planning meeting, attended by 8 school and college history teachers and lecturers, 3 academic historians and the project leader, at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London (IHR) on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 2011.<sup>3</sup> The discussions that took place at this meeting defined the guiding principles, structure and organisation of the 2011 HVA.<sup>4</sup>

#### **2.1a Sixth Form and University History**

The meeting began with a general discussion of the challenges that studying history post-16 presents for students and of 'School / College to HE Transitions'. Many of the themes that arose in discussion echoed observations and perceptions reported elsewhere (Booth, 2005; Hibbert, 2006; Lavender, 2009).

##### **2.1. a (i) School Teachers' and College Lecturers' Perspectives**

A number of features of examinations were discussed, including transitions between different levels of secondary study – GCSE to AS level and AS level to A2 – and the ways in which examination pressures and structures impact on students. Some concerns were expressed about assessment 14-19 – about, for example, the extent to which assessment at one level of qualification did or did not prepare students for transition to work at the next level, about the extent to which source work in examinations did or did not support meaningful historical thinking and about the extent to which examinations did or did not make it possible to engage meaningfully with historiography and historical interpretations at AS and / or at A2. Some differences of view emerged – for example, on the one hand, the view that the source extracts used in examinations were too short to be meaningful was expressed by some participants and, on the other hand, the view that short sources did support meaningful historical thinking by acting as prompts that reminded

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<sup>3</sup> The meeting was chaired by Dr Arthur Chapman and attended by eight history teachers and lecturers - Katy Allen, Libby Bond, Dr David Brown, Dr Jane Facey, Matt Harwood, Dr Elisabeth Pickles, Rick Rogers and Judith Smith - and three university historians – Dr Robert Poole, Professor Justin Champion and Antony Bounds. An earlier meeting, attended by Dr Alyson Brown, Roger Spalding, Dr Robert Poole and Dr Arthur Chapman took place at Edge Hill University in February 2011.

<sup>4</sup> A second meeting was held in May to evaluate the HVA. This meeting is discussed below in 4.2.

students of issues or content to discuss was expressed by others. It was apparent that much depended, at AS and A2, on decisions made by different examination boards and on school and college choices of 'specification'. There was some support for the view, for example, that it was only at A2 and in modules focused on historical enquiry that students had opportunities to engage with historical source materials and / or with historiography in a sustained manner whilst others also expressed the view that it was possible to do some of these things earlier in the AS/A2 process.

In general, the consensus was that students were under a number of pressures at AS and A2 and that, as a result, students tended to want to 'play safe' when engaging with historical problems and to look for scripts that would guarantee good marks when tackling historical questions. These pressures were also felt to have potentially negative impacts on teaching such that 'teaching kids to pass exams' could come, at times, to have priority over 'teaching them history'. It was also felt that confidence was a big issue for many students and that the anxiety about 'getting answers right', intensified by the high stakes nature of assessment and by its constant presence, often impeded students' willingness to take risks and to think creatively.

### **2.1. a (ii) University Historians' Perspectives**

Many of the same themes arose in the university historians' contributions to the discussion.

One historian remarked, for example, that new undergraduates often lacked confidence and that they were often reluctant, even in relatively small seminar groups of 12-14, to voice opinions and, in particular, to challenge academics and engage in historical debate.

It was also remarked that there were often tensions between the ways in which academic historians conceptualised knowledge and the ways in which students were encouraged to think in their school and college education and also in the wider culture: whereas academic history tended to regard knowledge in relativistic terms, it was argued that students often expected 'an' answer and were reluctant to take risks and to 'think for themselves'. It was suggested that a constant focus on assessment and on assessment criteria, throughout secondary schooling

and, in particular, at GCSE and AS and A2, were in part responsible for this state of affairs and that a focus on assessment diminished the scope for creativity and for challenging conceptual thinking about big issues (such as the nature of 'the state' in the present and the past). It was also felt that similar pressures were present in university where students were often more concerned with identifying a script that would enable them to 'get a 2.1' than with engaging with ideas, concepts and big questions.

The view was expressed that the intellectual processes underlying historical thinking had been over analysed and broken up into separately assessed components and that the outcome was often stultifying. Two historians argued, in addition, that there was insufficient attention in history education at school / college and at university, on getting students to become writers, and on challenging them to build up and synthesise ideas and to construct historical narratives.

### **2.1. a (iii) Ways Forward? Motivation, Challenge and Argument**

Three themes, in particular, emerged from these discussions - 'motivation', 'challenge' and 'argument' – and it was felt that history post-16 would be benefit from greater attention being paid to all three and that exercises such as the HVA could make some contribution to developing challenge, motivation and argument.

'Motivation' and 'challenge' were felt to be closely linked: tasks that challenged students to think beyond narrow assessment foci, it was argued, would be likely to be beneficial in increasing students' intrinsic motivation to study. It was agreed that we would endeavour, through the design of the HVA, to challenge students to develop their historical thinking by:

1. asking students to engage with complex texts;
2. setting students tasks that would require them to explore conceptually challenging problems; and by
3. asking students to argue with and to question other students that they did not know and 'experts' (university historians).

It was hoped that all of these three features of the HVA would be motivating for students and that the exercise would appeal because it was unusual. It was

hoped also that the exercise would appeal because it involved 'real' interaction with 'live' historians and would have greater authenticity than paper based activities.

### **2.1. b The 2011 HVA Design: Description and Rationale**

Materials exemplifying past discussion boarding projects had been circulated prior to the meeting: an example of an online debate that had closely followed an A2 module's examination structure (Chapman and Hibbert, 2009) and the report on the previous iterations of the HVA which contained two alternate discussion structures (Chapman, 2009(a)). The design structure for the HVA was created in the afternoon of the meeting of the 5<sup>th</sup> of March: the meeting broke into two smaller groups both of whom devised designs and a final design was then agreed in a plenary discussion. This design was subsequently circulated by email and modified in response to comments from members of the group before being implemented.

Discussions around the design of the HVA kept a number of considerations in mind: on the one hand, the need to design exercises that would contribute to the objectives identified in discussions during the morning and that would contribute to enhancing challenge, motivation and argument; on the other hand, the need to keep the particular needs of A2 students who were nearing the end of their A2 studies and approaching examination preparation clearly in view.

#### **2.1. b (i) Historical Interpretation**

Historical interpretations are a key component of the history curriculum in England and Wales, from Key Stage 1 to AS and A2 (QCA, 1999, pp. 16–17, 2006, p. 5, 2007a, pp. 112–113 and 2007b, p. 5). Simplifying the various curricular statements, we can say that it is intended that the study of 'interpretations' will enable students to:

1. *Understand that* the past has been interpreted in different ways;
2. *Understand how* the past has been interpreted in different ways;
3. *Explain why* the past has been interpreted in different ways and;
4. *Evaluate* different interpretations of the past.

(Chapman, 2010(b), p.97)

A key aim of the HVA project was to develop understandings of historical interpretation and historiography, key elements of historical learning that research suggests can form barriers to transition between school / college and university

history (Booth, 2005; Hibbert, 2006).

The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's subject criteria for history post-16 state that

A level specifications should require students to comprehend, analyse and evaluate how the past has been interpreted and represented in different ways, for example in historians' debates and through a range of media such as paintings, films, reconstructions, museum displays and the internet.  
(QCA, 2006, p.5)

Examination boards interpret this requirement in variable ways and a number of different approaches to the assessment of interpretations exist at AS and A2:

Edexcel, for example, understand interpretations for assessment purposes largely as products (historians' claims) that students are required to assess... whereas OCR's Specification B understands interpretation as a process and intends candidates to develop methodological as well as substantive understandings of interpretations...  
(Chapman, 2010(c), p.55-55)

The HVA design, explained below, understood interpretation in historiographic terms and focused on explaining why differing interpretations arise and on evaluating differing interpretations.

### **2.1. b (ii) Questions**

A key issue for discussion was defining the form and nature of the problem/s that we would ask students to address through the HVA.

The simplest solution – closely following an examination format – was not available, since the institutions involved followed different specifications, and this solution was, in any case, inconsistent with our intention to innovate.

The questions used in previous iterations of the HVA were discussed and it was decided to adopt an approach based on questions that had been used in both 2008 and 2009 (Chapman, 2009(a), p.14 and p.24). The following question format was agreed:

How might you explain the fact that these historians give different reasons / assessments / explanations [*delete as appropriate*] of [*insert*

*topic*] and if you had to choose between them how might you do this?

As in previous iterations of the HVA, the intention was to engage students with issues that, it was intended, would get them to focus on two fundamental questions about historical interpretation, namely, why differing interpretations arise and how conflicts of interpretation can be adjudicated (Chapman, 2009(a), p.15).

It was felt that these questions were worthwhile questions that had been shown to stimulate useful discussions in the past. It was also felt that these questions presented a challenge – by asking students to think about why different interpretations arise, an issue that examination questions rarely address directly. It was also felt that the second component of the question was near enough to the kinds of evaluative question that students were used to being asked for the question to be both recognisable and meaningful for students.

One question was preferred to two on the grounds that having one question simplified the structure of discussions by reducing the number of posts that students would be asked to make at each stage of the HVA.

It was agreed that we would ask students to address this question in the first week of the HVA and then to return to it in modified form in the second and third weeks of the HVA in the light, of the responses to their initial post that they would receive from each other and from participating historians and in the light of the contribution to the debate that historians would make. The structure of the HVA discussion is outlined fully in Figure 4 below.

### **2.1. b (iii) Task Texts**

Concern has frequently been expressed about the prevalence of short text extracts in assessment post-16 and about the practice, in exam board specific text books at AS and A2 and in examinations (HA, 2005, p.26, 31, and 36), of relying on short extracts from work summarising historical debates rather than the historical debates themselves.<sup>5</sup> It was felt that it was particularly important that the texts that

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<sup>5</sup> A randomly sampled A2 exam paper provides an indication of the kinds of text that are typically set at A2 (Edexcel 2010) and confirms the observations cited above (HA, 2005): this paper presents students with a substantial quantity of text to analyse (1539 words of text), however, the text is fragmented (split up into 12 extracts averaging 128.3 words each). The texts themselves are also

we chose for the HVA tasks presented students with an authentic historical challenge and therefore with exposure to genuine historical problems and debates in the form of substantial extracts from real historical writing.

It was agreed, then, that the tasks we devised for students would centre on extracts of around 500 words each from genuine works of historical scholarship at an appropriately advanced level in order to present a challenge for students. It was also decided to move away from the model based on paired texts that had been developed in previous iterations of the HVA as it was felt that text-pairing polarised issues unduly in a way that might encourage overly simplified and dichotomising responses that modelled debate in terms of notions like 'side-taking'. It was agreed, therefore, that we would work with three texts: two extracts from authentic and scholarly historical publications, introduced in the first week of the HVA, and a third text, introduced in the second week, written specifically for each discussion by the historians taking part in the HVA.

It was felt that the inclusion of three texts would increase the level of challenge and that the introduction of the third text some way into the process would increase the level of challenge further by requiring students to rethink the approach that they had taken when only two texts were in play. It was also felt that the fact that third text was authored by the historian that the students would interact with through their HVA discussion would also introduce a degree of novelty, challenge and authenticity to the exercise: the historians' texts would be composed specifically for the student discussions and students would also be arguing with academic historians about the work of other historians and about arguments that the historians were themselves advancing.

### **2.1. b (iv) Topics**

Because of the difficulty of finding a common topic that students in a number of institutions could simultaneously work on, previous iterations of the HVA had focused on a topic that none of the students taking part were studying and the exercise had, therefore, had a conceptual focus and rationale rather than a content focus and rationale. Although a minority of teachers and lecturers were happy to

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mostly excerpts from basic introductory surveys and two are excerpted from a textbook written by

adopt a purely conceptual rationale and focus for the 2011 HVA, the consensus of the meeting was that we needed to ensure a content focus, particularly given the fact that the students were approaching the end of their A2 studies. It was agreed, therefore, that the 2011 HVA design should have both a content and a conceptual rationale and that we should aim to provide students with an opportunity to deepen and extend both their substantive knowledge and their conceptual understanding.

It was difficult to achieve direct topic-relevance for all participants, however, given the range of specifications and content that were studied in participating institutions, given the fact that many institutions offered a number of different history options and given the fact that in one institution students were studying different qualifications (some following AS and A2 courses and others following an International Baccalaureate course).

It was decided that we should work to a common HVA structure – of tasks and timings (see Figure 4 below) – but run a number of parallel exercises focused on five different historical topics in order to maximise the direct relevance of the content covered for student participants. As Figure 2 shows, however, we were able to achieve direct topic-relevance for the majority of participating institutions.

### Figure 2. Topics and Institutions: 2011 HVAs

This figure identifies the five content areas that the 2011 HVA discussions focused on and analyses the exam-relevance of the topics covered for the institutions concerned.

	(a) Students were studying the discussion topics as part of their current sixth form course	(b) Students were not studying the discussion topics as part of their current sixth form course
Nazi Germany	2 institutions	1 institution
Tudor Rebellions	2 institutions	1 institution
American Civil War	2 institutions	0 institutions
Cold War	1 institution	1 institution
Cromwell	2 institutions	0 institutions
Totals	9 institutions <sup>6</sup>	3 institutions

#### 2.1. b (v) Structure: debate

After discussion, it was agreed that we should adopt a ‘debate’-style format

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examiners.

<sup>6</sup> Two institutions had students in more than one discussion topic: one institution had students in two topics and another had students in three topics (both institutions ran a number of AS and A2 history

for the discussion tasks. This was true in two senses.

- First, it was agreed that, as in the examples of previous discussion boards mentioned above (Chapman and Hibbert, 2009; Chapman, 2009(a)), we would adopt a design in which there were defined tasks to complete in each week of the HVA that built on each other cumulatively – like the phases of a conventional debate where a proposition is advanced, critiqued and then restated. It was felt that this would be useful in providing structure and direction to the HVA.
- Second, and again as in the examples identified above, it was agreed that it would be useful to adopt the ‘competition’ element typical of formal debates: students would have criteria of effective historical argument to work to during the discussion and, at the end of the process a best contribution or overall ‘winner’ in each group would be identified.<sup>7</sup> It was suggested that a ‘prize’ would be necessary – if there were to be ‘winners’ - and it was agreed that the Subject Centre would provide a nominal prize for the winner of each debate.<sup>8</sup>

### **2.1. b (vi) Structure: timings**

Notwithstanding the overall HVA design principles – that we should seek to enhance challenge, motivation, and argument – it was crucial also to bear in mind the needs of the A2 students who would engage with the HVA. The impact of student need on content has already been noted. Student need impacted also on the duration of the exercise. Although a case could no doubt be made for an extended exercise running over a number of months, it was necessary to work to a relatively tight and short discussion structure, given that students would be moving into the final revision stage of their A2 studies after Easter: it was agreed, therefore, to work to a design that would last for between three and four weeks in March and early April 2011.

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options).

<sup>7</sup> The discussion criteria are reproduced in Appendix 7.4.

<sup>8</sup> As the BERA guidelines note, the ‘use of incentives to encourage participation must be commensurate with good sense and must avoid choices which in themselves have undesirable effects’ (BERA, 2011, p.7): the Subject Centre ‘prizes’ were notional only (e.g. Subject Centre stationery) and were not items that could in themselves provide material incentives for participation.

### 2.1. b (vii) Structure: groups

It was decided, on the basis of discussion of the experience of the 2008 HVA, which had been small scale and in which students have received feedback directly from participating historians, and of the 2009 HVA, where groups had been larger and feedback had often been to whole groups rather than to individual posts, that it would be desirable to keep discussion groups relatively small. A number of parallel groups were created under each of the five topic areas above in order to achieve this. Figure 3 lists the number of discussion groups that were created.

**Figure 3. Topics and Discussion Groups: 2011 HVAs**

Discussion Topics	Number of parallel discussion groups on each topic
Nazi Germany	3
Tudor Rebellions	3
American Civil War	2
Cold War	1
Cromwell	1
Totals	10

### 2.1. b (viii) Structure: threads and posts

A number of problems that had arisen in previous discussion exercises were discussed – for example, the fact that in the 2009 design, where students were able to create new discussion threads, multiple discussion threads had resulted many of which had not been replied to. It was agreed that the 2011 HVA design should restrict the number of threads that could be started in order to minimise the number of posts without replies and the discussion board was set up such that students could reply to but not initiate threads.

The experience of the 2008 and 2009 HVAs had also suggested that there was a need to set a limit to the length of student posts, which, without this, had tended in both of those cases to be very variable in length. It was also felt that setting a limit would first, give students a clear benchmark to aim at and, second, require them to aim for precision and focus in their responses and an indicative word limit for each student post of 300 words was agreed.

### **2.1. b (ix) Structure: outline**

As a result of a discussion of the examples of discussion exercises that had already been conducted (Chapman and Hibbert, 2009; Chapman, 2009(a)) and in the light of comments reflecting the experiences of school, college and university colleagues who had taken part in the previous iterations of the HVA the following outline HVA structure was agreed.

The HVA would last three weeks and be made up of three 'phases', each lasting one week.

In the Phase 1 of the HVA, students would be presented with paired pieces of historical writing of around 500 words each and a question (see 2.1.b (ii) above). Students would be asked to post a response to the question in around 300 words and also to reply to at least one other student post.

In Phase 2 of the HVA, students would be presented with a third text, written by the historian taking part in their HVA discussion group, and a revised version of the question modified to take account of the fact that there were now three texts:

How might you explain the fact that historians give different reasons / assessments / explanations [*delete as appropriate*] of [Insert topic] and if you had to choose between historians' explanations / assessments how might you do this?

Students would be asked to post a response to this question, again in around 300 words, revising their response to the Phase 1 question in the light of the new text and the replies and comments that had been posted on their texts in Phase 1. Again, students would be asked to reply to at least one other student post.

In Phase 3 of the HVA students would be asked to redraft their response to the question from Phase 2 in the light of comments posted in reply to their Phase 2 post by the historian and by the other students.

This structure is set out in Figure 4 below.

**Figure 4. Outline HVA Discussion Structure 2011**

Phase	A. Resources	B. Questions	C. Students' Tasks	D. Historian's Tasks
1	Two contrasting interpretations of an historical issue / problem of around 500 words each extracted from works of scholarly history.	How might you explain the fact that these historians give different reasons / assessments / explanations [ <i>delete as appropriate</i> ] of [ <i>insert topic</i> ] and if you had to choose between them how you might do this?	(a) To post an answer to the question (see Column B) in around 300 words and (b) to post a reply to at least one other student post.	N/A
2	As at Week 1 and a 'third text' provided by the historian (see Column D)	How might you explain the fact that historians give different reasons / assessments / explanations [ <i>delete as appropriate</i> ] of [ <i>insert topic</i> ] and if you had to choose between historians' explanations / assessments how might you do this?	(a) Post an answer to the question (see Column B) and (b) post a reply to at least one other student post.	Make a post of around 500 words addressing the issue / topic that the two extracts provided in Week 1 had focused on (see Phase 1 Column A) expressing an alternative perspective on the issue / topic.
3	As at Week 2	As at Week 2	(a) Review their answer to the Week 2 question and (b) re-post a revised answer taking account of the comments of other students and of the historian.	To respond to student posts in Week 2

As noted above (2.1. b (v)) each HVA discussion group was set up as a competition. Once Phases 1-3 were complete, it was agreed that contributions to each discussion would be adjudicated and an overall 'winner' in each discussion would be identified.

### 3. Enriching student learning? The 2011 HVA Discussions

It was intended that the process of participating in the HVA discussion boards would provide a valuable learning experience for participating students and enhance their sixth form learning experience by providing:

1. an opportunity to interact with students from other sixth forms
2. an opportunity to interact with academic historians

It was also intended that, through and as a result of these interactions, participating students would be enabled to:

3. refine and develop their understanding and mastery of historical argument
4. increase their understanding of understanding of historiography and historical interpretation)
5. gain an insight into teaching and learning at university level.

As existing work has shown, discussion board exercises typically generate extensive data sets of posts that can be analysed and explored to answer a range of questions about teaching and learning (including, for example, questions about students' historical thinking and about the impact of discussion board interventions on student thinking).<sup>9</sup>

The data sets generated by the 2011 HVA are analysed in this section of this report in order to explore the degree to which the HVA succeeded in achieving outcomes 1-5: outcomes 1-4 will be explored in Section 3 of this report by examining quantitative data (relating to the numbers of posts made to the boards) and qualitative data (the text of student and academic posts to the boards); outcomes 1-5 will be explored in Section 4.1 of this report by examining student perception data gathered through a questionnaire evaluating student experiences of the HVA.

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<sup>9</sup> Examples of previous history education research and practitioner work in this field include Coffin, 2007; Chapman and Hibbert, 2009; Chapman, 2009(a); Thompson and Cole, 2003; Journell, 2008; Martin, 2008; Martin, Coffin and North, 2007; Moorhouse, 2006; and Snape and Allen, 2008.

### 3.1 Student Participation in the Discussion Boards

The degree of effectiveness with which the discussion boards encouraged interaction and discussion will be assessed below by considering, first, the extent of student participation and, second the qualities of student participation in the discussions. The extent of student participation will be explored by examining the entire data set for the 2011 HVA. The qualities of student participation will be assessed by exploring a sample of two from the ten 2011 HVA discussion groups.

#### 3.1. a The Extent of Student Participation in the HVA

The HVA was delivered through Edge Hill University's virtual learning environment (VLE): Blackboard 9.1.<sup>10</sup> One hundred and twenty five (125) anonymous student log-ons were created and log-ons were also created for participating university academics and for teachers and lecturers.<sup>11</sup> Log-ons were distributed as equitably as possible between the 9 participating institutions. A mismatch between the number of log-ons available and the demand for log-ons in some of the participating institutions resulted in a situation where some log-ons represented individual students and others represented groups of students.<sup>12</sup>

Of the 125 student log-ons, 91(72.8%) became live log-ons.<sup>13</sup> It will be recalled, from Figure 4 and from the discussion in section 2.1.b (i) above, that students were asked to make five posts over the course of the HVA. Figure 5 presents actual participation in the boards, measured in terms of the number of posts made, against the theoretical total number of posts that could have been made (calculated by multiplying the number of live log-ons by 5).

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<sup>10</sup> Exemplification of the Blackboard interface is provided in Appendix 7.2.

<sup>11</sup> Student log-ons were anonymous so as to minimise data protection issues – thus, for example, a series of numbered 'Esher' log-ons were created for Esher students, a series of numbered Benton Park log-ons were created for Benton Park pupils, and so on. Teachers distributed log-ons to students and kept records of log-on distribution. Student log-ons are further anonymised in the text of this report: where posts are quoted, no references to institutions are made in these quotations.

<sup>12</sup> In the remainder of this report the convention of referring to 'student log-ons' rather than to 'students' when discussing posts is adopted wherever clarity is required as to the exact reference of terms.

<sup>13</sup> This reflects the fact that the number of students who would volunteer to take part in some participating institutions had been overestimated at the point at which log-ons were distributed.

**Figure 5. Participation in the 2011 HVA: Actual Participation Measured Against Possible Participation**

	Phase 1		Phase 2		Phase 3	Overall
	Posts	Replies	Posts	Replies	Posts	
Total possible number of posts	91	91	91	91	91	455
Total actual number of posts	86	56	29	40	39	250
Actual and a Percentage of possible posts	94.5%	61.5%	31.9%	44.0%	42.9%	54.9%

As Figure 5 shows, participation rates declined dramatically over time and, although a participation rate of 94.5% is achieved in the initial component of Phase 1, participation rates do not exceed 44% in either Phase 2 or Phase 3.<sup>14</sup>

It is not possible to present the data in tabular form, because of differences in the structure of the three HVAs, however, a similar pattern of decline over time in the percentage of student log-ons posting was apparent in the 2008 and 2009 data sets: for example, whereas 100% of students posted at the start of the 2008 HVA, the figure declined to 40% in the final stage of the 2008 HVA (Chapman, 2009(a), p.36).

Figure 6 compares overall participation rates for the 2008, 2009 and 2011 HVAs.

**Figure 6. Participation Rates in the 2008, 2009 and 2011 HVAs: Actual Participation Measured Against Possible Participation<sup>15</sup>**

	Number of active log-ons	Total possible number of posts	Total actual number of posts	Actual posts as a percentage of possible posts
2008	15	90	67	74.4%
2009	27	297	165	55.6%
2011	91	455	250	54.9%

<sup>14</sup> All 91 log-ons were active over the course of the discussions, although they did not all make a Phase 1 post.

<sup>15</sup> 2008 and 2009 data is reported at Chapman 2009 (a) p.36.

Figure 6 shows that the overall participation rates in 2011 were the lower than those achieved in earlier HVAs. It will be recalled, however, that the 2011 HVA involved 10 different discussion groups and five different discussion topics. The data reported in Figure 6 masks a very wide variation in participation rates by discussion topic and discussion group. Figure 7 reports the range of variation.

**Figure 7. Participation Rates by Discussion Topic and Discussion Group: 2011 HVA**

Discussion Topic	Discussion Group	Live student log-ons	Total number of possible posts	Total number of actual posts	Actual posts as a percentage of possible posts
American Civil War	1	8	40	37	92.5%
	2	9	45	30	66.7%
	All groups	17	85	67	78.8%
Cold War	1	11	55	20	36.4%
Cromwell	1	11	55	36	65.5%
Nazi Germany	1	9	45	25	55.6%
	2	7	35	19	54.3
	3	9	45	21	46.7%
	All groups	25	125	65	52%
Tudor Rebellions	1	10	50	22	44%
	2	8	40	23	57.5%
	3	9	45	17	37.8%
	All groups	27	135	62	45.9%

Comparisons between Figures 6 and 7 indicate that although the overall participation rate for 2011 (54.9%) was lower than the overall figures for both 2008 and 2009, the most successful 2011 discussion, in terms of participation rates (the American Civil War Group 1, with a participation rate of 92.5%) had a higher overall participation rate than the 2008 HVA. It is also apparent that 5 of the 10 2011 groups had equal (1 group) or higher participation rates (4 groups) than the 2009 HVA.

A particularly notable feature of the 2011 data set, then, is the degree of variation in participation rates within it and it is notable that degree of variation is marked within discussion topics as well as between discussion groups, as the differences in participation rates between the two American Civil War groups (25.8%) and between Tudor Rebellions 2 and 3 (19.7%) show. This variation in participation rates within discussion topics makes it particularly hard to account convincingly, in purely quantitative terms, for much of the variation apparent in

Figure 7 since all the discussion groups in each discussion topic shared the following features in common:

- institutional group composition (e.g. each Nazi Germany discussion group contained students from the same three institutions)
- task texts
- task structure
- contributing historian.

It is difficult, therefore, to identify factors that might account for the differential rates of participation in the different discussion groups, at the level of participation data.

As was noted above, in Figure 2 at section 2.1.b (iv), the topics covered in the discussions had variable relevance to students in different institutions and it is plausible to suggest that this factor might impact participation. Figure 8 presents participation rates by institution and by topic relevance in order to explore this possibility.

**Figure 8. Participation Rates by Discussion Topic and Discussion Group: 2011 HVA**

This figure presents institutions clustered into categories according to the degree to which discussion topics had direct relevance to students and explores relationships between topic-relevance and participation rates.

Institutions	(a) Students were currently studying the discussion topics as part of their current sixth form course	(b) Students were not currently studying the discussion topics as part of their current sixth form course	Institutional average participation rate	Category average
Category 1	Yes		87.3%	62.1%
	Yes		86.7%	
	Yes		65.7%	
	Yes		56.7%	
	Yes		40%	
	Yes		36%	
Category 2		Yes	46.7%	41.2%
		Yes	35.6%	
		Yes	38%	

Figure 8 appears to provide some support for the suggestion that topic-relevance may be a factor explaining student participation, particularly where the category averages in the final column are considered. The data is inconclusive, however, particularly given the range apparent within Category 1 (where

participation rates vary by over 50% by institution). The proposition that topic relevance is a key factor influencing participation is also inconsistent with the 2008 and 2009 participation data, as topic irrelevance did not have a negative impact on participation in 2008 and 2009.<sup>16</sup>

It seems probable that variations in participation rates are accounted for by a combination of institutional variables impacting participation – such as variations in coursework deadlines – variable perceptions of the importance of topic-relevance and factors linked to the dynamics of individual discussion groups.<sup>17</sup>

### **3.1. b The nature of student participation in the HVA**

In the discussion that follows in this and the next section of this report the 2011 data sets are evaluated by sample through an examination of the posts in American Civil War discussion group 2 and Nazi Germany discussion group 2, groups that were respectively 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> in descending rank order by participation rate.

These two discussions will be explored in terms of their generic characteristics as arguments, in this section, and in terms of the thinking about historical interpretations that they exhibit and the extent to which students' ideas appear to change over the course of the discussion boards, in section 3.2 below.

The analysis of the student posts in American Civil War discussion group 2 (ACW2) and Nazi Germany discussion group 2 (NG2) makes use of a coding system developed by Wayne Journell (2008) to explore the nature and 'quality of online interaction' (p.318) in a case study of high school students following a history course through a South-western Virginia e-learning programme (pp.323-325). Journell's code categories are used because, first, they allow the extent to which the discussions enabled focused historical argument to be scoped and, second, because doing so allows comparison to be made between Journell's data set and the 2011 HVA data sets and thus enabling external benchmarking to take place.

Journell's coding system, which is reproduced, with minor modifications, in

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<sup>16</sup> It was not possible to find topics common to participating institutions in the 2008 and 2009 HVA iterations and these exercises focused on a topic that none of the participating students had studied.

<sup>17</sup> It is possible that discussion group specific aspects of interaction may have played a role in differential rates of participation: data has yet to be analysed systematically across all discussions in a way that would allow this possibility to be explored.

the first two columns of Figure 9 below, categorises discussion board posts and emails in terms of the contribution that they do or do not make to advancing historical argument and discussion (pp.327-8) and divides contributions to discussion into two broad categories, 'substantive' and 'non-substantive' statements:

substantive statements... used historical evidence, actively agreed with others' posts, posed questions to others, directly responded to questions posed by others, or disagreed with or challenged others' beliefs... non-substantive [statements] expressed unsubstantiated opinions, offered simple encouragement, passively agreed with others' posts, or provided recreational banter.  
(Journell, 2008, p.327)

Figure 9 adapts Journell's categories and illustrates them, using examples drawn from the ACW2 and NG2 discussions. The figure does not adopt all of Journell's categories since two (recreational banter and unsubstantiated opinions) were not present in these two discussions.

### Figure 9. A Coding Scheme for Analysing the Nature of Student Participation in the HVA

This coding scheme is adapted from Journell, 2008, pp.327-8 and exemplified with quotations from American Civil War discussion group 2 and Nazi Germany discussion group 2.

Code	Explanation	Example from Text
<b>Substantive Statements</b>		
Use of Historical Evidence (HE)	Statements which use historical information from sources provided and/or other sources to support claims	<i>"It should be highlighted the people of Germany wanted change from the Weimar and Hitler was able to give this change."</i>
Active Agreement (AA)	Statements agreeing with others' claims together with an explanation for agreement.	<i>"...We do agree that Sewell's narrative overview focused purely on Sherman's Atlantic campaign, emphasising that Sherman's military leadership is a key factor for Union victory."</i>
Posing a Question to Others (PQ)	Statements requesting further information or the clarification of meaning.	<i>"Hi, have you given any consideration to the possibility that the factual evidence referenced in Source 2 cannot necessarily be taken at face value?"</i>
Responses to Questions (RQ)	Statements which provide a response to others' questions.	<i>"Making the distinctions between the approaches that Sewell and Grimsley use to analyse events, may prove useful in answer to the question that [the historian] poses."</i>
Disagreement/Challenge Beliefs (D)	Statements which disagree or challenge claims made in other's posts	<i>"Your argument in regards to the "lack of evidence in Gellately's source" is questionable."</i>
<b>Non-Substantive Statements</b>		
Encouraging Remarks (ER)	Statements offering encouragement.	<i>"This post seems a very useful summary of what the sources embody."</i>
Passive Agreement (PA)	Statements agreeing with others' claims without giving specific reasons.	<i>"After consideration of the sources we have concluded that the Source 3 is strongest, reaching similar judgments to our original points."</i>

Figure 10 applies Journell's coding scheme (2008, pp.327-8), as adapted in Figure 9, to analyse the ACW2 and NG2 discussion board data sets and Figure 11 compares Journell's data with the amalgamated ACW2 and NG2 data.

### Figure 10. The Nature of Student Participation in the 2011 HVA (ACW2 and NG2)

Figure 10 applies Journell's coding scheme (2008, pp.327-8), as presented in Figure 9, to analyse the American Civil War discussion group 2 (ACW2) and Nazi Germany discussion group 2 (NG2) data sets. N=37 text items coded (NG2) and N= 44 text items coded (ACW2)

Group	Respondent	Non-substantive statements(NSS)			Substantive statements (SS)					
		Encouraging Remarks (ER)	Passive Agreement (PA)	NSS Totals	Active Agreement (AA)	Posing a Question to Others (PQ)	Disagreement / Challenge Beliefs (D)	Responses to Questions (RQ)	Use of Historical Evidence (HE)	SS Totals
NG2	Student C.4	0	0	0	2	1	5	0	4	12
NG2	Student A.5	0	0	0	2	1	2	0	3	8
NG2	Student A.7	1	0	1	1	2	1	0	1	5
NG2	Student A.1	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	4
NG2	Student B.24	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	1	4
NG2	Student B.20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
NG2	Student B.21	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
NG2	Student B.22	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
NG2	Total	1	0	1	7	6	10	0	14	37
ACW2	Student B.8	0	1	1	4	0	2	0	2	9
ACW2	Student D.2	1	0	1	2	2	3	1	0	9
ACW2	Student B.10	0	0	0	4	1	1	0	2	8
ACW2	Student B.6	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	1	5
ACW2	Student B.7	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	2	5
ACW2	Student D.3	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	3
ACW2	Student B.9	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
ACW2	Student D.5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
ACW2	Student D.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
ACW2	Student D.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
ACW2	Student D.4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ACW2	Total	3	1	4	13	3	12	1	11	44

What conclusions are suggested by the presentation of the HVA data samples in Figure 10? First, it is apparent that the overwhelming majority of the HVA posts are coded as substantive posts, or, in other words, posts concerned with driving forward historical discussion, and that irrelevant posts or posts that lack substantiation through the use of evidence or argument are very rare in the HVA data for these two discussions, constituting 4 (4.9%) of the 81 posts.

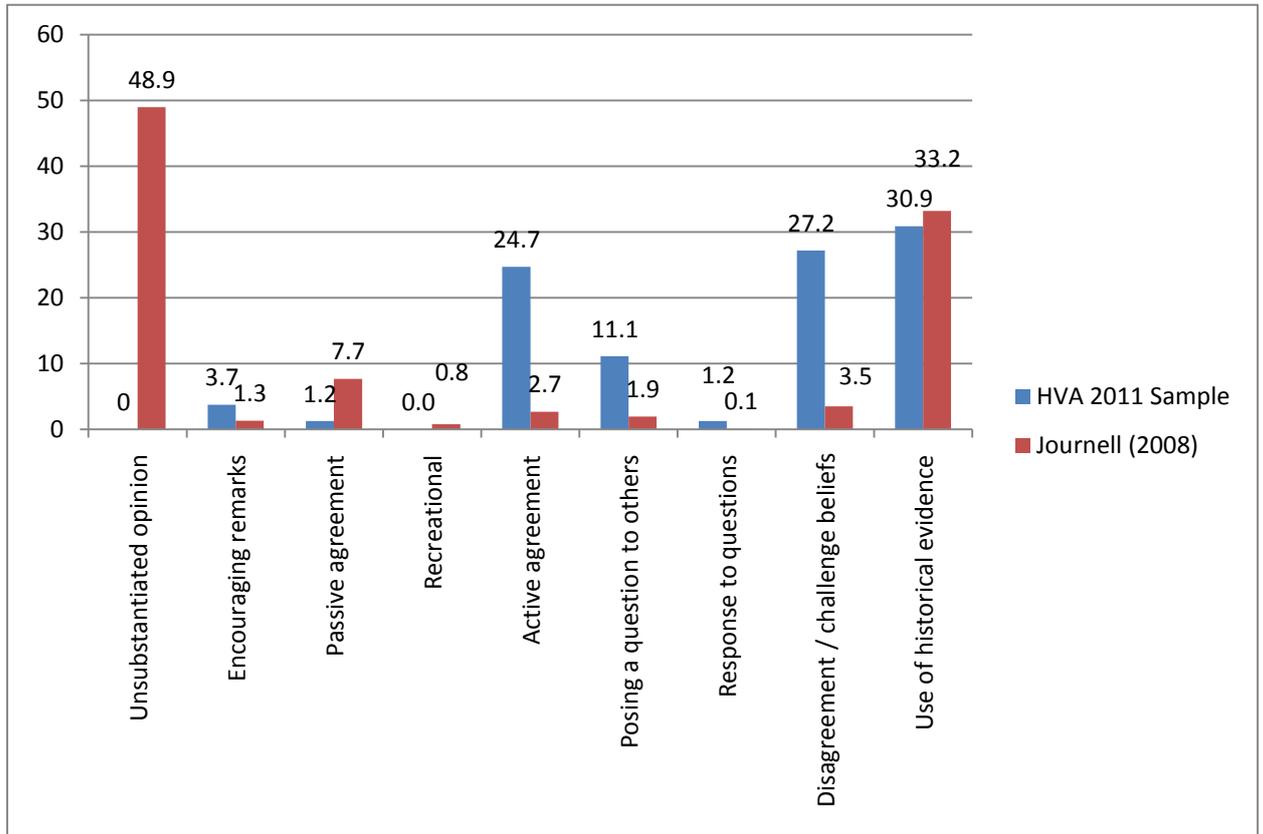
It is also apparent that the HVA data set is markedly dialogic in nature: 51 (63%) of the 81 post elements coded in HVA sample discussions were coded as involving 'active agreement', 'posing a question to others' and 'disagreement / challenge', suggesting that the HVA succeeded in engaging students in historical argument. It is equally apparent, however, that the data set is very unevenly dialogic and that the HVA participants make highly unequal contributions to the generation of dialogue: 8 of the 19 logins in the HVA data samples represented in Figure 10 made 1 (3 cases) or 0 (6 cases) contributions coded under 'active agreement', 'posing a question to others' and / or 'disagreement / challenge' and 7 log-ins made 51 (or 76.5%) of the posts coded under these categories.

Figure 11 re-presents the HVA data samples presented in Figure 10, amalgamating the NG2 and ACW2 data, and comparing it with Journell's data sample: it is apparent that the HVA data set is the more dialogic of the two: 51 (63%) of the 81 post elements coded in HVA sample discussions were coded as involving 'active agreement', 'posing a question to others' and 'disagreement / challenge', whereas the figure for Journell's data set is 137 (8.1%) of 1694 posts. Figure 11 also draws attention, however, to a common limitation of both data sets: posts devoted to answering interlocutors questions are very rare in both of the data sets represented by the figure.

What conclusions follow from this discussion? It is apparent, on the showing of this data sample at least, that the HVA discussion boards were successful in fostering historical argument. However, it is also apparent that these debates are limited in at least two respects: first, in being dominated by a minority of students who made the overwhelming majority of the dialogic posts and, second, by being characterised, by a preponderance, in interactions between students at any rate, of questions and challenges over replies to questions or challenges.

**Figure 11. A Comparison of the Nature of Student Participation in the 2011 HVA (ACW2 and NG2 combined) and the Journell (2008) Data Set.**

Figure 11 compares Journell's data set (2008, p.331) with the combined data for ACW2 and NG2 using Journell's coding scheme (2009, pp.327-8), as presented in Figure 9.



### 3.2 Developing student thinking?

A primary purpose of the HVA discussion boards was to promote and develop student thinking about historical interpretations and controversies. The sample discussions - American Civil War discussion group 2 (ACW2) and Nazi Germany discussion group 2 (NG2) – were analysed to identify the kinds of ideas that the students brought to the explanatory and evaluative interpretations tasks that they were asked to complete in the three stages of the HVA and to identify the extent to which the ideas that students' advanced over the course of the HVA phases changed.

### **3.2. a Data analysis: methods**

The posts in the two sample discussions were analysed, using an inductive coding method loosely based on grounded theoretic approaches to qualitative data analysis (Blaikie, 2007; Gibbs, 2002; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). All student posts in the two sample discussions were inputted into NVivo (Gibbs, 2002) and read and coded in iterative cycles until a system of low inference descriptive codes had been developed that allowed all the explanatory and evaluative propositions that the students advanced in their posts to be labelled, grouped and modelled in terms of similarities and differences in the ideas that they expressed.

Twenty six (26) explanatory codes were developed to code the explanations for interpretive variation put forward in ACW2 and NG2 and 16 evaluative codes were developed to code the evaluative moves that were made in ACW2 and NG2. The codes were then used to compare the types of explanation and of evaluative move that were present in Phase 1 posts, made before the historians had posted to the discussions, with those that were present in the Phase 2 and Phase 3 discussion posts.

The purpose of coding the data in this manner is to identify broad patterns of similarity and difference between posts and also to scope ways in which and the extent to which students' ideas appear to change over the course of the discussion boards. For each discussion, broad patterns are examined quantitatively and examples of student thinking are then explored in depth.

### **3.2. b American Civil War Discussion Board 2**

Like the other discussion tasks, the American Civil War discussion presented students with two contrasting accounts and asked them to, first, explain why the two historians provided different reasons for the outcome of the war, and, second, to explain how they might choose between the two explanations. In the second week of the discussion exercise a further account was introduced, written for the discussion by the historian taking part in the discussion exercise, and students were asked to revisit the question of why historians give different reasons for the outcome of the war and of how they might adjudicate between differing explanations. These three texts are reproduced in Appendix 7.7.

### 3.2. b (i) Explaining why interpretations differ

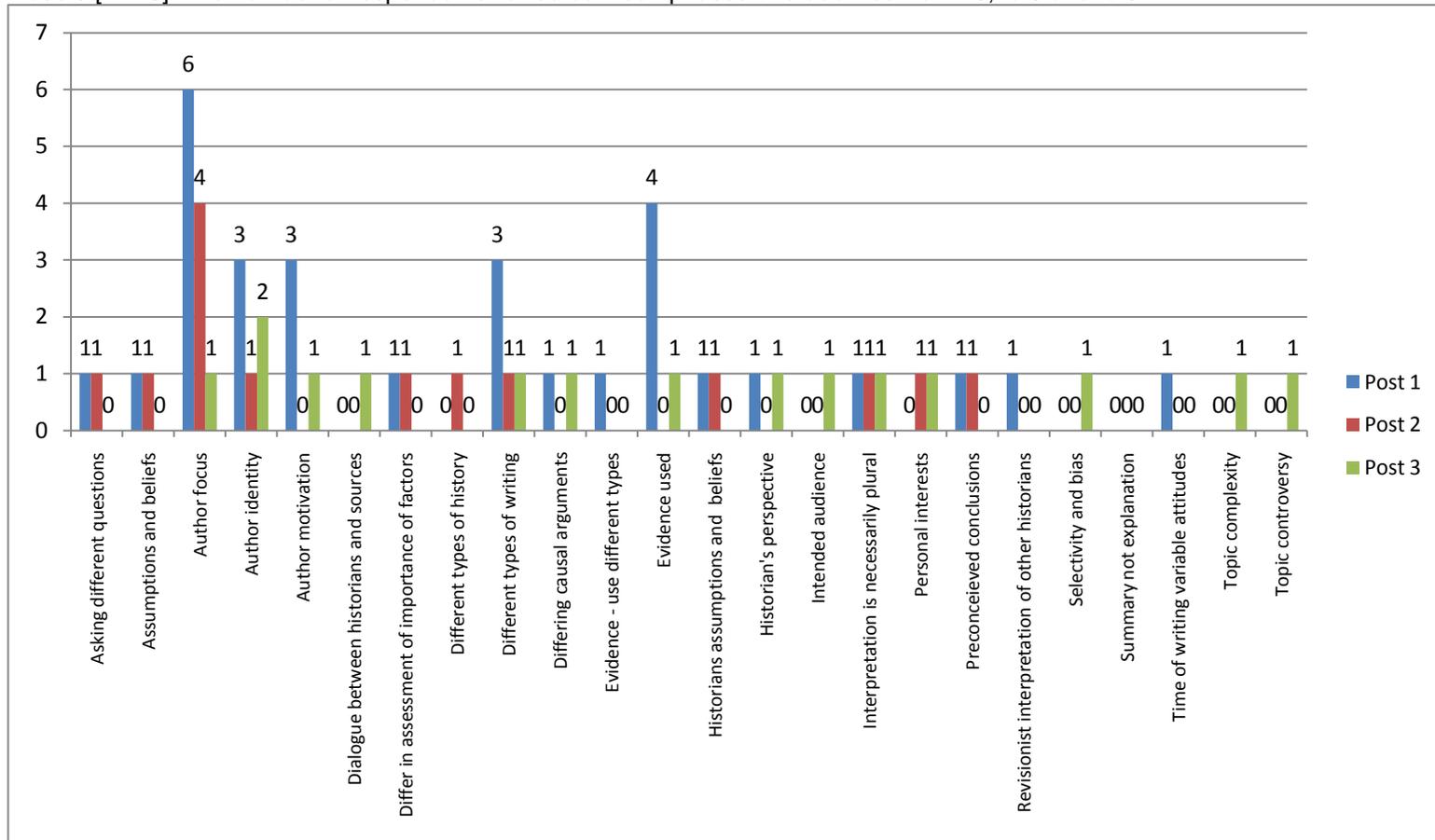
Figure 12 presents the incidence and distribution of explanations for account variation offered in the first, second and third phases of the ACW2 HVA and allows the extent of change in the forms of explanation offered at the different phases of the HVA to be explored. The changes that the figure reports need to be interpreted with caution since the number of participants in the discussion shrank significantly over time (Figure 7, above) and a decline in the incidence of particular ideas may simply reflect the fact that the proponents of these ideas ceased posting.

As Figure 12 indicates, in Phase 1 explanation in terms of ‘author focus’, ‘evidence used’, ‘author identity’, ‘author motivation’ and ‘types of writing’ dominated; in Phase 2, ‘evidence used’ and ‘author motivation’ declined dramatically in importance, ‘author identity’, ‘types of writing’ and ‘author focus’ declined also but to a lesser extent, and two new explanations appeared (‘personal interest’ and ‘types of history’). At Phase 3 some explanations that had already appeared (such as ‘author identity’) recur and further new explanations are introduced (including ‘selectivity and bias’, ‘audience’, two ‘topic’ factors, and explanation in terms of ‘dialogue between historians and the past’). It is not immediately obvious what conclusions can be drawn from these patterns, other than, first, that the kinds of explanation offered over the course of the HVA change and increase and, second, that there is a very clear and rapid movement away from an initial strong commitment to explanation in terms of the evidence (‘evidence used’ and ‘evidence – use different types’).

Two contrasting sets of posts, from the subset of ACW2 who posted at all three phases of the HVA, are explored below to understand the shifts reported in Figure 12 at the level of individual posts.

**Figure12. American Civil War 2: Explaining Differences in Interpretation**

A comparison between the explanations for the existence of differences in interpretation present in posts at HVA Phase 1 [N=30], Phase 2 [N=14], and Phase 3 [N=15]. The number of respondents varied between phases and declined from 10, to 6 and to 5.



The following three extracts are from Student Log-on B.7's posts.

Student B.7 18 March 2011 09:34:22

The historians may differ in their interpretations as to the outcome of the Civil War for several reasons; the most prevalent of which is their area of focus. For example, Sewell argues in Source 1 that the military campaigns and the physical devastation, i.e. Sherman's 'scorched earth' policy, suffered by the South at the hands of the North contributed to defeat. Whereas Source 2 chooses to focus on the economic crippling of the South, exacerbated by the Confederacy's internal weaknesses, as opposed to external factors. This is also linked to the mentality of the historians and whether they believe that the North won or the South lost. It would appear that Source 2 regards the South's own deficiencies were to blame for their downfall and they used the North's "brute force" to alleviate responsibility in this collapse. Conversely, Source 1 maintains a mentality that it was the North who won through their aggressive military tactics and overpowering of the Confederacy's army.....

Student B.7, 25 March 2011 09:54:49

The historians may differ [*repeats the first paragraph of the first post above verbatim*] of the Confederacy's army.

Source 3 incorporates both of the previous sources... Another reason historians such as Sewell, Grimsley and [*the historian*] might differ in their interpretation is the type of history they choose to pursue. For example, Sewell appears more concentrated on military history and the battles of the war, whereas [*the historian*] identifies precursors to the war as a significant factor in Southern defeat and Grimsley the after effects of the war.

Student B.7 1 April 2011 08:42:06

...We find that the main reasons for these differing perspectives is the approach that each of the historians takes, i.e. an economic or social stance and will thus articulate their argument based around this structure. For example, as re-iterated by student [*Student D.2*] Sewell has mainly used Confederate sources to support his interpretation and is thus rather selective. As supported by [*Student D.2*] it is also a narrative account of events and refrains from offering an explicit interpretation....

The first post explains differences in interpretation in terms of the idea of focus (historians say different things about the past because they focus on different issues or different aspects of the past) and also through reference to historians' assumptions and beliefs (historians see things in different ways

because they already hold beliefs that shape how they understand their materials). The second of these posts incorporates ideas derived from the historian's main post to the board in week two of the discussion:

Historian A 21 March 2011 14:36:24

The outcome of the American Civil War

The two sources you have previously studied have both taken differing stances on the reasons behind the outcomes of the Civil War. Sewell takes a more narrative, narrower focused approach to explaining the North's victory over the South: he credits the military strength and expertise of the North's commanders, particularly General Sherman and his 'Scorched Earth' policy, for demoralising Southerners and 'like a full developed cyclone' cutting a swathe of destruction across the Southern states.

Alternatively, Grimsley advocates the economic fragility of the South, brought about by Slave Emancipation, the policy of impressment and a weak currency, as the real reasons for its being unsuccessful in the conflict. By analysing the impact of events, rather than the events themselves, Grimsley takes a less narrative, less militaristic focus, identifying that the psychological impact of the war (perpetrated by 'Yankee vandals') helped divert Southern mentality away from its own responsibilities for the war.....

The student appears to have drawn on suggestions made by the historian (e.g. 'militaristic focus') and added the idea of 'types of history' to the notion of focus identified in the first post and also to have elaborated the notion of focus to include temporal focus, drawing on the historian's comments (about a focus on 'impact... rather than the events themselves').

The third Student B.7 post incorporates ideas derived from the historian's final post to the discussion board (the notion of a 'defined perspective'):

Historian A 29 March 2011 11:25:09

Your responses to the various posts, including my own, have been stimulating and engaging. You make particularly valid points regarding the impact of perspective on the subjectivity of historians.

Many authors who approach historical events from a defined perspective (such as an economic or social standpoint) will ultimately formulate an argument based on a predefined structure. You have all clearly identified the perspective taken by Sewell and Grimsley. The skill for yourselves as historians is to understand this structure and manage your expectations of the

source accordingly. Do you believe that historians should make clear analytical judgements about historical events or should they simply record these events with little analysis?

It very much looks as if Student Log-on B.7's posts record a process of development and consolidation in which they progressively incorporate observations made by the historian and, in the third post, by another student, without fundamentally changing their overall explanatory approach. In other words, it very much looks as if the process of involvement in the HVA helped this student consolidate and sophisticate how they were already thinking and that they used the historian's posts to elaborate, deepen and extend that thinking (the view that differences in interpretation can, in large part, be explained in terms of the variable stances and sets of assumptions that different historians bring to their study of the past).

The following set of posts has a somewhat different character: rather than recording the incremental expansion and consolidation of an existing framework, the posts record a process of reflection and metacognition: Student log-on D.2 appears to have been stimulated to reflect on large scale questions and on historical epistemology by the online interactions and, in particular, by questions posed by Historian A.

The first post is tightly focused on the question posed in the discussion board, provides a list of factors in answer to the question and works through them, exploring how they might impact on the construction of interpretations.

Student D.2 18 March 2011 15:15:36

Different historians have varying interpretations because of the following reasons; the sources that they base their argument upon, the perspective they use to approach the topic, and revisionist techniques of interpreting other historian's sources, as demonstrated in Source Two.

The sources that the said historians base their argument upon are clearly influential in terms of their concluding interpretation. For example, the first source includes a Confederate version of the war, as well as highlighting references to events in Georgia at the time, as well as citing the words of Sherman before the march. Sewell also incorporates statistical evidence. Whereas Grimsley uses a revisionist approach to shape his judgement, taking into consideration the perspective of other historians, and Confederates. From this we can infer that the use of a range of

sources effects the way that they view the outcome of the Civil War.

Another reason why historians give different reasons for the outcome of the American Civil War is because of their perception. Source one is a narrative account of Sherman's plan of action. Source two on the other hand the uses historical interpretations to be analytical of the 'Lost Cause' interpretation...

The second post responds to a question posed by the historian in their Phase 2 post, namely –

Historian A 21 March 2011 14:36:24

The outcome of the American Civil War

.....

The key role of any historian is to understand the plurality of reasons behind historical events. No explanations can truly stand in isolation. The moral certainty that some historians have attributed to the North's cause comes increasingly from the Union's military ability to convincingly win crucial battles (based on their industrial strength and greater numerical and technological superiority). Equally, as the North began to press harder and victories came more rapidly, the South was unable to mobilise greater resources for its cause based on their narrow focused economy and smaller population. How could these different interpretations be used in a complementary fashion to understand the complexity of the American Civil War?

As noted above, the students' response to this supplementary question moves some distance from the original discussion question and, arguably, into much more interesting and complex historical territory: the student has moved from talking about this particular concrete problem of historical interpretation and into a discussion of historical interpretation itself.

Student D.2 5 April 2011 19:00:38

In light of the interpretations provided by other posts, and [*the historian*], it seems clear that the different approaches of Sewell and Grimsley are in fact very useful in understanding the concept of historical interpretation, and the reasons the historians give for the outcome of the war. Making the distinctions between the approaches that Sewell and Grimsley use to analyse events, may prove useful in answer to the question that [*the historian*] poses; "How could these different interpretations be used in a complementary fashion to understand the complexity of the American Civil War?" These approaches, whether narrative or analytic, are as a result of each historian's own interpretation.

Arguably, the complexity of the Civil War was due to the interpretation of events or individuals such as Lincoln, reflected in the two sources provided. What both sources seem to agree on, is that the complexity of the Civil War was not in itself caused by isolated events, such as Sewell's reference to events in Georgia, but the fact that every person had a different interpretation about it, a notion most accurately displayed in Grimsley's source. Even now, the legacy of the Civil War is entirely dependent on the interpretation of events; therefore, it could be argued that in one respect, the question of why historians have varying interpretations is self-explanatory. Although each historian has conveyed their own interpretation differently, interpretation is essential in understanding an event. Historians' observations of events and the way they approach discussing them, is due to different interpretation, just as the events in the Civil War have been shaped by interpretation. Perhaps the reason as to why historians have different interpretations of the outcome of the Civil War is due to interpretation itself.

The students' final post (on the same day as the post above) looks very much as if it was prompted by the historian's post of the 29<sup>th</sup> March the first paragraph of which was cited above and the final lines of which are cited below –

Historian A. 29 March 2011 11:25:09

.....

As historians, it is important that you utilise your own knowledge and judgement of historical secondary sources by looking at who is writing, why they are writing and then, in the end, what they are writing. Many of you have done this with regards to the Grimsley and Sewell sources; how could you do this with a) the source that I wrote and, b) with regards to the debates that you have engaged in?

In calling for a degree of reflexivity the historian is certainly moving beyond the criteria that concern A2 examiners (and into the realm of the QAA Benchmarks for History).<sup>18</sup> For this particular student, however, reflexivity is clearly welcome, as the comments in the post below and in their other posts, and the fact that both posts were made on the same day and in excess of the requirements of the HVA tasks, all suggest.

---

<sup>18</sup> QAA, 2007, p.4.

Student D.2 5 April 2011 23:02:29

After reviewing the comments made by others I think that it is clear to see that interpretations in history can be very useful, however there is always evidence to counter the point the source/historian is making since the American Civil War is a complex and controversial issue. The two sources provided clearly show that there is a range of approaches and attitudes towards this war and the implication of this is that we can understand different aspects of the war according to the judgements of different historians. There is no definitive answer on such a complex topic, which is why it is even easier to challenge one another's posts because of the way in which we understand the evidence provided by the sources. Each historian focuses on a different factor and uses different evidence to support this point. This suggests that historians tend to focus on arguing their point by being very selective in their evidence, because they ignore weighty evidence which might contradict their stance. Overall I think interpretations exist because the issue of the Civil War is controversial and so no one conclusion can be formed.

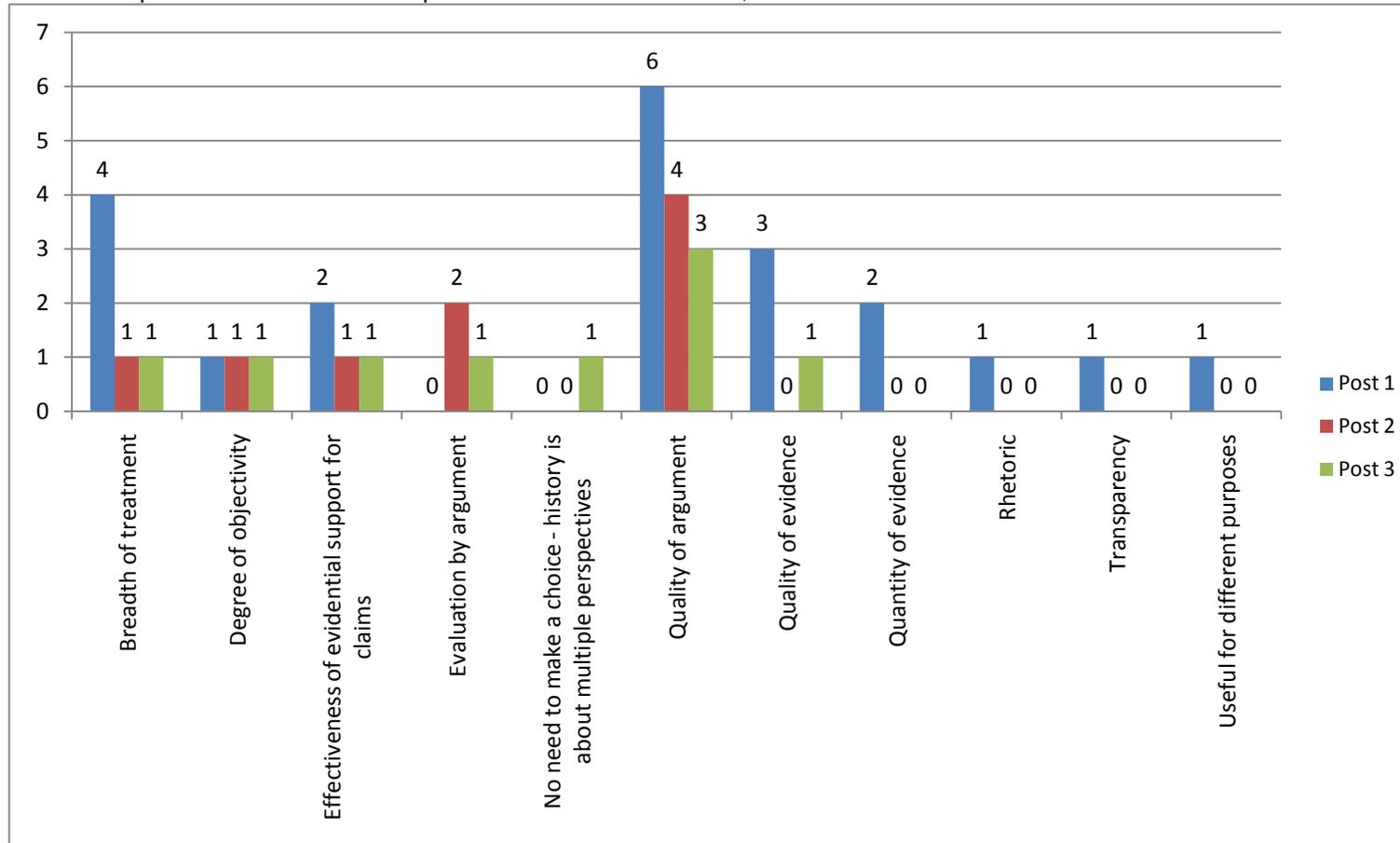
The data presented in Figure 12 certainly show that the types of explanation for variation in historical interpretation that the students posted to the HVA changed and developed over time. Caveats are necessary, of course, since the number of students participating in this discussion declined over time. The two cases discussed, however, provide support for the proposition that for at least some of the students who took part, the HVA provided an environment in which they could consolidate or extend their thinking about explaining variation in historical interpretation.

### **3.2. b (ii) Evaluating historical interpretations**

Figure 13 reports the evaluative ideas that the students in ACW2 drew upon when reflecting on how to 'choose between' interpretations and also indicates the ways in which the ideas that students put forward changed over the course of the HVA phases. Again, as was the case with the explanation data, the changes that the figure reports need to be interpreted with caution as the number of participants in the discussion shrank significantly over time. Nevertheless, the pattern of change suggested by the figure is much more straightforward than the pattern that was suggested by Figure 12.

**Figure13. American Civil War 2: Evaluating Different Interpretations**

A comparison between the evaluation criteria or evaluative moves present in posts at HVA Phase 1 [N=21], Phase 2 [N=9], and Phase 3 [N=9]. The number of respondents varied between phases and declined from 10, to 6 and to 5.



Again there is a pattern of decline in the incidence of ideas coded by a number of codes, however, it is clear that the ideas on the left hand side of the figure are a constant, if declining, presence and that a minority of the students appeared to remain wedded to these criteria. Two randomly selected sets of posts from the subset of ACW2 who posted at all three phases of the HVA are discussed below.

Student Log-on B.6 changed their mind about which historian they found most convincing between Phase 1 and Phase 3 of the HVA, however, as the following post extracts indicate, they remained consistent in their approach to evaluating historical writing across the three phases of the HVA.

Student B.6 18 March 2011 10:01:46

.....  
Looking at the evidence in Richard H Swells (1) interpretation and Mark Grimsley's (2) Interpretation we have come to the conclusion that we would choose Richard H Swells' (1) over Grimsley's (2) for the following reasons. One of main ones that led us to our decision was the amount of evidence used throughout the source enforcing his view that the main factor was the military, especially their manpower in why the south lost the war "With 50,000 men to Hood's 23, 000". On the other hand Grimsley (2) is depending on Southern justification "Grandpappy reminisced" and Southern Propaganda "The savage ferocity" and then going against this in this same source which we saw to actually be quite a negative approach. He doesn't fully provide any evidence to support his claim that it was the economic decisions by the south that was the main factor.

Student B.6 25 March 2011 10:07:17

Posted Date: Friday, 25 March 2011 10:07:17.....

Considering our focus on the evidence used in the interpretations by the historians Sewell (1) and Grimsley (2) we found that the evidence used by [*the historian*] (3) to back up his argument was lacking and therefore did not support his argument adequately. There was a lack of statistics or quotations in [*the historian*]'s interpretation although we did find that his arguments were analytical and concise. Thus this imbalance in his argument between analysis and evidence of the outcome of the Civil War was comparatively different to the two previous sources...

Student B.6 1 April 2011 08:53:44

In conclusion having looked at the different arguments in this debate, we believe that our interpretation of Sewell's source and

the way he focuses strongly on Military tactics... was further confirmed by [*the historian*] and agree that Sewell's source was 'narrative and narrower' than Grimsley's in the way that the evidence used by Sewell to support his argument is very statistical...

Although a case might be made for introducing a new criterion of evaluation in the last post (type of evidence) and although it is clear that their conclusions do shift as a result of the HVA discussions, Student Log-on B.6 is consistent in applying the same principles of evaluation across these posts (quantity of evidence, quality of evidence and quality of argument).

By contrast, Student Log-on B.10's posts demonstrate development and changes of approach rather than cumulative consolidation or consistency of approach.

Student B.10 19 March 2011 10:00:56

.....  
We would choose Grimsley's account because, although it focuses on how Union victory is perceived within the South as opposed to the 'reasons', Grimsley, in a sense, is furthering H. Sewell's emphasis on military campaigns and questioning this as a factor for Union victory by focusing on the Southern myth. H. Sewell's narrative account provides evidence to why the Union won by military campaigns in relation to other factors, while Grimsley uses a broader scope of analysis to make a more substantial conclusion to why the Union won.

Student B.10 27 March 2011 12:38:53

.....  
we would choose [*the historian*]'s approach to put forward our interpretation, as he relates the outcome to an underlying cause, whereas Sewell fails to put forth a broad analytical conclusion, whilst Grimsley puts too much emphasis on perception as opposed to analysis.

Student B.10 1 April 2011 08:54:04

.....  
In light of [*the historian*]'s final comment, we feel that although Sewell takes a narrative approach, he has brought together his argument/hypothesis in a coherent way whereby he uses a narrative format to reinforce how the other factors within which the Union had the advantage.... Therefore we feel that by using a narrative account, it can display a broad range of factors whilst

still emphasising the main cause for Union victory. We feel that Sewell's use of a narrative approach is in fact perhaps the best way to emphasise the importance of military leadership... We originally thought Grimsley's account had a broader scope of analysis than Sewell's, however Grimsley is using a very different approach and by looking at the perception of events, he is focusing on the analysis, rather than the immediate impact. Finally, both of [*the historian*]'s comments has brought Grimsley's and Sewell's interpretations together in reference to his own argument. [*The historian*] takes a broad approach, and considers both Sewell's and Grimsley's argument, but ultimately underpins this with one sole factor: slavery. His reply to our post highlights his argument that even if the Civil War had not occurred, slavery would have ceased to be economically sustainable and would have contributed to a decline in the Southern economy....

Student Log-on B.10 appears to have changed their minds over the course of the discussion and in the light of observations made by others, notably Historian A. They were coded, among other things, as evaluating historian's arguments across all three posts in terms of the qualities of the historians' arguments. They expanded the criteria that they drew upon in order to do this over the course of their posts, however, and / or re-thought the relative weight placed upon particular criteria: their initial post identifies 'breadth' and qualities of argument (such as the weightiness of conclusions) as criteria with which to assess interpretations; their second post reiterates these considerations and also adds new criteria (degree of analysis and of causal analysis); their final post reiterates all of these considerations but also includes a revision of their previous negative assessment of the analytical potential of narrative presentation.

The data presented in this section, in relation to the evaluation of contrasting interpretations, parallels the claims advanced in section 3.2.b (i) in respect of the explanation of variation in interpretation: the HVA provided at least some of the students with an environment in which to consolidate, develop or revise their thinking.

### **3.2. c Nazi Germany Discussion Board 2**

Like the other discussion tasks, the Nazi Germany discussion presented students with two contrasting accounts of the roles of coercion and consent in Nazi Germany and asked them to, first, explain why the two historians provided different assessments of the role of coercion and consent, and, second, to explain how they might choose between the two accounts. In the second week of the discussion exercise a further account was introduced, written for the discussion by the historian taking part in the discussion exercise, and students were asked to revisit the question of why historians give different assessments of the role of coercion and consent and to explain how they might adjudicate between differing assessments. These three texts are reproduced in Appendix 7.8.

#### **3.2. c (i) Explaining why interpretations differ**

Figure 14 presents the incidence and distribution of explanations for account variation offered in the Nazi Germany discussion group 2 (NG2) Phase 1-3 posts and allows us to explore the extent to which the forms of explanation offered at the different phases of the HVA shifted. Again, the number of active log-ons posting to the boards declined over the course of the boards, however, the decline in the case of NG2 was particularly dramatic: 7 log-ons were active at the start of Phase 1 but only 3 remained active in Phases 2 and 3.<sup>19</sup>

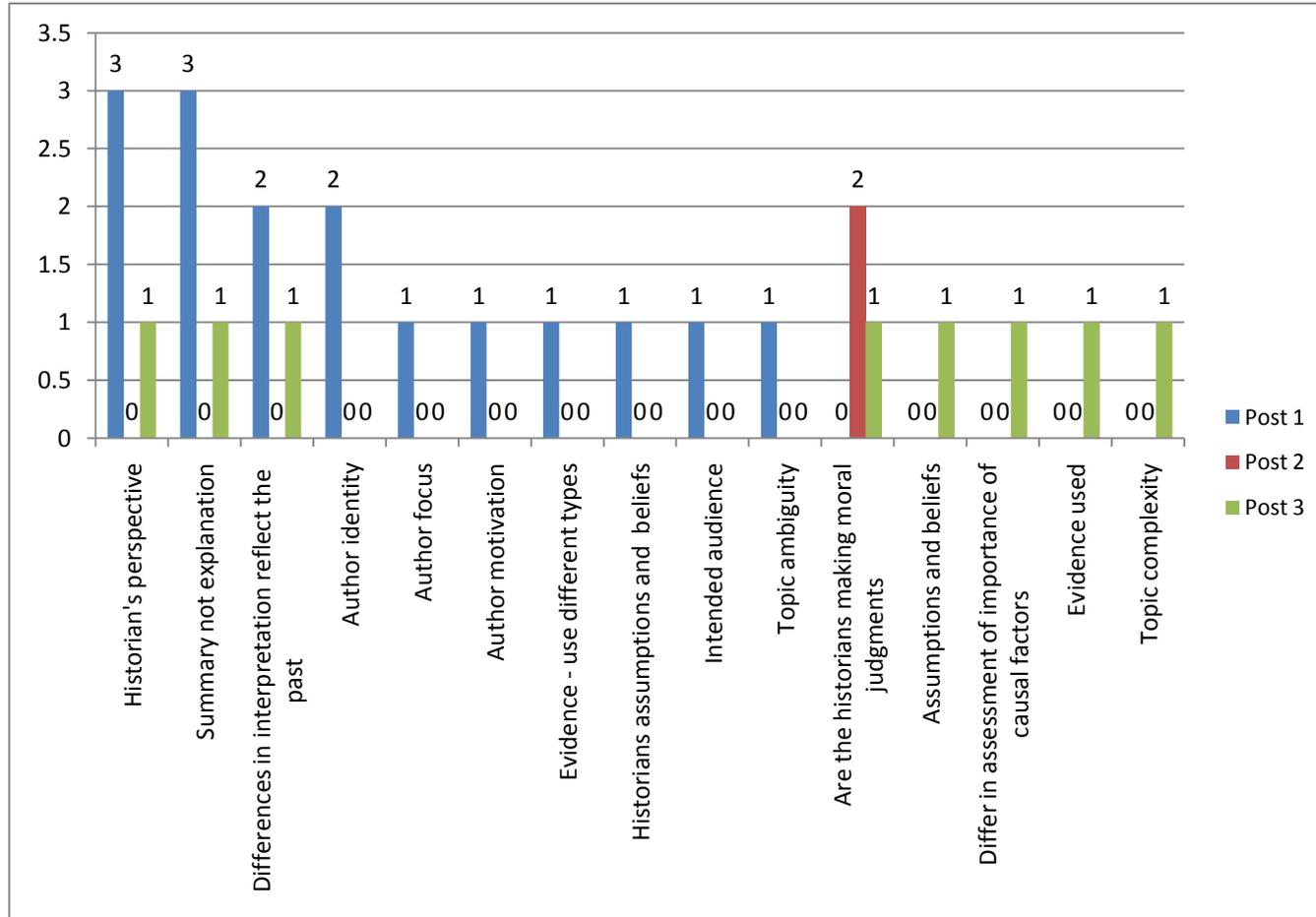
Figure 14 is much easier to interpret than Figures 12 and 13 and a clear pattern of shift between differing modes of explanation is apparent between the three phases of the HVA – explanations on the left hand side of the graph dominate in Phase 1, only one code figures in Phase 2 (where discussion focused on the nature of the topic that the historians were focused on) and a number of new explanations, on the right hand side of the graph, appear in Phase 3.

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<sup>19</sup> One student log-on (C.4) posted in both Phase 2 and Phase 3. The other two log-ons that remained active posted in either Phase 2 (A.7) or Phase 3 (B.22).

**Figure14. Nazi Germany: Explaining Differences in Interpretation**

A comparison between the explanations for the existence of differences in interpretation present in posts at HVA Phase 1 [N=16], Phase 2 [N=2], and Phase 3 [N=8]. The number of respondents varied between phases and declined from 7 in Phase 1 to 2 in Phases 2 and 3.



Given the degree of drop out after Phase 1, it is worth focusing on some of the log-ons that posted in Phase 1 only in order to explore the character of these posts. As the two examples cited below show, NG2 contained a number of students with defined and contrasting approaches to the problem of conceptualising interpretation who made an initial but not a subsequent post.

The following student log-on treats the controversy about the nature of government in Nazi Germany as simply arising from the nature of the past reality that the historians seek to try and understand:

Student B.20 15 March 2011 14:33:31

There is a variety of interpretations by Historians as although coercion was a clear feature of Nazi power this was alongside support and consent from the Nazi people as well as propaganda... evidence in both sources can be argued to represent how Nazi installed complete control over the German people. By removing civil liberties they could use the terror techniques to keep control in addition to ordinary citizens 'keeping an eye out' for traitors of the regime, which could be argued to be as a result of the terror used by the Nazi power or outright support for the party and its policies...

For another student the issue is construed as a problem of bias and is bound up with the identities of authors and their context:

Student B.21 15 March 2011 14:35:39

Source 1, written by German author Robert Gellately states that coercion wasn't used and wasn't effective.... the intended audience of a German study would be largely German and so Gellately would be more invested in agreeing with their views. On the other hand, source 2.... Evan's account a more reassuring and legitimate account... because the source was written for a British audience and so would be more objective.<sup>20</sup>

Only two students provided explanatory posts in Phase 1 and again in Phase 3 and both of these students clearly changed either their approach or their arguments between their first and their final explanatory posts. Whereas Student Log-on B.22's initial post did not provide an explanation for variation in the two interpretations but, rather, provided a summary of what the accounts said, their Phase 3 post did provide an explanatory answer.

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<sup>20</sup> This attribution of identity, echoed in a number of other posts, is erroneous: Gellately is a Canadian.

Student B.22 15 March 2011 14:27:47

Gellately is of the opinion that the wider public helped the Gestapo through denunciations and he portrays them as active participants. He claims that the people did not object because they supported the Nazi's policies, such as reversal of the treaty of Versailles and the destruction of the communist threat. Many people willingly supported the regime and did not need to be terrorised into compliance, this is shown when they supported the government as they began to lose the war. Most people did not need to be terrorised or coerced because they supported the regime of their own accord. On the other hand, Evans argues that the government did use terror and coercion to make the population submissive and this is proved by the large apparatus of terror that existed. The Nazi state had little political freedoms and it was illegal to be a member of any non-Nazi organisation. The fear that the public felt, mainly came from the local active Nazis and committed supporters of the regime because the public at large could not tell each-others' allegiances so they had to be cautious when talking to people about the government....

Student B.22 31 March 2011 09:04:38

Historians provide differing assessments on the role of coercion in Nazi Germany for many reasons. These may include them looking at different pieces of evidence or interpreting them in other ways. Also, many people have contradictory opinions to start with, often due to political views or moral obligations. Gellately and Evans' opposing views show the two sides to the argument on coercion in Nazi Germany...

The second student who made explanatory posts at both Phase 1 and Phase 3 also made a non-explanatory post at Phase 2 and a number of additional posts and replies. The catalyst for the development of this student's thinking was an observation made by Historian B in their main post at Phase 2 of the discussion.

Historian B. March 2011 16:54:06

The energy of the argument between these two prominent historians reflects the importance of this debate which seeks to examine the extent to which the coming to power of Nazi Party and the brutality of its regime can be perceived as a moral failure on the part of the German people. These historians are making a moral judgement on the behaviour of the German people at this time.

Student Log-on C.4 engaged the historian in debate on this point and key extracts from this exchange are reproduced below.

Student C.4 27 March 2011 23:22:07

In regards to the interpretation that these historians are making a moral judgment on the behaviour of the German people, or even to go as far as to perceive the German public as immoral in their submission to the brutal regime, is in our opinion a difficult one to justify. Even Gellately who conveys the public as 'willing' to comply does not morally condemn them. It's understandable that the population would have a sense of allegiance owing to the short-term success of the regime, putting them "on a better footing than many people, until then, had experienced in their lifetime"....

Historian B. 28 March 2011 09:43:21

.....  
 You seem to doubt that moral judgements are being made by these historians however I would argue that is essentially what these arguments are about - judgements based on extensive research over many years. Close reading of historical work is often required to see these judgements, in work that should strive for objectivity judgements are usually not made through blunt statements. For example, if an historian includes in their work an example from a Gestapo case file in which someone reports a neighbour for socialising with a Jewish person and their motive for doing so is that they want the flat/house that their neighbour lives in, that evidence lends weight to a judgement of the behaviour of that person, and perhaps others, and by writing about it the historian strengthens that judgement.

Student C.4 30 March 2011 20:40:15

Upon closer inspection of the sources in question, it is certainly acknowledgeable that a suggestion of a moral judgement lies within the subtexts of the extracts under consideration. Therefore our initial doubts regarding the existence of moral judgements admittedly may have been a little hasty. Nonetheless, we were inclined to form our previous interpretation based on the connotations that arise out of "moral failure." Such connotations of condemnation and disapproval, we felt, are not evident in the given sources. However that is not to say that a moral judgement of sorts has not been made. Both Gellately and Evans conclude that the German people should not be held accountable for their cooperation and the resulting continuation of the brutal regime. The manipulative nature of the Nazis, their appeal to the masses and the surrounding circumstances including, for example, the considerable improvement from the Weimar era all contribute to vast public support.

Arguably the historians are not primarily making "a moral judgement on the behaviour of the German people at this time" but rather a judgement as to the causes of the coercion and consent by the majority of German citizens. The fundamental

question of cause as opposed to morality is apparent in the work of Gellately whereby he states “inducement to obey” suggesting that his focus is centred on vindication of how Nazi tactics rallied support.

This exchange is of course valuable in itself – and particularly so in the context of an exercise that aimed to develop both challenge and argument. The exchange also seems to have had a very positive impact on the qualities of the student’s answer to the HVA question. Their Phase 1 post was as follows and was rather circular – historians are described as assessing Nazi Germany differently because they perceive it differently; it is also notable that historians are described more as creating a *mise-en-scène* (establishing atmosphere, placing focus on, highlighting) than as developing arguments.

Student C.4 17 March 2011 22:46:43

Arguably Gellately and Evans provide different assessments of the role of coercion in Nazi Germany for the reason that their respective fundamental perceptions of the German public starkly contrast. Whereas Gellately immediately establishes an atmosphere in which German citizens were to an extent sympathetic to Nazi policies (e.g. abolishment of Treaty of Versailles; the removal of a threat from the left) and therefore “willing to comply and cooperate” with the regime, Evans, from the outset, places a focus upon the limiting nature of the Nazi regime, therefore portraying German society as wholly oppressed.

The examples of research alluded to by the two historians reinforces this difference in interpretation. For example, Gellately refers to Gestapo case files of Wurzburg, Speyer or Dusseldorf, highlighting the “extent of unsolicited informing from citizens.”....

This explanation contrasts markedly with the same student log-on’s Phase 3 post.

Student C.4 31 March 2011 21:24:20

.....

Also important to consider when evaluating why the historians provide different assessments of the role of coercion is the distinction in emphasis placed on the differing reasons as to why the German population were inclined to sustain the Nazi regime. Gellately holds the view that propaganda, economic improvement, the reversal of the Treaty of Versailles etc. are of greater significance than other oppressive means of control. This is in contrast to Evans, who as noted before, although acknowledging the existence of other contributing factors continues to question why such measures of oppression were

necessary if there did exist such mass 'support' for the regime. This evidently indicates that Evans holds the view that terror and oppression was truly instrumental in securing submission of the people...

It is harder to find clear evidence in NG2 for changing approaches to explaining variation in interpretation than it is to find such evidence in ACW2, largely as a result of the small size of the discussion group and the low levels of participation in the second and third phases of the HVA. There is nevertheless evidence that the exercise impacted the style and the sophistication of the posts of the students who engaged with the exercise over more than one of the phases of the HVA, as the examples discussed above demonstrate.

### **3.2. c (ii) Evaluating historical interpretations**

Figure 15 reports the evaluative ideas that the students in ACW2 drew upon when reflecting on how to 'choose between' interpretations. As the figure shows, the most common approaches to evaluation taken by NG2 respondents in Phase 1 involved reference to evidence and/or argument.

One student log-on posted evaluative comments at all three phases of the NG2 discussion and a further two students posted at Phase 1 and at either Phase 2 or Phase 3. In three of these four cases, the changes between early and late postings were relatively minor, as in the following example.

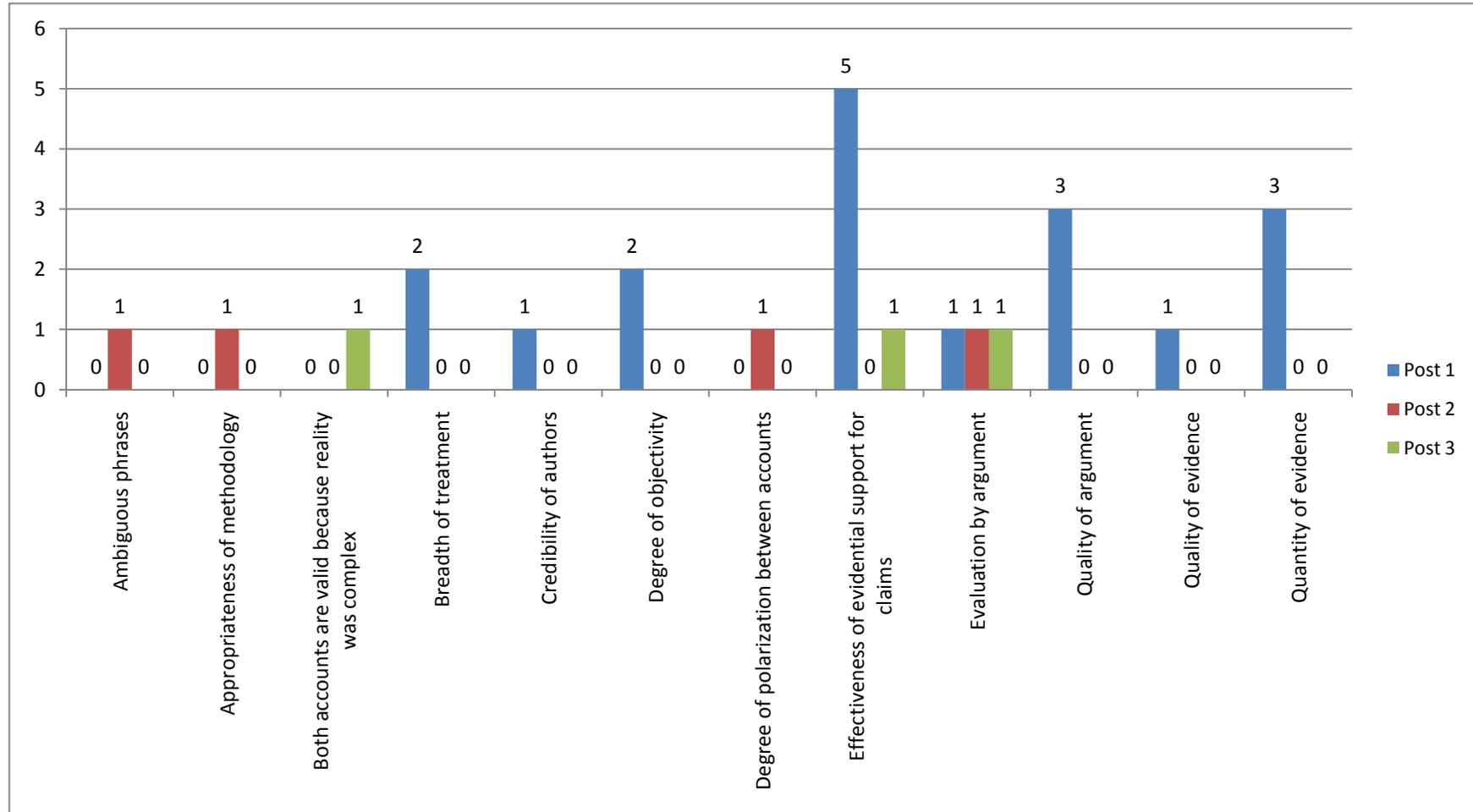
Student C.4 17 March 2011 22:46:43

.....

Regarding the question of how one ought to approach choosing between the two sources under consideration, it is important to take a holistic viewpoint concerning the methods the Nazis took to ensure the state efficiently answered to the Fuhrer's will. In light of this, one could argue that Evans' response places too much emphasis on the oppressive nature of the regime whereas Gellately offers some recognition of other contributing factors that served to "tempt and entice" ordinary citizens into supporting the Nazis.

**Figure15. Nazi Germany: Evaluating Differences in Interpretation**

A comparison between the evaluation criteria or evaluative moves present in posts at HVA Phase 1 [N=18], Phase 2 [N=4], and Phase 3 [N=3]. The number of respondents varied between phases and declined from 7 in Phase 1 to 2 in Phases 2 and 3.



Student C.4 31 March 2011 21:24:20

.....  
 Concerning the question of how one might approach choosing between the two assessments, Evans primary focus on the oppressive nature of the regime and arguable underestimation of evidence referencing the popular policies of the Nazis could perhaps lead one to a conclusion more in line with Gellately's. Certainly the psychological impact of the terror system cannot be denied in terms of its importance, however the inherent and deeply ingrained resentment of the German population towards the Treaty of Versailles and 'democratic' Weimar Republic only served to increase the significance of policies that directly targeted this aforementioned concerns.

In both of these posts, the student focuses on substantive issues. They were coded, in the first post, as evaluating arguments in terms of breadth of content coverage ('breadth of treatment') and a very similar approach is apparent in their Phase 3 post where, again, the focus is substantive and they develop arguments in support of the historian whose model of the past they find most accurate and comprehensive.

Of the NG3 participants who posted in both or either Phase 2 or 3 Student Log-on A.7 was unique in adopting strikingly different approaches in Phase 1 and in Phase 2.

Student A.7 15 March 2011 23:38:30

.....  
 To choose between one or the other is a more complex process – especially so because a compromise is not an option. Furthermore, both are from seemingly respectable sources, and neither have a bibliography of all the evidence they have used to draw their conclusions (which through sheer size would be difficult to compare) and so it means that a decision must be made on the conclusions drawn only. Source 1 provides a clearer explanation of why people might wish to inform the Gestapo, which is strongly to its credit as an argument. However, Source 2 directly looks at reasons why Evans' conclusion might be wrong, and counters these reasons with reference to the wider picture of whether or not the Nazi regime was popular at large (and indeed, how this changed throughout the course of the war). Therefore, I would choose the second source. Evans' conclusion seems to be more carefully backed up, though Gellately's conclusions are also well argued and both use the chronology of the time effectively.

Like Student Log-on C.4's approach, above, this post assesses the historians in terms of their arguments, by contrast, however, Student Log-on A.7's approach is formal rather than substantive: formal strengths of both historians' arguments are praised (for example, clarity) and the historian whose argument is considered most systematic is preferred. Student Log-on A.7's Phase 2 post takes a dramatically different approach, however, in response to the historian's suggestion that this controversy relates to questions of morality and moral judgment: whereas Student Log-on A.7's Phase 1 post focused on logic and on substantiation, their Phase 2 post is explicitly methodological in focus and concerned with the extent to which claims of particular kinds (in this case judgements on human actors' actions) can be constructed on the basis of particular knowledge construction strategies.

Student A.7 29 March 2011 09:35:43

.....

That they are making a moral judgement is an interesting suggestion, because their position to make a moral judgement of great accuracy is dubious – they were not alive during the period in question and did not experience first-hand the atmosphere within which decisions to inform the Gestapo were taken. Whilst it would be reasonably valid to attempt such a judgement through careful research and analysis of anecdotal evidence from survivors, there is no clue to this being a part of their methodology –Evans is caught up in the clinical statistics of the era and Gellately speaks on the actions of the German people well, but without explaining the alternatives of cooperation beyond fear of the regime. Were Gellately to consider that the situation before Hitler came to power was disastrous, he might find a valuable source to explain cooperation that was voluntary, of which he speaks but goes only a little distance to resolve. Thus his argument is incomplete and to make an accurate judgement from it would be very difficult. Similarly, Evans' constant approach to statistical evidence is not sufficient to create a moral judgement because, having made no reference to any sufficient contact with people who knew what the atmosphere was or accounts of it, he has based his judgement entirely on what he can infer from statistics without comparison to people's human existence of the time, which would be found in anecdotal evidence. Thus whilst they are making a moral judgement, it is unfair to say they are in any way accurate.

Like the shifts in the evaluative arguments noted in the American Civil

War discussion, the Nazi Germany discussion group 2 evaluative data shows that dramatic shifts took place in some students' approaches to the problem that the HVA set them, however, the evidence is considerably weaker in this case and the majority of the students who posted at both the beginning and the end take broadly similar approaches in all of their posts.

### **3.3 Conclusions**

What conclusions does the data presented in 3.1 and 3.2 above suggest in relation to the aims in relation to the intended outcomes of the HVA?

#### **3.3. a Interaction between students and between students and historians**

It has been established that the HVA succeeded in providing the students involved with opportunities for interaction with other students (Outcome 1) and with academics (Outcome 2), however, it has also been shown that there was a high degree of variation, across the 5 discussion topics and across the 10 discussion groups, in the extent to which the first category of opportunities were realised: an observation that is perhaps most graphically expressed in the 56.1% difference between participation rates in American Civil War discussion group 1 and the Cold War discussion group reported in Figure 7 above.

The qualitative data presented above do clearly indicate, however, that it was possible for the HVA to result in some very stimulating and challenging issues being discussed and also that for some of the students the HVA represented an opportunity to explore complex and challenging issues in discussion with academic historians.

#### **3.3. b Understanding and mastery of historical argument**

The analysis of the HVA posts in terms of their generic qualities as arguments has shown that the HVA discussion boards were successful in fostering historical argument (Outcome 3) but, again, that this is only true to an extent and in a variable manner. The discussion in 3.1.b and, in particular,

the discussion of the characteristics of the data samples presented in Figure 10 suggested that whilst the HVA discussions were certainly effective in fostering argument features such as challenge there were clear limitations to the senses in which the students were engaging in dialogue with each other. It was also noted that the majority of the moves indicating the presence of argument in the data samples were made by a minority of the HVA participants reinforcing the conclusion in 3.3.a above about the high degree of variability with which outcomes were achieved.

Again, however, analysis of the qualitative data indicates that for some of the students, the HVA presented an opportunity through which they could develop sophisticated and in some cases extended arguments in response to challenges from historians (as the case of the methodological arguments or the reflections on the nature of interpretation identified above indicate).

### **3.3. c Understanding of historiography and historical interpretations**

The analysis reported in 3.1.b cannot fully answer questions about the understanding and mastery of argument, since it presents data about the presence or absence of indicators of argument only. The analysis of the sample discussion groups and student posts in 3.2.b and 3.2.c provided further insight into this question and into the extent to which students' understandings of historiography and historical interpretation developed over the course of the discussions (Objective 4). The data presented in Figures 12-15 and the discussion of individual student log-ons in the discussion linked to those figures provided good reason to conclude that students who remained engaged in the discussions through Phases 1-3 tended to develop and sophisticate their arguments. The evidence was variable – there were cases where students essentially maintained the same stance across the three phases and simply elaborated or sophisticated it and there were cases where dramatic changes were apparent – but the evidence nevertheless is evidence of change and development. Again, however, the attrition in the number of students posting to the discussions across the three phases reinforces the conclusions established already: the outcomes were achieved for a minority of students only (it will be recalled that the overall participation rate in the 2011

HVA shrank by 51.6% between the Phase 1 posts (94.5% participation) and the Phase 3 posts (42.9%), as reported in Figure 5). Again, however, the qualitative post data discussed above demonstrates that for a minority of the students, the HVA presented opportunities to engage with questions of historiography and interpretation at a high level of challenge and complexity.

The question of understanding cannot entirely be addressed simply by, as it were, 'observing' how students were thinking through inference from what they said in posts: the question of understanding will be returned to in 4.1.c below in the light of student perception data.

## 4. Evaluating the 2011 HVA

The 2011 HVA was evaluated in two ways:

- Student participants in the HVA were asked to complete an online questionnaire evaluating the HVA at the end of the exercise;
- Participating school and college teachers and lecturers and university academics meet face to face on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2011 to discuss and review the HVA.

Sections 4.1 explore the student evaluation data and 4.2 reports the conclusions of the evaluation meeting.

### 4.1 Student Evaluations of the HVA

Student participants in the HVA were asked to complete an online questionnaire evaluating the HVA at the end of the exercise. The questionnaire was closely modelled on the questionnaire used to evaluate the 2009 HVA in order to facilitate comparisons between the two exercises. Students were provided with a link to an online questionnaire through the HVA discussions and also by email via their teachers and lecturers and asked to evaluate the HVA by completing the questionnaire.

The questionnaire contained 12 substantive questions: 6 were closed questions calling for a 'yes', 'not sure' or 'no' answer and 6 questions asked students to 'explain' their 'answer' to the closed questions. The six closed questions were:

4. A key aim of the HVA was to help students develop their thinking about historical interpretations and controversies. Has the HVA helped you develop your thinking about this area of history do you think?
5. A key aim of the HVA was to enable you to interact with academic historians. Did you find this a useful and enjoyable experience?
6. A key aim of the HVA was to enable you to interact with students in other sixth forms. Did you find this a useful and enjoyable experience?
7. A key aim of the HVA was to provide insights into what history involves in higher education. Did we succeed in doing this, do

you think?

8. Would you recommend taking part in the HVA to a friend who was studying history at AS/A2?
9. Can you suggest any modifications to the HVA that might improve the experience for other students in future?<sup>21</sup>

In total 50 questionnaire responses were received, 45 online and 5 in paper copy, representing 45 of the 91 live student log-ons (a return rate of 49.5%).<sup>22</sup>

Figure 16 presents the institutions represented in the questionnaire return. Six of the nine institutions taking part in the HVA were represented in the questionnaire return and three (School 1, School 4 and College 4) were not.

**Figure 16. Questionnaire Responses 2011, by Institution**

N= 50

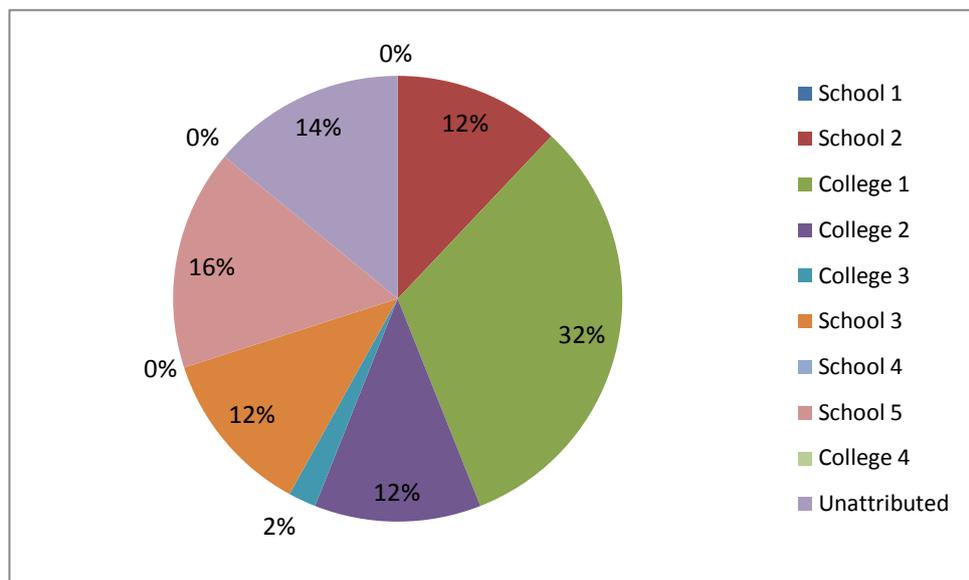


Figure 17 presents the distribution of live log-ons by institution and a comparison between Figures 16 and 17 allows institutional under or over-representation in the questionnaire data set to be assessed. Apart from the three institutions that were not represented in the questionnaire return, it is

<sup>21</sup> Questions 1-3 of the questionnaire were not substantive questions (e.g. Question 3 asked students which discussion group they were part of).

<sup>22</sup> It will be recalled that in some institutions log-ons represented groups of students. Four log-ons were represented by two questionnaire responses each. One questionnaire was received

apparent that representation by institution is roughly proportional to HVA participation, with the exception of College 3, who are under-represented, and School 3 who are markedly over-represented.

**Figure 17. Distribution of Live Log-ons by Institution 2011**

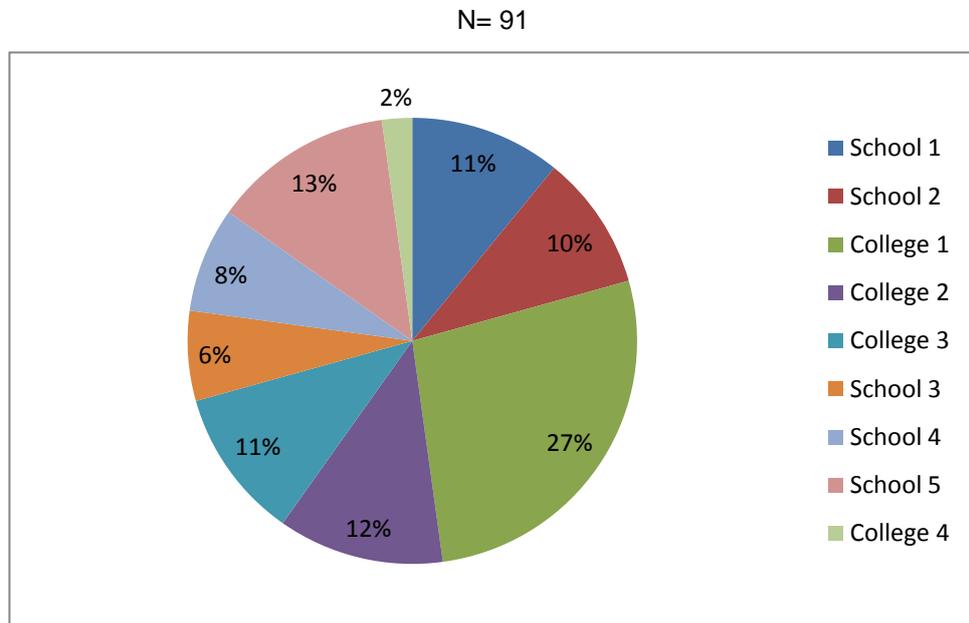


Figure 18 presents the HVA discussion topics represented in the questionnaire return. All 5 topics were represented in the questionnaire return although it is apparent that some topics were under and others over-represented in the questionnaire responses (there were 3 discussion groups for the Nazi Germany topic and only 1 for the Cromwell topic, for example, and yet these topics account for 6% and 30% of the questionnaire responses respectively).<sup>23</sup>

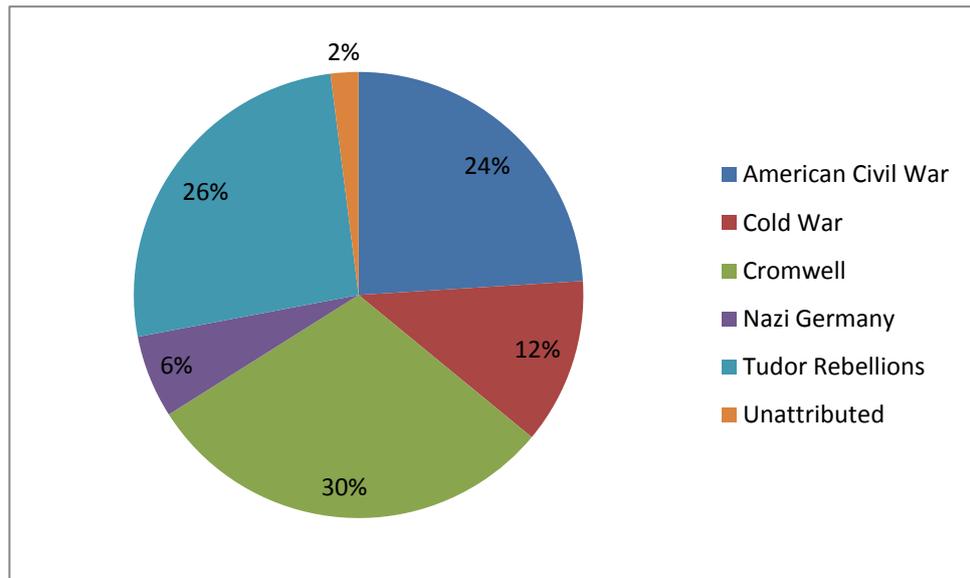
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without log-on attribution.

<sup>23</sup> See Figure 3 in section 2.1. b (vii) above.

**Figure 18. Questionnaire Responses 2011, by Discussion Topic**

N= 50



Responses to all quantitative questions are discussed in 4.1.a below and 2011 data is compared with 2009 data. Qualitative responses to each question are then discussed question by question in the sections that follow.

#### 4.1. a Student evaluations: Overview

Figure 19 reports responses to the 6 closed evaluative questions that were asked in 2011.

**Figure 19. Questionnaire Responses 2011: Closed Questions**

N= 49-50, variable by question

Question	Yes	No	Not Sure	Total
4. A key aim of the HVA was to help students develop their thinking about historical interpretations and controversies. Has the HVA helped you develop your thinking about this area of history do you think?	39	6	5	50
5. A key aim of the HVA was to enable you to interact with academic historians. Did you find this a useful and enjoyable experience?	38	5	6	49
6. A key aim of the HVA was to enable you to interact with students in other sixth forms. Did you find this a useful and enjoyable experience?	17	12	21	50
7. A key aim of the HVA was to provide insights into what history involves in higher education. Did we succeed in doing this, do you think?	32	5	13	50
8. Would you recommend taking part in the HVA to a friend who was studying history at AS/A2?	32	4	14	50
9. Can you suggest any modifications to the HVA that might improve the experience for other students in future?	27	19	3	49

As Figure 19 indicates, student evaluations of the HVA were overwhelmingly positive: between 32 (64%) and 39 (78%) respondents replied 'Yes' to questions 4, 5 and 7, questions that identified central project aims (developing historical thinking, interacting with academic historians and gaining insights into history in higher education); 32 (64%) of the 50 respondents also stated 'yes' when asked if they would recommend the HVA to a friend studying AS and A2 history.

It is notable, however, first, that the students were much less positive in their response to Question 6 that asked about their experiences of interacting with students in other schools and colleges, and, second, that 27 (55.1%) of the 50 respondents replied 'yes' to the question 'Can you suggest any modifications to the HVA that might improve the experience for other students in future?'.

**Figure 20. Questionnaire Responses Closed Questions: The 2009 and 2011 Data Sets Compared**

This figure presents the 2009 and the 2011 HVA evaluation questionnaire data in percentage format (100% in the case of each data set is the total number of respondents for that year). The two data sets are compared, in the final three columns, by subtracting the 2009 totals from the 2011 totals in each of the three answer columns in order to indicate the degree to which answers in each category increased (positive numbers) or declined (negative numbers) between the 2009 and 2011 data sets. The 2009 and 2011 questionnaires were similar but not identical and are rendered comparable by amalgamating two categories in the 2009 data and by renaming 'not sure' as 'other' in the 2011 data.

N 2009 = 17; N, 2011 = 49-50, variable by question.

Question	2009			2011			2011 minus 2009		
	Yes	No	Other	Yes	No	Other	Yes	No	Other
The HVA helped develop thinking about historical evidence and interpretations?	82.4	0.0	17.6	78.0	12.0	10.0	-4.4	12.0	-7.6
Interaction with academic historians: a useful and enjoyable experience?	64.7	11.8	23.5	77.6	12.2	10.2	12.8	0.5	-13.3
Interaction with students in other sixth forms: a useful and enjoyable experience?	52.9	17.6	29.4	34.0	24.0	42.0	-18.9	6.4	12.6
Did the HVA provide insight into what history involves in higher education?	64.7	11.8	23.5	64.0	26.0	10.0	-0.7	14.2	-13.5
Can you suggest any improvements to the HVA?	94.1	5.9	0.0	55.1	6.1	38.8	-39.0	0.2	38.8
Would you recommend taking part in the HVA to a friend who was studying history at AS/A2? <sup>24</sup>	NA	NA	NA	64.0	28.0	8.0	NA	NA	NA

<sup>24</sup> This question was not asked in 2009.

Figure 20 compares responses to the student evaluation questionnaire in 2009 and 2011.<sup>25</sup>

The figure suggests that student perceptions of the value of the HVA are roughly comparable in both years in terms of positive evaluations of impact on thinking about evidence and interpretations and in terms of positive evaluations of insight into history at higher education; it is apparent also that positive evaluations of the experience of interacting with historians increased in 2011 and also that positive evaluations of the experience of interacting with students in other schools and colleges declined in 2011. It is also apparent that students were much more certain about suggestions for improvement in 2009 than in 2011.

It will be recalled, from the discussion in 3.1.a and from the data presented in Figures 5-8, that participation varied dramatically by discussion topic and, indeed, within discussion topics by discussion group. The overall questionnaire responses reported in Figures 19 and 20 mask considerable variations in response by discussion topic. Figure 21 breaks down the 2011 questionnaire data by discussion topic allowing comparisons to be made between the percentage of responses for each discussion topic that responded 'yes', 'no' and 'not sure' across the evaluation questionnaire data set as a whole.

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<sup>25</sup> 2009 data is as at Chapman, 2009(a), p.69.

### Figure 21. Evaluation Responses by Discussion Topic 2011

This figure presents the evaluation responses for 2011 by discussion topic. In each case 100% is the total number of 'yes'/'no'/'not sure' responses for each topic and the figure indicates what percentage of responses for each discussion topic fell into each category. The number of questionnaire respondents for each topic is indicated in brackets after the topic name.

N = 50

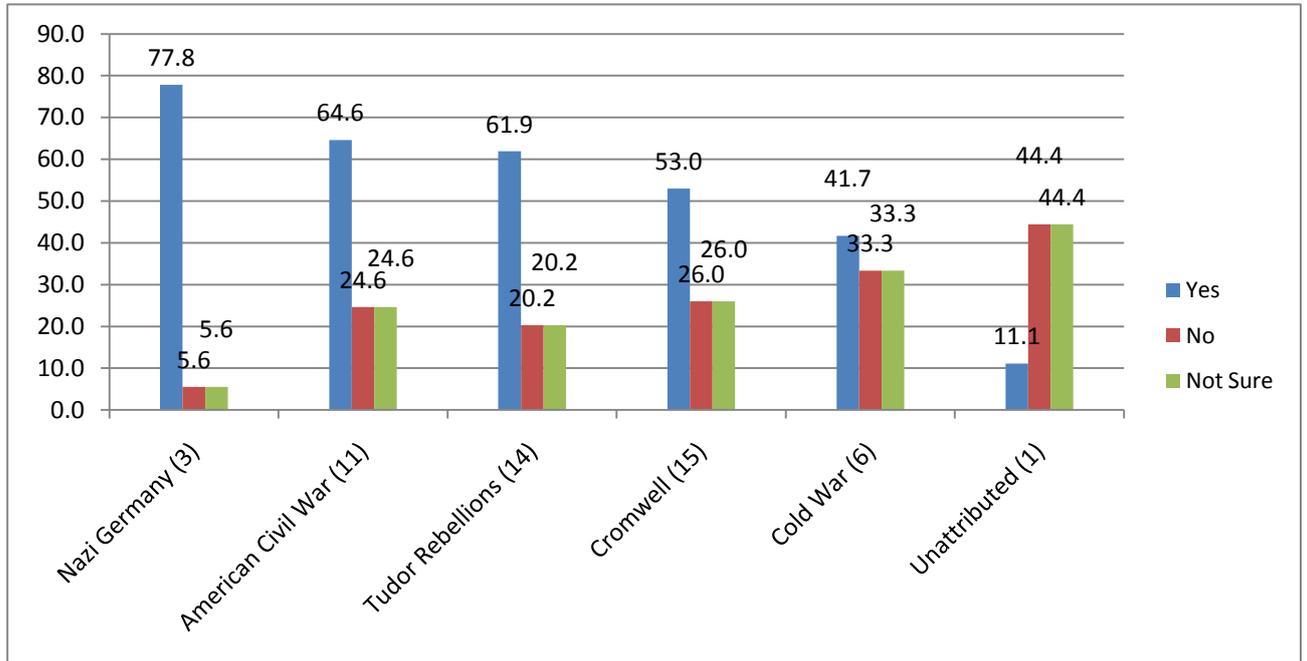
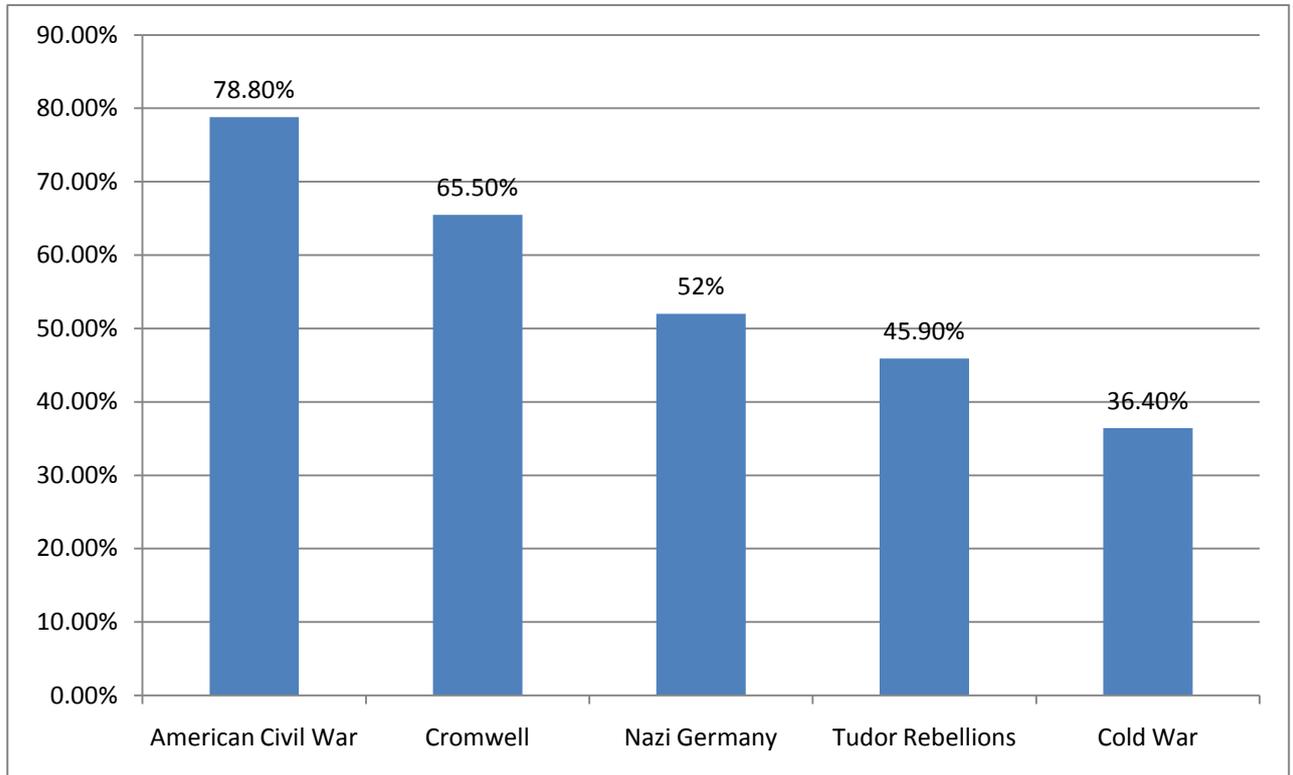


Figure 22 re-presents the participation rate by topic data presented above in Figure 7 above in graphical form in order to facilitate comparisons between participation rates and the evaluation data presented in Figure 21.

### Figure 22. 2011 HVA Participation Rates by Discussion Group

This figure re-presents the 2011 discussion group participation data presented in Figure 7 above in graphical form. Percentages measure actual posts as a percentage of the number possible posts by discussion group.  
N = 250 actual posts and 455 possible posts.



A comparison of the descending rank order of positive satisfaction ratings (as at Figure 21) with the descending order of participation rates (as at Figure 22) is inconclusive, other than in the sense that it shows that the group with the lowest participation rates is also the group with the lowest positive evaluation rate.

Qualitative evaluation data, provided in the responses in which students explained their answers to the closed questionnaire questions, will be presented and discussed below in order to gain a richer understanding of the students' responses to the evaluation questions.

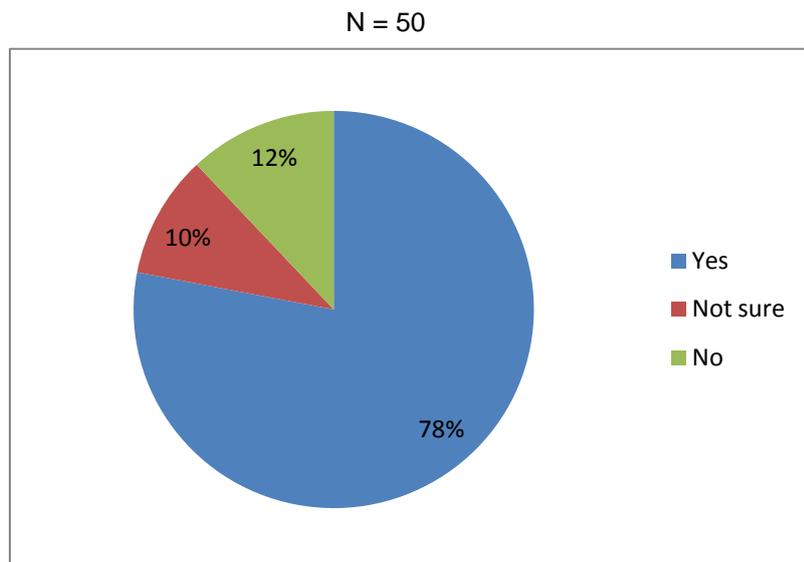
#### 4.1. b Student evaluations by question

##### 4.1. b (i) Developing thinking about historical interpretations and controversies

Figure 23 presents student responses to questionnaire Question 4 that asked students to reflect on the extent to which the HVA had helped ‘develop their thinking about historical interpretations and controversies’.

**Figure 23. Responses to Question 4: Developing Thinking about Historical Interpretations and Controversies. 2011 HVA.**

This figure presents student responses to the question – ‘A key aim of the HVA was to help students develop their thinking about historical interpretations and controversies. Has the HVA helped you develop your thinking about this area of history do you think?’

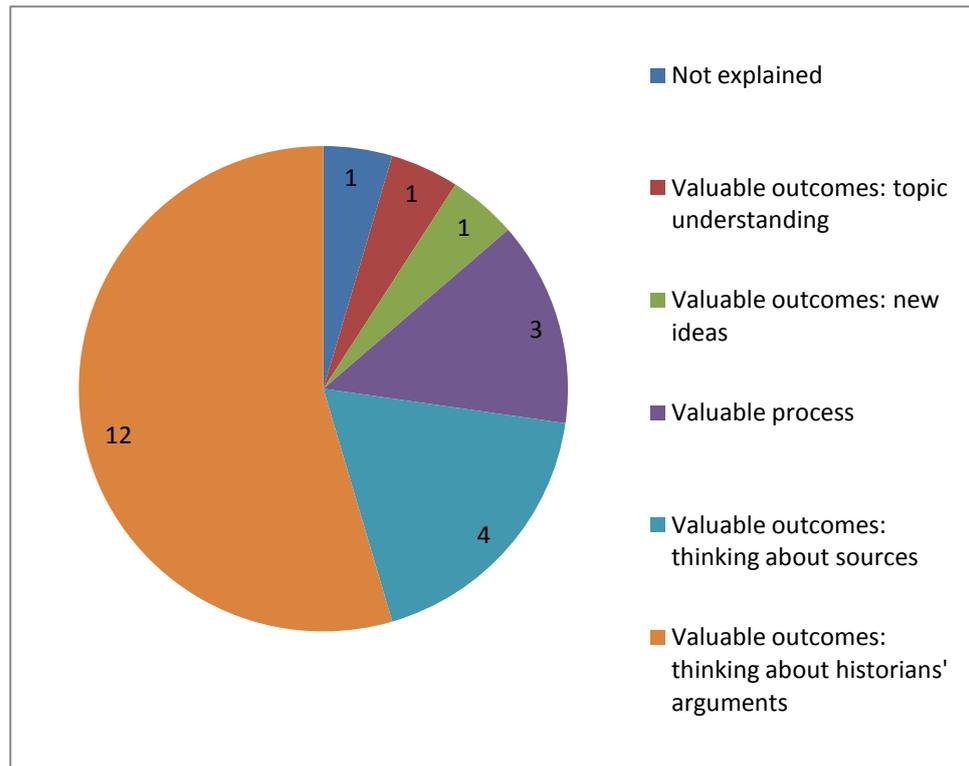


Twenty-seven respondents provided comments in reply to the subsidiary question ‘please explain your answer’: 20 respondents explained ‘yes’ answers, 3 explained ‘not sure’ answers and 4 explained ‘no’ answers.

The 20 responses explaining ‘yes’ answers were grouped into six types, on the basis of similarity, and the distribution of comments between these difference types of comment is presented in Figure 24.

**Figure 24. Types of Response to Question 4 and Their Incidence**

N = 21 (One respondent was coded in two categories).



Twelve respondents commented that taking part in the HVA had developed their thinking about historians and historical interpretations in a range of different ways. The following comments exemplify the range of response and represent all the discussion topics.

It has given me a broader scope of thinking when assessing the value of historian's arguments and enabled me to think in a more balanced manner and take the different arguments and points into account.

Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

It has helped me understand how historians' interpretations differ subtly, and to see how historians need not be diametrically opposed to be different. They might have different focuses, or ways for measuring success, for example.

Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

It helped us to analyse the events of Nazi Germany more closely and to understand different historical interpretations and how they come about.

Student comment, Nazi Germany discussion topic

It showed me that there are very different views despite being written at the same time  
 Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

We look more carefully now at the type of history being written and whether this affects the particular focus and the type of evidence being used  
 Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

Four respondents commented that taking part in the HVA had developed their thinking about historical sources in a range of different ways. The following comment exemplifies these comments.

It has enabled me to further develop my analytical skills and develop my skills in source based questions.  
 Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

Three respondents commented on the value of different aspects of the HVA process and these three comments are reproduced below.

I found that as we were answering a similar question I saw how our answers developed throughout.  
 Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

It was really interesting to get feedback from historians, and to read another school's work.  
 Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

Taking the time to carefully construct an argument and then evaluating other students' arguments has been extremely useful and forces us to consider our points in greater depth.  
 Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

Three respondents' comments were coded as stating that the HVA process had been valuable in introducing them to new ideas, as enhancing their understanding of the topic or as stating that the HVA had been useful without further elaboration. The comment about topic understanding was also coded as referencing developing thinking about historians and historical interpretations and has already been cited above (Student comment, Nazi Germany discussion topic). The remaining comments are reproduced below.

Made me think about viewpoints that I had not considered before.  
 Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic  
 In a way  
 Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

The three respondents who were 'not sure' if they agreed with the statement commented as follows:

As I am new to studying history it's been interesting  
Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

As we're not studying this period of history and don't know much about what happened in the Tudor Rebellions it is difficult to know what we gained from the task. However it was interesting to discover different schools of thought and why historians approach history differently, sometimes from a subjective viewpoint.

Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

I found it interesting in seeing how I would respond to a piece of History that I have no prior knowledge of, however I feel I would benefit from more direct points of improvement.

Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

The four students who answered 'no' to the question did so for different reasons, as their comments show.

I wasn't very intrigued  
Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

I'd already known that different historians had different viewpoints.

Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

It was all a little confusing and arguments I had to challenge were poorly formed.

Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

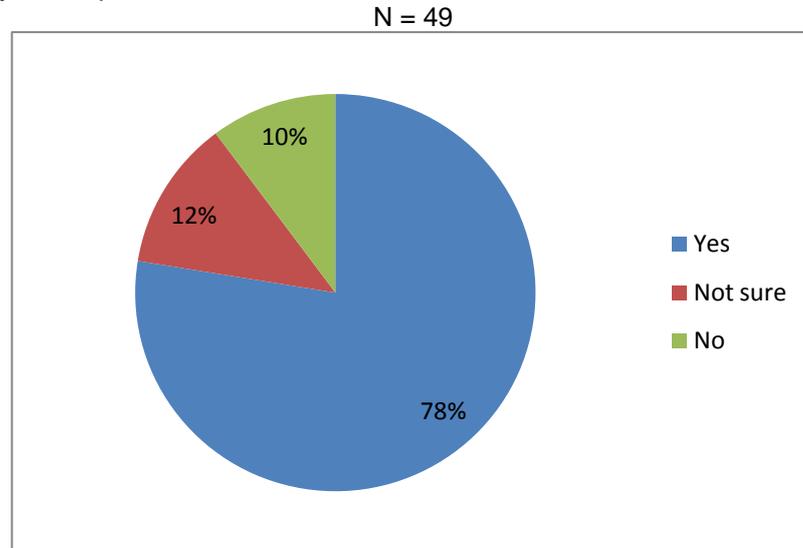
There was no response to our answer from the historian  
Unattributed

#### **4.1. b (ii) Interaction with academic historians**

Figure 25 presents student responses to questionnaire question 5 that asked students to reflect on the value of interacting with academic historians through the HVA.

**Figure 25. Responses to Question 5: The Value of Interacting with Academic Historians. 2011 HVA.**

This figure presents student responses to the question – ‘A key aim of the HVA was to enable you to interact with academic historians. Did you find this a useful and enjoyable experience?’



Twenty-five respondents provided comments in reply to the subsidiary question ‘please explain your answer’: 18 respondents explained ‘yes’ answers, 2 explained ‘not sure’ answers and 5 explained ‘no’ answers. Positive and negative comments were contained in all three categories of comment, however, and the comments will, therefore, be examined together.

Critical observations were made by 10 students, 3 of whom had answered ‘yes’ to the question. The common theme underlying almost all of these observations was a perception that there had either not been enough interaction with the academic historians or that the interaction had not been direct. The following comments exemplify these observations. The first two are from students who answered ‘yes’, the next two are from students who answered ‘not sure’ and the final two are from students who answered ‘no’ to question 5.

It was good to have an academic critique of an answer and to be able to respond to these suggestions. There could, however, have been more interaction, as there was only one reply.  
Student comment, Nazi Germany discussion topic

Yes as it was nice to have them directly replying however not all of the historians replied.

Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

My answer wasn't actually marked but the general comments were helpful

Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

Historian never responded directly to our points.

Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

Didn't comment on mine as sent to wrong place though on feedback on others I would say it was useful

Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

We did not receive a reply

Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

There was, in addition, one negative comment, in a 'yes' answer, in which a student criticised an historian's manner of interaction with the students.

It was nice to hear what they had to say, though I felt they were occasionally dismissive of the students' ideas.

Student comment<sup>26</sup>

It is apparent from the majority of the comments above, then that where students were critical in their comments on the interaction with historians provided through the HVA this was because there was not, in their perception, enough of it or because it was not personalised and direct in all cases.

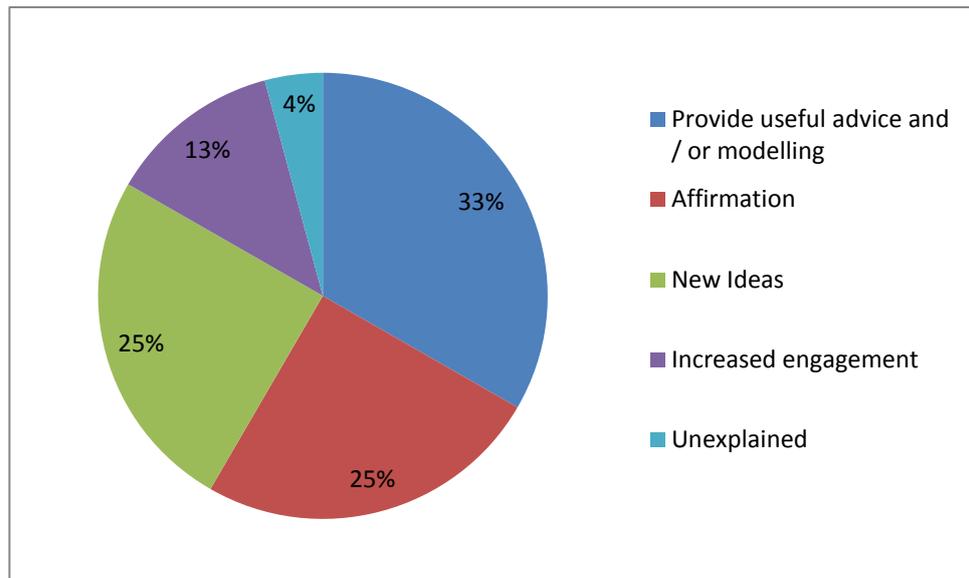
What did the students find valuable about interaction with academic historians? Nineteen students, 1 of whom had answered 'no' and 1 of whom had answered 'not sure' to Question 5, provided comments that contained observations allowing this question to be explored. These comments were analysed into five categories and this analysis is reported in Figure 26.

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<sup>26</sup> The discussion group has been anonymised. This comment was unique in its discussion group and the other comments from the group showed that many students also this historians' feedback very helpful.

**Figure 26. The Value of Interacting with Historians: Student Comments  
Analysed**

N = 24 (Four respondents were coded as commenting under two categories).



The students who were coded as explaining the value of interaction with academics in terms of advice or modelling referenced a range of considerations as the following examples show.

When they did interact, it was useful and insightful.  
Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

[*The historian*] replied to our posts and critically evaluated our sources, giving us useful advice, which helped in later posts.  
Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

It was interesting to see how a proper historian would react to our answers.  
Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

It gave me advice on how to improve my historiography  
Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

Comments coded as referencing 'affirmation' included the following:

Very encouraging to have a historian personally report on an essay  
Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

I really enjoyed receiving feedback from an academic historian, as they have allowed me to become fully engaged with the debate.

Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

We liked having the historian's reply and being challenged to think more about the topic

Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

Comments coded as referencing 'new ideas' included the following:

The historian opened the debate and suggested viewpoints that hadn't previously occurred to me. I think this will come in useful at university next year

Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

They broadened by thinking about how you evaluate historians' arguments.

Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

Comments coded as referencing 'increased engagement' have already been cited under previous code categories (for example, the American Civil War comment cited under 'affirmation' above). A further example is the following:

We were pushed / made to think about different views/concepts that we did not think of first time round, which made us both more open and more sensitive to the sources we were using, and to sources we may use in the future.

Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

The student comment coded as 'unexplained' simply stated that they had enjoyed the process of interaction without providing further indication about what had been enjoyable about it:

Interaction with historians was good

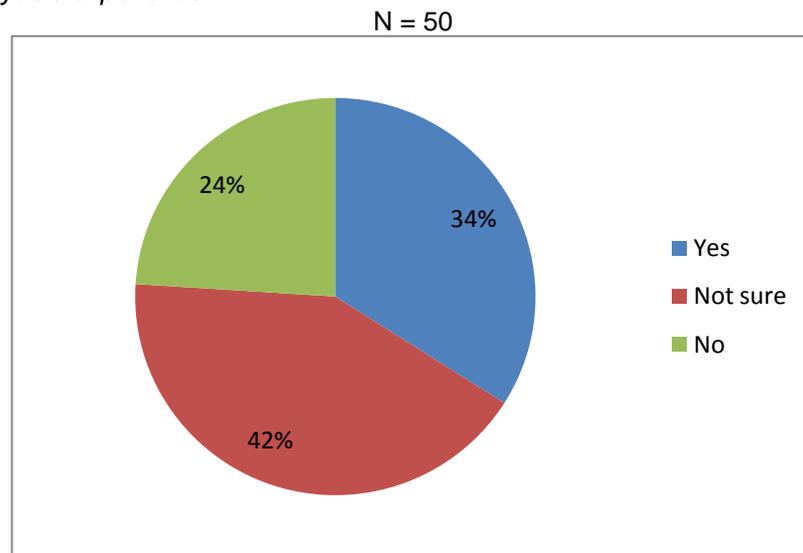
Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

#### 4.1. b (iii) Interaction with students in other sixth forms

Figure 27 presents student responses to questionnaire question 6 that asked students to reflect on the value of interacting with students in other sixth forms through the HVA.

**Figure 27. Responses to Question 6: The Value of Interacting with Students in Other Sixth Forms. 2011 HVA.**

This figure presents student responses to the question – ‘A key aim of the HVA was to enable you to interact with students in other sixth forms. Did you find this a useful and enjoyable experience?’



Twenty-one respondents provided comments in reply to the subsidiary question ‘please explain your answer’: 7 respondents explained ‘yes’ answers, 9 explained ‘not sure’ answers and 5 explained ‘no’ answers.

Students who explained ‘yes’ answers fell into three categories:

- Students who stated that they enjoyed interacting with the other students such as the following two examples:  
I enjoyed challenging their interpretations  
Student comment, Cold War discussion topic  
It was good to be able to interact with others through history  
Student comment, Nazi Germany discussion topic
- Students who stated that the process was useful and that it had helped them improve their own work, as in the following two examples:

It was very useful seeing how other students answer questions and helps me think how to improve based on their answers.  
Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

Overall having students criticise and evaluate our arguments was very useful as it made us reflect on our arguments and perhaps rethink them. However, sometimes other students did not participate as fully and so we could not benefit from their opinions.

Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

- A final category of comment – of which there was one – stated that it was interesting to see what other students thought:

It was interesting to see how other students my age interpreted the sources, and to see how they may have come to those conclusions.

Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

The majority of the explanatory comments, however, were critical and sixteen critical observations were made. One student stated that

It was nice to comment on people's posts as a learning experience but it was not enjoyable

Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

Another student commented that

It wasn't always clear where the responses to my answers were, and then sometimes the answers were very short and vague.

Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

Like the second half of this last comment, the majority of the critical observations focused on the quantity or qualities of the other students' posts. Nine students commented that there had been little interaction with other students and that they had either not received replies or received few replies. The following comments exemplify these observations.

Yes I did, debating is good. However, not many groups actually posted a final answer, which would have been nice.

Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

Did not receive a response from the other group.

Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

There was no real interaction

Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

By the time we had finished, no other students had interacted with us  
 Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

The range of considerations raised by the remaining 5 student comments are captured by the following three posts. Four comments – exemplified by the first two examples - criticised the academic qualities of other student posts and the final post speaks for itself.

Some had useful view points, whilst others merely pointed out the obvious in the sources we were given, which could not provoke an interesting debate. I found the input from the historian far more interesting.  
 Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

The other students didn't write as much as us and so it was difficult to enter into a dialogue with them  
 Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

The replies I got were ill mannered  
 Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic<sup>27</sup>

#### **4.1. b (iv) Insight into history in higher education.**

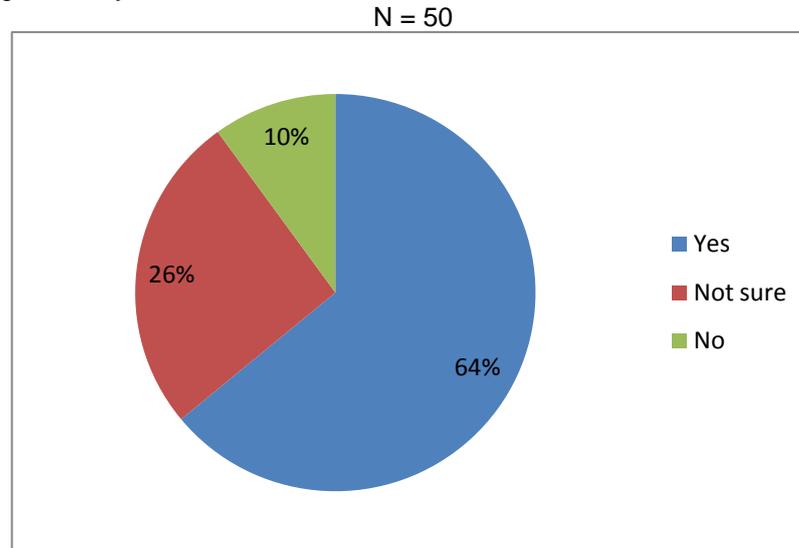
Figure 28 presents student responses to questionnaire question 7 that asked students to comment on the proposition that the HVA had provided them with insights into the study of history at university.

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<sup>27</sup> All the discussions were regularly moderated by the Principal Investigator. There was one instance across the 250 posts, in another discussion topic, where, in the moderator's view, a student comment needed challenging on grounds such as these.

**Figure 28. Responses to Question 7: Providing Insights into History in Higher Education. 2011 HVA.**

This figure presents student responses to the question – ‘A key aim of the HVA was to provide insights into what history involves in higher education. Did we succeed in doing this, do you think?’



Fifteen respondents provided comments in reply to the subsidiary question ‘please explain your answer’: 9 respondents explained ‘yes’ answers, 2 explained ‘not sure’ answers and 2 explained ‘no’ answers.

Three of the students who explained ‘yes’ responses did so very briefly or without explicitly explaining how they felt that their learning experiences on the HVA had related to study at university. Six of the students who explained a ‘yes’ answer and one student who explained a ‘not sure’ answer did comment on relationships between the HVA and study at university. One student commented on independent learning:

That we are made to do lots of work independently was clearly shown.

Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

Another student commented on the style of discussion that the HVA had exemplified:

By openly discussing the topic in a formal way I can understand the way history at university might be taught. Furthermore, the opinions of real historians seem very similar to advice from academics at university.

Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

Three students' comments focused on the level of depth that the HVA work had involved:

It helped us to delve deeper into historical controversy, which no doubt will be useful preparation for anyone studying history beyond A-level.

Student comment, Nazi Germany discussion topic

Showed the level to which historiography is needed at university

Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

We had to think in more depth than we do currently for our A level course.

Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

Two students commented on the level of challenge that the HVA work had set:

The question was challenging but this was a good thing, as I feel I have learnt from this.

Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

I supposed that it showed history at further ed to be very challenging

Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

One student, who explained a 'not sure' answer commenting:

I was quite aware of the requirements for studying history.

Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

The two students who explained a 'no' answer both commented that they felt the standard of challenge embodied in the HVA was similar to the level at which they were already being asked to work.

It was similar to questions asked in class

Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

We already do everything we did in the three lessons spent on it.

Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

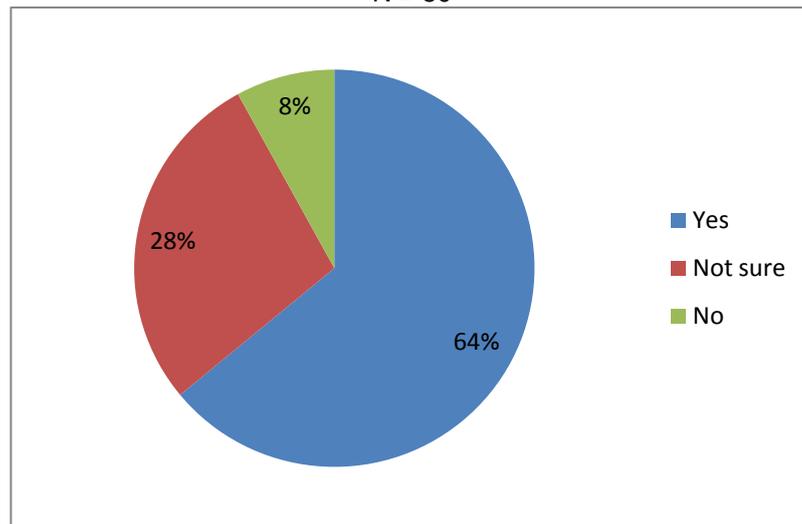
#### 4.1. b (v) The value of the HVA for other AS and A2 students

Figure 29 presents student responses to questionnaire Question 8 that asked students to state whether they would recommend the HVA to a friend studying history at AS / A2.

**Figure 29. Responses to Question 8: Would They Recommend the HVA to a Friend Studying AS and A2 History. 2011 HVA.**

This figure presents student responses to the question – ‘*Would you recommend taking part in the HVA to a friend who was studying history at AS/A2?*’

N = 50



Fifteen respondents provided comments in reply to the subsidiary question ‘please explain your answer’: 9 respondents explained ‘yes’ answers, 3 explained ‘not sure’ answers and 3 explained ‘no’ answers.

Three of the students provided conditional answers to the question, stating that they would recommend the HVA if particular conditions were met:

If done more thoroughly by everyone involved it could well be a very enjoyable and valuable experience for other students.  
Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

If they were studying this topic, then yes.  
Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

I would recommend it to people wanting a challenge and who enjoy looking at historiography in depth  
Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

Four respondents were straightforwardly negative in their assessments

and either could not see the value of the HVA, were unhappy with particular features of the HVA or did not consider it relevant to their priorities.

It seemed a bit pointless  
Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

Not enough input from historians, was very confusing  
Student comment, unattributed

Not worthwhile, especially at the end of the year when we need to be revising.  
Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

A lot of work when I had exams to be revising for! Only really useful because I plan to do history next year!  
Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

Seven respondents were uniformly positive in their comments: five stated that they would recommend the HVA to a friend studying history at AS/A2 on instrumental grounds and two on intrinsic grounds. The first three comments below illustrate the first category of comment and the second two comments the second.

It was useful because it's helpful in analysing historians  
Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

Helped to develop the use of debate phrases  
Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

It has been extremely valuable and I believe will make a great difference in improving my grade  
Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

It is an enjoyable experience and it allows you to voice your own interpretation on the Civil War.  
Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

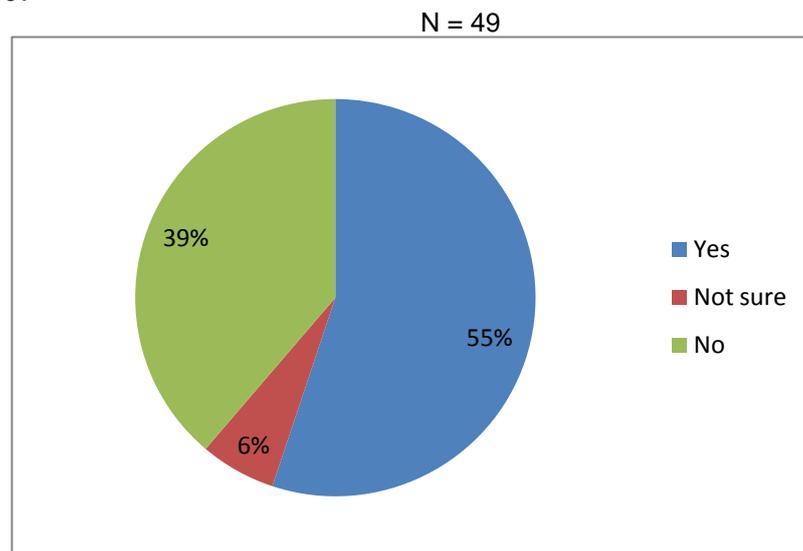
Revealing, intriguing and enjoyable  
Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

#### 4.1. b (vi) Improvements and modifications to the HVA

Figure 30 presents responses to questionnaire Question 9 that asked students to state whether they could recommend improvements to the HVA.

**Figure 30. Responses to Question 9: Suggested Modifications to Improve the HVA in Future. 2011 HVA.**

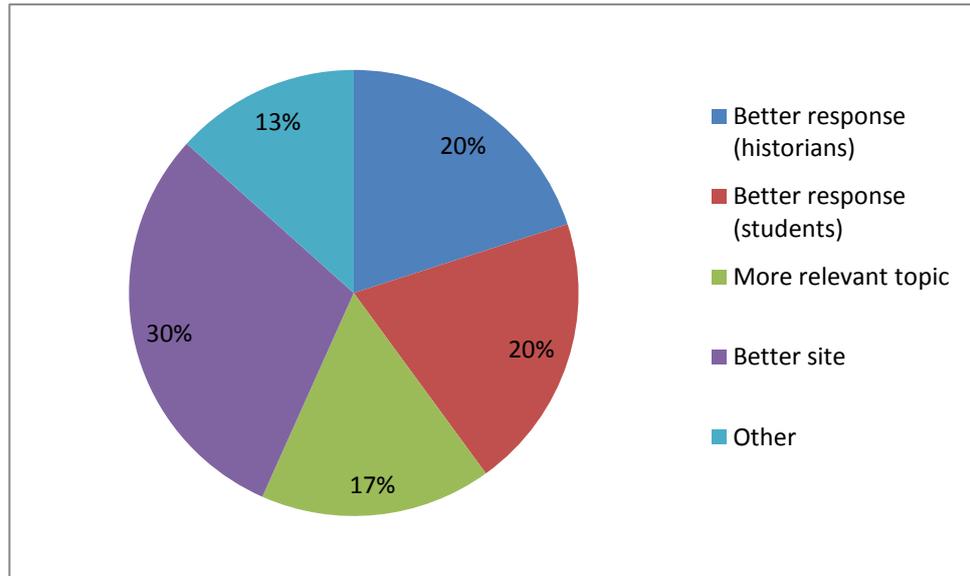
This figure presents student responses to the question – ‘Can you suggest any modifications to the HVA that might improve the experience for other students in future?’



Twenty-seven respondents provided comments in reply to the subsidiary question ‘please explain your answer’ explaining ‘yes’ answers. Student responses were organised into five categories on the basis of similarity and the distribution of responses in these five categories are reported in Figure 31.

**Figure 31. Types of Response to Question 9 and Their Incidence**

N = 30 (Three responses were coded under two categories)



All bar one of the 6 comments coded in the first category called for more comprehensive, more direct or better quality feedback on student posts, as in the following comments:

Mark the answers  
Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

More direct feedback, i.e. "make sure you do this", "you should consider this approach"  
Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

All posts to be replied to by the historian  
Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

The exception called for improvements to the historian's post at Phase 2:

The historian to give a stronger third interpretation (although in reply to B10 [*they*] did in the end give [*their*] view)  
Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

The comments in the second category all called for improvements in the posts provided by all participant students / schools and colleges, as in the following examples:

A stronger impetus may be needed for all participants to contribute throughout the period.  
Student comment, Nazi Germany discussion topic

Schools involved really need to participate effectively and equally for the full benefit  
 Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

The comments in the third category related to the choice of HVA topic:

It would be more helpful if the sources were on the topic you were actually taking or give a topic to everyone that no one has studied before then everybody is on an even playing field.  
 Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

Choose a topic that is known by all as the one given was confusing  
 Student comment, Cold War discussion topic

Nine respondents made suggestions about how the website delivering the HVA might be organised more effectively.<sup>28</sup>

The website layout was a tad confusing. Where the students had to put answers often got muddled.  
 Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

Make it a little clearer on the website. It put a few students off when it was so confusing to access  
 Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

Better layout of the forum as it was difficult to see who had replied and who hadn't.  
 Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

It was quite difficult to get started as everything was quite confusing, i.e. usernames and finding the right discussions.  
 Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

A better layout for the posts, at times it was confusing and difficult to ascertain the order of posts and the flow of the debates.  
 Student comment, Tudor Rebellions discussion topic

The four comments in the final category ('other') made a variety of suggestions. Two comments, exemplified by the first of the three below, suggested varying the HVA questions and two students suggested alterations to the practical organisation of the HVA.

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<sup>28</sup> The layout of the site is exemplified in Appendix 7.2 and further comments on the question of site layout and design follow in 4.2 below.

There could have been more variety in the questions offered  
Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

Ensure that the programme is implemented into a student's lesson to ensure they take part to the fullest of their ability.  
Student comment, American Civil War discussion topic

To make sure that each group is matched with another group to avoid confusion.  
Student comment, Cromwell discussion topic

#### **4.1. c Student evaluation data: conclusions**

The discussion in 4.1.b has aimed to explore the full range of student comment on the HVA and, in so doing, a large number of positive and negative observations have been explored. It would be easy, in this context, for the negative comments to acquire disproportionate weight and it is important therefore, to begin the process of drawing conclusions from the student perception data by reiterating the fact that, as Figure 19 showed, the majority of students (between 64-78%) reported very positive perceptions of the HVA across the majority of the questionnaire questions and that 77.6% and 78% of students agreed that interacting with historians had been a positive experience and that they had developed their understanding, respectively.

#### **4.1. c (i) Interaction between students and between students and historians**

The questionnaire data is unequivocal about the value added by the interaction with historians, as Figures 25 and 26, and the qualitative comments associated with them, show. The relatively few negative comments that are contained in this section tend also to reinforce this positive analysis: where students express displeasure, overwhelmingly, it is not with the interaction with the historians but with the quantity of interaction and, overwhelmingly, they wanted more of it. It is apparent, then, that the HVA provided students with opportunities to interact with historians (Objective 2), that these interactions were perceived as valuable and that, if anything, the students considered the opportunities for interaction provided by the HVA

insufficient.

It will be recalled that the discussion in 3.3.a established that the HVA succeeded at best highly variably in providing the students involved with opportunities for interaction with other students (Outcome 1). The questionnaire data supports this conclusion: the majority of the students are either negative or unsure in their estimation of the value of interactions with other students provided through the HVA and, as the discussion of qualitative responses in 4.1.b (iii) shows, concerns that interaction did not occur, was minimal or was of a low quality are expressed in the responses.

#### **4.1. c (ii) Understanding and mastery of historical argument**

The questionnaire data can only provide marginal evidence in relation to the question of understanding and mastery of historical argument (Objective 3), except in the sense in which it is implied in developing understanding of historiography and historical interpretation (4.1.c (iii) below), because no one question was designed to elicit data specifically on this issue.

There is good evidence, nevertheless, in many of the questionnaire responses to support the conclusion that, for a minority of students at least, taking part in the HVA enhanced understanding and mastery of argument: this is apparent, for example, in 4.1.b (ii) where the value of the historians' advice and modelling of historical thinking and argument is commented on, in 4.1.b (iii) where the value of learning from other students' arguments is commented upon and in 4.1.b (v) where the HVA is recommended to other students instrumentally in terms of the gains in historical understanding that it is described as resulting in are highlighted.

Again, as in 3.3.b, however, this data does not allow us to go beyond the claim that the HVA resulted in these outcomes for a minority of students only since the statements referred to above are made by a minority of the questionnaire respondents only.

#### **4.1. c (iii) Understanding of historiography and historical interpretations**

It will be recalled that the evaluation of the extent to which the HVA had

developed students' understanding of historiography and historical interpretation (Objective 3) in 3.3.c concluded that there was good reason to conclude that the HVA had succeeded in this aim for a minority of students, on the evidence of the post data.

The student questionnaire data suggests less cautious conclusions: 78% of respondents agreed with the statement that the HVA had enhanced their thinking in this area and the qualitative responses in sections 4.1.b (i), (iv) and (v) above provide elaboration and exemplification of the wide range of ways in which students felt that the HVA had impacted positively on their historical knowledge and understanding.

The questionnaire data, then, reinforces the conclusions that the quantitative and qualitative posting data suggested and, perhaps, increases the confidence with which the conclusion is advanced: section 3.3.c gives us reason to infer that the HVA added value in this area and through the evidence reported in 4.1.b (i) and elsewhere substantial numbers of the students tell us that it did.

#### **4.1. c (iv) Insights into teaching and learning at university level**

The questionnaire data discussed in 4.1.b (iv) indicates that a majority of the questionnaire respondents agreed with the proposition that the HVA had provided insights into what the study of history involved in higher education. The qualitative comments are relatively sparse in this question, nevertheless, these responses indicate that in the majority of these cases students were able to identify the ways in or extent to which the tasks and interaction involved in the HVA went above the demand level of advanced level.

Many of the other questions also provide evidence in support of the proposition that the HVA was successful in providing students with the experience of a new level of challenge (for example, the comments analysed in Figure 26 above).

The post data discussed in 3.2 above also supports this conclusion. It is apparent, for example, that many of the qualities of the two historians' posts cited in 3.2 raise issues that are typically not addressed at advanced level, such as the identification of the normative and ethical elements in the

'coercion' and 'consent' debate in the case of the Nazi Germany discussion.

## 4.2 The HVA Evaluation Meeting

The 2011 HVA was evaluated through a face-to-face meeting that took place at the IHR on the 25<sup>th</sup> May 2011 and also through email correspondence linked to the evaluation meeting.<sup>29</sup> The evaluative discussions focused on the following questions:

1. How effective were the discussions at engaging students?
2. Were the discussions appropriately challenging?
3. Did the discussions work well as discussions?
4. What have we learned from this exercise about the scope that exists for collaboration between (a) sixth forms and HE and (b) colleges/schools?<sup>30</sup>

The meeting served two purposes: first, a retrospective one of evaluating the HVA discussions and, second, a prospective one of defining next steps that could build on this experience.

### 4.2. a Retrospective

#### 4.2. a. (i) How effective were the discussions at engaging students?

The general feeling of the meeting was that the 2011 HVA had been a successful exercise – that it had been stimulating for students, that it had challenged them and also that the format of an inter-institutional debate and the interaction with academic historians had both been motivating for students. It was also felt, however, that there were a number of respects in which the HVA might be improved.

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<sup>29</sup> The meeting was chaired by Dr Arthur Chapman and attended by seven history teachers and lecturers - Libby Bond, Dr David Brown, Dr Jane Facey, Matt Harwood, Daniel Magnoff, Dr Elisabeth Pickles and Judith Smith - and two university historians – Dr Robert Poole and Dr Marcus Collins.

<sup>30</sup> These questions were circulated by email prior to the meeting and formed a key part of the agenda for the meeting. An additional question not reproduced here- 'Were the discussions 'good history'?' – was also posed by email and on the agenda. The question was addressed

**Topic relevance**

Although a case was made for working with topics that were new to students and unrelated to examinations, the consensus was that the relevance of the discussion topic was key in motivating students, particularly at A2 students and that the exercise worked best when the students were working on a topic that was central to their exam studies.

**Task structure**

It was generally felt that aspects of the task structure had worked very well – notably the inclusion of a text composed by a historian specifically for the discussion in Phase 2.

It was also suggested that the structure of weekly tasks had helped break things down for students and enabled students to build confidence over time. It was also felt, however, that the repetition of questions had been problematic and that a new question might have been more motivating in, for example, week two.

**Interaction with academics**

It was felt that the interactions with academics had been very positive and affirming for the students and also that it had had a positive impact on motivation.

It was also observed, however, that the students were very keen to get personal feedback from academics and that the fact that they did not all get individual feedback had been demotivating for some of the students.

**Adjudication**

It was felt that the adjudication of the debates had taken much longer than it should have done and that it was important to make this component of process as punctual as possible.

#### **4.2. a. (ii) Were the discussions appropriately challenging?**

It was felt that the texts chosen for the task had worked effectively and set an achievable level of challenge.

The historians' comments and responses were generally agreed to have challenged students to develop their thinking effectively also.

As has already been noted, reservations were expressed about the task question, and it was suggested that greater variation in the task at this stage would increase student perception of challenge.

#### **4.2. a. (iii) Did the discussions work well as discussions?**

It was generally felt that the discussions had been a success: that the interaction between the students and the historians had been effective and that the students had developed their thinking. However, it was also felt that discussion between the students had not worked as well as had been hoped and that there was not enough of it.

The presentation of the discussion boards was felt to have been an inhibitor: it was suggested that the single thread design, combined with aspects of the screen display, had made it difficult for students to track back through the discussion. Alternative and more intuitive platforms – such as Facebook - were discussed and it was also suggested that some use of synchronous discussion – such as a live chat component – might be effective in increasing interaction between students.

#### **4.2. b Prospective**

##### **4.2. b. (i) The scope that exists for collaboration between (a) sixth forms and HE and (b) colleges/schools?**

It was felt that the HVA activity in March and April had demonstrated the viability and the value of collaborations of this nature and that there was scope for the further development of inter-institutional discussions and the participants in the 2011 HVA were willing to explore ways of developing the project further in future iterations.

The second half of the meeting was concerned with thinking about

discussion board designs that could build on or supplement the 2011 HVA. The meeting split into two groups: one group focused on developing a discussion board design for use in the second half of the summer term focused on the transition to A2 and one group focusing on refining the HVA discussion structure so as to take on board problems identified with the 2011 structure, for delivery in January after modular exams.

#### **4.2. b. (ii) AS/A2 Transition: The Beatles Discussion Board**

It was felt that AS/A2 transition was a point at which there might be greater freedom to innovate than was the case at A2, because it was a point when there were few module exams, and that this would be a good point at which to introduce students to key ideas about how historians work and to support transition into A2 work on historical enquiry and controversies.

A discussion board design was developed (Appendix 7.9) and piloted in July 2011 with three of the schools and colleges involved in the HVA project and Dr Marcus Collins of Loughborough University. The design was focused around a non-exam topic (the history of The Beatles) and aimed to scaffold understanding of key components of historical interpretation and enquiry (in particular, source selection) by, among other things, asking students to make and defend selections of sources (in this case songs). The board also innovated in the platform that it used (Fronter). The site for the board was designed by Daniel Magnoff and implemented through Coombe School's VLE. The discussion also innovated in making use of more than one medium and incorporated a podcast lecture on gender history. The Beatles discussion pilot is yet to be evaluated and will be reported in due course with a view to refining it and implementing it again in the summer of 2012, if the conclusions of the evaluation recommend this.

#### **4.2. b. (iii) A Revised A2 Discussion Structure**

Revisions to the 2011 structure were proposed – for implementation slightly earlier, in the post-exam period in January - and are currently in development. The revisions implement key changes that it was felt might

engage students further in the discussions. A suggested change involves incorporating source materials into the discussion, as well as historians' interpretations: the proposal is that two conflicting interpretations should be used in the first phase of the exercise, as in 2011, but that they should both concern the same set of source materials which would be made available to the students. Students would be asked to explore how the interpretations relate to the available source materials and to explore the decisions that the historians had made in interpreting these materials. As in 2011, the historian participating in the discussion would be asked to construct an interpretation based on this source material in the final stage of the exercise and the students would be asked to do this also.<sup>31</sup> It is also proposed that the students be paired up and allocated to small discussion groups and be asked to pose, question and reply to identified partners over the course of the exercise in order to increase sustained and purposeful discussion.

#### **4.2. b. (IV) Next Steps**

It was agreed at that the project leader would liaise with potential partners nationally who might be able to provide a platform for the HVA that would be both attractive and accessible to students and teachers. It was also agreed that similar discussions should be opened with archives that might be able to make appropriate collections of source materials available.

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<sup>31</sup> The 2009 HVA involved both sources and historiography also: in that case, however, there had simply been two phases in sequence (a source phase and an historiography phase). This design aims to integrate these components.

## **5. Conclusions**

### **5.1 The scope of this report**

This is a preliminary report and one that is based on the systematic analysis of a sample of the data sets generated by the 2011 HVA. The project team intend to continue to develop and refine the HVA model and to build on and grow the networks that the HVA has developed and further systematic analysis and publications are in process or in prospect that will draw on the entire project data set. The conclusions that follow below are, therefore, provisional and, in a number of respects tentative.

### **5.2 Aims**

The 2011 HVA aimed to :

- add to emerging knowledge about the effectiveness and organisation of inter and intra-sector collaborative exercises;
- provide models and a knowledge base for the development of larger scale collaborative projects in future; and
- build networks that can be drawn upon and developed further in future.

The 2011 HVA has been successful in achieving these aims, as this report indicates: the outcomes of the discussion boards implemented in March and April 2011 include extensive data sets allowing the effectiveness of the discussion board design to be evaluated and this report begins the process of evaluation. The discussion boards themselves allow the value of the kinds of inter and intra-sector collaboration that produced them to be scoped and the data sets generated through this project provide clear evidence that the boards added value for substantial numbers of the students who took part.

It is the intention, as indicated in 4.2.a and 4.2.b above, to continue to develop and refine the discussion designs developed in this project and to continue to develop the institutional networks developed through the three iterations of the HVA that have occurred to date.

### 5.3 Knowledge exchange

There is a widespread perception that the different sectors of history education operate in different worlds (Booth, 2005; IHR, 2005). Although there have been indications, in recent years, that this situation may be changing - thanks, not least, to the efforts of organisations like the History Subject Centre (Lavender, 2009 and 2010) - it is still rare to find fora in which history educators from different sectors can share perceptions and ideas and still rarer to find opportunities for collaboration across sector boundaries.

The HVA process and the meetings of that took place in March and May provided both fora for the exchange of ideas (as section 2.1.a demonstrates) and opportunities for collaboration, as the co-construction and co-evaluation of the HVA, reported in 2.1.b and in 4.2.a-b above, both attest. Although, in a very real sense, the process *is* the product in this case, these opportunities for the exchange of perspective and expertise have clearly been consequential: the HVA data sets for March/April and July and the draft redesign of the 2011 HVA structure all evidence the fruitfulness of these inter and intra-sector conversations.

### 5.4 Learning Enrichment

It will be recalled that it the HVA process aimed to provide participating students with:

1. an opportunity to interact with students from other sixth forms and
2. an opportunity to interact with academic historians through which students would be enabled:
3. to refine and develop their understanding and mastery of historical argument;
4. to increase their understanding of historiography and historical interpretation); and
5. to gain an insight into teaching and learning at university level.

The degree of success with which the HVA achieved these outcomes has been evaluated in some detail above – in sections 3.3a-c and 4.1c (i)-(iv) – and the headlines only need be reprised here: the data and discussion in the sections above have provided good grounds to advance the conclusions, first, that the HVA achieved all of these learning enrichment objectives but, second, that they were only achieved for a minority of the HVA participants. The key task, therefore, for future HVA design-modification and implementation, is to close the substantial gap between the 94.5% of student participants who posted at Phase 1 and the 42.9% who posted at Phase 3.

## **5.5 Knowledge Creation**

This report begins the process of knowledge creation arising from the 2011 HVA. It is apparent from the comments above – subject, of course, to the limitations of the data sample analysed to date – that significant knowledge creation has already taken place. This report has endeavoured to advance warranted claims about the strengths and limitations of the discussion board design developed through the 2011 HVA in promoting positive historical learning outcomes for students. The reader will be the judge of the degree to which the report has succeeded in that task.

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## 7. Appendices

## Appendix 7.1 HVA Discussion Group Instructions Weeks 1-4

### Cromwell Instructions Week 1

Please read the hyperlinked word document Assessing the Protectorate and consider the following question:

*How might you explain the fact that these historians give different reasons for the limited success of the Protectorate and if you had to choose between them how might you do this?*

In Week 1 of this discussion exercise **please (1)** make a post of around 300 words answering this question **and then (2)** make a post replying to another student. Remember to make reference to the Discussion Criteria when making your posts

### Cromwell Instructions Week 2

In **Week 2** you have a *third perspective* to consider (a post from an historian).

Please consider this post, which will arrive during the week, and the two accounts in the hyperlinked word document 'Assessing the Protectorate.

Please make a new post to this modified question:

***How might you explain the fact that historians give different reasons for the limited success of the Protectorate and if you had to choose between historians' explanations how might you do this?***

In Week 2 of this discussion exercise **please (1)** make a post of around 300 words answering this modified question **and (2)** make a post replying to at least one other student post. The more posts you make the more discussion we will generate: discussion is the essence of history. Remember to make reference to the Discussion Criteria when making your posts.

### Cromwell Instructions Week 3

Welcome to **Week 3** of the History Virtual Academy!

Many thanks for your posts in Weeks 1-2!

The idea, In Week 3 is to post your '**final answer**'. As you know we have been discussing *why* historical interpretations differ and *how* to evaluate them and you should now have had (or shortly receive) input from an historian and also from fellow students in the earlier stages of the academy. This week please make your final post. This is a 'final answer' to the week 2 question, taking account of comments that have been made in the discussions. Your 'final answer' should be at least 300 words in length. Please can you make this post by the end of this week (which ends on the 3rd April).

Please

- (a) post your 'final answer' in the new thread (called 'Final Answer') that you will find in your discussion group and
- (b) reply to any replies that have been made to your posts in Week 2

Please note that you can still make your Weeks 1 to 2 posts if you have not yet had the opportunity to do so and please could I encourage you to do so.

By taking part in this exercise, you agree to follow the hyperlinked *Discussion Rules*.

Enjoy!

Dr Arthur Chapman, Edge Hill University

## **Cromwell Instructions Week4**

Welcome to Week 4, the *final week* of the History Virtual Academy!

Many thanks for your posts in Weeks 1-3!

The instructions for Week 4 are the same as for Week 3 - you have until the end of week 4 to complete those tasks. Please complete the Week 3 tasks, if you have not already done so - you have until the. In addition, please complete the HVA Evaluation Questionnaire (available at this link: <http://surveys.edgehill.ac.uk/hva/>) once you have completed your posts. The questionnaire will be available from Monday the 4th of April.

The idea, In Week 3 is to post your '**final answer**'. As you know we have been discussing *why* historical interpretations differ and *how* to evaluate them and you should now have had (or shortly receive) input from an historian and also from fellow students in the earlier stages of the academy. This week please make your final post. This is a 'final answer' to the week 2 question, taking account of comments that have been made in the discussions. Your 'final answer' should be at least 300 words in length. Please can you make this post by the end of this week (which ends on the 3rd April).

Please

- (a) post your 'final answer' in the new thread (called 'Final Answer') that you will find in your discussion group and
- (b) reply to any replies that have been made to your posts in Week 2

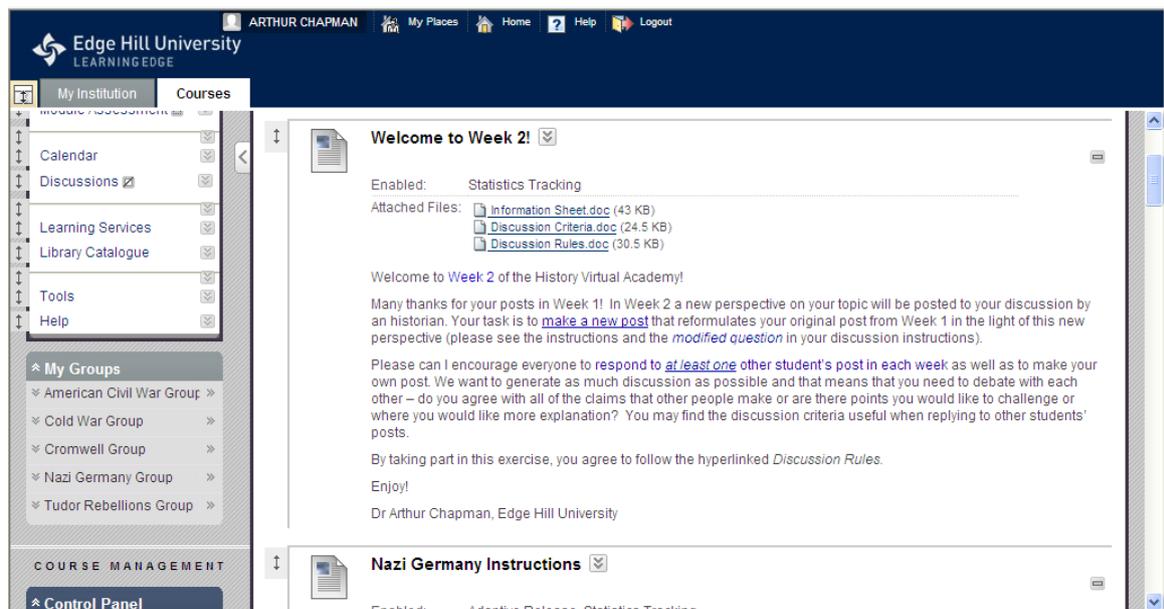
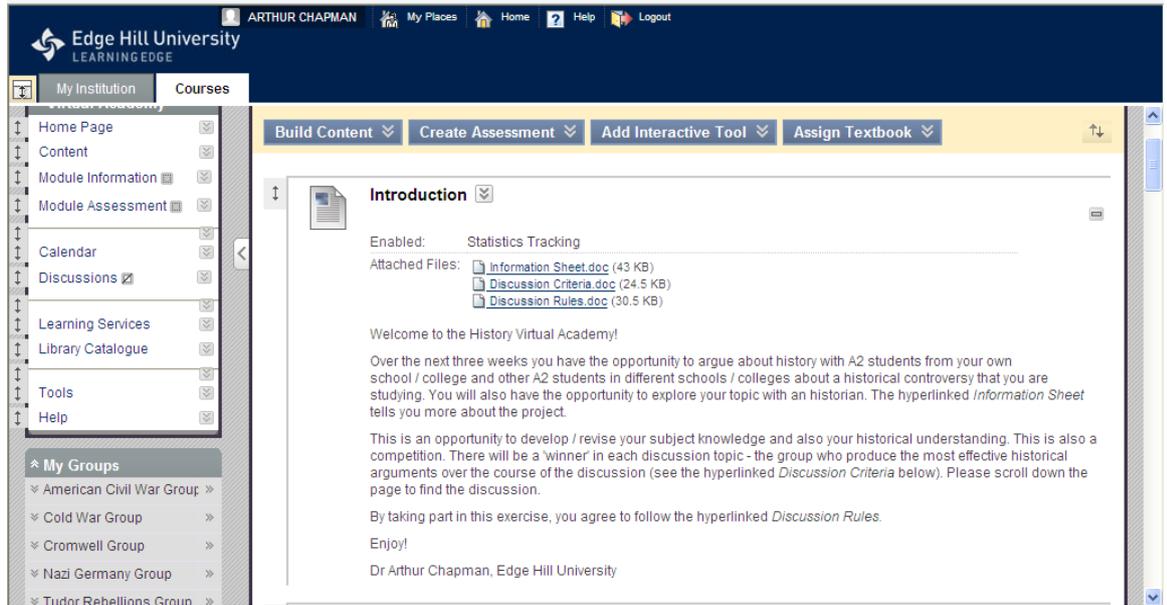
Please note that you can still make your Weeks 1 to 2 posts if you have not yet had the opportunity to do so and please could I encourage you to do so.

By taking part in this exercise, you agree to follow the hyperlinked *Discussion Rules*.

Enjoy!

Dr Arthur Chapman, Edge Hill University

## Appendix 7.2 The Blackboard Interface: Exemplar Screen Captures



The screenshot displays the Edge Hill University course management system. At the top, the user is identified as ARTHUR CHAPMAN. The navigation bar includes 'My Institution' and 'Courses'. A sidebar on the left lists various site functions such as 'Home Page', 'Content', 'Module Information', 'Module Assessment', 'Calendar', 'Discussions', 'Learning Services', 'Library Catalogue', 'Tools', and 'Help'. Below this is a 'My Groups' section with expandable categories for 'American Civil War Group', 'Cold War Group', 'Cromwell Group', 'Nazi Germany Group', and 'Tudor Rebellions Group'. The main content area shows a 'Thread Detail Page' for 'Nazi Germany Discussion Thread Group 3'. It features a 'Reply' button, a 'Total Posts: 22 Unread Posts: 0' status, and a 'Message Actions' menu with 'Collect' and 'Select: All None' options. A list of discussion posts is visible, including the main thread and several replies. A yellow banner at the top of the main content area states: 'The Thread Detail Page provides a complete view of the Thread and its contents. Options for viewing ar...'. A text box on the right side of the screenshot contains the text: 'The portion of the screen with log-on details has been cropped here.'

## **Appendix 7.3 The History Virtual Academy: Information Sheet for Participating Students**

### **What is the project for and who is running it?**

The History Virtual Academy is an online discussion forum. It has been created to enable sixth form students from schools and colleges in different parts of the country to argue about historical interpretation problems with academic historians and with each other.

We hope that it will provide an enjoyable opportunity for students who take part to argue about history and also an opportunity to develop and enhance their historical understanding. The History Virtual Academy is also intended to provide students who take part with insights into the nature of academic study at university.

The project is run by Edge Hill University and it is funded by Edge Hill University and the History Subject Centre of the Higher Education Academy based at The University of Warwick.

As well as providing a valuable and enjoyable experience for pupils the project is also designed to provide an opportunity for teachers, lecturers and academics to work together and share ideas and expertise. The project is also a research project. The purpose of the research exercise is to understand and evaluate the potential of exercises of this nature. The research also aims to enhance teaching and learning in history by helping academics and teachers understand how students approach interpretation problems.

### **When and how will it take place?**

The discussion boards will take place over a number of weeks in the second half of the spring term of 2011 through a secure online learning environment. You will be given a password to access this environment and a log on name so that your identity will be protected. Only people taking part in the exercise will be able to see the posts.

The discussion boards will contain questions about historical interpretations problems and you will be asked to debate the questions with students from other sixth forms and colleges. Academic historians will also contribute to the debates. Participants will be asked to make at least one post a week over the duration of the boards.

### **Discussion rules**

You will be asked to agree to some discussion rules, contained on the next page of this document as a condition for taking part. The rules are there to ensure that discussion is an enjoyable experience for everyone who takes part.

### **Research reports**

A research report and research articles are likely to result from this project. All posts to the boards that are analysed and published in reports will be presented anonymously: no one will be able to know who said what. You will be given an opportunity to read any reports and articles that we write.

**The Right to withdraw**

This exercise is entirely voluntary. We very much hope that you will enjoy taking part in it but there is no obligation to do so. You can choose not to take part. You can also choose to withdraw at any time without explanation.

**Contacts and further questions**

The project is being coordinated by Dr Arthur Chapman, Reader in Education at Edge Hill University. Arthur can be contacted on [arthur.chapman@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:arthur.chapman@edgehill.ac.uk) if you have any questions or if you would like further information about this project.

Please keep this information sheet for future reference.

## Appendix 7.4 HVA Discussion Criteria

When contributing to the discussions you should aim to:

- Be ***courteous*** and use appropriate ***academic language***
- ***Focus*** clearly ***on the issues*** being debated
- ***Argue clearly*** and in a structured way
- ***Support the claims that you make*** with evidence and/or reasoning
- Consider a number of ***explanations*** (when explaining why interpretations vary)
- Consider a number of ***criteria*** (when evaluating interpretations)
- Be ***precise*** when challenging, questioning or arguing against another person's arguments)
- ***Respond appropriately*** to questions or counter-arguments (when replying to comments from other participants on a previous post).

## Appendix 7.5 Rules for Acceptable Online Discussion

This sheet outlines the safeguards and rules for acceptable online discussion that will apply to the History Virtual Academy project discussion boards.

By signing the attached consent form you are agreeing to these conditions and rules.

### **(a) E-security**

Participants will be provided with log on information in order to take part in this project. This information will be provided to participants either as individuals or as members of a group where appropriate. In all cases participants must ensure that this information is kept secure and not shared with anyone other than members of their group (if this is applicable) or their teacher.

### **(b) Anonymity**

Participating students' identities will be protected during the discussions through anonymised usernames.

### **(c) Acceptable Usage**

The online discussion sites are provided for the purposes of a specific discussion exercises focused on historical interpretations and should not be used for any other purpose, including the exchange of personal information.

### **(d) Discussion Rules**

The discussion will be conducted according to academic conventions of debate. Specifically –

- Participants will behave courteously to each other in their contributions and confine their comments to the historical issues under discussion.
- Claims that are made during the discussions must be clearly explained and supported with argument and / or evidence.
- Observations that are made on the contributions of other participants to the debate must be courteous, clearly explained and supported with argument and / or evidence.

### **(e) Moderation**

The discussion will be moderated. Participants who do not abide by the conditions above may be withdrawn from the discussion and comments that breach the conditions above will be removed.

### Appendix 7.6 HVA Questions Phase 1 and Phases 2 and 3

Topic	Phase1 Question	Phase 2 and 3 Question
Cromwell	How might you explain the fact that these historians give different reasons for the limited success of the Protectorate and if you had to choose between them how might you do this?	How might you explain the fact that historians give different reasons for the limited success of the Protectorate and if you had to choose between historians' explanations how might you do this?
Cold War	How might you explain the fact that these historians give different accounts of the origins of the Cold War and, if you had to choose between them, how might you do this?	How might you explain the fact that historians give different accounts of the origins of the Cold War and if you had to choose between historians' accounts how might you do this?
Nazi Germany	How might you explain the fact that these historians provide different assessments of the role of coercion in Nazi Germany and if you had to choose between their assessments how might you do this?	How might you explain the fact that historians provide different assessments of the role of coercion in Nazi Germany and if you had to choose between historians' assessments how might you do this?
American Civil War	How might you explain the fact that these historians give different reasons for the outcome of the American Civil War and, if you had to choose between them, how might you do this?	How might you explain the fact that historians give different reasons for the outcome of the American Civil War and if you had to choose between historians' explanations how might you do this?
Tudor Rebellions	How might you explain the fact that these historians give different motives for the Northern Rebellion of 1569 and, if you had to choose between them, how might you do this?	How might you explain the fact that historians give different motives for the Northern Rebellion of 1569 and, if you had to choose between historians' explanations how might you do this?

## Appendix 7.7 American Civil War Discussion Texts

### Source 1: Richard H. Sewell, *A House Divided: Sectionalism and Civil War, 1848-1865* (1988).

The stage was now set for the most daring operation of the war. After chasing Hood in northern Georgia for a month, Sherman hit upon a more promising plan of action. Leaving General Thomas at Nashville with enough troops to defend the Tennessee River line against Hood, he proposed marching his army through Georgia to the sea. "Until we can repopulate Georgia, it is useless for us to occupy it," he explained to Grant, "but the utter destruction of its [rail] roads, houses, and people, will cripple their military resources... I can make this march, and make Georgia howl!" Such a raid promised psychological dividends as well. In marching, "a well-appointed army" through the very heart of Rebelom, carrying off slaves and laying waste to the countryside, the Federals would demoralize Southerners, Sherman declared, giving lie to their government's promise of protection."

Grant at first reacted coolly to Sherman's proposal, thinking it better "to entirely ruin" Hood before striking South. Lincoln, too, confessed himself "anxious, if not fearful" over the risky venture. Once assured that Thomas could take care of Hood, however, they let Sherman put his plan in motion. On the morning of November 15, after setting Atlanta ablaze, Sherman's men moved out, 62,000 strong, bound for the Atlantic coast. Foraging "liberally on the country" and encountering meagre opposition, the high-spirited Yankees reached Savannah a month later, having cut a swath of destruction 60 miles wide through previously untouched, harvest-rich Georgia. Hood, meanwhile, obliged the Yankees by launching a suicidal attack against a powerful, dug-in Union detachment at Franklin, Tennessee, on November 30. Though his losses (which included five generals killed, one captured, and six wounded) were thrice those of the Federals, he rashly pressed onward, laying nominal siege to Thomas's army at Nashville. With 50,000 men to Hood's 23,000, Thomas was in little danger. On December 15-16 he attacked and sent the Army of Tennessee reeling in defeat, no longer an effective fighting force. By the time he found sanctuary in Mississippi, Hood's once-proud legion of 51,000 had withered away to barely 15,000 tattered, pinch-cheeked survivors – a ruinous decline to which his own tactical errors had contributed much.

Having ransacked a goodly portion of Georgia and presented Savannah to Lincoln "as a Christmas gift," Sherman paused long enough to rest his troops and stockpile supplies. By February 1865 he was off again, following Grant's instructions to "break up the railroads in South and North Carolina, and join the armies operating against Richmond." Moving slowly and deceptively, avoiding battle when possible, Sherman swept northward "like a full developed cyclone," a Confederate cavalry officer remembered, "leaving behind him a track of desolation and ashes fifty miles wide. In front of them was terror and dismay."

**Source 2: Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War* (1995).**

The idea that the Federals were conducting an immoral war in an immoral fashion goes back as far as the conflict itself. Fearful that “the hope of reconstruction was a latent sentiment in the bosom of the Southern community,” Confederate nationalists portrayed the enemy as demons and blackguards in a bid to create an unbridgeable chasm to reunion. Jefferson Davis railed against “the savage ferocity” of Union military conduct. “The frontier of our country,” he wrote in 1863, “bears witness to the alacrity and devastation of farms, the destruction of agricultural implements, the burning of the houses, and the plunder of everything moveable.”

Southerners continued to level such charges after the war had ended, snarling of Northern “atrocities” and “barbarism,” of “soulless raiders” and their “hellish work.” In the postwar South, the legend of Yankee ruffians waging campaigns of fire and vandalism was surely useful in several respects. First, it helped Redeemers convince their fellow white Southerners that a terrible wrong had been done to them – a conviction that resonated well with the humiliations of military Reconstruction. Second, it played into the myth of a South beaten down by brute force, not defeated by military art and certainly not by internal divisions or a failure of national will. It also made it easier to overlook the Confederate government’s tax-in-kind and impressment policies, as well as “scorched earth” practices carried out by the rebel army. When Grandpappy reminisced about how his team of prized horses had disappeared, he preferred to recall that Yankee vandals had done it – even if the real culprit had been a Confederate impressment agent.

Third, the myth of Yankee atrocities accounted for the economic disaster that gripped the South after 1865. As historians have since pointed out, the distribution of Southern crops, livestock, factories, railroads, and other infrastructures was anything but complete; much of the damage was repaired within a few years. The really serious economic losses can be traced to two things: the emancipation of the slaves, which wiped out billions of dollars in Southern wealth, and the worthlessness of Confederate scrip, bonds, and promissory notes into which Southerners had sunk most of their savings. Both, of course, could be better traced to the South’s decision to secede – and so begin the war – than anything that Union soldiers did. Thus, the emphasis on hard war, as an explanation for the economic devastation of the South, may have diverted attention from Southern responsibilities in bringing on the war, and thus for the outcome. Even if Southerners conceded their responsibility for beginning the conflict, the myth of Yankee atrocities remained useful. Southerners could assert that they themselves had inaugurated a chivalrous struggle based on honour; the Yankees were responsible for the brutal, destructive war it eventually became.

**Historian A 21 March 2011 14:34:13**

**Posted Date:**

Monday, 21 March 2011 14:34:13 o'clock GMT+00:00

**Edited Date:**

Monday, 21 March 2011 14:34:13 o'clock GMT+00:00

**Total views:**

68

### The outcome of the American Civil War

The two sources you have previously studied have both taken differing stances on the reasons behind the outcomes of the Civil War. Sewell takes a more narrative, narrower focused approach to explaining the North's victory over the South: he credits the military strength and expertise of the North's commanders, particularly General Sherman and his 'Scorched Earth' policy, for demoralising Southerners and 'like a full developed cyclone' cutting a swathe of destruction across the Southern states.

Alternatively, Grimsley advocates the economic fragility of the South, brought about by Slave Emancipation, the policy of impressment and a weak currency, as the real reasons for its being unsuccessful in the conflict. By analysing the impact of events, rather than the events themselves, Grimsley takes a less narrative, less militaristic focus, identifying that the psychological impact of the war (perpetrated by 'Yankee vandals') helped divert Southern mentality away from its own responsibilities for the war.

However, it is vital for any historian of the American Civil War to understand that the conflict's outcome rested as much on the fragility of the South as it did on the strength of the North. Much of this can be identified in perhaps the most central cause for the war: slavery. This was the overriding reason for the conflict. By 1860, driven both directly or indirectly by slavery, the North and South could name a long list of issues against the other which formed the reasons behind going to war.

The South's reliance on slavery has been identified by historians as a key reason for its defeat: the reliance on a slave workforce to drive and sustain the economy meant that as that workforce disappeared (through desertion, fighting for the Union and emancipation), the greater population and industrial strength of the North became increasingly apparent.

For the North, and in particular Lincoln, belief in the moral certainty of their ideological stance (that slavery was unquestionably wrong) was allied to the fact that the South's secession from the Union was wholly undemocratic. Lincoln feared that it would present a twisted model of America's Republic ideals if 'a minority of disaffected slaveholders was allowed to reject the result of a democratic election'. By the start of the American Civil War therefore, the Mason-Dixon Line became as much an ideological division within America as it did a geographic one.

The key role of any historian is to understand the plurality of reasons behind historical events. No explanations can truly stand in isolation. The moral certainty that some historians have attributed to the North's cause comes increasingly from the Union's military ability to convincingly win crucial battles (based on their industrial strength and greater numerical and technological

superiority). Equally, as the North began to press harder and victories came more rapidly, the South was unable to mobilise greater resources for its cause based on their narrow focused economy and smaller population. How could these different interpretations be used in a complementary fashion to understand the complexity of the American Civil War?

## Appendix 7.8 Nazi Germany Discussion Texts

**Source 1: Robert Gellately, "Rethinking the Nazi Terror System: A Historiographical Analysis." *German Studies Review*, Vol. 14, No.1, February 1991.**

One question that might be asked is how were the 'criminal' deeds brought to light? The scrupulousness of the Gestapo is well known, but how was it attained? Even zealous officials employing violent methods cannot achieve much on their own, at least when they seek to enforce policies which intrude into the more private realm of social and sexual relations. If one reads though some of the Gestapo case files which survive in Wurzburg, Speyer or Dusseldorf, what is immediately striking is then extent of unsolicited informing from citizens. These political denunciations from the population at large, as several recent studies make clear, were indispensable in the function of the terror system. Tracking political 'crimes' such as 'malicious gossip', as one Gestapo insider candidly stated in testimony at the Nuremberg trials, was possible because 'of reports which were sent in from private persons or other agencies outside the police.' Indeed, when it came to the initiation of all cases, the Gestapo was by and large passive, that is, it had to rely on information from the outside before it moved into action. Historians have only occasionally even noted the interaction of ordinary citizens and the Gestapo. Instead of regarding the German population as largely passive, it might be more useful to portray them as more active participants who, even as unorganised individuals from time to time, played a role in the terror system. The generalised fear of the kind introduced by the terror system in Nazi Germany beginning in 1933 was not the only cause of the paucity of dissent, opposition, or resistance; the importance of such a negative inducement to obey has to be set alongside the regime's sources of legitimacy. Hitler's dictatorship likely could not have been sustained itself through terror alone. Hardly less important to the maintenance of the regime, indeed, to some extent fuelling the willingness of citizens to participate in the terror, was that most Germans accepted the legitimacy of Hitler's government and were willing to comply and cooperate. There is little doubt that many welcomed the restoration of 'law and order', destruction of the 'Communist Threat', the eliminate of unemployment, and establishment of the economy on a better footing than many people, until then, had experienced in their lifetime. In foreign affairs, few Germans failed to applaud when Hitler tore up the Treaty of Versailles, brought Austria 'back into the Reich', or ended the Sudeten crisis of September 1938 with a resounding political victory over England and France. Even when the initial victories in the war began to turn sour, the government continued to enjoy the support of the majority of its citizens. Given these and other legitimating successes, it has to be said that many people did not need to be terrorised or coerced as much as tempted and enticed into offering their support for the regime.

**Source 2: R. J. Evans, "Coercion and Consent in Nazi Germany."  
Proceedings of the British Academy, No. 151, 2007.**

It is important to remember the extreme extent to which civil liberties were destroyed in the sources of the Nazi seizure of power. In the Third Reich it was illegal to belong to any political grouping apart from the Nazi party or indeed any non-Nazi organisation of any kind apart from the Churches and the army; it was illegal to tell jokes about Hitler; it was illegal to spread rumours about the government; it was illegal to discuss alternatives to the political status quo. The Reichstag Fire Decree of 28 February 1933 made it legal for the police to open letters and tap telephones and to detain people indefinitely and without a court order in so called 'protective custody.' The same decree also abrogated the clauses in the Weimar Constitution that guaranteed freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of association and freedom of expression. The right of judicial appeal was effectively abolished for offences dealt with by the Special Courts and the People's Courts. All this meant that large numbers of offenders were sent to prison for political as well as ordinary criminal offences. In 1937 the courts passed no fewer than 5,255 convictions for high treason. These people if they escaped the death penalty were put into a state prison, often for a lengthy period of time. From 1932 to 1937 the prison population increased from 69,000 to 122,000. In 1935, 23,000 inmates were classified as political offenders. The crushing of the Communist and Social Democratic resistance ensured that these numbers had fallen by more than 50 per cent by the beginning of 1939; nevertheless, they were still far more significant than the numbers of political offenders in the camps after 1937. The very wide range of coercive measures used by the regime at every level was enforced by an equally wide range of coercive agents. It is a mistake to focus exclusively on the Gestapo on the assumption that it was the sole, or even the principal instrument of control in Nazi Germany. The fear that formed the permanent backdrop to their daily lives was not a fear of the Gestapo, still less of ordinary citizens, friends or relatives, but a fear of active Nazis, low level Party officials and committed supporters of the regime: if you fell into conversation with a stranger you might be able to tell whether he belonged to one of these categories by small signs such as whether he used the Hitler greeting, but you could never be entirely certain, so it was best to be circumspect, and if you knew the person you were talking to was an active Nazi, then you certainly had to be cautious. Why was such a vast apparatus of coercion and control necessary if, as historians like Wehler, Gellately, Johnson and Reuband and other claim, the Nazi regime was viewed in such a popular light by the mass of the German people? The more people clung to alternative values to those of Nazism, the more important terror was as a means of coercing them into submission. In the end, coercion was at least as important as propaganda in its impact on the behaviour of the vast majority of people who lived in Nazi Germany.

**Historian B 21 March 2011 16:54:06**

**Posted Date:**

Monday, 21 March 2011 16:54:06 o'clock GMT+00:00

**Edited Date:**

Monday, 21 March 2011 16:54:06 o'clock GMT+00:00

**Total views:**

54

The energy of the argument between these two prominent historians reflects the importance of this debate which seeks to examine the extent to which the coming to power of Nazi Party and the brutality of its regime can be perceived as a moral failure on the part of the German people. These historians are making a moral judgement on the behaviour of the German people at this time.

In their examinations, Gellately and Evans concur that the Nazi state could not have been sustained by terror alone and observe that coercion was not the whole story. In that respect it is important that the positions of the two should not be made to appear more polarised than they actually are; debates of historians are dynamic interactions and not often completely opposing stances.

Also at issue here is the best means to undertake this examination. Both historians suggest in their perspective that a 'history from below' has greater potential to reveal more about the Nazi terror than a top-down analysis of central administration and control. For example, both writers are concerned with the routine, local and day-to-day operation of instigating fear as well as the role and response of the German people regarding Nazi impositions.

Evan's highlighting of the extensive use made of state prisons is interesting as he asserts by this example that the terror was not only orchestrated by organs of the Nazi Party but by previously mainstream agencies such as the criminal justice system. For most of the Nazi era state prisons held more prisoners than SS concentration camps. This emphasises for Evans the range of 'coercive agents' in effect implementing Nazi policies. In disagreement with Gellately, therefore, Evan's emphasis is not on 'ordinary citizens' who inform on others but on 'low level Party officials and committed supporters' whom he suggests reached a much greater proportion of the German population than the Gestapo. Given the range of organisations used by and/or set up under the Nazi state, Gellately is not specific about whom he is actually writing – for example who were 'private persons or other agencies outside the police' or 'ordinary citizens.'

Gellately refers to 'zealous officials' but places stress on surviving 'Gestapo case files' while Evans places importance on the all-encompassing nature of legal measures and the prison population compared to numbers held in camps. This reflects the criticism of Gellately's work by Evan's – that a focus on the Gestapo is too limited to enable an understanding of the multi-layered and multi-faceted reach of the Nazi Party.

The above suggests that close reading of historical work is essential. In the extracts from the work of Gellately and Evans what do terms such as 'unsolicited', 'ordinary', 'willing', 'coercion' and 'control' actually mean and to what extent have the writer's left these unexplained? The nature, selection and use of primary material should also be questioned - does the evidence Gellately discusses convince the reader that 'most' German's accepted the legitimacy of the Nazi state? In comparison how convincing is the evidence used by Evans? Crucially, is the psychological impact of power and terror to be felt in its range or intensity and do the studies here suggest that power is not just a top down phenomenon but much more complex and dynamic?

## Appendix 7.9 HVA AS/A2 Transition Discussion Project Outline: 'The Beatles'

### 1. Aim

The purpose of this discussion exercise is to develop students' understandings of how historians work and of the processes that are involved in historical interpretation – including, for example, the role that source selection plays in historical study.

### 2. Duration

Two weeks.

### 3. Structure

#### Stage 1

To benchmark students' understandings of how historians work before the exercise begins, all participating students (this should be an individual task) should be asked to write a brief statement explaining what they think historians do when setting out to answer questions about the past. This statement will be an answer to the question:

*'Historians set out to answer questions about the past. Please explain what historians do in order to answer their questions.'*

Students should answer this question briefly (say in 15 minutes writing or in around 300 words). The idea is to archive these answers and to return to and revise them at the end of the exercise. A sensible way of doing this may be for students to email their responses to their teacher who could then email them back at the end of the process for the students to revise. This way we will have e-copy of their initial thoughts and any changes that they make. Please could these be collated together (e.g. into a word document) and forwarded to me at the end of the exercise?

#### Stage 2

##### (a) The overall task

Students are introduced to their task as follows:

The 1960s are frequently presented as a decade in which significant social and cultural changes took place in Britain, for example in attitudes to 'love' and relations between men and women. Many of these changes are often linked to the 'youth culture' of the time.

The Beatles are the iconic '60s band' and are often treated as representative of the dramatic changes of the decade. The career of the Beatles also spanned the 1960s and is often considered to reflect the wider changes that

took place.

The purpose of this exercise is to conduct an historical inquiry to explore these issues by looking at the career of the Beatles, and, in particular, at their song lyrics.

Our overall question is this:

*Does an investigation of the lyrics of Beatles' songs support the claim that dramatic changes took place in the band's thinking about love over the course of their career?*

### **(b) The stage 1 task**

Students are provided with a short list of Beatles' songs to consider (50 songs). The site also contains links to sites at which the lyrics can be read.

Their task is to propose a selection of 10 songs that they think will be particularly useful in answering the overall question. We present this to students by saying that when they come to write up their answer to the question they will only be able to afford to quote 10 songs (since they will need to pay the copyright holders to cite them).

1. Students make a post of up to 400 words stating and justifying their 10 choices. Why have they chosen these songs and excluded others?
2. Students should also make at least one post to another group – commenting on and, if necessary, arguing against the choices or the explanations that the other group have made.
3. At the end of week 1, Marcus Collins, who is currently working on a book on the Beatles, will reply to the students (either through one generic post or to individuals depending on the volume of traffic!). Marcus will comment on the students' choices and / or their rationales for their choices. Marcus may also, for example, suggest additional lines of enquiry.

### **Stage 2**

Students have now had feedback – from each other and also from an historian. They should now:

1. Make a post that
  - a. states and justifies their definitive choice of 10 songs, in the light of feedback they have received (it is possible that they will have changed their minds in the light of replies to their posts and, if they have not, they will still need to defend the fact that they are not making changes) and

- b. answer the overall question in no more than 500 words.
2. At the end of week 2 Marcus will comment again on student posts as above, this time focusing on the arguments that the students advance in answer to the substantive question (about change in the Beatles' attitudes).

### **Stage 3**

Each student should return to the answer that they gave at Stage 1, revising it as appropriate and stating what, if anything, they have learned from this exercise about how historians work.