

**History Subject Centre**  
History in Schools and Higher Education:



enhancing the study of our subject and  
understanding the transition to HE

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## **Acknowledgements:**

This History Subject Centre would like to thank the following people for their research and direct input into this report:

- Sarah Richardson (Director of History at the Higher Education Academy)
- Rebecca Sullivan (CEO Historical Association)
- Barbara Hibbert (Head of History at Harrogate Grammar School)
- Arthur Chapman (Lecturer in History Education, Institute of Education)
  
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We also appreciate the inspiration provided by the English Subject Centre's Seed Guide on '*Working with Secondary Schools: a guide for higher education English*': and their agreement in reproducing some of the generic elements that make up the guide.

## **Note on Terminology**

For reasons of clarity and brevity, in this guide we use 'students' to refer to higher education learners and 'pupils' to refer to secondary school learners; 'lecturers' for those teaching in higher education and 'teachers' for those teaching in secondary education. This guide also concentrates predominantly on English schools; it is worth noting that differences may occur in Scottish, Welsh and Irish schools.



Inspiration for this guide was taken from the 2009 **History in Schools – Present and Future** conference, where discussions frequently returned to two main points: highlighting the advantages of studying history to a higher level; the role that closer collaboration between schools and universities can have in revealing the importance of such study, giving a taste of what HE study would be like, and helping to provide robust pedagogic and contextual teaching to advance pupil study skills.

**This report aims to highlight practical ways in which teachers in schools and HE can further the interest and study of history at senior school and HE level.** It will provide

background information on current school and HE practices and case studies by staff and students from the history community to encourage:

- Academics from HE to collaborate with schools, and work directly with pupils and teachers
- A better understanding of study requirements at university level
- Effective preparation of prospective candidates for successful transition to HE study

**These aims encompass a broad audience with an interest in promoting the study of history, but we hope that the information included will be of particular use to:**

- History teachers of the 16+ age group
- HE admissions tutors
- Early career academics looking at their career development
- International academics working in the UK

Throughout this guide look out for...



**TOP TIPS**



**ONLINE IDEAS**



**CASE STUDY**

## Who benefits from working with schools?

**History** remains a popular subject of study at GCSE, A-Level and degree level with, for instance, GCSE entry figures consistently over 200,000 since 2004. However, we should not be complacent, curriculum changes, pressures on schools, and the increasing opportunities to learn a wider range of subjects and themes means that the benefits and joys of choosing history have to be highlighted if the discipline is to maintain its entry numbers, and even improve the quality of recruitment to higher level study.

**Why does history matter?** At the aforementioned History in Schools conference, Ben Walsh (Historical Association) asked a key point about engagement:

With reference to a QCA report by Terry Haydn from 2005 on student perceptions of history, it was noted that in a survey of 1700 children, two thirds gave up History aged fourteen, even though half of those giving up liked the subject and rated their teachers well. The issue is one of relevance. In addition to giving encouragement and information to pupils to help them consider history at GCSE level and beyond, the HE community can provide specialist and often local knowledge, addressing the issue of relevance head on. It is the responsibility of all of us within the discipline to show children, and their parents, that the study of history is not solely about the content, but thinking about and engaging with the world.

# WHO BENEFITS FROM WORKING WITH SCHOOLS?

**Pupils** benefit from hearing up-to-date research on a given topic from a lecturer to enhance their current study and drive forward their understanding of key curriculum areas. It would also give them some insight into studying history at HE level from talking to the lecturer: in the absence of information, many students expect HE teaching to be similar to school teaching. As pupils become familiar with individual lecturers and HEIs, they will develop affiliations which may convert into applications.

**Teachers** have the opportunity to gain current information about what is expected at HE level and how to prepare their pupils for the next stage of History study. Teachers in schools and colleges often work closely with pupils as they apply for university: they are likely to recommend pupils to follow courses in departments where they know academic staff and feel that students will be supported and where a genuine interest is taken in student development.

**Lecturers and HEIs** gain a greater awareness of the content of secondary exam syllabi and students' experiences of History before university, which may help them plan more effectively to meet incoming students' needs and abilities. This is particularly significant for international lecturers who would have an opportunity to gain some first-hand knowledge of the English school system, and engage with A-level and/or International Baccalaureate courses to better understand what the different courses and grades actually mean. Early career academics could also use the opportunity to fulfil elements of their career development programme.

Departments and institutions can only gain from proactively introducing to prospective students some of the skills they will need and some of the issues they will face at university.

**All** will be able to enjoy the richness of working with people outside their normal academic life.

**All** will gain meaningful insight into the transition to HE and how they, as teachers, lecturers and prospective students can best facilitate the transition.

## Report Focus

The focus of this report also aims to help the history community consider and meet the national remit on increased participation and aspirations in education.

The National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE) was established in June 2007 and published its recommendations in October 2008. These focused on school and college links with businesses and HE institutions, and about how early years, schools and colleges can work together to help raise standards.

Among the NCEE recommendations:

- Every primary school should devote time to work on raising student aspirations to take up a place in higher education. Schools and HEIs should try to ensure that every pupil visits a higher education campus either during primary or early secondary education, concentrating initially on schools in low participation or deprived areas.
- Schools should appoint a senior member of staff with responsibility for careers and education guidance, ensure that all staff have dedicated time to undertake HE-related CPD activities, and ensure that up to date HE related information, advice and guidance is provided.
- HEIs should support schools, including arrangements for improving school performance in the light of the national challenge, and be involved with supporting Academies, Trusts or other mechanisms for working with schools.

# WHEN AND HOW TO WORK WITH SCHOOLS

This section may be of particular interest to early career academics and international academics who are either unfamiliar with the practicalities of working with children, or unaware of the details of the school system in England. Here are a few practical do and don'ts to consider:



**DO** ... make initial contact with the Head Teacher when trying to forge a new relationship with a school. If they are interested they will introduce you to the most appropriate member of staff for progressing the activity under discussion.

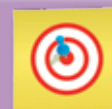


**DON'T** ... try to schedule activities **DURING** the main examination periods: A Levels are in January and mid-May to mid-June; GCSEs are mid-May to mid-June.

**DO** ... consider times which would bring most benefit to the pupils you are aiming to reach. For example, the weeks prior to examinations would be very helpful if you are providing master-class revision sessions.

**DON'T** ... just think about A level candidates: working with younger pupils may fit better with your subject specialism **AND** encourage them to continue studying history to GCSE or A level ... and beyond.

## TOP TIPS



Contact the school's Examination Officer for details of mock exam times (as they are school specific): public examination schedules can be found on examination board websites (see the useful contacts on page 29)

## Have you thought about working with teachers?

This could still directly benefit pupils through raising staff awareness on new subject-specific research, or equipping them for a more effective transition to HE by providing their teachers with a better understanding of what is expected of new students. The advice of a trusted subject teacher is so often an important first step in considering HE options.

There is also added schedule flexibility in working just with teachers...

- ✓ Running evening or Saturday sessions which are difficult to offer to pupils
- ✓ Days immediately before or after school terms
- ✓ School INSET days: specifically designated for training purposes.





# GOING INTO SCHOOLS

## A CHECKLIST OF ISSUES TO CONSIDER

- ✓ **Named liaison person in school:**  
your job in arranging and managing any contact with schools will be much easier if you have a dedicated liaison person to deal with. It is even easier if your contact has a direct phone line (usually only a Head of Department, a Head of Year or a Senior Teacher will have this)
- ✓ **Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosure:**  
the decision whether to allow visitors without CRB clearance into a school to work with children lies with the Head Teacher in the current climate. Head Teachers are increasingly unwilling to waive this requirement, so if you are likely to be regularly working in schools, clearance is well worth having. If the school demands CRB clearance it will have to be sought by your HEI: check with Human Resources in the first instance.
- ✓ **Parental consent:**  
this may be an issue in certain circumstances, depending upon what you are doing. If you are dealing with sensitive issues (e.g. race, sexuality, and religious belief) parents retain the right to withdraw their child from participation. Seek advice from the school.
- ✓ **Finance:**  
does the event have financial cost to the school or to the pupils? Check out the going rate for the kind of event you are planning. If money has to be collected from parents, schools will need time to circulate letters and collect payments.
- ✓ **Technical resourcing:**  
does the school have the type of facilities you wish to use? Access to ICT facilities, video/DVD players, audio resources is variable in schools, and special arrangements may be required.
- ✓ **Layout and size of rooms:**  
school teaching rooms come in all shapes and sizes, some with movable furniture, some without, some well resourced, some very basic. Make no assumptions!
- ✓ **Ability range of pupils:**  
schools operate a variety of policies with regard to grouping pupils – some will use setting by ability, others will have broad bands of ability, others will group according to gender, others believe in teaching mixed ability groups. It is important to know the nature of the group you will be working with in order to pitch material effectively.
- ✓ **Timing:**  
check with the school about good and bad times to run activities.
- ✓ **What they have studied before:**  
preparing effective ways into your sessions will be much easier if you know what the pupils have already covered and what they are going onto study. Find out which examination board is being followed and check the specification on their website. This will help you in planning and will help the pupils to contextualise their learning.
- ✓ **Certification:**  
for one-off events, certification is unlikely to be necessary, but if you have worked with pupils on sustained projects or over a sequence of related events, a simple certification with the logo of your institution stating what students have participated in and any major outcomes may well provide useful evidence for future employers and in UCAS applications.



# WHEN AND HOW TO WORK WITH SCHOOLS

## How to choose a school to work with... in your local area

Getting involved with a local school is probably the most obvious starting point, and is likely to be encouraged by your HEI in terms of their widening participation remit. The widening participation unit should be familiar with schools in the area and be able to provide lists of useful contacts.

**The local LAs should have information on specific schools: visit the education pages on your local county council's website, or identify schools in a geographic area using [www.edubase.gov.uk](http://www.edubase.gov.uk)**

However, if your particular field of specialism is not appropriate or relevant for working with a local school, you may consider contacting the **Historical Association**. They have links with schools across the country and may be able to pair you with a school nationally, or even work with you on organising an activity.

### CASE STUDY

#### HA Lincolnshire Branch Sixth Form Conferences



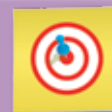
#### Aims:

- To support students and develop their knowledge and understanding of a historical topic
- To encourage mixing students from different schools
- To introduce students to a leading academic on the topic and the latest academic thinking
- To encourage links between Lincolnshire schools and university admissions tutors
- To expose students to different styles of teaching
- To include a 'hands on' artefact style activity as part of the day
- To show that history can be fun!

For several years we have organised a Sixth Form Conference for AS students focused on Henry VII. The topic is chosen because enough schools take that option to enable a critical mass to make a conference viable. Each year we have invited a leading academic to talk about the latest research; a leading teacher-trainer to provide varied teaching and learning activities; and a 'hands-on' activity to make the day different. We have tried to also include an admissions tutor who can talk at lunchtime about the application process for HE.

Teachers appreciate the academic update as much as students. Students appreciate meeting 'the famous name' they have read, and the opportunity to work with students from different schools.

### TOP TIPS



The Historical Association can help you contact History Subject Leaders in your local schools.

Email: [enquiry@history.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@history.org.uk)

A number of HA branches hold regular events for A Level students and have good links with schools in their locality. Again, contact branch volunteers through the HA enquiry email address above.



**The Aimhigher programme**, run by HEFCE, is about making everyone aware of the benefits higher education can bring, whatever their background. A huge range of courses are offered giving extensive opportunities for academics to get involved with schools within an organised programme.

Aimhigher activities take place across 44 local areas in England. Activities supported by the programme include:

- Visits to university campuses
- Residential summer schools
- Master-classes and open days
- Mentoring schemes

**MORE IDEAS FOR COLLABORATION CAN BE FOUND IN THE NEXT SECTION OF THIS GUIDE...**

# THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLING IN ENGLAND

## Types of Schools in England

The majority of pupils within England attend one of the four types of mainstream schools. These are all funded by the local authority, follow the national curriculum and are inspected by Ofsted:

**Community Schools** have strong community links and are increasingly expanding the use of their facilities for out-of-hours childcare and adult learning purposes. The local authority employs all staff and decides on the admissions criteria.

**Foundation Schools** are run by their own governing body which employs staff and sets the admission criteria. Funded by the local authority but land and buildings may be owned by the governing body or charitable trust.

**Trust Schools** are similar to Foundation Schools. They form a charitable trust with an outside partner (such as a business or educational charity), which aims to raise standards and explore new methods of working.

**Voluntary Aided Schools** are mainly religious or faith schools, though open admission policies allow attendance by all children. Land and buildings are owned by a charity, often a religious organisation, but the local authority employs the staff and sets the admission criteria.

Other types of school found in England include:

- Academies – independently managed
- Grammar – select all or most of their pupils based on academic ability
- Specialist – follow the national curriculum but have some focus on a particular subject area, such as sport, technology or modern languages.
- Maintained boarding – offer free tuition but charge for board and lodging
- Independent – around 2,300 fee-paying schools in England set their own curriculum and admissions policies
- Further Education Colleges
- Sixth Form Colleges

All these schools are still responsible to the DSCF and are regularly monitored by Ofsted.

For further information, please visit [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

## The National Curriculum for History (NCH) and public examinations at GCSE

The NCH is a statutory document outlining requirements for the teaching of History across the 5-14 age range: key stages 1 to 3, up to the age that pupils select their GCSE options. After this, the NCH is followed by what is sometimes referred to as Key Stage 4, although KS4 is not a statutory requirement, and the direction of study is covered by public examination, GCSE.

The NCH is divided into key concepts that underpin the study of history and broaden the knowledge, skills and understanding of pupils. These are:

- Chronological Understanding
- Cultural, religious and ethnic diversity
- Change and Continuity
- Cause and Consequence
- Significance
- Interpretation

The key processes learned by students studying History should be:

- Historical Enquiry  
Identify and investigate specific historical questions by reflecting critically on them and making and testing hypotheses.
- Using Evidence  
Identify, select and use a range of historical sources (textual, visual and oral) artefacts and historic environment. Evaluate the sources to reach reasoned conclusions.
- Communicating about the past, present and organize accounts and explanations about the past in coherent, structured and substantiated ways, using chronological conventions and historical vocabulary. Communicate knowledge and understanding of history in a variety of ways.

### Key Stage 3 – Ages 11-14

Years 7-9 - internal teacher assessment

A better understanding of key stage 3 history can be found in the HA secondary guide: [http://www.history.org.uk/resources/secondary\\_guide\\_1215\\_54.html](http://www.history.org.uk/resources/secondary_guide_1215_54.html)

### Key Stage 4 – Ages 14-16

Years 10-11 - summative assessment GCSE

In years 12 and 13 (ages 17-18) most pupils follow a course of 3 to 5 AS levels, which can be progressed to A2 level in the second year for full A-Level qualification. At the end of Year 13 pupils are awarded a final summative grade which reflects their performance across both years of the course.



# IDEAS FOR COLLABORATION

## Working in School

### One-off workshops

Such events are useful as a means of making initial contact, having an instant benefit, whilst not committing any party long term, which can be off-putting when everyone has busy schedules. There is a large market for one-day seminars dealing with specific topics in the curriculum, which can really drive forward pupil understanding in key areas. In addition, one-off workshops can be useful to academics and their HEIs by starting to develop the understanding of schools noted earlier.

### Ideas for workshop themes ...

In addition to events or masterclasses dealing with very specific historical subjects or periods, the following themes may also be helpful to a school:

- **helping potential applicants** – preparing for university History, writing personal statements, trial interviews
- **live or online debates** – between schools or groups on a relevant topic
- **managing wider reading** – guidance on the importance of wide reading, what to read and how best to read it
- **academic writing workshops** – guidance on how to use primary and secondary sources, referencing, use of the internet, plagiarism
- **using historical theory** – understanding historiography is key in higher education but difficult to fit into an A level course: all involved would benefit from prospective students gaining insight into how to read theory.

## CASE STUDY

### A2 pupils in a sixth form college and a tertiary college: revising and honing the skills of historical analysis and debate.



This case study was a competition in the form of a debate, involving two groups of sixth formers in different institutions and different parts of the country, but both following the same exam specification (Edexcel) and synoptic paper on Nazi Germany. This exercise was part of the pupils' preparation for this paper. The sixth formers in each institution were split into small groups and paired with corresponding groups across institutions to comment on each other's work via a Moodle virtual learning environment: the VLE contained a question, a collection of documents, debate criteria and a discussion board for participants to post to.

Over approximately two weeks, pupil groups were tasked (1) to post an answer to the question (2) to post criterion-referenced feedback on a partner group's answer and then (3) to respond to feedback, modifying their initial position as appropriate. At the end of this process, the debates were adjudicated by an academic historian who identified a 'winner' in each discussion pairing and overall, across all the groups and gave criterion-referenced summative feedback on the work of the pupil groups.

### Direct curriculum benefits:

As the debate took place in May, just before the students began examination leave " ... The students in effect completed their course through this exercise, which gave them the opportunity to revise an examination topic and to revisit and practise their examination skills. Such outcomes can be achieved through straightforward examination practise exercises ... and the students also completed conventional examination practise. [However] ...the students were working together and learning from each other through this exercise and they provided each other with models of ways of approaching this task and this topic as well as with examples of arguments and counter-arguments mobilizing a diverse range of relevant factual material." (Chapman and Hibbert, 2009, p.145)

The exercise was also motivating for sixth formers in a way that conventional 'exam technique revision' would not have been – it was interactive and it involved competition.

### Impact of academic involvement:

The academic involved, Dr Gareth Pritchard of the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, adjudicated the debate and posted responses to the discussion postings.

"Dr Pritchard's feedback was very helpful to the students in a range of ways. First, it was very affirming for the students to receive feedback from a 'real historian' and all student groups received praise for aspects of their work. Secondly, it was very valuable for the students to receive detailed feedback from an academic expert: the detail, precision and complexity of the feedback modelled the nature and complexity of historical thinking for the students." (Chapman and Hibbert, 2009, p.144-5)

See the bibliography for further details of the publication in which this case study appears.

# IDEAS FOR COLLABORATION

## Working in University

**Taster days ...** pupils could be invited into the university to experience a day of example lectures and seminars. Such days could also include information about applications, outlines of courses and modules, smaller group discussions with lecturers and undergraduates, plus library and campus tours.

**Student 'buddy'/mentoring schemes ...** involve more sustained contact between undergraduates and pupils, where the students have regular contact with a pupil or small group of pupils. Activities might include ...

- Visits to schools
- Providing input into pupils' study of a particular historical theme or period
- Giving guidance on note-taking and reading
- Hosting sixth formers as guests at the HEI

**Working with your HEI's Education department ...** many universities have departments specifically dedicated to education as an academic discipline. These departments will be experienced in running HE courses in education, but will also, by their very nature, have an established relationship with the secondary school community. Lecturers within

the Education department are likely to have extensive experience of both HE and secondary school communities, with specific knowledge of the secondary school system and the needs of teachers and pupils within it. In addition, they will be familiar with current developments in secondary schools within their particular disciplines and with pedagogical and curricular issues.

**In addition, the brief of such departments involves the development of active partnership links and to create innovative and effective relationships between schools and HE. In short, get to know lecturers in your Education Department!**



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### CASE STUDY

This 2009 festival was initiated by Manchester's universities, Manchester City Council, The Wellcome Trust and Manchester Primary Care Trust to celebrate and engage with the city's history.



The academic communities set up resourced projects, exhibitions, talks and performances with schools which went on public display.

- All the schools were positive about the festival, many stating that they would include more local histories in their future work with pupils, some intending to build them into the curricula.
- Schools who directly received Wellcome Trust support gained a greater understanding of the Trust's purpose, and through the specific projects undertaken and exhibited/presented pupils, teachers and visitors gained knowledge and understanding about the history of science and medicine in Manchester.
- The presence of a number of displays from both Manchester University and Manchester Metropolitan University, and the contacts that were made during the planning of the festival and during its public day demonstrated the universities' commitments to and connections with Manchester's communities and their role in supporting local heritage and histories.

# IDEAS FOR COLLABORATION

## Events for Teachers

**One-off events** ...the expertise of academics can be important to teachers interested in developing their knowledge in specific areas of the National Curriculum and A/IB level. With the pressured nature of work in schools, teachers may by necessity make conservative choices on topics to study. You and your department may be able to offer training or seminars to open up the possibility of diversifying the curriculum in a school or group of local schools.



**DON'T FORGET ...** both teachers and early career academics are assessed against Continuing Professional Development Standards: running events to share academic knowledge directly benefits both parties.

**Regular events** ... can build useful and lasting connections through regular programmes of events. A range of staff can get involved in annual conferences on a specific subject, or you may think about developing a programme of teacher study days based around curriculum requirements.

**Sequenced events** ... can maximise benefit for a school/group of schools in a particular field of study. An example sequence of related events:

- Late summer – teacher training session on the topic
- Christmas – run a workshop with A level pupils in the school on the topic ... or bring in student ambassadors
- Easter – Sixth form conference on the topic

## Working with Special Groups and Initiatives

**Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT)** ... promotes the development of specific areas of curriculum expertise within schools and academies in the UK: find out if any schools in your area have a specialist status within Humanities for History. For such schools, higher education partnerships can help develop progression routes for pupils. A number of HEI's are members of the SSAT network: investigate their matching service for schools and affiliated universities in developing partnerships

**Educational charities and trusts** ... work through summer schools, projects and online resources to provide development opportunities, often specifically targeted at able pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, or with little experience of the opportunities that higher education can bring.

Here are three examples with history-related activities ...

### CASE STUDY... I ...



**“The main objective of the Sutton Trust is to improve educational opportunities for young people from non-privileged backgrounds and increase social mobility.”**

**Sir Peter Lampl, Chairman**

Founded in 1997, an important focus of the Trust is its summer schools, offering an opportunity for over 700 young people each year to try university life. The one week taster courses consist not only of lectures, seminars and tutorials, but also a varied programme of social activities, to give participants an accurate idea of life as an undergraduate at a researched university. The programme started in 1997 at Oxford and the Trust has subsequently expanded the scheme to Bristol, Cambridge, Nottingham and St Andrews Universities.



# IDEAS FOR COLLABORATION



## CASE STUDY ... 2

Villiers Park Educational Trust puts on a variety of residential courses and has online resources for schools.

An important aspect of its work is the **Scholars Programme ...**

“Many able students perform well below their capability and a disproportionate number of these underperformers come from less advantaged backgrounds. To address this problem, Villiers Park Educational Trust has launched the Villiers Park Scholars Programme. The Programme aims to level the playing field by helping students, families, schools and universities work in partnership so that entry requirements to leading universities can be met first time round based on AS/A2 grade achievements.

**Hastings & Bexhill** and **Swindon** are the two areas that have been selected for a pilot programme. Within each area students aged 14 to 19 are identified by their schools and colleges as having the potential to do well, achieve high grades and win a place at a leading university.

The Scholars Programme builds on the Trust’s considerable expertise and brings together several vital aspects of our work in a targeted approach over four years (from Year 10 to Year 13). Scholars devise a personal progression plan and are provided with a programme of outreach activities that take place at Villiers Park and locally. A learning mentor is available to help them to achieve their progression plan goals. “

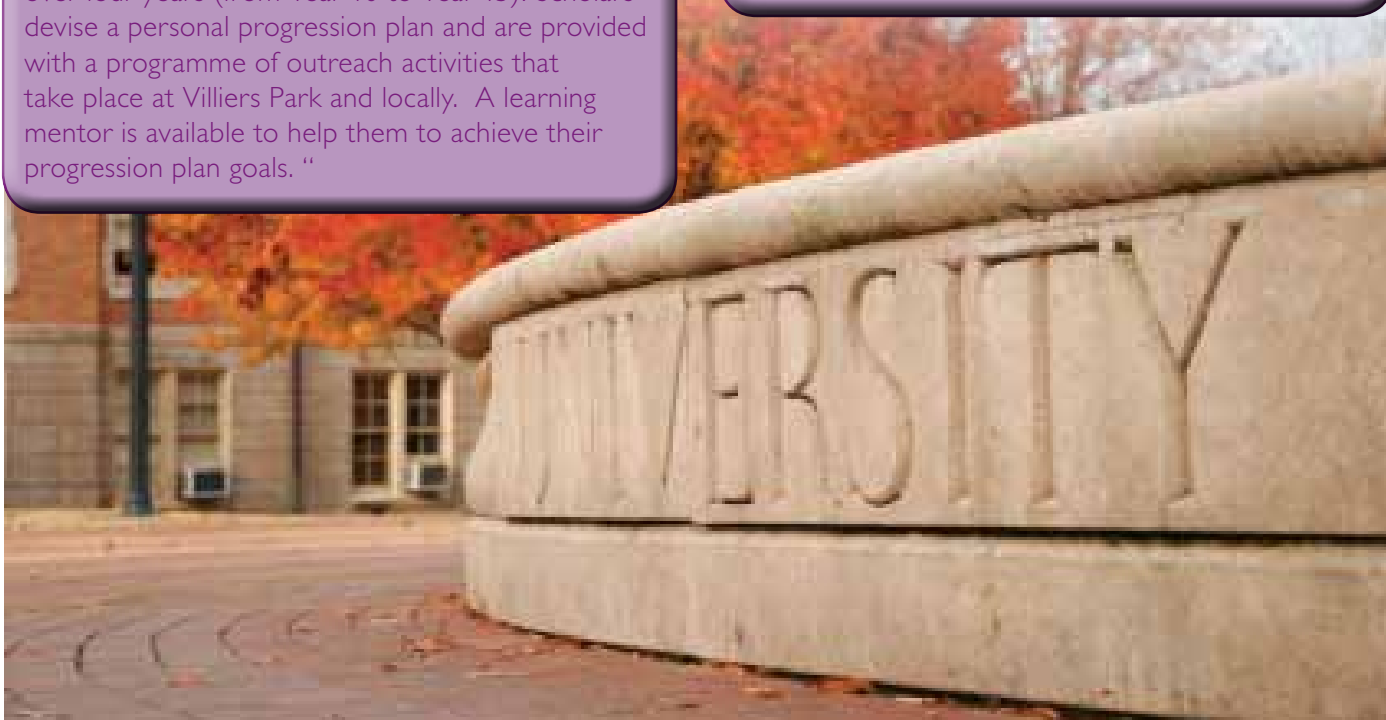


## CASE STUDY ... 3

The Prince's Teaching Institute

The Prince's Teaching Institute (PTI) is an independent educational charity, set up in partnership with Cambridge University, which developed out of the Prince of Wales Education Summer Schools held every year from 2002-2006. It believes that all children deserve a rich, subject-based experience at school, and puts on regular activities which bring teachers and academics together in a variety of subjects. History, together with English Literature, was one of the initial subjects.

As well as four day residential summer schools the PTI puts on a variety of one day events. An example is 'Parliament and Monarchy – Charles I and the outbreak of the English Civil War' at Trafalgar Park, nr Salisbury, Wiltshire on 27th March 2010. The day involves lectures and a panel discussion including Dr David Smith of Cambridge University, Professor Richard Cust of Birmingham University and Professor Kevin Sharpe of Queen Mary, University of London. Another example includes the contribution of Professor Justin Champion of Royal Holloway in a day school on the History of Medicine at the Wellcome Collection.





# IDEAS FOR COLLABORATION

Collaborative possibilities nationally, and internationally are opening up due to ever-expanding online provision in schools and HEI's ... here's just one example ...

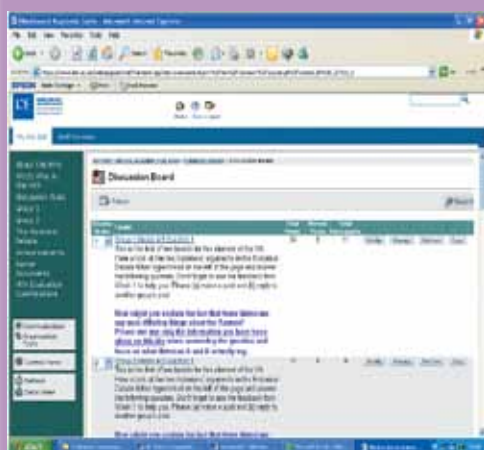
## ONLINE TIP



### **CASE STUDY: Supporting High Achievement and Transition to Higher Education Through History Virtual Academies**

In a HEA-funded project, Arthur Chapman (Institute of Education, University of London) used 'virtual academy' discussion boards to progress the following aims:

- to provide opportunities for high achieving 16-19 year old historians in participating schools and colleges to enrich and enhance their experience of learning about historical interpretation;
- to forge links between academics and school and college pupils and teachers;
- to explore a key issue raised in the literature on school / HE transition in History, namely differences between school and college pupils' and university teachers' understandings of historical interpretation (Booth (2005) and Hibbert (2006)), through a practical case study.



Second year A Level school and college sixth formers were encouraged to engage with interpretations problems and to interact with academic historians. The discussion boards focused on historical interpretation and set out to encourage the sixth formers to compose answers to interpretation questions and to discuss their answers with each other. They received formative and summative feedback from academics that aimed to foreground explicit reflection on historical interpretation.

*Figure 1: the 2008/09 History Virtual Academy (HVA) front page. (Chapman, 2009, p.101)*

The outcome for the participating sixth formers arose directly from their participating in the discussion board, which aimed to enrich their educational experience and enhance their understanding of historical interpretation, and therefore to ease their transition into higher education courses in history should they wish to pursue them.

The academy ran for two years, and involved two academic historians: Dr Robert Poole, Reader in History, University of Cumbria and Professor Eric Evans, University of Lancaster. The 2007/08 academy involved 15 sixth form participants in two institutions organised into discussion pairs, and the 2008/09 academy involved 72 sixth formers in three institutions organised into two large discussion groups. The structure of the 2009 academy is outlined in the table on the next page.

The tasks within the structure consisted of questions designed to help the sixth formers think critically about competing historical claims and to explore the nature of historical interpretation.

The project findings note that the role of academics was to 'feedback on discussion' rather than to engage in discussion. This feedback was of two kinds, formative feedback during the discussion process and summative feedback at the end of the discussion process.

Feedback implies criteria with which to feedback and against which performance can be measured, or, at least, a normative model of practice. We did not start out with explicit criteria or with an explicit model for pupils to work to when completing their posts, however; and a model of the forms of thinking that we wanted to encourage emerged during the course of the academies through academic and moderator posts and also through pupils' comments on each others' posts.

*continued on next page*



# IDEAS FOR COLLABORATION

Figure 2: History Virtual Academy structure 2008/09 (Chapman, 2009, p.19)

HVA Stage	Explanation
1. Historiography task (I) (One week)	Sixth formers were asked to answer two general questions about variation in historical interpretation.
2. Academic feedback	Group feedback from participating academic historians on both question was posted to the two groups.
3. Document task (Two weeks)	A collection of documents was posted to the VLE and students were asked to answer one question about the documents and to feedback on other pupils' posts.
4. Moderator feedback (midway through stage 3)	Generic moderator feedback was posted to both groups on both questions.
5. Historiography Task (I) (Two weeks)	As in 2008, students were asked to read two contrasting historical accounts and to answer two questions by making one post in answer to each question. The same accounts and the same questions were used.
6. Moderator feedback (midway through stage 5)	Generic moderator feedback was posted to both groups on both questions.
7. Academic feedback	Final group feedback on both questions and adjudication.

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There were good reasons for operating in this way: firstly, establishing criteria at the start of the HVA might have inhibited student posts, particularly if these criteria had been extensive; secondly, the HVA had a discovery dimension: one purpose of this exercise was to gain an insight into the ideas that sixth formers brought to such exercises and we needed, therefore, to start from the students' ideas.

In conclusion, the virtual academy, particularly in 2008-9, provided a forum for collaboration between colleagues working in different phases of history education and the dialogue that this involved was surely a valuable process in and of itself: the virtual academies draw attention to the scope that e-learning and e-mail communication provide for collaboration of this kind. Sixth form interaction through discussion postings and responses encouraged ongoing and confident engagement with historical interpretation and the development of their thinking. The data set generated by the posts also provides insight into the thinking of sixth formers about the nature of historical interpretation and their assumptions about how to resolve interpretations problems.

For more information on the virtual academy and its analysis of data for the wider history community, visit the History Subject Centre's website and search the elibrary: see the bibliography section for further details

Final word on the benefit of the HVA should go to some of the students and teachers involved ...

**Yes - I have certainly developed my thinking about how far it is benefits that can come from historians interpreting possible for an historian to be objective and the evidence in different ways (such as the debates that this can result in).**

**I found this a very useful and beneficial activity, it helped me to explore more deeper historical perspectives and sources. Hearing responses from historians helped stimulate me to think more broadly on the issue than the straightforward approach I previously would have taken.**

**There is a strange relationship between us as teachers and students we are expected to say certain things and be exam orientated. They, as students, have their own code through which they interpret what we say and the pointers we give, but when we bring in the unknown student peer and the unknown academic there is a completely different response. Real concern arrives about how to express views and what constitutes a valid view. This is the first time they will have this sort of contact and it is excellent preparation to draw from in the early stages at university.**  
(Chapman, 2009, pp.70/75)

# THE A LEVEL CURRICULUM AND RECENT REFORMS

## Understanding the A Level Curriculum, other study options and recent reforms: how does this affect transition?

### History at A level

Following on from the 30%+ levels taking History at GCSE, A level numbers also remain high, despite press fears about 'new' or 'trendy' subjects. 5.8% of all A level entrants study the subject, as the sixth most popular behind Biology, English, General Studies, Maths and Psychology. A Level history saw a big increase following the introduction of the AS examination in 2000. Currently about 56,000 sixth formers nationally choose AS history each year and about 48,000 continue their studies to A Level. Of the pupils taking History, over 26% of candidates achieved an A grade in 2009, with the percentage increasing year on year.

Perhaps one of the most striking changes brought about by Curriculum 2000 was the widening participation at A Level across the board. History has certainly seen more 'non-traditional' candidates; that is those pupils who enjoy the subject but are not necessarily academic high flyers.

The last A Level review began in 2005 with new specifications introduced for first teaching in September 2008. The university intake of 2010 will be the first students to have completed the new specifications.

Changes in 2008 reduced the number of units from six to four with one unit comprising a compulsory personal study and one a compulsory British history study.

### What does this mean in practice?

One major criticism of the 2000 specifications was that the six units could be combined in such a way that sixth formers covered only narrow chronological and geographical topics. The four unit structure was devised in an attempt to counter this problem. The criteria state that pupils are required to study:

- the history of more than one country or state or the history of more than one period
- aspects of the past in breadth (through period(s) or theme(s)) and in depth
- significant individuals, societies, events, developments and issues within a broad historical context
- developments affecting different groups within the societies studied
- a range of appropriate historical perspectives, for example aesthetic, cultural, economic, ethnic, political, religious, scientific, social or technological.

In addition, A level specifications should require sixth formers to study:

- a substantial (a minimum of 25 per cent) and coherent element of British history and/or the history of England, Scotland, Ireland or Wales
- change and/or development over a period of time sufficient to demonstrate understanding of the process of change, both long term (at least 100 years) and short term.

(QCDA History Subject Criteria)

### What does the personal study mean?

With a personal study becoming a compulsory 20% of the examination, awarding bodies have developed 'off-the-shelf' units with supporting texts and study aids. Although it is very early, initial trends suggest the majority of centres are choosing these pre-prepared units for a variety of reasons: one major reason is likely to be the time constraints most teachers face. That said, the awarding bodies have developed (in most cases) a broad range of units covering a wide range of subjects and are encouraging centres to take up these courses.

### What about the content?

Early indications suggest that the period 1750-1900 has been the loser in the latest changes, although the French Revolution and Risorgimento still remain relatively popular choices. Overall, the change from six to four units has allowed for greater cohesion and breadth of study.

The introduction of a compulsory British history unit has seen a huge growth in Tudor history, specifically the reign of Henry VIII with both AQA and Edexcel citing this as their most popular AS unit. Media interest with TV programmes and the recent anniversary have probably fuelled this growth. Other areas seeing an increase are: twentieth century China, the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli Conflict.

Another result of the recent changes seems to be a greater diversity of study although Awarding Bodies say it is too early yet to say how this will look in the longer term.

# THE A LEVEL CURRICULUM

## Assessment

All candidates must be required to meet the following assessment objectives. The assessment objectives for AS and A level are the same. The assessment objectives are to be weighted in all specifications as indicated in the following table.

### Assessment objectives

#### AO1

Recall, select and deploy historical knowledge appropriately, and communicate knowledge and understanding of history in a clear and effective manner.

Demonstrate their understanding of the past through explanation, analysis and arriving at substantiated judgements of:

- key concepts such as causation, consequence, continuity, change and significance within an historical context
- the relationships between key features and characteristics of the periods studied.

**Weighting:** 60–70%

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#### AO2

As part of an historical enquiry, analyse and evaluate a range of appropriate source material with discrimination.

Analyse and evaluate, in relation to the historical context, how aspects of the past have been interpreted and represented in different ways.

**Weighting:** 30–40%

1. Assessment objective 2b should have a higher weighting at A2 level than at AS level.
2. The assessment objectives apply to the whole specification.

Sample mark schemes are available from the QCDA online along with full specifications and sample papers from all the Awarding bodies.

#### Additional useful resources:

*Better Lessons in A Level History*, by Diana Laffin, provides practical ideas for A Level history teachers and trainees who want to improve their students' learning.

*The Articulation of the Study of History at General Certificate of Education Advanced Level with the Study of History for an Honours Degree*, Barbara Hibbert PhD Thesis.

Further details can be found in the bibliography.

## The Cambridge Pre-U

The Cambridge pre-U is a two year linear course, offered by some independent and maintained schools, with the first candidates being examined in summer 2010. It is not possible for students to re-sit individual units. Students wishing to take the full Diploma study three principal subjects out of a choice of 26. To achieve the full Diploma students must also complete an 'Independent Research Project' and a 'Global Perspectives' portfolio. They may also take one year short courses in modern foreign languages, but these are not compulsory. A major difference between the pre-U and the IB is that there are no compulsory subjects.

It is possible for students to mix and match A Level and pre-U courses in various subjects, but then they will not be eligible for the full Diploma.

The pre-U is reported on a scale of 9 grades: Distinction 1, 2 and 3; Merit 1, 2 and 3 and Pass 1, 2 and 3 with Distinction 1 being above the new A\* grade, Distinction 2 being equivalent to A\* and Distinction 3 being aligned to an A grade at A Level. Pass 3 is aligned to an E grade at A Level.

Universities which normally ask for three A grades at A Level might therefore consider Cambridge Pre-U offers involving a combination of Distinction 3 and Merit 1. Other offers may include asking for a Merit 2 in place of a B, Merit 3 or Pass 1 for a C, Pass 2 for a D and Pass 3 for an E.

In History candidates take:

- two outline papers, which must be from different countries or regions, in which three essays are answered from a choice of over 40.

Candidates take two of papers 1 – 4:

- Paper 1 British History Outlines c.300 – 2000
- Paper 2 European history Outlines
- Paper 3 United States History Outlines
- Paper 4 Asian and African History Outlines
- a special subject which has one source-based and one essay question. Here the principal requirement will be to consider issues of corroboration and difference, and to evaluate the quality of the evidence. Candidates should consider the sources as a set.
- a personal investigation of 3,500-4,000 words on a topic of their own choice.

# OTHER STUDY OPTIONS

## The Humanities and Social Sciences Diploma and HE

Diplomas are a new qualifications that have been introduced across England. The first ones were vocational in content such as Engineering, IT and Society, Health & Development, however they are now planned for academic subjects, including sciences and languages. A total of 17 Diplomas will be rolled out by 2011 and will sit alongside Apprenticeships, GCSEs, A levels and the International Baccalaureate. The Diploma in Humanities and Social Sciences will be available from September 2011 and will draw on 16 subjects delivered in a 'hub' of schools and colleges so that one institution is not expected to provide teaching expertise in all subjects.

A Diploma is a new style of qualification that uses interdisciplinary learning and assesses students through a range of approaches not just exams. All assessments are required to have an applied purpose – meaning that they would demonstrate knowledge and skills using a variety of methods, such as report writing, or a planning document. It has been developed in cooperation with employers and the HE sector, as well as receiving input from the subject associations and teachers. At the current stage the team responsible for developing the Diploma, Creative and Cultural Skills are working with the awarding bodies on how the diploma will look and be assessed.

The Diploma has three levels: Foundation – equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grades D to G; Higher – equivalent to 7 GCSEs at grades A\* to C; Advanced – equivalent to 3.5 A levels. Of special interest for HE is the Additional and Specialist Learning (ASL) component which offers young people the opportunity to study a particular topic in more depth or broaden their studies through complementary learning. ASL consists of a wide range of existing and some new qualifications, including GCSEs, A levels and BTECs. So if a pupil wishes to study for a History degree they can study for the H &SS diploma and have ASL 'A' Level History.

## International Baccalaureate

Students taking the International Baccalaureate have to study subjects from six groups, including maths, literature, science and a foreign language. Three subjects are taken at Standard Level (SL) and three at Higher Level (SL).

History is a popular subject in Group 3 which covers individuals and society. History pupils take two papers at SL and three at HL. There is also an internal assessment (IA) at both levels. There are two routes: Route 1: History of Europe and the Islamic World, which is largely medieval and Route 2: 20th century World History.

Paper 1, taken by all students, is a source-based paper on prescribed subjects. For route 1 the options include the origins and rise of Islam c500-661 and for route 2 include Communism in Crisis 1976-89. The paper is an hour long and contains four compulsory structured questions.

Paper 2, also taken by all pupils, is usually seen as the most difficult. Pupils have to answer two questions in one and a half hours chosen from different sections of the course. For route 1 these include 'Dynasties and rulers', 'Wars and Warfare' and 'Religion and the state'. Route 2 options include 'Causes, practices and effects of war', 'Democratic states – challenges and responses' and 'Origins and Development of Authoritarian States'.

Paper 3, taken by HL pupils only, involves answering three essay questions in two and a half hours on either 'Aspects of the history of medieval Europe and the Islamic world' for Route 1 or aspects of the history of one of the following regions: Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania or Europe and the Middle East for Route 2.

All history pupils also undertake an internal assessment on a topic of their own choice. IB candidates also have to complete an Extended Essay of 4,000 words chosen from any subject, but most young people applying to study history in higher education might be expected to have undertaken one on a historical topic. The Extended Essay is intended to develop research skills, and failures in referencing and presentation, or exceeding the word limit can be heavily penalised.



# KEY TRANSITION ISSUES

This section will offer some insights into the potentially problematic issue of academic transition in studying History, before revealing individual stakeholder perspectives in the next section.



## General issues ...

University applications to study History remain healthy. Over 8,200 students were accepted onto History Honours programmes in August 2009 (with a further few thousand studying for joint degrees or History variants): this was an 8.6% rise from the 2008 figure. In total there are around 55,000 students studying History at university in the UK. There has been a substantial increase in student numbers on History programmes over the past decade and this, considered alongside the changes in the 14-19 qualification framework, has had significant implications for the transition from school and college to university.

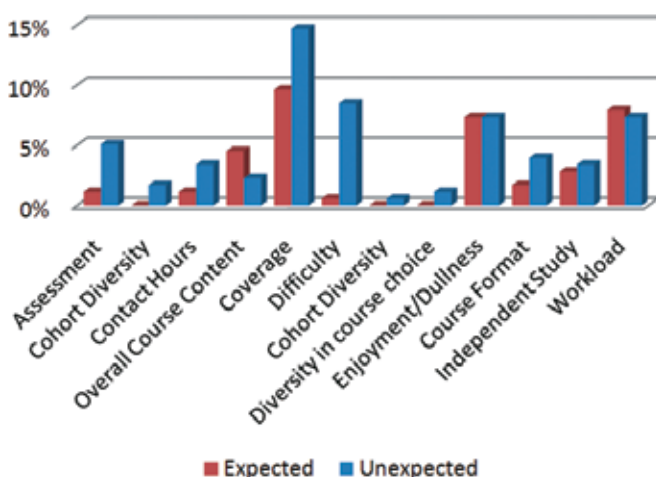
Transition is not a problem universally amongst prospective students ... the key is preparation.

A three year study into **Learning and Teaching Transition to University** run by the Educational and Staff Development unit at Queen Mary University of London has surveyed over 1300 new entrants across disciplines. Schools were also visited to gain a perspective of pupil expectations and knowledge of university: some telling, if possibly expected points were raised.

Teachers felt that changes to school curricula and a lack of knowledge amongst staff in both sectors about the other did not help the transition process. Pupils appreciated that the level of support and interaction they receive at school would reduce at university. The term 'independent learning' is frequently used when discussing the move into higher education, but not really understood amongst new entrants. **"Working on your own"** is a common, but fairly meaningless answer given when first years are asked about their understanding, whilst those surveyed a year into their studies appreciate that it involves being given (or choosing) an essay title, deciding on reading, structuring work and working to a deadline without reminders from tutors.

(See bibliography section for further details on the study.)

Survey of First Year History Students on Expectations



This lack of understanding about what independent study entails is backed up by the Higher Education Academy History Subject Centre, currently surveying first year history students about their expectations of different aspects of study through the academic year: over 300 students have participated so far.

When responding to questions about specific areas of expectations, 50% of comments on course difficulty noted that it was more difficult than they had anticipated, whilst 20% believed it to be too similar to A Levels. Less than half of respondents felt that the course had covered the themes and subjects they had expected: a third thought their course unexpectedly broad, whilst 5% commented on a lack of political history or international context.



# KEY TRANSITION ISSUES

**The Centre's survey will be completed and published later in 2010, but even a cursory glance at the chart on the previous page reveals that first year students find many elements of their study differ from their expectations: either positively or negatively.**

With experience as an admissions tutor, Dr Sarah Richardson shares her thoughts on ...

## **Expectations of course content: Understanding Learning and Teaching Methods in HE ...**

In school and college sixth form classes, students are taught in groups of up to thirty, and often considerably less. At University, **lecture courses** are regularly delivered to up to three hundred students. Students often find difficulties with note-taking during lectures and many complain of information overload. One first-year History student commented:

'Note taking in lectures has been quite a big change for me compared to note taking in school. At lectures you are very much left to your own devices with regards to note taking. My previous experience of note taking involved a much more structured set-up. I am used to receiving handouts and taking notes from these rather than taking notes from a verbal source. This change has proved quite difficult for me as I have struggled to find the right balance between taking in what the lecturer is saying, and actually writing it down. It is also quite easy to go to the extremes and either write far too much or very little.'

Another student admitted:

'I did find the note taking element quite difficult. Looking back days later at my notes there were a few points I had written down that were not very clear. Having come straight from school, I was used to just copying notes from the whiteboard or teachers dictating notes to me word for word but I have come to the realisation that university is nothing like that! The lecturer talks constantly and you have to decide for yourself what you are going to write down. Brief pointers are usually given on the accompanying powerpoint but I think it is difficult to try to listen to more detailed information, look at the screen and write at the same time.'

HE lecturers are frequently supplementing lectures with podcasts and online resources such as handouts and powerpoint presentations.

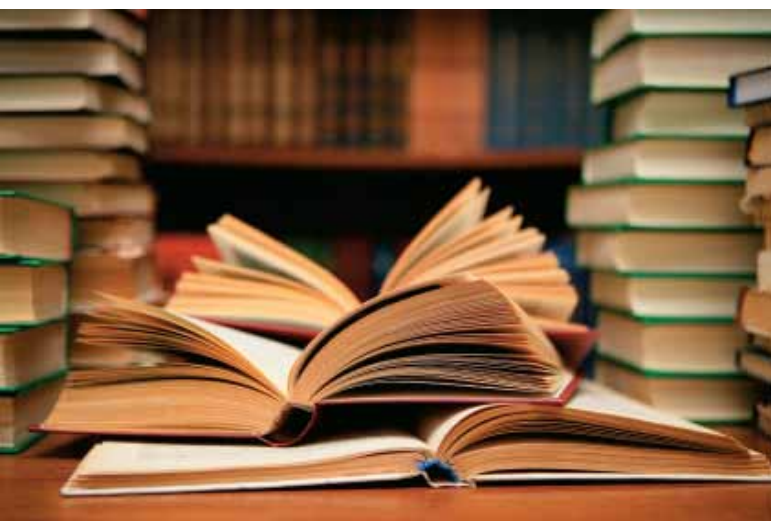
**Seminars** are the other standard form of teaching at HE level. Many students are surprised by the amount of reading that they are required to do in advance of seminars. This can then become a serious issue if students are unprepared. In many institutions participation in seminars is being incorporated into assessment strategies.

**Assessment and contact hours** are significant issues in the transition to HE study, as they are elements so closely mapped and monitored in schools. With reference to the Centre's survey again, students noted that assessment deadlines had been either unclear or unevenly spaced through the year: feedback infrequent or absent; and they had not expected assessed group work (increasingly common in undergraduate study programmes).

Whether expecting it or not, the reduced contact hours with lecturers, compared to time spent with teachers is difficult for many to get used to.

'The amount by which the lecturers skim through things, and therefore we have to read immensely around the subject.'

**– bringing us full circle to the issue of independent study.**



# KEY TRANSITION ISSUES

## What to look for when choosing a university course ...

Choosing a university and environment where you wish to spend three years of your life is crucial, and prospective students need to be reminded that choosing to study history is not just about the 'right' university, but selecting **the right course to meet your interests, skills and aims.**

- **Would you like a broad survey course?**  
**Or ...**
- **Do you want to specialise in a particular historical period or theme?**
- **Do you have a particular language ability that you would like to utilise?**
- **Would you like your chosen course to include study abroad?**



**Directgov**

Public services all in one place

has a comprehensive section to help in university course selection, with direct links to the relevant UCAS webpages ...



**UCAS** helping students into higher education

UCAS holds entry profiles, prospectus information and manages applications to all UK higher education courses.

Beyond the minimum entry requirements for a course, look at the **Entry Profile**: look for the **EP** symbol within the UCAS course search.

'They provide details about the courses, university or college offering each course, entry qualifications, selection criteria and the admissions policy. They are compiled by staff at the university or college, who understand what you need to know about their courses, and what kind of personal qualities, interests and experiences it will be helpful for you to have ...' [UCAS]

Entry profiles also include comments written by current and former students: their perspective can be very helpful.

Putting aside a candidates' academic abilities and expected qualifications for now, how should a sixth former avoid disappointment when searching for a course?

**It is important to look beyond the course title: even courses with the same name differ greatly.**

For example, if your particular interests lie in modern history, don't assume that you will be able to select only modern history modules on a general history course: note compulsory core modules.

Even within courses listed as 'Modern History' on the UCAS website, the term can mean very different things ...

"Modern History at Queen's is 'modern' only in the sense that it does not cover the Ancient World. In fact, it spans the period from the early middle ages to the twentieth century ..." - Queens University, Belfast.

**Once you've found a course that meets your interests, don't set your heart on studying a specific module.**

'You may have some say over some or all of the modules you study, or you may not. Either way, it's important to look at the components that will make up your course.' [Directgov]

Outside core modules, not every option will be available every year, due to staff research commitments, etc. Contacting a department directly may offer some reassurances, but it is wise to select a course that offers a wide enough range of modules of interest to you.

**Visit the chosen university and department website, this can give a better understanding of how the course and department work, and some insight into how the department engages with students outside the lecture theatre.**

## Maximising the opportunities of prospective students ...

**The personal statement** is taken very seriously by admissions tutors. It is perhaps the main opportunity for candidates to impress but can also be their downfall. Course selectors look for a variety of factors from a well-rounded, motivated applicant, encompassing intellectual ability, a clear articulation of aims and goals, and evidence that the candidate and course should be a good fit. As a result, the following elements should be considered, when writing a personal statement:

### Research courses ...

- History programmes differ widely from institution to institution so it is vitally important to research courses and universities thoroughly
- Read prospectuses, scan websites and take advantage of University Open Days
- Be honest, do the course requirements match the candidates predictions, abilities and preferences?

Bear in mind this comment from a course selector ...

“Things that turn me off? ... Two tired looking sentences on why I like ... followed by two paragraphs enthusiastically detailing the applicant’s rugby career.”

### Writing the statement ...

**The main focus should always be the subject applied for**, highlighting the candidates commitment to the course and understanding of what is included by giving reasons for the course choice. For example, don’t profess a commitment to medieval history if the course applied for only offers modules post 1700! Sound interesting and interested. Evidence of genuine enthusiasm for History is crucial. This may be shown by examples of wider reading beyond the confines of sixth-form study, possibly linked to the course choice.

### Assess skills and abilities.

It is very important that if a candidates **qualifications - past, present and future (predicted)** do not reflect their academic performance, this should be explained on the UCAS form: perhaps in the academic reference.

Other factors that may be relevant are further qualifications such as Advanced Extension Awards, attendance at summer schools or workshops.

**Plan your personal statement - be structured and organised.** Don’t repeat information and don’t use humour or gimmicks ... it’s too easy to miss the mark. Utilise the space available effectively (only 4,000 characters including spaces) but write in paragraphs NOT bullet points. It is important that applicants for History courses write in full sentences and show that they can construct an argument. Present a perfectly word-processed, immaculately proof-read, well written statement. Don’t cut and paste from the internet.

**Check spelling and grammar ... and then check it again!**

**Focus on aims and goals by linking them to the candidates relevant qualities.** Be personal, giving interests, personal development and relevant work experience. **Detail extra-curricular activities**, particularly where these go beyond opportunities provided by the school ( for example county-level performance in sport or music) and therefore reveal added commitment. Activities which show candidates adopting leadership roles, volunteer work, contributing to their communities, involvement in enterprise all show a potential for imaginative, resourceful contribution to university life. Provide any gap year plans.

**Don’t undersell yourself, this is your one chance, but equally, don’t make things up!**

# PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSITION

This section offers a series of perspectives on transition, from prospective and existing students of history, to a teacher and lecturer with experience in first year admissions: highlighting the key issues.

## The thoughts of three A level candidates ...

**1. I hope** to be attending Nottingham or Birmingham to study History at university. Because I currently enjoy the subject so much, I am looking forward to being able to focus solely upon this and improve my analytical skills. At A level we have been given a taste of using the skills of a historian - analysing sources, using different approaches, forming interpretations etc, but in the knowledge that there is much more depth involved at university level. Although I anticipate the transition to be great from A level History, it is one which I am very excited about! I am most looking forward to the opportunity of broadening the topics/periods of which I have studied - getting to grips with Medieval History in particular, which I have as of yet had little encounter with. The wide choice of study options is also appealing, especially in years 2 and 3 where I will be able to begin specialising in areas. It seems like the pressure in the final year will be heavy though, and writing a dissertation sounds like a challenging prospect.

In terms of differences to A levels, student led seminars, which are an important part of the learning at Nottingham, are a little daunting. I am not overly confident at presenting, but I hope to improve through the experience at university and will be interested to see how I find this approach to learning. I gather that for the course, a lot of my time will be allocated to reading and researching my topics independently. Personally, I find this rewarding and expect that this course format will suit me better than more lecture-based courses (e.g. science, engineering), as you can study in your own environment. Having several hours of lectures a week though should vary the course and will maybe be more like current A level lessons where a teacher occasionally presents while we take relevant notes, so on that basis I am glad that it will be an element of the course.

Most of all, I am excited about studying History at university because I will be working towards an esteemed degree whilst learning something which I have a genuine passion for and want to progress in academically and possibly as a career in the future.

**2. Obviously there is no way for me to know exactly what studying history at university will be like**, after attending open days, reading prospectuses and listening to a wide range of people talk about their experiences I do have certain hopes and expectations of what it will be like. I know it is likely to be very different from my current experience of studying history. The main difference, I imagine, is the increased responsibility and a vast reduction in the amount of time I will spend under direct supervision from teachers and professors. Most universities have told me to expect about 6-10 contact hours a week, which is a lot less than the current amount of time I spend in lessons. I guess that to balance this, I will be spending a lot more time studying by myself, whether reading books or making notes, or preparing for seminars. At the moment I do read some history books, especially for my personal study, but I've no doubt that this will increase dramatically once I'm studying at university. I am looking forward to the facilities that will be available at university. Whilst there is a library with history books available for my studies at A level, I am sure that at university the facilities will be much larger with a wider range of books, which I am looking forward to greatly. I am also looking forward to the increased responsibility; I have been told that at university no one chases you up, so whether you succeed or not is down to you, which I believe will help separate the motivated from those not really there to learn. I am not especially worried about anything; I am a little apprehensive about the level of personal organization involved, but I see it a challenge and a chance to prove yourself, rather than anything to be worried about. That is in essence what I believe studying history at university will be all about; undoubtedly a challenge, but also a great chance to excel for those who want to.



# PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSITION

**3. When I was just 13,** my brother left for University and as every younger sibling does, I became extremely jealous of his new life. At this point, I decided that I was ready to go to University. Yet as I grew a little older; the thought of leaving home, living in a completely new place and meeting strangers posed many terrifying prospects and as the time draws closer I'm a little apprehensive.

In this my final year of Secondary School, I've spent the time anxiously waiting for the offers and unfortunately the rejections from the Universities I'd applied to. During this nerve-wracking time, I almost forgot about the implications of studying for a degree in History. After very recently securing an offer from a University that I wished to go to, I'm afraid my first thoughts centred on the accommodation, the fees and the nightlife or the money I would need for all these things. However, after these initial thoughts had passed my mind did turn to the prospect of undertaking a degree.

Everyone had told me that studying for A levels would be the hardest year of my life, so in truth I had always imagined that going to University would be much easier. However, despite studying only one subject I am under no illusion that University will be 'easy'. In an educational sense, I believe I am prepared.

I think that my A level History Course has been very good preparation for studying for a degree in History at University. For example, almost half of the course's marks rest on a personal study. The topic was my own personal choice; the Suez Crisis and writing this piece has meant a lot of determination to keep to targets set by myself and has involved many hours spent in the Library searching through old books and data to find sources. The other side of the course involves a large amount of historiography; it is a study of the American West but through the interpretations of historians in order to find the truth behind the Myth. This combined with a teacher who refuses to spoon-feed my class the answers via running lessons similar to seminars; this has helped because it is something that I will experience at University.

All together the course feels like a good preparation for study at University. However, there are parts of studying for a degree that worry me immensely; the need for great self discipline is evident, for example meeting deadlines and getting through the inevitably large reading list without the guilt trip I'm normally used to by my teachers. At university, History involves much less direct teaching, only six hours in some cases, this is much less direct teaching time than students studying science for example but I think it is actually more difficult because there is a need for greater self-motivation. Of course, I'm naturally concerned that I'll be tempted by the exciting things going on in university life; social events, sports and the nightlife, without my parents to monitor my activities. However, I think it's impossible to be fully prepared for university and half the excitement is probably the unknown.





# PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSITION

## Does the perspective change following a year at university?

**1. In my first year at university** doing history I felt at an advantage over other people with regard to preparation for the type of study needed to complete the course. Instead of A Levels I took the International Baccalaureate and so had a heavier workload throughout my time in 6th form than many of my peers. I was encouraged to take part in independent study and reading, and had to learn very quickly how to best manage my time and organise my work. Many other students that I know had trouble adapting to the increased pressure on personal and independent learning during the transition to university, and many lacked the self-motivation to complete assignments, reading and lecture and seminar preparation. My history teachers at secondary school also helped greatly by expecting reading of academic sources in lessons and homework, rather than just being told 'facts', and also by being active in encouraging me and my history peers to attend lectures and seminars given for a more advanced audience. History at university is all about reading sources and papers, listening to lectures and making notes and extracting useful information, so I was able to quickly adapt to this style of teaching and learning with relative ease. I know that this is another aspect that caused problems with other students. With regard to historical theory, I had read Richard Evans' 'In Defence of History' before arriving at university, but otherwise knew little about historiography. At UCL there is a compulsory first year module on this subject, and I have come to believe that this is possibly the most important knowledge for a prospective history student to be familiar with before going to university. In arriving, most people had studied completely different areas of history, but historiography is an area which is applicable to any historical topic. Not just in understanding how to read a paper and know from what historical background it originates, what the problems with that could be etc, but also in understanding the movement of history, historical time, causation, events, *longue durée* and so on.

I think that this has helped me to mature as a history student and understand more than just what is written down.

Looking back at questions that scared and flummoxed me in my interview, I could now answer them with ease, purely from more historiographical knowledge, as well as avoiding all of those whiggish statements both there and on my personal statement! On top of this, a very basic historical outline of time and periods would be a useful read for a prospective history student, as I was woefully lacking in basic chronology such as reformation, renaissance, enlightenment, various empires, british history etc. I enjoy university history exponentially more than school history. At university I can choose the subjects that I find most appealing, I take different modules on different topics at the same time adding variety but also allowing moments of great satisfaction when one thing slots into another and I can feel that I have more of a historical knowledge, rather than just knowing some stuff about the past. I also enjoy being in control of organisation of my own workload, how I go about writing and developing my own style and method in essays and thinking of ideas myself, not just being told theories. Putting an idea that has just come to you in a coursework essay is hugely satisfying and something that I was not capable of doing at school. I have made the transition from being taught history to thinking about history myself, with the help of some of the leading experts in the field and libraries of every book you could ever want. There is a lot more creativity, a lot more passion and a lot more fun.

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# PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSITION

## **2. I didn't quite realise how independent 'independent study' at university would actually be.**

Although the IB with its extended essay had given some sense of this, it was still very different from being given a weekly reading list and essay question, and left completely to your own devices. Our lectures tend to assume a basic knowledge of the topic in hand, which means that after them it's sometimes necessary to look certain bits of information up. On the other hand, seminars involve a considerable amount of reading beforehand. We might also be asked to prepare a presentation for the rest of the group, and all this can take a lot of time so it's important to prioritise according to when your weekly essay and seminar work is due in. All this independent study and time management is the key difference between HE and school, as the emphasis is firmly on you to find things out, as opposed to being gradually introduced to a topic through teaching. At school little further reading was required, even if it was encouraged, and this means that there are additional layers to your study. Of course, this takes more time, especially when you can't just go to one textbook for all the information that you need. The art of skim-reading is something that you have to learn quite quickly!

Something else that's very different is how much you're exposed to the theory of History. This is really only something that people have thought of for their interviews, but it's something that is often covered in lectures, crops up in weekly essays, and at Cambridge has a compulsory paper devoted to it. It's actually quite enjoyable and does add layers to your understanding of all the topics which you're studying. The most enjoyable thing about studying History at university, though, is the fact that wherever you study, you're being taught by experts who you can really engage with. It's this that helps give you renewed enthusiasm even when you're struggling with a lot of reading or a difficult essay. The key thing for anybody considering history at university is that they have a genuine enthusiasm for the subject, a desire to learn more and to learn on their own for much of the time. It's also really worth properly checking course guides, so that people will be happy with the topics and options at everywhere that they've applied.

## **Don't just think about where you want to study ... LOOK AT THE COURSES IN DETAIL, YOU WILL FIND SOME BIG DIFFERENCES.**

**3.** The transition from studying A-level to studying it at university can be tricky. At A-level there was such a focus on remembering names and dates, which although important, sometimes came at the expense of understanding the events or time as a whole. My first experience of studying history at university was at my local university, I found the course to be almost similar to school, lots of repetition of dates and in all honestly the teaching sucked the life out of the subject matter. The expectation I had of history at university was that it be more in depth and more like a story, rather than series of facts and figures. When I moved to Warwick, I was happy to see that the course was taught more of the way I imagined. Lectures looked at all different aspects of history, the people, economics, religion, sociological factors and it allowed a more detailed insight into the time. I found the subjects interesting rather dragged out and repetitive. Seminars encourage discussion and debate rather, than simply sitting in silence and writing yet more notes. The perspective focused on its flexible teaching the willingness of lectures to engage with students. This is a true representation of the staff, as tutors have always been more than happy to speak to me outside of lectures and seminars. They also always arrange essay feedback meetings, which mean that you know exactly how you are doing and you can relay any issues you may have with the topic.

I have been lucky enough to also be part of a research project which has helped develop research and presentation skills, which as has aided me within history and for future employment. It has really giving me a taste of what a research job may be like, and has helped forge links both within the history and sociology department. The experience of working alongside the academic staff and being treated like an equal, has been an enlightening and useful experience

# PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSITION

## The views of a teacher ...

I think universities have always looked for the same potential in someone who is going to study history at their institution, an interest in the subject and the ability to achieve. This has and always will involve reading, an enthusiasm for discussion and the ability to write analytically. These are difficult skills and ones I attempt to instil in my students. I try to convey to them the idea that the study of history takes a lot of independence and the ability to become passionate about a subject as well as the self discipline to get things done without someone chasing them around. I also try to encourage them to read around the subjects they are studying and any others which interest them, as well as becoming more active in historical thinking generally through articles and online resources. This often seems to be incongruous with the messages they are getting from other subjects and the experiences they are offered by other teachers who are teaching them to pass exams. I feel lucky that when I went to university I had already been given many of these skills through good A Level teaching but I think it is much rarer for students to arrive at university being able to do these things than it was in the past. My students find it difficult to believe that they will need to complete so much independent reading because they are used to being given so much pre-prepared material in school and struggle when I try to get them into real discussion using their own ideas. I think that universities have had to change how much guidance and time they spend on basic ideas with first year students because of the skills that many lack. Looking at the programme for first year undergraduates at my old university, what shocks me is the amount of 'stuff' they seem to be doing, lots of courses and lectures series, where I only ever had one focus a term. However I can understand how this is necessitated both by a lack of general study skills and the awareness of students that they are paying for a service which they expect to be top class. My aim is to give my students the edge so that they can really thrive when they arrive at university; however this is sometimes difficult to combine with 'successful' teaching at A Level.

## The HE perspective ...

Students entering the first year of History study at university are often unfamiliar and uncomfortable with aspects of the curriculum. For example, there may be an under-appreciation of the nature of History as a discipline. In their writing, students often favour a narrative approach as opposed to employing critical analysis. Some essays are over-reliant on quotations or on the use of a single text. Many students have a limited understanding of the diversity of historical schools and of historiography. They have often been schooled to view political and diplomatic history as the established norm and thus are less aware of fields such as social, cultural and economic history. Some students have concentrated closely on a narrow chronology or particular geographical area. Thus the history of the world outside twentieth-century Europe may be alien to them. Modules based on thematic approaches are viewed as particularly difficult because they have become used to event-driven courses.

This is not to imply criticism of the teaching of History post-16 but to emphasise the extent of the difference between school and university level approaches to the subject.

Academics need to be aware of the changing landscape of school History and to ensure that they do not have unreasonable expectations of entrants' knowledge and capabilities. The curriculum in the first level in higher education is often designed deliberately to take students out of their 'comfort zones'. Thus challenging thematic modules introduce students to new historical concepts. For example, the University of Newcastle's first year core course focuses on the themes of 'encounters' and 'identities' and thus is explicitly designed to cross geographical, chronological and conceptual boundaries. The module is closely connected to the research interests of the academic staff and therefore immediately introduces students to cutting-edge scholarship. A similar approach is taken at the University of Warwick where the first-year compulsory module *The Making of the Modern World* hinges on one central premise: the rise of the 'modern', its diffusion and resistance to it.

# PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSITION

At Canterbury Christ Church University the year as a whole is seen as a 'foundation year'. The structure requires students, in small groups, to debate, and to draw upon (and foster) their general knowledge.

In addition, first-year modules often focus on the basic skills for historical study which academics consider lacking in students' past experience. These may be fully integrated into modules or delivered as standalone classes. Typically such sessions cover using a university library (many students are unfamiliar with the range of journals, electronic resources and publications); IT skills; referencing; note-taking; essay writing; organising a bibliography; and the historical analysis of sources such as statistics, literary writings, newspapers, film, painting, architecture and oral history.

One area which first-year students (perhaps surprisingly) find bewildering is the reliance on e-learning techniques and resources in university teaching. Virtual Learning Environments are now standard in History Departments with online resources, discussion forums, podcasts and i-casts supplementing face-to-face teaching. This last point can also be misinterpreted, with new students mistakenly believing that online tutor engagement is replacing greater personal contact available in the past. This is not the case as independent study has always been the norm. University libraries often have scanning licences to provide online access to book chapters and essays. Digitised resources including online journals; newspapers; databases; visual material and primary sources are increasingly becoming a standard element of History modules. Although these techniques and resources are becoming embedded in HE History, it is still difficult for schools and colleges to gain access. Therefore, first-year students often find basic navigation and assessment of such material difficult.

The most dramatic change that most students find in moving from school to university is the timetable. They may have very few contact hours with academics in contrast with their sixth form study. There is a reliance on self-directed learning and students have

more free time in which independent study is expected with no supervision.

In addition, there is little 'teaching to the exam'. Most modules will offer a revision class at the end of the formal teaching but there will be no mock examinations, practice essays or model answers.

## Conclusion

There are clearly significant differences in approaches to the teaching and learning of History in schools and universities. Current students entering university possess a range of knowledge and skills but these often do not equip them for HE study. HE lecturers need to address the deficits in their experience as well as to make clearer the expectations and demands of university-level study. There should also be more collaboration with schools and teachers to encourage better preparation of students for university History courses.





# ONLINE RESOURCES

Online resources with a strong academic input are becoming increasingly available, and an accessible body of work for schools to draw upon. The difficulty is finding the 'good' material amongst the ever-increasing number of websites: not all subject to sufficient academic rigour.

Below are some examples of useful, innovative online resources ...

## The British Library's Turning the Pages online books

An excellent way for students to experience examples of the printed word as a researcher, the online gallery includes:

- Diamond Sutra – the oldest printed 'book' made in china in 868
- First atlas of Europe, 1570s
- Henry VIII's Psalter, including his own notes



- A selection of Leonardo da Vinci's sketches

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/ttp/ttpbooks.html>

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## The National Archives podcast series

A repository of over 100 mp3 podcasts on subjects such as:

- Education in 1911
- Transportation to Australia
- The gunpowder plot
- Internment in the UK in 1939
- Prison: 50 years behind bars



<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/rss/podcasts.xml>

History News Network – includes video lectures and talks. There is a strong focus on American history and current affairs, as a site developed by George Mason University, but also has resources on broader issues relating to historical research, for example:

- Is Google Good for History?
- What Becomes of Print in the Digital Age?



<http://hnn.us/>

# ONLINE RESOURCES

## HOTS: History off The Shelf at Oxford University

A small selection of podcasts from HOTS: History Off The Shelf at Oxford University

<http://hots.modhist.ox.ac.uk/podcasts>

## Cambridge University: Take a Journey into History: the virtual classroom

This site includes resources to help develop research skills using primary and secondary sources, plus four online lectures given by Cambridge academics to A level students in 2008.

<http://www.historycambridge.com/default.asp?contentID=604>

## The History Faculty.com ...

Podcasts written by academics on key A level topics: 36 podcasts, along with other teaching and learning resources are in the archive, with new material being added regularly.



<http://www.thehistoryfaculty.com/>

## School History resource site

A comprehensive repository of online resources for teaching history to all ages.

<http://www.schoolhistory.co.uk/>



KeyStage history is a one stop shop subscription website to support teaching history and leading of history from Key Stages 1 to 4. Up-to-date expert advice from an experienced history consultant provides guidance you can trust, teaching and learning activities that inspire and outstanding lessons which will quickly prove indispensable.

[www.keystagehistory.co.uk](http://www.keystagehistory.co.uk)



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Chapter 5, “Advancing history post-16: e-learning, collaboration and assessment”, Arthur Chapman and Barbara Hibbert (p. 136-148) in *Constructing History 11 – 19*, edited by Hilary Cooper and Arthur Chapman (SAGE, 2009).  
[The details of the case study found on page 7]

*Supporting High Achievement and Transition to Higher Education Through History Virtual Academies: Final Report*, Arthur Chapman (HEA, 2009)  
[http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross\\_fac/heahistory/resources/cs\\_chapman\\_highachievement\\_20091001.pdf](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/heahistory/resources/cs_chapman_highachievement_20091001.pdf) [The details of the case study found on page 11]

*Pupil Perceptions of History at Key Stage 3: Final Report for QCA*, Terry Haydn (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, 2005)  
<http://www.qcda.gov.uk/6391.aspx>

*Better Lessons in a Level History*, Diana Laffin (Hodder and Historical Association). This provides practical ideas for A Level history teachers and trainees who want to improve their students’ learning. It draws on common topics from the current A Level specifications in order to model creative learning strategies which could be used with any historical content. This is an excellent chance to look at current A Level teaching.

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*The Articulation of the Study of History at General Certificate of Education Advanced Level with the Study of History for an Honours Degree*, Barbara Hibbert (PhD Thesis, University of Leeds).  
<http://www.tactic-solutions.com/phd/bhibbert.htm>

*History in Schools – Present and Future*, Lisa Lavender. (Event report for the one-day conference hosted at the IHR on 28th February 2009.) The report can be found in the eLibrary of the History Subject Centre website, or can accessed directly at: [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross\\_fac/heahistory/elibrary/internal/cr\\_lavender\\_hsc\\_20090228](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/heahistory/elibrary/internal/cr_lavender_hsc_20090228)

*Learning and Teaching Transition to University*, Dr Giles Martin & Dr Matthew Williamson of Queen Mary, University of London. This three year study on student transition into higher education has focused on expectations and experiences of teaching and learning. It is due for completion in the summer of 2010 but their findings so far were presented at a UCAS research forum in November 2009. The presentation notes can be found on the UCAS website at: <http://www.ucasresearch.com/events/pastevents>

*National Council for Educational Excellence: Recommendations* (NCEE, 2008)  
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/ncee/>

# USEFUL CONTACTS AND SOURCES OF INFORMATION

**Aimhigher** - promotes HE especially amongst under-represented groups. It is regional. Please visit the Directgov website via the url below for contact details of regional offices.

<http://tinyurl.com/6f9ld4>

## Awarding Bodies

Examination specifications are defined by the following awarding bodies in the UK:

- Edexcel: [www.edexcel.org.uk](http://www.edexcel.org.uk)
- AQA: [www.aqa.org.uk](http://www.aqa.org.uk)
- OCR: [www.ocr.org.uk](http://www.ocr.org.uk)
- WJEC: [www.wjec.co.uk](http://www.wjec.co.uk)
- SQA: [www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk) (Scotland)
- CCEA: [www.ccea.org.uk](http://www.ccea.org.uk) (Northern Ireland)
- IBO: [www.ibo.org.uk](http://www.ibo.org.uk)

**Directgov** - the UK governments public services website: section on education and learning

[www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/index.htm)

**Edubase** - the up to date database of educational establishments across England and Wales.

[www.edubase.gov.uk/](http://www.edubase.gov.uk/)

## Humanities and Social Sciences Diploma

<http://www.humanitiesdiploma.co.uk/>

**International Baccalaureate (IB)** - programme of 16+ education

<http://www.ibo.org/>

## Manchester Histories Festival

[www.manchesterhistoriesfestival.org.uk/](http://www.manchesterhistoriesfestival.org.uk/)

**National Council for Educational Excellence** - the NCEE was established in 2007 to bring together influential people from business, HE and the secondary sector to contribute to raising standards. Its recommendations, published in October 2008, cover how schools and HE can work together.

[www.dcsf.gov.uk/ncee](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/ncee)

**Prince's Teaching Institute** - an independent education charity created by the Prince of Wales

[www.princes-ti.org.uk](http://www.princes-ti.org.uk)

**Qualifications and Curriculum Design Agency (QCDA)** - the public body that maintains and develops the national curriculum.

[www.qcda.gov.uk/](http://www.qcda.gov.uk/)

**Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT)** - the supporting body for Specialist Schools, which specialise in one of ten curriculum areas.

Email: [info@ssatrust.org.uk](mailto:info@ssatrust.org.uk)

[www.specialistschools.org.uk](http://www.specialistschools.org.uk)

**Sutton Trust** - providing educational opportunities for young people from non-privileged backgrounds.

<http://www.suttontrust.com>

**Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)** - the organisation responsible for managing applications to higher education courses in the UK.

[www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)

**Villiers Park Educational Trust** - experts in gifted and talented education.

Email: [vp@villierspark.org.uk](mailto:vp@villierspark.org.uk)

[www.villierspark.org.uk/](http://www.villierspark.org.uk/)





The  
Historical Association

The voice for history

The Historical Association is an independent charity incorporated by Royal Charter and has been supporting the study and enjoyment of history since 1906. With over 6000 members the HA is the major national organisation representing the case for an historical education to policy makers and ministers.

The Historical Association brings together people who share an interest in, and love for the past and it furthers the study and teaching and enjoyment of history in all forms.

Email: [enquiry@history.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@history.org.uk)

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