How can the First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours Programme enhance your teaching of the new GCSE history specifications?

The First World War features in a number of the new GCSE history specifications (first exams 2018 onwards).

Here we provide guidance on how the First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours Programme can enhance your teaching of the new GCSE history specifications, through our CPD programme and battlefield tours.

AQA GCSE history specification 2016 onwards

AQA offers one GCSE history specification where it previously offered two. Within this new specification the First World War features in Paper 1: Understanding the modern world in the option entitled Conflict and tension 1894-1918. This option is worth 25% of the total specification.

Through this option students are expected to study the causes of the First World War (from the evolution of opposing alliances to the outbreak of war in 1914), the war itself and why stalemate prevailed for so long on the Western Front (including the Schlieffen Plan, trench warfare, key battles such as the Somme and Passchendaele), and why the war ended (including the advancement of tactics, the campaigns of 1918, the contribution of the Allied military leadership to Germany’s defeat).

Many of the topics listed in this specification are covered in depth on our tours of the Western Front. What better way for teachers and students to get a real and lasting insight into the nature of trench warfare and how tactics evolved than by actually visiting the battlefields, walking through the trenches and seeing for themselves the enormous challenges faced by the Allied forces in trying to break through the German defences. Our enquiry based approach encourages students to think critically about some of the key questions covered in AQA specification. All our tours are supported by guides from the Guild of Battlefield Guides and led by UCL Institute of Education history experts who provide teachers and students with access to a level of expertise not readily available back in school.
For teachers, our website contains a wealth of classroom resources including 11 substantial history enquiries covering all aspects of the war from the outbreak to its longer term political, economic and social impact.

In addition, the post war settlement and the ensuing consequences are featured in AQA’s option entitled Conflict and tension 1918-1939.

**Links to other useful First World War resources available for teachers on this website:**

Extend your subject knowledge about the First World War by accessing our range of [podcasts](#) recorded exclusively by historians from our academic advisory group.

Access our guide to the latest scholarship on the First World War from BBC online: [Myths, misrepresentations, and conflicting views of the First World War](#)

Find out more about how to access the Imperial War Museum’s new classroom resources for the First World War using items from their extensive collections: [Learning resources from the Imperial War Museums](#)

**Edexcel GCSE history specification 2016 onwards**

Like AQA, Edexcel offers one GCSE history specification where it previously offered two. Within this new specification the First World War features in **Paper 1: Thematic study and historic environment, Option 11: Medicine in Britain, c1250–present.** In this option is a linked study of the historic environment entitled The British sector of the Western Front, 1914–18: injuries, treatment and the trenches. The option as a whole is worth 30% of the total specification.

For the historic environment students are expected to study content which includes the context of the British sector of the Western Front, conditions requiring medical treatment on the Western Front, medical infrastructure from the battlefield to base hospital, experiments and advances in medicine and surgery. These topics are covered on our battlefield tours of the Western Front where students can learn about medicine and surgery in situ. Here they can examine the relationship between specific sites and their relationship to medicine and surgery in the
First World War. In addition, serving soldiers are present on our tours to offer a contrast between present day approaches to medicine on the battlefield with that of the Western Front.

We will soon be publishing an historical enquiry designed especially for the teaching of this historic environment option. Keep an eye out for further news of this on the homepage of our website.

*Option 12: Warfare and British society, c1250–present* also features aspects of the First World War. It focuses on the Western Front, the Battle of the Somme and reasons for its outcome, the nature of trench warfare and war of attrition, and role of General Haig. All of these topics are covered in depth during our battlefield tours where teachers and students have the opportunity to visit the battlefield sites of the Somme and consider whether or not the battle deserves its reputation as a military disaster.

**Links to useful First World War resources available for teachers on this website:**

Take a look at some of our substantial history enquiries such as [What was life really like for a British soldier on the Western Front?](#) and [How and why should we remember the Battle of the Somme today?](#) Each one is accompanied by classroom resources and could be used to cover some of the topics listed in Edexcel’s specification.

Extend your subject knowledge about the First World War by accessing our range of [podcasts](#) recorded exclusively by historians from our academic advisory group.

Access our guide to the latest scholarship on the First World War from BBC online: [Myths, misrepresentations, and conflicting views of the First World War](#)

**OCR GCSE history specifications 2016 onwards**

OCR offers two GCSE history specifications, History A (Explaining the Modern World) and History B (SHP).

Within Specification A the First World War features in the British thematic study option entitled *War and British Society c.790 to c.2010*. As part of this option students are required to study the First and Second World Wars including the impact on people’s lives, increased state power and the changing relationship between the state and the people. This option as a whole is worth 25% of the total specification.
One of the key themes on our battlefield tours is how the First World War impacted on people’s lives. Through this we consider how the war impacted upon soldiers and civilians and students are able to use their visits to various battlefield sites and local museums to explore this in great depth. For example, the *In Flanders Field Museum* in Ypres provides a vivid illustration of how the town and its civilians were directly affected by the war and provides a different perspective to the Home Front in the UK.

Within Specification B aspects of the First World War feature in the *British Depth Study* option entitled *Britain in Peace and War, 1900–1918* – most specifically the Home Front. This option as a whole is worth 20%.

As part of the specification all schools have to study a site in its historical context. Specific sites can be chosen by the schools themselves unlike in the other awarding body GCSE history specifications. They have however to be submitted in advance for approval by OCR.

The *History Around Us* component is worth 20% of total specification.

Our battlefield tours could provide the perfect opportunity for teachers and students to develop their ability to interpret historical sites and relate them to the wider historical context. Schools could also approach OCR to see whether they would be permitted to use a site from the Western Front as their *History Around Us* site.

The criteria for site study provided by OCR mirror closely the approach we take with students to historic sites whilst on tour.

- The reasons for the location of the site within its surroundings
- When and why people first created the site
- The ways in which the site has changed over time
- How the site has been used throughout its history
- The diversity of activities and people associated with the site
• The reasons for changes to the site and to the way it was used
• Significant times in the site’s past: peak activity, major developments, turning points
• The significance of specific features in the physical remains at the site
• The importance of the whole site either locally or nationally, as appropriate
• The typicality of the site based on a comparison with other similar sites
• What the site reveals about everyday life, attitudes and values in particular periods of history
• How the physical remains may prompt questions about the past and how historians frame these as valid historical enquiries
• How the physical remains can inform artistic reconstructions and other interpretations of the site
• The challenges and benefits of studying the historic environment

In addition, for teachers, our website contains a CPD module (Core Module 2) which focuses specifically on how to make the most of onsite learning.

Links to other useful First World War resources available for teachers on this website:

Learn more about how to use historic sites effectively by downloading our article: Remembering the First World War: using a battlefield tour to help pupils take a more critical approach to what they encounter

Take a look at some of our substantial history enquiries such as How much did the First World War change the lives of women in Britain? and How great was the impact of the First World War. Each one is accompanied by classroom resources and could be used to cover some of the topics listed in OCR’s specifications.