



**Subject Centre for
History, Classics
and Archaeology**

Discussion Paper

The teaching and assessment of Contemporary History in UK higher education institutions

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1) Introduction

The Higher Education Academy's Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology commissioned me in September 2007 to conduct a survey of contemporary history taught in UK higher education institutions and further education institutions offering degree level courses. The purpose of the survey was to establish where contemporary history is taught in UK higher education departments and further education institutions - both at undergraduate and Masters levels - and to understand chronologies used by departments; the resources used in its teaching; how learning is assessed; and the distinctiveness of contemporary history. The term 'contemporary' is, in itself, fairly contentious. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition is 'living or occurring at the same time, a person or thing living or existing at the same time as another'.¹ Whilst the HCA Subject Centre did not attempt to impose any definition of 'contemporary' history or chronology, and definitions within HE/FE departments include modern, twentieth century, present day, recent past etc., it was necessary for me to apply some chronology myself when deciding what would be considered contemporary and what I would, therefore, include in the results. I decided that the Twentieth Century and beyond would be considered contemporary for the purposes of the survey. This decision was based on the chronology used by the IHR in their MA course on Contemporary British History.

The survey was conducted in two parts. Firstly, university and further education college websites were searched to discover where contemporary history at any level was being offered. This identified those institutions that offered contemporary history, either as stand-alone degree courses, or as part of history or related subject courses, or as modules within history or related subject courses. A database of the details from these websites was then compiled. Secondly, an explanatory letter outlining the purpose of the survey and a short questionnaire was sent by email attachment at the end of November 2007 to all those universities and colleges identified as offering some level of contemporary history courses from the search of websites. Where possible, the questionnaire was emailed to Heads of Departments, based on a list supplied by the HCA Subject Centre, otherwise they were sent to a named contact from the website. Details of the survey and a copy of the questionnaire were also included on the December issue of the Centre for Contemporary British History's electronic newsletter. The questionnaire was resent in early January 2008 to those institutions who had not replied in the first instance, giving a final deadline for the receipt of replies of 11th January 2008.

The results of both these stages have now been analysed, entered onto the database and this is the final report, based on the analysis of website information and received replies to the questionnaire. This report will be circulated as the basis of a colloquium on the teaching of contemporary history to be held at the HEA Subject Centre for History, Classics and Archaeology's annual conference on Teaching and Learning in History between 3-5th April 2008, where this report will be presented as a plenary paper in the session on assessment.

2) Stage one – Details from websites

It was necessary firstly to find an up-to-date list of all UK universities and colleges offering HE courses and I took this information from the UCAS website (www.ucas.com) and double-checked it against the Higher Education & Research Opportunities (HERO) website (www.hero.ac.uk). I then discarded those institutions that do not teach any history or humanities subjects, such as the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, and entered all the remaining institutions onto a Microsoft

¹ J. Pearsall & B. Trumble (Eds.), *The Oxford English Reference Dictionary*, (OUP: 1996)

Access database. The websites of the remaining universities and colleges were then searched to ascertain whether they advertised any contemporary history, either at undergraduate or Masters levels. I limited my selection to taught postgraduate courses only and did not include research masters, MPhil or PhD degrees. This resulted in a list of 104 UK universities, colleges or institutes that, according to their website information, offer some amount of contemporary history teaching, either as an individual stand-alone contemporary history degree or as a module within a history, modern history, combined history, or other course (such as within European or American studies). Other information from the websites was entered onto the database at the same time, such as whether it was an undergraduate or Masters course, the course length, a general description and course aims (where given), examples of specific contemporary history module titles offered, the types of assessment used, and a note of any chronology or definition used.

It should be pointed out that the content of university and college websites varies enormously. Some are extremely comprehensive and give detailed information and a break down of each module offered, whilst others are very limited in the amount of course details they provide and give only bare outlines of modules offered, or simply discuss themes. I attempted to look only for courses on offer from 2008, but some websites stressed that not all courses run every year and that courses cannot be guaranteed: their running depends on lecturer availability and on course popularity, amongst other things. Courses listed as covering the contemporary period as defined above were entered on the database and I also listed courses that had contemporary history elements such as those covering nineteenth century and into the twentieth, for example a module offered at the University of Durham on Egypt & the Sudan 1869-1956. I also listed long sweep courses that often cover several centuries, but culminate in the twentieth century or present day, for example Glasgow University's Europe 1500-2000 module.

Website Findings:

Stand-alone Undergraduate degrees

According to website information, the following were identified as offering contemporary history as a stand-alone undergraduate degree.

Institute	Title of course(s)
Aberdeen	European Languages & Twentieth Century Culture
Aberystwyth	Modern & Contemporary History
Bangor (Wales)	Modern & Contemporary History
City University	Journalism & Contemporary History (jointly with Queen Mary)
Essex	Contemporary History
Huddersfield	Politics with Contemporary History
Hull	20 th Century History
Leicester	Contemporary History
Northumbria	Contemporary History & Politics (from 2008)
Queen Mary (London)	Modern & Contemporary History Journalism & Contemporary History (jointly with City University)
Salford	Contemporary History & Politics Contemporary Military & International History
Sunderland	Contemporary History & Politics
Sussex	Contemporary History Contemporary History & Politics Contemporary History & Sociology Contemporary History with language
Teeside	Modern & Contemporary European History

The following offered modular courses, listed as 'modern', but with the emphasis on contemporary or on 19th and 20th century history:

Institute	Title of course(s)
Royal Holloway	Modern History & Politics
University of Wales Institute (Cardiff)	Modern History & Politics Modern History & Popular Culture
University of Westminster	Modern History
Queen Mary (London)	Film Studies & History
Central Lancashire	History
Sheffield Hallam	History (19 th & 20 th century) History, Film & Television History & Politics

Stand-alone Masters degrees

According to website information, the following were identified as offering contemporary history as a stand-alone Masters degree.

Institute	Title of course(s)	Degree
Birkbeck	Contemporary History & Politics	MA
Birmingham	British First World War Studies British Second World War Studies	MA MA
Bristol	Contemporary History Conflict & Culture in 20 th Century Europe	MA MA
Coventry	20 th Century History	MA
De Montfort	20 th Century History	MA
Dundee	Greater Britain in the 20 th Century	MLitt
Glasgow	Contemporary Economic History	MSc/PGDip
Liverpool	20 th Century History	MA
IHR/CCBH	Contemporary British History	MA
Queen Mary	20 th Century History Contemporary British History since 1939	MA MA
Manchester	Holocaust Studies	MA
Sussex	Contemporary History	MA
Warwick	Society & Culture in the Cold War	MA

The following offered modular courses listed as 'modern', but with the emphasis on contemporary or on 19th and 20th century history:

Institute	Title of course(s)	Degree
Leeds	Modern History	MA
Royal Holloway	History – Modern Britain History – Modern World History	MA MA

There are, however, many more UK HE departments and FE institutions that offer contemporary history modules, either as core compulsory courses, or as optional elective modules within history, modern history and combined history degrees or other courses (such as within European or American studies). In fact, according to the information on websites, there are no UK universities offering history degrees that do not contain at least an element of contemporary history, for example the Open University offers one contemporary history module in its broad history degree. It may be that these are not available in 2008, but that details remain on the websites, or that they are only available if enough students register for them. It does appear that contemporary history is very popular with students and is being offered at some level by most UK HE departments.

3) Assessment

According to information on websites concerning assessment, the vast majority of courses are still assessed in traditional ways of coursework, examinations and dissertation. Some also assess on group or solo presentations. There is evidence, however, that other forms of assessment, reflecting the use of new technology/media such as video or film, are starting to be used. For example, the Contemporary History and Politics degree at Sunderland University notes on its website that 'Although the main forms of assessment are essays and exams, you will also have the opportunity to complete projects, make presentations to your seminar group, and participate in formal debate. You'll also use computers to analyse historical and contemporary information'. The University of Sussex's MA in Contemporary History is assessed by essays and a portfolio consisting of a group submission, an individual essay and a research proposal. Video Documentary is examined on the basis of the documentaries produced as group projects. Others are offering the option of students using video, film, CD-ROM, or other media submission, for assessment within their dissertation. The Cultural History MA at Goldsmiths is an example of this. Whilst this degree is not specifically contemporary, it has contemporary history elements such as citizenship and feminism in the early 20th century; the cultural history of fascist Italy; the main debates and methodologies of contemporary thought.

4) Stage two – Questionnaire

A letter of explanation, request to pass the details on to the most appropriate person within the department, and a short questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was emailed to the Heads of Departments (history) or website contact names of the 104 universities or colleges identified as offering any level of contemporary history. The purpose of the questionnaire was to invite those teaching and assessing contemporary history at HE level to describe their practices, comment on the themes and give their views on the challenges involved in teaching the subject, thus giving some qualitative data alongside the more quantitative data. In the first instance the questionnaire was emailed on 27th November 2007 and a deadline for its completion and return was set for 13th December – allowing just over a fortnight. Questionnaires could either be returned electronically via email attachment, or printed out and returned by post (three chose this method). At the deadline, only 20 replies had been received, so it was decided to send out a reminder to those who had not replied and to extend the deadline to 11th January 2008. This resulted in a final count of 36 replies. This represents an overall response rate of 34%. Whilst this reply rate was slightly disappointing, comments from teaching colleagues and others suggest that this does not signify lack of interest in the subject, or indeed, any adverse reaction to the questionnaire, but simply lack of time in an increasingly busy and pressurised teaching/lecturing schedule, along with recent pressures of the RAE.

Nevertheless, the replies to the questionnaires contained some excellent, varied comments and useful detail and are discussed below. Individuals are not identified as anonymity was guaranteed.

Responses to questions

The responses to each question are given below. Some are clear-cut ticks in boxes; others required comment or further detail. There were 36 replies in total, but not all answers add up to 36 as some gave a combination of answers. Where this is the case, it is noted in the analysis of the answers below. Where comments were particularly interesting and noteworthy, or reflect a wide variety of views, these have been reproduced either within the analysis or fully below the analysis.

Q1.1 Is contemporary history being offered as a stand-alone undergraduate degree or as a module or option within a degree programme during 2008

Module/option within a history degree	14
Module/option within a history degree & as a module/option within another degree programme	6
Module/option within another degree programme	1
Compulsory course within a history degree & as a module/option within a history degree	4
Compulsory course within a history degree	2
Compulsory course within a history degree & as a module/option within another degree programme	2
Stand-alone	2

Stand alone & module/option with a history degree	1
Stand alone & as a module/option within another degree programme	1
Not offered at undergraduate level at all	3

The majority, 69%, of all replies offer contemporary history as a module or option within a history degree. Just over a fifth (22%) of respondents said that contemporary history is a compulsory element of a history degree. Contemporary history is offered within another degree programme, such as American Studies or Film Studies, by 28% of respondents.

Q1.2 How is contemporary history defined within your department, e.g. what is the chronology used?

1900-present	5
Twentieth century	3
From First World War/1917-present	4
From Second World War/post 1945	16
Modern history	5
Non specified	1
Other – from 1970	1
Varies within dept	1

Definitions varied within departments and most respondents noted that definitions stated were based on their own definition, rather than on an institutional one. Nearly half of respondents (44%) defined 'contemporary' as from the Second World War/post-1945. One respondent commented that contemporary history was not differentiated from other forms of modern history (loosely defined as post 1800) and that they would probably define 'contemporary history' loosely as involving periods prior to which public records have not yet been opened. Another explained that there was no official definition and courses are labelled by their topic rather than any generic term, though to this respondent, contemporary history was post-1945. A further commented that post-WW2 would reasonably differentiate 'contemporary' from 'modern'.

Q1.3 At which level of teaching is contemporary history offered (undergraduate)

All years	26
Years 1 and 3	2
Year 2 only	1
Years 2 and 3	4
Not offered	3

The vast majority of respondents (72%) stated that contemporary history was offered at some level across all degree years.

2. Contemporary History within taught Masters/MSc programmes

Q2.1 Is contemporary history being offered as a stand-alone Masters degree or as a module or option within a taught Masters programme during 2008

Module/option within history only	13
Not offered at Masters level	9
Module/option within history & as a module/option within another programme	5
Module/option within another programme, but not history	4
Stand alone & module/option within history	2
& module/option within another programme	
Stand alone history course	2
Stand alone history course & module/option within history	1

Contemporary history is not so widely available at Masters level than as at undergraduate level, with a quarter of respondents saying it is not offered currently, though over half (58%) do offer it as a module or option within a history course. Four do not offer it as part of a history MA, but do include it as part of

another course. Two commented that they were developing a contemporary history MA or that it will feature in their history MA in the future.

3. Resources Used

Q3.1 In addition to usual teaching resources, what particular other resources are used in teaching contemporary history

The use of resources other than traditional teaching resources (journal articles, books, etc.) appears to be widely adopted for the teaching of contemporary history as the following shows. (Respondents ticked all that apply)

Type of resource	No. using this resource	% using
Film	34	94.4
Online documents	33	91.6
Oral history	27	75.0
Sound	23	63.8
Own online study/support system	15	41.6
- WebCT	4	
- Blackboard	8	
- Virtual Learning Environment	3	
Other	4	11.1
- Microfilm of party records/journals		
- Uni. Kent Cartoon archives		
- External archives & work placement in archives		
- Databases, CD-Roms, online access to journals/newspapers heavily used		

Film and online documents are almost universally used in the teaching of contemporary history. Oral history and sound, whilst still well used, are not used by over a quarter of respondents in their contemporary history teaching. Nearly half of the respondents use some form of institution's own online study/support system, mainly Blackboard or WebCT. It is likely that this number will increase as more and more universities employ such systems. Nearly half do not monitor/assess the use of these resources – see below.

Q3.2 Is the use of these resources assessed/monitored?

Yes	17 (47%)
No	15 (42%)
No answer	4

Fourteen of those who answered yes to this question expanded on the type of assessment or monitoring this consisted of. This varied and is broken down as follows:

Blackboard/WebCT system monitoring of usage and student usage by time	4
Within mainstream teaching/assessment	4
Specific modules and training in contemporary research skills	3
Monitoring by student support office	1
Monitoring during work placements	1
Student questionnaires/class presentations	1

Q3.3 Do you feel that HE is fully exploiting the range of resources available for the study of contemporary history?

No	19 (53%)
Yes	14 (39%)
Yes & No	1
No answer	3

Respondents were asked to expand on their answer to 3.3, commenting on what were the perceived blockages in being able to exploit fully these resources and how they thought the range of resources could be better exploited. Twenty-four respondents expanded their answer (18 who answered 'no' to 3.3 and 6 who answered 'yes'/'yes & no').

These fall into the following broad categories (some gave more than one reason):

Insufficient funding/staff resources/lack of time	13
Copyright/30 year rule issues	6
Reluctance by historians to engage with archival sources & FOI	5
Level of ignorance about what material is available	4
Better IT equipment needed	2
Problems with accessing the sources (e.g. BBC archive)	2
Lack of understanding within institutes of CH as 'real' history	1
Reluctance to engage with inter-disciplinary sources (literature/art)	1

Q3.5 How are the use of resources in 3.1 reflected in the assessment of learning in the discipline (other than standard assessment methods (essay/ course work, examinations and dissertation)?

There were nineteen replies to this question. Of these, eleven stated that no distinctive methods were used. The other eight replies mentioned a variety of new/different assessment methods. These included the use and assessment of reflective diaries and blogs, presentations and practical work (e.g. oral history), set assessments using CH sources (e.g. students asked to identify/evaluate sources, make FOI requests and conduct oral interviews). Others said that although there was no set different assessment, many students chose to use CH sources within their coursework (e.g. the addition of links to film clips, use of clips from YouTube). Another commented on the use by students of digital cameras to work up assessed presentations on the history of certain areas they chose. This particular department are currently planning introducing designing a website as an area of assessment based on the selection on on-line documents and have looked at students making short 'history documentaries', though due to lack of funding for equipment, this idea has had to be put on hold for the time-being, but they are looking at assessed presentations based on freely available on-line materials.

Q4. How distinctive is contemporary history

Some respondents gave more than one answer to this question. There were some similar views reflected in the comments given. Ten respondents saw no distinction at all and three gave no comment. Closeness of events, within living memory, or conscious connection with issues of contemporary importance was cited by twelve respondents as making contemporary history distinctive and five mentioned methodological problems and the plethora of resources as being distinctive. Three explained that it was hard to answer as different staff within their department defined contemporary history differently and there was no consensus. Individual comments not included above are reproduced below.

The boundaries between contemporary history and modern history can be elastic, especially since the abolition of the thirty-year rule has made more archival sources available. A key issue for both modern and contemporary historians is change over time – this tells us apart from political scientists – but also the extend to which current issues develop from previous development or orientations

The difference is a methodological one, but it isn't between modern or contemporary history; rather it is between the approaches of sociologists and social policy researchers...It is the *practice* of history that units it as a discipline and distinguishes it from other areas of study.

One important difference is that one is often dealing with a period through which the students have themselves lived, and they are thus active participants in the history. This necessitates perhaps

particular attention to balance and sensitivity. It also provides opportunities because students can easily see the relevance of topics to their own lives.

It can certainly be seen as distinctive, and I would accept the distinctiveness to a large extent. The possibility of using oral methodology is obviously one thing that distinguishes it, but there are others as well. It is not just a matter of sources though – I think it does require a particularly careful historical methodology which is not afraid to distinguish itself from political science and other disciplines on the one hand (while learning from them), and the higher journalism on the other.

It deals with the historical (rather than sociological or political-sciences) analysis of the roots of contemporary issues and problems (such as immigration; medialisation; problems of government in complex societies; social-movement activism, etc): it is informed by present-day concerns, but not driven by them.

I think it is distinctive, as both a period and also a methodology. I emphasise the relationship with politics and with public policy, and the active, applicable nature of such study. My experience is that students are greatly exercised by it, and that they feel more connected as citizens.

'Contemporary History' is not a term we use even though some of our courses come right up to the present. The aim is to explain recent events within a longer historical trajectory that can be foreclosed by a narrow focus on, say, the post-1979 period.

Yes, it is distinctive. 'Modern' history goes further back; contemporary history goes beyond the end of the twentieth century. Contemporary history is informed more explicitly by – but not guided by – the concerns of the present.

Lacking the perspective and often the depth and variety of scholarship available to earlier periods, it has its limitations.

It's more interdisciplinary. For example, sociology written even a decade ago is now getting used as both a primary and secondary historical source. My "contemporary" students read other disciplines in a way that most students do not.

It seems to me that students make little distinction between modern and contemporary history. The major dividing line for them is early modern/modern.

Q5. How prepared generally are students at HE undergraduate level to engage with contemporary history?

Very prepared	1
Well-prepared	3
Prepared	13
Neither prepared nor unprepared	6
Under prepared	9
Not at all prepared	2
No answer	2

Nearly half the respondents (47%) believe undergraduates to be prepared, well prepared or very well prepared to engage with contemporary history. Eleven (31%) believe them to be under prepared or not at all prepared, with six stating they are neither prepared nor unprepared. Several comments mentioned that whilst students had concentrated on certain aspects of contemporary history (e.g. Nazi Germany or Fascism) at school, they have little general knowledge of other areas or of contemporary history as a chronology and little awareness of the specific issues connected to the historical analysis of the more recent past and very little empirical knowledge. One mentioned that it was depressing to note that many students chose modules on the Nazis because it was familiar to them and they thought they would get better marks because of it. Another noted an over-concentration on the mid-twentieth century at schools, with little on specifically contemporary historical problems. This was believed by two respondents to be due to public expectations of history as dealing with the more distant past and that many regard contemporary history as too unhistorical. Another commented that there was a general lack of understanding among A-level students of politics and of basic administrative structures. Therefore, much remedial work was needed to update their knowledge of political parties and other areas of general knowledge, rather than engaging with the themes and topics required. Students are surprisingly ignorant about many major events, noted one respondent. Whilst another measured how prepared students are for contemporary history based on whether they read a quality newspaper regularly. Few do, he noted.

Two respondents believed that students feel more comfortable studying contemporary history than with other periods and are more familiar with aspects of CH. Another stated that students enjoy drawing links between the immediate past and the present when given the chance. This, however, was thought to be a particular challenge by another respondent as the very recent past can appear too similar to today and that it is demonstrating carefully the subtle 'otherness' of the very recent past that makes teaching CH particularly challenging. Another believed that students assume CH will be easier since the language is more accessible or relevant. It was felt that this could make it more difficult to question hegemonic narratives or general critical thinking. Normative concepts or contemporary assumptions are more readily reproduced and students are more prone to 'take sides'. The interdisciplinary nature of CH compared to other periods of historical study was seen by this respondent to be both a disadvantage (monitoring a range of journals/publications/websites) and advantage (aiding one to think beyond the historical 'box').

Comments (not included above)

Respondents were given the opportunity to make further comment throughout the questionnaire, and at the end. The following comments have not been included in the analysis of each question above.

This seems at present to be among the most popular areas of history.

Access to materials (even more so for non-British topics), decent websites and scarce University resources are issues for CH (as for all areas of history). Students tend to be very keen and enthusiastic to study CH – most of our Imperial, US, European and British courses are over-subscribed.

I'm very pleased that such interest is being taken, and would be very happy to help with any future activities.

It is interesting that contemporary history seems to be taught as a 'first year' subject. I would argue that in many ways, it is a subject for students who have a better grip of historiographical and methodological issues, especially as it is all too easy for students to fail to detach themselves sufficiently from the events/topics studied and to look at them with a critical eye.

I find it very hard to make historical judgements about something which is still unfolding. But the serious side of the internet provides amazing opportunities nowadays for accessing sources for 'modern' or 'contemporary' history, but a lot of us need help in locating it from reliable academic sources. At least part of the problem is being able to keep up with what's appearing. And finally of course, there's a reluctance on the part of historians to become 'too contemporary', in case we turn into sociologists or politics lecturers. You can't understand the present without a solid background in the past, from at least 1789 (or 1776? or 1690?).

5) Conclusion

Contemporary history appears to be a popular choice for many students, who may feel comfortable with elements they have previously studied at school, such as Nazi Germany. This was reflected in respondents' comments and might account for the fact that contemporary history at some level, even if only one module, appears to be offered by nearly all universities or further education colleges offering history modules. More stand-alone contemporary history courses are being considered and introduced at both undergraduate and Masters levels, with for example the new course on Contemporary History and Politics for 2008 at Northumbria University. It seems likely that this interest by students will continue or increase as more and more contemporary sources become available through FOI and the ending of the thirty-year rule. The increasing use and reliance by students on the internet, and the availability of material and sources online, is likely to grow. As one respondent commented, however, the difficulty some students have in differentiating between a good contemporary source and Wikipedia, is slightly worrying!

Nevertheless, the lack of consensus as to what 'contemporary' actually means, both at individual and at institutional level, raises questions. For example, when does 'contemporary' become 'current affairs' and how far back should we go to gain the background to contemporary subjects? Indeed, can there ever be any consensus on the chronology or definition of 'contemporary' since, as one respondent commented, what is contemporary to one person is not contemporary to another. If 'contemporary' means within living memory, then for most 18 year-old undergraduates, this is extremely recent indeed. Older students, on the other hand, face the problem of having lived through/experienced the area under study. Do these definitions and chronologies change depending upon religious and/or

racial differences? Should the boundaries of 'contemporary' move with time? For example, is 1914 still contemporary?

Furthermore, the question of whether historians should try to define periods into neat packages anyway is currently under discussion. An IHR History Lab conference is planned for June 2008 to discuss this issue and to raise awareness of when things change in history and why, what distinguishes one era, century or decade from another and how do we identify the moment of transformation? As noted on the conference webpage, 'Periodization is a natural reflex for most historians, but does the use of 'ancient', 'medieval', 'modern' and 'contemporary' limit our ability to draw broader connections or trace continuities over time?'

In terms of resources used, other than traditional teaching resources (journal articles, books, etc.), it is encouraging to note that the use of film and online documents appear to be almost universally adopted for the teaching of contemporary history. Other resources such as oral history and sound archives could be used more. Over half the respondents felt that HE is not fully exploiting the use of such resources and insufficient funding, staff resources and lack of time were cited most often as the reason for this. Copyright issues/thirty year rule, reluctance by historians to engage with the material and lack of knowledge of what is available were also cited as problems. Interestingly, nearly half the respondents (42%) stated that the use of such resources is not assessed or monitored.

Turning to assessment, as already noted in the website section, the majority of courses continue to be assessed via traditional methods of coursework (essays), examinations, presentations and dissertations. However, some now assess work completed in on-line blogs, diaries, presentations and practical work. Other initiatives include assessment based on the selection of on-line documents to a student-designed website and assessment of student-produced documentaries and film. Clearly, as students incorporate more and more sources such as film clips, video and sound material into their coursework and dissertations, new assessment methods will need to be developed to take account of these. This is likely to be student-driven by the increasing availability and usage of sources and material on-line and has particular implications for the teaching and assessment of contemporary history, since it is material from the recent past that is mostly contained in film, television and sound archives. Whilst the majority of contemporary history courses are assessed by traditional methods currently, this is likely to need to change in future and historians need to be aware of this.

Clearly, there is much to be discussed concerning the teaching, assessment, definition and chronology of Contemporary History in UK higher education institutions and it is hoped that this report will provide a platform for such discussion. Furthermore, it is hoped that this report will aid fuller understanding of contemporary history teaching at higher education level in the UK and that this initial investigation and discussion will spark ongoing interest in how the subject is taught in the future and will provide groundwork for enhancing the subject and a platform for its further development.

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