UCL

# What do students know and understand about the Holocaust?

## Evidence from English secondary schools

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Centre for Holocaust Education

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## About the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education

This research report has been written under the auspices of the University College London (UCL) Centre for Holocaust Education. The Centre is part of the UCL Institute of Education – currently the world's leading university for education – and is comprised of a team of researchers and educators from a variety of different disciplinary fields. The Centre works in partnership with the Pears Foundation who, together with the Department for Education, have co-funded its operation since it was first established in 2008.

A centrally important principle of all activity based at the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education is that, wherever possible, classroom practice should be informed by academic scholarship and relevant empirical research. In 2009, Centre staff published an extensive national study of secondary school teachers' experience of and attitudes towards teaching about the Holocaust (Pettigrew et al. 2009). This new report builds on that earlier work by critically examining English school students' knowledge and understanding of this history. In both cases, research findings have been – and will continue to be – used to develop an innovative and ground-breaking programme of continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and educational resources which are uniquely responsive to clearly identified classroom needs. The UCL Centre for Holocaust Education is the only institution of its kind, both within the United Kingdom and internationally, where pioneering empirical research is placed at the heart of work to support teachers and their students encountering this profoundly important yet complex and challenging subject in schools.

The Centre offers a wide-ranging educational programme appropriate to teachers at all stages of their careers through a carefully constructed 'pathway of professional development'. This provides opportunities for individuals to progressively deepen their knowledge and improve their practice. It offers a national programme of Initial Teacher Education in Holocaust education and a variety of in-depth and subject-specific CPD. In addition, the Centre also offers online distance learning facilities, including a fully accredited taught Masters-level module *The Holocaust in the Curriculum*. Through its Beacon School programme, Centre staff work intensively with up to 20 schools across England each year in order to recognise and further develop exemplary whole-school approaches and effective pedagogy.

All of the courses and classroom materials developed by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education are available free of charge to teachers working in England's state-funded secondary schools. Further information can be found at www.ioe.ac.uk/holocaust.

# Glossary

### A Levels

The A Level is a school leaving qualification offered by educational bodies in England (and in other countries) to students completing secondary or pre-university education. Typically, students aged 16 to 18 intensely focus on a small number of school subjects (i.e. 2, 3 or 4) over a two-year period. The A Level is generally split into two parts. The first part is known as the Advanced Subsidiary Level (or AS Level) and the second part is known as the A2 Level. In most subjects A Level grades (A-E) are awarded according to the results of rigorous formal exams.

### Cronbach's alpha (α)

Used to assess internal reliability, giving an indication of how consistent each participant is when responding to questions within a scale. To assess this, the Cronbach's alpha is calculated. Values range from 0 to 1, with values below 0.7 indicating that the scale lacks reliability (and so should be refined or removed from the survey). Values above 0.7 indicate an acceptable level of reliability and determine the scale can be kept in the survey (Field 2013).

### English secondary schools

In the United Kingdom, the separate countries – England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – each have their own education department with a separate structure for organisation and funding. This report focuses only on secondary school students in England.

### GCSE

The General Certificate of Secondary Education is a compulsory qualification awarded by subject to students in secondary education (aged 14 to 16) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

### IBM SPSS

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. This is a software package that performs statistical analyses. It was used in this study to create a database of the survey responses, and to conduct statistical analysis.

### Key Stage 3

The English education system is structured into several 'key stages' that mark progressive periods of schooling. Key Stage 3 comprises the first three years of students' secondary education – Years 7, 8 and 9 – in which students are typically aged between 11 and 14.

### Mean

The everyday numerical average score. So, the mean of 2 and 3 is 2.5 (Howitt and Cramer 2011). Mean scores were calculated for some of the scales in the survey. For example, in the case of the 11 multiple-choice knowledge-based questions, a total score was calculated for each student to find out how many questions they answered correctly. These scores were then added together and divided by the total number of students, to give a mean score for the whole sample.

### Principal Components Analysis (PCA)

This is a technique that can be used on scales which examine things that cannot be measured directly, like attitudes (Field 2013). Scales of this sort will comprise multiple questions to capture different aspects of the phenomenon being examined; PCA can be used to determine whether individual questions in the scale cluster together (which would provide support for the underlying theoretical constructs being measured in that scale) (Coolican 2005: 176).

### Scale

Refers to the instrument used for assessment of a measured variable (Coolican 2005: 260). An example from the survey is the scale developed to measure students' attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust. Questions within a scale are often referred to as items.

### Statistically significant

The probability level at and below which an outcome is assumed unlikely to be due to chance (Howitt and Cramer 2011). This is typically 5 per cent. Thus, a finding is considered to be statistically significant if the probability of it being due to chance is less than 5 per cent.

# Foreword by Sir Peter Bazalgette

## Chair of the United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial Foundation.

Photograph by Philippa Gedge

In April this year I visited the Bergen Belsen Memorial to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the concentration camp's liberation by the British Army. I was privileged to stand alongside some of the extraordinary men and women who had defied all the odds to survive the extreme deprivation imposed on them by the Nazis. I listened to a former British soldier recalling the horrors that he encountered there to a group of students, who were hanging on his every word. It was, no doubt, a day that will stay with them for the rest of their lives, as it will with me.

These students epitomised the many engaged and well-informed young people I have met over the year and a half since the launch of the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission. They are testament to the outstanding teachers, schools and Holocaust organisations we are fortunate to have in this country. Among the best of these is the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education, one of the world's leading academic institutes for Holocaust education. The Centre not only reveals challenges and opportunities in teaching and learning about the Holocaust through its world class research, crucially and uniquely it directly responds to these issues, helping schools to address proven classroom needs through the country's most ambitious teacher development programme, powerful educational materials, and effective pedagogical approaches. This report presents the findings of the Centre's latest extraordinarily detailed and thorough research. With a national survey and in-depth interviews in a project involving some 9,500 students, it offers a vital and unprecedented insight into the depth of knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust among young people.

It is clear from the findings that there is much to be done to ensure that more students have the same grasp of the subject as those I met at Bergen Belsen, that the significance of the Holocaust is understood and that its meanings for today are properly considered. The will is there, but misconceptions abound, reinforced by misleading references in popular culture and often left unchallenged in schools. The warnings from the Holocaust urge us to stand up to prejudice and hatred in all its forms. We have seen, in the last few months, despicable attacks in Paris, Copenhagen and Tunisia, and the continued brutality of ISIL in Iraq and Syria. And here in Britain, another worrying increase in antisemitic attacks has been recorded over the past year, while incidents of Islamophobia, racism and homophobia remain all too common.

But other profound meanings of the Holocaust can be missed without a proper understanding of what took place during those darkest days of humanity, and why; and of the vast range of participants who enabled such industrial scale murder to take place, from the most wicked of perpetrators to willing collaborators and those who stood by, watching without protest.

Seventy years on from the end of the Holocaust and the liberation of the camps, survivors and liberators implore us to never forget. But one day those voices will fall silent and young people will no longer benefit from the experience of meeting someone able to say, 'I was there'. The task becomes more difficult, and yet more important, with each passing year.

It was with this urgency and with invaluable early access to the findings in this report that the Holocaust Commission formed its recommendations. Now, in taking this work forward, the new UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation has a number of sacred tasks to fulfill, including the recording of testimony and the creation of a National Memorial and Learning Centre. But at the core of this work is one thing above all else: supporting education. Educating people from every community in our

country about why and how the Holocaust happened and what this teaches us all.

That is why the research and the educational programmes of the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education are so important. Its research helps to give an insight into the myths, misconceptions and inaccuracies that persist in common understanding of the Holocaust. And the Centre's research-informed approach has demonstrated the power and effectiveness of directly addressing these issues in the classroom. The Centre provides an evidence base and pedagogical expertise that will play a fundamental role in helping the Foundation to support Britain's network of Holocaust organisations in a renewed national effort to extend high quality Holocaust education to all parts of the country. Only by doing so can we truly honour our promise to the survivors and ensure that Britain never forgets.

# Foreword by Professor Yehuda Bauer

Professor Emeritus of History and Holocaust Studies at the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Academic Advisor to Yad Vashem.

*'What do students know and understand about the Holocaust?'* is a tremendously impressive piece of most detailed research. Not only did more than 8,000 students, aged 11-18, take part in an extensive national survey, but an astounding 244 students were also interviewed in depth by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education. Significant findings result from this great effort.

Some are surprising: the extent of the students' positive evaluation of the necessity to study the Holocaust is, to this commentator at least, very encouraging. The adage about Muslim children being opposed to dealing with the Holocaust appears to be laid to rest – nothing of the kind, apparently, or at least, if there is any opposition, it is very marginal indeed. The same applies to children of non-English, backgrounds. (A side comment may be that perhaps this augurs much better for general integration than the media would have us believe).

The questions that are asked about Britain's role regarding the Jews and the Holocaust are extremely important, and one can derive a number of conclusions from the answers – some are contained in the report, and one might add others from the material that is presented. It becomes clear that the context of the war, and how society chooses to remember Britain's role in it, plays an important part in the perceptions of the students; this means that the youngsters, not only those with a British background, but also those who come from families that immigrated into Britain one, two, or perhaps more generations ago, feel that they are part of a history in which their families may not have played any part. The report very rightly emphasises the

need to explain the real background, which of course brings us back to the question of the war context that is so essential in order to understand what happened during the Holocaust. This means British society examining not only the positive aspects of its national memory, but also more difficult, problematic and uncomfortable issues. To isolate the genocide of the Jews from that context would be a mistake. Teaching programmes should, I believe, be adjusted to meet this challenge and I am heartened to note that the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education is already taking up that task.

A conclusion one may draw from the material – and one often overlooked in education, as well as by policy makers – is that it illuminates the crucial importance of the wider society's view of the Holocaust on young people's perceptions. So it is no good taking the easy path of blaming teachers or students for young people's limited understanding. School can have only so much influence; and teachers themselves, of course, represent in many ways the social context in which the Holocaust is understood, so unless they have had the benefit of high quality professional development in Holocaust education, the myths and misconceptions prevalent in wider society can often go unchallenged in the classroom.

Schools are burdened with a large part of this task, but they are also hampered by the place the Holocaust is given in the curriculum. The National Curriculum, as is clearly stated in the report, includes school instruction on the Holocaust chiefly at Key Stage 3, the ages of 11 to 14. At this stage, there is no formal public examination against which learning is assessed; teachers have to cover the Holocaust in history, but there is no stipulation regarding how many lessons, what should be covered or – even – what the Holocaust was. Later, it becomes problematic, optional, and uncertain. One does not need to be an expert in pedagogy in order to understand that until the age of 15-16 at the earliest,

concepts of historical time are vague at best. Connections, contexts, and so on, are hazy, and are indeed, as the report shows, impacted on by what the youngster absorbs from parents, films, Internet, social media, peers, and society in general. Schooling – especially when it is not part of an external examination system – can impact on this situation only, I think, very partly. The major thrust of recommendations should, in my humble view, be directed at suggesting that if indeed the Holocaust is a 'civilizational break' (as Dan Diner put it), and young people should grapple with it, then the emphasis should be on ages 15-18, at GCSE and at Advanced Level. And yet – shockingly – the examination boards have all dropped the Holocaust from intensive study at A-level.

The very limited time the teachers have to teach about the Holocaust makes it very difficult to accommodate the – quite correct – demands and recommendations of the report. The obvious conclusion would be to increase the time allocated, and that again is very difficult indeed. But make it an examination subject – not as a bullet point in a wider paper on Nazi Germany but as a crucial part of European history in its own right – and then school investment in time, resources, and teacher development will certainly follow.

This highlights the crucial importance of the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education's teacher development programme, created through the innovation and generosity of the Pears Foundation in establishing the Centre in 2008. It is also to the credit of the British government in supporting this national effort to improve teaching and learning about the Holocaust; but it is essential that the government renews this commitment as so much more remains to be done. The UCL Centre for Holocaust Education enables teachers to explore the complexity of the Holocaust more deeply with their students, and to cultivate in them enquiring minds, independent and critical thinking as they reflect on what the Holocaust means for them today – rather than merely (mis)using the Holocaust to pass on perceived 'moral lessons'.
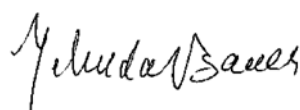
Indeed, I believe that the most important conclusion of the report is that there is no 'lesson', and there are no 'lessons' inherent in the Holocaust, and that any attempt to goad students to conclude on any lesson or lessons is a big mistake. The implication of the report is that 'lessons' from history generally, and certainly from this particular history, would mean that somehow the future can be predicted by looking at what happened in the past, or that history often repeats itself in an accurate way, and that that is an error. What is at least equally important is the analysis of the students' responses which shows that they are instinctively wary of any such drawing of 'lessons'.

Furthermore, any such attempt to distil the complexity of the Holocaust into a moral fable is bound to lead to oversimplification, half-understandings, and superficial knowledge.

The Holocaust is too often turned into vague lessons of the danger of 'hatred' or 'prejudice' at the expense of really trying to understand the reasons and motivations for the genocide. How else can it be possible that so many students who say that they have studied the Holocaust still do not even recognise the term antisemitism? After all, the Germans (not just members of the Nazi Party), and their allies all over Europe did not murder the Jews because they loved them, or even because they were indifferent to them, or because of a generalized 'racism'. They did not kill all the green-eyed men and the red-haired women, but Jews. Nor were Jews shipped to Birkenau because they were human beings: human beings were shipped there because they were Jews. To its credit, the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education has already developed teaching and learning materials to deepen young people's understanding about antisemitism, and professional development programmes to help teachers to teach about it.

And this is unique about the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education: it is not only a research institution – it is also the UK's leading centre for the development of Holocaust pedagogy: it is part of a university that has been ranked first in the world for education two years running, in 2014 and 2015, and it is devoting its expertise not only to research that reveals classroom issues but in the development of resources and pedagogy that responds to these challenges.

This research report and the work of the Centre more broadly are enormously important resources upon which the British government should be able to draw: one that could lead to far more effective teaching and learning about the Holocaust in the United Kingdom.

*Yehuda Bauer*

# Executive summary

This research study was conducted by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education, an integral part of UCL's Institute of Education – currently ranked as the world's leading university for education.

It is the world's largest ever study of its kind, drawing on the contributions of more than 9,500 students across all years of secondary school in England (i.e. 11 to 18 year olds). This report presents analysis of survey responses from 7,952 students and focus group interviews with 244 students.

## Aim

The primary aim of the research was to provide a detailed national portrait of students' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. The research also focused on students' attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust and their encounters with this history, both in and outside of school. Ultimately, the research sought to establish an empirical basis from which considerations of the most effective ways to improve teaching and learning about the Holocaust could be made.

## Overview

2015 marked the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the liberation of death and concentration camps like Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. It also heralded the final report of the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission which outlined key 'recommendations to commemorate the Holocaust and ensure a world-leading educational initiative' (Cabinet Office 2015: 7). In light of these significant anniversaries and proposed new national developments in education and commemoration of the Holocaust, the findings of this research report reveal some troubling evidence.

The report suggests that, despite the Holocaust being a staple in the curriculum for almost 25 years, student knowledge and conceptual understanding is often limited and based on inaccuracies and misconceptions. This study, therefore, should both prompt a reconsideration of existing educational practice and serve as a call for action to ensure that young people receive an education of the highest quality.

## Key findings

- Multiple opportunities appear to exist for students to encounter the Holocaust within their school curriculum, across year groups and in a variety of different subject areas. By Year 10, more than 85 per cent of students reported that they had learned about the Holocaust within school.
- Overwhelmingly, students were familiar with the term 'the Holocaust' which the majority most clearly associated with the persecution and mass murder of Jews.
- The vast majority of students surveyed (83 per cent) believed the Holocaust was important to study at school, 81.8 per cent of students found the subject interesting and over 70 per cent of those who had already learned about the Holocaust said they wanted to learn more. Those who had been given the opportunity to hear a survivor of the Holocaust speak in person found this an especially powerful educational experience.
- However, while some students, particularly those studying history at A level, were able to share more developed accounts of the Holocaust, the majority of those who took part in this study appeared to lack core knowledge and understanding of key features of this history. This overarching conclusion is illustrated by the following key findings.

### Victims

- Although the majority of students knew Jews were the primary victims of the Holocaust, most had little understanding of why they were persecuted and murdered. With 68 per cent of students unaware of what 'antisemitism' meant, their explanations often rested on misconceptions about who the Jews were and overlooked the distinctive racial dimensions of Nazi antisemitism.
- Many students held the erroneous belief that Jews constituted a significant proportion of the German population during the 1930s. For example, whereas only 8.8 per cent correctly identified the pre-war Jewish population to be less than 1 per cent, 73.9 per cent of students grossly overestimated this population by 15 to 30 times.
- A third massively underestimated the scale of the murder of Jewish people, with 10.3 per cent appearing to believe that no more than 100,000 lives were lost.

- Many students reasoned that other groups also were victims of the Holocaust – in particular these included homosexuals, disabled people, and Roma and Sinti (Gypsies). However, the vast majority were unfamiliar with any of the specific policies enacted against each group.
- Typically, students assumed all Nazi victims were targeted and treated in similar ways, and chiefly because they were 'different'. Students' explanations of difference took many forms but often included religious intolerance and reference to victims not being part of a 'master race'.

## Perpetrators and responsibility

- More than half (56.1 per cent) of younger students (Years 7 to 9) appeared to believe the Holocaust was *solely* attributable to Adolf Hitler. With age, students increasingly appreciated that the Nazis played a significant role in the Holocaust; however, most students saw the Nazis as an elite group loyal to Hitler rather than a political party that enjoyed significant, broad-based support across all sectors of the German population.
- Only a small number of students (fewer than 10 per cent) suggested that the German people were complicit in, or responsible for, the persecution and mass murder of Jews and other victims groups.
- Very few students appeared to know about the role played in the Holocaust by collaborating regimes (such as the Vichy government), Axis allies or local populations across Europe.

## Chronology and geography

- 50.7 per cent of students who completed the survey incorrectly believed that the largest number of Jews murdered during the Holocaust came from Germany and 54.9 per cent thought that mass murder took place in Germany, not German-occupied Poland. For many students the Holocaust was seen through a distinctively Hitler-centric and German-centric lens.
- Many students did not have a secure or confident chronological understanding of the Holocaust. For example, only 7.4 per cent of students correctly understood that the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 was the event that primarily triggered the 'organised mass killing of Jews', with 40.2 per cent of students incorrectly believing that mass killing began immediately after Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in January 1933.

- Most students had limited understanding of the Holocaust and its relationship to the Second World War. Only 24.3 per cent recognised the term *Einsatzgruppen*, and knowledge of mass killing in Eastern Europe during the war was also very limited.
- Most students (71.0 per cent) recognised that Auschwitz was explicitly connected to the Holocaust, however very few students associated camps like Treblinka (14.9 per cent) and Bergen-Belsen (15.2 per cent) with it.
- Many students were uncertain about how and why the Holocaust ended and only 46.1 per cent correctly knew that the end of the Holocaust came as a result of the Allied liberation of lands occupied by the German army.

## Britain and the Holocaust

- Students typically had a very limited and often erroneous understanding of Britain's role during the Holocaust, with 34.4 per cent incorrectly believing that the Holocaust triggered Britain's entry into war. A further 17.6 per cent of students appeared to believe the British drew up rescue plans to save the Jews, while 23.8 per cent thought the British did not know about mass killing until the end of the war.
- Collectively, students' core conceptions of the Holocaust appeared to closely reflect the wider cultural and political representations of the Holocaust which proliferate within contemporary British society. It is notable therefore, that the historically inaccurate, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is, by a large margin, the most read book and the most watched film (viewed by 84.4 per cent of those students who said they had seen a film about the Holocaust).

## Challenges and issues

The authors of this study do not interpret or present these findings primarily as a criticism of students or their teachers. On the contrary, it is argued here that such limitations in knowledge and understanding are in part a consequence of the problematic manner in which the Holocaust is often popularly and politically framed. They may also derive from the complex challenges of teaching about the Holocaust and from a common over-emphasis on a simplistic 'lessons from' approach. The results of this report, coupled with the findings from the Centre's 2009 study of teaching practice (Pettigrew *et al*. 2009) – which itself drew on responses from more than 2,000 teachers – suggest that the Holocaust is a difficult and emotive subject to teach. Accordingly, teachers need

considerable support in helping students develop a deeper and more meaningful understanding of this subject across a range of historical and spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) perspectives.

This report also suggests that, to improve young people's understanding of the Holocaust, more curriculum time is required. Given the encouraging emphasis placed on Holocaust education by the current government, it is notable that the subject has never been more susceptible to the prospect of reduced curriculum time, both for 11 to 14 year olds and for those 14 to 18 years olds taking examination courses.

## Recommendations

Chapter 8 offers a detailed exploration of the major considerations and recommendations that result from this study. Salient among these are:

1. More emphasis needs to be placed on developing teachers' – and by extension, students' – substantive and conceptual knowledge of the Holocaust. Attention must be given to ensuring academic scholarship and research informs classroom practice in accessible, age-appropriate and pedagogically creative ways.

2. Continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers should focus on what key knowledge and conceptual understanding is required to enable young people to make deeper meaning from the Holocaust. For example, if students have limited knowledge (e.g. if they believe that Hitler solely was responsible) then it is impossible for them to develop deeper understanding (e.g. about broader levels of complicity and collaboration across Europe) or, importantly, to assess the significance of such knowledge for contemporary society.

3. The Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission Report (Cabinet Office 2015) correctly states that teachers need greater access to CPD. It is essential, however, that this CPD is quality-assured, research-informed and rigorous.

4. A simplistic 'lessons from' approach to the Holocaust should be avoided. It risks becoming tokenistic when not actually grounded in substantive historical knowledge and it may prevent critical and deeper understanding of the Holocaust.

5. It is important for all those working in this field, especially teachers, to distinguish between commemoration and education. Meaningful education entails knowing and understanding key aspects of the Holocaust, and grappling with difficult and complex issues.

6. The new National Memorial and Learning Centre must take serious account of the findings of this research. In particular, the Learning Centre – as a site of cultural pedagogy – must work towards redressing dominant myths, misconceptions and inaccuracies in British popular culture and society.

7. To ensure that young people learn about the Holocaust meaningfully, attention must be given to progression in students' learning across all key stages of the National Curriculum and in a range of relevant subjects and curriculum frameworks (including religious education, English, SMSC). In this respect the 'spiral curriculum' advocated by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education deserves serious consideration.

8. A need exists to conduct more specific research into teaching and learning about the Holocaust. In particular, case studies of classroom practice would prove invaluable.

9. If Holocaust education is to improve, it is imperative that more evaluation studies are conducted which examine the impact of educational interventions or programmes on teaching and learning.

## Offering solutions: The UCL Centre for Holocaust Education

Located within the world's leading university for education, the work of the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education is underpinned by extensive research, acclaimed pedagogical expertise and engagement with leading historians. As a result, the Centre is uniquely placed both to address the challenges presented by the findings and recommendations of this research and to support the Government and its Holocaust Memorial Foundation in positively shaping the future of Holocaust teaching and learning in England.

# Part I
# Introductions

# 1.

# Introduction

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## Key questions

**1.** What are the overarching questions and primary principles that inform this research?

**2.** How is the Holocaust currently framed in the context of England and its secondary schools?

**3.** What distinguishes the current study from previous empirical research?

**4.** How is the report structured?

## Key points

**1.** Learning is not reducible to knowledge-acquisition and this study is concerned to do more than simply catalogue what students appear to know. However, specific knowledge content does matter, especially with regards to the forms of understanding it can impede or allow.

**2.** There is strong and clear recognition of the Holocaust's educational importance within England, as elsewhere. But there are few clear and explicit articulations of exactly why the Holocaust should be taught about in schools. As a consequence, teachers are given little guidance in terms of what specific content should be included within limited curriculum time.

**3.** It is important to distinguish between the Holocaust as history and the mythic Holocaust as it is represented and/or 'remembered' within wider popular culture and political debate.

**4.** Both knowledge and understanding are socially situated phenomena. What students know about the Holocaust and what they then do with that knowledge are both impacted by wider sociocultural frames. In the contemporary British context, such framings are commonly characterised by an emphasis on 'memory' and on simplified universal lessons in place of critical engagement with the complexities and contingencies of history.

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## What are the overarching questions and primary principles that inform this research?

The Holocaust is a compulsory component of history teaching in state-maintained English secondary schools and has been since the introduction of the country's first mandated National Curriculum in 1991. In recent years, the functional power of a single National Curriculum has been weakened somewhat as schools have been encouraged to adopt academy or free-school status, which gives them far greater autonomy in determining their own educational agendas and priorities.

Nonetheless, symbolically at least, the Holocaust retains a central position in the canon of culturally and politically valued knowledge that successive Westminster governments have judged important for future generations to acquire. Outside of formal education, representations of the Holocaust proliferate through bestselling works of literature, box-office hit feature films, television programmes, museum exhibitions and public acts of commemoration, such as those surrounding the UK's annual Holocaust Memorial Day. In January 2014, Prime Minister David Cameron launched a cross-party national Holocaust Commission to ensure that, 'the memory and lessons of the Holocaust remain central and relevant' (Mick Davis quoted in Prynne 2014).

But in recent years, concerns have been expressed that the forms of representation that have come to dominate our collective consciousness may in fact serve to distort or obscure accurate understandings of this history (Langer 1995a; Cole 1999; Novick 1999; Pearce 2014). In this context, a number of salient questions are raised:

- What *do* England's secondary school-aged students appear to know and understand about this history?
- What sources of knowledge do they commonly draw upon?

- What forms of representation of the Holocaust are they most likely to encounter?
- Do common myths or misconceptions appear to circulate?
- If so, what might be the likely causes or consequences of these?

The answers to such questions matter if the government's instruction that students be taught about the Holocaust is to have more than rhetorical significance. They also underpin the research that is reported here.

## 'Knowledge' and 'understanding'

Any empirical examination or attempt to measure 'knowledge' is an inherently complex and contested enterprise and it is important to outline some of the key principles and positions that inform the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education's research:

1. **Knowledge is not firmly fixed, independent or easy to isolate.** It cannot be accessed, let alone 'measured', in a pure or simple form. The research reported here is not presented as a complete or final measure of students' knowledge of the Holocaust. But it does offer important, albeit partial, illustration of what students appear to know – and are able to recall – about specific aspects of this history.

2. **Knowledge is a socially situated phenomenon. Individual students' perspectives are to a very large extent impacted upon by wider sociocultural frames.** Stevick and Michaels (2013: 12) make a very similar point when they argue that, 'the common and problematic responses that teachers and students fall into are important to document'. But, also, 'little is accomplished by criticising people – particularly students – for where they are when that location is broadly determined by the broader culture. People are largely products of their environments and the views that circulate there' (Stevick and Michaels 2013: 11).

3. **There is no single, undisputed correspondence between claims to knowledge and 'truth' or 'reality'.** But that relationship isn't entirely capricious either. Because it is socially situated, knowledge – in any field – is always partial and incomplete, reliant on personal or group perspective (Carr 1964; Myrdal 1969; LaCapra 1985; Friedman 1998).

    However, within the context of knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust, it is profoundly important to recognise that not everything is relative (Lipstadt 1994). For example, while there remain several areas of ongoing dispute and discussion over interpretations of this history,

'there is no credible debate' around the number of Jewish victims killed (Gudgel 2013: 51); as Mark Gudel asserts, 'the number six million is firmly established and widely accepted' (ibid.).

Today, refutation of this figure most commonly represents a wilful distortion and obfuscation of history by those who seek to deny the Holocaust on ideologically motivated grounds. This provides compelling reason to continue with attempts to construct secure and corroborated knowledge bases. Whether school students' understanding of the magnitude of the Holocaust is guaranteed by or dependent upon their knowing the six million figure is, however, a different and more complex matter and will be examined in Chapters 3 and 5.

4. **Relationships between 'knowledge' and 'understanding' are of central importance in this research.** The two terms are not synonymous. Critically, in the context of education, learning is not reducible to knowledge-acquisition. As Resnick (1989: 2) has argued, 'learning occurs not by recording information but by interpreting it.'

    Our research does not document or record students' possession of individual facts or pieces of information for their own sake. Instead, our interest in the absence or presence of any particular area of knowledge relates to the specific forms of understanding – or meaning-making – that such knowledge allows (see also Perkins 1993). The transparency of this rationale is one of the most distinctive features of the Centre for Holocaust Education's approach as is demonstrated in our discussion of prior empirical research below. In the language of curriculum theory, while 'powerful knowledge' (Young 2013; Wheelahan 2007) – that is, knowledge which enables students to arrive at secure and potentially transformative understandings – is critically important, its relationship to clearly considered aims for teaching and learning is of paramount importance too (see Reiss and White 2014).

5. **Understanding as meaning-making also has a social context.** West et al. (1985: 31) offer a definition of learning as the process of 'giving personal meaning to public knowledge'. But we would further contend that 'meaning-making' also has an irreducibly public dimension and is not just a personal affair. Both knowledge and understanding have social sources *and* social implication. The second section of this chapter identifies and characterises some of the currently dominant frames of reference for interpreting the Holocaust. These, it is argued, are closely bound with the aims most commonly articulated within popular and political culture to justify the study of the Holocaust in schools.

**6. There are distinctive ways of framing both knowledge and understanding within various academic disciplines and practitioner fields.** Philosophers, sociologists, psychologists and historians may each conceive of and approach knowledge and understanding in different and discipline-specific ways. These may reflect very different interests from those of the people tasked with designing curriculum materials or with teaching students in schools.

In this research report, Chapters 3 and 4 share the widest-angle, broadly sociological framing, while Chapters 5, 6 and 7 adopt a more tightly focused lens informed by disciplinary history and, more specifically, its application within schools. It is within the history curriculum that the Holocaust is specified as compulsory content, and previous research confirms that history classrooms are where most teaching about this subject takes place (Pettigrew *et al*. 2009). We recognise that there are profoundly important alternative curricular and disciplinary framings of the Holocaust that we do not examine with the same level of detail. However, it is a central contention of our work here and elsewhere that secure historical knowledge is a fundamental basis from which to draw other forms of understanding. That is reflected in the structure and focus of this report.

## Defining 'the Holocaust'

The emergence of the term 'the Holocaust' during the post-war period is one frequently retold by scholars. Gerd Korman (1989: 292-295) and Alvin H. Rosenfeld (2011: 57-58), for example, show how, from the 1950s onwards, the term came to supplant what had previously been described as the 'catastrophe' or the 'disaster' experienced by the Jews of Europe under Nazism. Yet the 'conversion of the destruction of European Jewry into "Holocaust" was neither immediate nor uniform' (Korman 1989: 294); the word 'holocaust' continued to be employed in other contexts, and among some Jews and non-Jews alternative terms like the Hebrew words *sho'ah* and *churban* became preferred means of referring to the fate of European Jewry. It was not until the late 1970s that 'the Holocaust' began to acquire broad international currency, in the main due to the phenomenal success of the American television series *Holocaust* (Insdorf 1989: 4-6; Shandler 1999: 155-178).

In the generation since, the term 'the Holocaust' has become ubiquitous in contemporary British society and, indeed, throughout much of the English speaking world. Meanwhile, the term itself is widely recognised in the academy and beyond to be 'problematic' (LaCapra 1992: n4, 357). In the first instance the Greek origins of the word 'holocaust' (*holos kauston*), with its reference to a 'whole' 'burning' for religious sacrifice render it a 'potentially disturbing' (Lawson 2010: 8) phrase for the killings enacted by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. Consequently, some scholars explicitly avoid the term altogether (Agamben 1999: 31; Steiner 1988). Yet despite the phrase remaining inherently unsatisfactory, there is a broad recognition among scholars that the prevalence of 'the Holocaust' makes it a practical and pragmatic term to use.

More vexed than this is the matter of precisely what the phrase refers to when it is applied – a question especially charged since the use of the definite article 'raises questions concerning the distinguishing features' (Lang 1999: 77) and in particular whether it should apply only to the genocide of the Jews or more widely to include other Nazi victims. Within the academy 'the traditional view that it ["the Holocaust"] was the genocide of the Jews alone' (Niewyk & Nicosia 2000: 51) tends to hold sway, though there is some 'debate' between 'those who reserve the term 'Holocaust' specifically and exclusively for the Jewish victims of Nazism and those who opt for much wider inclusion of victim populations' (Rosenfeld 2011: 58). These contrasting positions of exclusivity and inclusivity are much more highly charged outside academia however, where they are intensely politicised – not least because they often segue into contrasting claims over the uniqueness, universality and comparability of different victim group experiences under Nazism.

Among scholars, discussion over the perceived 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust has long 'lost most of its steam' (Bloxham 2013: 319). Advances in knowledge of Nazi ideology and praxis have furthered understanding of what happened to its various victim groups, how, and why, while a greater appreciation of the interface of these policies has helped transcend dichotomies of uniqueness and comparability. In sum, scholarship of the last quarter of a century has positioned the Holocaust within a much wider spatial and temporal context, allowing the 'specific features' of the murder of the Jews to be drawn more sharply within the context of the 'broader phenomenon' of genocide (Bloxham 2013: 1).

In the public sphere, controversies and contestations continue with petitions for an inclusive approach to defining the Holocaust showing no signs of going away. Interestingly, attempts to open up 'the Holocaust' and make it referential to all victim groups are somewhat at odds with the position adopted by many of the entities and bodies which have done the most to shape cultural understandings of the term. Around the world, one finds most national museums, for instance, clearly ascribing 'the Holocaust' to

the fate of the Jews, even if many also seek to simultaneously recognise the suffering of non-Jewish victims. How this is managed differs from institution to institution, country to country, though this is by no means the only point of divergence. Invariably institutional definitions will also differ on the framing of the perpetrators, the language used to describe their actions (including the separation of persecution from murder) and the time-frame these acts are posited within.

Such subtle variations are not surprising, of course, and are more revealing of the present than of the past. They also reflect the problems of taking a word of Greek origin, which has been adopted in the English speaking world, and introducing this into other languages and national contexts. So while the term 'the Holocaust' has been popularised around the globe, this development has not been total: as Monique Eckmann (2015: 53) notes, the term 'the Holocaust' 'is not universally employed' and 'cannot be easily transposed to other languages and other socio-historical contexts'; other terms continue to be more dominant in certain national cultures. For example, in the Francophone world, the term *Shoah* is popularly used; in Germany, some of the leading historians of recent years 'have preferred to employ simply descriptive terminology such as Nazi "Jewish policy" (*Judenpolitik*) or the "policy/policies of annihilation" (*Vernichtungspolitik*)' (Bloxham and Kushner 2005: 3). This may help to explain why, despite supranational organisations like the European Union, United Nations and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working to give 'the memory of the Holocaust the format of a standardized transnational memory with a specific political agenda' (Assmann 2010: 112) this has not resulted in a singular, one-size-fits-all definition of the Holocaust (Carrier, Fuchs, Messinger: 2015). What is noteworthy in the case of IHRA, is how its 31 member countries all endorse the Stockholm Declaration of 2000 – a proclamation that frames the Holocaust in the following terms identifying it explicitly with the Hebrew term for the genocide of the Jews: 'The Holocaust (*Shoah*) fundamentally challenged the foundations of civilization. The unprecedented character of the Holocaust will always hold universal meaning' (IHRA, 2015).

Given the global circulation of so many uses of 'the Holocaust', confusion and uncertainty among non-specialists is perhaps to be expected. As suggested by the Centre's 2009 research into teaching practices in English secondary schools – described in fuller detail later in this chapter – the most commonly shared understanding of the Holocaust among teachers included, 'the persecution and murder of a range of victims' (Pettigrew *et al.* 2009: 65). Interestingly, not only does

this finding appear to suggest a dissonance between teachers' understanding and existing scholarship in this field, it is also somewhat at odds with those institutional definitions of the Holocaust currently most significant within British society.

Chief among these is the Imperial War Museum and its permanent Holocaust Exhibition, which since its opening in 2000 has popularised the following definition:

> Under the cover of the Second World War, for the sake of their 'New Order', the Nazis sought to destroy all the Jews of Europe. For the first time in history, industrial methods were used for the mass extermination of a whole people. Six million people were murdered, including 1,500,000 children. This event is called the Holocaust.
>
> The Nazis enslaved and murdered millions of other people as well. Gypsies, people with physical and mental disabilities, Poles, Soviet Prisoners of War, trade unionists, political opponents, prisoners of conscience, homosexuals, and others were killed in vast numbers.

This definition could arguably be improved further by reference to non-Nazi perpetrators, collaborating individuals, agencies and regimes, but it is nonetheless very clear in asserting the Holocaust as an event specific to European Jewry, which occurred within the context of the Second World War. Importantly the Exhibition's definition does not overlook the persecution and murder of non-Jewish victim groups, but rather distinguishes these on account of perpetrator intent – i.e. only the Jews were targeted for total murder – 'the mass extermination of a whole people'. It is noteworthy that this definition is far more extensive than that provided by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust – the charitable organisation responsible for Britain's annual memorial day. In its latest iteration, the Trust's definition (2015) is outlined as follows:

> Between 1941 and 1945, the Nazis attempted to annihilate all of Europe's Jews. This systematic and planned attempt to murder European Jewry is known as the Holocaust (The *Shoah* in Hebrew).
>
> From the time they assumed power in 1933, the Nazis used propaganda, persecution, and legislation to deny human and civil rights to Jews. They used centuries of antisemitism as their foundation. By the end of the Holocaust, six million Jewish men, women and children had perished in ghettos, mass-shootings, in concentration camps and extermination camps.

As with the Imperial War Museum, the Trust is clear in framing the Holocaust as referential to the Jewish experience and goes further in temporal contextualisation to anchor it within the period following the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. Further remark might be made of the decision to employ the term *Shoah* as well as Holocaust and to not make any reference to other groups, but the overriding point of its divergence to the inclusive understandings employed by many teachers is clear for all to see.

Positioned side-by-side, the definitions of the Imperial War Museum and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust are illustrative of how public framings of the Holocaust overlap and differ. Rather than set students the 'test' of writing their own definitions of the Holocaust and then trying to judge the correctness of each, the researchers in this project were more interested in investigating the ways in which students use the term 'the Holocaust', what they understand it to encapsulate, and how they relate this to the historical events themselves.

The Centre for Holocaust Education believes students should recognise the Jewish specificity of the Holocaust (the intent to murder all Jews, everywhere that the perpetrators could reach them, every last man, woman and child (Bauer 2002)); its symbiotic relationship with the Second World War (in particular, the years after 1941); its scale in terms of geography and persons killed; and the crucial role played by factors that had their roots in broader European history, such as nationalism, antisemitism and Nazi racial ideology. It is equally important students identify the perpetrators of these crimes – the Nazi regime, in the first instance, but also the hundreds of thousands of non-Nazis across Europe who actively engaged or were complicit in continental genocide.

While the Centre works with a definition of the Holocaust that focuses on the persecution and murder of Jews, it also considers that 'Holocaust education' extends beyond the study of that genocide alone. It is important, therefore, that young people learn about the enslavement, persecution and murder of political opponents, German gay men, and Jehovah's Witnesses in concentration camps; the forced sterilisation of Black people; the mass murder of the German disabled; the genocide of the Roma and Sinti (Gypsies); the mass death of Soviet Prisoners of War through exposure and deliberate starvation; and the many crimes against humanity committed in German-occupied lands.

Subsuming each of these distinct crimes under the vague heading of 'the Holocaust' may appear inclusive, but it runs the risk that the distinctiveness of each is lost. The Centre seeks to differentiate other Nazi crimes from the Holocaust, not to produce a hierarchy of victims but, on the contrary, to better recognise and understand how these distinctive threads are also interwoven in a complex historical process. Each is important and significant in its own right, each had its own causes and course, and each can contribute in different ways to our broader understanding of crimes against humanity. Finally, if this understanding is to contribute to education for genocide prevention, then it is essential that students recognise the place of the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes within the long, dark history of genocide and man-made atrocity.

## How is the Holocaust currently framed in the context of England and its secondary schools?

### Contemporary 'myths' and 'representations' of the Holocaust

Before continuing further, it is important to say a few words about some of the other language and vocabulary used in this report.

In this and other chapters, reference is made to 'representations' of the Holocaust and to how the Holocaust may be 'imagined', 'conceived' or otherwise 'constructed' both by individuals and by societies. It is critically important to emphasise that none of this language is used to denote or imply that the Holocaust itself is in any sense fictive: there is a profound difference between postulating that something is 'imagined' or has an imagined dimension, and suggesting that it is 'imaginary'. In fact, such language is used here to argue that, independent of actual historical events, the Holocaust has enormous symbolic and representational significance within popular and political culture, both within contemporary Britain and over much of the globe. Indeed, Lawrence Langer (1995a: 3) has argued that there are 'two planes on which the event we call the Holocaust takes place in human memory – the historical and the rhetorical, the way it was and its verbal reformation, or deformation by later commentators'.

To Langer's 'verbal reformation' we can add – as Langer himself does – a visual register: for, over the last 40 years, the history of the Holocaust has been communicated in an increasingly wide variety of forms. And whether depicted through the compelling narrative of a historical novel or feature film, through iconic imagery or through public acts of commemoration, these omnipresent representations can powerfully influence how we come to conceive of, interpret and make meaning in response to the actual historical events.

The notion of 'representation' is important for

two reasons here in that, alongside the many and various representations of the Holocaust, the word has itself acquired enormous representational significance. As Tim Cole, following James Young, has argued, the Holocaust has become a widely used 'cultural icon', an 'archetype' and a rhetorical device: a 'figure for subsequent pain, suffering and destruction' emblematic of man's inhumanity to man (Cole 1999: 9).

In characterising and attempting to account for both forms of representational work, Cole distinguishes between the Holocaust as historical reality and what he calls 'the myth of the Holocaust'. Citing Liebman and Don-Yehiya (in Cole 1999: 4), he argues that, 'by labelling a story a myth, we do not mean it is false'; rather, 'a myth is a story that evokes strong sentiments, and transmits and reinforces basic societal values'. Bell (2003: 75) agrees that, 'as such, myth is not synonymous with pernicious distortion or dissimulation' nor is it 'an antonym of history'. Instead, Bell employs the term in a very similar manner to Cole, to denote (re)constructions of the past that use processes of simplification, selection and/or dramatisation to reflect *contemporary* values, sensibilities and concerns (Bell 2003).

Among the emblematic figures and places that Cole critically examines in his 1999 study are: Oscar Schindler, the eponymous hero of Spielberg's 1993 feature film; the immortalised schoolgirl diarist Anne Frank; and the infamous Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. Each, he demonstrates very clearly, have occupied positions of central importance within public imaginaries of the Holocaust. While the research findings reported in a number of the following chapters confirm the continued representational significance of Auschwitz-Birkenau, classroom-based research conducted by Michael Gray (2014b) suggests that both Schindler and Anne Frank have been displaced in the popular consciousness of today's school students by the entirely fictional characters 'Bruno' and 'Schmuel' from the novel and film adaptation of *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas*. This contention is examined in detail in Chapter 4.

## Political and pedagogical framings: The importance of educational aims

Public institutions, and schools in particular, perform a vital function in communicating frameworks for understanding the Holocaust. In 2014, the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, unveiled the revised National Curriculum for England's schools, the fifth since its introduction in 1991.

While the Holocaust has always been a compulsory component of study for students in Key Stage 3, its symbolic significance in terms of curricular framing has never been more profound. In the current curriculum – taught in schools from September 2014 – the Holocaust stands alone as the only named compulsory content within a unit of study entitled 'Challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to the present day'. Other key twentieth-century events – both the First and Second World Wars, for example – are listed only as content that *could* be included (DfE 2014: 97, emphasis added).

In spite of this prominence, and in keeping with all four previous curricular framings, the 2014 curriculum does not provide any further detail or guidance on what should be taught about the Holocaust. Nor does it specify what students who have completed their compulsory taught content might reasonably be expected to understand. Interestingly, at no point during the last 25 years has the question of *why* the Holocaust appears as compulsory content been formally explained. Rather, its educational importance is presented as though entirely self-evident.

This belies the reality that there are multiple competing perspectives on how, why and indeed whether this history should be taught in schools (Russell 2006). It also obscures the fact that, although they are seldom explicit, there are dominant discursive framings which powerfully prioritise specific approaches to teaching the Holocaust.

In 2009, the Centre for Holocaust Education – then known as the Holocaust Education Development Programme – produced an empirical study which documented pedagogical practice in English secondary schools. This drew on over 2,000 survey responses and focus-group interviews with 68 teachers at 24 different schools. Among its key findings, the study reported high levels of commitment among teachers towards teaching about the Holocaust and strong agreement that it was important to do so. For example, 86 per cent of the history teachers who responded to the relevant question agreed with the statement, 'It is right that teaching about the Holocaust is compulsory in the history curriculum', while 93 per cent agreed that 'It will always be important to teach about the Holocaust'.

Many of those who were interviewed in greater detail also made reference in various ways to a 'special' status given to the subject within their own practice. Some, like the two teachers quoted below, explained that they also emphasised this status to their students:

> I always say to them [her students], if you never ever remember anything else that we are teaching you in this classroom – in this school – I want you to learn

the lesson we are teaching you today (Pettigrew *et al*. 2009: 81).

> I actually start my lessons – I'd forgotten about this – by saying this is the *only compulsory part* of the National Curriculum. It is so important. And it has to be because nothing has actually ever happened like that before (extract from orginal interview material, previously unreported).

The words of the second teacher are particularly telling. For her, and ultimately for the students she would speak to, it is by dint of its secured position within the curriculum that the educational importance of the Holocaust is both demonstrated and assured. However, in interview, teachers regularly struggled to articulate exactly what made the Holocaust so important in educational terms:

> It's an interesting one that you should ask that, because it's something … you kind of just assume to some extent that they should know about the Holocaust, rather than even think about whether there's any reason why they should know about it (Pettigrew *et al*. 2009: 81).

Indeed, for some, the very question – why should students be taught about the Holocaust? – was something they had not had cause, nor perhaps opportunity, to consider before. Again, this relates very closely to policy framings: as Russell (2006) and Pearce (2014) have both argued, the absence of critical reflection on the purpose(s) of including the subject in the curriculum from 1991 onwards continues to have an impact on the shape and form given to teaching and learning about the Holocaust in the present day.

Writing from the American context, Totten *et al*. (2001) are clear that classroom teaching of the Holocaust should be on the basis of clearly articulated and thought-through rationales. Reiss and White (2014) stress the importance of explicitly stated aims for education in more general terms (see also White 1982). Without these, a number of the teachers who took part in the 2009 study expressed uncertainties, confusions and, in some cases, concerns:

> What does the Government want us to be teaching every child of this country? … What aspects are they wanting us to teach? What is the focus? … What is the outcome they want us to have with the students that we're teaching? … Learning from the past or what we can learn in the future? … Or is it that they just want us to teach the facts, the figures? (Pettigrew *et al*. 2009: 96).

There is, of course, an enormous and extensive body of academic knowledge and historiography of the Holocaust. The 2009 teacher study also suggested that, while there was considerable variation in the amount of time teachers were able to spend delivering their compulsory lessons on the Holocaust, the average duration for the whole unit was approximately six hours. Some teachers reported that they had to fit all of their teaching within just two. Given these time constraints, teachers clearly have to make pragmatic selections in terms of the content to be shared with students. But, as Russell (2006) and Pearce (2014) have also argued, in the absence of any clear discussion at a policy level, the form and content of actual pedagogical practice is in large part shaped by implicit directives, and by shifting contemporary sociocultural and political concerns.

And so, for example, many teachers in the 2009 study framed their practice in a language that prioritised 'relevance' and 'relatability' to their students' twenty-first century multicultural lives. This made sense against the background of a then Labour government for whom issues of 'social inclusion', 'community cohesion' and 'managing diversity' had been high priorities within domestic policy (Worley 2005). But this in turn could have profound impact on the content then delivered to students in schools, as seen in the illustration below where teachers describe how their focus on 'relevance' for students explicitly determined the 'definition' of the Holocaust they went on to provide:

> **Teacher A:** One of the ways that you can make it relevant to the pupils, because we're in a multiracial school, is the fact that anybody who is of a different race, who is not of the 'Aryan' race, would not be living here if the Nazis had actually won the war.
> **Teacher B:** I think that's really relevant in a school like this, isn't it – where we've got such a high number of Asian kids.
> **Teacher C:** Yes, so we try and look at it in a much broader way than just the Jews (Pettigrew *et al.* 2009: 80).

It is not our intention to adjudicate here between competing 'history-focused' or more broadly 'civic' or 'moral' teaching aims. Indeed, we have argued elsewhere that it is not always helpful to insist upon a clear-cut dichotomy between the two (Pettigrew 2010). However, it is useful to note that, when teachers taking part in the 2009 survey were asked to choose what they considered to be the three 'most important' aims in teaching about the Holocaust, their shared priorities were clear. Irrespective of subject background, teachers were overwhelmingly likely to identify the teaching aims, 'To develop an understanding of the roots and ramifications of prejudice, racism and stereotyping

**Figure 1.1** Variation in teachers' aims by subject background



To explore questions about the foundations
of Western civilisation

To reflect upon the theological questions raised
by events of the Holocaust

To understand and explain the actions of people involved in
and affected by an unprecedented historical event

To deepen knowledge of the Second World War
and twentieth-century history

To reflect upon political questions, about power and/or
abuse of power, raised by events of the Holocaust

To preserve the memory of those who suffered

To explore the implications of remaining silent and indifferent
in the face of the oppression of others

To reflect upon the moral and/or ethical questions raised by
events of the Holocaust

To explore the roles and responsibilities of individuals,
organisations and governments when confronted with human
rights violations and/or policies of genocide

To learn the lessons of the Holocaust and to ensure that
a similar human atrocity never happens again

To develop an understanding of the roots and ramifications
of prejudice, racism and stereotyping in any society

■ PSHE   ■ Citizenship   ■ English   ■ RE   ■ History

**Percentage of respondents**

0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80

in any society' and, 'To learn the lessons of the Holocaust and to ensure that a similar human atrocity never happens again' among their top three (see Figure 1.1, page 14).

It could, perhaps, be reasonably assumed that the decision to place the Holocaust within the secondary school history curriculum was not an arbitrary one and that policymakers intended the subject to be approached, at least in the first instance, through a disciplinary historical lens. If that were the case, policymakers might be frustrated that so few teachers prioritised the aims, 'To deepen knowledge of the Second World War and twentieth-century history', 'To understand and explain the actions of people involved in and affected by an unprecedented historical event' or, 'To explore questions about the foundations of Western civilisation'. And yet, as the following pages will argue, teachers' concerns to draw out contemporary, broadly antiracist lessons from this history are entirely compatible with – and may themselves be fed by – the way in which the Holocaust is regularly framed politically.

## 'Britain's promise to remember': The Holocaust, education and British national imaginaries

> Ensuring that the memory and the lessons of the Holocaust are never forgotten lies at the heart of Britain's values as a nation. In commemorating the Holocaust, Britain remembers the way it proudly stood up to Hitler and provided a home to tens of thousands of survivors and refugees, including almost 10,000 children who came on the *Kindertransport*s. In debating the more challenging elements of Britain's history – such as the refusal to accept more refugees or the questions over whether more could have been done to disrupt the Final Solution – Britain reflects on its responsibilities in the world today. In educating young people about the Holocaust, Britain reaffirms its commitment to stand up against prejudice and hatred in all its forms. The prize is empathetic citizens with tolerance for the beliefs and cultures of others. But eternal vigilance is needed to instil this in every generation (Cabinet Office 2015: 9).

Benedict Anderson (1991) famously coined the phrase 'imagined community' to emphasise the manner in which disparate groups and otherwise unconnected individuals are encouraged to perceive themselves as bound together in a nation through multiple symbolic and rhetorical devices rather than through actual familial or otherwise concrete practical ties. Articulations of the past are crucial here; for as Seixas (2004: 5) notes and many have argued, there is a self-evident and essential relationship between notions of memory and identity – whether that of an individual or of a collective such as 'the nation' (see also Olick 2003 and Smith 1999).

Again, education has a profoundly important role to play in this respect. As Gellner (1983), Green (2013) and others have argued, public education was one of the founding pillars of the modern nation-state (see also Lowe 1999), and the history curriculum in particular a principle platform through which constructions of the national story could be told (Tormey 2006; Grosevnor and Lawn 2001). However, the temporally and spatially bound notion of a nation or national collective has *always* been problematic (Benhabib 2005; Hobsbawm 1990), and has increasingly been challenged by the proliferation of global movement of both people and ideas (see, for example, Held and McGrew 2003; Appadurai 1996). The way we imagine ourselves in the twenty-first century is no longer – if it ever was – fixed simply to a national frame (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). *Trans*national forms of identification, and of 'remembering', are being increasingly articulated and, as Levy and Sznaider (2002; 2006) and Alexander (2003) have identified, representations of the Holocaust are pivotal within these (see also Pakier and Stråth 2010).

As Bell (2009: 253) helpfully summarises, Alexander (2003) 'traces how the Holocaust became "the dominant symbolic representation of evil" during the second half of the twentieth century' and goes on to suggest that 'this historical process underpins the development of a supranational moral universalism' aimed at attempting to 'reduce the probability of such events occurring again'. For Levy and Sznaider (2002), the global spread of a shared discursive framing of the Holocaust – as a yardstick for international politics and transnational values – serves as the foundation of what they term 'cosmopolitan memory'. Essentially, across different national contexts, the Holocaust is foremost presented in terms of its universal lessons and as 'a traumatic event for all of humankind' (Alexander 2003: 28).

In actual fact, as in most nuanced analyses of the wider 'globalisation debate', global impulses never entirely displace the national (Held and McGrew 2003; Hirst and Thompson 1999). Rather, there is a dialectic relationship between *trans*national and national imaginaries, and sensibilities. In a striking illustration of this, the current section of our discussion opened with a statement taken from the final report produced by the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission. In it, the values of tolerance and of vigilance against prejudice are articulated directly with reference to commemoration of the Holocaust and against a specifically British frame: 'Ensuring that the memory and the lessons of the

Holocaust are never forgotten lies at the heart of Britain's values as a nation' (Cabinet Office 2015: 9).

The emphasis placed upon 'memory' and 'commemoration' in the Commission's report is also important to note. In its executive summary and introduction – published under the title *Britain's Promise to Remember* – there are 17 individual uses of the word 'memory'. By comparison, the term 'history' is used only eight times. But it is far from clear whether or not a collective like the British nation can really be understood to 'remember' in the same sense that an individual does. Within the growing interdisciplinary field of memory studies, this issue remains open to competing interpretation and debate (see, for example, Halbwachs 1992; Wertsch 2002; Assman 2006).

While we will not attempt to resolve this discussion in these pages, Duncan Bell's observations are instructive here. Bell argues that notions of collective memory are, for the most part, metaphorical at best, and the processes through which a community (re)constructs a shared history for future generations is not analogous to how an individual's memory works (for a competing argument see Anastasio *et al*. 2012). For Bell:

> Memory is a concept that is readily employed to represent a whole host of different social practices, cognitive processes and representational strategies and what gets submerged, flattened out, is the nuance, texture and often contradictory forces and tensions of history and politics. In particular it can elide the manner in which such 'memories' are constructed through acts of manipulation through the atavistic play of power' (Bell 2003: 71).

> This is not to say that our shared understanding(s), conceptualization(s) or representation(s) of past events … are unimportant, but rather that they should not be classified as truly mnemonic (Bell 2003: 64).

Instead of 'memory', Bell argues that we should conceive of these sorts of shared understandings as 'mythical' in the sense that we have already explored. Again, almost by definition, 'memory' as 'myth' presents simplified stories and obscures complexity. This matters with respect to our contemporary relationship(s) with the Holocaust. For, in various ways, it is precisely 'memory' and 'commemoration' that have been prioritised. A speech given by Prime Minister David Cameron at the launch of the Holocaust Commission makes this position clear:

> There will be a time when it won't be possible for survivors to go into our schools and to talk about their experiences, and to make sure we learn the lessons of the dreadful events that happened.

And so, the sacred task is to think, '*How are we best going to remember, to commemorate and to educate future generations of children?*' In 50 years' time, in 2064, when a young British Christian child or a young British Muslim child or a young British Jewish child wants to learn about the Holocaust, and we as a country want them to learn about the Holocaust, where are they going to go? Who are they going to listen to? What images will they see? *How can we make sure in 2064 that it is as vibrant and strong a memory as it is today?* (David Cameron, 27 January 2014, emphasis added)*.

Both Cameron's statement and the extract from the Holocaust Commission at the start of this section are clear that it is not just the Holocaust that must be vigilantly 'remembered' but more specifically its 'lessons' for the present day.

Equally, we could draw examples from the earlier Labour government's official framing for the introduction of an annual Holocaust Memorial Day as an intervention intended 'to ensure the terrible crimes against humanity committed during the Holocaust are never forgotten and its relevance for each new generation is understood' (David Blunkett quoted in Pearce 2014: 76). As Pearce has argued, 'quite explicitly then, commemoration and education were to be amalgamated together in the pursuit of these goals. Schools were identified as essential hubs' (Pearce 2014: 76).

It is important to clarify that this is not to dismiss the importance of remembrance and commemoration. Historian Jay Winter (2006: 55–6) offers a compelling case for exactly this form of memory work when he suggests it can be:

> …a way of confronting the Holocaust at the very moment that the survivors are steadily passing away [in order] to capture those voices, those faces, and through them to establish a bridge to the world of European Jewry that the Nazis succeeded in destroying.

The point remains however, that contrary to the compelling rhetoric of successive British governments and others working in this field, there are very important distinctions to make between education and commemoration: 'remembering' *that* something happened is not the same as 'learning' in the sense of grappling with the complexities and contingencies of *why* it happened (see also Gross and Stevick 2010). Eckmann (2010: 10) argues this point very clearly:

> …it is important to counter a common misinterpretation: that Holocaust education is above all a duty of memory. In fact, it is first and foremost a duty of history: the duty to transmit and to teach and learn the history. Too much emphasis

has been placed on the duties of memory and of commemoration, and some students react negatively to this. Even if one aim … is to keep alive the memory of the victims, commemoration does not have the same meaning for everyone; for some it means holding onto the memory of the death, and preserving one's group identity, while for others it means taking responsibility for one's own history. My intent is not to oppose memory and history, nor to choose between them, but rather to emphasize the need to distinguish between them, and to focus on both, according to the educational context.

But what is the implication of arguments such as these for the current study? Our contention earlier in this chapter was that all knowledge and understanding is socially situated and, as a consequence, that the survey responses and interview contributions given by students were likely to reflect wider sociocultural and political frames. Our argument here, then, is that the contemporary emphasis on memory and commemoration – and of simplified, universal 'lessons' for the present – is an important part of the context against which the research findings reported in the following chapters should be understood.

## What distinguishes the current study from previous empirical research?

In preparation for this study, a catalogue of almost 350 individual references to journal articles, books, chapters, research reports, summaries, conference papers and unpublished doctoral theses was compiled. These were identified through academic databases, including the British Educational Index, the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences and the Education Research Information Centre, using key-word searches on terms such as 'Holocaust' and/or '*Shoah*' with 'education', 'knowledge', 'learn(ing)', 'teach(ing)' and/or 'schools'. Only materials published in English or available in English translation were reviewed. Of these, 125 reported original empirical research. This included:

- analysis of textbooks and/or policy frameworks (for example, Schar and Sperison 2010; Bromley and Russell 2010; Stevick 2010; Boersema and Schimmel 2008)
- interpretive analysis of visual materials and museum exhibits (Adams 1999, 2008; Clark 2007a; Lisle 2006)
- classroom-based ethnographies (for example, Meseth and Proske 2010; Zembylas and Bekerman 2008, 2011; Jennings 2010; Misco 2008, 2010; Schweber 2008a, 2008b)

- studies based on qualitative interviews with students (Rutland 2010; Short 1991, 1997, 2005; Carrington and Short 1997) and their teachers (Bekerman and Zembylas 2010a; 2010b; Russell 2005; Short 2001; Hector 2000; Supple 1992)
- formal evaluations and impact studies of specific educational programmes (for example, Cowan and Maitles 2005, 2007, 2011; Bastel *et al*. 2010; Spalding *et al*. 2007; Maitles and Cowan 2004; Barr 2010; Schultz *et al*. 2001)
- variously conceived situated studies of both teachers' and students' experience of and attitudes towards educational encounters with the Holocaust in schools (for example, Richardson 2012; Meliza 2011, Kuehner and Langer 2010; Clements 2007; Cowan and Maitles 1999; Burke 1998, 2003).

It is not possible to provide a comprehensive commentary on the many and varied significant findings, theoretical frameworks or methodological approaches reflected in this body of scholarship. Instead we will reflect upon some of the more distinctive and distinguishing features of the Centre for Holocaust Education's research focus and approach.

### Scale

One immediately striking feature of the current study is its unprecedented scale. With more than 8,000 students participating in the final survey and focus groups, we believe this to be the largest single-nation study in this field. The closest available international comparisons include:

- a survey of over 5,000 Swedish teachers' experiences and perceptions of teaching about the Holocaust (Lange 2008)
- a study of the links between knowledge of the Holocaust and 'democratic attitudes' among 1,242 Belgian secondary school-aged students (Kavadias 2004)
- a comparative study of 1,120 German and 1,137 Israeli school students, which again focused upon both knowledge and understanding, and social and political attitudes (Bar-On *et al*. 1993)
- a study of social influences upon Holocaust knowledge which drew on the responses of 1,003 university students in America (Bischoping 1996).

In the UK context, the largest-scale existing relevant empirical studies were:

- the Centre's own research with more than 2,000 English secondary school teachers, (Pettigrew *et al*. 2009)

- the inclusion of 978 British adult respondents within a seven-nation comparative study undertaken on behalf of the American Jewish Committee (Smith 2005)
- a survey of 1,200 English secondary school students conducted for the London Jewish Cultural Centre in 2009.

## Focus on knowledge and understanding

Among all 125 research studies referenced, only a small minority were explicitly focused on knowledge and/or understanding of the Holocaust. In addition to those already listed, these included Gray (2014a), Shamai *et al*. (2004), Ivanova (2004) and Lazar *et al*. (2004). More commonly, a measurement for 'knowledge' was included as a potential variable to be examined alongside and/or correlated with others including:

- levels of antisemitism (for example, Gordon *et al*. 2004)
- attitudes towards others (Shamai *et al*. 2004)
- attitudes to 'diversity' (Jedwab 2010)
- dimensions of identity (Auron *et al*. 1994).

Several studies focused exclusively on issues related to the impact of teaching and/or learning about the Holocaust upon attitudes and/or beliefs (for example, Rosen and Salomon 2011; Rutland 2010; Cowan and Maitless 2007; Burke 2003).

Only a small minority of studies framed their research primarily in terms of 'understanding' (see, for example, Lazar *et al*. 2004, 2009; Ivanova 2004), but both knowledge and understanding were highlighted within those studies whose explicit focus was teaching and/or learning in schools (for example, Richardson 2012; Meliza 2011 and Clements 2007).

## Measurement of 'knowledge' and its rationale

Among those studies with an explicit focus on knowledge content, the most common methodology employed, especially among the larger-scale studies, was a multiple-choice survey instrument (see, for example, Lange 2008; Romi and Lev 2007; Kavadias 2004; Smith 2005; Gordon *et al*. 2004; Shamai *et al*. 2004). Significantly, in all except two of these studies, answers given by individuals to knowledge-based multiple-choice questions were combined, for analysis, to create a single, aggregate score to represent their knowledge across all the questions and subjects covered. In other words, these researchers appeared to be interested only in comparing total levels of knowledge rather than specific content.

Critically, there was seldom any explicit discussion of the rationale behind the inclusion of individual questions. Notable exceptions were Gray (2014a) and Lange (2008). This is an important distinction in the focus and framing of the Centre for Holocaust Education's research. In our own reporting, where knowledge-related survey data is presented, it is prefaced by a clear explanation and commentary on why this specific knowledge-content was considered an important dimension of the research.

It is also notable that only two other studies (Bischoping 1996 and Bar-On *et al*. 1993) combined a large-scale quantitative analysis with in-depth qualitative work. As a consequence, the contextualised and problematised framing of 'knowledge' with which we opened the current chapter is missing from much of this research (for a similar criticism, see Jedwab 2010 and Bischoping 1998).

Alternative methods used to examine knowledge and, in particular, understanding, included invitations for respondents to provide free-text descriptions of – or associations with – the Holocaust (see, for example, Lazar *et al*. 2009; Ivanova 2004; Bischoping 1996). The practicalities of robustly analysing free-text, qualitative responses meant that these studies tended to be much smaller in terms of scale than those reliant on questions that could be answered through multiple choice.

## Limitations of the current study and intentions for future research

Many of the most informative insights and conceptually rich analyses offered within previous studies were drawn from long-term ethnographic fieldwork and other qualitative research involving much smaller numbers of students, teachers or schools (see, for example, Richardson 2012; Meseth and Proske 2010; Misco 2008; Schweber 2008a, 2008b). This is clearly the most appropriate methodology to use in studies explicitly designed to fully probe and critically consider the socially situated and context-dependent manners in which meaning of and from the Holocaust is made.

Our own remit was to offer a nationwide analysis of student knowledge and understanding so it was neither possible, nor appropriate, to employ such long-term and tightly focused ethnographic techniques. However, we consider that a number of the findings and arguments advanced in the following chapters could offer an instructive basis from which to build future, smaller-scale but embedded classroom studies of this sort.

We also acknowledge the very important contributions made by scholars whose focus is not on historical-content knowledge but who offer alternative disciplinary framings or focus upon the

relationship between encounters with the Holocaust and individuals' spiritual, moral and/or civic learning as well as their affective and attitudinal response (see, for example, Clements 2007; Cowan and Maitles 2005, 2007; Burke 2003; Short 2001; Carrington and Short 1997). Our own initial research design, outlined in Chapter 2, did include exploration of a number of attitudinal measures. However, given the complexity of this additional data and the huge volume of material already interrogated within the following chapters, we considered it would be more appropriate, and more responsible, to examine and publish this material in a separate research report.

There is one final important point to make about the Centre for Holocaust Education's report in relation to previous empirical studies, and within the field of teaching and learning about the Holocaust in broader terms. Many of the 125 studies cited above were either explicitly or implicitly focused upon the evaluation of a specific educational programme or were concerned to demonstrate in various ways the 'impact' of what was being taught and learned. It must be emphasised that neither the current report, nor the research from which it is drawn were intended to serve as a commentary on existing education provision about the Holocaust in England's secondary schools. Instead, the research was designed and carried out in order to provide a robust yet nuanced overview of the form and content of existing knowledge and understanding among the nation's 11 to 18 year olds. As such, we offer our findings and analyses as a tool to be drawn upon – though perhaps not fully digested in just one sitting – by teachers, teacher-educators, policymakers, non-governmental organisations and other researchers working in this and related fields.

## How is the report structured?

In order to guide the reader through the following pages, this report has been organised into four sections:

- Part I 'Introductions' includes this opening chapter and a second chapter which details the full research methodology employed.
- Part II, 'Conceptions and encounters' includes Chapters 3 and 4 and provides a commentary on students' general awareness of the Holocaust, and their experience of and attitudes towards encountering this subject both within and outside of schools.

- Part III is the longest section of this report. It comprises three chapters prefaced by their own short introductory text, each of which critically examines the form and content of student knowledge and understanding of specific aspects of this history. Chapter 5 asks what students know and understand about different victim groups targeted by the Nazis and their collaborators, Chapter 6 focuses on perpetration and issues of responsibility, while Chapter 7 considers students' understanding of when and where the Holocaust happened and the role that the British government and British people played.
- Chapter 8 constitutes the final 'Recommendations' section of this report and offers reflection on how the research might best be used to inform and plan teaching and learning of the Holocaust in England's secondary schools and, potentially, further afield.

Chapters 1 to 7 are each structured around a series of key framing questions which also function as subheads listed at the start of each chapter to facilitate a modular approach to digesting the full report. Each chapter begins with a brief list of some of its central findings and arguments and ends with a short summary.

A full version of the survey instrument used with students is reproduced as Appendix 1 of this report. It is hoped that this will act as a point of reference to help clarify and contextualise the many findings discussed in the following chapters. It is also intended that parts of the survey could act as a tool for teachers in order to gauge their own students' prior knowledge and perspectives, and plan teaching accordingly.

## Summary

- This chapter argued that learning is not reducible to knowledge-acquisition and that, as a consequence, the current study is concerned to do more than simply catalogue what students appear to know.
- The chapter also argued that specific knowledge-content does matter, especially with regard to the forms of understanding it allows or impedes. It is the position of the Centre for Holocaust Education that secure historical knowledge is an important basis from which powerful understandings of – and from – the Holocaust can ultimately be drawn, and it is for this reason that a disciplinary historical focus is given to many of the subsequent chapters in this report.

- The chapter described and provided evidence of a strong commitment to ensuring a central position for the Holocaust in the English education system. This has been reflected in all five versions of the National Curriculum followed in state-maintained secondary schools since 1991. It has also been articulated through the establishment and focus of work around the UK's annual Holocaust Memorial Day and, most recently, through the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission. Previous research from the Centre for Holocaust Education affirmed this same support and commitment among teachers from England's secondary schools.
- In spite of – arguably *because of* – the high rhetorical importance placed upon the subject by teachers, politicians and policymakers, the chapter also noted that clear and explicit articulations of *why* the Holocaust is educationally important are seldom made. As a consequence, many teachers can be left uncertain as to what content to include or to prioritise within often limited curriculum time.
- Following Cole (1999), Bell (2003) and Langer (1995a), the chapter suggested that it is important to distinguish between the Holocaust as history, and the mythic Holocaust that is represented and/or 'remembered' within wider popular culture and political debate.
- Knowledge and understanding are both socially situated phenomena. What students know about the Holocaust and what they then do with that knowledge are both impacted upon by wider sociocultural frames. In the context of contemporary Britain, the chapter argued that such framings are commonly characterised by an emphasis on 'memory' and 'commemoration' over critical and confronting engagements with the complexity of this history.
- In preparation for this study, a database of more than 350 broadly related academic references were collated and, within these, 125 original empirical studies were identified. Review of the previous existing literature confirmed that the Centre for Holocaust Education's research is unprecedented in terms of both scope and scale; built on the survey responses of almost 8,000 secondary school students *and* qualitative focus-group interview with a further 244 in schools across England, this is both the largest and most detailed study of its kind.

# 2.

## Methodology

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### Key questions

1. How was the survey developed?
2. What was the final content of the survey?
3. How did we select schools to participate?
4. Who took part in the survey?
5. How was the survey introduced to students?
6. How was the survey data analysed?
7. How did we select schools and individual students to take part in the focus groups?
8. Who took part in the focus groups?
9. How were the focus groups conducted?
10. What were students asked and why?
11. How was the focus-group data analysed?

### Key points

1. This research was a mixed-method study using both quantitative and qualitative methods so that we could examine different types of research questions.
2. A survey enabled us to examine questions about the prevalence of particular knowledge content, common associations, and misconceptions and attitudes among a large number of students. (The research survey is reproduced in Appendix 1 of this report).
3. Focus-group discussions conducted with a smaller number of students enabled us to follow up interesting issues – or themes – highlighted by the survey. It also allowed us to explore students' understanding and the nuance and detail of the knowledge, opinions and attitudes that they held.
4. Overall, more than 9,500 students contributed to the research by participating in the pilot studies, completing the survey and sharing their views in focus groups.
5. The method for the survey is outlined in Part 1 of this chapter, and the method for the focus groups is outlined in Part 2.

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### PART 1: SURVEY

### How was the survey developed?

The aim of the survey was to examine students' knowledge about the Holocaust, their exposure to Holocaust education, their attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust, and their attitudes towards fairness and equality in general and for perceived 'out-groups' – social groups with which they do not identify (Spears 2007). Consequently, the scales and questions included in the survey sought to tap into these areas. The development of the survey was extensive and included:

- a detailed review of research in Holocaust education (as outlined in Chapter 1)
- engagement with teachers
- consultation with experts in Holocaust education
- discussions with students about the accessibility of the instructions and content of the survey
- pilot studies to assess the reliability of the survey questions and identify ways to refine the data-collection process.

Of particular note were two large pilot studies involving 900 students from nine schools.

## Pilot study 1

In the first of these studies, 555 students (282 girls, 273 boys) from seven schools took part. The students were from Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12. All participants completed a paper version of the survey. Predominantly, the survey comprised questions we developed to explore students' substantive knowledge of the Holocaust, their recognition of associated words and images, and the sources of information and ideas about the Holocaust that they were likely to draw upon. Additionally, the pilot survey included attitudinal scales to tap into:

- students' personal interest in other people at local, national and international levels (to explore individual agency and responsibility)
- students' orientations towards school
- students' attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust.

The scale to measure students' attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust was created by the research team. The other attitudinal scales were developed using modified versions of questions from the IEA Civic Knowledge and Engagement Study (Amadeo *et al*. 2002).

For the knowledge-based questions, students' responses were examined to determine the extent to which they were able to provide 'correct' or 'incorrect' answers as judged against current historiography. 'Incorrect' answers were examined to give insight into common misconceptions about the Holocaust. Total scores were calculated for each student, to give an indication of levels of knowledge across all of the questions in the survey. Mean scores were also calculated to explore differences in knowledge between year groups.

The attitudinal scales were assessed for reliability using Principal Components Analysis (PCA) and by calculating the Cronbach's alpha. For each scale, PCA was used to explore how many underlying dimensions of the construct were being measured. Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha$) was used to assess the internal reliability of each scale, giving an indication of how consistent each student was when responding to the questions. We sought to include scales where the Cronbach's alpha was above 0.7, indicating an acceptable level of reliability (Field 2013).

These analyses revealed some problems with the individual agency and responsibility scale – namely that students were answering the questions in an inconsistent manner and the scale lacked internal reliability (that is, the Cronbach's alpha was below 0.7). Consequently, this scale was removed from the survey and replaced with three scales that have previously been used in other research. The Beliefs in a Just World (Others) Scale was introduced to the survey because it assesses the extent that respondents think the world is a just place and so gives insight into attitudes towards fairness. We used the version that has been adapted for use with adolescents and found to have good internal reliability (Fox *et al*. 2010).

To tap into students' attitudes towards perceived 'out-groups', we included scales to measure cultural xenophobia and blatant racism (Elchardus and Spruyt 2014). Elchardus and Spruyt reported that both scales showed a high level of internal reliability (both had Cronbach's alphas above 0.8), however they were originally used with university students. In view of this, the questions in both scales were modified and our second pilot study was used as an opportunity to examine if this made them accessible to secondary school students.

## Pilot study 2

The scales to examine orientations towards school and attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust were retained in the second survey, but some of the questions were refined to improve clarity. The knowledge-content-based questions were also kept in the survey, with just a small number of amendments to improve the wording.

The first pilot study also highlighted that, where possible, an online version of the survey was preferable to a paper version as an online version meant that a 'question-skip facility' could be used. This enabled us to modify the questions that students were presented with based on their earlier answers. For example, if students indicated reading books about the Holocaust, they were presented with a list of books so they could identify which ones they had read; if they had not read any books about the Holocaust they were moved on to a different question. This helped to reduce confusion for the students as they completed the survey, because they were not asked questions that were irrelevant to them. Using an online survey also meant that data could be uploaded from the survey platform (Survey Monkey) into IBM SPSS for analysis. This reduced errors that can occur through manual data entry.

In view of all of this, the aim of the second pilot study was to review the data-collection process when using the online version of the survey, as well as evaluating the modifications made. For this pilot study, 345 students (171 girls and 174 boys) from two schools took part. The students were in years 7 to 12.

As for the first pilot study, descriptive statistics were calculated for each scale and reliability

analyses were performed (PCA and Cronbach's alpha). The knowledge-based questions were retained, as well as the scale measuring attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust, and the scale to measure beliefs in a just world.

However, the scales measuring cultural xenophobia and blatant racism were removed because reliability analyses suggested that younger students did not understand all of the questions. That is, even though we modified these scales there was still little consistency in how younger students answered the questions. Consequently, we replaced them with a scale to measure attitudes towards equal rights for immigrants (Schulz *et al*. 2010) and a scale to measure attitudes towards neighbourhood diversity (Schulz *et al*. 2011). These scales enabled us to tap into students' attitudes towards equality for perceived 'out-groups' and, crucially, these measures have been used with large numbers of adolescents and found to have high internal reliability (Cronbach's alphas above 0.8).

## What was the final content of the survey?

The majority of students (87.2 per cent) completed the online version of the survey. In schools where they did not have access to computers for the survey, or where technical problems were encountered, students completed the paper version of the survey. For the most part the online version of the survey was identical to the paper version. However, as outlined above, some questions on the online version benefited from using the question skip facility, which meant that some (online) students were not presented with questions judged to be irrelevant in view of their responses to previous question(s).

The final version of the survey is reproduced in Appendix 1 of this report. It comprised a series of questions and scales to examine:

■ demographic information
■ substantive knowledge of the Holocaust
■ recognition of people/places/events related to the Holocaust
■ recognition of images related to the Holocaust
■ understanding of key words
■ knowledge of other genocides
■ experiences of learning about the Holocaust
■ attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust
■ vocabulary skills
■ attitudes towards the purpose of school*
■ just-world beliefs*
■ attitudes towards equal rights for immigrants*
■ attitudes towards neighbourhood diversity*.

With the exception of those marked with an asterisk, the data from all of the survey questions and scales is discussed in this report. As described in Chapter 1, the report focuses primarily on students' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust, the sources of such knowledge and students' attitudes towards learning about this history. Thus, exploration of students' attitudes towards equality for perceived 'out-groups', their just-world beliefs and how these variables relate to Holocaust knowledge are not discussed in this report and will instead be presented in a future publication. Further information on these scales is given in Appendix 2 of this report.

### Demographic information

Students were first asked a series of demographic questions including their year group, gender, age, birthplace, religion, ethnic group and postcode. There was also a question to determine how many books students had in their home which has been used in previous cross-country research as an indicator of students' socioeconomic background (Hanushek and Woessmann 2011). (Survey questions 1 to 12).

### Substantive knowledge of the Holocaust

As described in Chapter 1, all the substantive knowledge questions in the final version of the survey were included because their specific knowledge content contributes to or impedes students' capacity to understand.

There were three questions requiring free-text responses (survey questions 30, 40 and 42). They asked students to:

■ describe in a few sentences what they thought the Holocaust was
■ state who they thought the victims of the Holocaust were
■ state who they thought was responsible for the Holocaust.

Responses to these questions were analysed using a numerical coding framework so that the data could be included in statistical analyses (see Appendix 3).

Students were given four statements about Nazi victims and asked to identify which group or group(s) they applied to (survey questions 54 to 57). So, for example, after the statement, 'They could avoid Nazi persecution if they gave up their beliefs' (question 56), the questionnaire listed 'Jews', 'Jehovah's Witnesses', 'Roma and Sinti (Gypsies)' and 'Poles', and students could select as many as they thought appropriate to the statement.

The remainder of the substantive knowledge questions were multiple-choice questions (survey questions 38, 39, 44 to 53, and 58 to 67). Students

were asked questions such as: 'Approximately how many Jews in all of Europe were killed during the Holocaust?' A list of possible answers was presented and students were asked to select the correct one. Each of these questions was accompanied by a confidence question, where students were asked to indicate their level of confidence in the answer they selected, using the following four-point Likert scale, in which:
1 = I don't know the answer – this was just a guess
2 = I am not very confident in the answer
3 = I am fairly confident in the answer
4 = I am very confident in this answer.
The confidence questions provided an indication of what students thought they knew about the Holocaust. This meant it was possible to determine whether correct answers reflected students' genuine knowledge, rather than simply being an auspicious guess, and also whether students' incorrect answers to the knowledge questions were due to fixed misconceptions. The follow-up confidence question was also used with the three questions requiring free-text responses.

Eleven of the substantive knowledge questions asked students to choose the one correct answer from a list (survey questions 38, 44, 46, 48, 50, 52, 58, 60, 62, 64, 66). Students' accuracy across these questions was examined by calculating how many they answered correctly. This gave each student a total score from 0 (they answered all questions incorrectly) to 11 (they answered all questions correctly). This also enabled us to calculate the mean of the total scores for each year group so that we could examine differences between groups.

A total score for students' level of confidence across the multiple choice substantive knowledge questions was also calculated. Students' scores ranged from 11 (they reported they had guessed all of their answers) to 44 (they were very confident in all of their answers).

## Recognition of people/places/events

Students were provided with a list of 20 people, places and events, and asked to identify which of them were related to the Holocaust by ticking 'Yes', 'No' or 'Don't know' (13 words were relevant and 7 were not). (Survey question 31)

## Recognition of images

Six images related to the Holocaust were examined (survey questions 32 to 37). They were:

- the entrance to Auschwitz concentration camp
- Anne Frank
- a film still from *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*
- Adolf Hitler

- an identification tattoo on the arm of a former Auschwitz prisoner
- the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin.

The question-skip facility was used in the online version of the survey so that students were first asked if they recognised what was being shown in the image. If they said they did not recognise it, the next image was presented. If they said they did recognise it, they were presented with four options for what the image could be showing and asked to pick the correct one. In the paper version of the survey, students were only shown the list of options and were not first asked whether or not they recognised what was being shown in the image.

## Key words

Students were asked if they recognised five key terms: 'racism', 'antisemitism', 'Islamophobia', 'homophobia', and 'genocide' (survey questions 24 to 28). In the online survey, using the question-skip facility, when students said they recognised a word they were presented with a corresponding list of four definitions and had to select the correct definition. In the paper version, where the question-skip facility could not be used, students were only presented with the definitions (so were not first asked whether or not they recognised the word).

## Experiences of learning about the Holocaust

Students were asked whether all students should learn about the Holocaust in school (response options: 'Yes'; 'No'; 'Don't know') and whether they themselves had learned about the Holocaust in school (response options: 'Yes, definitely'; 'Yes, I think so'; 'Maybe'; 'No, I don't think so'; 'No, definitely not') (survey questions 68 and 69). Students who had learned about the Holocaust in school were asked to:

- indicate what year group they were in when they first learned about the Holocaust
- identify the subject(s) where they had learned about it
- say whether or not they had learned about the Holocaust since September 2013 (that is, during the school year in which the survey was completed – survey questions 70 to 72).

Students were then asked if they had heard about the Holocaust outside of school (response options: 'Yes, definitely'; 'Yes, I think so'; 'Maybe'; 'No, I don't think so'; 'No, definitely not') (survey question 73). They were also asked to indicate if they had read any books about the Holocaust (response options:

'Yes'; 'No'; 'Don't know'). In the online version of the survey, the question-skip facility ensured that only students who responded 'Yes' or 'Don't know' were presented with a list of options in order to indicate which books they had read. In the paper version, all students were presented with the list of books regardless of whether or not they had read books about the Holocaust (survey questions 74 and 75). Selected on the basis of previous exploratory research the books listed were: *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*; *Hana's Suitcase*; *The Diary of Anne Frank*; and school textbooks. Students could also name other books they had read.

The next question asked students if they had seen any films or television programmes about the Holocaust (survey questions 76 and 77). Again the question-skip facility was used in the online survey so that only students who indicated that they had watched a film or TV programme were presented with the following list (again informed by previous exploratory research): *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*; *The Pianist*; *Schindler's List*; *Defiance*, a TV documentary. Students could also name other films or TV programmes they had watched.

The following learning experiences were also examined (survey questions 79 and 88):

■ listening to a survivor talk about their experience
■ visiting the site of a former concentration or death camp
■ using textbooks about the Holocaust
■ visiting a museum to learn about the Holocaust
■ taking part in an event to mark Holocaust Memorial Day.

For each experience, students were first asked if they had participated in the activity (response options: 'Yes'; 'No'; 'Not sure'). The question-skip facility was used online so that only students responding 'Yes' or 'Not sure' were presented with a four-item subscale to find out more about the experience. The four-item subscale contained the following statements:

■ It helped me to understand how and/or why the Holocaust happened
■ It made what happened during the Holocaust feel more real to me
■ It was upsetting
■ It was boring

For each statement, students were asked to indicate the extent they (dis)agreed with each statement using a four-point Likert scale where 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 4 = 'strongly agree'.

Towards the end of the survey (questions 89 and 90), students were asked first to assess their own knowledge of the Holocaust by selecting one of the following statements:

■ I don't know anything about the Holocaust
■ I know a little about the Holocaust
■ I know quite a lot about the Holocaust
■ I know lots about the Holocaust.

They were then asked if they would like to learn more about the Holocaust (response options: 'Yes'; 'No'; 'Not sure').

## Other genocides

Students were asked if they had learned about any of the following genocides or mass killings: Armenians (in the former Ottoman Empire); Cambodia; Rwanda; Bosnia (in the former Yugoslavia); Darfur (in Sudan); the Democratic Republic of Congo (survey question 78).

## Attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust

During the pilot studies a scale was developed to measure students' attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust and this was used in the final version (survey question 91). The scale comprised 11 statements regarding learning about the Holocaust, for example: 'Young people should learn about the Holocaust to stop something like that from happening again'. Responses were made using a four-point Likert scale where 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 4 = 'strongly agree'.

Four of the items were negatively worded (for example, 'Too much time in school is spent learning about the Holocaust'), and were recoded for analysis, meaning that the numbers ascribed in the Likert scale when students responded to positively worded statements (1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree) were turned on their heads (so that 1 = strongly agree, etc.) to cancel out negatively worded statements, ensuring consistency in the degree of positivity and negativity for students' answers. Consequently, higher scores continued to represent more positive attitudes. Students' responses were then added up to give a total attitude score. The minimum total score that students could achieve was 11 (they showed a highly negative attitude on all statements) and the maximum they could score was 44 (they showed a highly positive attitude on all statements). Thus, the higher that a student's total score appeared on this scale, the more positive their attitude towards learning about the Holocaust.

Mean scores were also calculated for this scale to examine differences between groups, for example differences between year groups and between boys and girls. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.83 indicating that it had good internal reliability.

## Vocabulary test

We expected that students' level of knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust would be influenced to some extent by their ability level, including their vocabulary and comprehension skills. The survey included a series of questions to tap into this by using a subset of questions from the vocabulary test used in the 1986 Birth Cohort Study (Centre for Longitudinal Studies 2015), and informed by the Age of Acquisition Databases (Centre for Reading Research 2012).

Seven 'target words' were used, and for each target word five other words were presented (survey questions 17 to 23). Within these five words was a synonym for the target word, and students were asked to identify this. For example, for the target word 'begin', the five synonyms presented were: 'ask', 'start', 'plain', 'over' and 'away'. Students therefore had to correctly identify that 'start' meant the same as 'begin'. Students were given a total score (out of 7) for this scale, where a higher score demonstrated a larger vocabulary.

## How did we select schools to participate?

For the survey element of the research, we developed a sampling frame using a database of schools in England obtained from the Department for Education (DfE) in 2013. Schools were targeted to ensure the sample was broadly representative of:

1. the number of schools in the nine government regions
2. academic performance
3. the composition of different ethnic groups within each region.

These criteria were used because this was a national study and so it was important to include schools from across the country and ensure they were representative of the proportion of ethnic groups in England. Moreover, as the research primarily aimed to examine students' knowledge and understanding, it was important to include schools with a wide range of attainment levels. Student success in gaining five pass grades at GCSE (grades A*–C, including in maths and English), was used as an indicator of schools' academic performance.

We aimed to recruit at least 5,000 students for the study to reduce sampling bias and to increase the power of the statistical analyses. The 2011 Census data from the Office for National Statistics was used to ascertain the breakdown of ethnic groups within the nine regions, enabling us to calculate the aggregate percentage of individuals in each region who described themselves as being: from mixed/multiple ethnic groups; Asian / Asian British; Black / African / Caribbean / Black British; and from other ethnic groups – a large collective group henceforth referred to as BME (Black and minority ethnic). Using DfE data, the ethnic composition of every school was identified to determine whether it was above or below the BME proportion for its region.

At the time of developing the sampling frame,

Table 2.1 Number of students and schools included in the research analysis (by sampling-frame criteria)

| Region | Above National GCSE pass rate; above regional rate of BME groups | | Above National GCSE pass rate; below regional rate of BME groups | | Below National GCSE pass rate; above regional rate of BME groups | | Below National GCSE pass rate; below regional rate of BME groups | | Totals | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Students | Schools | Students | Schools | Students | Schools | Students | Schools | Students | Schools |
| East Midlands | 0 | 0 | 109 | 1 | 90 | 1 | 361 | 3 | 560 | 5 |
| East of England | 229 | 2 | 260 | 3 | 374 | 3 | 252 | 3 | 1,115 | 11 |
| London | 620 | 5 | 43 | 1 | 207 | 2 | 107 | 1 | 977 | 9 |
| North East | 0 | 0 | 184 | 2 | 106 | 1 | 210 | 2 | 500 | 5 |
| North West | 269 | 2 | 385 | 3 | 190 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 844 | 7 |
| South East | 84 | 1 | 332 | 4 | 284 | 2 | 419 | 5 | 1,119 | 12 |
| South West | 125 | 1 | 298 | 3 | 296 | 3 | 219 | 2 | 938 | 9 |
| West Midlands | 388 | 2 | 212 | 2 | 361 | 3 | 157 | 2 | 1,118 | 9 |
| Yorkshire & the Humber | 418 | 3 | 171 | 2 | 99 | 1 | 93 | 1 | 781 | 7 |
| Totals | 2,133 | 16 | 1,994 | 21 | 2,007 | 18 | 1,818 | 19 | 7,952 | 74 |

the most recent GCSE results available from the DfE were the 2012 results. In 2012, the national average for students achieving five or more A* to C grades (including maths and English) was 59 per cent. GCSE attainment data for each school was examined to determine whether the school was above or below the national average.

In sum, 74 schools took part. A breakdown of the number of schools that participated in relation to each criterion of the sampling frame is given in Table 2.1. We were able to recruit schools in each region for each of the criteria with the exception of three instances. For example, in the East Midlands we were unable to recruit a school with above national average GCSE grades and above the regional percentage of BME groups. We do acknowledge that this introduces some bias into the sample. However, schools from all nine regions, with different attainment levels and with ethnically diverse student populations were included and, as Table 2.2 goes on to demonstrate, our total sample was representative of national trends. With almost 8,000 student participants from 74 schools spread across the country, this represents an unprecedentedly extensive and detailed dataset.

## Who took part in the survey?

Head teachers were approached by letter to invite their school to participate. Initially, head teachers were able to select year group(s) to participate but, as the research progressed, more specific requests for year groups were made to ensure a larger proportion of Year 9 students participated. This is because our previous research indicated that the statutory requirement to teach students about the Holocaust is most often delivered in Year 9 (Pettigrew et al. 2009).

Once the head teacher gave consent, parents were contacted by letter to inform them about the research and to give them the opportunity to opt their children out. A research assistant then visited the school to meet students and explain what the survey was about. Students were told that their participation was voluntary and those who did not want to complete the survey were given another task. Thus, while a sampling framework was used to identify schools to participate, the schools and students who actually took part were volunteers (that is, they were selected by 'opportunity sampling').

A total of 8,074 students completed the survey from November 2013 until October 2014, although only 7,952 of them were included in statistical analyses because surveys affected by technical problems with Survey Monkey and those spoilt by students were removed (1.5 per cent of the sample). Slightly more girls (52.8 per cent) than boys participated in the research. As shown in Figure 2.1, students from year groups 7 to 13 took part, with the largest proportion of students in Year 9.

The majority of the students (90.1 per cent) reported they were born in England. Where students were not born in England, they named over 75 countries from around the world as their

Figure 2.1 Breakdown of sample by year group (percentage of students)
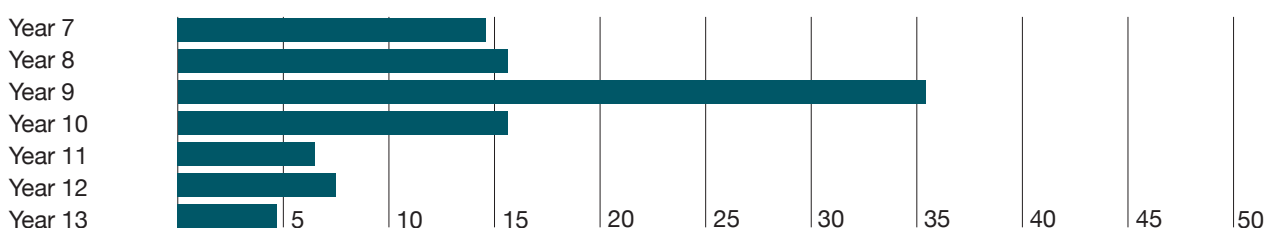


Figure 2.2 Student responses to survey question 8: 'Do you or your family belong to a particular religious group? If so, which one(s)?' (percentage of students)
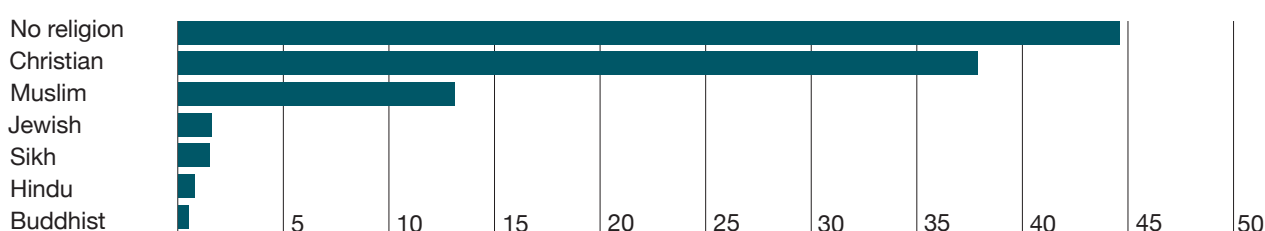
Table 2.2 Breakdown of sample by ethnic group (%)

| Ethnic group | Percentage |
|---|---|
| **White** | **73.3** |
| British, English, Welsh, Scottish or Northern Irish | 67.0 |
| Irish | 1.1 |
| Gypsy or Irish Traveller | 0.6 |
| Any other white category | 4.6 |
| **Asian / Asian British** | **12.9** |
| Indian | 2.3 |
| Pakistani | 6.4 |
| Bangladeshi | 2.1 |
| Chinese | 0.4 |
| Any other Asian background | 1.7 |
| **Black / African / Caribbean / Black British** | **6.4** |
| African | 2.5 |
| Caribbean | 1.2 |
| British | 2.2 |
| Any other Black / African / Caribbean background | 0.5 |
| **Mixed / multiple ethnic groups** | **5.8** |
| White and Black Caribbean | 1.9 |
| White and Black African | 0.8 |
| White and Asian | 1.6 |
| Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background | 1.5 |
| **Other ethnic group** | **1.6** |
| Arab | 0.9 |
| Any other | 0.7 |

birthplace. Poland, Pakistan and India were the most frequently cited countries (accounting for 1 per cent, 0.7 per cent and 0.4 per cent of the total sample, respectively). As shown in Figure 2.2, nearly 45 per cent of the sample reported that their family did not belong to any religious group and, of those who did identify their religious group(s), Christian was the most frequently identified, followed by Muslim.

The breakdown of the students by ethnic group is shown in Table 2.2. The majority of participants were White and the second largest ethnic group was Asian / Asian British. 6.4 per cent of students identified themselves as Black, African, Caribbean or Black British, 5.8 per cent of students were from Mixed / Multiple ethnic group categories, and 1.6 per cent reported that they belonged to another ethnic group. In 2013, when our sampling frame was developed, 25.3 per cent of students registered to attend secondary school in England were classified as being of minority ethnic origin (DfE, 2014), and so the sample was broadly representative of the national picture in 2013/14.

## How was the survey introduced to students?

For both the online and paper versions of the survey, the researcher introduced his/herself to the class and explained how to complete the survey. The researcher told the students that their participation was voluntary, that they could miss out any questions they did not want to answer, and that their responses would be anonymous and kept confidential. Students were asked to complete the survey individually and not to discuss their answers with their classmates until after everyone had finished.

Students worked through the questions at their own pace and asked the researcher for help if they did not understand anything. Due to the nature of the survey, researchers could not give students the answers to questions (students were told to make a guess if they did not know the answer). However, researchers could clarify the instructions for how to complete the survey questions, and assist students with reading the questions and/or response options.

## How was the survey data analysed?

Data from the paper surveys was entered manually into a database created in IBM SPSS. The online data was uploaded from Survey Monkey and transferred into the database. Analyses of the data included the following.

- For the knowledge-based questions, we looked at the frequency with which students gave each answer, and determined how many students responded correctly to each question. We also looked at their incorrect answers to explore the nature of students' misconceptions about the Holocaust.
- For the attitudinal scales, we conducted the reliability analyses (performed the Principle Component Analysis and calculated the Cronbach's alpha), described on page 24.
- For the knowledge-based questions and attitudinal scales, we calculated total scores, as described above. This meant that we had an overall score for students' performance on the knowledge-based questions. It also meant we had a score that represented students' overall attitude towards learning about the Holocaust.

- These total scores were used to generate the mean (average) of the total score for each year group (and for the entire sample). This enabled us to make comparisons between groups, for example, to note differences in the knowledge of each year group and in their attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust.
- We were also able to conduct more complex analyses. For example, we looked at groups' different attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust to (a) determine if these differences were statistically significant, and (b) explore the influence of other relevant factors, like vocabulary skills, on these findings.

## PART 2: FOCUS GROUPS

### How did we select schools and individual students to take part in the focus groups?

Seventeen schools took part in the focus groups, and twelve of these were recruited via their participation in the survey element. In these instances the schools had expressed an interest in taking part in other aspects of the research and so were approached when we were looking for schools to host the focus groups.

The other five participating schools were recruited to ensure that schools with specific characteristics participated (for example, schools where students had recently heard a Holocaust survivor talk, from under-represented regions, of different faiths and with ethnically diverse student bodies). It should be noted that increasing the diversity of schools that participated in the focus groups was not done in a systematic manner (as with the survey). However, we still sought to ensure representative variation where possible.

Head teachers were contacted by letter to invite their school to participate in the focus groups. Once the head teacher had given consent and identified a date on which the focus groups could take place, teachers identified specific class(es) to take part on the basis of the year groups we requested (to ensure that a range of year groups across the schools took part).

One week before the focus groups were due to take place the relevant teacher(s) explained to their class(es) that a researcher would be visiting their school. Students who expressed an interest in being part of the focus groups were given an information sheet to read and also a letter for their parents. The parents' letter explained what the research was about and gave parents the opportunity to opt their child

out of the study. On the day of the focus groups, the researcher checked whether each student still wanted to take part: even if they had expressed an interest to participate the previous week, they could still decide on the day not to take part. The researcher also checked whether any of these students had been opted out by their parents.

### Who took part in the focus groups?

In total, 244 students (119 girls and 125 boys) took part in the focus groups. A total of 49 focus groups were conducted, with four to eight students in each group. The details of the focus groups are summarised in the 'Focus group details' box (p. 32). Altogether, seven focus groups were conducted with Year 8 students, sixteen groups with Year 9, six with Year 10, one with Year 11, four with Year 12, three with Year 13, nine with a mix of Year 12 and 13 students, one with a mix of Year 8 and 9 students, one with a mix of Year 9 and 10 students, and one with a mix of Year 10 and 11 students.

### How were the focus groups conducted?

Each focus group lasted approximately one hour, and began with an introduction from the researcher to explain what a focus group was and what the students' participation would involve. The researcher explained that the focus group would be audio-recorded, with the students' permission, to get an accurate record of the discussion and that the recording would be typed into a transcript. Students were told that their name and any names they mentioned would not be included in the transcripts and that only the research team would have access to the recording and the transcript.

The nature of a focus group meant that confidentiality could not be guaranteed as everyone in the group would be privy to each other's opinions and ideas. For this reason, students were asked not to repeat the details of the discussion to other people outside the focus group and, as a further precaution, students were asked only to discuss things that they were comfortable for other people to hear. The researcher explained that s/he had a small number of questions to help guide the discussion, but other than that would say very little. The students were encouraged to talk about anything that seemed relevant and were reminded that they did not have to contribute to every question if they did not want to.

After this introduction, the researcher asked if the students still wanted to participate (and be recorded). Students were also advised that they could leave the discussion and return to their classroom at any time, without giving a reason.

## Focus group details

### KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE HOLOCAUST

120 students:
- 61 girls
- 59 boys

From Years 8 to 13, taking part in 24 focus groups:
- 3 focus groups with Year 8
- 7 focus groups with Year 9
- 5 focus groups with Year 10
- 3 focus groups with Year 12
- 3 focus groups with Year 13
- 3 focus groups with mixed Years 12 and 13

In 7 schools:
- 2 academy converters
- 1 academy sponsor-led
- 1 community school
- 1 voluntary-aided Church of England school
- 1 voluntary-aided Roman Catholic school
- 1 foundation school

Across 4 regions:
- East of England
- London
- North-east
- South-east

### SURVIVOR TESTIMONY

45 students:
- 22 girls
- 23 boys

From Years 9, 11, 12 and 13, taking part in 8 focus groups:
- 5 focus groups with Year 9
- 1 focus group with Year 11
- 1 focus group with Year 12
- 1 focus group with mixed Years 12 and 13

In 4 schools:
- 3 academy converters
- 1 voluntary-aided Jewish schools

Across 3 regions:
- London
- South-west
- Yorkshire and the Humber

### *THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PYJAMAS*

44 students:
- 13 girls
- 31 boys

From Years 8 to 13, taking part in 8 focus groups:
- 2 focus groups with Year 8
- 2 focus groups with Year 9
- 1 focus group with mixed Years 8 and 9
- 1 focus group with Year 10
- 1 focus group with mixed Years 10 and 11
- 1 focus group with mixed Years 12 and 13

In 3 schools:
- 1 foundation school
- 1 academy converter
- 1 voluntary-aided Roman Catholic school

Across 2 regions:
- London
- West Midlands

### ATTITUDES TO LEARNING ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

35 students:
- 23 girls
- 12 boys

From Years 8, 9, 10, 12 and 13, taking part in 9 focus groups:
- 2 focus groups with Year 8
- 2 focus groups with Year 9
- 1 focus group with mixed Years 9 and 10
- 4 focus groups with mixed Years 12 and 13

In 4 schools:
- 1 academy converter
- 1 community school
- 1 voluntary-aided Roman Catholic school
- 1 foundation school

Across 4 regions:
- West Midlands
- London
- South-east
- East of England

Eighteen schools are mentioned here because one school took part in two focus-group topics.

## What were students asked and why?

Across all focus groups, the discussions followed a semi-structured format where the researcher had a small number of questions to help guide the discussion, refocus the students and/or act as prompts to keep the conversation flowing. However, students were encouraged to discuss anything that seemed relevant and to ask the other participants questions. They were also invited to contradict any views or topics discussed.

### Knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust

The focus groups exploring students' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust were framed around four key questions:

- What was the Holocaust?
- Who were the perpetrators; who was responsible?
- Who were the victims of the Holocaust?
- When and where did the Holocaust happen?

The four key questions were designed with reference to analysis of the survey findings (for example, to explore areas where certain misconceptions appeared prevalent), literature in the field and aspects of Holocaust knowledge that the research team felt it was important to examine. Students were encouraged to provide any information they thought was relevant to these questions, and the researcher sought to explore any interesting points that students raised. Additionally, for each question the researcher had a number of prompts to help guide the discussion. For example, for the question 'Who were the victims of the Holocaust?' the prompts included:

- When did they become victims?
- Why do you think the Nazis and their allies murdered them?
- What happened to the victims?
- Where did the victims come from?

In all except one of these focus groups, every student reported that they had already learned about the Holocaust in school. The group that had not learned about the Holocaust were Year 8 students, but some of them reported that they had read *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* in their English lessons. The Year 12 and 13 students who took part in these focus groups were all studying A level history. However, at the time of the focus groups none of them had covered the Holocaust as part of the course (and indeed, as these focus groups were conducted at the start of the academic year, the Year 12 students had only just started their A level studies). Questions were adapted slightly to make them age appropriate, as students had different levels of knowledge about the Holocaust dependent on their age.

### Survivor testimony

The students who took part in the focus groups about survivor testimony had all recently heard a survivor talk about what happened to them during the Holocaust. The students were asked to talk about this learning experience, including views about how their teachers had prepared them for the talk, their most enduring memories of the survivor's testimony and how this learning experience differed from other ways in which they had learned about the Holocaust in the classroom.

### *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*

These focus groups began with a discussion of the terms: 'history', 'evidence', 'fiction' and 'historical fiction'. Students were encouraged to come to a consensus about what these terms meant. Any misconceptions that emerged were addressed by the researcher. These terms were then referred to throughout the discussion about *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*.

A number of prompts were used by the researcher to facilitate discussion, including consideration of which part of the film stuck in the students' minds and which characters they identified with and/or 'felt sorry for'.

### Attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust

For the focus groups exploring students' attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust, the researcher presented the students with the 11 statements from the 'Attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust scale' (survey question 91). The researcher asked students to discuss which of the statements they agreed and disagreed with. As a group, they were then asked to identify three statements which they thought offered the most important reasons for learning about the Holocaust, and explain their choices.

In these focus groups, students were also asked about the extent to which they could be concerned about an event that had happened before they were born. Additionally, these focus groups explored students' exposure to, and opinions about, the use of graphic atrocity images from the Holocaust.

## How was the focus-group data analysed?

### Knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust

For the focus groups concerned with knowledge, the four key questions were used as a framework for analysis, and the transcripts were read to identify all instances of the students discussing each of the questions. Across all transcripts (and, thus, across all year groups), sections of relevant text were extracted and organised into four groups that corresponded with each question.

For each question, the content of the collated text was looked at to examine the different responses given by students. This included making notes on how students' discussions were related to the survey data and creating a question-specific framework to attach the content of responses to the relevant key questions. Each transcript was coded according to this question-specific framework. For example, for the key question 'Where did the Holocaust happen?' transcripts were coded for students' references to:

- where the Jews came from
- where they were killed
- Germany, Poland and other countries
- the camp system
- the ghettos
- *Einsatzgruppen*

A narrative on each of these 'codes' was then produced which included discussion of any patterns in students' responses, for instance recurring misconceptions, as well as exploring any trends in their answers (for example, how students' understanding developed with age).

Overall, this enabled us to map what students said in response to each key question and thus give an account of students' knowledge of what the Holocaust was, who was responsible, who the victims were, and when and where the Holocaust happened. Finally, students' accounts were explored for their explanations of what happened during the Holocaust, and what appeared to shape and influence these explanations.

### Survivor testimony; *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas;* attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust

A slightly different approach was taken to the analysis of the focus groups conducted on survivor testimony, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, and attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust. For each of these topics, the transcripts were read and reread closely for themes that emerged in students' discussions. This included recurring themes across the transcripts (within each focus-group topic) as well as any atypical comments that students made. Emergent themes were then compared and contrasted with the findings from the survey, as well as with relevant literature.

# Part II
# Conceptions and encounters

# 3.

## Collective conceptions of the Holocaust

### Key questions

**1.** What is meant by 'collective conceptions of the Holocaust' and what is their importance here?

**2.** To what extent were the students in our study familiar with the Holocaust?

**3.** How did students most commonly conceive of the Holocaust?

**4.** How might students' collective conceptions relate to wider discursive framings and to educational encounters with the Holocaust?

**5.** How confident were students in their knowledge of the Holocaust?

### Key findings

**1.** More than 85 per cent of the students surveyed for this study recognised the term 'the Holocaust'. A further 9 per cent indicated that they were familiar with the history to which the term refers. Of those who were neither familiar with the term nor with the history, 90 per cent were still in Year 9 or below at school.

**2.** When volunteering their own description of the Holocaust, students overwhelmingly prioritised the identification of an action or series of actions (most commonly 'killing', 'murdering', and/or 'taking to concentration camps') committed by named perpetrators (most commonly 'Hitler' and/or 'the Nazis') upon named victims (most commonly 'the Jews').

**3.** Students were considerably less likely to make reference to a specific timeframe or geographical location within their description. Where such references were made, they were overwhelmingly restricted to 'the Second World War' and 'Germany'.

**4.** Concentration camps appear to play a centrally important role in students' conceptions of the Holocaust. In many students' descriptions, the two terms seemed to be used and understood synonymously.

**5.** The core content of students' conceptions appears to remain largely constant across year groups, and between those who have and those who have not formally encountered the subject in school. This could reflect powerful sociocultural representations of the Holocaust that circulate outside the classroom and upon which students' thinking is likely to draw.

**6.** The students who took part in this study commonly recognised the limitations of their knowledge of this history. Only 12 per cent described that they knew 'lots' about the subject and 69 per cent suggested they would like to learn more. However, the research also identified a number of key areas of widespread misunderstanding where large numbers of students expressed high levels of confidence in answers judged inaccurate against the consensus of academic historians in this field.

### What is meant by 'collective conceptions of the Holocaust' and what is their importance here?

It is a central contention of this research that in order to fully understand the significance of the Holocaust – both as an object of historical enquiry and in wider social and political terms – certain things are important to know. However, as any experienced teacher will recognise, identifying what students *should* know in order to make meaning is only part of the challenge. As Sharp and Murphy (2014: 16) remind us, 'the most influential factor affecting the rate, accuracy and effectiveness of knowledge acquisition and concept learning, including what we forget, is what a learner *already* knows' or rather, 'what learners *think* they already

know' (Conway 2006, emphasis added). Mounting empirical evidence from a variety of different curriculum contexts suggests that students are likely to approach any 'new' area of study replete with, 'if not knowledge, then ideas, beliefs, attitudes and images in their mind' (Pendry *et al*. 1997: 20; see also Donovan and Bransford 2005). Some of these attitudes, beliefs or ideas may be directly at odds with the information and understanding that a teacher hopes to communicate. But as Torney-Purta (1991: 194) surmises, without an adequate engagement with students' starting points, 'the presentation of "correct facts" alone' is unlikely to be very effective in 'dislodging' these.

With that in mind, this chapter begins its analysis and reporting as a teacher might, by examining students' awareness of the Holocaust in the broadest terms. In doing so, it offers a distinctive perspective from the chapters that follow and presents its data through a somewhat wider-angle lens. At this stage the concern is not so much with the precise factual content that individual students were able or not to demonstrate, but rather with overarching patterns and shared frameworks for understanding. It is these patterns and framings that are characterised as students' collective conceptions of the Holocaust.

Most related literature, at least within the field of history education, employs a vocabulary of '*pre*conceptions' and/or '*mis*conception', and focuses on the individual as its primary point of reference (see, for example, Epstein 2012; Gray 2011; Conway 2006; Husbands and Pendry 2000; Pendry *et al*. 1997). There are three important distinctions in the approach outlined here:

1. Our research draws on responses offered by students from across all seven years of secondary education, the majority of whom had already encountered the Holocaust on at least one occasion within school. As a consequence, it would be both misleading and unhelpful to claim access to a 'starting point' in students' thinking, to a point that is prior to a specific educational intervention, as the term '*pre*conception' implies.
2. The term '*mis*conception' specifically denotes inaccuracies or limitations in student thinking. While relationships between students' ideas about the Holocaust and the existing historical record will be critically examined in later chapters, this is not the primary focus of analysis here.
3. Rather than focusing on individuals, this chapter is centrally concerned with shared forms of consciousness and with overarching patterns. For these reasons a theoretical framing that emphasises social rather than individualised cognition has been applied.

The notion of 'schema' or 'schemata', as an organising structure for thoughts, plays a central role in the analysis that follows, for it is not just individual beliefs and ideas that are important but the manner in which a collection of thoughts become interrelated and arranged. As Wertsch (2002: 7) describes:

> the past several decades of research in the psychology of memory… [have] shown time and again memory is more a matter of organising, or reconstructing, bits of information into a general scheme than it is a matter of accurate recall of the isolated bits themselves.

This in turn can have a profound impact on our understanding of students' learning or, at the very least, of their information recall.

In much recent educational theory, the term 'schema' is used as though it denotes something akin to a storage facility that freezes and fixes information inside an individual's head. However, Frederic Bartlett, the English psychologist who first developed the concept, thought of memory in 'embodied, dynamic, temporal, holistic, and social' terms (Wagoner 2013: 553, emphasis added). Bartlett (1932) did not believe that 'remembering' happened exclusively – nor even primarily – 'in the head' but rather through people's ongoing interaction with each other and their worlds.

It is this socially situated understanding of memory and cognition that we want to attend to here. For, as Chapter 1 has already argued, 'the Holocaust' is not only an object of historical enquiry: in recent years it has also been constructed and communicated as a sociocultural phenomenon and powerful symbolic resource (see Alexander 2003; Cole 1999; Novick 1999). Indeed, 'all knowledge of the past is social knowledge' (Uzell and Blud 1993: 131) and is therefore both informed by, and in turn reflects, many of the perspectives and priorities shared by wider society.

A related theoretical framework is provided by the Romanian social psychologist Serge Moscovici (1981, 1984) who employed the term 'social representations' to describe 'collective systems of meaning' (Duveen and Lloyd 1993); 'knowledge and information which people share in the form of common-sense theories about the social world' (Augoustinos and Innes 1990: 215). While the two terms, 'schemata' and 'social representations', are far from interchangeable, there are a number of important points of intersection between Bartlett and Moscovici's perspectives which are relevant to discussion here.

In different ways both Bartlett and Moscovici characterise memory as an 'effort after meaning' (Wagoner 2011: 106). From this perspective, knowledge-acquisition is never a passive process:

when an individual encounters new information they will actively try to find or make personal sense of it. However, personal 'sense-making' will always make recourse to already existing frames of reference – 'schemata' or 'social representations' – and these are inherently socialised.

Neither schemata nor social representations are entirely objective or value-free. Rather, they tend towards the 'evaluative and affective' (Augoustinos and Innes 1990) and are likely to serve a particular function (Elmer and Ohana 1993). As Wagoner (2013: 563) summarises, 'remembering is interest and meaning driven', and both interest and meaning are shaped by wider society (Billig 1993). Sammut *et al.* (2012: 6) make a similar argument:

> Values are important elements of cultural and social interpretative frameworks. What aspects of past events are made salient in the exercise of remembering and interpreting is guided by what a community holds as significant and worthy … Beliefs and interpretations that stick are beliefs and interpretations that are valued for what project they represent.

Both Bartlett and Moscovici suggest that such meaning-making 'operates below the level of self-reflective awareness' (Wagoner 2013: 558). Therefore, the culturally specific interpretations that an individual or group's schemata or social representation reflect are likely to be experienced and thought of as self-evident, universal and value-free. With reference to the study described here, at a societal level we may have both conscious and unconscious vested interests in remembering or interpreting the events of the Holocaust in a particular way. This in turn is likely to be reflected in both the form and specific content of students' collective conceptions of this history.

Bartlett and Moscovici each also identify mechanisms through which (shared) schemata or social representations are formed and communicated. Bartlett, for example, describes a process that he characterises as 'conventionalisation', whereby individuals are likely to change or draw inferences from any new stimulus material in order to be able to recall it in a manner that feels sufficiently coherent and concise (Brewer 2001).

In a similar fashion, Moscovici famously characterised a number of processes of 'objectification' through which unfamiliar, abstract or threateningly complex phenomena are made more intelligible by being cognitively 'anchored' in relation to something more easily recognised. Alternatively they may be distilled into an association with an individual person, object or idea (Jarvis and Russell 2002). An educational encounter with the Holocaust could certainly present exactly such a confronting challenge and it is important to consider how students might respond to its cognitive complexity.

As Bartlett and Moscovici both also emphasise, heuristic devices such as categorisation or reduction can make difficult ideas feel easier to engage with. However, through their use, meaning can often be distorted, and important detail and nuance lost or denied (Augoustinos and Walker 1995; Elmer and Ohana 1993). A primary function of this chapter is to identify whether there appear to be commonly shared cognitive short-hands employed when students attempt to make meaning of and from the Holocaust.

Finally, and perhaps most important in the context of education and learning, both Bartlett's schema theory and Moscovici's social representations approach stress the dynamic and temporal nature of cognition: they both see understanding as ultimately open to reconstruction.

However, both have also argued that existing knowledge structures have inbuilt resistance and are unlikely to submit readily to radical change. New and potentially challenging or contradictory information is always at risk of being discounted, forgotten or distorted in order to preserve what is already there. There is always opportunity to have an impact on what students' 'know', or think they know, about the Holocaust as about any other object of enquiry. However, that task must begin with an adequate examination, not only of the content of students' pre-existing ideas and associations, but also with the form and structure of those ideas and with their relationship to wider sociocultural frames. Critically, this process must consider what might already be invested in existing understandings, both at the level of the individual and of wider society.

## To what extent were the students in our study familiar with the Holocaust?

For Moscovici (1998), in order to talk meaningfully about a group's 'social representation' of a particular phenomenon, the phenomenon itself must first be established as both recognisable and intelligible to those concerned. From this perspective, it is important to establish the extent to which students who took part in this study were familiar with the term, 'the Holocaust'.

Question 29 of the research survey asked, 'Have you ever seen or heard the word "Holocaust" before?' As Figure 3.1 illustrates, in total 85.5 per cent of the 7,661 students who answered this question indicated that they were either sure (73 per cent) or thought (12.5 per cent) that they recognised the term. Among the Year 7 students who answered

this question, just over half (54.2 per cent) indicated that they were familiar with the word 'Holocaust' but this figure rose significantly among the Year 8 and Year 9 students to 78.5 per cent and 90.4 per cent respectively. By Year 13, 98.3 per cent reported that they recognised the term.

Of course, it is entirely possible that students might be conscious – and have conceptions – of the history we are referring to as 'the Holocaust' without being familiar with that specific word. Accordingly, those students who completed the online version of the survey and who indicated that they were not familiar with the term were subsequently presented with a short explanatory text:

> There was a period in history when Adolf Hitler was in charge of the Nazi Party who had control of Germany, and later, other countries. During this time, various groups of people were discriminated against and Jews from across Europe were murdered. This is often called 'the Holocaust'[1].

Students completing the online version of the survey were then asked, 'Have you heard about any of this before?' Of the 956 students who indicated that they had not recognised the word 'Holocaust', 661 (69.1 per cent) reported that they had in fact heard about this history. Only 295 students, or 4.3 per cent of the 6,931 who completed the online version of the survey, suggested that they were unfamiliar with both the word and the history it describes. Of these, approximately 90 per cent were still in Year 9 or below at school (40.3 per cent

were in Year 7, 28.1 per cent in Year 8 and 22 per cent in Year 9).

It is equally possible that students may believe they recognise the term 'the Holocaust' but understand or interpret it in a manner that is entirely unrelated to our object of enquiry here. In both the online and paper versions of the survey, students who identified that they were familiar with the word were then invited, in question 30 to 'describe in one or two sentences' what they thought the Holocaust was.

The responses given to this question will be examined extensively in later sections of this chapter but it is significant to note that 6,133 students attempted to answer this question, 77.1 per cent of all those who completed the survey. Among these, only 39 students provided responses that suggested they had confused or mistaken the word with another term, for example, 'a church where you go to pray and forget your sins' (Year 9 student), 'Roman central heating' (Year 7 student), 'a place in Scotland where a battle was' (Year 8 student). These responses were excluded from further analysis.

The remaining 6,094 students provided answers relevant enough to suggest that they were to some degree familiar with the meaning of the Holocaust. Their contributions thus constituted an appropriate dataset from which to investigate collective conceptions of the term.

## How did the students in our study most commonly conceive of the Holocaust?

Examples of the individual responses to survey question 30 include:

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[1] Throughout this chapter, the spelling used within students' responses has been edited for clarity only. Individuals' use of capital letters – or otherwise – for terms such as 'the Holocaust' appears as in their original text'

**Figure 3.1** Recognition of the term 'Holocaust' by year group (percentage of students)
Percentages below 5 per cent are not labelled on the chart.



Percentage of students

| | Yes, definitely | Yes, I think so | No, I don't think so | No, definitely not |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| All students (n=7,661) | 73.0 | 12.5 | 9.1 | 5.4 |
| Year 7 (n=1,100) | 36.7 | 17.5 | 25.7 | 20.1 |
| Year 8 (n=1,191) | 62.0 | 16.5 | 14.5 | 7.0 |
| Year 9 (n=2,717) | 76.8 | 13.6 | 6.9 | |
| Year 10 (n=1,199) | 87.1 | 9.8 | | |
| Year 11 (n=503) | 88.7 | 7.6 | | |
| Year 12 (n=570) | 90.5 | 6.1 | | |
| Year 13 (n=356) | 96.1 | | | |

■ Yes, definitely   ■ Yes, I think so   ■ No, I don't think so   ■ No, definitely not
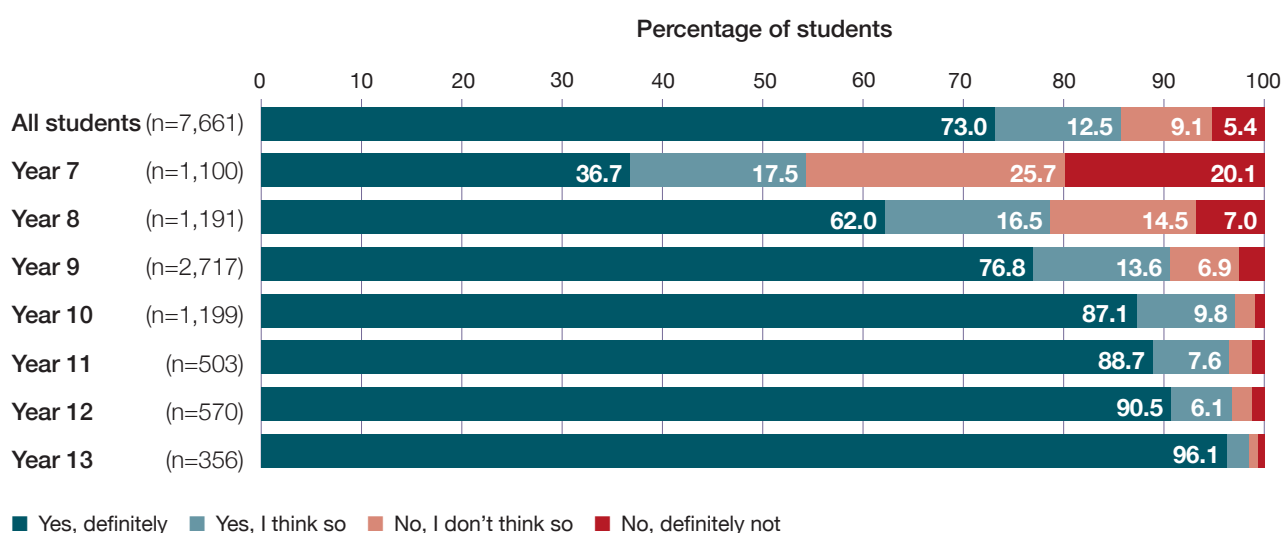
Horrific (Year 10 student).

Genocide (Year 9 student).

Concentration camps (Year 9 student).

Hitler killing Jews (Year 9 student).

The holocaust[1] was disgraceful and almost unbelievable (Year 9 student).

It was something to do with Hitler (Year 7 student).

Hell on earth, people were dying in gas chambers and burnt (Year 10 student).

The remembrance of the millions of people who died in the nazi camps for being different (Year 10 student).

The targeted genocide of Jews, homosexuals, Gypsies and others deemed 'undesirable' by the Nazi regime (Year 12 student).

The Holocaust was during World War Two where Jews were blamed for losing the war, therefore they were kept hostage all over Germany. Many people did not realise the conditions they were living in (Year 8 student).

I think that it was a terrible affair which took place in an unfortunate time for my people and could have been avoided if people thought through a little more as to who they follow and what they are doing. It was when the Nazis led by Hitler decided to attempt to kill all Jews in their territory (Year 10 student).

**Table 3.1** Summary of student responses to survey question 30 'Please can you describe in one or two sentences what you think the Holocaust was'

| Year group | Number of responses | Range of number of words used | Average number of words used |
|---|---|---|---|
| Year 7 | 533 | 1–74 | 19 |
| Year 8 | 854 | 1–138 | 20 |
| Year 9 | 2,299 | 1–245 | 20 |
| Year 10 | 1,074 | 1–258 | 20 |
| Year 11 | 472 | 1–92 | 22 |
| Year 12/13 | 862 | 1–197 | 22 |
| Totals | **6,094** | **1–258** | **20** |

[1] Throughout this chapter, the spelling used within students' responses has been edited for clarity only. Individuals' use of capital letters – or otherwise – for terms such as 'the Holocaust' appears as in their original text.

The holocaust was a historical moment when the Nazis persecuted the Jews and ended up sending them to death camps and killing them. The holocaust was in 3 stages. The 1st one was the ghettos, 2nd one was killing the jews in public places and sending them to concentration camps and then the 3rd and final one was the 'Final Solution' which was the Nazis sending the jews and other types of people like gypsies to death camps (Year 11 student).

It is important to emphasise that question 30 of the survey, did not ask students to demonstrate *everything* they knew about the Holocaust; it only invited them to provide a short description. Therefore, the data presented here is not intended as a reliable measure of whether or not students know specific things. Instead, the chapter reports the 'knowledge' that students' themselves chose to prioritise in just one or two sentences as a basis from which to identify the most commonly shared conceptions of the Holocaust.

The descriptions provided by students ranged from single-word answers to short paragraphs of up to 250 words (as summarised in Table 3.1) and contained a wide variety of descriptive, evaluative and 'factual' content as is also evident in just the handful of examples already quoted. Across all 6,094 responses, this translates into an enormous amount of complex data. Nonetheless, through close textual analysis of commonly recurring words, phrases and related terms, it is possible to discern a clear shared, core content.

Table 3.2 summarises the ten most commonly occurring words and phrases used within student descriptions across individual year groups. Although caution must always be taken with any attempt to quantify what are essentially interpretative phenomena – in this case, people's words – it is striking to note that the three most commonly occurring words or phrases remain constant across all year groups.

As Table 3.2 clearly demonstrates, students were, by some margin, most likely to make at least one reference to 'Jews', 'Jewish people' and/or 'the Jewish faith' in their descriptions. The second most likely term to be referenced was 'killing', while 'Hitler' was the third. Indeed, in a number of students' responses, these were the only individual terms referenced, for example:

Where Hitler killed lots of jewish people (Year 7 student).

When jews were killed by hitler (Year 9 student).

Hitler had the jews killed (Year 11 student).

**Table 3.2** Approximate frequency counts (freq) of the 10 most commonly appearing words or phrases by year group

| Rank | Year 7 (n=533) | Freq | Year 8 (n =854) | Freq | Year 9 (n=2,299) | Freq | Year 10 (n=1,074) | Freq | Year 11 (n=472) | Freq | Year 12/13 (n=862) | Freq |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Jews/ Jewish | 472 | Jews/ Jewish | 862 | Jews/ Jewish | 2,346 | Jews/ Jewish | 1,088 | Jews/ Jewish | 498 | Jews/ Jewish | 934 |
| 2 | Killed | 302 | Killed | 450 | Killed | 1,258 | Killed | 638 | Killed | 271 | Killed | 384 |
| 3 | Hitler | 232 | Hitler | 402 | Hitler | 1,032 | Hitler | 522 | Hitler | 230 | Hitler | 365 |
| 4 | Camps | 167 | Camps | 293 | Camps | 741 | Camps | 336 | Nazis | 158 | Nazis | 358 |
| 5 | Nazis[a] | 130 | Nazis | 211 | Nazis | 697 | Nazis | 303 | Camps | 131 | Second World War | 214 |
| 6 | Second World War | 125 | Second World War | 164 | Second World War | 424 | Second World War | 178 | Million/6 million | 92 | Camps | 205 |
| 7 | Sent or Taken | 98 | Sent or Taken | 157 | Sent or Taken | 355 | Million/6 million | 161 | Germany | 88 | Germany | 198 |
| 8 | Germans[b] | 91 | Gassed | 154 | Germans | 336 | Sent or Taken | 156 | Second World War | 78 | Genocide | 196 |
| 9 | Gassed[c] | 68 | Germans | 143 | Million/ 6 million | 317 | Race/racism/ ethnicity | 146 | Race/racism/ ethnicity | 77 | Million/ 6 million | 161 |
| 10 | Religion[d] | 43 | Million/6 million | 92 | Gassed | 300 | Homosexuals | 133 | Homosexuals | 60 | Race/racism/ ethnicity | 153 |

a Count includes references to: 'Nazis', 'Nazi party', 'Nazi Germans' and 'Nazi regime'.
b Count includes 'German people'
c Count includes all references to 'gas' and 'gassing' (including 'gas chambers' and 'gas showers')
d Count includes references to 'religious' and 'beliefs'

**Figure 3.2** Component parts of students' descriptions of the Holocaust by year group (percentage of students)
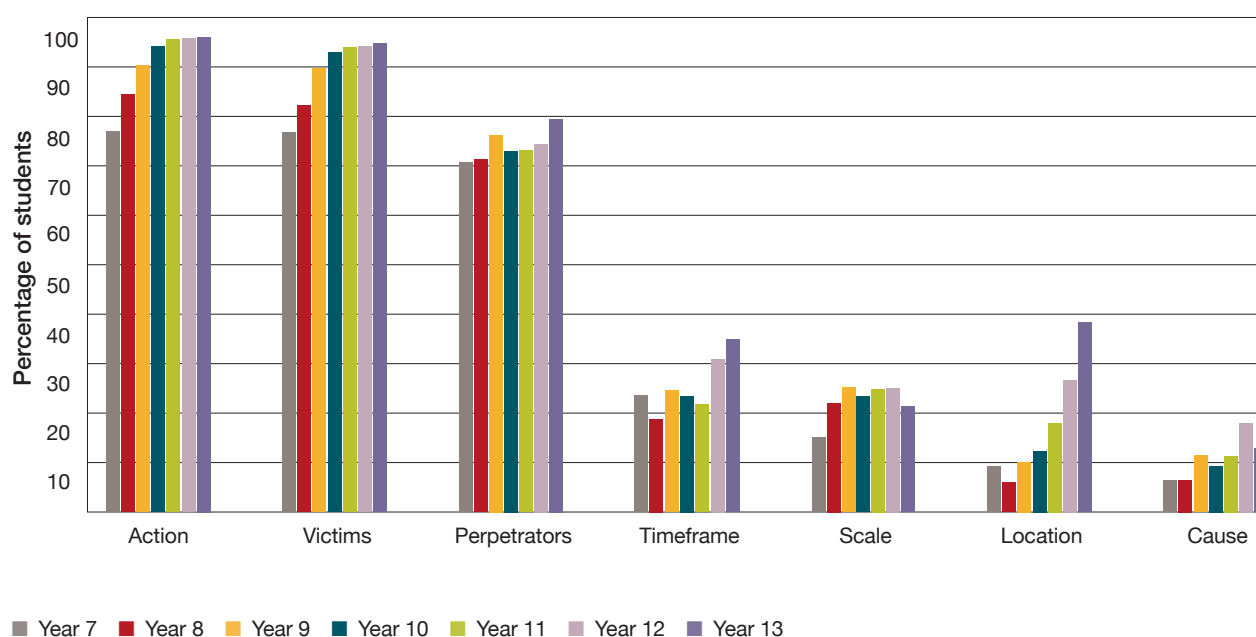
**Figure 3.3** 'Mapping' the form of students' descriptions of the Holocaust by year group (percentage of students)
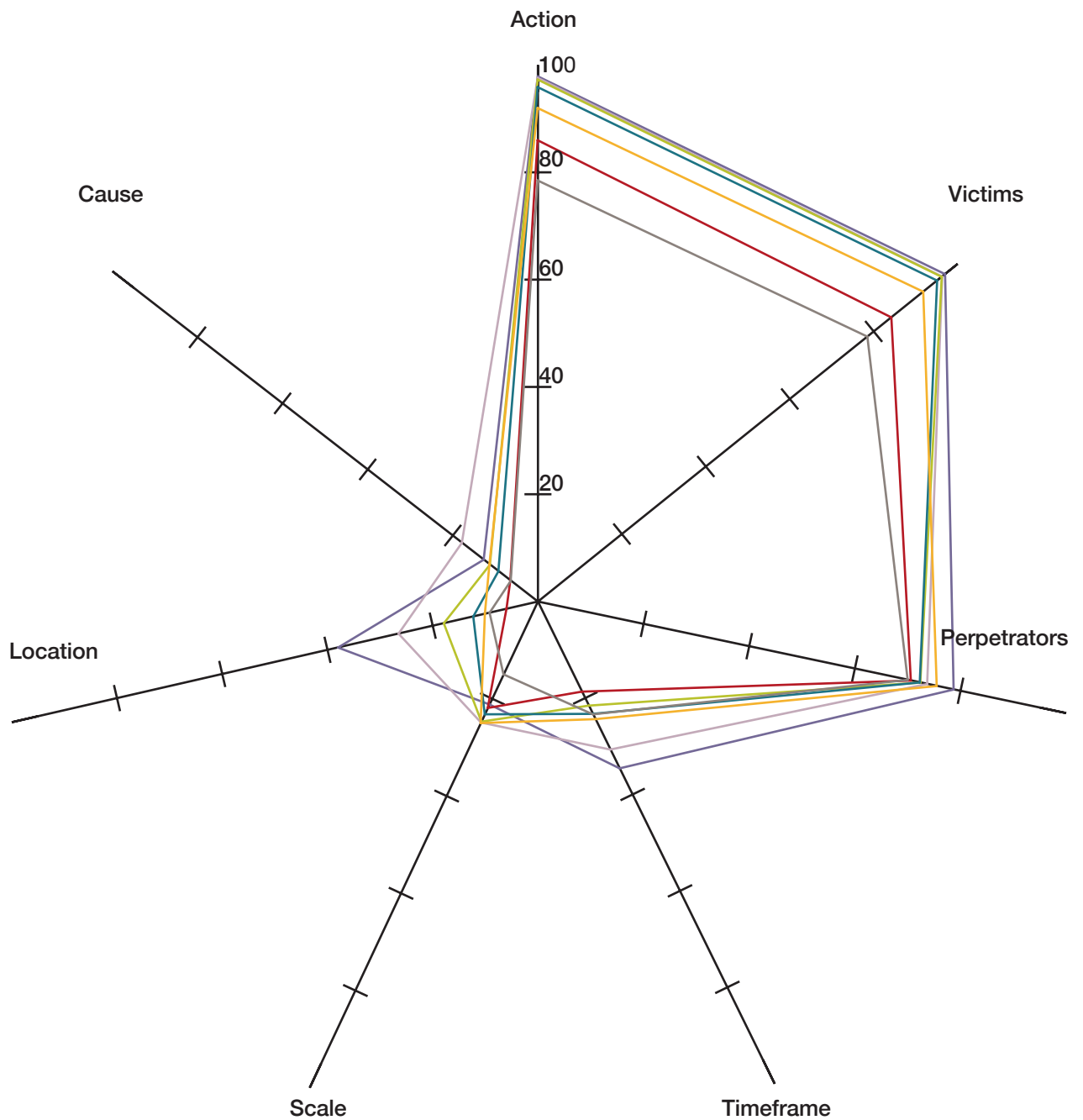
Across all year groups, the terms 'Nazis', 'concentration camps' and 'Second World War' also consistently featured among the ten most frequently occurring words or phrases. Among the Year 7–11 students who took part in our survey, 'Nazis' and 'concentration camps' repeatedly ranked as the fourth and fifth most common terms while among the Year 12 and 13 students, reference to the Second World War was prioritised.

If 'Jews', 'killing' 'Hitler', 'Nazis', 'concentration camps' and 'the Second World War' appear to comprise a relatively stable core content across all year groups, it is also possible to identify variation between the responses given by the oldest and youngest students in terms of the next most frequently appearing terms. For example, a vocabulary of movement – of victims being 'sent' or 'taken' from one place to another – was most regularly shared by students in Years 7 to 10. Younger students were also more likely to make specific reference to the killing of victims through gassing whereas students in Years 12 and 13 were considerably more likely than others to employ the term 'genocide'. Students from Year 10 onwards were most likely to incorporate a language related to 'race', 'racism' and/or 'ethnicity'.

The chapter will make a closer examination of the precise content of students' responses shortly but, in addition to producing frequency counts on individual words and phrases, our analysis also attempted to characterise the *form* that student descriptions were most likely to take. A subsample of 2,987 responses was analysed against a coding frame in order to record whether or not individual students made reference to each of the following within their descriptions:

1. Named or otherwise identified **victims** of the Holocaust.
2. Named or otherwise identified **perpetrators** of the Holocaust.
3. Specific **actions** undertaken during the Holocaust.
4. An indication of the **scale** of the Holocaust.
5. A **timeframe** for the Holocaust.
6. A geographic **location** associated with the Holocaust.
7. Any indication of a possible **cause** of the Holocaust.
8. A recognition of the Nazis' exterminationist objective – that is, their intention to kill every Jew in Europe.

A summary of coding against dimensions 1 to 7 of this frame is illustrated in Figures 3.2 and 3.3.

Again – as Figures 3.2 and 3.3 illustrate – across year groups there is striking consistency in the form that students' responses take. Irrespective of age, the students completing the survey were most likely

to describe the Holocaust in terms of a named action (or series of actions) involving named victims and perpetrators. They were significantly less likely to position the Holocaust within a specified timeframe or geographical location, or to make reference to either its scale or possible cause. And so, while 73.7 per cent of students aggregated across all year groups identified at least one perpetrator, 92.5 per cent identified at least one victim and 93.2 per cent identified at least one action, only 24.7 per cent referred to a timeframe and only 14.9 per cent located it geographically.

Broadly speaking, as they progressed through school, students became increasingly expansive in their responses and the likelihood of all components being included in a student's description increased. The greatest variation was found in relation to students' referencing of place: while only 5.9 per cent of the Year 8 students whose responses were sampled made reference to a specific geographical location, 37.9 per cent of the Year 13 students did. However, even among older students, references made to place were relatively infrequent. By comparison, nearly 96.9 per cent of Year 13 students identified victims in their descriptions, while 97.8 per cent included actions associated with the Holocaust.

It is important to reiterate that the claim here is not necessarily that students do not know when, where or why the Holocaust happened or how many people it involved. Rather, it is to argue that these dimensions of understanding do not seem to be as significant to students – or at least they are not as likely to be spontaneously recalled – as their understanding of specific aspects of *what* happened and who was involved.

## Victims of the Holocaust

As seen in Table 3.2, the single strongest association that students made in their descriptions of the Holocaust was with 'Jews' or related references to 'Jewishness'. What Table 3.2 does not capture, however, are the many and varied ways in which students identified this group, for example as 'Jewish people', 'Jewish citizens', the 'Jewish race', 'Jewish religion' or 'Jewish community'.

This variety is better reflected in Figure 3.4 which also indicates the extensive vocabulary used by students in describing those they conceived of as 'victims' of the Holocaust in broader terms. This contrasts strikingly with the significantly more truncated list of terms employed by students when accounting for those who perpetrated the Holocaust (as is illustrated in Figure 3.5).

The issue of whether or not other named victims of Nazi persecution should be conceived of as victims specifically of the Holocaust will be addressed

**Figure 3.4** Most commonly used words and phrases which refer to victims of the Holocaust across all 6,094 student descriptions

All Wordcloud images in this chapter were generated by TagCrowd at www.tagcrowd.com

along with (17) anne frank (11) anyone (86) appearance (11) background (18)
beliefs (80) black people (74) blacks (88)
certain people (77) children (56) coloured people (21)
communists (32) different (352)
disabled people (189) disabled (249)
elderly (11) etc (167) ethnic groups (30) ethnic minorities (21)
ethnicity (107) families (35) gay people (41) gays (148)
gender (12) groups of people (82) groups (199)
gypsies (337) homosexual people (27)
homosexuals (372) including (69) individuals (10)
jehovah's witnesses (17) jewish citizens (11) jewish community (19) jewish faith (18)
jewish people (763) jewish race (98)
jewish religion (44) jewish (374) jews (4837)
judaism (12) lesbians (19) mental illness or disability (55)
minorities (47) minority groups (34) others (85)
people who were jewish (12) people with disabilities (51)
people (1304) polish (15) political opponents (16) prisoners (19)
race (324) racial group (13) religion (349) religious group (16)
religious (25) roma (16) sexual orientation (26) sexuality (39)
skin colour (30) slaves (69) slavs (20) survivors (14) types (41)
undesirables (23) women (21)

**Figure 3.5** Most commonly used words and phrases which refer to perpetrators of the Holocaust across all 6,094 student descriptions



adolf (558)  german army (18)  german people (37)

german soldiers (10)  **germans** (777)  government (16)  himmler (17)

hitler's army (20)  **hitler** (2781)  man (73)

nazi germans (36)  nazi germany (144)

nazi party (233)  nazi regime (47)  **nazis** (1569)

one man (13)  party (33)  people (28)  political group (17)  regime (12)  reich (10)  ss (12)

in further detail later in this chapter. However, there are a number of other interesting features of the language students chose to use that are worth reflecting upon here.

First, the variety of ways in which Jewish victims are identified is perhaps illustrative of a wider uncertainty – or at least a lack of consensus – over how 'Jewishness' itself should be conceived. Analysis of student responses here suggests that they are not always clear personally, and certainly not in wide agreement with each other, as to how Jewishness operates as a marker of identity – whether it is primarily a religious identification or matter of faith, for example, a question of culture or a racialized category. Chapter 5 examines related confusions and uncertainties that were expressed by students who took part in focus groups when asked if they were able to explain why the Nazis and their collaborators had specifically targeted Jews.

Second, given the emphasis placed upon the victims of the Holocaust – both in terms of the overall frequency of referencing and the comparatively expansive vocabulary used – it is perhaps surprising that there was only very infrequent reference made to named individuals. Anne Frank was identified as a victim of the Holocaust 11 times across all 6,094 descriptions but hers was the only name that appeared with a frequency count of 10 or more. It is also striking that only 16 students made any specific reference to survivors of the Holocaust.

Finally, while individual stories may not feature prominently in students' immediate recall, there is nonetheless a strong impression that, in relation to the Jews and other victims of Nazi persecution, students are identifying with and describing human beings here.

Again, this is particularly noticeable in contrast to what students say about perpetrators of the Holocaust. At a very basic level, the term 'people' is used extensively where students describe those who were killed, captured or discriminated against. Yet this term is relatively absent in students' descriptions of those who perpetrated these acts. While there were approaching 3,000 individual references to 'people' as victims of the Holocaust, there were fewer than 100 made specifically to 'people' as those who did the killing, taking captive or discriminating. Instead, as Figure 3.5 makes clear, perpetrators were considerably more likely to be positioned with somewhat more distance – as 'Germans' much more commonly than as 'German *people*', or as 'Nazis'. More likely still, they were obscured from view entirely in those descriptions where Hitler was the lone perpetrator identified.

It is impossible to know from this data alone whether such humanising of victims and dehumanising of perpetrators was consciously undertaken. However, it is also evident on occasions where students chose to emphasise that victims were not just an undifferentiated mass of 'people' but, more specifically, included 'families' (35 references), 'children' (56 references), 'women' (21 references) and 'the elderly' (11 references). Again, this form of differentiation is entirely absent in the vocabulary summarised in Figure 3.5.

## Perpetrators of the Holocaust

We have already identified the dominance of Hitler as a point of reference in students' descriptions of the Holocaust, and Chapter 6 explores focus-group discussions to offer a detailed analysis of students' understandings about his responsibility. Even so, such is Hitler's significance in student accounts that it is helpful to take a look now at how he was most commonly positioned in even the briefest of their responses.

Some students, especially among older year groups, purposefully problematised the idea that Hitler alone was responsible for the Holocaust, emphasising, for example, that:

> Hitler is the most popular figure associated with this … however other countries in europe also contributed greatly to the genocide (Year 11 student).

However, in the descriptions provided by many others, Hitler appears to be awarded singular agency. Many, if not all, of the actions identified in Figure 3.6 were repeatedly attributed by students to Hitler himself. For example, the following answers were provided in response to survey question 30 (emphasis added):

> When *Hitler sent* many Jews to concentration camps where they were killed (Year 10 student).

> The Holocaust was when *Hitler tortured and killed* Jews (Year 11 student).

> It was when *Adolf Hitler attempted to wipe out* the Jews by committing Genocide (Year 10 student).

> When *Hitler captured* the Jews, *put* them in a concentration camp and *gassed* them (Year 10 student).

> Where *Hitler took* Jews to a concentration camp and said they were going to work but *he killed* them all because *he didn't like* jews (Year 10 student).

> The holocaust was a period in time where the German leader Adolf *Hitler discriminated* against everyone who was different and *tried to kill* them all (Year 10 student).

> The holocaust was the part of the war when thousands of Jews died *at the hands of Hitler*. They were gassed in concentration camps and were buried in mass graves. The gas chambers where like showers and *Hitler made them look nice* (Year 7 student).

There are a number of possible explanations for the central importance awarded to Hitler in students' conceptions of the Holocaust. Adopting the language offered by Moscovici, we could argue that he operates as a useful personification of the Holocaust: that a single, vividly drawn figure is easier to conceptualise and hang your thoughts and interpretations upon than the complex and confronting reality of vast networks of shared culpability and complicity and of individuals positioned within – but not ultimately reducible to – wider structures of social, political and economic power. This conflation certainly appears to be active in the most extreme of all the students' descriptions, in which the Holocaust is described precisely and exclusively as a person; specifically as 'an evil man that wanted to rule the world and make it his own' (Year 9 student).

Again, the perspective shared by both Moscovici and Bartlett – and adopted here – is that 'errors' like this in students' thinking, are not primarily a function of faulty information-processing or of inadequate knowledge-acquisition. Rather, they are very likely to reflect and represent individual interpretations of a wider social framing in which it is common and potentially advantageous to bestow a solitary figure with such enormous representational and explanatory power.

Whatever the cause, the dominance of Hitler within students' thinking about the Holocaust could significantly compromise both the depth and accuracy of their understanding. This contention is developed further in Chapter 6, but it is interesting to note here that – when given entirely free rein to 'describe what the Holocaust was' – in addition to the 2,781 references to Hitler across all 6,094 responses, students also made 6 references specifically to his moustache, but only 3 to the *Einsatzgruppen*, 8 to the SS and 8 to any form of collaboration with the Nazis.

## Actions undertaken during the Holocaust

A related 'cognitive shorthand' or conceptual conflation also appears to be at work when we examine more closely the action – or actions – that students most commonly describe. Alongside the clear recognition that, essentially, the Holocaust involved the mass killing and attempted extermination of Jews, the second most prominent point of reference here is a noun rather than a verb: the 'camps' where victims, in students' descriptions, were 'sent', 'taken', 'captured', 'imprisoned' or otherwise 'held'. Indeed, in one Year 9 student's description, the camp system itself becomes the principal action of the Holocaust:

> [The Holocaust was] the Nazi way of killing all Jews by *concentrating* them into fortified camps to do hard labour or be killed (emphasis added).

**Figure 3.6** Most commonly used words and phrases which refer to actions undertaken during the Holocaust across all 6,094 student descriptions

abused (10)   achieve (11)   affected (11)   agree (16)   aim (28)   attacked (25)

attempt (350)   auschwitz (56)   away (84)   beaten (12)

blamed (79)   bodies (22)   bombing (21)   brutally (46)   built (18)

burned (59)   camps (359)   captured (106)

carried out (62)   chambers (29)   cleansing or ethnic-cleansing (17)

command (18)   committed (56)

concentration camps (1204)

conducted (16)   considered (19)   control (55)   create (122)

death camps (211)   decided (74)   deemed (16)

deliberate (49)   destroy or destruction (124)

didn't like (163)   didn't want (16)   died (235)

discriminated (339)   disliked (40)

eliminate (57)   eradicate (59)   experimented (18)

extermination camps (13)   extermination (157)   felt (18)   fighting (14)

forced (96)   gas chambers (253)   gas (123)

gassed (375)   gathered up (16)   gathered (29)

genocide (452)   get rid of (106)   ghettos (84)

hated (99)   held (26)   hurt (12)   imprisoned (40)   in charge (51)

invaded (28)   isolated (12)   kept (117)   killed (3018)

labour camps (29)   labour (58)   led (171)   locked (29)

mass extermination (40)   mass genocide (110)

mass killing (284)   mass murder (211)

mass slaughter (11)   massacre (43)   methods (28)   mistreated (10)

murdered (229)   ordered (104)   organised (22)

It is not just the numeric frequency with which reference to camps are made that is striking. It is also the enormous representational significance they appear to hold. For, more than any other single word or phrase used by students in their descriptions, the association between 'camps' – and in particular 'concentration camps' – and the Holocaust is so strong that, in a number of cases, they are presented as though synonymous:

> A holocaust is a prison/camp to hold up Jews (Year 8 student).

> Holocaust is a concentration camp for jews (Year 9 student).

> The holocaust was the concentration camp within the world wars that jews would be sent to work as slaves and eventually be gassed to death (Year 13 student).

> [The Holocaust is] otherwise referred to as the concentration camps. These were built during the second world war by the Nazis in which they imprisoned jews, Blacks, gays and disabled there to work and build more of the camp and then they would put the ones that could no longer work into a gas chamber where they were gassed until no one in there was alive (Year 9 student).

Many others across all age groups appeared to think of the Holocaust primarily as a place, for example:

> I think it's a big place that's locked where the Germans killed the Jews (Year 9 student).

> A holocaust was a place where germans in the second world war put jewish people in camps [to] work or get killed (Year 9 student).

> A place where the Nazis killed people with different ethnicities (Year 10 student).

> The holocaust was a place where they would put people such as Jews and gay people and other people who weren't considered the right type of German to try and wipe them out (Year 12 student).

> [The Holocaust] was a cruel place for people that Hitler sent people to go to just because of their race and the way they are (Year 7 student)

Arguably, where students made the broadest references to the Holocaust as somewhere that Jews or other victims were 'sent' or 'put' they may not have been thinking specifically in terms of the camp system. Indeed, in 12 student descriptions, ghettos rather than camps were prioritised, for example:

> When Hitler sent Jews to Ghettos (Year 10 student).

> When Hitler took all the Jews in Germany and Poland, put them in Ghettos and made them do degrading jobs or killed them (Year 12 student).

A small number of students provided descriptions in which it was evident that they recognised at least something of the specific function of the Jewish ghettos. However, it was much more common for ghettos and camps to be presented almost interchangeably, and for any detailed knowledge of the former to be subsumed or overshadowed by the dominant imagery of the latter.

Behind their references, students were able – or chose – to demonstrate varying levels of understanding of the extensive system of labour, transit and extermination camps established by the Nazis. In 120 student responses, there was at least some recognition that different types of camps existed with different form and function. However, in the majority of the descriptions provided, such distinction was not apparent. Instead, most students appeared to operate with a more monolithic conception of 'the camps' – or, in a number of cases, 'the camp' singular – as prison-like places where victims were 'brutally' 'beaten', 'burned', 'starved', 'tortured' or 'punished'.

As has already been highlighted, the Nazis' use of gassing as a means of murder within the camp system also featured prominently across students' descriptions, especially among those in younger years. In some cases this led to an even further narrowing of understanding as, for example, where the Holocaust was described as:

> When the Germans put people in gas chambers and gassed them (Year 7 student).

> A gas camp the Germans controlled to kill Jewish people (Year 10 student).

> …a day in the war when a lot of Jews were killed in the gas chambers which were in the concentration camps (Year 7 student).

> I think the Holocaust was about people in a camp and they got tricked about going into a shower but when really they got gassed (Year 10 student).

The idea that people were 'tricked' into thinking they were taking a shower appears to have taken particular hold in a number of students' imagination and similar descriptions appeared in at least 25 different accounts.

Other details that some students seemed to prioritise were experimentation or medical testing (23 individual references) – including one Year 7

student who described the Holocaust in its entirety as, 'When Nazi's experimented on the jewish people killing most of them with these experiments' – and the use of torture (225 references), for example:

> Holocaust was where the Jews were kept and brutally tortured (Year 9 student).

> When Hitler put the Jews in concentration camps and tortured them (Year 10 student).

> In World War 2 Hitler took people to camps to torture them (Year 7 student).

For the majority of students who provided descriptions of the Holocaust, the camps appear to be understood and are framed as places of death, as tools used by the Nazis to kill Jews and other victims. However, for a smaller but nonetheless significant number of students, the whole camp system – and indeed the whole Holocaust – is presented as though the enslavement and forced labour of victims was its primary – in some cases its exclusive – function, for example:

> When the Nazis (in WW2) captured slaves (Jews mainly) and made them produce weapons until they died of either lack of nutrition or exhaustion (Year 9 student).

> I think Holocaust is a place that the Germans took their slaves in the world war. I believe it was just Jewish people they took there (Year 9 student).

> The holocaust was when Hitler kept the Jews in slavery (Year 9 student).

> The holocaust was when the germans turned Jews into slaves and then eventually killed them with a gas (Year 10 student).

> It was when Hitler locked up all the Jews and made them into slaves (Year 7 student).

Such a perspective also goes some way to accounting for the 69 references that characterised victims of the Holocaust as 'slaves' (see Figure 3.4). In many of these accounts, the actual killing of Jews or other victims is not even mentioned while in others, students only appear to recognise the deaths of those who were 'too old or too weak' (Year 9 student) to work:

> A holocaust was a place where all the Jews had to go when they was either old, too young or had a disability. Hitler was the one that said the Jews had to go into the holocaust. Only the healthy Jews was allowed to stay alive (Year 10 student).

And so, while the *idea* of a concentration camp was familiar to most students and awarded central significance by many, the accounts provided suggest this was not always underpinned by very comprehensive understanding. Indeed, here it is possible to identify an ostensibly common but important misconception – that the camp system was primarily motivated as a means to exploit Jewish labour. This serves to undermine, or at least confuse, any understanding that the Holocaust was unambiguously murderous in its intent.

Again remembering Bartlett and Moscovici, it is also instructive to consider what this overwhelming focus on the camp system in students' collective conceptions of the Holocaust might serve to obscure. Arguably there is a lot missing from the short accounts that students chose to provide. For example, while there were over 750 individual references to the Nazis' use of gasses as a means to murder victims, only 65 references were made to people being shot. Yet, as Chapter 6 will describe in further detail, the Einsatzgruppen (mobile killing squads), assisted by thousands of local auxiliaries from the occupied lands, are estimated to have killed more than 1.5 million people, the overwhelming majority of whom were Jews who were shot. Nor is there any significant evidence of students awarding attention to, or placing any emphasis upon, the actions or responses of the victims of the Holocaust. In all except a very small handful of responses, perpetrators are positioned as the only active agents within students' accounts.
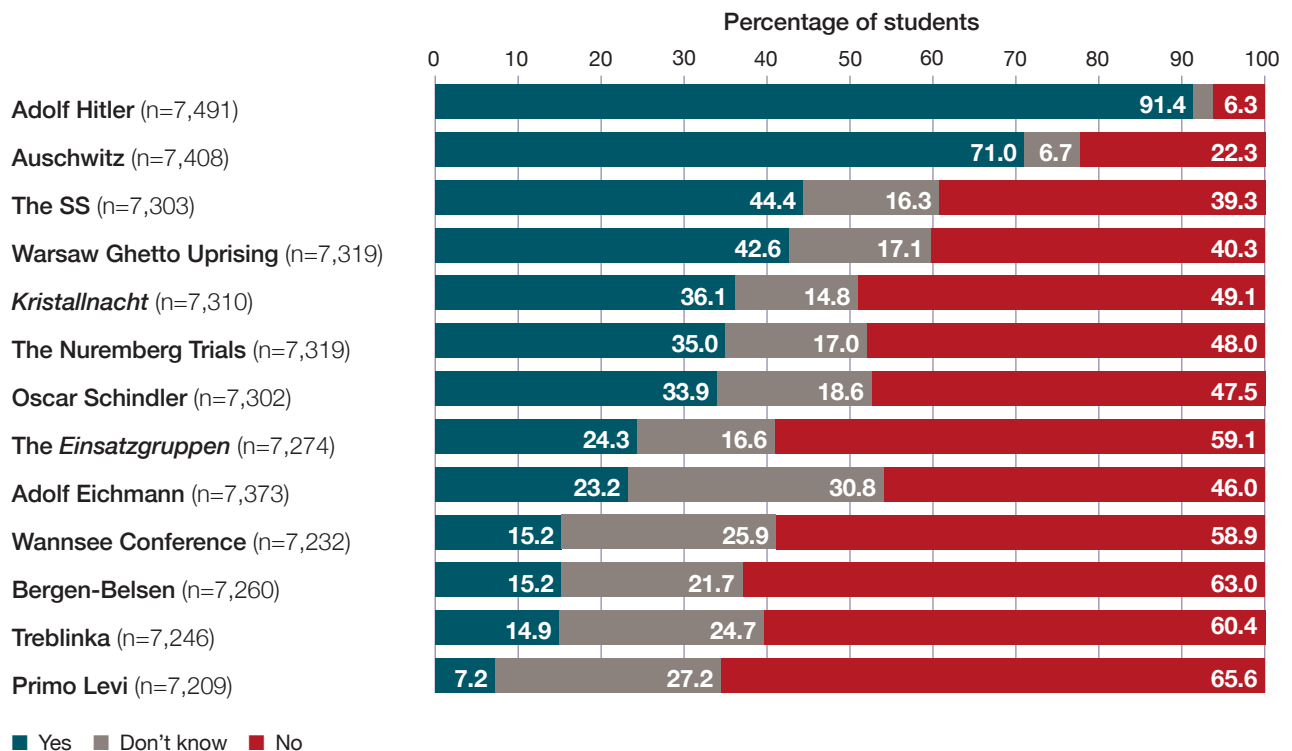
There is, however, an important methodological argument here: observations made on the basis of what students did *not* include in their descriptions can only be tentative at best. To reiterate, at no point in the survey were students asked to outline *everything* they knew about the Holocaust, and so it is only possible to draw inferences on the basis of the implied significance of what they chose to include. In order to address this limitation, question 31 of the survey presented students with a list of named events, people and places and asked them which they considered to be connected to the Holocaust.

This data will be examined again and in closer detail in Chapters 6 and 7, but a few overarching trends are worth highlighting and reflecting upon in relation to the commentary here. First, as Figure 3.7 illustrates, 91.4 per cent of the students responding to the survey identified Adolf Hitler as connected to the Holocaust.

The second most commonly identified connection was Auschwitz. Seventy-one per cent of students recognised Auschwitz as related to the Holocaust while two other named camps, the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen and extermination camp Treblinka, were only recognised by 15.2 per cent and 14.9 per cent, respectively. Indeed, a greater

**Figure 3.7** Students' recognition of people, events and places associated with the Holocaust (percentage of students)

Percentages below 5 per cent are not labelled on the chart

Percentage of students

| | Yes | Don't know | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Adolf Hitler** (n=7,491) | 91.4 | | 6.3 |
| **Auschwitz** (n=7,408) | 71.0 | 6.7 | 22.3 |
| **The SS** (n=7,303) | 44.4 | 16.3 | 39.3 |
| **Warsaw Ghetto Uprising** (n=7,319) | 42.6 | 17.1 | 40.3 |
| *Kristallnacht* (n=7,310) | 36.1 | 14.8 | 49.1 |
| **The Nuremberg Trials** (n=7,319) | 35.0 | 17.0 | 48.0 |
| **Oscar Schindler** (n=7,302) | 33.9 | 18.6 | 47.5 |
| **The *Einsatzgruppen*** (n=7,274) | 24.3 | 16.6 | 59.1 |
| **Adolf Eichmann** (n=7,373) | 23.2 | 30.8 | 46.0 |
| **Wannsee Conference** (n=7,232) | 15.2 | 25.9 | 58.9 |
| **Bergen-Belsen** (n=7,260) | 15.2 | 21.7 | 63.0 |
| **Treblinka** (n=7,246) | 14.9 | 24.7 | 60.4 |
| **Primo Levi** (n=7,209) | 7.2 | 27.2 | 65.6 |

■ Yes   ■ Don't know   ■ No

proportion rejected the premise that either was in any way related to the Holocaust (63.0 per cent and 60.4 per cent of students with regard to Bergen-Belsen and Treblinka, respectively).

Returning to students' own descriptions, across all 6,094 responses given, Auschwitz, or Auschwitz-Birkenau was referenced 56 times. Dachau and Bergen-Belsen were the only other camps individually identified and each was mentioned on only one occasion. Taken together, the responses given by students to both question 30 and question 31 suggest that, while a generalised notion of 'the camps' features prominently in students' thinking, their actual knowledge of the camp system is likely to be partial and incomplete. This is a contention explored in considerably further detail in Chapter 7.

Figure 3.7 also offers further evidence to support the argument that students readily associate the killing of Jews and other victims of Nazi persecution with the camp system – and in particular with the use of gas chambers – but are much less likely to be aware of what Desbois (2008) has characterised as 'the Holocaust by bullets'. Even when given it as a prompt, only 24.3 per cent of the students surveyed recognised that the term 'the *Einsatzgruppen*' was in some way connected to the Holocaust.

Finally, in spite of the total absence of any discussion of Jewish resistance within students' own descriptions of the Holocaust, it is significant to

note that well over a third recognised the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising as part of this history. Arguably, this suggests that the idea of resistance was not entirely unfamiliar to these students nor antithetical to their understanding of the Holocaust itself. Rather, resistance was simply not something that they chose to prioritise within their short accounts.

## Scale

Among the subsample of 2,987 student responses analysed in relation to overarching patterns of form and content, across all year groups, only 23.4 per cent included reference to the scale of the Holocaust in terms of the number of people killed. This varied between 14.9 per cent of Year 7 students to approximately 25 per cent of students from Years 9, 11 and 12. The issue of the number of Jewish victims killed during the Holocaust was in fact the focus of a separate survey question, as will be discussed much more fully in Chapter 5.

However, a closer examination of students' free-text and unprompted responses is again important here. For, what quickly becomes apparent, is the difficulty in adequately capturing – and in return reporting upon – students' understanding of the magnitude of this event.

The specific figure of 6 million was included 365 times across all 6,094 student responses. This in

**Figure 3.8** Most commonly used words and phrases which refer to the scale of the Holocaust across all 6,094 student descriptions
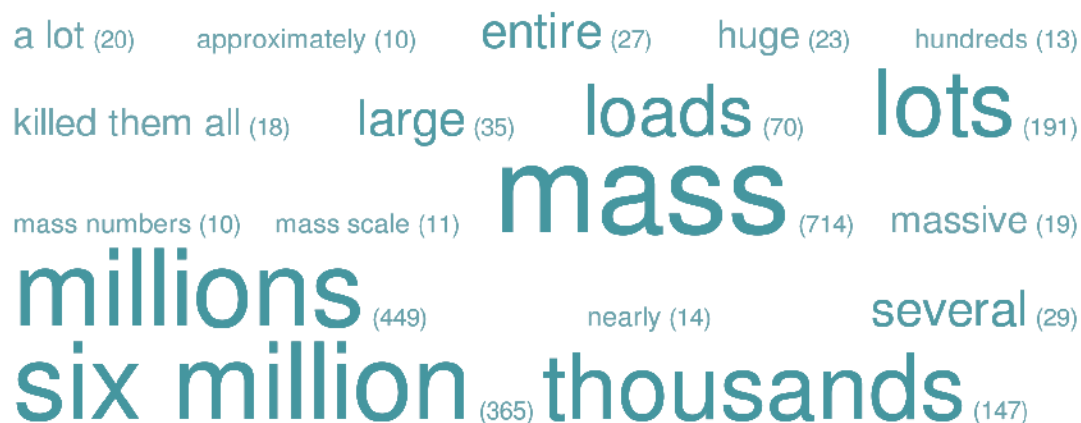


itself would suggest that the number has at least some traction within their collective conceptions of the Holocaust. Although not captured in the summary offered by Figure 3.8, a number between 10 and 12 million was also cited on 15 different occasions. Here, students provided their own explanation that this referred to the total number of deaths if non-Jewish victims were included within the count.

However, by their own volition, students most commonly framed the question of scale with rather less precision through reference to 'millions' of people being killed. A smaller, but still significant minority of students spoke in terms of 'thousands', 'many thousands', 'thousands upon thousands' or 'hundreds of thousands' of murders, while a handful placed the figure in 'billions' instead.

Before this finding is interpreted too readily as clear 'evidence' of students' underestimation of the scale of the Holocaust, closer examination of the actual words they use and the context they provide for any specific numbers given suggests that it is also important to consider the students' numerical literacy and their conceptualisation of magnitude through large numbers more generally.

Whether framed in terms of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions or even billions, almost all of the students surveyed appeared to want to emphasise what they conceived of as the enormity of the Holocaust. And so, for example, while one Year 8 student included a speculative figure of '10,000s' of deaths, they added that this was a figure that was 'more than people can count'. Some characterised it as a 'huge' campaign or 'mass genocide' while referencing thousands or hundreds rather than millions of lives lost. Many others avoided the use

of numbers entirely but emphasised enormity in other ways: some said that 'a massive percentage of Jews in the world' or 'nearly every Jew' was murdered (extracts from Year 11 and Year 10 student responses); the prefix 'mass' was employed on well over 700 occasions while other students simply asserted that the Holocaust itself was 'a huge event'.

**Timeframe**

In their short descriptions, only around one in four students made mention of any kind of temporal framework for the Holocaust and, as is illustrated in Figure 3.9, the Second World War was overwhelmingly the dominant point of reference here. Among the much smaller number of students who chose to offer a more precise timeframe, most considered that the Holocaust began at some point between 1933 (20 references) and 1942 (17 references). They were in clearer agreement that it ended in 1945 (61 references). Other students made less specific associations with the 1930s (30 references) and/or 1940s (64 references), while some simply located the Holocaust as 'an event' in history (13 references).

In a handful of students' accounts, the sense that the Holocaust was historically located was used to highlight a disconnection with the present, for example where one Year 8 student said that '[the] Holocaust means that people where mean and racist in the old days', or where a Year 13 student outlined something of Hitler's racial ideology but countered, 'however in modern days we know this to be untrue'. In other student descriptions provided in response to survey question 30, continuity with the past was emphasised in various ways:

The Holocaust was a terrible, problematic trauma that happened many years ago but is still known to this very day (Year 9 student).

The Evil atrocities of one Nation that changed the land scape of the World we live in today (Year 10 student).

Holocaust was something what happened in the past. But it was so around the world, that even now people still talk about it (Year 10 student).

I think that the Holocaust was a terrible event that took place near the 1930s where the Nazi's killed innocent Jew[s] all around Europe. Germans hated the Jews and so did Hitler, they decided to kill the Jews in many ways by shooting them, torturing them, concentration camps where they were killed with gas without knowing and shoving them in ghettos. Even today there are not many Jews around because the populations dropped back during the world wars (Year 9 student).

Although they did not give specific dates, some students implied that the Holocaust really 'began' prior to 1933 and regularly cited both Germany's loss in the First World War and Hitler's rise to power as salient points of reference within even very short accounts. Indeed, a small number of students across all age groups explicitly stated that the Holocaust occurred *before* as well as during the Second World War. As the Year 9 student responses reproduced below suggest, this might in part be explained if and where students understand 'the Holocaust' in a manner akin to broader notions of antisemitism:

The holocaust started many years before world war 2 and it was basically where the citizens of towns and countries discriminat[ed] against the jews. After many years Hitler came to power and killed many of them. This was one of the most biggest events of the holocaust so many people now remember that as the holocaust (Year 9 student).

The Holocaust, was [an] act against the Jews. It started way before Hitler, but Hitler when he became in power, blew up the spark [against] the jews starting with laws and then leading to gas chambers or death chambers and concentration camps like Auschwitz (Year 9 student).

In more than 40 further student responses, the Holocaust is described as 'having something to do with' or 'happening during' the First World War. However, in many of these same accounts students also reference Hitler and/or refer to dates within the 1940s, so this would seem to denote a much wider confusion concerning the chronology of the twentieth

century rather than of the Holocaust *per se.*

It is entirely understandable – and indeed completely appropriate – for the Second World War to feature so prominently in students' collective conceptions of the Holocaust. However, if we look at the detail of their responses through the theoretical lens established at the start of this chapter, there is evidence that certain forms of understanding can be compromised where two potentially distinct schemata – here 'the Holocaust' and 'the Second World War' as separate but closely related entities – lose their clarity and become unwittingly intertwined.

On one level, such entanglement might explain some of the most striking ostensible confusions in students' accounts. In a number of cases, a conceptual vocabulary related to students' wider schemata for the Second World War, or for war more generally, appears to have been uncomfortably tacked on to or incorporated within their framing of the Holocaust. Among the more obvious examples of this in students' descriptions are the 21 references to 'bombing' noted in Figure 3.6 including the repeated suggestion that Jews, like Britons during the Blitz, were murdered by the deployment of Nazi bombs, for example:

Where many jewish people were killed by german bombers (Year 9 student).

The holocaust is about where jews where bombed by gasses (Year 9 student).

Where the Nazis destroyed the jewish race by bombing them or gassing them (Year 10 student).
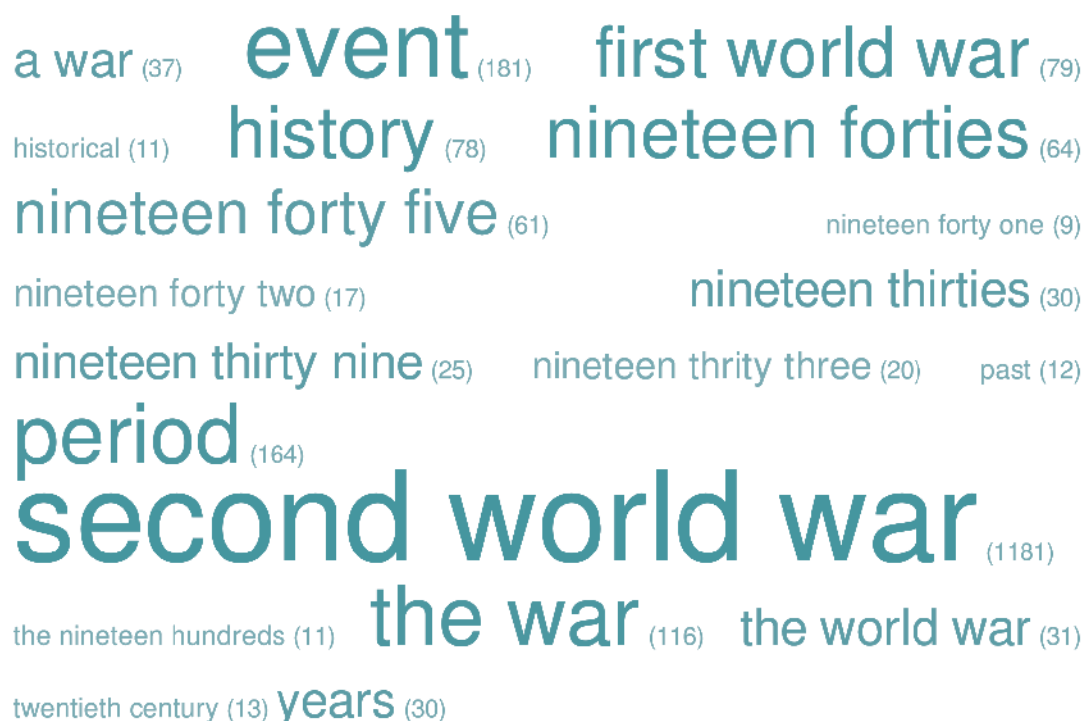
I think the Holocaust was when the Germans killed a lot of Jews by bombing their country (Year 11 student).

There is also, arguably, a related fusion and confusion evident in some students' thinking on the movement of child victims of war. As is illustrated in the responses below, tentative and incomplete knowledge of victims' deportation by train to concentration camps, the *Kindertransport* rescue of Jewish children to Britain and British children's wartime evacuation to the countryside can all appear to become entangled, if not entirely conflated, especially in younger students' minds:

Was the holocaust a train that took jews out of Germany to help them? (Year 7 student).

I think holocaust was something that helped children in the war go to the country side. This made them a bit safer. (Year 7 student).

**Figure 3.9** Most commonly used words and phrases which refer to a timeframe for the Holocaust across all 6,094 student descriptions

a war (37) event (181) first world war (79)

historical (11) history (78) nineteen forties (64)

nineteen forty five (61) nineteen forty one (9)

nineteen forty two (17) nineteen thirties (30)

nineteen thirty nine (25) nineteen thrity three (20) past (12)

period (164)

second world war (1181)

the nineteen hundreds (11) the war (116) the world war (31)

twentieth century (13) years (30)

The Holocaust was when Jews got killed and children had to go to kindertransport (only if they had the money) (Year 7 student).

The holocaust was around in world war 2, it was when children had to immigrate somewhere else due to the war (Year 7 student).

I think it was when they went to war and the kids got evacuated (Year 8 student).

The holocaust was a period of time when jewish children were ridiculed because of their beliefs. They were sent away to POW (Prisoner of War) camp or sent to Britain for reasons of their safety (Year 7 student).

The holocaust was when hitler and the other germans decided that they would put jews in death camps because they wanted everyone [to] be like them. Evacuees from England had to stay in different places because England was being bombed. In the end all the fighting stopped because the English had won (Year 7 student).

When children were taken out of their country for safety and placed in another country (Year 9 student).

Holocaust was like a big evacuation for the jews. They had to go and live in ghetto's and the ghettos would then be surrounded by walls with glass on the top (Year 9 student).

On another level, the potential consequence of these two unconsciously entangled schemata is also evident where students implicitly drew on their understanding of one to explain or interpret the other. This is illustrated in a number of different ways across student responses, for example, where the war is interpreted as a function of the Holocaust (emphasis added):

The German army led by Adolf Hitler are killing a lot of Jews *so other countries go to war with them* and defeated them then Adolf Hitler committed suicide (Year 7 student).

The Holocaust was what *started the second world war* (Year 13 student).

The Holocaust was a time period in the 20th century where the nazis (under Hitler's control) wanted to destroy the jews/disabled/homophobic and put them in concentration camps … Hitler also wanted to create the Aryan race … *Britain went to war with Germany because of this* (Year 9 student).

The Holocaust was when Adolf Hitler killed around Eleven million people and six million were jews. He killed them because he felt as if they were taking over the country he lived in (Germany). This was the cause of the second world war. (Year 10 student).

In another type of confused schemata, the Holocaust was explained primarily in terms of objectives of war (again, emphasis added):

The Holocaust was when *Hitler invaded the world* by capturing Jewish people [and] killing them. He kept them in concentration camps (Year 7 student).

holocaust is when the G*ermans invaded* the Jews country's and captured them and treated them badly and put them in concentration camps and gas chambers (Year 10 student).

The Holocaust was a war between a lot of countries; Hitler was the cause because he didn't like Jews, homosexuals, etc. Countries would be bombed and Hitler sent innocent people (Jews, homosexuals, etc.) to concentration camps and then killed them in gas chambers (Year 9 student).

I think that the Holocaust was a war between different countries because a man called Hitler had this idea of a 'perfect race' and he thought that Jewish people weren't part of that race. He then started being very violent towards them and tried to create his perfect race (Year 9 student).

At its most extreme, in descriptions from 10 individual students, this form of entangled framing led to the Holocaust being explicitly presented – and ostensibly understood – as a war or 'conflict' between the Nazis and/or Germans and the Jews.

Perhaps the most subtle but, in the context of our research, the most numerically significant consequence of a fused association between these two distinct schemata occurs where understanding of one is subsumed within the latter, for example where the Holocaust is described as 'a kind of effect that made the world war worse; something that triggered the war even more' (Year 9 student).

In many cases, students' (often faulty) understanding of the chronology of the Second World War appears to stand in for an understanding of the specific chronology of the Holocaust. Students were considerably more likely to frame the Holocaust simply as an 'event within' – or 'period' coterminous with – the Second World War than to outline the significance of any points that were important in the development of the Holocaust itself. For example, across all 6,094 student responses there were just two individual and very brief references to *Kristallnacht*, one reference to the passing of the Nuremberg Laws and one to the Wannsee Conference. Both *Kristallnacht* and the Wannsee Conference were, however, included in the list of named people, events and places already reported above. Here, too, only a minority of students recognised either event as in any way connected to the Holocaust: 36.1 per cent recognised a connection with *Kristallnacht* and 15.2 per cent a connection with the Wannsee Conference.

**Figure 3.10** Most commonly used words and phrases which refer to geographic locations of the Holocaust across all 6,094 student descriptions

auschwitz (56)  countries (148)

eastern europe (14)  europe (140)  european (11)

germany (590)

nazi germany (144)  occupied (15)

poland (51) surrounding (9) world (102)

## Location

References to location were prioritised even more infrequently in students' descriptions of the Holocaust. They also tended to be somewhat limited in terms of specific content. As Figure 3.10 illustrates, where reference was made to a specific named country – or set of countries – this was almost exclusively restricted to Germany or 'Nazi Germany' (734 individual references) and, to a far lesser extent, to Poland (51 references). However, a number of more generalised references to 'occupied', 'surrounding' or 'neighbouring' countries were also made.

The Holocaust was placed within Europe or described as European in 151 individual references, while approximately 60 students described or implied that Hitler and/or the Nazis ultimately wanted to exterminate Jews worldwide. Again, students' understanding of the location of the Holocaust appears to be very closely related to and dependent upon their understanding of the location of the Second World War. Although Germany was again the very clear focus of such understanding, there was significant recognition that Hitler (and/or the Nazis) 'invaded', 'took control of' or otherwise 'occupied' other, largely unnamed, countries and that the Holocaust was in some way – albeit often vaguely or imprecisely – connected to these places too.

## Causes

Students were not directly asked to identify any possible or probable cause of the Holocaust in their short descriptions. However, close examination of the subsample of responses coded for form and content suggest that approximately 11 per cent of students across all age groups nonetheless chose to.

Figure 3.11 summarises the most commonly occurring words and phrases across all 6,094 responses where students explicitly articulated, implicitly suggested or otherwise invoked any reasons behind the events they described.

Although this is not captured in Figure 3.11, the central figure of Adolf Hitler is once again profoundly important here. Just as Hitler, the Nazis, and occasionally, 'the Germans' were identified as the primary if not exclusive agents behind the actions prioritised by students in Figure 3.5, he and they stand behind many if not all of the 'causes' or 'explanations' summarised in Figure 3.11 and illustrated through specific examples of responses given in answer to survey question 30:

> The Holocaust was the germans killing Jews because Hitler didn't agree with their religion and

thought it was the Jews fault that they lost first world war (Year 10 student).

> The Holocaust was caused by a German man named Adolf Hitler. He hated jewish people because what they believed was different so he killed nearly every Jew (Year 10 student).

> The holocaust was the mass murdering of all Jews due to the fact that Hitler used them as scapegoats and blamed them for everything that went wrong in Germany (Year 9 student).

> The holocaust was when Hitler decided to 'get rid' of all the jews because he blamed them for the downfall in Germany's economy after the war (Year 10 student).

> It was when the germans discriminated the Jews because they were Jews and Hitler didn't like them for some reason so he made a concentration camp and put all the jews in it (Year 8 student).

> The Holocaust is where Adolf Hitler wanted to create a super race by eliminating people like Jews (Year 10 student).

> It was about war against the jews. Hitler caused all of it. He wanted a world without jews (Year 9).

As is also evident in the examples above, the reasons that students included were often somewhat thin, scarcely constituting 'explanation' at all. A number were tautological, as, for example, on 34 separate occasions where students offered an explanation along the lines, 'Jewish people were killed or persecuted because they were Jews'.

It is once again important to remember the methodological point that students had been asked to describe rather than to explain. It is nonetheless striking how few students provided any real rationale for Hitler or the Nazis' hatred of the Jews. Instead this was presented as though itself an explanation – that is, the Holocaust happened because Hitler and/or the Nazis did not like the Jews – rather than something in need of explanation in its own right. The impression given of most students' understanding here, is that the Holocaust was a consequence almost exclusively of Hitler and the Nazi Party's personal beliefs or desires, choices or fears.

In some cases, such choices were presented as almost arbitrary. Thirty-five students suggested there was 'no reason' for the perpetrators' actions, while one Year 9 student explained:

> 'The Holocaust was when Hitler *picked one religion* (the Jews) to target. They were shot, gassed in concentration camps and slaved (emphasis added).

**Figure 3.11** Most commonly used words and phrases which refer to potential causes of the Holocaust across all 6,094 student descriptions

antisemitic (61)  appearance (11)  aryan race (80)
aryan (45)  blamed (79)
blonde hair (118)  blue eyes (118)
culture (29)  didn't fit (45)  didn't like (163)
didn't want (16)  different (352)  disliked (40)
hated (99)  hatred (36)  ideal (27)  impure (12)
inferior (49)  losing the war (47)
master race (29)  money (12)  no reason (35)
perfect race (73)  perfect (88)
perpetrators' beliefs (96)
prejudice (49)  problems (30)  pure (35)  racial (17)
racism (19)  racist (58)  superior (22)  threat (13)
victims' beliefs (80)

Other students did attempt to relate the events of the Holocaust to wider socioeconomic and political conditions. Explanations offered by these students were regularly framed with reference to Germany's economic downturn and the loss of the First World War.

'Antisemitism' was referred to on 61 separate occasions. Again, students' understanding of anti-Jewish prejudice, of various articulations of antisemitism and of the Nazi Party's racial ideology will be explored in much more detail in Chapter 5. However, it is worth noting now that even here, in some accounts, Hitler himself is held responsible as 'the man who began antisemitism' or who

'created antisemitic views' (extracts from Year 9 student responses).

A similar uncertainty or confusion to that identified regarding the basis on which victims of the Holocaust were targeted is also at play here. For example, some students described the Holocaust as a function of religious intolerance:

The Holocaust was where germans killed a lot of jews for their religion (Year 9 student).

Where Hitler put all the jews in concentration camps and the ghettoes. He made all the jews work and he would kill the jews as well. All because they were a

different religion to him. I think this was wrong. (Year 10 student)

The killing of people because of their religion or belief during the war (Year 11 student).

The Holocaust was caused by a person who was prejudiced and didn't respect other religions (Year 11 student).

The Holocaust was the death of millions of people in religious groups because other people didn't believe what they did and wanted them punished (Year 10 student).

Other students said the Holocaust was about conflicting lifestyle choices or opinions:

The massacre of millions of Jews performed by the Nazis in second world war because they believed that they were different and didn't fit into the Nazi way of life (Year 11 student).

The mass killing of jews because of their views and way of life (Year 12 student).

A mass killing of the jewish people by the nazis because the nazis disapproved of the jewish people and their views (Year 9 student).

Yet other students said the Holocaust was rooted wholly in racism and racial ideology:

The Holocaust was when Hitler sent many people who he considered was not to be perfect aryan race. This people included Jews. He wanted to create the next generation of Germans, so they could follow this perfect race. The people who were not considered to be this race were killed (Year 10 student).

The Holocaust was a mass killing which the Nazis did in 1942. The Holocaust was when the Nazis killed the jewish race, not only Jews but others such as African, gypsies, and basically all people who weren't just like one aryan race (blonde hair blue eyes) pure Germans (Year 10 student).

The Holocaust was the killing of Jews by Adolf Hitler because he believed there should only be one 'perfect race' which were white Germans with blonde hair and blue eyes (Year 11 student).

The holocaust was the mass killing of the Jews due to racism from German nazis (Year 9 student).

A framing of Nazi racial ideology as a fixation with deviation from a 'blonde-haired and blue-eyed' Aryan ideal was particularly pronounced here

(again, this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5). Students made 118 individual references to 'blonde hair and blue eyes', and 125 to the notion of an Aryan race. Often this specific imagery was articulated with implicit reference to the building of a German nation but it is perhaps surprising that the term 'nationalism' itself was entirely absent from student accounts and there were only 31 references made to nations or nationality.

While there were clear distinctions in some students' prioritising of 'race' and/or 'colour' *over* 'religion' and/or 'faith', many appeared to work with a considerably more inclusive – and in a number of cases muddled – conflation of these:

It's when people go and kill other religion[s] because of their colour (Year 7 student).

The holocaust was when Hitler invaded all the other religions, example: Jews and Muslims for not having blue eyes or blonde hair (Year 7 student).

The holocaust was were the jews would get killed for being Black (Year 10 student).

A mass slaughter of one religious race (Year 8 student).

The Holocaust was a riot/war that had happened because of race, gender, religion and culture (Year 10 student).

The Holocaust was when Adolf Hitler lost the war so he blamed the Jews, Black people and homosexuals (everyone that was different) (Year 8 student).

The Holocaust was when Hitler took people that he didn't think were 'normal' (Jews, homosexuals etc.) and put them in concentration camps (Year 10 student).

It was when people from different groups, like the Jews, the disabled etc. were seen as different to a normal person, therefore were out casted and treated differently and killed or either sent concentration camps and death camps (Year 10 student).

The repetition of 'etc.' in descriptions such as these is particularly telling. In fact, on 146 separate occasions this shorthand was used as if to suggest students believed the list of those marked by their shared 'otherness' and victimhood was either infinite or self-evident. In a number of students' descriptions, this imprecise inclusivity led to erroneous understandings, as, for example, where 'gender', 'age' and 'social class' were listed as bases

for persecution, or where 'Asians', 'Muslims' and 'Hindus' were specifically named as victims of the regime.

It is not only students' schemata for the Holocaust that are relevant in this context. Where students are encouraged to interpret the history of the Holocaust through a vocabulary of generic notions such as 'racism', 'prejudice' and/or 'difference', they are likely to draw upon wider understandings of what those same terms mean to them within the context of the present day.

Again, these observations should not be interpreted foremost as evidence of students' faulty thinking. As Chapter 5 outlines in considerable detail, the Nazi's historically contingent fusion of racialised nationalism, antisemitism and eugenics was a complex construction that was inconsistently articulated; it is far from simple to understand let alone to explain succinctly. Something of this complexity was implicitly acknowledged by a handful of students whose descriptions directly confronted a common confusion, for example: 'Hitler attempted to end the Jew race, however he was wrong as they were a religion not a race' (Year 12 student). The broader point however is that a generalised notion of 'prejudice' against generic 'difference' – as appears to circulate widely – is unlikely to help students identify, let alone grapple with, such complexity.

**Figure 3.12** Responses to question 69, 'Have you ever learned about the Holocaust at school?'



Percentage of students

■ Yes, definitely  ■ Yes, I think so  ■ Maybe
■ No, I don't think so  ■ Definitely not

## How might students' collective conceptions relate to wider discursive framings and to educational encounters with the Holocaust?

Where do the collective conceptions of the Holocaust that have been charted on the preceding pages come from? As educators, we might hope that the taught content delivered in school and through extracurricular educational encounters have significant impact upon student understanding but, as has already been outlined in Chapter 1, we know that representations of the Holocaust also circulate extensively within popular culture and wider society.

Question 69 of the survey asked students if they had already learned about the Holocaust within school. A total of 7,339 students answered this question and, as Figure 3.12 indicates, 77 per cent reported that they thought, or were sure, they had.

Chapter 4 will examine the detail of students' reported educational encounters with the Holocaust. However, it is instructive to consider here the 15.1 per cent – or 1,112 students – who reported that they had not learned about the Holocaust while at school. When asked if they had ever seen or heard the word 'Holocaust' before, 34.7 per cent of these students said they definitely had, 19.4 per cent thought they had, 26.1 per cent did not think they had, and 19.8 per cent said they definitely had not. However, when students completing the online version of the survey were then presented with the short explanation below, more than half of those unfamiliar with the word 'Holocaust' said they were in fact aware of this history:

> There was a period in history when Adolf Hitler was in charge of the Nazi Party who had control of Germany, and later, other countries. During this time, various groups of people were discriminated against and Jews from across Europe were murdered. This is often called 'the Holocaust'.

In total, more than 80 per cent of students who had never learned about the Holocaust at school were nonetheless familiar with either the term 'Holocaust' or its related history.

It is possible to offer a tentative comparative analysis of students' collective conceptions of the Holocaust prior to formal school-based learning. Table 3.3 shows the ten words or phrases most commonly used across 396 descriptions provided by students from Years, 7, 8 and 9 who had not yet been taught about the Holocaust in school. By way of comparison, the table also reproduces the words most commonly used by the full cohort of students from each of these three year groups, as seen in Table 3.2. One hundred and seventy-three descriptions from the subsample of those coded
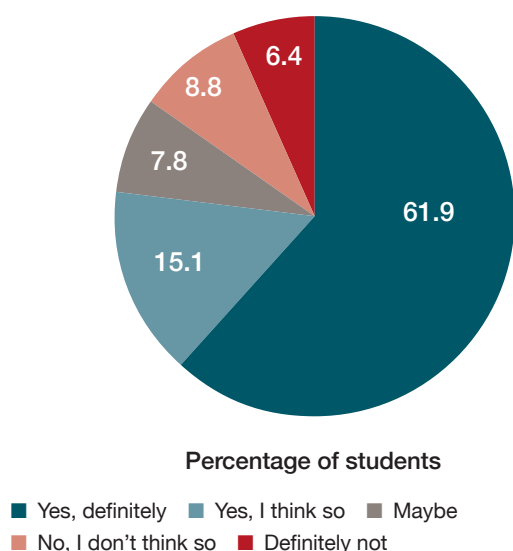
for form and content were contributed by this same group of students, and these are summarised in Figure 3.13.

Table 3.3 and Figure 3.13 appear to illustrate considerable consistency in the form and core content of students' conceptions, irrespective of whether or not they have ever been taught about the Holocaust in school. Figures 3.14 and 3.15 explore this contention further by reproducing a more extensive selection of the words and phrases commonly used by two cohorts of students in Years 7 to 9, those who had learned about the Holocaust (3,293 responses summarised in Figure 3.14), and those who had not (396 responses summarised in Figure 3.15).

While it is very important to exercise caution here rather than claim too much on the basis of a comparative frequency count, it is once again striking that there is so little to separate Figures 3.14 and 3.15. Those who had not learned about the Holocaust in school were proportionately a little more likely to couch their descriptions with caveats or qualifiers expressing uncertainty – including phrases such as 'I think' and 'something to do with'. But the substantive content most commonly included by both sets of students is almost identical.

The only really notable difference – at least as illustrated in the two summary tables – is that those who had learned about the subject were more likely to make reference to homosexuals, 'Gypsies' and people with disabilities. The 147 references to homosexuality recorded in Figure 3.14 – students who had previously learned about the Holocaust – is equivalent to a single reference being made by 4.5 per cent of all students in this group. The comparative proportion for references made by students who *had not* learned about the Holocaust is only 2.3 per cent. Students who had learned about the Holocaust were, proportionately, twice as likely to make references to 'Gypsies' in their descriptions and almost three times as likely to include reference to people with disabilities.

As already outlined in Chapter 1, the research was never designed to measure the impact of any specific educational intervention and this is certainly not the intention of the analysis presented here. Rather, what these findings do appear to demonstrate is that students' overarching conceptions of the Holocaust – as distinct from their precise knowledge content – are to a very large part formed prior to and independent from what they are taught in schools. Moreover, this data would also suggest that what students are then taught does not appear to lead to a fundamental reconfiguration of these conceptions.

This should not be interpreted as suggesting there is little consequence of time spent teaching about the Holocaust in schools. While the increased prominence of groups such as homosexuals,

**Table 3.3** Comparative approximate frequency count (freq) of words and phrases most commonly used by students who had not learned about the Holocaust within school and all student responses from years 7, 8 and 9

| Year 7 (n=533) | Freq | Year 8 (n=854) | Freq | Year 9 (n=2,299) | Freq | Years 7–9 not learned about Holocaust in school (n=396) | Freq |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jews/Jewish | 472 | Jews/Jewish | 862 | Jews/Jewish | 2,346 | Jews/Jewish | 343 |
| Killed | 302 | Killed | 450 | Killed | 1,258 | Killed | 211 |
| Hitler | 232 | Hitler | 402 | Hitler | 1,032 | Hitler | 165 |
| Camps | 167 | Camps | 293 | Camps | 741 | Nazis | 90 |
| Nazis[a] | 130 | Nazis | 211 | Nazis | 697 | Camps | 83 |
| Second World War | 125 | Second World War | 164 | Second World War | 424 | Second World War | 86 |
| Sent or Taken | 98 | Sent or Taken | 157 | Sent or Taken | 355 | Sent or Taken | 60 |
| Germans[b] | 91 | Gassed | 154 | Germans | 336 | Germans | 55 |
| Gassed[c] | 68 | Germans | 143 | Million/ 6 million | 317 | Gassed | 42 |
| Religion[d] | 43 | Million/ 6 million | 92 | Gassed | 300 | Religion | 27 |

a Includes references to: 'Nazis', 'Nazi party', 'Nazi Germans' and 'Nazi regime'

b Includes 'German people'

c Includes all references to 'gas' and 'gassing' (including 'gas chambers' and 'gas showers')

d Includes references to 'religious' and 'beliefs'

**Figure 3.13** Descriptions of the Holocaust given by students in Years 7 to 9. Comparison between all students and those who had not been taught about the Holocaust (percentage of students)



■ Years 7, 8, 9: All students   ■ Years 7, 8, 9: Students not taught about the Holocaust
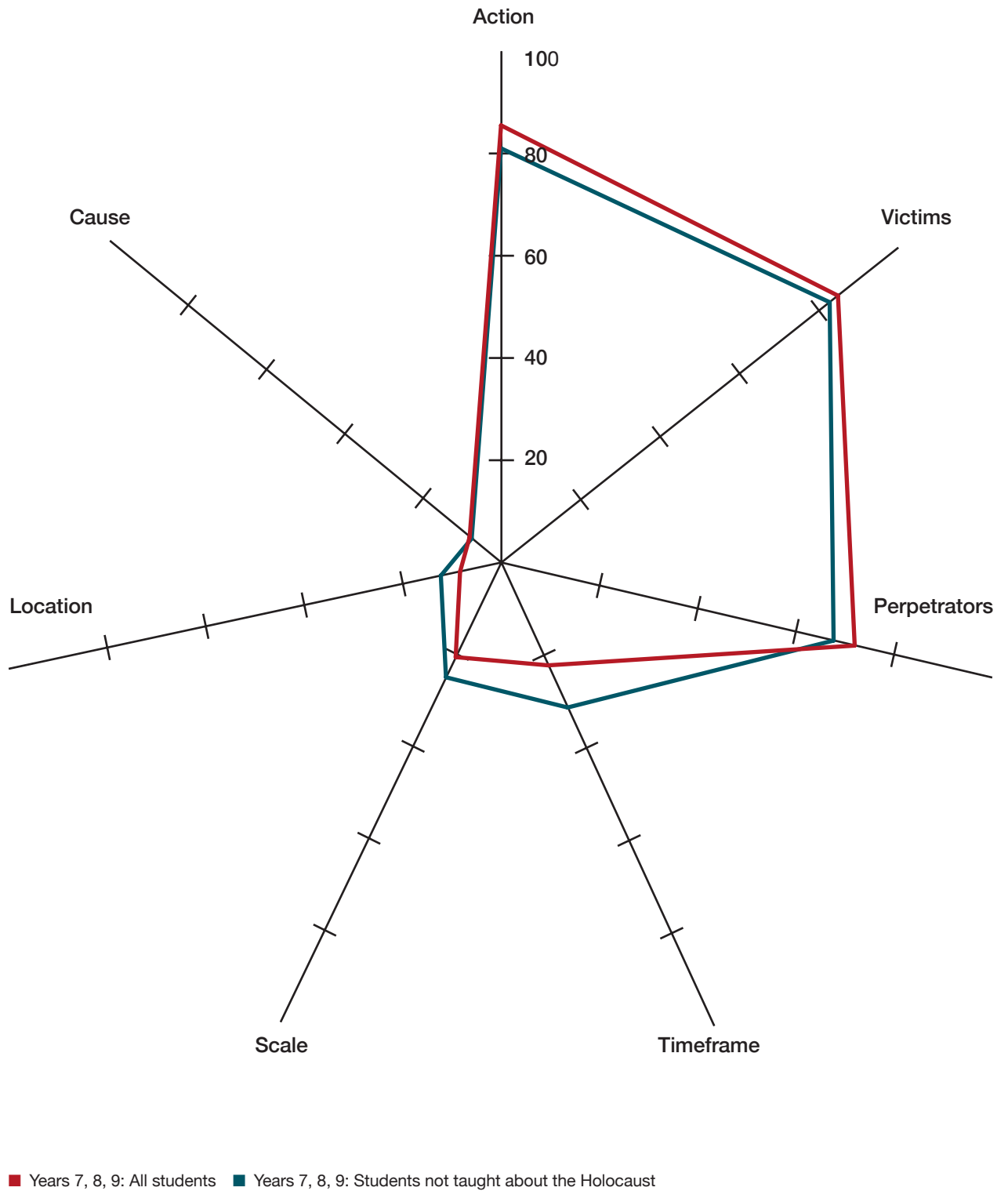
people with disabilities, and those that students themselves identify as 'Gypsies', among those who had learned about the Holocaust reflect a relatively small shift in thinking, it also indicates a potential influence of schooling. Furthermore, none of the figures presented above can tell us anything about how much each group of students actually knew or understood in relation to the words and phrases used.

It would also be a mistake to over emphasise a distinction between the notion of an 'inside' and an 'outside' of schools. The importance of wider sociopolitical framings has been stressed throughout this chapter and, of course, schools and schoolteachers do not exist independently of these. On the contrary, the boundaries between classrooms and popular culture are inherently porous and there are, of course, very significant relationships between formal systems of education and national policy frames. The way that contemporary British society positions its relationship with the Holocaust – and with the memory of the Holocaust, as described in Chapter 1 – is therefore of considerable importance, especially given the central role routinely awarded to education in ensuring that the 'lessons' of the Holocaust are 'learned'.

In this respect, it is helpful to note the small but potentially significant group of 25 students who, in response to survey question 30, described their understanding of the Holocaust primarily as an act of remembrance. Some appeared to interpret the term even more specifically as a discrete day, or 'moment', of commemoration or reflection:

> [The Holocaust is] the remembrance of the millions of people who died in the nazi camps for being different (Year 10 student).

> Holocaust is the day when the Jews remember all the other Jews who got killed by Adolf Hitler (Year 10 student).

> Remembrance day of the genocide of jews (Year 11 student).

> It was Hitler's discrimination against Jews. It is now used as the name of the day we remember this (Year 7 student).

> It is where we have a moment where we remember the jews (Year 9 student).

> Holocaust is a day were we think back to what Hitler did to the jews (Year 10 student).

Again, the number of students articulating understandings such as these was proportionately very small and, even in this small group, some

appeared to have confused 'the Holocaust' with remembrance of the First or Second World Wars. However, their responses arguably illustrate a wider impact upon students' thinking that stems from collective acts of commemoration, such as Holocaust Memorial Day, and the central role often awarded to schools within these.

Returning to our theoretical framework of shared schemata and social representations – and more specifically to their plastic but resistant nature – Jean-Claude Abric suggests a dominant representation may change 'if there is a radical threat to [its] organising structure', what he refers to as its 'nucleus':

> Change in the meaning and values attached to the peripheral elements will only lead to superficial change, but a transformation in the nucleus will change the whole nature and structure of the representation itself (quoted in Augoustinos and Innes 1990: 227).

If we return to look at Figure 3.13 and allow ourselves to imagine that the lines it charts offer a figurative tracing around precisely such a nucleus, it would appear that there is very little indication of transformation or change. Nor for that matter was there evidence of significant transformation across year groups as depicted in Figure 3.3: all students, irrespective of age, and prior educational encounter were most likely to prioritise named victims, perpetrators and actions in their descriptions and to award much less attention to when or where the Holocaust took place.

There are at least two important implications of this. The first concerns the question of why the core content of students' collective conceptions is consistently structured in such a manner in the first place. Here we need, once again, to consider wider discursive framings and critically reflect upon the symbolic work we – as a national society – most commonly ask the Holocaust to do. If, as already suggested in Chapter 1, our encounters with this history are typically conceived in terms of opportunity, if not obligation, to learn overarching 'lessons from the past', then it is easy – perhaps even necessary – to allow the Holocaust to become decoupled from a specific place and time. Offering a similar interpretation, Alexander (2003: 28) contends that, as a social representation, the Holocaust has become 'free-floating rather than situated', 'universal rather than particular', 'a traumatic event for all of humankind'.

The second implication regards the way forward for teaching and learning. If it were considered important to do so, an educational intervention could clearly emphasise particular key events and turning points or specifically try to expand students' awareness of the Holocaust's unfolding

**Figure 3.14** Most commonly used words or phrases in students' descriptions of the Holocaust – students in Years 7, 8 and 9 who have learned about the Holocaust in school (n=3,293)

adolf (307)     all the jews (181)     attempted (86)

because (475)   blue eyes (72)   called (79)   camps (245)

concentration camps (704)

countries (90)   death camps (109)   death (109)   didn't like (110)   died (107)

different (172)   disabled people (83)   disabled (105)   discriminated (194)

etc (71)   event (103)   gas chambers (159)   gas (73)   gassed (242)

gays (77)     genocide (159)     germans (497)

germany (256)   group (106)   gypsies (128)   happened (147)

hated (72)   hitler (1502)   homosexuals (147)   i think (255)

jewish people (367)   jewish (170)   jews (2496)

killed (1699)   leader (80)   lots (127)   mass killing (94)   mass murder (94)

millions (203)   murdered (116)   nazi party (106)   nazis (849)

people (790)   period (83)   race (123)   religion (206)

second world war (624)   sent (225)

six million (181)   started (77)   taken (80)   the war (73)   thought (106)

thousands (77)   took (206)   tortured (139)   treated (89)   tried (134)   wanted (177)

wipe out (88)   work (186)   world (97)

**Figure 3.15** Most commonly used words of phrases in students' descriptions of the Holocaust – students in Years 7, 8 and 9 who have not learned about the Holocaust in school (n=396)

adolf (43)　　all the jews (23)　　attempt (11)

because (59)　believed (7)　blonde hair (9)　blue eyes (9)

camps (16)　　　　　　　　　　captured (7)

concentration camps (65)　countries (7)

death camps (7)　death (12)　didn't like (8)　died (13)　different (19)

discriminated (11) etc (8) event (7) first world war (8) gas chambers (12) gas (9)

gassed (18)　　genocide (16)　　germans (52)

germany (22)　group (8)　gypsies (8)　happened (21)

hitler (164)　homosexuals (9)　horrible (10)　i think (54)

in charge (7)　jewish people (40)　　jewish (28)

jews (243)　kept (10)　killed (200)　lots (28)

mass killing (10)　millions (20)　murdered (19)　nazi germany (8)

nazi party (9)　nazis (70)　ordered (8)　people (90)

period (13)　prison (8)　race (15)　religion (18)

second world war (86)　sent (23)

six million (18) something to do with (19) something (9) started (8)

taken (10)　the war (13)　thought (7)　thousands (15)　took (21)

tortured (15) treated (12) tried (10) wanted (12) worked (7)

geography. However, the challenge is not necessarily that students have inadequate access to such information (although this may also be true). A more fundamental challenge is that students may then attempt to accommodate any such new information within underlying schemata that actively prohibit the recognition that this is pertinent knowledge at all.

## Definitions of the Holocaust

Neither the survey nor focus-group interviews specifically asked students to define the Holocaust. Instead, the more open invitation to 'describe' the Holocaust was always used. However, as Chapter 1 has already identified, the coexistence of competing and potentially contradictory definitions of 'the Holocaust' is another important characteristic of how this history is currently framed and previous commentators such as Russell (2006) and Salmons (2003) have noted with concern that there are often important distinctions between historians' definitions and popular understandings of the term.

For the purposes of our discussion here, there are two significant axes along which opposing definitions of the Holocaust may divide. The first concerns the term's inclusivity or otherwise as regards the identification of variously targeted victim groups. Again, as Chapter 1 has already detailed, most contemporary academic historians use the particular term 'the Holocaust' to refer exclusively to the targeting of European Jews (see, for example, Bauer 2002; Cesarani 2004; Hilberg 1993). Here, the experiences of other groups of people persecuted and in many cases murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators are recognised as critically important to an understanding of the Holocaust, but they are not themselves denoted by the use of this specific term. More inclusive definitions might use the term to reference the experiences of other groups, most commonly the Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), disabled people, Poles, Slavs, homosexuals, Jehovah's witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, Black people and/or other political or minority ethnic groups (for an expanded discussion of variously articulated definitions of the Holocaust, see Niewyk and Nicosia 2000).

The second axis concerns the totality of the Nazis' exterminationist objective for European Jews. For historian Yehuda Bauer, for example, what makes the Holocaust an unprecedented historical phenomenon was the Nazi's intention to kill every Jew across all of Europe – a genocide that extended beyond boundaries of national sovereignty (Bauer 2002). There is some evidence that this could also have been the Nazis' ultimate intended fate for Europe's Roma and Sinti (Gypsy) population. From this perspective, an explicit recognition of this

exterminationist objective is seen as an important requirement with regard to defining the term.

The polar contrast to this position is an entirely decontextualized definition made without reference to any distinguishing feature of this history. Thus, in some contexts, the term 'holocaust' is used as a generic term synonymous either with mass murder and genocide or with processes of discrimination and prejudice more broadly. Such generic definitions are not commonly used in the putative field of Holocaust education in the United Kingdom, but they do circulate more widely. Across all 6,094 student descriptions only a very small minority of students appeared to interpret the Holocaust in such a way:

> I think it is when a big group of people are murdered even if they are children or women (Year 9 student).

> Slaughter of a massive scale of people (Year 9 student).

> When lots of people are killed because of their religion, race or sexuality (Year 9 student).

A handful of others wrote simply 'mass killing' or 'genocide', while two more presented 'the Jewish Holocaust' as 'an example of' a holocaust – a more general category.

The question of whether or not the students in this study were likely to interpret the Holocaust to refer exclusively to Jewish victims is, on the basis of available data, harder to discern. As has already been emphasised, Jewish people very firmly occupied a central position in students' collective conceptions of the Holocaust. Other named victims were identified far less frequently. However, where other victim groups were included alongside Jews in students' descriptions, they tended to be listed somewhat indiscriminately, for example,

> 'The Holocaust was the mass murder of people because they were either Jewish, disabled, gypsies, homosexual, mentally ill' (Year 12 student).

In other cases there appeared to be slippage – or perhaps confusion – in students' thinking, for example in the case of a Year 12 student who described the Holocaust as 'the mass genocide of Jews during the time of the Second World War' before continuing: 'which was an attempt from Hitler to wipe-out the Jews, gays, disabled and any others who didn't conform to his ruling' (Year 12 student).

Elsewhere, some students clearly recognised the centrality of the Jews in relation to the Holocaust but appeared uncertain as to how to distinguish this from the experience of other victim groups:

> The Holocaust was the event where Jews were discriminated against by Nazi Germany under the

rule of Hitler, to the extent that around six million Jewish people were killed. The Nazi's did not only target Jews but also other minorities, those who Hitler and the Nazi's believed to be inferior. (Year 12 student).

The attempt led by the Nazis to kill all the Jews and the people they deemed to be Jewish by placing them in death camps. People with disabilities, homosexuals and many others were also killed. (Year 12 student).

Again, it is not possible to determine from just these short responses whether these and other students would ultimately 'define' the Holocaust in exclusive or inclusive terms. While many students appeared to conceive of various different victim groups as almost interchangeable, others seemed to recognise that there was something distinctive about the positioning of Jewish victims in relation to the word.

As described earlier in this chapter, a subsample of 2,987 students' descriptions was coded to identify what proportion made specific mention of the Nazis' exterminationist objective to murder every Jewish person everywhere. As Table 3.4 illustrates, this accounted for approximately 7 per cent of students across all year groups.

Although the absolute numbers remain small, the proportionate increase in the likelihood that students would include this recognition in their description was one of the most significant shifts in terms of overarching collective conceptions that we observed. By the time they had reached Year 13, students in this sample were proportionately five times more likely than those in Years 7 and 8 to outline a recognition that the Nazis intended to kill all Jews everywhere. While the reasons for this increase and its relationship with both taught content and extracurricular encounters with the Holocaust clearly need further exploration, it serves as an important reminder of the plasticity – and thus scope for educational intervention – in students' thinking.

## How confident were students in their knowledge of the Holocaust?

It has been emphasised that the primary focus of this chapter is not the accuracy or otherwise of students' substantive knowledge of the Holocaust.

The responses that students gave to individual 'knowledge-based' questions included in the survey will be analysed in detail in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. However, with regard to collective conceptions it is instructive to examine how much students *thought* they knew about this history.

When asked almost exactly this question in the survey, students responded in the following proportions:

- 12.6 per cent chose the statement, 'I know lots about the Holocaust'
- 43.8 per cent chose, 'I know quite a lot about the Holocaust'
- 36.9 per cent chose, 'I know a little bit about the Holocaust
- 6.7 per cent chose the statement suggesting they did not know anything about the Holocaust at all.

Over two-thirds (68.6 per cent) of all the students surveyed suggested they would like to learn more.

All knowledge-based questions included in the survey were accompanied by the follow-up question 'How confident are you of this answer?' Here students could respond: 'I am very confident in this answer'; 'I am fairly confident in this answer'; I am not very confident in this answer'; 'I don't know the answer – this is just a guess'.

Figure 3.16 illustrates students' average self-reported confidence level across 11 multiple choice questions included in the survey. It shows that there is a steady increase in confidence with year group but that this varies within a fairly limited range. While a student who indicated that they had simply guessed all 11 answers would have been given the lowest possible confidence score of 11 and a student expressing total confidence across all their answers the highest score of 44, the average Year 7 student score was 25.0 and the average for Year 13 students 30.1.

The composite accuracy score and composite knowledge score (based on the 11 multiple choice questions) were found to have a statistically significant correlation (with a correlation coefficient 0.44): as the accuracy of students' responses increased, so too did their confidence in those answers. In very general terms, the students who appeared to know the least about the history of the Holocaust – as measured through this short series of knowledge questions – were also those who were least confident in their answers.

**Table 3.4** Percentage of student responses with reference to total extermination of Jews

| Year 7 | Year 8 | Year 9 | Year 10 | Year 11 | Year 12 | Year 13 | All students |
|--------|--------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------------|
| 2.3 | 2.3 | 5.5 | 9.1 | 9.5 | 8.3 | 11.4 | 7.1 |

Perhaps this observation seems self-explanatory and unremarkable. However, the relationship between students' confidence and the accuracy of their knowledge was not as clear-cut or predictable as it might first seem. Figure 3.17 charts the percentage of students who were at least fairly confident that they had given the right answer to all 11 multiple choice questions in the survey against the comparable proportion who *actually* gave the most accurate answer in each case.

A broadly consistent proportion of students both knew – and *knew* that they knew – when the Holocaust happened, what the purpose of the Nazi ghettoes was and approximately how many European Jews were killed. However, confidence outstripped actual knowledge in a further eight of the eleven responses they were invited to provide. For two of these questions – 'Approximately what percentage of Jewish children in Nazi-controlled Europe were murdered?' and, 'In 1933, what percentage of the German population was Jewish' – students expressed considerable uncertainty over their answers. Even here there were respective gaps of 11.6 and 21.3 percentage points between the proportion of those who were confident they had answered correctly and those who actually had.

For other questions this same gap was striking: 45.2 percentage points where students were asked which historical event immediately preceded the Holocaust and almost 55.8 where they were asked to identify the most likely consequence if a member of the military or police refused an instruction to kill. This chapter began by outlining the implications of students' collective conceptions of the Holocaust for classroom practice and it is appropriate to return to that endeavour here. If, as educators, we ultimately want to challenge and dispel some of the most pervasive misunderstandings that concern the Holocaust, it is instructive to recognise the strength with which these conceptions may be held.

Moreover, as has been argued in this chapter, it is important to reflect upon where such misinformation might come from. Why is it that so few people are familiar with the weight of available historical evidence suggesting an officer who refused to kill would most likely have been reallocated to a different task (see Chapter 6 for a fuller discussion of this historiography and students' responses)? And what wider frameworks for deriving meaning from the Holocaust might this and other such misconceptions reflect or serve?

## Summary

■ This chapter has reported widespread recognition of the Holocaust, even among students who stated that they had never learned about the subject in school. In total, more than 85 per cent of all students surveyed recognised the term 'the Holocaust' and a further 9 per cent were familiar with the history to which it refers. Of those unfamiliar with both the term and this history, 90 per cent were still in Year 9 or below.

■ When invited to provide their own description of the Holocaust, a clear majority of students across all year groups included at least one reference to Jewish people.

■ The second and third most consistently referenced terms were 'killing' and 'Hitler' respectively. 'Nazis', 'concentration camps' and 'the Second World War' were also frequently prioritised.

■ Further content analysis revealed a relatively stable core structure within students' descriptions of the Holocaust: across all year groups, students were most likely to identify an action or series of actions committed by named perpetrators upon named victims. They were considerably less likely to make reference to a specific timeframe or geographical location in their description. Within a subsample of 2,987 student responses, 73.7 per cent identified at least one perpetrator, 92.5 per cent at least one victim and 93.2 per cent at least one action, while only 24.7 per cent referred to a timeframe and only 14.9 per cent located the Holocaust geographically.

■ Across all student descriptions, a much more extensive and varied vocabulary was used in relation to those identified as the victims of the Holocaust than those positioned as perpetrators. While victims were very regularly described as 'Jewish *people*', 'Black *people*', '*people* with disabilities' and so on, perpetrators were much more commonly presented in abstracted terms.

■ The chapter suggested that 'camps' – and in particular, concentration camps – appear to play a centrally important role in students' conceptions of the Holocaust and, in many students' descriptions, the two terms seemed to be used and understood interchangeably. While some students emphasised that the Nazis operated a variety of different camps with varying form and function, the majority did not acknowledge – nor perhaps recognise – such distinctions in their accounts.

**Figure 3.16** Variation in average confidence score by year group
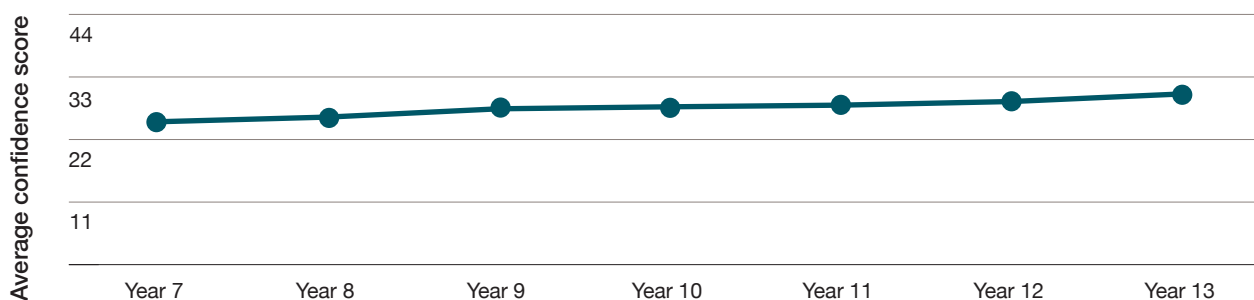


44: 'Very confident' across all answers    33: 'Fairly confident' across all answers
22: 'Not very confident' across all answers    11: 'Just a guess' across all answers

**Figure 3.17** The percentage of students who were at least fairly confident they had given the correct answer for each question, and the percentage of students who actually did give the correct answer
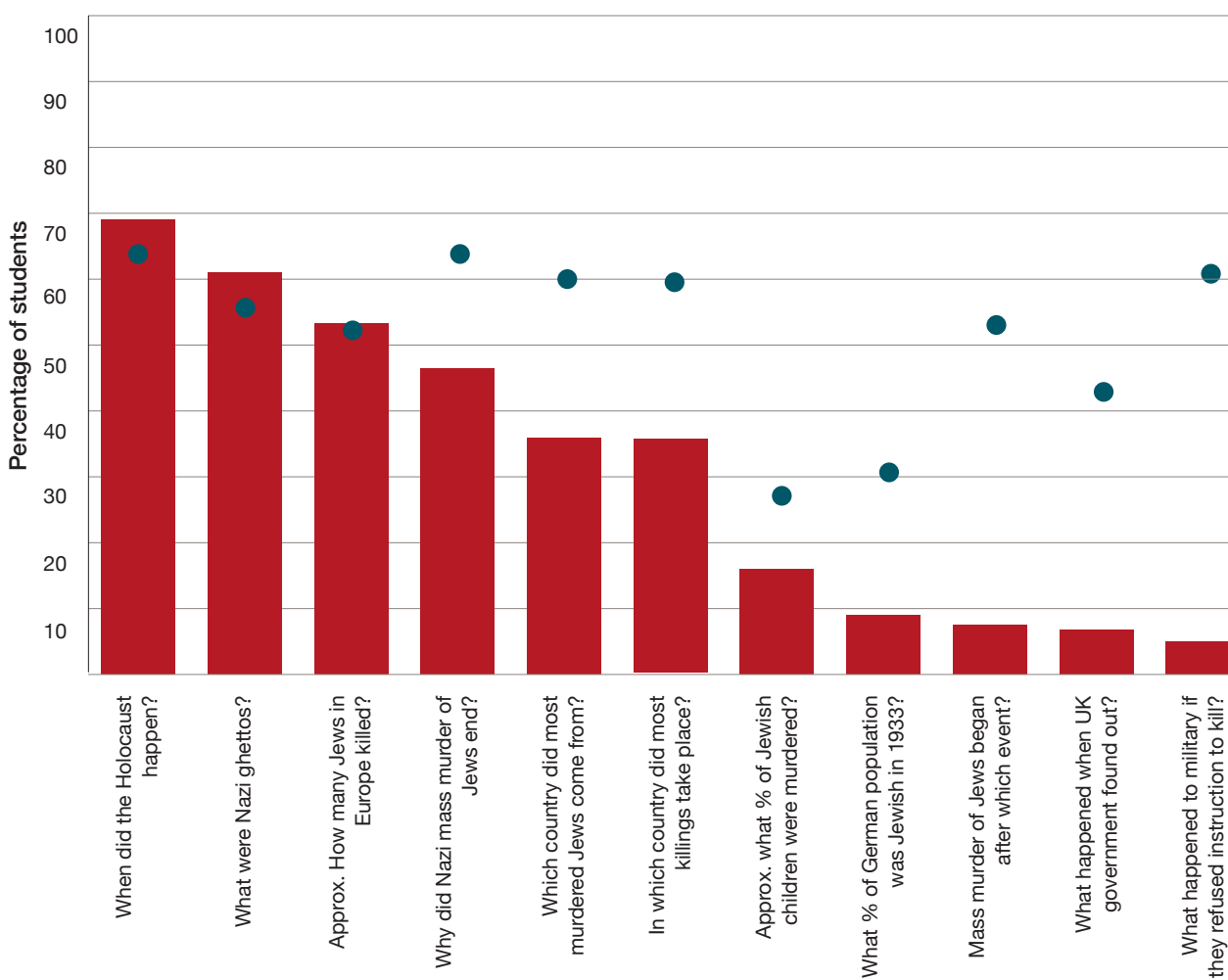


■ Percentage who actually gave the correct answer    ■ Percentage who were confident they had given the correct answer

- For most students 'the camps' appeared to be understood and framed as places of execution and murder. However, in some student descriptions, the whole camp system – and indeed the whole Holocaust – was presented as though the enslavement and forced labour of Jews and other victims of Nazi persecution was its primary motivation and function.

- The chapter also argued that the emphasis placed upon camps in students' framing of the Holocaust had potentially obscured other significant dimensions of this history. For example, while students' descriptions included over 750 individual references to the Nazis' use of gasses as a means to murder victims, only 65 references were made to people being shot.

- Approximately 10 per cent of the students surveyed for this study made reference to possible causes of the Holocaust. Overwhelmingly, these centred on Hitler and/or 'the Nazis' whose hatred of Jews was typically presented by way of explanation rather than as something in need of explanation in itself.

- The chapter also specifically examined the descriptions offered by a subsample of students who reported that they had not (yet) learned about the Holocaust at school. There was striking consistency in the collective conceptions of these students and those who *had* been taught about the Holocaust. This was interpreted as strong indication that students' overarching conceptions of the Holocaust – as distinct from precise knowledge content – are in large part formed prior to and independent of taught content received in schools.

- It was very rare among survey responses for students to describe the Holocaust in such a manner that implied the term had a generic meaning broadly equivalent to 'mass murder' or 'genocide'. It was also relatively uncommon for students to emphasise any recognition that the Nazis intended to eliminate all Jews everywhere. However, the likelihood of students including such a recognition in their description increased considerably with age.

- The students who took part in this study commonly recognised the limitations of their knowledge of this history. Only 12.6 per cent described that they knew 'lots' about the subject and 68.6 per cent suggested they would like to learn more. Students' confidence in answering individual knowledge-based questions increased with age and in relation to the accuracy of their answers. Broadly speaking, those who appeared most knowledgeable about this history were most confident in their answers.

- However, the chapter also reported that there were a number of areas of understanding in which students' self-reported confidence regularly outstripped their accuracy. For example, 12 times as many students confidently believed they knew the likely consequence of a member of the military or police refusing a direct order to kill than were actually able to answer the question correctly.

Olivia Hemingway, 2014

# 4.

## Encountering representations of the Holocaust in classrooms and beyond

### Key questions

1. What is the focus of the current chapter?
2. Where do students encounter the Holocaust both within and outside school?
3. What value do students place upon learning about the Holocaust in school?
4. What impact does first-hand survivor testimony have on students' understanding of the Holocaust?
5. What impact does *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* have on students' understanding of the Holocaust?
6. What do students think and feel about encountering atrocity images of the Holocaust?

### Key findings

1. Of all the students surveyed, 28.5 per cent said they first encountered the Holocaust in primary school. Among students in Years 10 and above, more than 85 per cent had learned, or thought they had learned, about the Holocaust in school.
2. The majority of students had positive attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust. Over 70 per cent who had already learned about the Holocaust said they wanted to learn more.
3. There was broad consensus on the importance of the subject, with 83 per cent of students saying that all students should learn about the Holocaust at school.
4. Attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust appeared broadly stable across gender, year group and religious affiliation. In contrast to regularly voiced concerns, Muslim students' attitudes did not appear to differ significantly from those of the full cohort taking part in the research.
5. Students with first-hand experience of hearing survivor testimony were overwhelmingly positive about such encounters. Many emphasised that meeting and hearing from an individual survivor helped make this history feel 'more real'.
6. *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was the most-read book and the most-watched film about the Holocaust among students. Focus-group interviews suggest that this narrative can reinforce an inaccurate perception of German ignorance of the Holocaust.
7. Young people are viewing atrocity images of the Holocaust even when they are not shown these images in school. Students generally appeared to respond appropriately to such images and described their value in helping them to 'make sense' of the Holocaust.

### What is the focus of the current chapter?

In a 1989 article, 'Art and the Holocaust: Trivializing memory', Holocaust survivor, activist and writer Elie Wiesel (1989: no pagination) reflects upon both the impossibility and the necessity of communicating the 'monstrous meaning' of the Holocaust beyond those who actually experienced it first-hand:

The truth of Auschwitz remains hidden in its ashes. Only those who lived it in their flesh and in their minds can possibly transform their experience into knowledge. Others, despite their best intentions, can never do so. Such, then, is the victory of the executioner: by raising his crimes to a level beyond the imagining and understanding of men, he planned to deprive his victims of any hope of sharing their monstrous meaning with others.

As he had argued elsewhere six years earlier, 'the Holocaust in its enormity defies language and art, and yet both must be used to tell the tale, the tale that must be told' (quoted in Muschamp 1993: no pagination).

For Wiesel, one of the most powerful imperatives for at least attempting to communicate this history is as a commitment to the Holocaust's victims, to those who feared their tale(s) might *never* be told. In a famous passage from the preface to *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi describes a regularly articulated fear among survivors that their accounts would simply not be believed. This is a fear all the more profound because it had been foreshadowed by their persecutors, as Levi (1988: 1) illustrates in identifying the sort of admonishments and threats made by SS officers to young Jews:

> However this war may end, we have won the war against you; none of you will be left to bear witness, but even if someone were to survive, the world will not believe him. There will perhaps be suspicions, discussions, research by historians, but there will be no certainties, because we will destroy the evidence together with you. And even if some proof should remain and some of you survive, people will say that the events you described are too monstrous to be believed: they will say that they are the exaggerations of Allied propaganda and will believe us, who will deny everything, and not you. We will be the ones to dictate the history of the Lagers.

Of course the Nazis were successful neither in entirely destroying the evidence of their crimes nor in silencing their victims' voices. On the contrary, in place of silence, multifarious 'tales' of and from the Holocaust now abound. As Levi and Rothberg (2003: 4) note in the introduction to an edited collection of readings from across the humanities and social sciences, 'despite a slow start in the early postwar years and the many famous warnings about these events' incomprehensibility', 'the amount of research and writing about the Holocaust is mind-boggling'.

In addition to the many academic historians, philosophers, theologians, cultural theorists and social scientists that Levi and Rothberg cite, numerous artists, novelists, poets, playwrights and film-makers have also attempted to communicate and reflect upon the meaning – or meanings – of the Holocaust in a variety of different ways. And, as this chapter will demonstrate, multiple forms of both academic and popular cultural representation of the Holocaust are likely to inform students' knowledge and understanding of this history.

Wiesel's central tenet – that 'the truth' of the Holocaust can only be understood by those who were its victims – remains contentious, as all discussions regarding claims to 'knowledge' or

'truth' are wont to be. However, it has significant implication for teaching and learning, as is illustrated by the following conversation with a group of Year 12 students who had been asked to consider whether 'too much time is spent learning about the Holocaust in schools':

> **Miles:** I think the only key point about that is the fact that if we get the point of what it means and what it means in relation to us.
> **Interviewer:** Could you try and articulate what that is? What it is, and what it means in relation to you?
> **Miles:** So like, for me, while I was listening to [the survivor who talked in school] he was talking about how there was kids in the concentration camps and how they were sent off without their mothers and their fathers and stuff like that. And for me I sort of pictured myself into that situation, and once I saw it I thought, I've got to respect this, it's a really key thing in history. Yeah, I don't want to go on and on about it 'til the day is done really, but 'til it's really enforced in my brain, I just think this is injustice in a sense and it isn't right!
> [. . .]
> **John:** Yeah. It's just so … you wouldn't be able to imagine yourself in that position. You try and imagine yourself in that position and you think, that's so intense and so…
> **Sarah:** It just sounds too terrible to be true.
> **John:** Yeah, almost as if it could be … it's not possible, as if it didn't happen because it's so, so intense and so …
> **Sarah:** Brutal.
> **John:** …brutal, yeah (Year 12, EE2).

Miles describes that, while he may not want 'to go on and on about it 'til the day is done', it is important that he and other students are able to 'get the point of what [the Holocaust] means' and, more specifically, what it means in relation to them. Sarah and John articulate their own struggle to comprehend the *almost* unbelievable brutality of this history while Miles says that he was able to 'picture' himself in the context of the concentration camp system after hearing the spoken first-person account of a survivor and that this visualisation enabled him to grasp the salience of the Holocaust: 'once I saw it I thought, I've got to respect this, it's a really key thing in history'. Such articulations by students of what they think or feel it means to 'know' about or 'understand' the Holocaust are the focus of this chapter, along with analysis of how they relate to various forms of encounter in their attempts to do so.

In the context specifically of history classrooms, several authors have raised concerns over ahistorical forms of empathising based on 'imagination', 'identification' or 'sympathy', reminiscent of the experience that Miles appears to describe (Foster

and Yeager 2001: 169; Harris and Foreman-Peck 2004; Ashby and Lee 1987 and Shemilt 1984). However, most would also argue that the 'meaning' and significance of the Holocaust could not be comprehended through historical analysis alone. Indeed, as this chapter will go on to describe, many of the students who took part in this study themselves described their 'understanding' in affective and experiential rather than purely cognitive terms.

It is perhaps for these reasons that the Centre's previous research on classroom practice found that many teachers from across all subject backgrounds – including history – were likely to draw upon multiple forms of representation of the Holocaust. For example, 76 per cent of those who answered the relevant survey question reported that they were likely to use feature films in their teaching, while 81 per cent said they were likely to use film or television documentaries and 67 per cent were likely to make use of school textbooks (Pettigrew *et al*. 2009: 52).

When interviewed, individual teachers described incorporating drama, poetry, visual art and music into their lessons – in some cases explicitly to facilitate students' emotional and affective engagement with this history. But how are such forms of encounters likely to be experienced by students? And what impact might competing representations or accounts of the Holocaust have upon their substantive 'knowledge' and 'understanding' of the 'monstrous' realities that Wiesel, Levi and others experienced first-hand?

As a companion to that aspect of the 2009 study, this chapter focuses on students' perspectives and experiences of learning about the Holocaust, both within and beyond school. It begins with an overview of the curricular contexts in which this learning takes place and then considers the value – or otherwise – that students place upon being taught about the Holocaust within school. It specifically considers the contention that some students may experience reluctance or resistance to learning about this subject. Critically, the chapter asks how students themselves appear to frame the importance or value of learning about the Holocaust and what 'meaning', 'knowledge' or 'understanding' they consider it appropriate or possible to take from their encounters with this history.

Students' experiences of and perspectives on three specific modes of encounter are then examined in particular detail:

- first-hand oral testimony given in person by survivors of the Holocaust
- the film adaptation of John Boyne's novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*

- photographic atrocity images of victims of the Holocaust and more specifically their use within schools.

While each of these was chosen for a different reason (explained below), each also reflects a number of debates and questions raised around competing attempts to communicate meaning of and from the Holocaust on both ethical and epistemological grounds. For example: What are the relationships between individual memory and disciplinary history? Levi and Rothberg (2003: 25) describe how 'some historians [e.g. Wieviorka 2006a] remain sceptical about the historical accuracy of victims' testimony'. But, as they continue:

> …most scholars now agree on the human value of oral and written testimonies. Whatever the problems of memory and point of view that such documents exhibit, they offer an unparalleled access to the unfolding of the Holocaust and to the subjective experience of catastrophe.

If that is accepted, how do students who have heard first-hand testimony position this experience in relation to their wider study of the history?

Further, in relation to *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, can the 'meaning' – or 'meanings' – of the Holocaust only be reliably accessed through precise and historically accurate retelling, or is a degree of 'poetic licence' sometimes justified? What is or should be the status of fictionalised accounts of the Holocaust within and outside of the classroom? And what do students themselves consider to be the strengths or limitations of these?

Still other questions emerge when considering whether the nature of the Holocaust itself imposes certain limits on its own representation. Is the classroom an appropriate space for students to encounter graphic visual imagery, including photographic evidence of Nazi atrocities? For some commentators a reverence and respect for the brutalised victims that such images depict must always take precedence, while others argue that those seeking to 'understand' the Holocaust must be fully confronted with its barbarity.

It is not in the remit of this research to attempt an ultimate reconciliation between the many competing perspectives offered by numerous commentators in response to questions such as these. Rather, the focus is upon students' experiences of encountering the Holocaust and, critically, on the implication of these for the knowledge, understandings and meanings that they were able and inclined to draw.

## Where do students encounter the Holocaust both within and beyond school?

### Classroom encounters with the Holocaust

As described in Chapter 3, 77 per cent of all students who took part in the survey indicated that they had already learned about the Holocaust at school; 7.8 per cent of students were uncertain and 15.2 per cent indicated that they had not (see Figure 3.12). The highest proportion of students who had not yet learned about the Holocaust were in Years 7 and 8, as is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

For schools following the National Curriculum, compulsory content on the Holocaust must be delivered within Key Stage 3 history, that is before students reach the end of Year 9. As Figure 4.1 also demonstrates, within each year group from Year 10 onwards, more than 85 per cent of students think or are sure that they have learned about the Holocaust within school.

It is perhaps more surprising and significant to note that, even in Years 7 and 8 (ages 11 to 13), 46.8 per cent and 63.1 per cent of students, respectively, thought they had already learned about the Holocaust within school. Yet the 2009 research with teachers reported that, within the history curriculum at least, teachers were unlikely to introduce the subject to students before Year 9 (Pettigrew *et al*. 2009). The students who indicated that they had already learned about the Holocaust were asked if they could remember how old they were when they first encountered the subject within school. As Figure 4.2 illustrates, among the 5,626 students who

responded to this question, 67.2 per cent believed they had learned about the Holocaust *before* they had reached Year 9: 21.9 per cent thought they had done so in Year 8, 16.8 per cent in Year 7 and 28.5 per cent while still in primary school.

The relatively high proportion of students who reported that they first learned about the Holocaust in primary school is significant. In the United States, Simone Schweber (2006, 2008b) has observed a tendency for the Holocaust to be introduced to students at earlier and earlier stages in their school career, a phenomenon she terms 'curricular creep'. Schweber warns that, if this is not managed carefully, it may lead to unsystematic and repetitive coverage of the subject which could in turn contribute to a sense of 'Holocaust fatigue' (see also Short 2003). She also suggests that confronting younger students with this difficult history raises specific pedagogical challenges and ethical tensions, and notes that there is – as of yet – very little empirical evidence of or reflection upon 'what the Holocaust looks like when taught to a young audience' (Schweber 2008b: 2,073). For noteable exceptions in the UK context, see Cowan and Maitles (1999, 2002).

While primary school students are not the focus of the current study, arguably many of Schweber's observations and concerns also hold for curricular exposure to the Holocaust within the earliest years of secondary school. In this context it is interesting to note that a number of students interviewed expressed the opinion that young people should only be taught about the subject 'at an age when [they] are more emotionally ready to take in the concept of what actually happened' (Stephanie, Year 13, SE2).

**Figure 4.1** Student responses to survey question 69, 'Have you learned about the Holocaust in school?' (percentage by year group)
Percentages below 5 per cent are not labelled on the chart



Percentage of students

Year 7: 29.1 | 17.7 | 13.0 | 19.4 | 20.8
Year 8: 46.0 | 17.1 | 11.0 | 16.9 | 9.0
Year 9: 68.6 | 14.7 | 7.0 | 6.0
Year 10: 75.9 | 14.3 | 5.2
Year 11: 77.9 | 12.0 | 5.1
Year 12: 70.5 | 15.8 | 5.7
Year 13: 77.9 | 9.9

■ Yes, definitely ■ Yes, I think so ■ Maybe ■ No, I don't think so ■ No, definitely not
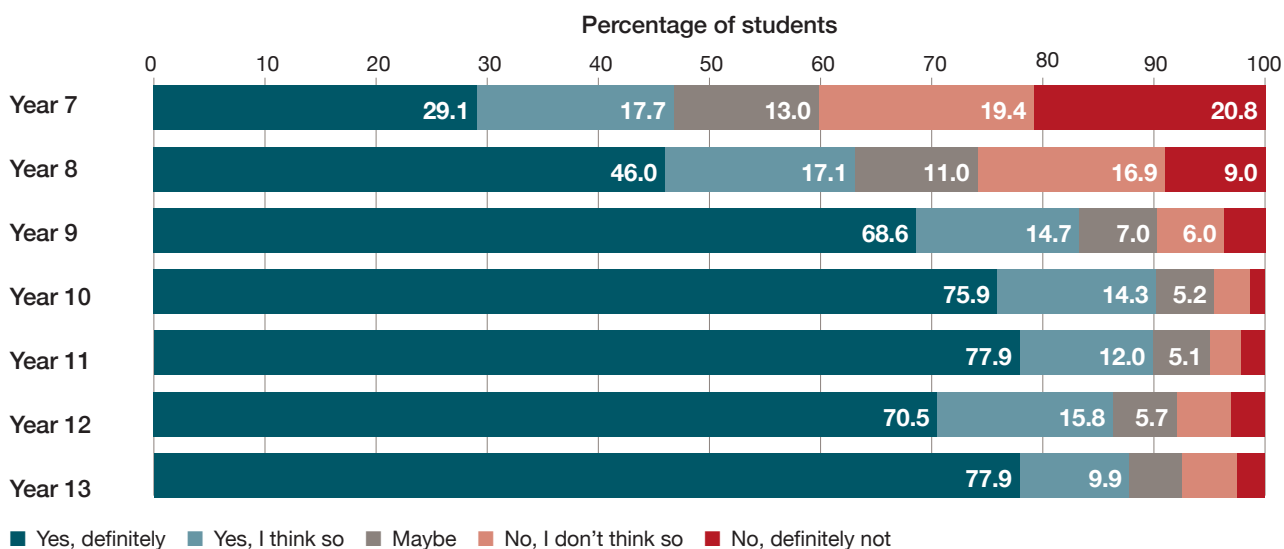
Figure 4.2 Student responses to survey question 70, 'Can you remember what year group you were in when you first learned about the Holocaust in school?' (percentage of students)

**Percentage of students**

| 28.5 Before year 7 | 16.8 Year 7 | 21.9 Year 8 | 23.2 Year 9 |

3.5 Year 10 or 11
0.6 Year 12 or 13
5.5 Don't know
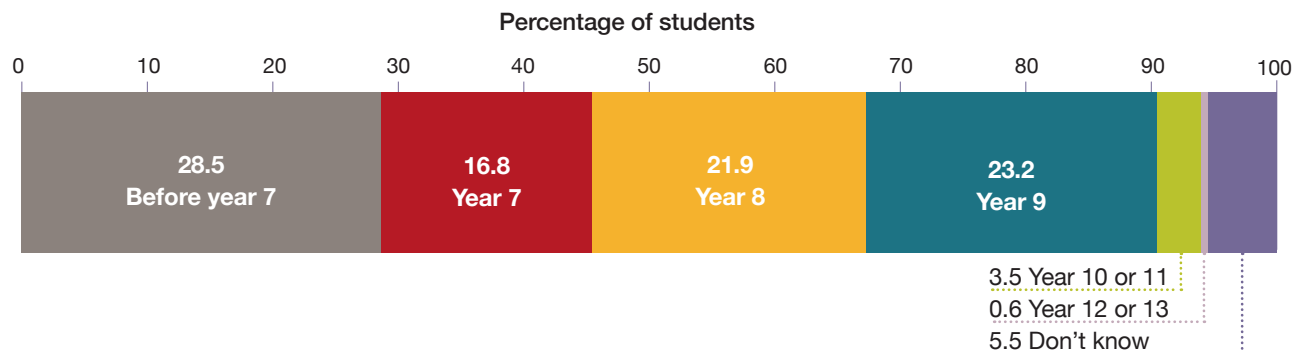
Figure 4.3 Student responses to survey question 71, 'If you have learned about the Holocaust in school, which subjects have you learned about it in?' (percentage of students)
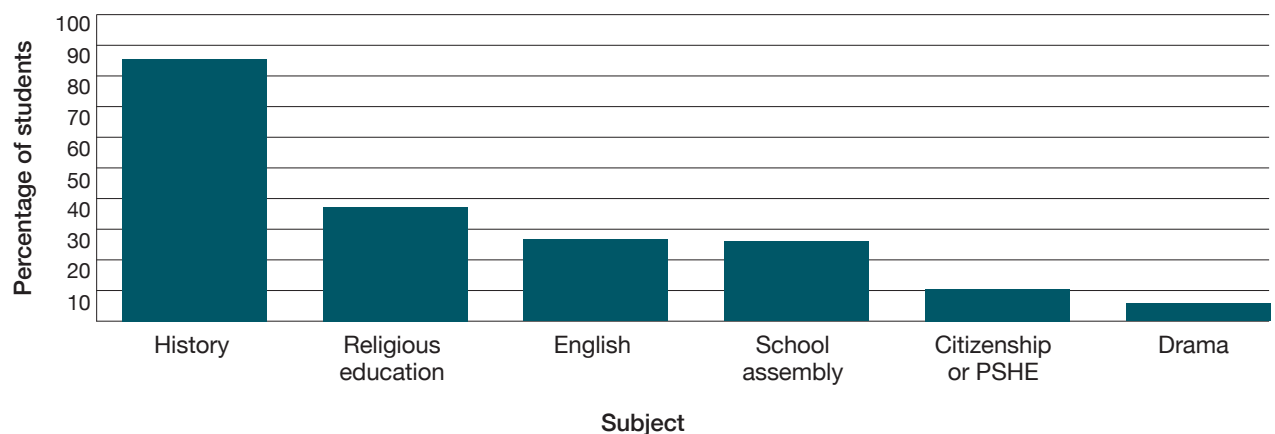


However, as was emphasised in Chapter 3, schools are not the only places in which young people encounter representations of the Holocaust. Of the 706 students in Years 7 and 8 who *did not* think they had learned about the subject at school, approximately 74 per cent of Year 7s and 81 per cent of Year 8s were familiar with the term 'Holocaust' or with the history it denotes (figures are approximate here as only students who completed the survey electronically were asked if they recognised a short explanation of the term). It might then be argued that postponing formal taught content of the Holocaust until students are judged to have reached an appropriate maturity will do little to prevent – or 'protect' – younger students from encountering this difficult history.

It is also instructive to examine the subject discipline in which the Holocaust is first introduced to students in a school context. Students who reported in the survey that they had already learned about the Holocaust at school were also asked to indicate the curriculum context in which this had taken place. As Figure 4.3 shows, 86.1 per cent of these students across all year groups had learned about the Holocaust in history, 37.5 per cent in religious

education, 27.0 per cent in English and 26.2 per cent in school assemblies. This is broadly consistent with the findings of the 2009 teacher study in which teachers reported that history was, by some margin, the most common subject in which they taught about the Holocaust, followed by religious education, English, citizenship and PSHE (Pettigrew *et al*. 2009).

Figure 4.4 investigates this pattern in a little more detail, presenting the responses to survey question 71 – about the subject in which they learned about the Holocaust – given by three separate groups of students in Years 7, 8 and 9 who each reported that they had learned about the Holocaust *for the first time* during their current academic year (so, the Year 7s learning in that year, the Year 8s in that year, etc). The figures suggest that it is only in Year 8 and beyond that history becomes the predominant subject in which teaching and learning about the Holocaust takes place. Indeed, in Year 7, only just over a third of the students who had learned about the Holocaust in school for the first time that year had done so in history. A majority had been introduced to the Holocaust in a subject other than history. Figure 4.4 also suggests that, within the school subject of English, teaching about the Holocaust is more likely

**Figure 4.4** Subjects in which students in Years 7, 8 and 9 say they learned about the Holocaust for the first time during that academic year (percentage of students)



Year 7 (n=135)    Year 8 (n=245)    Year 9 (n=671)
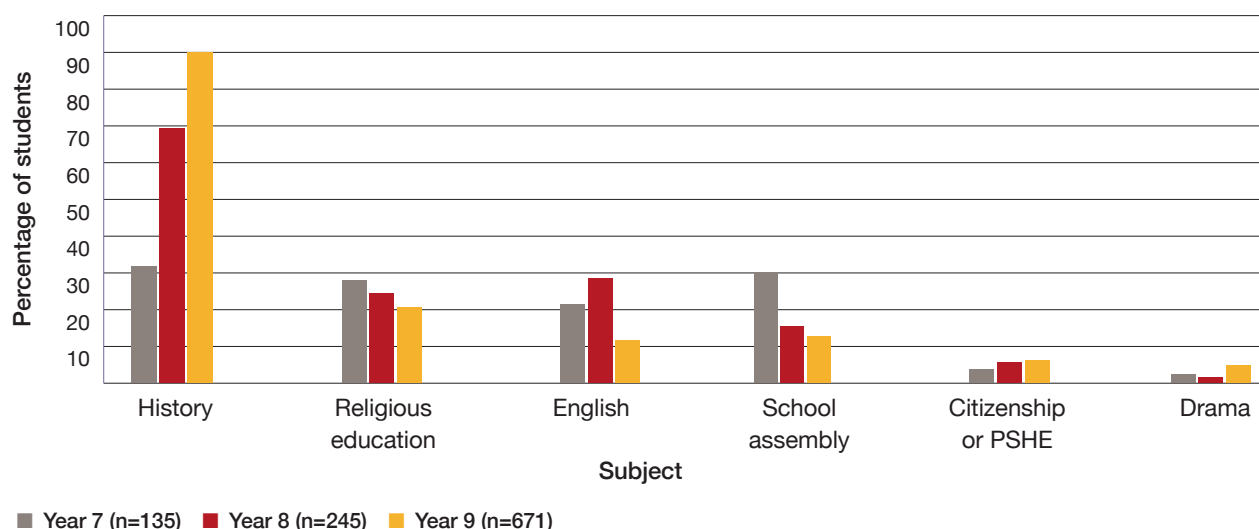
to take place in Year 8 than in either Year 7 or Year 9.

## Encounters with the Holocaust outside the classroom

Students were also asked if they had heard about the Holocaust outside of school. Here 66.1 per cent who completed the survey suggested that they had, while only 24.1 percent said they had not and 9.8 per cent said they were unsure. As Figure 4.5 demonstrates, there was a very clear and steady increase by year group in the proportion of students who report that they learned about the Holocaust outside of formal schooling.

As mentioned above, among students in Years 7 and 8 who did not think they had been taught about the Holocaust at school, approximately 74 per cent and 81 per cent, respectively, were nonetheless familiar with either the word itself or with the history it is used to describe. Interestingly, only 39.9 per cent of the same group of Year 7 students and 46.7 per cent of the Year 8 students reported that they had consciously identified learning about the Holocaust outside of school. This appears to suggest that a significant proportion of students in both year groups were familiar with the Holocaust without consciously having learned or even heard about it either inside or outside of school.

This picture of wide, and in some cases subliminal, cultural exposure to the subject was reiterated in several focus-group interviews. Here, students regularly suggested that the Holocaust had become part of a common stock of widely shared knowledge and that some form of Holocaust consciousness was pervasive in everyday life:

**Stephanie:** I think even if it's not in the curriculum people still learn about it, it's like just one of those things […] And there's TV shows and things with Anne Frank and all these different…
**Shannon:** People know without even realising that they've learned it.
**Stan:** Yeah.
**Daisy:** It's like 9/11, you weren't really told about, you just know that it happened. You don't have a lesson on that or anything (Year 13, SE2).

**Laboni:** I think it's … it's so *mainstream* nowadays with the Holocaust, isn't it?
**Faiha:** Yeah (Year 12, LON8, emphasis added).

In the survey, students were also asked to identify whether or not they had ever read any books about the Holocaust or watched any films or television programmes related to this history. As Figures 4.6 and 4.7 show, while 38.2 per cent of all Year 7 students reported that they had read books about the subject, this was true of 61.7 per cent of those in Year 13. And while 54.8 per cent of all Year 7 students had seen films or television programmes about the Holocaust, in Year 13 this figure was 92.4 per cent.

In answering these questions, students were not asked to differentiate between books read or films and television programmes watched within school as opposed to those they had watched or read elsewhere. However, Figures 4.8 and 4.9 detail the responses given to these same two questions among only those students who did not remember ever having learned about the Holocaust in school. From this data, it is possible to infer that at least 23.2 per cent of the students in Year 7 and 21.6 per cent of those in Year 8 had read books about the
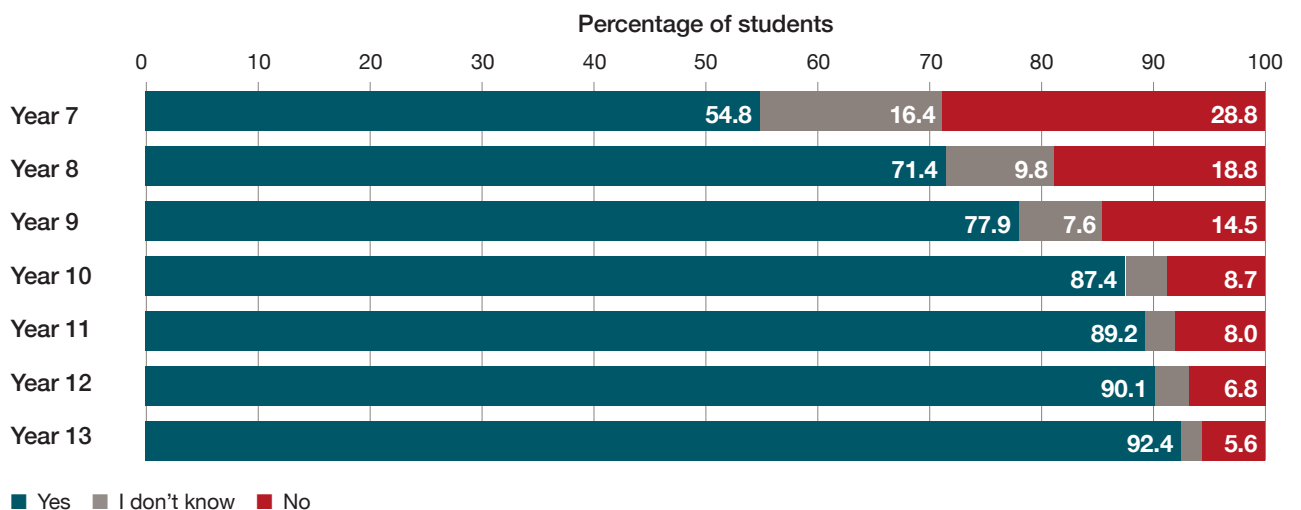
**Figure 4.5** Student responses to survey question 73, 'Have you ever heard about the Holocaust outside of school?' (by year group) percentages below 5 per cent are not labelled on the chart

Percentage of students

| Year | Yes, definitely | Yes, I think so | Maybe | I don't think so | Definitely not |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Year 7 | 32.6 | 14.5 | 12.3 | 17.2 | 23.4 |
| Year 8 | 42.4 | 19.6 | 11.0 | 14.4 | 12.6 |
| Year 9 | 45.1 | 18.9 | 10.3 | 15.4 | 10.3 |
| Year 10 | 53.8 | 18.0 | 9.7 | 11.7 | 6.8 |
| Year 11 | 59.2 | 16.2 | 9.2 | 8.9 | 6.5 |
| Year 12 | 71.4 | 11.5 | 6.1 | 6.3 | |
| Year 13 | 83.1 | 9.9 | | | |

■ Yes, definitely  ■ Yes, I think so  ■ Maybe  ■ I don't think so  ■ Definitely not
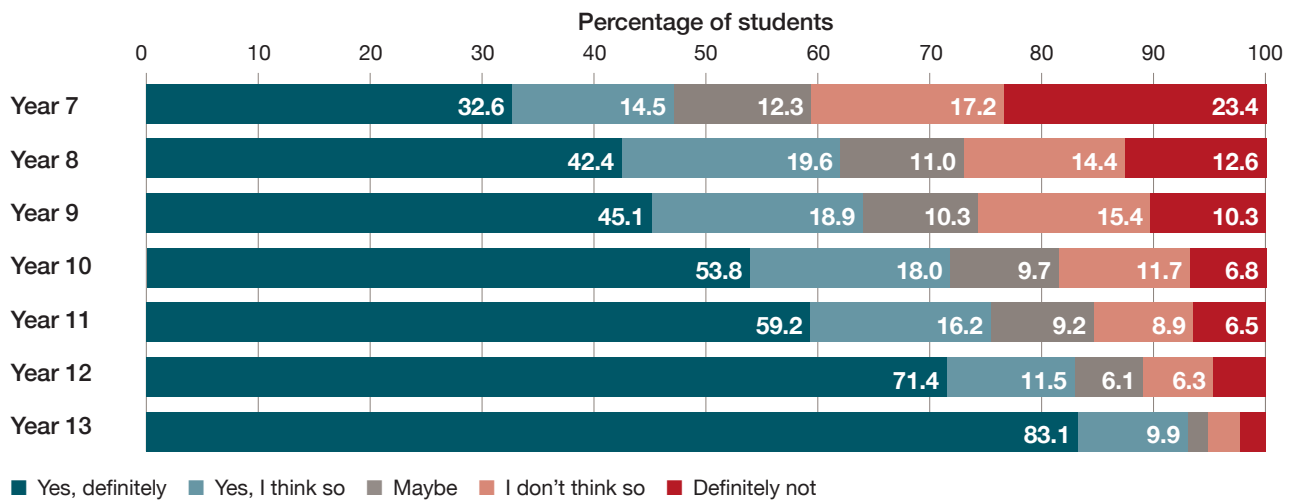
**Figure 4.6** Student responses to survey question 74, 'Have you read any books about the Holocaust?' (by year group) percentages below 5 per cent are not labelled on the chart

Percentage of students

| Year | Yes | I don't know | No |
|------|------|------|------|
| Year 7 | 38.2 | 16.6 | 45.2 |
| Year 8 | 42.5 | 12.6 | 44.9 |
| Year 9 | 41.2 | 11.8 | 47.0 |
| Year 10 | 48.3 | 7.8 | 43.9 |
| Year 11 | 43.1 | 6.4 | 50.5 |
| Year 12 | 50.7 | 6.9 | 42.4 |
| Year 13 | 61.7 | | 35.1 |

■ Yes  ■ I don't know  ■ No
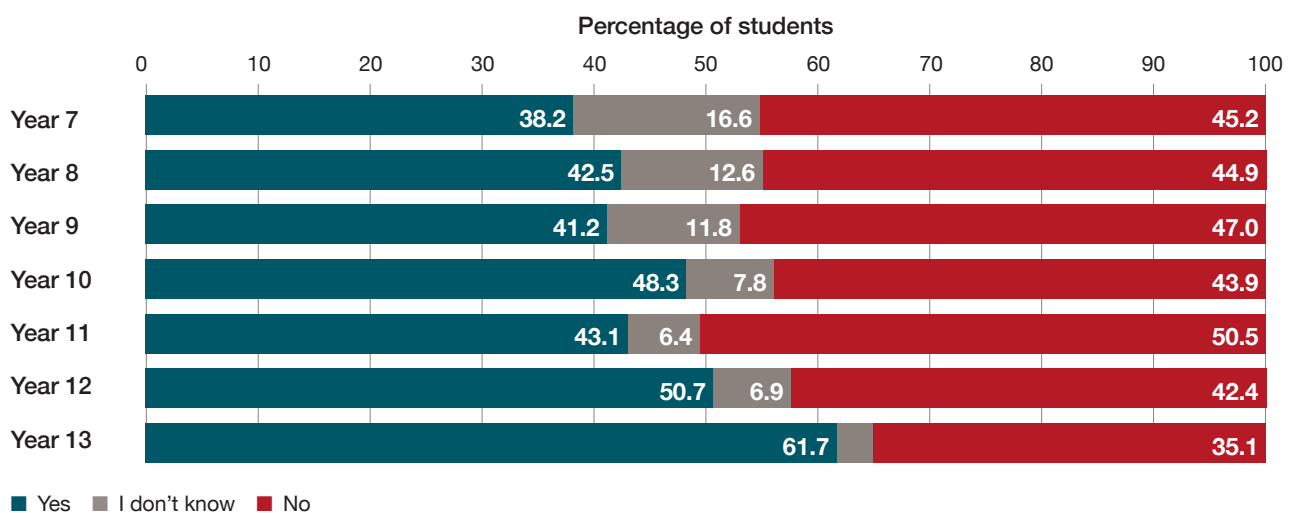
**Figure 4.7** Student responses to survey question 76, 'Have you seen any films or television programmes about the Holocaust? (by year group) percentages below 5 per cent are not labelled on the chart

Percentage of students

| Year | Yes | I don't know | No |
|------|------|------|------|
| Year 7 | 54.8 | 16.4 | 28.8 |
| Year 8 | 71.4 | 9.8 | 18.8 |
| Year 9 | 77.9 | 7.6 | 14.5 |
| Year 10 | 87.4 | | 8.7 |
| Year 11 | 89.2 | | 8.0 |
| Year 12 | 90.1 | | 6.8 |
| Year 13 | 92.4 | | 5.6 |

■ Yes  ■ I don't know  ■ No

**Figure 4.8** Responses given by students who have not learned about the Holocaust in school to survey question 74, 'Have you read any books about the Holocaust?' (by year group)
percentages below 5 per cent are not labelled on the chart

**Percentage of students**

| Year group | Yes | I don't know | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| Year 7 (n=396) | 23.2 | 19.4 | 57.4 |
| Year 8 (n=238) | 21.6 | 16.3 | 62.1 |
| Year 9 (n=237) | 25.7 | 18.6 | 55.7 |
| Year 10 (n=49) | 34.7 | 12.2 | 53.1 |
| Year 11 (n=21) | 28.6 | 9.5 | 61.9 |
| Year 12 (n=42) | 33.3 | | 61.9 |
| Year 13 (n=26) | 23.1 | 11.5 | 65.4 |

■ Yes   ■ I don't know   ■ No
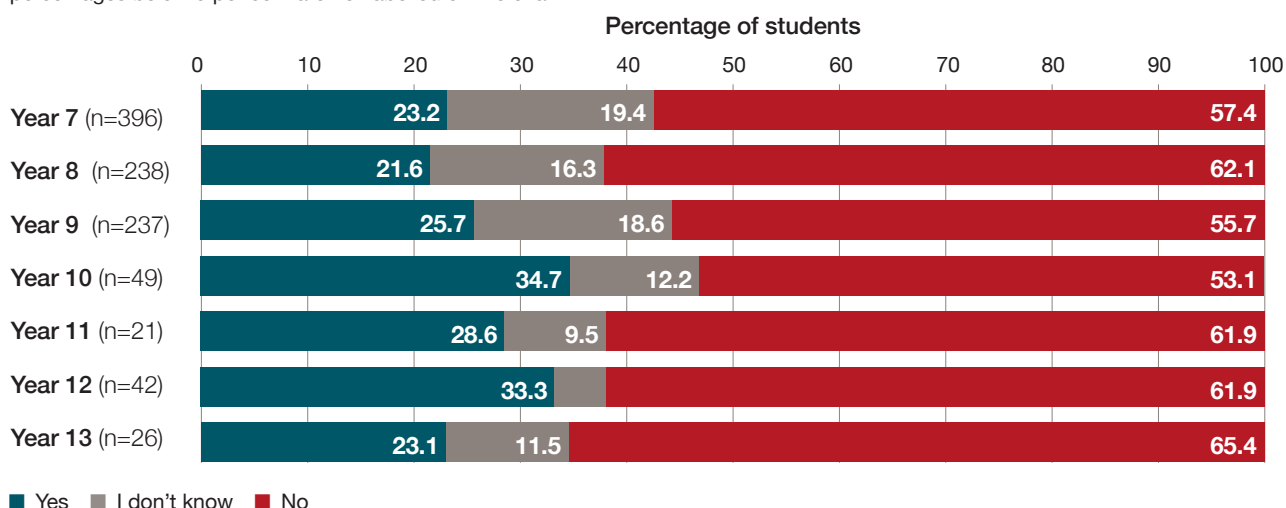
**Figure 4.9** Responses given by students who have not learned about the Holocaust in school to survey question 76, 'Have you seen any films or television programmes about the Holocaust?' (by year group)
percentages below 5 per cent are not labelled on the chart

**Percentage of students**

| Year group | Yes | I don't know | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| Year 7 (n=398) | 39.2 | 20.3 | 40.5 |
| Year 8 (n=281) | 53.0 | 15.3 | 31.7 |
| Year 9 (n=241) | 51.9 | 16.6 | 31.5 |
| Year 10 (n=48) | 75.0 | 12.5 | 12.5 |
| Year 11 (n=22) | 50.0 | 9.1 | 40.9 |
| Year 12 (n=43) | 67.4 | | 27.9 |
| Year 13 (n=25) | 80.0 | | 16.0 |

■ Yes   ■ I don't know   ■ No
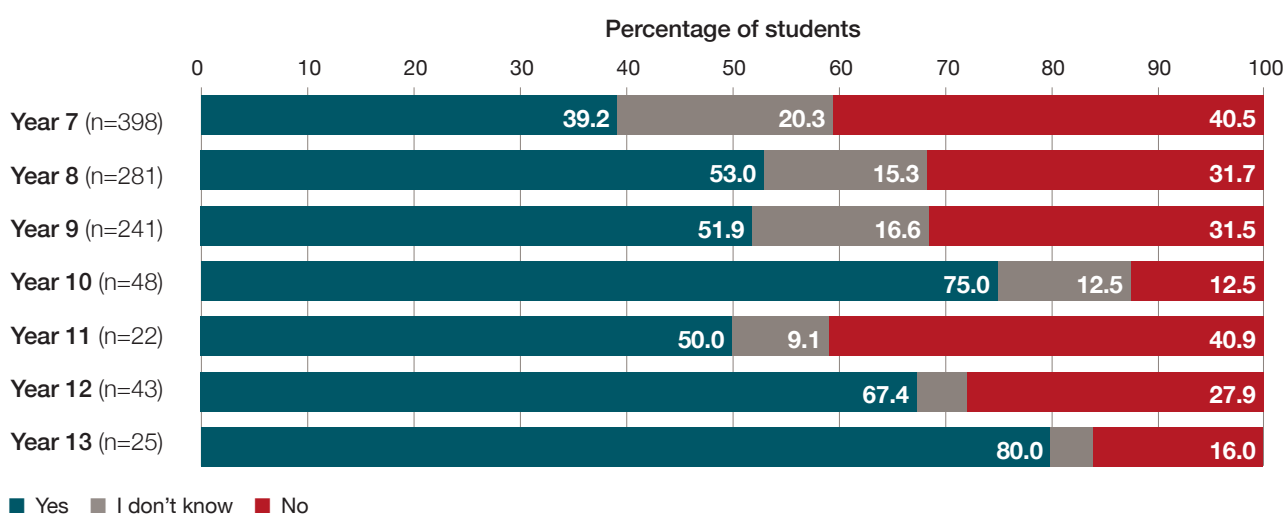
Holocaust outside of formal study and that at least 39.2 per cent of Year 7 students and 53 per cent of Year 8 students had watched films or television programmes about the Holocaust in contexts other than school.

Students were also presented with lists of names and/or categories of books, films and television programmes, and asked to indicate which they had read or watched. As Figures 4.10 and 4.11 illustrate, across all year groups apart from Year 7, John Boyne's novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and its film adaptation appear to be both the most widely read of books about the Holocaust and the most regularly watched film. In Year 7, *The Diary of*

*Anne Frank* was the most regularly cited book read by students.

Almost 80 per cent of Year 8 students who had read any book about the Holocaust had read *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. Among those who had watched any film or television programme about the Holocaust, 70 per cent of Year 7 students and 90 per cent of Year 12 students had watched *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* film. This represents a significant proportion of students across all age groups, and the potential impact of this finding will be considered in detail below.

**Figure 4.10** Student responses to survey question 75, 'If you have read any books on the Holocaust, please tick all those you have read' (percentage by year group)



■ *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*   ■ *Hana's Suitcase*   ■ *The Diary of Anne Frank*   ■ School textbook   ■ Other
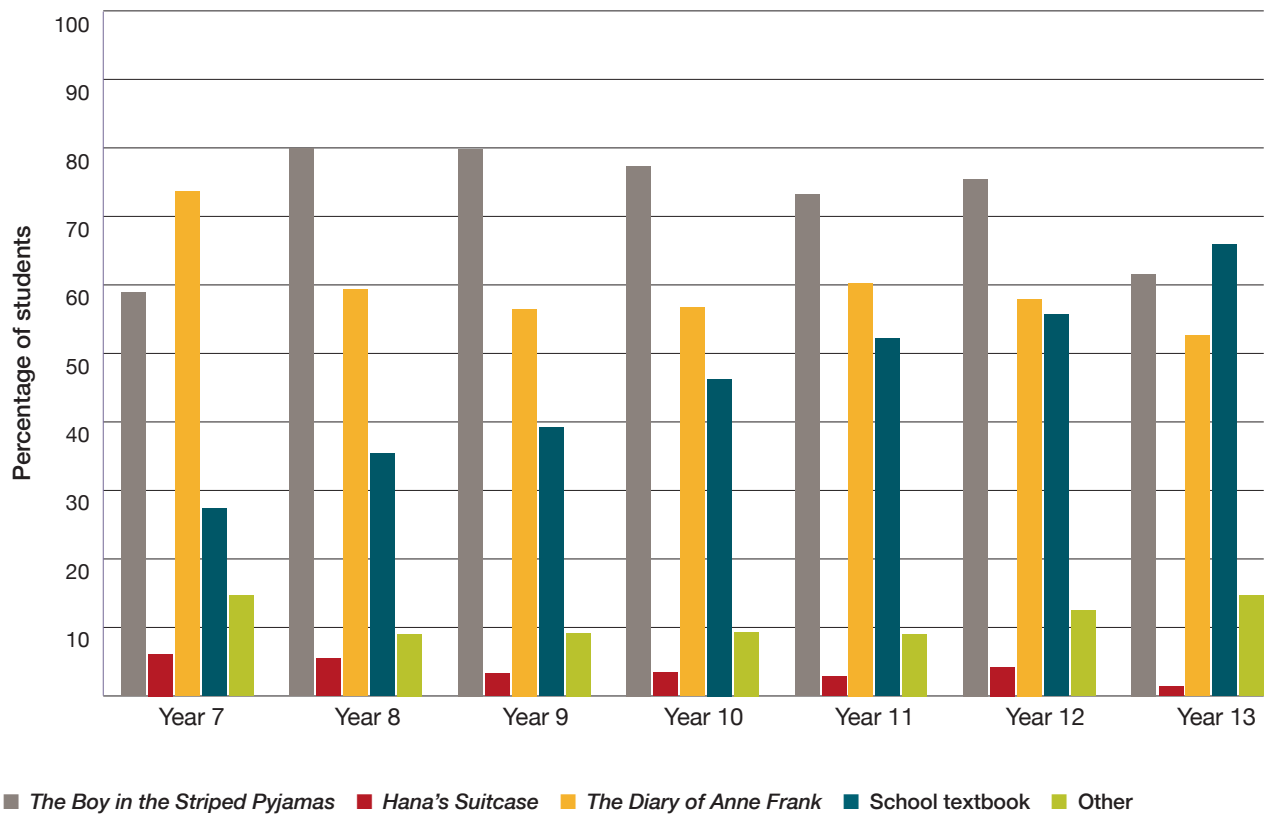
## What value do students place upon learning about the Holocaust in school?

As described in Chapter 1, the teachers who took part in the Centre's 2009 study reported very high levels of positivity and commitment towards teaching about the Holocaust (Pettigrew *et al*. 2009). But what of their students? How do they feel about encountering this challenging subject within their classrooms? If, as suggested by some student comments, many perceive that 'the Holocaust is mainstream' – already omnipresent throughout public life – do they consider that its position within the secondary school curriculum is justified? And if, as this research and the earlier study with teachers suggest, students are likely to encounter the subject on multiple occasions throughout their school career – potentially from primary school onwards – is there any evidence that some at least are experiencing any form of 'Holocaust fatigue'?

This notion of 'fatigue' is now relatively well established and implies a weariness or indifference resulting from possible overexposure to or saturation by the Holocaust (Schweber 2006; Bensoussan 2013). But in recent years, some academics and a number of public commentators have gone further in

suggesting that particular groups of students might actively object or even be hostile to any form of curricular exposure to the Holocaust (for example, Jikeli 2013, 2015; Rutland 2010; Short 2008, 2012, 2013).

In 2007, the Historical Association produced an empirical report about teaching emotive and controversial history (Historical Association 2007). While the report itself was largely uncontentious, the words of a small number of teachers at just two of the schools visited by researchers were seized upon in national and international media commentary to support inflammatory and alarmist headlines such as this one in the *Daily Mail*: 'Teachers drop the Holocaust to avoid offending Muslims' (Clark 2007b). Although the stories behind such headlines have since been widely and resoundingly discredited (see, for example, BBC 2008), discussion – and in some quarters concern – around Muslim students' level of engagement with this history continues in the present day.

We were clear that the research design should not in any way imply tacit acceptance of this position and, instead, wanted to interrogate the speculation empirically. In this context it is useful to note that over 1,000 students in the total survey sample self-

**Figure 4.11** Student responses to survey question 77, 'If you have seen any films or television programmes about the Holocaust, please tick the ones you have seen' (percentage by year group)
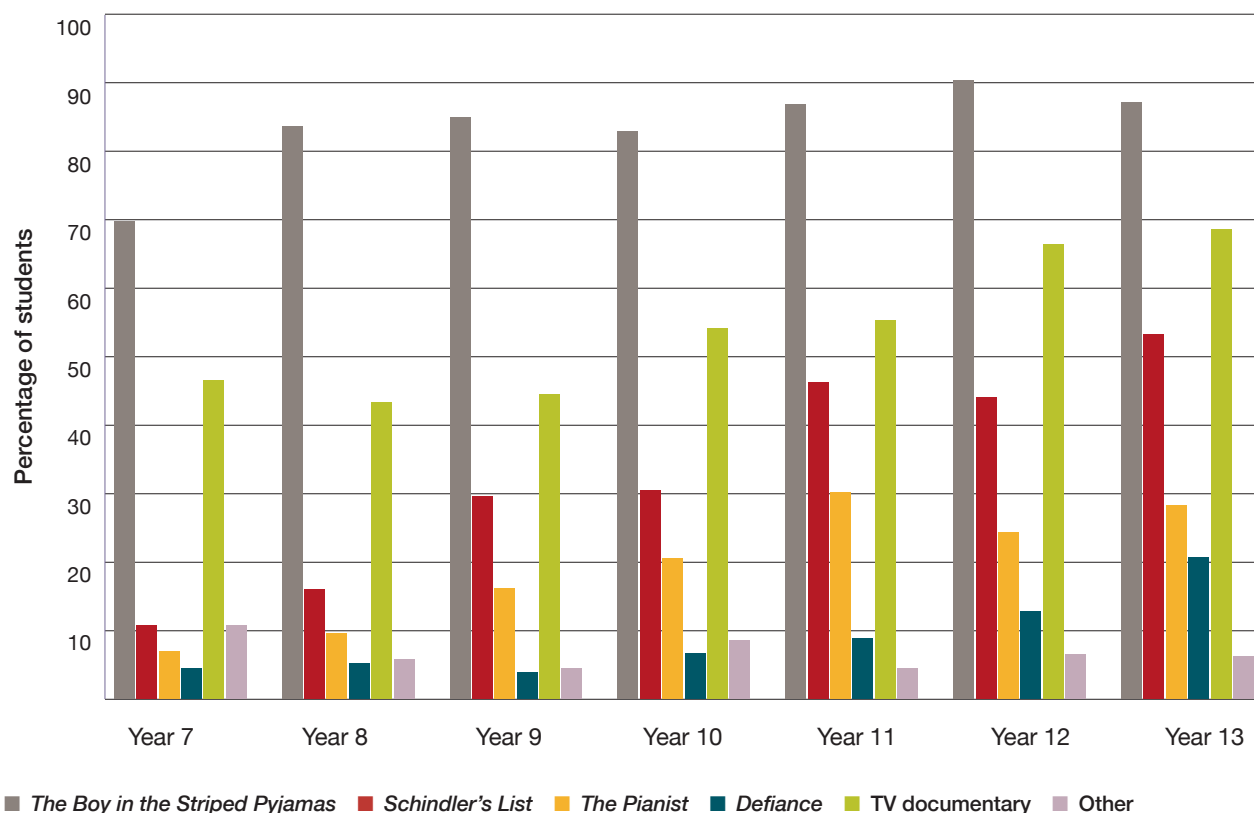


identified as Muslim and two of the in-depth focus-group interviews on students' attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust were conducted in schools with an intake of almost exclusively Muslim students. Data from these focus groups is considered in further detail as part of the discussion that follows below.

## Do students appear to value learning about the Holocaust?

A clear majority of all students who took part in the research reported very positive attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust. Among those who took part in focus-group interviews, many emphasised that they considered the Holocaust a singularly 'interesting' and/or 'important' part of their studies, describing it as, for example, their 'favourite topic' (Patricia, Year 9, SW2), 'a key event in history' (Miles, Year 12, EE2) and 'really interest[ing] even if [you] are not interested in history' (Samreen, Year 12, LON).

Significantly, 83 per cent of those who completed the survey agreed that all students should learn about the Holocaust in school – and while 10.2 per

cent of students were uncertain, only 6.9 per cent disagreed. By comparison, 89 per cent disagreed with the statement, 'Too much time in school is spent learning about the Holocaust'. This position was also firmly rejected by the students who took part in focus groups, even in schools where up to a whole term's worth of history classes were devoted to the subject with additional coverage in other curriculum areas and school assemblies.

The survey also asked students if they would like to learn more about the Holocaust and 68.6 per cent answered that they would. Those who had already learned about the Holocaust in school were even more likely to indicate they wanted to learn more about the subject than those who had not (70.3 per cent of students compared to 64.5 per cent). Rather than offering evidence of students' sense of 'saturation', 'fatigue' or 'disinterest' in relation to the Holocaust, these results suggest high levels of continued student engagement across all student groups.

One survey participant offered a lone voice of dissent in the free-text response to question 30

which asked for a short description of the Holocaust:

> The Holocaust was when the Nazis killed lots of
> Jews and people they didn't like. We covered it so
> much that it is becoming very boring to learn about
> and no [one] really pays attention to it anymore. We
> know it's a serious topic but we don't need to learn
> about it 24/7.

No matter how unrepresentative, this statement reminds us that despite students' broad appetite to learn about this subject – even this dissenting student says 'it's a serious topic' – students' attention and interest cannot be taken for granted. The subject still needs to be taught in an engaging and meaningful manner, especially if and when students encounter the Holocaust at several points in their school career.

For the purposes of our study, one further measure of students' attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust was devised. As described in Chapter 2, the survey included 11 questions inviting students to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements such as, 'The Holocaust does not really interest me' and, 'The Holocaust is not related to my life because it happened so long ago'. Students' responses to all 11 statements were combined to create a single mean figure, as an indication of their overall disposition towards engagement with this history (for explanation of the method, see p. 27) which enabled statistical comparison between different student groups. The higher the score, the more positive was a student's attitude towards learning about the Holocaust.

Across all students, the average score on the measure was 34.6 (out of 44), which appears to demonstrate very high levels of positive engagement with the history. This data was examined across a range of different criteria and groups of students, as detailed below, but only very limited variation was found – across all analyses levels of positivity remained consistently high.

For example, students who had already learned about the Holocaust in school were a little more positive about the subject than those who had not, with an average score of 35.0 compared to 33.3. Girls appeared to have slightly more positive attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust than boys, but again the difference was small: an average score of 35.0 for girls across all year groups compared with 34.0 for boys. As a year group, Year 13 students appeared collectively to hold the most positive attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust, with an average score of 36.1. The 'lowest' measure for a single year group was the average score of 34.1 for Year 9 students.

Critically, in relation to the concerns expressed about Muslim students' disposition towards learning about the Holocaust identified earlier in this chapter, the average score across all those survey respondents who self-identified as Muslim was 33.8, while – by point of comparison – the average score for those who identified as having 'no religion' was 34.2. Even this very small distinction was found to be statistically insignificant when the potential influence of other demographic variables such as socioeconomic class (as indicated by the number of books in students' homes) and academic ability (indicated by vocabulary scores) was taken into account. A more detailed explanation of the multiple regression procedures used to conduct this analysis is offered in Appendix 6. In summary, our research indicates that – for the students who took part in the survey – gender, academic ability and socioeconomic class all appeared to have more influence upon attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust than whether a student identified as Muslim or not. Again, across the board, all students, irrespective of year group, gender or religious identification articulated very positive attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust.

Lest these findings be queried as 'unrepresentative' it is worth emphasising that the 1,016 students who completed the survey and identified themselves and/or their families as Muslim represent 12.8 per cent of the total cohort of 7,952 students who took part. The 2011 census figures puts the proportion of school-aged children in the United Kingdom who are Muslim at 8.1 per cent (Muslim Council of Britain 2015). Of the survey respondents who identified as Muslim, 70.5 per cent indicated that religion was 'very important' to them personally, 26.2 per cent that it was 'quite important' and 3.4 per cent that it was 'not important'; 49.6 per cent identified their ethnicity as Asian–Pakistani, 16.2 per cent as Asian–Bangladeshi, 7.5 per cent as Asian–other (including Indian). Again, these figures are broadly consistent with the 2011 census information on the United Kingdom's adult Muslim population.

The findings reported here consequently challenge the growing and problematic national and international discourse that risks positioning Muslim students as in opposition to learning about the Holocaust in schools. Five focus-group interviews with students from two different schools with a very high intake of Muslims were conducted in order to begin to examine this in further depth. It is also important to emphasise that the two schools had very different approaches to teaching about the Holocaust and the students who participated appeared to have markedly different levels of knowledge about this history. However, among both groups of students, discussion again revealed very

positive attitudes and high levels of interest towards educational engagement with the Holocaust.

In one of the two schools, which had an extensive and well established programme of teaching and learning about the Holocaust, interest in this history was sufficiently strong that it had influenced the courses of study that some students had chosen to take:

> **Rupa:** I disagree with that: 'The Holocaust does not really interest me'. I disagree with that because we learn about a lot of stuff from this topic…
> **Kanta:** What people went through. Why people were suffering.
> **Rupa:** It does interest me because in Year 8 we chose between history and geography. So we knew what we were going to learn about in Year 9 and Year 10. So I chose history because the Holocaust does interest me…
> **Interviewer:** Was that one of the reasons you chose history?
> **Rupa:** Yeah.
> **Interviewer:** Because you wanted to learn about the Holocaust?
> **Rupa:** Yeah
> (Year 9 students, LON8).

In the same school, students were consistently keen to emphasise that they understood the Holocaust as a human tragedy with universal ramifications. Students across all year groups argued that the subject was important to them for humanitarian reasons, and this was something that transcended distinctions and putative tensions between groups:

> It was done against humans. I think it's just innate in us to feel emotions towards it, regardless of their race or religion or anything … their age or when it happened. I think as humans, when we actually delve into history and see what happened, it always just happens instinctively for you to feel an emotion. towards it (Laboni, Year 12, LON8).

> I think if we are empathetic people then we will be interested to learn about it. Because even though they are not Muslims or they are not Bengali, they are Jews, they are still human beings and so we probably will still be interested to learn about other human beings and how they were treated (Yasmina, Year 7, LON8).

> So no matter where you are in the world you should learn about that so … to ensure it doesn't happen again in your country. Like what's to say that it won't happen again to you and in your country? So you should learn about that and know why it's wrong (Chandni, Year 9, LON8).

In the second school, where the Holocaust only received cursory attention based primarily on the use of textbooks and film and where curricular exposure was limited to one or two lessons in Year 9, students were less emphatic. However, they still appeared interested and aware of the subject's historical significance and considered that it had an impact on life now. Students who had already studied the subject, but only briefly, were aware of the limitations of what they had learned and spoke of their desire to learn more. Hifaz (Year 9, WM2), for example, said, 'I need to do more into the subject, because it's interesting. There's loads more to it', while her classmate, Juggan, added: '…to know what wrongs have happened in the past to try not to make it happen again'.

When asked to reflect on *why* they felt the Holocaust might be significant, these students articulated many of the same positions as those put forward in other focus groups. Their primary motivation was a desire to know more about this past, which they hoped would prevent such tragedies from happening in the future. Across both schools, students expressed awareness of the historical significance and complexity of the subject and moral condemnation of the events. Students' voices here certainly gave an impression that was very far removed from the reluctance, hostility and/or disinterest suggested by some of the available literature in this field (see, for example, Rutland 2010).

Prior 'evidence' of negativity among Muslim students has always been based on small-scale research or anecdotal evidence. The qualitative data offered here is likewise drawn only from two schools and of course cannot hope to offer a comprehensive or authoritative account of *all* Muslim students' attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust in *all* of England's schools. However, these findings do support and extend those drawn from analysis of the much larger and more representative sample of students' survey responses. While it is not possible to claim on the basis of either that negative attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust are entirely absent among Muslim students – nor for that matter among *any* group of students – they do very strongly suggest that such attitudes are not widespread.

Among those authors who have remarked upon reluctance to learning about the Holocaust within Muslim communities, many predicate their argument with reference to the current Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The Holocaust and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict are clearly distinct histories, although not unrelated (Schweber 2006). Within the context of our study, while some of the students who took part in focus-group interviews had strong views in defence of the Palestinian cause and believed that this could lead to inter-group tensions between Muslims and

Jews, there was no indication that this then impacted upon their attitude towards learning about the Holocaust in schools.

A further explanation for Muslim students' potential resistance to this subject is offered by Whine (2013: 29) who observes that, despite what he considers to be its 'implications for the entire world', the Holocaust was 'a European tragedy in which the Muslim world played only a very small part'. Allouche-Benayon and Jikeli (2013) make a similar argument in suggesting that, for many of Europe's Muslim populations, the Holocaust may not be seen as a central point of reference within their shared sense of community history.

This issue was broached by one of the groups of Year 12 Muslim students who had been asked to consider whether the Holocaust felt relevant to them personally, despite it having happened before they were born, in a different country and to an ethnic or religious group with which none of them identified:

> **Laboni:** Some students might want to learn about something a bit more closer to their identity and identify with it a bit more…
> **Samreen:** It's like Eurocentric. Being Muslim, it is more than likely that you'll be from somewhere in Asia or Africa. I think learning about perhaps the Nationalist challenge in India would be a bit more interesting to us than what happened in Germany perhaps
> (Year 12, LON8).

The sense that young British Muslim students' historical concern lay outside of the histories of European conflicts also arose in an oblique fashion in discussion with a group of Year 13 students in the second school. Here an arguably critical commentary emerged relating to what some students considered to be a celebratory British narrative within which the Holocaust itself was regularly framed.

> **Marwa:** It [the Holocaust] shows the British in a positive light.
> **Zarak:** That's why they publicise it … When you are studying certain subjects you sort of inoculate the conflicting arguments so you don't really know much about them, so you can't really acknowledge them. So obviously by putting the Holocaust in, you see Britain, as like they are doing a good thing, so you don't really think about the bad things they might have done. […]
> **Rameesha:** I think's it's like last year we learned about how Hitler got into power and more about the Holocaust – that should be like the British Empire, how they attained the British Empire, find out what the British Empire did for them.
> **Wassim:** All they really talk about is how our tiny island ruled this many countries, which shows its power. It doesn't tell you about all the people who died, and like

India and how they lost their freedom. They don't display the debts, they don't show the debts (Year 13, WM2).

Moreover, in this same interview, some students identified and expressed resentment towards discursive attempts to position Muslims as though 'outside of' or 'other' to the British nation and its putatively shared values. As Chapter 1 has already noted, precisely such 'British values' have recently been framed at a governmental level explicitly in relation to a national commitment to the memory of the Holocaust. Represented crudely and without sufficient context, these students' voices could arguably be interpreted as indication of potential resentment towards learning about the Holocaust. Wassim (Year 13, WM2), for example, explained:

> I think if, er, there was someone in the papers wrote about, erm, 'Muslims need to be taught British values', I think there wasn't much … there was a bit of anger, between Muslims, but it wasn't [much] … but if it was someone like, if they wrote about Jewish people need to be taught about British values that could have more of an impact because of what happened in the Holocaust.

It was beyond the function of this particular focus group – indeed of this whole research report – to adequately probe and contextualise Wassim's thoughts here but this could be a critically important avenue for future research.

Finally, it is crucial to emphasise that it was by no means only Muslim students who made observations or raised objections such as these. In an entirely different school the following related conversation ensued:

> **Ella:** I think what we do is we teach about the Holocaust because Britain got involved to stop Germany. So it looks like we…
> **Sarah:** We're the better … yeah.
> […]
> **Sarah:** We did mention the Boer War during our lessons and the concentration camps that were used then. But that's the closest we've got to…
> **Billie:** Yes, to the negative side of Britain.
> **Brian:** Yeah. Like the negative side of Britain, like a lot of conflicts that go on today happened because of us – well, not *us*; but I mean Britain as in the country. The results of our actions have led to a lot of other killings around the world. Not just to do with our own country. So I suppose we only really learn about things that we win or…
> **Billie:** Yeah, [where] we look the best.
> **Brian:** Yeah.
> **Billie:** Because I bet in other countries they learn about what Britain has done and what Britain has caused. But I don't think it's right that we don't
> (Year 12 students, EE2).

It must also be emphasised that in neither of these interviews – nor in any of the focus groups – did students appear to be arguing *against* the teaching of the Holocaust. However, while some of the comments made here reflect common confusions over Britain's response to the Holocaust – 'Britain got involved *to stop Germany*' (see also later discussions in Chapter 7) – they also indicate a willingness, indeed, an enthusiasm, on the part of a number of students to engage with national and international histories and the notion of national values more critically.

## Why do students value learning about the Holocaust?

Echoing the findings of the Centre's teacher study (Pettigrew *et al*. 2009), while students regularly stressed the importance of learning about the Holocaust in interview, some struggled to offer an explanation as to why:

> I just think it's something you should know about, really. There's not really a specific reason, I just think it's so huge everyone should know what happened. Even if you're not interested you should know and I think you will never come out of learning about something like that feeling happy … It's something that shakes you up and people should be aware of the past (Stan, Year 12, SE2).

This is perhaps not surprising; teachers also regularly struggle to articulate the importance of the Holocaust in educational terms (Pettigrew *et al*. 2009).

As part of the survey's 11-item scale mentioned earlier in this chapter, students were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed with a series of seven potential positive rationales for learning about the Holocaust. Students broadly agreed with all the different rationales provided, but Figure 4.12 illustrates that they most strongly supported the following statements: 'Young people should learn about the Holocaust so they understand where prejudice and racism can lead'; 'Young people should learn about the Holocaust to respect the memory of the people who were killed'; and 'Young people should learn about the Holocaust to stop something like that from happening again'.

It is also useful to note that, while fewer students 'strongly agreed' with the two statements, 'Young people should learn about the Holocaust to deepen their knowledge of the Second World War and twentieth-century history' and, 'Young people should learn about the Holocaust so that they can learn about the different things that caused it', almost 90 per cent of students broadly supported each of these (87.1 per cent and 88.9 per cent, respectively). Students were least likely to support the two most specific, present-oriented statements: 'Young people should learn about the Holocaust so that they have more sympathy for refugees coming to this country to escape discrimination and murder' and 'Young people should learn about the Holocaust so that they will be more likely to stand up for people who get picked on/bullied'.

When asked to try and articulate a rationale for learning about the Holocaust in their own words, ideas about 'respect', 'prevention' and of the dangers of 'racism and prejudice' were again regularly emphasised:

> **Ella:** It's about respect for the people it happened to. Because if you go, oh, it's not important, it invalidates what they went through.
> **Sarah:** They're innocent people and I think it's an injustice to them not to remember this, I think personally (Year 12, EE2).

> The moral meaning is that it's really about not to be racist, because we … in lessons we learn that the Nazis are bad people, they did wrong things … Not all of them, but the Nazi Party, their propaganda, the eradication of the races … that was wrong. So if we learn that what they're doing is wrong we should hopefully learn that we shouldn't do it too. So it has that kind of moral: 'Don't be racist' (Chris, Year 9, SE2).

While not diminishing the strong and impressive commitment that young people across all year groups demonstrated towards learning from the Holocaust, the desire to use the Holocaust as a negative examplar was often articulated along with a problematic understanding of the history in question. Here, the marked tendency to reduce all causality to Hitler – explored in Chapters 3 and 6 – was particularly apparent:

> Yeah. I do think that the Holocaust is the epitome of racism and prejudice. And it does go to show what escalation can do to something that started out as quite small. Like something is in one man's head and it expanded to kill millions (Laboni, Year 12, LON8).

> It's because it's a massive extreme. It's the worst … really the worst that can happen, isn't it, is someone dying. And for that to happen on a large scale and in the millions … like 12 million people had been killed because this one person thought that you're not right. And that grew into that massive machine. And you think, maybe if you start on that part with maybe just a bit of conflict and it keeps on going, it builds up and up and it doesn't stop … and then it just ends up like that (Chris, Year 9, SE2).

Personally I think someone can say, oh, racism is not really a big deal. But one snide comment can escalate and I don't think at the beginning, when people got involved with Hitler and the Nazi Party, they probably didn't really realise the extent to which they would go. And I don't think anyone would ever have expected it when they joined that it would come to this mass genocide, millions and trillions of people being killed. I think people should know that that's what can happen. Even if they're saying, oh it's only tiny, it's not a big deal – it can lead to a big deal. It may not be, but it can be, that's the problem – it can happen, it has happened. That's my own opinion anyway (Stephanie, Year 12, SE2).

The sense of inexorable escalation – that the Holocaust was something that 'started out as quite small', 'something in [just] one man's head', or 'just one snide comment', but that 'expanded to kill millions' – expressed by these three students was regularly repeated in interviews.

In other student responses there was clear suggestion that attention to the symbolic and representational significance of the Holocaust, as described in Chapter 1, could override or displace a comprehensive engagement with the actual history. The following group of Year 12 history students summed up this position when they prioritised 'the concept of' the Holocaust over knowledge or understanding of the events themselves:

> **Ella:** I think people should know about it, like the basics of it. I just thought … I just thought maybe it's the actual event isn't as important as the concept of it is.
> **Interviewer:** What do you mean by the concept of it?

**John:** Like what Ella was saying, you should know it – you don't come out of it happy – you know it's wrong and people should know it's wrong. But I feel more that that's important rather than knowing the details of the actual event.
**Interviewer:** Explain to me how you can understand the concept without knowing what happened?
**Ella:** I think you have to, but I don't think people have to know in exact depth … this bunch of people killed thousands, millions of people, these people died, this is mass genocide; they can tell it but you don't have to go into such deep detail into it. They can just know it happened and I think that's enough for anyone, let alone having any extra interest into it (Year 12, EE2).

Again, students' conviction of the importance of the Holocaust is evident here, and all were clear that this was something everyone should 'know about'. However, the students stress the importance of 'knowing about' the Holocaust as a parable – for what it stands for or represents – rather than as an historical event. Given the wider sociocultural context described in Chapter 1, such responses are not altogether surprising. In most popular and political contemporary framings, the notion that there are 'lessons to be learned' from the Holocaust is taken as a given. Moreover, this is articulated in such a manner that it could easily be assumed that 'just knowing it happened' – or publicly 'remembering' that it happened – is sufficient; any suggestion of the specific knowledge content that might be necessary to underpin or substantiate such 'lessons' is almost never made.

However, at other times in interview, many of

**Figure 4.12** Student responses to survey question 91, asking how far they agreed or disagreed with opinions about teaching the Holocaust in schools
percentages below 5 per cent are not labelled in the chart



Percentage of students

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| To understand where racism can lead | 43.2 | 48.5 | 5.7 | |
| To respect the memory of victims | 36.2 | 53.2 | 8.0 | |
| To stop something similar happening again | 33.3 | 52.2 | 11.1 | |
| To deepen historical knowledge | 26.6 | 60.5 | 9.8 | |
| To learn about what caused the Holocaust | 24.7 | 64.2 | 8.1 | |
| To become more likely to defend victims of bullying | 22.1 | 53.0 | 19.8 | |
| To increase sympathy for refugees coming to this country | 20.5 | 56.7 | 17.8 | |

■ Strongly agree  ■ Agree  ■ Disagree  ■ Strongly Disagree

these same students were able to offer more critical and/or circumspect perspectives. For example, Ella (Year 12, EE2) – who volunteered the importance of 'the *concept* of the Holocaust' – later questioned the common proposition that learning about the Holocaust is primarily an intervention against racism and prejudice by identifying the following challenge to this thesis:

> Even when I was little, before I really knew anything about it, I wasn't … I didn't stop being racist *because of the Holocaust*; I wasn't racist and then not racist. I've always not been racist.

Others reflected upon potential limits to the idea that students should encounter this history in school in order to prevent things like the Holocaust from happening again:

> **Megan:** To stop it from happening again? I don't think…
> **Hermione:** [Interrupts] There are genocides happening all the time.
> **Megan:** [I don't think] … if we learned about it, it would stop somebody from thinking that they could do that. If Hitler learned about genocides, I don't think he'd have thought, 'Oh, I couldn't do that now'. You know, 'I'd never kill a Jew again', because he learned about that (Year 9, SE2).

In some cases, even the notion of 'respect' was critically interrogated and reframed in interesting ways:

> I'm not sure if it's so much about respecting the individuals who died themselves as much as respecting the concept of the Holocaust and what it means to the people it affected. Like, when we talk about this statement, respecting… I don't know, learning about the Holocaust, isn't it more to do with respecting the fact that it happened [. . .] than respecting each individual person for having died? I don't know (Milo, Year 12, SE2).

> **Fariha:** I think it's also a sign of regret.
> **Samreen:** Yeah.
> **Laboni:** The world is regretting that we did not know, or we claimed not to know. I think not enough was done and six million odd people died, innocent victims died as a result of our neglect (Year 12, LON8).

As seen in Laboni's contribution, students' discussions also began to identify and grapple with some of the most challenging moral, ethical and political questions that engagement with the history of the Holocaust can raise. Laboni is confronting notions of national and international responsibility: What *did* 'we', as Britain or as the rest of the world, know of what was happening at the time, and what could we perhaps have done differently? Other students suggested that encountering the Holocaust prompted fundamental questions about what it means to be a human – 'How could a group of people that could be like us in a way do things like that?' (Finn, Year 8, EE2) – and which can profoundly challenge notions of human progress and modernity:

> History has developed and you would think over time people would begin to treat people better. But it went from development to kind of reverse and any morals that ever existed about any human beings just went out the window and it was just okay to just kill people (Stephanie, Year 12, SE2).

So, while the dominant discourse of clear 'lessons from' the Holocaust clearly frames student thinking, many of those who took part in focus-group interviews were also demonstrably able and willing to think beyond and against this frame.

## What impact does first-hand survivor testimony have on students' understanding of the Holocaust?

In the survey, students were asked if they had ever heard a survivor talk about their experience of the Holocaust and, across all year groups, 49 per cent indicated that they had (survey question 79). By point of comparison, 24.2 per cent said they had visited a museum to learn about the Holocaust, 18.8 per cent had participated in an event to mark Holocaust Memorial Day and 9.4 per cent had visited the site of a former concentration camp or death camp.

The survey also asked those students who had been given these opportunities to decide how far they agreed that the experience had: helped them understand how and/or why the Holocaust had happened; made what happened during the Holocaust feel 'more real'; been upsetting; or been boring. Of these, 89.4 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that hearing a survivor speak had made the Holocaust 'feel more real', 87.5 per cent indicated they had found the experience upsetting, and 81.8 per cent agreed it had helped their understanding of how or why the Holocaust took place. It was also clear that most students found the talks interesting and engaging, as 90.2 per cent disagreed or strongly disagreed that the experience was 'boring'.

As the current cohort of students is likely to be among the last who will be able to hear first-hand survivor testimony, the research team felt it important to examine students' experience of such encounters more fully, so a series of eight specifically targeted follow-up focus-group interviews were also held. Students who had recently listened to a survivor talk were invited to explain, in their own terms, what the experience of meeting and listening to a

Holocaust survivor meant to them and how they felt it had contributed to their understanding of and engagement with this history.

Again, one of the most regularly and promptly volunteered responses was that hearing a first-hand account delivered 'face-to-face' had made the Holocaust 'seem more real'. Indeed, this was the most common, consistent and enthusiastically asserted reaction irrespective of gender and year group:

> Yes, it is like it was his *life*. So if someone else tells it, it doesn't feel like it was his life. If someone has a story, sure you can just tell it and it will still have like an impact but then if you hear it from the person who actually is the story, then it kind of actually makes it more real and it makes you understand more (Aasif, Year 9, YH1).

> …because if it's kind of like from a textbook or a video it doesn't really seem real to you. But then since it's an actual person, face-to-face, talking to you, it seems a lot more real, because they've been through it and their presence is there (Chloe, Year 9, SW1).

> Before you see someone who has gone through it, who has actually been to one of the camps, you kind of – for me anyway – I was in a bit of disbelief. Because you kind of don't believe it until you actually … hear a first-hand view of actually what happened there (Dafna, Year 12, LON2).

Arguably, recognising how survivor testimony made the Holocaust seem more real to these students emphasises how 'unreal' the Holocaust might continue to feel to others who had not shared this experience. This may be especially true for those students who only encounter its history through text and/or film. Some students referred to 'a fairy-tale' or 'story-book' like quality to this 'pre-survivor encounter' history:

> It just seems so unrealistic, that such a major event happened and occurred, I mean you wouldn't believe it, you would think it was something out of a story book or something (Roland, Year 12, LON1).

> It wasn't a story, it was something that actually happened, because it can seem a bit like a children's story or a fairy tale, although not a very happy one (Simon, Year 9, SW1).

> With the experiments that went on it seems a bit, you know, Captain America? You know, the bad one. And it is like that, because that is so unrealistic. And they did experiments on people and sewed

twins together? It just doesn't sound right (Jacob, Year 9, LON2).

> In the books and like all the stuff that you read about the Holocaust in class it is like real but sometimes what you read is hard to believe because it is like so extreme, but then like when you hear it from a real live person who was actually there, it like cements it that it did actually happen and it is not just like exaggerated (Hannah, Year 9, LON2).

It is important here not to take such comments out of context and consider them as a form of denial of the historical record. Rather, they can be seen to encapsulate what the philosopher Sarah Kofman (1998: 36), refers to as an 'inevitable incredulity'. These comments by students also resonate with those made by Gideon Hausner. Reflecting on the Eichmann trial, at which he was the Israeli prosecutor, Hausner described the pivotal role of survivor testimony in making the otherwise distant and 'unbelievable' events approachable and meaningful to an audience who had not been there. He recalled that:

> It was mainly through the testimony of witnesses that the events could be reproduced in court, and thus conveyed … to the world at large, in such a way that men would not recoil from the narrative as from scalding steam, and so that it would not remain the *fantastic, unbelievable apparition* that emerges from the Nazi documents (quoted in Wieviorka, 2006b: 390, emphasis added).

Woven through all of the group interviews was the clear sense that students took a great deal from meeting a survivor in person and hearing from them first hand. Many students spoke of how a face-to-face encounter with a survivor made the Holocaust seem less distant in time:

> It was also very recent, if you think about it, it only happened… like 70 years ago. You don't really think about it, like the lifestyle we live at the moment, you wouldn't think that people [were] treated that badly, but it was really close, she was still like, I was still able to meet her, I felt how close it was… You wouldn't really think that it was that close, because you read about it in history and you think, you don't realise that it was that recent (Deborah, Year 12, LON1).

> …it is important in order to say 'never again' we need to believe that it is possible that it could happen in a recent time and the fact that there are survivors around who are still living says to us, 'No we are not talking about, you know, eleven hundred in Yorkshire or whatever, or the blood libel. We are talking about really recent history, you know'. That

makes people think that it is relevant to them and immediate and something that they need to look at (Natalie, Year 12, LON2).

Different survivors, with different stories and different approaches to sharing their testimony, capture students' attention in different ways. Different spaces inside or outside of school, be they large assemblies or smaller meetings, sometimes in local synagogues or community centres, encouraged different modes of interaction with the speakers and other members of the audience. However, it was clear that the embodied presence of the witness – their actually *being there* – was an important part of the experience beyond simply the transfer of information, or even the telling of stories. Young people spoke of listening to a survivor in person as a powerful, edifying, affective experience:

> …and it gives you a different feeling, compared to when you, like, read something or when you're told about something by someone who wasn't really there, it wasn't like … it just has, like, a different sense of feeling, because she was actually there, and she was standing in front of us, telling us about it (Malcolm, Year 12, LON1).

> I think it is when like you can see them you know you are, like, in the same room as them, you know that they are saying it from their story, like, you can see the emotion on their face, the tone of their voice, you can tell by their emotions. Whereas in a video, like, or anything else, you are not that face-to-face kind of thing, you are not in that intimacy of like what actually happened (Fred, Year 9, YH1).

> Yeah, I feel, like, personally, like, quite honoured to be able to hear them in person. Because there is a difference between, like, hearing it on a video and actually being in the same room (Simon, Year 9, LON2).

Many students found the experience humbling and expressed how touched they were by the positivity of the Holocaust survivor in spite of his or her catastrophic past and of the emotional disorder that ensued:

> Even at the end he still managed to make jokes about his life and his wife and it was really funny and I was crying and laughing … It was so inspirational and moving about how he managed to survive through that terrible time (Sandra, Year 9, YH1).

Rather than find that listening to trauma was traumatic, the experience aroused in respondents a heightened feeling of self-awareness and momentousness. When her group was asked what they remembered most about meeting the survivor

– apart from their actual story – Natalie (Year 12, LON2) replied, 'The atmosphere in the room. We were utterly silent'. In another school, Richard (Year 9, YH1) reflected upon the enormous significance of the physical presence of the survivor:

> It's just like, this guy's in front of me. If he hadn't made a decision when he was like eight or nine years old then he could of died in one of the most horrific ways ever.

In addition, students were able to reflect on how the survivors transcended fear and found strength and purpose through facing and escaping death:

> His look on life changed because of what he went through, so he was no longer scared of death because of what he had been through, he wasn't scared any more of anything that would normally scare us because he knew what death was (Timothy, Year 9, YH1).

> He had met it almost face to face and he seen it in front of his eyes, so the fact that he wasn't scared of dying, he had seen death and wasn't scared (Andrew, Year 9, YH1).

This sort of experience touches on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) dimension of young people's learning. According to a recent Royal Society of the Arts study (Peterson *et al*. 2014), this area is commonly marginalised in schools and often lacks an underpinning rationale. With 2013 Ofsted guidelines raising the stakes regarding SMSC, the area should generate greater attention. A particular issue rests perhaps with the complex and enigmatic 'spiritual development'. Rowson (2013: 2) states:

> The capacious term 'spirituality' lacks clarity because it is not so much a unitary concept as a signpost for a range of touchstones: our search for meaning, our sense of the sacred, the value of compassion, the experience of transcendence, the hunger for transformation.

From what they said during focus groups, it appeared that encounters with people who lived through the Holocaust aroused a deep respect in students – a sense of knowing about a life beyond anything they ordinarily experience – touching on the transformative and existential and resonating with Rowson's description.

It is hard to conceive of any technology that will be able to replicate these students' profound encounters with an embodied, human presence. However, two organisations in the field of Holocaust education – the US-based USC Shoah Foundation at the Institute of Creative Technologies and the National Holocaust Centre in Laxton, England – are working to develop innovative methods harnessing digital technology in

an attempt to maintain as much of that intimacy as possible. Using advanced digital film recordings and dynamic forms of simulated interaction, they hope students of the future will not only hear and see a survivor giving their testimony, but also be able to ask the person questions and hear their answers. In this way, they aspire to maintain as much as possible of the *experience* of meeting a living witness in an attempt to preserve the voice of Holocaust survivors for generations to come.

As already reported at the beginning of this section, after making the Holocaust 'feel more real', the next most common response in the survey was that students found survivor testimony 'upsetting'. Perhaps counter-intuitively, but nevertheless compellingly, it was clear in interviews that students interpreted this as a positive impact. During focus groups, many students expressed how being upset was an appropriate response to the subject matter – the most direct way to demonstrate that they had 'understood' the Holocaust. Lenny (Year 11, LON1) articulated this very clearly: 'You understand by being upset, in my opinion.'

In the students' discussions, the three answer categories – 'more real', 'upsetting' and 'helped me to understand' – overlapped at many points. The Holocaust experienced as 'more real' was 'upsetting', and being upset gave some students the sense that this meant they had 'understood' – at least on a personal level. It became clear that many students considered being upset a meaningful personal experience, an apposite response to this history. At no point during any of the focus-group interviews did any students suggest that they might avoid the subject because it was upsetting, nor did they recoil from the difficult emotions evoked by survivor testimony in any other way. Rather, they appeared to really value such experiences:

> I did cry, but, because it was sad, but I think it's important to be upset about these things and if you're not upset, you're not having empathy, for the subject, and I think people should be upset about it, because then, you know what these people have experienced, and it makes you want to stop it (Joanna, Year 9, SW1).

> **Interviewer:** You say you felt emotion and you were crying. Did the experience help you learn and understand more about the Holocaust?
> **Geoff:** Yes.
> **Interviewer:** Why is that?
> **Geoff:** You weren't just having a history teacher just at the front of the room just like telling you facts and facts about the Holocaust. You have someone's own personal story, so you know that every single person in the Holocaust had a different story but this way you

actually get to experience the person's story and how they actually felt and what their emotions were at that exact moment. And it like really hits home (Year 9, YH1).

Such comments speak to the importance for students of having an affective and personal response to the Holocaust. However, they provide a relatively shallow basis for historical knowledge and understanding for, as Weissman (2004: 201) insists, being upset by something, 'neither requires nor guarantees much in the way of historical and moral comprehension'.

The young people quoted above do not really know what survivors of the Holocaust went through and nor do they get to 'experience their story' – unless we understand such comments in the sense that the telling of the story itself is something they 'experience'. Furthermore, while students' emotional response to the Holocaust can be recognised as an essential dimension of a meaningful encounter, their being upset by the experiences of those who lived through the Holocaust must be understood in the context of significant gaps in key historical knowledge and explanatory understanding (outlined in Chapters 5, 6 and 7).

Some students themselves recognised the necessary limitations of experiential narratives, including testimonies, in this respect, and emphasised the need to contextualise such accounts as a (potentially privileged) part of a fuller picture:

> I sort of disagree [that it helped me understand why the Holocaust happened]. In the context it helped the Holocaust feel more real, but why it happened? I disagree, because why it happened, she [the survivor whose testimony he had heard] can't really tell us why it happened, she can only tell us what happened to her, she can't tell us why it actually happened (Henry, Year 11, LON1).

> I personally still don't understand how people thought in that way, I don't know, whether it was a time thing or what it was, but I still think, in a lot of ways, if anything, it highlighted to me how radical and different the Nazis were. There was racism and things, but they took it a lot further … So I don't think hearing her made it any clearer to me why, personally, why a person would have thought that was necessary. I don't think that was cleared up to me. I don't know how that would be cleared (Deborah, Year 12, LON1).

> You need to learn about the factual information before you can connect to it emotionally so, like, Holocaust survivors are there to allow you to understand an individual story and help you

comprehend it, but you first of all you need to know, like, the historical background to it, you need to understand like why it happened and how many people died and sort of what the conditions were, so it sort of allows you to put yourself in that position and then meeting a Holocaust survivor brings out all the emotions (Natalie, Year 12, LON2).

This does not diminish the value of testimony, but it highlights the importance of embedding survivors' personal accounts within a detailed understanding of the socio-historical context of the events described – as one would with any experiential narrative. As Natalie was able to appreciate, such context enriches young people's reception of testimony just as testimony enriches young people's capacity to relate to the historical record.

However, survivor testimony did not only offer a personal, affective connection to these events. Many students reported how the testimonies they heard provided greater detail and insight into everyday life before, during and after the Holocaust and, as such, enriched and deepened their knowledge of the times:

That's how I felt at times, the books and things you read in class, is very much focused on the dead and what happened there, you don't really get to see what happened afterwards, I wouldn't have, in class I wouldn't have had any idea, when the camps were liberated, what the survivors did from that point onwards, because a lot of them wouldn't have had their families and their homes left, and that sort of thing, where she said how she went to – was it Switzerland or Sweden, or was it a refugee camp? – and things like that, and you don't think about things like that in lessons, how they progressed from that point onwards (Deborah, Year 12, LON1).

He told you where you could and couldn't go, so it wasn't everywhere, and he told you about time differences when half of France was taken over then almost all of it. So it just shows a bit more depth of the time periods that it was happening in (George, Year 9, SW1).

Given that the Centre's research with teachers revealed a concerning 'lack of emphasis on Jewish life and culture before the war' (Pettigrew *et al*. 2009: 42), and textbooks reaffirm the primacy of perpetrator narratives with scant attention to Jewish agency or life before or after the war (Foster and Burgess 2013), survivor testimony may be adding important historical detail. Wieviorka (2006a: 132), speaking about the impact of testimony on professional Holocaust historians, cautions against making too much of this – survivor's stories are not the same as historiography – while acknowledging the deep affective potential in these narratives:

[They] can read, listen to, and watch testimonies without looking for what … is not to be found – clarification of precise events, places, dates, and numbers, which are wrong with the regularity of a metronome – but knowing also that testimony contains extraordinary riches: an encounter with the voice of someone who has lived through a piece of history; and, in an oblique fashion, not factual truth, but the more subtle and just as indispensable truth of an epoch and of an experience.

The young people in our research are clearly drawn to and moved by testimony. There is an intensity of learning that arises from it that is extraordinarily rich and affecting. While accepting that testimony is not the same as historiography, it is important to acknowledge the distinctive forms of knowledge and understanding that a face-to-face encounter listening to a Holocaust survivor can facilitate.

## What impact does *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* have on students' understanding of the Holocaust?

[A]ll fiction about the Holocaust inevitably imposes the artifice of style, point of view and personification upon its subject matter. This artifice, Lang [(1990)] claims, distorts the Holocaust's singular features, such as the collective agency of its perpetration and the depersonalised objectified conditions of its victims (Levi and Rothberg 2003: 325).

As described earlier in this chapter, the survey asked students if they had read any books about the Holocaust (see Figures 4.6 and 4.8), and 43.0 per cent indicated that they had. Of these, 74.8 per cent had read *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (see Figure 4.10). This was significantly more than those who had read the perennially popular *Diary of Anne Frank* (59.1 per cent) or the general category 'school textbooks' (42.5 per cent). Even more significantly, of the 76.2 per cent who stated that they had 'seen any films or television programmes about the Holocaust', 84.4 per cent had seen the film *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. This far exceeds the general category of 'a TV documentary' (50.9 per cent) and the once hugely popular *Schindler's List*, which had been watched by only 30.2 per cent of students in this sub category.

The ubiquity of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is potentially concerning because both the book and the film, in subtle and not so subtle ways, deviate from the historical record and misrepresent the period. The British historian of the Holocaust, David Cesarani (2008: 3), has insisted that the story of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* 'is utterly implausible

… a travesty of facts … the book amounts to a distortion of history'. He describes how 'the film-makers manage to turn Germans into victims of the Holocaust'. And Olaf Jensen (2013: 118) is so concerned by the film's representation of the period, he notes – apropos of the film's popularity in schools – that 'even though bad films can serve a good example to study, this is worrying.'

Given that both the book and the film have been so critically received by leading scholars in the field of Holocaust studies and Holocaust education, our study sought to gain an understanding of how this story was being received by young people, how *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was contributing to and possibly distorting their knowledge and understandings of the Holocaust.

Students were selected for specifically targeted focus-group interviews if they had seen the film and thought they had a good recollection of it. Each focus group began with a discussion of the meaning of four words – 'history', 'evidence', 'fiction' and 'historical fiction'. Students were encouraged to provide their own definition and discussion was recorded. If the groups failed to come to a consensus, or if that consensus contained marked misunderstandings of any term, a working definition was provided by the facilitator. As well as functioning as an ice breaker, this process allowed us to define some key parameters for the subsequent discussion and, importantly, to ensure that all the participants were using these terms to refer to the same, or at least similar, concepts. Students were then asked to discuss which of these concepts were useful for trying to know about and make sense of the past.

## Students' ability to position the film as a work of historical fiction

Across all the interviews exploring students' responses to *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* only one participant believed that the film was based on a true story. The majority of students across all age groups – and certainly all those who had studied the Holocaust in history – recognised that *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* was a work of fiction based in a historical epoch. When probed, it became apparent they understood that the story was predicated on clear historical inaccuracies and implausibility. Students across all schools were aware that a Nazi concentration camp was a much more tightly guarded and severely regimented place than shown in the film. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, concentration camps are a central component of many young people's conception of the Holocaust, and while they may have only limited knowledge and understanding of the different camps and of differences between camps, they were easily able to

pick up on the historical implausibility and narrative inconsistencies in the plot.

The discussion that follows took place among a group of Year 8 students who were yet to formally learn about the Holocaust within school:

**Ife:** I don't know why, but I don't think, er, you know the boy who goes under the fence, I don't think in those times they would have even let the children in there, the Jews, because they didn't like them did they, so why would they let their children near to it, that's something that I don't really think … I think that was not believable, you know, how the boy went with the Jewish boy inside the concentration camp. One of them would have [been] spotted, because, don't they do like checks? They shave their heads, even though the boy had a cap, when they were going inside, didn't the boy remove it? I find it really hard to believe that someone was in there when [he] normally wasn't in there.
**Esosa:** Also there would have been people watching and guarding the place to see if anyone would come in or out. So the way the rich boy was just going in and out, I think it wasn't that reliable because someone would have been watching.
**Abena:** It also seems quite unbelievable because if Bruno can get under the fence, why can't the boy, the Jewish boy get under the fence [to escape] as well? (Year 8, LON4 ).

At another school, a group of Year 9 students who had recently studied this history, shared further examples of some of the film's most egregious deviations from the historical record:

**Claudia:** Prisoners wouldn't have been able to have slacked off enough to sit by a fence.
**Alessia:** It would have been protected, not just a very thin barbed wire fence that people can dig under, because that's really bad.
**Claudia:** They would have had barbed wire, then a fence then another fence.
**Rosalyn:** Surely as soon as he came to the camp he would have been killed, because he was too young? (Year 9, LON9).

In this way, most students drew on *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* as a work of fiction, or historical fiction, and showed awareness of the key points at which it clearly deviated from the historical record. Further, several students argued that they had engaged with the film 'as a [feature] film', and so felt that to criticise it for not being a documentary or a pedagogic tool was 'unfair':

It seems a little pointless to criticise a movie for historical [in]accuracy. You don't really go to a movie to get historical pristine accuracy, you go to a movie to experience something. So if you are

going to criticise every single point of it you are better off watching documentaries that are factually accurate and only rely on evidence. This is more of a story based on things that may or may not have happened. It is not going to be ground in the dirt, it is not going to be like accurate based on sources (Lee, Year 10, LON3).

Jensen (2013: 119) makes a similar point when he argues that, 'In the end, it is meant to be a "fable" for children to bring home some of the issues involved in the Holocaust, not a documentary.' However, what the film is 'meant to be' and how it is used and received are not the same thing. And so, while Lee argues that it is inappropriate to judge any movie on the basis of historical accuracy, elsewhere he explicitly describes, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* as 'kind of like a documentary':

> It is not that it didn't seem real, it was just like we didn't really have it explained to us fully. It was kind of like a documentary, it has shown you like all the proper … it is not like a film, it is like *Panorama*, it is like they have actually gone inside and shown you things you are not supposed to see (Lee, Year 10, LON3).

Across all the interviews, a number of other students of varying age groups described their perception of the film and its relation to historical reality in similar terms:

> Because like … it's a good film in the sense that it shows you what happened during that time. But it's like … it's quite sad, so it's not something that you would want to watch again and again. But it is a good, it is a good thing to watch so you understand like *what really happened* during that time (Nkechi, Year 9, LON4, emphasis added).

> Yeah, kind of like a documentary in a way (Nathan, Year 10, LON3).

> But there's films like *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and the book and things like that which shows you *what actually happened* (Max, Year 13, SE2, emphasis added).

Of particular note in this context is the 'film within a film' scene, in which Bruno's father, the camp commandant, is seen showing a propaganda movie which portrays the camps as places of comfortable, happy and productive labour to an assembled group of Nazi officers. This is a clear deviation from the historical record in that it conflates Auschwitz with Theresienstadt, where the Nazi propaganda film *Terezin: A documentary film of the Jewish resettlement* was based. It also implies that Jews were, *en masse*, tricked into voluntarily moving to the camps, thus diminishing the brutality of the deportations.

Most significantly, the film appears to be propagating the discredited but popular idea that most German's didn't know what was happening or, in the words of Lilly (Year 12, WM2): 'the Nazis showed them what they wanted them to see'. This is particularly concerning in light of the findings outlined in the Chapter 3, and further explored in Chapter 7, that the vast majority of students thought that only Hitler and the Nazis were responsible for the Holocaust and didn't recognise that hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens were complicit in the murder of their Jewish neighbours. Students referred to the 'film within a film' scene in a particularly uncritical manner and used it as evidence of German ignorance. For example:

> Well it's sort of evidence of what happened because you saw how, say, the one bit where the father had made the film about what happened inside the concentration camps and you saw the perspective that the army and Hitler and followers of Hitler high up kind of made, kind of showed people what they wanted them to see (Lilly, Year 11, WM2).

Students often made what Seixas (1993a: 153) describes as 'seamless transitions' between talking about the film's content and the history of the Holocaust, despite their awareness of the inaccuracies (and improbabilities) in its depiction of the period and their stated awareness that the film is fictional. It therefore appears that they engage with the film both reflexively – acknowledging that it is not a (re)presentation of (past) reality but an imaginative fiction – and non-reflexively – drawing on the source uncritically to make a personal 'sense' of the past – at the same time.

In the following exchange, students who have earlier identified and accepted that *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is a work of fiction premised on historically implausible events then refer to how it gives them an insight into not just what *could* have happened but what *actually* happened:

> **Sally:** Because if you've been … it was all bad … even fictional films show the good side and the bad side of it, so it gives you a wider perspective of what actually happened.
> **Interviewer:** What was the good side about it?
> **Sally:** Well he befriended him, didn't he? It just shows that not everyone in Germany followed Hitler and believed that Jews were bad.
> **Lilly:** But he was young…
> **Sally:** He was still being brainwashed by his teachers and his father saying that basically Hitler was correct (Years 10 and 11, WM2).

> Yes as I said before, I think it is challenging that the Germans are like that in general because actually it

makes you feel empathetic towards the Germans, the German families, which I don't think had been done before because all other sources they use Germans in a negative light, just because of the Nazis, but this opens your eyes and tells you what the actual truth is, I guess, in that sense (Callum, Year 12, LON3).

The tendency for students to draw on historical fiction as if it were a 'window onto the past' has been explored by Seixas (1993a: 364) who found that, when his respondents discussed the movie *Dances with Wolves*, 'they made statements about the film as if they were discussing the past'. He goes on to say that the film's 'effectiveness was based on its being "realistic", not on its being accurate'.

A similar process appears to be at work for the participants in our research. Students are aware of the more glaring historical inaccuracies of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* – they know it is a (historical) fiction – but they still see it as, in the words of several respondents, 'truthful':

> I think the way they actually did the film was good, because even though it was heartbreaking to see what really happened, it was truthful for what they were really doing and you got to know what it was really like for Jews in World War 2
> (Ife, Year 8, LON4).

So, an easy sense of understanding – a 'feel' for the period afforded by vague, reassuring notions of the film as 'truthful' or 'realistic' that are in fact susceptible to bias, misunderstanding, misrepresentation and error – persists despite the simultaneous understanding that the film is an inaccurate fiction. The concern is that this view of the film as 'truthful' may be consolidated by its use in the classroom – according to several groups of students it was being shown even in history lessons – where the context may give the film a veneer of 'official knowledge'. This in turn may contribute to students' contradictory reflexive and non-reflexive engagement with the film.

As noted earlier, Cesarani (2008) worried that the film had managed to 'turn the Germans into the victims of the Holocaust'. Similarly, Jensen (2013: 122) has suggested that, after watching the film, 'one cannot help but feel pity and sympathy for the perpetrators and bystanders; a subtle form of "victimisation" of the perpetrators shines through'. This effect appeared at play in some of the comments made by students:

> I feel sorry for practically everybody who was under Hitler's control. Like, they couldn't do anything about it because they were told what they could and couldn't do and basically got killed off if they didn't do what he said. And it doesn't matter who was

the bigger victim, they were all still victims of Hitler's control in some shape or form.
(Erica, Year 11, WM2).

> Yes, it is too easy to feel sorry for the Jews in the film. I don't mean that in a rude way, it is just like, everyone is always, like Callum said, is going to sympathise with the Jews in the camp, but when you see it from like Bruno or the mother's perspective it seems a bit different because they had to live with that in like Nazi Germany.
> (Jack, Year 12, LON3).

> Well we always think of the Nazis as the bad guys and this shows that the Holocaust didn't just affect the Jews, it did mostly affect the Jews, obviously, but the problems that Nazi families might encounter and what their problems were, because it is good showing all what the atrocities against the Jews were, but we see that a lot now and it is true, they were the worst, they came off the worst, but it is interesting to see what might happen to a Nazi family, if that happened (Dan, Year 9, LON3).

These comments contain a disproportionate mode of equivalence – 'I feel sorry for practically everyone under Hitler's control' – and normalisation, even trivialisation, of Jewish suffering – 'it's too easy to feel sorry for the Jews'. This also normalises and trivialises the extraordinary, unprecedented crime that took place in the camps and demonstrates a distorted understanding of the past. In almost all the schools where this film was discussed, students revealed a strong tendency to want to extend their concern to the German population as depicted in the film, including the members of the SS and their families.

Although there were undoubtedly Germans who resisted and even opposed the Nazis, and certainly many who suffered under the Third Reich, these comments reflect a comfortable and outmoded perception of the past that places all blame on Hitler – or on Hitler and a handful of elite Nazis – in a process of 'objectification', as outlined in Chapter 3. This avoids the more troubling questions of how, not so long ago, Europeans who were much like us could participate on a massive scale in the planned and systematic murder of their neighbours. This is not only morally dubious but historically inaccurate. As Jensen (2013: 123) argues: 'the problem lies in the reinforcement of outdated historical knowledge by writers and filmmakers that shape and reshape public perceptions and, moreover, the uncritical use of feature films like these in education'.

The film of *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* currently occupies a central place in young people's encounters with the Holocaust. Among survey

respondents, over 80 per cent of students who had watched a film or TV programme about the Holocaust had seen this, and this is supported by smaller-scale research (Gray 2014a, 2014b). As such it represents the continuation of a pattern by which, approximately every 20 years, a new mainstream representation of the Holocaust claims public attention. In the 1970s this was the NBC miniseries *Holocaust*, in the 1990s, *Schindler's List*, and in the 2010s – at least for teenagers – it is *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. The evidence from our focus groups suggest that this is having a significant, and significantly problematic impact on the way young people attempt to make sense of this complex past.

## What do students think and feel about encountering atrocity images of the Holocaust?

The value and appropriateness of using atrocity images in classroom teaching about the Holocaust has been called into question by many in the field, including the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). Its guidelines state that the Holocaust can be taught effectively without using photographs of corpses, human suffering and shootings, and warn of the potential harm in the use of such images with young people (IHRA no date).

There are three main reasons given in the guidelines for avoiding the overuse of Holocaust atrocity imagery. First, such practice might precipitate or reinforce a defining view of Jewish people as victims without agency, with the risk highest in classrooms where these types of images are the primary or only visual representation of Jewish people that students are exposed to. We know from the Centre's research with teachers (Pettigrew *et al.* 2009) that attention given by schools to Jewish life before the Holocaust, and Jewish responses during and after the Holocaust, is limited. The concern is that, if young people only see Jews within a paradigm of victimhood, this might lead to a dangerous misconstruction that the Holocaust was in some way part of an inevitable pattern.

Second, Holocaust images have the potential to shock, disturb or traumatise young people who have little say over the materials that are brought to lessons by their teachers. Marianne Hirsch uses the notion of 'rupture' to describe what can happen when a child encounters Holocaust imagery. The child, she writes, is confronted with shock and 'a sense that the world will never again be whole; that something broke' (Hirsch 2001: 6). This rupture may in turn impede learning rather than enhance it.

The third reason relates to how far respect for the

dignity and memory of the individuals depicted in the photographs can be assured when they are used as resource material in classrooms.

And yet, while these debates continue, the ubiquity of Holocaust atrocity images can be confirmed by any internet search and they have become a staple part of Holocaust representation in British textbooks (Foster and Burgess 2013) and popular documentaries. They are also an important part of this history; the harrowing photographs taken of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, for example, served not only to record but also to define the horror of mass-produced death (Sontag 2003). The challenge for the IHRA's guidelines on more limited use of Holocaust images in classrooms is that they are 'out there', and young people will be exposed to them whether or not they are brought to the classroom.

Focus-group interviews were conducted in order to gain insight into what educational value, if any, young people attribute to atrocity images of the Holocaust and how they respond to some of the criticisms that are made of their use, often on their behalf. In these interviews, young people were in the main resolute that graphic images of the Holocaust have an important place in their learning. Only one student reported that he felt uncomfortable viewing such images and said it was unnecessary in the learning process:

> It's enough to tell people what happened, just so long as … I don't know; obviously you want to catch the students' attention so they're paying attention to what they're learning, but I don't think it's quite so necessary to show them the images. I personally could learn without the images (Milo, Year 13, SE2).

All other respondents saw graphic images as useful learning tools. Accepting that they are inherently disturbing, the images were not seen as the cause of unreasonable or inappropriate psychological discomfort given the horrific nature of the past reality that students were attempting to understand. Some students felt that being disturbed by what they encountered in class was not necessarily a negative response but rather, in the case of the Holocaust, a necessary one:

> I think it's important to be upset about these things and if you're not upset, you're not having empathy, for the subject, and I think people should be upset about it, because then, you know what these people have experienced and it makes you want to stop it (Joanna, Year 9, SW1).

> I think it also adds to your own, like, it being realistic to you, and seeing consequences of it, because lots of us are visual learners and we learn by seeing

it, and images often stick in our heads more and last longer than just text to us, and it's easy to remember (Rupa, Year 9, LON8).

Others remarked that, in any case, they see the images outside class. Asked whether they would prefer their teachers to use the images as part of classroom learning, Saehna (Year 10, LON8) responded:

> …then you'd understand it more, you wouldn't be more scared of it, you'd be more understanding of it.

Interestingly, some students took objection to the idea that teachers might feel they have a duty to 'protect' students from the photographic material. One student recounted how she noticed this approach from her teacher:

> I feel that the school tries to shield the Holocaust in a way. Like they will tell us about it, but they are not going to show you images that upset you … so it's almost shielded in a way (Sophie, Year 9, SW1).

Most students appeared to take the view that such images had an important value in terms of confronting the reality of the Holocaust, as these Year 12 students suggest:

> **Billie:** Yeah. As awful as the photos are, you see that … It's almost like, okay, this is real; look this is it. I think people have to be seeing it before they even believe it, and then it just hits you.
> **Sarah:** Or you hear this was done and that was done, but without actually seeing the pictures you can't actually translate it into a real event that happened in history. And so when we actually see the pictures we can make that link and see that it was actually something that happened.
> **John:** It stops the idea of a story and a legend … it stops it being a story; it makes it real (Year 13, EE2).

No suggestion emerged from the young people that images dehumanise the Jewish victims depicted. Rather, some students remarked that the images were important in ensuring they understood that this had happened to human beings, as explained by Chandni (Year 9, LON8) when discussing the issue with a group of Year 9 and Year 10 students:

> It adds the human element to the teaching of history. You know, when we look at the figures and it's like millions died, but you never actually think about the people.

The group continued by connecting this point with the notion that images have weight as sources of evidence:

> **Kanta:** …you're shown something, you're being shown

evidence and it just connects everything that you've heard about, read about; and you look at that picture and…
> **Fatima:** …that's true. It's proof to what actually happened. If you have pictures from the time it shows that this actually happened and it shows the true horrors of what happened (Years 9 and 10, LON8).

When it was put to focus groups that showing these images might be disrespectful to those pictured, the majority of students responded that motivation for showing the images was an important factor in making this judgement: if motivation was educational and of good intent, that overrode concerns of possible wrongdoing. This rationale was common across all focus groups:

> It's really sad that they are textbook pictures now, but I suppose … If in a newspaper, I wouldn't agree with that. But if it's educating future generations and it could have an impact and make society better, if I was, I'd … well I wouldn't get a choice on it, but I wouldn't have a problem if it might have a chance of improving society (Sarah, Year 13, EE2).

> **Daisy:** I think it can be unrespectful, well it is. But it … if it helps some people understand the extent a bit more, then I feel that that…
> **Shannon:** Yeah. The intentions are…
> **Daisy:** …the intention is good.
> **Stan:** Not to be disrespectful.
> **Shannon:** It's not disrespectful of them using it almost to teach, educate (Year 13, SE2).

Some students voiced an ethical position to justify the use of atrocity images of the Holocaust. They argued that, despite the traumatic nature of the photographs, this was reality – this is the world as they find it and as such there was a need to confront it. As Samreen (Year 12, LON 8) said,

> 'If it was real enough to happen it's real enough for us to view it, I think. It's important for us to see it'.

In summary, most students appeared to welcome the opportunity to examine archival images in class and took exception to the possibility that teachers may avoid using them in order to shield them from the disturbing reality of the Holocaust. They were, in the main, insistent on the importance of using the archive imagery in class in spite of the emotional unease that such images can arouse, emphasising their critical role in helping grasp a sense of the reality of the Holocaust.

Students demonstrated sensitivity and concern in relation to the question of responsibility to the individuals captured in the photos in terms of dignifying their memory and whether, with this concern in mind, classroom use of atrocity images

was appropriate. Students wrestled with this dilemma but a significant number felt that the educational weight of the images assuaged any possible ethical wrongdoing to the memory of the victims depicted. Indeed, it was felt that such engagement with the images is, in itself, an empowering memorial. The conversations were evidence of the maturity in young people's critical thinking.

While this report is not arguing either for or against the inclusion of atrocity images of the Holocaust in schemes of work, the interviews conducted with young people do raise some important pedagogic questions:

- Do atrocity images of the Holocaust have a legitimate place in young people's learning?
- Do young people have the right to see such important archival representation as evidence of the Holocaust?
- Do such images provide a vital tool in developing consciousness of the reality of the Holocaust?
- Should the classroom use of such images be negotiated with students rather than simply presented or not presented to them?
- Might young people be more resilient to the potential negative effects of atrocity imagery than is generally attributed to them?
- Are there strategies that teachers can employ to support young people in engaging sensitively with images of brutality and death?
- If they avoid the use of Holocaust imagery, are teachers missing the opportunity to help young people through their encounters with images which they are likely, in all probability, to meet outside the classroom without the aid of structured framing or support?

Across all three modes of encounter examined here – survivor testimony, narrative fiction and use of atrocity images – students appeared to be striving to find something that felt like a 'real' understanding of the Holocaust. This was predicated for many upon an emotional or affective engagement, where the cognitive and affective are intertwined – or, in the words of Year 11 student Lenny, cited earlier, 'You understand by being upset'. Despite Elie Wiesel's (1989) proclamation at the start of this chapter – that only those who lived the Holocaust can transform that experience into 'knowledge' – many of the students who took part in this study were nonetheless motivated to attempt to draw their own personal meaning from these historical events.

## Summary

- Across the student survey responses, a very high proportion of participants indicated that they had learned about the Holocaust while in school, including more than 85 per cent of students from Years 10 and above. More surprising was the high number of students who had learned about the Holocaust at primary school or in Years 7 and 8; 28.5 per cent reported they had learned about the Holocaust at primary level. This raises important questions about the form and content of these youngest students' educational encounters with the Holocaust.
- The majority of teaching about the Holocaust happens in history classrooms, with 86.1 per cent of all those who had learned about the subject in a school context saying they had encountered it in history, while 37.5 per cent had encountered the Holocaust in religious education, 27.0 per cent in English and 26.2 per cent in assemblies.
- Two-thirds (66.1 per cent) of students reported that they had heard about the subject outside school. During interviews, knowledge – or at least awareness – of the Holocaust was described as 'mainstream', so embedded in popular consciousness that it had become something 'people know about without even realising they've learned about it'. This did not appear to dampen students' interest or enthusiasm for learning about this history in a school context.
- The findings from a number of measures across the survey all indicate that students have very positive attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust and that such attitudes remain broadly stable across gender, year group and religious affiliation. Significantly, in spite of recently expressed concerns to the contrary, there did not appear to be any significant variation between the attitudes held by those students who took part in this study that self-identified as Muslim and the full student cohort. In focus-group interviews, Muslim students articulated their keen interest in the subject and, in line with other students, foregrounded their moral condemnation of the Holocaust. Some Muslim students appeared to question the way in which the Holocaust can be used as political capital in the present. This data came from only two focus groups, so was insufficient to draw any firm conclusions. Some non-Muslim students also expressed similar views. Further research into this area would be valuable.

- A desire to learn more about the Holocaust was reported by 68.6 per cent of the students who completed the survey. This figure increased to 70.3 per cent among those who reported having already learned about the Holocaust. Taken alongside the students' comments at interview, this indicates a common appetite to learn more about the subject, with limited evidence of so-called 'Holocaust fatigue'.

- There was broad consensus about the importance of the subject: 83 per cent of respondents thought that all students should learn about the Holocaust while at school, suggesting their support for its mandated place within the curriculum. These findings were supported by focus-group participants, who often spoke of a sense of duty and obligation to know about this past.

- In survey responses, students prioritised anti-racist and commemorative and/or preventative aims for learning about the Holocaust over more historical rationales, although both received a high degree of support. This balance was similar in focus groups, and in some cases students expressed their commitment to ensuring that 'the concept' of the Holocaust – that is, what it had come to represent – was understood and remembered over and above accurate or detailed knowledge of the historical events. However, many students also identified and articulated potential challenges to the notion that there are clear or simple 'lessons from' the Holocaust that can easily be learned.

- Those students who had been given the opportunity to hear a first-hand account from a Holocaust survivor strongly valued the experience; both the survey findings and the focus groups revealed what a powerful and engaging encounter this proved for most students. Many reported that meeting a survivor made the Holocaust feel 'more real'. They spoke enthusiastically of the powerful personal, emotive and affective responses experienced when listening in person to first-hand survivor accounts. Arguably, this suggests how 'unreal' or phantasmagorical the subject may seem to those who encounter the subject only through texts and films – indeed, some students described their previous perspective in terms of 'disbelief', 'unreality' or like 'something out of a story book'.

- Students spoke of taking a great deal from being in the company of a survivor, with many expressing how they found this an edifying as well as an affective experience. Many spoke convincingly of how the intimacy would perhaps be hard to reproduce through technological representation.

- Students also regularly reported being upset by hearing survivor testimony. However, this was described as an appropriate experience – one that allowed students to believe they had gained a personal understanding or emotional connection to the history. There was no sense that students avoided being upset and, instead, they actively sought such a personal, emotional response to the experience of the survivor. Weissmann (2004) has argued that such feelings are not necessarily equivalent – nor directly related to – meaningful comprehension of the historical events, but some students reported that survivor testimony had given them greater insight into the textures of everyday life at the time and of Jewish life before and after the war.

- *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is, by a large margin, both the most read book and the most watched film about the Holocaust. Of the 43.0 per cent of students who reported reading books about the Holocaust, 74.8 per cent had read *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, considerably more than even the perennially popular *Diary of Anne Frank*, which 59.1 per cent had read. This picture was even more pronounced among the 76.2 per cent of students who had watched films or TV programmes about the Holocaust, of whom 84.4 per cent reported watching *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. It has now eclipsed *Schindler's List* as the predominant mainstream media representation of the Holocaust.

- Focus-group interviews revealed that the clear majority of students position the film as a work of historical fiction and most students demonstrated enough awareness of the reality of life in a Nazi concentration camp to realise that the film was based on a historically implausible narrative. However, despite this awareness, students still regularly drew on the film as if it provided them with an unproblematic window on to the past.

- Notably, the film appears to be reinforcing a perspective of widespread German ignorance of the Holocaust. Moreover, in their discussions, many students showed a marked tendency to shift their locus of concern from the victims of the Holocaust onto the bystanders and even, to some extent, to the perpetrators.

- Many young people are viewing atrocity images of the Holocaust even when they are not shown them in school. Those who took part in focus-group interviews generally valued them as part of their attempt to make both affective and cognitive sense of the Holocaust.

- Young people spoke of how the images of atrocity made the Holocaust 'more real' to them – a similar response to their experience of survivor testimony. Even where students found the imagery upsetting, they felt this was an appropriate response to the nature of the events and not something they should be shielded from.

# Part III
# Historical knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust

# Preface

The following three chapters focus on students' historical knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. Chapter 5 looks at students' knowledge and understanding of the different victim groups targeted by the Nazis and their collaborators while Chapter 6 focuses on the perpetrators and addresses issues of agency and responsibility. Chapter 7 reports students' understanding of when and where the Holocaust took place and the role that Britain played during the Holocaust.

Each chapter illustrates and analyses how students responded to a series of knowledge-based survey questions focused on key historical facts and issues. In addition, as a result of a comprehensive study of focus-group interviews, the chapters offer rich insights into what historical knowledge and understandings students employ to make sense of the Holocaust. But before moving on to these detailed analyses, it is important to briefly emphasise five issues that are relevant across each of these history-focused chapters.

## 1. Analysing what students know

Identifying and exploring what young people know about the past and how they use this knowledge to frame, interpret and make meaning of historical events is not a straightforward matter. Fortunately, a rich body of scholarship focused on students' historical thinking has emerged over the past four decades which offers compelling insights into the complex ways students encounter, acquire and 'use' their historical knowledge (Barton 1996; Booth 1993; Carretero and Voss 1994; Dickinson and Lee 1984; Harnett 1993; Husbands and Pendry 2000; Lee and Ashby 2000; Lee 2005; McKeown and Beck 1994; Seixas 1993b; Shemilt 2009; Vansledright 2004; Wineburg 1991a, 2001).

In numerous ways this literature has greatly informed the framework and development of the next three chapters. In particular, this research recognises the important relationship between, on the one hand, students' substantive knowledge of the past and, on the other, their conceptual or second-order understanding. In simple terms, substantive knowledge refers to the concepts used to organise and frame any understanding of the past

(such as concepts like authority, power, revolution, dictatorship). At its most fundamental level, substantive knowledge can also include knowledge of key facts, dates, individuals and events.

Second-order, or conceptual, understanding of the past refers to the application and appreciation of a number of key historical concepts, all of which have received attention in important scholarship. They include such concepts as causation, chronology, continuity and change, historical interpretation, significance and empathy (Ashby 2004, 2005; Ashby and Lee 1987; Barton 1997, 2001, 2002; Barton and Levstik 1996, 1998; Cercadillo 2001; Dulberg 2002; Foster and Yeager 1999; Foster *et al.* 1999; Halldén 1998; Hoge and Foster 2002; Lee *et al.* 2001; Levstik 2000; Levstik and Barton 1996; Seixas 1994, 1997; Shemilt 1987; Voss *et al.* 1998; Vansledright and Afflerbach 2005; Wineburg 1991b).

What is absolutely critical in relation to these three chapters and the research that underpins it, is the relationship between what history students 'know' and the sense they make of that knowledge. For example, it is perfectly possible for young people to know a raft of key facts about the Holocaust, but to have no sense of what caused it, how events unfolded over time or what its significance was. Equally, it is possible for students to have a reasonable sense of the long-term causes of the Holocaust, but little substantive knowledge of key events, individuals and actions between 1939 and 1945 or, indeed, how the Holocaust catastrophically impacted on the lives of ordinary people across Europe. As a result, it is widely acknowledged that students who are able to employ both key substantive knowledge and conceptual understandings are better equipped to fully appreciate and understand the past (Foster and Yeager 1999; Lee and Ashby 2000; Seixas 2004; Shemilt 2009; VanSeldright 2004; Wineburg 2001). In analysing and exploring students' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust, therefore, serious attention was paid during our research to considering the ways in which students implicitly drew on these relationships to make sense of the past.

It is also important to acknowledge that historical understanding is acquired and developed in relation to a galaxy of other factors and influences. For example, as outlined in Chapter 3, historical knowledge is rarely fixed and inert. Rather, it is

often socially constructed, context-dependent and complex. Numerous researchers have raised awareness of the important relationship between knowledge and understanding in the cognitive and affective domain (Ashby and Lee 1987; Davis *et al.* 2001; Downey 1995; Foster 1999; Shemilt 1984; Yeager *et al.* 1998).

So, at the simplest level, what and how students learn about the Holocaust may be heavily influenced by personal, emotional, empathetic and spiritual responses to the narratives and stories encountered. Furthermore, key scholarship has also revealed the importance of students' acquisition of historical knowledge in relation to notions of historical consciousness or historical frameworks (Howson 2007, 2009; Howson and Shemilt 2011; Lee 2004; Lee and Howson 2009; Rüsen 1987, 1993, 2004; Seixas 2004; Shemilt 2000). In this respect, we knew that the use of survey-based 'knowledge' questions (often multiple choice) and focused interviews would never be able to address all the complexities associated with uncovering every aspect of students' historical knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, with these considerations in mind, student responses to both the survey and during interview did provide unprecedented and rich material from which important conclusions could be reached.

## 2. Defining historical knowledge

The second issue worth emphasising is directly related to those raised above. In the next three chapters, an argument is made that it is vital for students to be able to draw on certain historical knowledge in order for them to understand the Holocaust in meaningful ways.

For example, if students believe that the Holocaust was fundamentally due to the desires and actions of one man – Hitler – then they may be unable to address critical broader issues of individual and societal responsibility, agency and choice. However, if students know more about the actions of collaborators, perpetrators and bystanders – and understand that individuals across Europe were complicit in the Holocaust – then they will be better equipped to consider its profound implications and deeper significance. In this example, historical knowledge is not detached knowledge for knowledge's sake. Rather, historical knowledge allows and compels students to ask difficult questions and address relevant and significant issues.

In a similar vein, if students have a robust understanding of how the policy to persecute and murder Jews changed and developed over time, they may be better equipped to understand and

evaluate the 'warning signs' critical to understanding how extremist actions in a society can take root and develop. However, if students believe that mass killing happened as soon as Hitler came into power, the limitations of their historical knowledge will render them unable to contemplate the relevance and significance of the Holocaust for contemporary society.

Once again, therefore, the acquisition and understanding of key historical knowledge empowers students to raise and consider important issues, while the absence of key knowledge makes such endeavours impossible. As a result, in the following chapters, attention is given to what students know (and don't know) and the impact this has on their ability to understand and explain the Holocaust.

## 3. Determining fundamental historical knowledge and understanding

These chapters are written with the full acknowledgement that the Holocaust, as with any subject of historical enquiry and research, is always open to new and shifting interpretations. Indeed, the Holocaust continues to be one of the world's most studied and debated historical phenomena and so is understandably a subject that invites multiple interpretations, vigorous debate and contested argument. As new evidence and scholarship emerges it is inevitable that the historical record will be continually revised, revisited and reshaped. As a result, it is not surprising that no fixed, shared and agreed narrative of the Holocaust exists.

This, of course, provides the (history) teacher of the Holocaust with an ongoing problem. In many ways, history teachers in England have long been comfortable with teaching a subject that is open to interpretation and critical evaluation. Developments in history teaching in the past four decades have ensured that the subject is often taught as an enquiry-based and evidence-led discipline. Nevertheless, tension always remains in the history classroom between, on the one hand, providing students with a clear narrative and chronological framework while, on the other, accepting that interpretations of the Holocaust are fluid and dynamic.

As such the following chapters are written in a way that respects these very real pedagogical tensions.  Where reference is made to historical scholarship it is done in such a way that it acknowledges that many issues are open to debate and revision. However, the chapters take some of the commonly agreed historical aspects of the Holocaust, and compare and contrast these with what students know and understand. For example, while many students claim that Britain and the Allies did not know about the Holocaust until the end of

the war, it is possible to juxtapose this with reference to historical scholarship which suggests the Allies knew a great deal about the mass killings as early as 1941 and certainly by 1942.

Thus, while it is fully accepted that the Holocaust is open to interpretation, the chapters often focus on evaluating the extent to which students' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust accords with commonly held historical interpretations, and key chronological and 'factual' information. Nevertheless it is important to state that the research was also very interested in how students conceptualised the past, referenced contested interpretations and applied critical historical reasoning in attempting to understand and make sense of the Holocaust.

## 4. Having regard for what students might know at different ages

The fourth issue relates to age-appropriateness. One of the aims of the next three chapters is to provide a guide to the historical knowledge and understanding of students across different age ranges. Wherever possible, historical knowledge of younger students is compared and contrasted with those of older students. Sometimes, findings are very focused and age-specific; at other times, the observations are more general and cut across age and/or year groups.

In framing the chapters, and in each individual chapter narrative, knowledge and understanding of young people is often contrasted with what students might or ought to know in order for them to assign meaning to events of the Holocaust. However, it is emphatically not the case that students of all ages would be expected to know all aspects of this knowledge in detail. Rather, the chapters identify key knowledge that students might acquire over time.

Fundamental to this framing are notions of the importance of progression over time in learning. Underpinning this focus on conceptual progression are two core principles first advanced by the renowned American psychologist Jerome Bruner (1960): first, that any ideas, including complex ideas, can be taught at an appropriate level to students at any age; second, that initial subject knowledge can be built on, revisited and extended over time, and with gradually increasing difficulty.

The acquisition of historical knowledge and understanding does not rest on a one-size-fits-all mentality. To the contrary, it is possible for students to develop deeper understanding over time in a manner that allows new knowledge to add to and build on existing knowledge. For example, at a basic level it might be important for students to understand that the treatment of Jews prior to 1939 was of a very different complexion to that after the

outbreak of war. This fundamental understanding would allow students to reflect on the radicalisation of Nazi policy during the Second World War and appreciate the shifting geographical scope of the genocide. As students develop their understanding further (potentially with age) they might explore the specific policies, events and actions that led to mass murder – thereby acquiring a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of events.

In overview, while some references in the chapter are made to what students might know (and why they might know it), this knowledge and understanding must be considered in relation to the progressive development of key ideas, often – though not always – associated with age.

## 5. Analysing the impact of having studied history on older students

Finally, as outlined in Chapter 2, the findings presented in the next three chapters were based on responses from 7,952 students who completed the survey and discussions with 120 students interviewed in 24 focus groups across 7 schools. The interviews were conducted with students from Year 8 to Year 13 and were typically 40 to 50 minutes in duration.

It is important to note that, while Year 12 and 13 students who completed the survey studied a range of subjects (and not necessarily history), the 17 and 18 year olds interviewed were all studying history at A Level. However, at the time of the interviews, none of them had learned about the Holocaust as part of their A Level course. The reason for targeting 'history' students in Years 12 and 13 was to explore whether or not young people who had studied history were more likely to hold more developed and deeper understanding of the Holocaust than students who had not. It also provided the opportunity to compare and contrast Year 12 and 13 survey responses from a general sample of young people in those years with the interview responses of those who had specifically studied history.

# 5.

## Who were the victims?

### Key questions

**1.** Why should students know about the victims of Nazism?

**2.** Who do students identify as the victims of the Holocaust?

**3.** What do students think happened to non-Jewish victim groups, and why?

**4.** What, if anything, do students think was distinctive about the fate of the Jews?

**5.** How do students explain 'Why the Jews'?

### Key findings

**1.** The majority of students see Jews as victims of the Holocaust. With age, students increasingly believe other groups to be Holocaust victims as well.

**2.** Homosexuals are most likely to be included alongside Jews as Holocaust victims, followed by disabled people and then Roma and Sinti (Gypsies).[1]

**3.** Though students are aware that various groups were persecuted by the Nazis, most are not familiar with the specific policies enacted against each group or how policies developed.

**4.** Students tend to presume all groups were simply murdered and that they were killed because they were in some way 'different'. 'Difference' is explained in various ways.

**5.** Most students indicate there was something distinctive about the Jewish experience but struggle to articulate just what that was. This can be attributed to key gaps in substantive knowledge.

**6.** While students are conscious that Jews were killed in large numbers, they do not see the Nazis' intent to murder all Jews everywhere they could reach as a defining feature of the Jewish experience. A significant proportion of students are in fact unaware of, or unable to say, how many Jews died.

**7.** Students are concerned with why the Jews were targeted, but have difficulty in providing robust, developed answers to the question. With most (68 per cent) unaware of what 'antisemitism' means, their explanations tend to rest on distorted understandings and misconceptions about who the Jews were and overlook the distinctive racial dimensions of Nazi antisemitism.

### Why should students know about the victims of Nazism?

If young people are to grasp the significance of any genocide, it is essential that they know not only the name of the persecuted group, but who they were, how they lived, and their culture, traditions and beliefs. For how can it be possible to understand the scale of a genocide if you have no appreciation for what was lost?

Similarly, the imperative that many feel for commemoration of the victims, to honour and mourn them, to 'never forget', is rendered empty if students have no real understanding of who those people were. And yet, in many commemorative events, in ceremonies, memorials and other representations of the Nazi crimes, there appears rather limited understanding of who is being remembered beyond a longer or shorter list of 'victim groups'. The risk is that victims appear as a homogenous mass, objects of persecution with little or no agency. Typically, they arrive upon the historical stage only to be persecuted and murdered.

A further risk is that many young people collapse the different crimes and their victims into an all-encompassing 'Holocaust' in which Hitler murdered anyone who was 'different'. Such a vague generalisation may serve a social aim of asking

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[1] While the authors of this report recognise that some of the terms used here and throughout this chapter are contested and potentially sensitive, their employment in this research reflects their usage both within secondary literature and among students themselves.

students to condemn 'intolerance', but does it show a valuing of 'diversity'? Surely, if we genuinely do value different ways of life, different groups of people and different cultures, we should at least devote a little curriculum time to understanding those differences – and to understanding the different policies that led to the persecution of a 'mosaic of victims'.

Young people need to understand that the first Nazi concentration camps were constructed not for Jews but for the Nazis' political opponents and that, in the early years, most people who were sent to these camps walked out again within a matter of months. Many, of course, were also killed in these camps, particularly as the Nazis became far more murderous during the war years. Even so, these were not killing centres as such and there was no plan to murder all political opponents of the regime. Nor was there systematic mass murder of Jehovah's Witnesses or gay men although, again, large numbers were horrifically persecuted and thousands of German homosexuals were killed. Still, these programmes were different from the systematic mass murder of the German disabled, or the continent-wide genocide of the Roma and Sinti (Gypsies).

Students need to be able to differentiate between the different victim groups, not in order to create some hierarchy of suffering but to genuinely understand why and how individuals came to be persecuted and killed. Each victim, whether German trade unionist, Polish priest, Lithuanian Jew, Soviet Prisoner of War or other, is surely entitled to the uniqueness of their own death. Lumping these people all together as 'Holocaust victims' blurs important differences, submerges each person into a vague and faceless mass, and does a disservice not only to the people in the past but also to our students who are denied an understanding of the complexity and diversity of that history.

Furthermore, each of these crimes is significant in and of itself. Even if the gas chambers of Treblinka had never been constructed – if the genocide of the Jews had never happened – it would still be worth our young people knowing about the violent persecution of political opponents in concentration camps such as Dachau and Buchenwald. And the persecution of political opponents by violent regimes of course continues today in countries around the world, even more frequently than genocide. If we are keen to prevent similar crimes in the future then we need to understand better why they happened, and to know their warning signs. For example, some of the Nazis' victims were victims of war, others were victims of political persecution; we need to do very different things to try to prevent the former than we do to prevent the latter.

Finally, none of these crimes and none of the experiences of these victim groups can fully be understood in isolation from the others. Not only are there similarities and differences between the persecution and murder of the different groups of Nazi victims, but often these policies overlapped and entwined. Deeper understanding of each group of victims therefore contributes to a greater understanding of the broader system of violence and mass murder.

In order to understand the particular policies that were pursued against the various victim groups, it is essential that students have knowledge and understanding both of Nazi antisemitism and the broader, ultranationalist and racist Nazi 'world view'. It would also be valuable if students were able to identify where there are interrelationships and divergences between these different facets of Nazi ideology. Equally, since ideology is 'one form of thought among others' (Confino 2008: 227), students need to be aware that an individual's resolve to persecute, discriminate against, or even kill others cannot always and exclusively be explained through the dominant political ideology of the day. Knowing why the victims of Nazism were targeted draws on knowledge and understanding of Nazi ideology and in turn enriches it. It follows that erroneous knowledge and understanding of why a group was targeted can and will distort understandings of Nazism, and *vice versa*. This carries direct consequences – not least for how students account for the actions of the perpetrators.

Yet ideas alone cannot answer why hundreds of thousands were persecuted and millions more killed; students need to appreciate how ideologies are translated into reality. On one level, this demands that students utilise and adapt their understanding of substantive concepts like 'power', 'politics' or 'agency' in order to identify the means by which things happened in Nazi Germany and occupied Europe. On a separate level, it requires students to employ second-order concepts like causation and significance, change and continuity, so as to determine the relevant forces that enabled things to occur.

If these processes are to be performed successfully, students need to have content knowledge of and familiarity with:

- how the Third Reich was organised
- its various agents and agencies
- its nature and characteristics
- key events and chronology

These are especially significant in the case of the various victim groups, since ideas themselves were altered, amended and revised due to unforeseen developments and what might be termed as

'structural pressures'. Put differently, policy was the product of interplay between ideology and reality: it was context-bound, subject to change, and could (and often did) follow paradoxical or what would appear to be nonsensical trajectories.

When it comes to the victims of Nazism there is evidently a great deal that students need to ideally 'know' and 'understand'. None of this is to say that the absence of any one of the above will inevitably result in complete ignorance – the nature of knowledge is more complex than that – but it serves to underline how gaps in knowledge, misconceptions or misunderstandings will have ramifications.

Through their studies students should ultimately not just know that there were numerous victim groups, but develop knowledge and understanding of what happened to each group, as well as how and why they happened. This approach can enable students to identify points of intersection and commonality; it can also empower students to recognise particularity, and help them come to appreciate that 'there were frayed edges to Nazi racial *concepts* as well as *practices*' (Bloxham 2013: 181). Such outcomes are the best means of ensuring not only historical accuracy, but also establishing the specific phenomenological character of Nazism.

## Who do students identify as the victims of the Holocaust?

Students were asked in the survey to provide a free-text response to the question 'Who were the victims of the Holocaust?' (question 40). Responses were coded, producing the results presented in Table 5.1.

This data indicates that, while students at the younger end of the age spectrum tend to identify only Jews as victims of the Holocaust, this is increasingly reversed with age – so much so that by the age of 15/16 years old, most will include Jews and at least one other victim group.

Such movement towards inclusive, holistic understandings of 'who' was a victim of the Holocaust suggests a fundamental shift in how students come to conceive of 'the Holocaust' during the course of their formal schooling. It implies that, as students get older, they see the term less as a descriptor of something specifically or exclusively 'Jewish', and more as a catch-all phrase for a shared or common experience. While this trend might be seen to indicate that with age students develop more complex understandings of victimhood, it nonetheless goes against the Jewish specificity of the Holocaust. Moreover, as was outlined at the beginning of this Chapter, a conceptual approach which collapses all victims of Nazism beneath one umbrella term and blurs the distinguishing features of each group's experience, actually risks being counterproductive and even pernicious.

It may also be tempting to attribute any correlation between age and conceptual transformation to a simple accumulation of knowledge. Although both this piece of research and the Centre's previous investigation into teaching practices (Pettigrew *et al.* 2009) have shown that younger students are increasingly likely to encounter 'the Holocaust' in multiple subject settings during Years 7 and 8, it remains the case that most formal teaching and learning takes place in history classrooms during Year 9. With that in mind, the transformation in how students come to think of the Holocaust and define its victims might appear to be the result of newly acquired knowledge brought through organised study.

However, the nature of learning and the development of knowledge and understanding is far more complex than this. Moreover, the notion that students necessarily come to know more with age and to re-evaluate their conceptions of the Holocaust and its victims was not always evidenced.

As will be demonstrated in the following sections, students' knowledge and understanding of the experiences of different victim groups was in fact

**Table 5.1** Reponses to the question 'Who were the victims of the Holocaust?', by year group (%)

| | Year 7 (n=895) | Year 8 (n=1,038) | Year 9 (n=2,482) | Year 10 (n=1,128) | Year 11 (n=487) | Year 12 (n=544) | Year 13 (n=343) | Total (n=6,917) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jews, Jewish people, the Jewish, etc. | 65.5 | 65.7 | 55.2 | 45.6 | 38.7 | 39.5 | 29.4 | 52.9 |
| Jews plus any other victim group | 15.8 | 25.4 | 38.2 | 49.9 | 59.0 | 57.5 | 67.3 | 39.7 |
| Other groups **without** reference to the Jews | 1.8 | 0.7 | 1.0 | 1.5 | 1.0 | 1.7 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| Other relevant answer | 1.9 | 2.3 | 1.3 | 0.7 | 0.3 | 0.0 | 0.9 | 1.2 |
| Inaccurate answer | 15.0 | 5.9 | 4.3 | 2.3 | 1.0 | 1.3 | 1.2 | 5.0 |

**Figure 5.1** Non-Jewish groups identified as victims of the Holocaust in students' responses to 'Who were the victims of the Holocaust?' (percentage of students)



Year 7    Year 8    Year 9    Year 10    Year 11    Year 12    Year 13
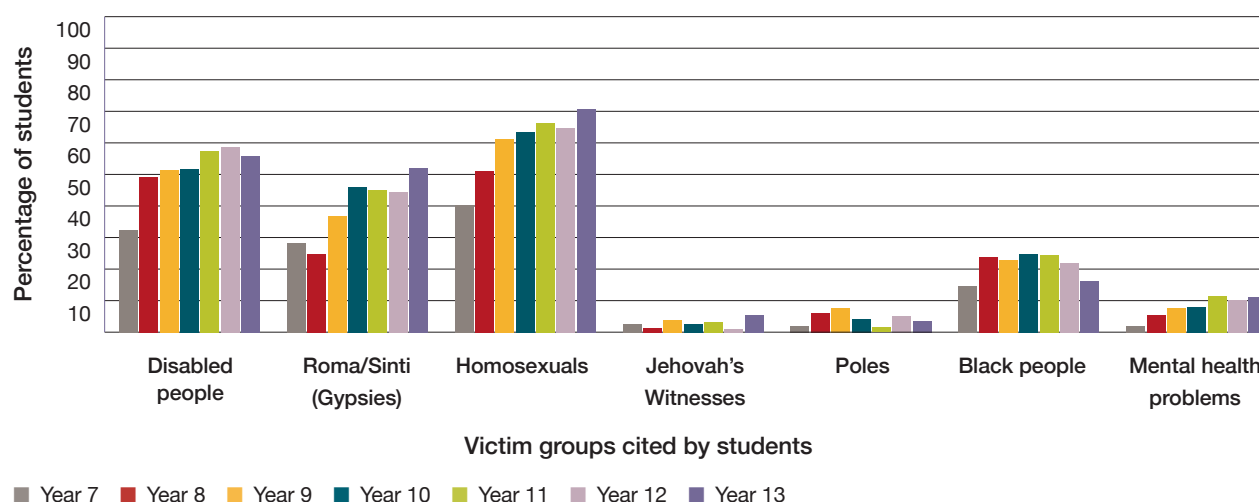
generally very shallow. Movement from exclusive to inclusive understandings was not therefore the product of growing levels of knowledge; if anything, change occurred without this. The picture is complicated further by trends relating to which non-Jewish groups were commonly referred to by students as Holocaust victims. A breakdown of these findings is shown in Figure 5.1.

These results clearly indicate that when students define Holocaust victims as Jews 'plus one' group (or more), they are most likely to include homosexuals. The percentage of students who do so is consistently high across the age range, suggesting that many students are attuned to the persecution of homosexuals by the Nazi regime. The extent to which this is matched by detailed knowledge and understanding will be explored further in the next section.

The second most frequently cited group is disabled people. Although the number of references made was less pronounced than for those to homosexuals, there was nevertheless a sharp increase between Years 7 and 8 followed by consistent growth over the next four year groups. Since the percentages are not as high as for homosexuals it might be inferred that students are less certain about according the status of 'Holocaust victims' to disabled people, yet the number who do remains significant.

The third group referred to by a sizeable proportion of students was the Roma and Sinti (Gypsies). Interestingly, it is not until Year 10 (14 to 15 year olds) that the percentage of students including the Roma and Sinti comes anywhere near the other two groups: a notable finding since, in purely numerical terms, the number of Gypsies killed by the regime is estimated to range between 250,000 and one million (Crowe 2000: 197) – a figure far greater than the number of disabled people (200,000–

250,000) and homosexuals (10,000–15,000) killed by the regime. It is also notable that, after spiking in Year 10, the percentage actually declines for two year groups before leaping to its peak in Year 13.

Final mention should be made of the proportion of students who indicated that Black people were victims of the Holocaust. Although it is some way behind the proportion indicating the three groups already mentioned, around a quarter of students in Years 8 to 12 (12 to 17 year olds) identified Black people as Holocaust victims. This finding is noteworthy when mapped against the historical experience of Black people under Nazism. Within the Nazi 'world view' Black people were viewed as racially inferior, 'degenerate', and therefore a potential threat to the well-being of the German nation. In turn, this group was subjected to brutality and persecution.

Mixed-race children (some descended from relations between Black French soldiers resident in the Rhineland in the 1920s and white German women – the so-called 'Rhineland bastards' – and others from male German colonists returning to Germany in the interwar period) experienced particular discrimination, and from 1937 around 600 to 800 were forcibly sterilised (Longerich 2010: 93). Some Black people were also incarcerated in Nazi camps during the period of the Third Reich and a few died at the hands of the regime.

Despite the tragedy of these experiences, at no point did the regime resolve to pursue a policy of murder against Black people. This raises the question of the grounds on which students believed Black people could be victims of the Holocaust. Interestingly, on the rare occasion when students mentioned Black people as victims in the focus-group interviews, they did so with considerable uncertainty.

Typical here was Charlotte, who admitted she 'didn't know' if she was 'right' in thinking Black people were targeted but reasoned that because 'he [Hitler] wanted everyone to be white' this meant Black people were 'sent to the concentration camps along with Muslims' (Year 8, LON5). The tendency of students to resort to logic and inference or assumption and reasoning rather than to secure knowledge and understanding was not exclusive to student description of Black people's experience; it was a hallmark of focus-group discussion around all the victims of Nazism.

Analysis of responses to the question 'Who were the victims of the Holocaust?' are at once illuminating and potentially deceiving. The trend towards an inclusive understanding of victimhood as students get older is indisputable. It suggests that their conceptions are malleable and developmental; that they come to understand 'the Holocaust' as involving a general and universal approach to victims rather than one that is specific to an individual group. What makes this problematic and deceptive is less to do with how far this notion is valid or justified (though that is important) than the extent to which the conception rests on undeveloped, even non-existent, historical knowledge and understanding. Put differently, do students come to see 'the Holocaust' as a holistic experience on the basis of what they know, or as a result of what they infer or presume?

## What do students think happened to non-Jewish victim groups, and why?

Focus-group interviews reinforced the survey responses showing that homosexuals, disabled people, and Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) were the three principal non-Jewish victim groups in students' consciousness. When students were asked during interview to identify groups targeted by the regime, Jews were named across the age range, with homosexuals and disabled people referred to in virtually every instance. Mention was also made of the Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) – though less often by younger students than their older peers – while sporadic, often isolated references to Black people, Jehovah's Witnesses, Communists, Slavs and Poles were made by students aged between 11 and 16. Some, but not all, of these groups appeared in discussion with students aged 16 to 18 – although, interestingly, Slavs were referred to in a number of separate interviews with this older age group. These older students were also the only ones to list Soviet (or Russian) Prisoners of War as victims of Nazism.

In response to these trends and also due to the confines of this report, the following discussion of non-Jewish victim groups referred to by students focuses solely on homosexuals, disabled people and the Roma and Sinti (Gypsies). This is neither to ignore nor overlook the position that other groups have in the consciousness of some students (indeed, where possible, mention will be made of these). Rather, the issues raised around students' knowledge and understanding of the experiences of these three victim groups opens up extensive space for discussing them below.

It is important to be clear that the ability of students to correctly refer to a victim group at interview did not necessarily mean they were familiar with the experience of that group. On many occasions students would name a victim group but, when invited to expand further on the fate of these people, they would either struggle to do so, concede they 'didn't know' or could not remember, or imply that everyone had the same experience. Paradoxically, this practice did not tend to prevent students from offering explanations and accounts for why groups were targeted.

### Homosexuals

As a preface to the section of the questionnaire that examined knowledge and understanding of victim experience (survey questions 54 to 67), students were told that 'The Nazis persecuted (or unfairly treated) a number of different groups of people'. A series of statements were then presented (survey questions 54 to 57), and students were asked to indicate the group(s) to whom they believed each

Figure 5.2 Student responses to the statement, 'The Nazis planned to kill every last person from this group, wherever they could reach them' (survey question 54)
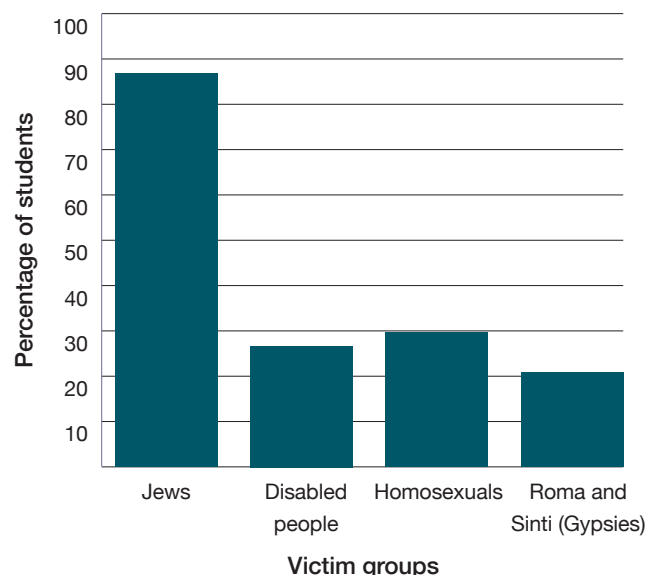
statement applied. Figure 5.2 shows responses to the first of these statements.

More will be said later in this chapter about the large percentage of students who marked this statement as applying to Jews. Here, it is pertinent that over a quarter of students believed intended annihilation was also true for homosexuals and disabled people (the latter of whom will also be discussed below). This conviction only increased with age: where 16.6 per cent of Year 7 students indicated homosexuals as being marked by the regime for complete extermination, by Year 9 this had risen to 30.9 per cent and it peaked at 40.6 per cent in Year 12.

These results suggest that a large proportion of students come to regard wholesale murder as a defining characteristic of the experience of homosexuals during the Nazi period. When cross-referenced with other findings from the study this may account for the increased tendency of students to include homosexuals alongside Jews as victims of the Holocaust. There was some evidence of this possibility in students' free-text descriptions of what they thought the Holocaust was (survey question 30), as discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

The combined responses to questions 30 and 54 suggest that the experience of homosexuals occupies a prominent position in students' thinking about Nazi victims, further implying that they have a measure of knowledge and understanding about what happened to this group, and why. However, the focus-group interviews did not support this implication. When referred to by younger students (Years 7 to 11), homosexuals tended simply to be listed as victims of the regime. On being asked to provide detail about their fate, only a few students offered additional information. Of these, just one indicated that homosexuals were sent to prison, while the majority said that homosexuals were sent to concentration camps.

Student responses here were commonly accompanied by a degree of doubt, for example when Michael asked, 'Were they all took to the concentration camps to get killed?' (Year 8, NE1) and when Lauren stated, 'I think they got sent to the concentration camps as well or they got killed, I can't remember' (Year 10, LON6). Only two students offered alternative narratives, with one indicating homosexuals may have been used as forced labour (Aaliyah, Year 10, LON5) and another suggesting attempts may have been made to 'make them un-gay' (Holly, Year 10, LON5).

When compared with related data from the survey, these findings from the focus groups were surprising. They revealed that students in fact had little sense of what happened to homosexuals and that their 'knowledge' was actually the product of inference

and guesswork rather than informed understanding. Nor was there compelling evidence from interviews with the older students in Years 12 and 13 that this state of affairs was rectified with age. Homosexuals were again often identified as victims, but detail proved equally elusive or led to the repetition of lines like, 'They got shipped off to death camps and killed' (Jake, Year 12, LON7).

Students of all ages were slightly more forthcoming when it came to providing accounts of why homosexuals were (or may have been) targeted by the regime. Among younger students, explanations tended to accent perceived difference and/or dislike. This was well captured during one exchange among a group of Year 9 girls who, having previously pointed to the centrality of Hitler in killing homosexuals in concentration camps, were asked, 'Why did he decide to target homosexuals?'

> **Courtney:** Because he thought they were wrong.
> **Juliette:** Yeah they were different; he felt that they were the wrong species I guess.
> **Nina:** Isn't it what Juliette said about them against Christianity?
> **Chloe:** Yes because somewhere in the Bible it says that you have to marriage the opposite gender don't you, the opposite sex, yeah that's it. I think it was something about not going ahead with religious people
> (Year 9, LON5).

This exchange contains a number of distinctive features which also appeared in other discussions of the homosexual experience and in students' explanatory accounts more generally. For example, the positioning of Hitler as the primary perpetrating agent was evident in many focus-group interviews, raising questions about students' knowledge and understanding of his role and responsibilities which are further explored in Chapter 6. As to how students explained the targeting of homosexuals (and victims more generally), we see in the above exchange two frameworks at play that figured often among students of all ages.

The first of these saw 'difference' narrated through biology. In remarking that 'they were the wrong species', Juliette displayed awareness – crudely put – that biology mattered to Hitler (and, by extension, to the regime). In many ways, this is testament to how understandings of Nazi Germany as the 'Racial State' have had widespread currency in recent decades, so much so that a 'hegemonic racial paradigm' (Confino 2012b: 140) has emerged and is now taken to explain everything the regime ever did.

The strengths and weaknesses of this characterisation have been the focus of interest from scholars (Confino 2009: 531–59; Stone 2010: 160–202), although Juliette's uncertain 'I guess' suggests

that she had not reflected upon it. It is far more likely that her supposition speaks to a general ambiguity around why homosexuals were persecuted, just as it also captures some of the difficulties that students encounter when levels of historical knowledge and understanding do not allow them to determine the validity of a particular explanatory framework.

The second explanatory framework gestured to by these students centres not on blood or 'race', but rather religion. For Nina and Chloe there is at least the possibility that homosexuals were targeted by the Nazi regime because their behaviour went against perceived Christian doctrine. Although both students demonstrate uncertainty about this, it is nevertheless significant to find them even entertaining such an idea. While Nazi homophobia did indeed take objection to homosexual behaviour it was not on account of homosexuality violating Christian beliefs; rather, it was predicated on the notion that homosexuality threatened the spiritual wellbeing of the German nation and endangered the production of progeny.

It should be re-emphasised how, in the main, younger students had little to say either about the particular experience of homosexuals or the specific reasons for their persecution. It became apparent from focus-group discussions like the one above that, in spite of absent historical knowledge, students still felt able to propose explanations for what they believed was the wholesale murder of homosexuals by the regime. It was, of course, positive to find students prepared to venture possible answers for why homosexuals were targeted, but the level of certainty many displayed was distinctly at odds with their ability to validate their arguments. At times it was as if the very strength of ideas about why homosexuals were persecuted – due to 'dislike' or 'difference' or Hitler himself – stood in for absent knowledge and understanding. This tendency was by no means exclusive to students' awareness of the experience of homosexuals; instead, it reappeared in conversations about other victim groups as well.

Of final note are the ways in which older students attempted to explain why homosexuals were targeted. While these students also generally held the belief that homosexuals were subject to mass murder, their explanations were more firmly centred upon ideology. For example, the majority made some sort of reference to the 'master race' or the 'Aryan race', and positioning homosexuals as having been understood by the regime to deviate from or threaten the realisation of these ideals. Thus, Damien mused: 'Maybe he [Hitler] thinks that being homosexual doesn't fit into the idea of the Aryan race either, maybe he thinks that to be an Aryan you have to be straight' (Year 12, LON3). Others, like Harrison, pointed to a wish to 'preserve that master race', to

'further it on, develop it, make it, like evolve it in a sense, [and] he kind of saw homosexuals as getting in the way of that' (Year 12, LON3).

In the same vein, Jake said the regime viewed homosexuals as 'either subhuman or race traitors or something', while Lucas explained the regime believed that homosexuals threatened the 'key policy' of population growth (both Year 12, LON7). These examples demonstrate how older students displayed a greater sophistication and assurance in their explanations for homosexual persecution compared to their younger counterparts. Further, in identifying the importance of reproduction to the Nazis, these students were actually closer to the main reasons behind targeting of the group.

Homophobia and legal discrimination of homosexuals predated the Third Reich and were rife throughout interwar Europe. On coming to power, the Nazi regime maintained and extended existing legislation, adding its own violent stamp (Evans 2006: 529). By 1936, growing animosity towards homosexuals was institutionalised in the establishment of the Office for the Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion. The linkage of these two 'practices' revealed how both were regarded as injurious to Nazi population policy: as Rüdiger Lautmann (1990: 346) has put it, 'the persecution of homosexuals was aimed at preventing sexual behaviour between men and men, not so much at the homosexual as a human being', for the homosexual man could in theory be 'encouraged to participate in reproduction'.

Homosexuality was nevertheless regarded by some – in particular, Heinrich Himmler – to be a threat to the moral and spiritual wellbeing of the nation. Accordingly, discriminatory measures increased throughout the 1930s, with imprisonment accompanied by escalating police harassment and rising incarceration in the concentration camp system. Life in the camps was particularly severe for homosexuals, with maltreatment from guards and fellow prisoners the norm and responsible for the deaths of many. Meanwhile, from the late 1930s onwards some homosexuals, both within and outside the camps, also endured castration. Homosexual persecution was, therefore, brutal and violent. The precise number of homosexuals who died at the hands of the Nazis is unclear. Around 100,000 were arrested during the regime's lifespan, with about half that number sent to prison for some duration, and between 10,000 and 15,000 absorbed into concentration camps where mortality rates for homosexuals were exceptionally high.

However, the regime did not adopt a coherent, organised policy of murdering homosexuals. Instead, as Günter Grau (1990: 342) notes, deterrence and violent 're-education' tended to be pursued in the

first instance. Furthermore, a number of prominent figures were in fact left alone and, towards the end of the Second World War, some homosexual prisoners were 'inducted into the Wehrmacht' (Connelly 2010: 283). Finally, while National Socialism did nothing to prevent homophobia in occupied Europe, it did not extend its policy vis-à-vis homosexuals beyond the borders of the Reich.

Homosexuality was clearly antithetical to many core principles of Nazi ideology, but this was not on any religious grounds. The perceived criminality of homosexuals principally resided in how it ran counter to Nazi 'demographic goals' (Lautmann 1990: 346), with only a minority 'hard core of incorrigibles' believed to be beyond 'cure' and thus regarded as direct threats to the regime (Evans 2006: 531). The Nazis did not plan to kill every last person from this group 'wherever they could reach them' because their view of homosexuality as 'different' did not translate into a belief that wholesale murder was necessary – although it did lead to state-sponsored stigmatisation, social ostracisation, and horrific treatment including death. Moreover, while the fall of the Third Reich may have removed the severity of persecution in Germany, discrimination of homosexuals across Europe continued well into the postwar period.

Our research shows that a number of students had inaccurate ideas about the experience of homosexuals during the Holocaust. They were not sent *en masse* to concentration camps to be killed, nor were they targeted because of Hitler's personal feelings.

A wish for historical accuracy is of less concern in relation to students' mistaken beliefs than the reality that, from these incorrect ideas, misunderstandings flow about what happened to homosexuals, and why. 'Race' and racial policy do indeed help to account for the experience of homosexuals, and in this regard older students stood out as having a more nuanced comprehension of these forces. However, even where students held some 'correct' knowledge, this did not guarantee a robust knowledge or understanding of all the issues involved. For example, many students who rightly saw homosexual persecution as linked to racial policy also believed that all homosexuals were targeted for murder. In turn, this erroneous conviction had a negative impact on understanding of Nazi racial policy writ large, leading most students who mentioned persecution of homosexuals to wrongly conclude that all policies enacted against groups regarded as racially 'different' were fundamentally murderous.

Research into student knowledge and understanding of the experience of homosexuals under Nazism reveals not just what is known and not known, or what is understood or misunderstood.

More fundamentally it highlights the complexities of their knowledge and understanding, demonstrating how it is possible for students to simultaneously 'know' and misunderstand – and vice versa. Additionally, the apparent lack of awareness that Nazi discrimination of homosexuals did not occur in a vacuum but intersected with long-term continental prejudice also underlines a general flaw in students' contextual knowledge about either the victims of Nazism or the history of homophobia.

## Disabled people

Information about student knowledge and understanding of what happened to disabled people under Nazism was initially provided by their answers to survey questions 54 and 55. The first of these saw just under 27 per cent of all respondents indicate that the Nazis intended to kill disabled people wherever they could reach them (see Figure 5.2). When broken down by age this percentage increased incrementally, rising from just under 15 per cent in Year 7, to 31 per cent in Year 10 and peaking at 37.9 per cent in Year 12.

These trends suggest that, as students get older, they are more likely to believe that the Nazi regime pursued an exterminatory programme against disabled people. Although this was a smaller proportion to those who said the same about the

**Figure 5.3** Student responses to the statement, 'They were the first victims of the Nazis' mass murder programme' (survey question 55)
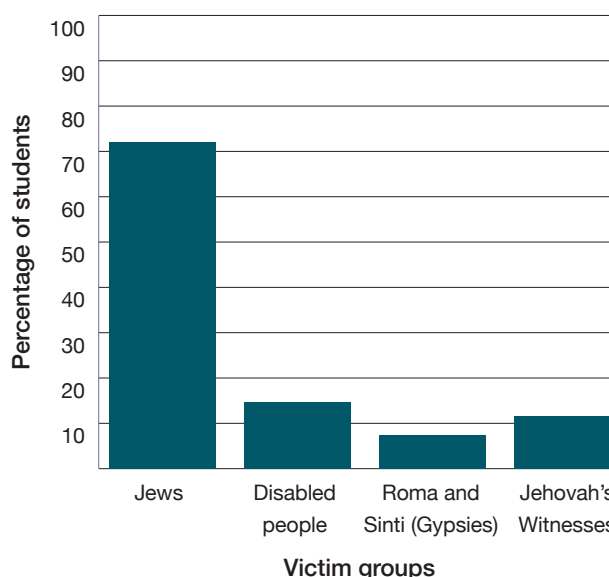
experience of homosexuals, the data still indicated that a significant number of students regarded Nazi policy towards disabled people to be annihilatory and total.

Student responses to the second question relating to disabled people are shown on Figure 5.3. These results not only confirm that students associate mass murder with Jews, they expose a skewed understanding of how anti-Jewish policy interfaced with the measures taken against other groups. Given that murder of disabled people predated the organised killing of Jews, it is notable that only 14.4 per cent of students marked disabled people as 'the first victims of the Nazis' mass murder programme'. When arranged by age, this data saw students becoming only slightly more aware of this reality as they got older; where just 13 per cent of Year 9 students correctly ascribed the statement to disabled people, the figure grew only fractionally to 16.2 per cent of Year 11 students. By Year 12, 21.3 per cent of respondents answered the question correctly, while the number reached a peak of 36.7 per cent of Year 13 students.

Taken together, the responses to questions 54 and 55 indicate considerable vagueness in student knowledge and understanding of what happened to disabled people under the Nazi regime. Certainly, a sizeable number of students appeared aware that disabled people were killed and a similar proportion noted this in their survey descriptions of the Holocaust (question 30). Yet the wider data generated by the survey gave a clear indication that students generally did not know the origins or development of Nazi measures towards the disabled.

These findings were substantiated in focus-group discussions. Disabled people were mentioned in nearly all interviews – often listed in the same manner as homosexuals in a general cataloguing of Nazi victim groups. But, when asked to expand on the fate of disabled people, students' uncertainty was again palpable. While they were able to name disabled people as among Nazi victims, student responses to follow-up questioning often resembled Michael's remark: 'Were they all took to the concentration camp to get killed?' (Year 8, NE1). Since some participants were yet to study the Holocaust in their history lessons such uncertainty is not altogether surprising, although students' ability to name disabled people as a victim group indicated they already had some awareness of this group's experience.

More revealing was the discovery that, while students who had studied the Holocaust were more assured that disabled people had been killed, details provided of this group's experience were no more extensive than that of their younger peers.

These trends extended into the focus groups held with older students, although two Year 12

respondents made notable additions to their accounts. Damien (LON3) indicated knowledge of difference between victim groups by saying that 'disabled people saw a lot of experimentation', while Anton (EE1) made this passing remark: 'The majority of killings that were disabled, the ambulance services they had, that was before anything that was before the "Final Solution"'.

It would be easy to overstate the significance of these two comments; ultimately, it is unclear what understanding lay behind them or how deep this may have ran, and time did not allow for exploration with the students involved. Nevertheless, both interjections did hint at students being able to deploy a measure of knowledge which went beyond simply 'knowing that' disabled people were killed.

Furthermore, despite being unclear in both expression and meaning, each statement contained a kernel of truth. In relation to Damien's comment about experimentation, Nazi benevolence towards race scientists meant that medical experimentation was rife within the Third Reich and those designated mentally or physically disabled were indeed deemed expendable for such endeavours (Friedlander 1995: 49, 131–2).

As for Anton, reference to 'ambulance services' may or may not have represented a nod towards the Community Patients' Transport Service (*Gemeinnützige Krankentransport* or *Gekrat*). Sometimes translated as 'Common Welfare Ambulance Service' (Lifton 2000: 70), this company customised former grey postal vans with blacked-out windows to transport those selected for murder to one of six killing centres located in Greater Germany (Burleigh 1994: 123; Friedlander 1995: 84). It's not possible to determine whether Anton was making reference to this little-known facet of the killing programme, though he was certainly correct to assert that the murder of disabled people 'was before' the 'Final Solution'. On this Anton was the exception: in all other focus groups, there was no indication that students knew when disabled people were murdered.

All told, both the survey and focus-group data indicated that the killing programme launched by the regime against those designated as disabled is a major blind spot in student consciousness. This was paradoxical, since many students indicated that disabled people were victims of the regime and were subject to mass killing.

With these findings we see that, while students may 'know' that disabled people were targeted by the regime and that this led to murder, their knowledge does not rest on deep or secure epistemological foundations. For a number of students, their 'knowledge' also carries incorrect understandings, including that disabled people were

shipped off to concentration camps to be killed. The consequences of these perceptions extend beyond knowledge for its own sake and come clearer into view when juxtaposed against what actually happened to disabled people.

Nazi policy against disabled people began just months after the ascension to power. On 14 July 1933 the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Progeny was passed by the German government, coming into force at the beginning of 1934. According to this legislation, people deemed to have particular mental or physical disabilities were liable for compulsory sterilisation. The conditions included were myriad and 'it was by no means certain that some of the sicknesses were hereditary' (Burleigh and Wipperman 1991: 136). Embedded in the legislation was its rationale: the regime was concerned with 'the increasingly evident composition of our people', and specifically with the 'countless number of inferiors and those suffering from hereditary conditions' who 'are reproducing unrestrainedly while their sick and asocial offspring burden the community' (Burleigh and Wipperman 1991: 137–8).

By the start of the Second World War upward of 300,000 people regarded as having a hereditary disability had been forcibly sterilised under this law, with legislation also adapted to allow for others deemed 'asocial' – including Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), as discussed below, but not Jews. As these measures were implemented, continued social ostracisation of disabled people went hand in glove with a general deterioration in the care provided to those already institutionalised (Burleigh 1995: 43-89). Meanwhile, in 1935 Hitler is said to have shared with the leading physician Gerhard Wagner his intention to implement a programme of 'euthanasia' against disabled people in the event of war (Burleigh and Wipperman 1991: 142; Friedlander 1995: 39).

While this is taken by some historians to indicate that 'the path to the killing of the handicapped was extraordinarily straight' (Browning 2004: 185), the origins of the children's 'euthanasia' programme are commonly attributed to a personal request for authorisation of a 'mercy killing' made to Hitler in 1938 or 1939 by the parents of a disabled child. Having assented and charged one of his physicians, Karl Brandt, to oversee the action, Hitler empowered Brandt and Phillip Bouhler from the Führer's Chancellery to oversee future requests.

An organised and highly effective bureaucracy soon sprang up: disabled children were registered, their documentation was processed and assessed by doctors, and those selected for death received a '+' mark on their registration form. If not already institutionalised, children selected for 'euthanasia' were then admitted to designated wards on the pretext of receiving specialist care. Some, though not all, were experimented on. All were killed, often through lethal medication or starvation.

The children's 'euthanasia' programme claimed the lives of around 5,000 disabled children by May 1945. It was interwoven with an adult equivalent that built on the actions taken against children and commenced in earnest in the winter of 1939. To deal with the much larger number of adults, the bureaucratic structure was expanded, with central administration rehoused on Berlin's Tiergartenstrasse 4 from which the programme acquired the codename 'T4'. The transportation company mentioned above was established, asylums were identified for the installation of gassing apparatus, and a cadre of administrative and medical staff were recruited. Both the child and adult programmes were given the appearance of quasi-legality through a private document signed by Hitler which effectively instructed Brandt and Bouhler to grant 'mercy death' to those 'considered incurable' (Friedlander 1995: 67).

In August 1941, when more than 70,000 adults had been murdered, 'euthanasia' was formally halted by Hitler. The programme had become common knowledge, leading to public protests. Although these were certainly embarrassing for the regime and are usually framed as the reason for the halt order, Burleigh and Wippermann (1991: 153) argue that 'more likely the programme was halted because the original target figure had been reached'. Furthermore 'wild euthanasia' continued, both on children's wards and in the asylums – the latter of which had also been used since spring 1941 for the murder of concentration camp prisoners deemed by doctors to be sick, hereditarily ill or simply 'asocial' (Friedlander 1995: 142). A significant proportion of those killed under this initiative (codenamed '14f13') were Jews. Meanwhile, a number of T4 personnel were redeployed to the East: either to work with the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing squads) or in the newly opened death camps (Burleigh and Wippermann 1991: 166).

Between 200,000 and 250,000 disabled people were killed as part of the 'euthanasia' programmes, in addition to thousands of concentration camp prisoners – including Jews and Roma and Sinti (Gypsies). The programmes required the active involvement of thousands of bureaucrats, auxiliaries, doctors and nurses, in addition to a cultural milieu that was open to extreme measures, more of which will be said below. Moreover, there was a number of extremely important intersections and crossovers between the killing of disabled people and what would become the extermination of Europe's Jews.

Taking the historical events into account, it becomes easier to identify the implications of

students' lack of knowledge and understanding. Not only does it result in a hollow cognisance of the particular fate of disabled people, it also decontextualises the policies pursued against other groups, especially the Jews. Yet, just as with persecution of homosexuals, lack of knowledge about how policy towards disabled people developed did not inhibit students from venturing explanations in interview for why disabled people were victimised and killed.

When this occurred, one set of student accounts gravitated towards deviation from (or difference to) a perceived normality or envisaged ideal. 'I don't think they [the disabled] were what he was looking for as humans', remarked Una (Year 8, LON5), who concluded that since 'he wanted people with blue eyes, blonde hair, perfect normal people, they weren't what he wanted in his country'. Others echoed this sentiment, although Lara (Year 9, SE1) did caution that 'even if you were mentally disabled but you looked normal he'd still put them in concentration camps and killed them'.

The articulation of difference around notions of blonde hair and blue eyes was not exclusive to accounts of the experience of disabled people; it was pervasive among a large swathe of students when considering a range of subjects other than disabled victims in both the survey and the focus groups. With age, this shorthand tended to give way to more developed language or the employment of more precise terminology. In the case of explanations for the experience of disabled people, this found form through remarks like those of Jeremy (Year 12, LON7), who maintained that:

> Hitler kind of dreamt of almost like an Aryan species, and obviously disabled people did not conform to that, and I think it was more like an irritant and they were kind of standing in his way of a perfect state.

Although this explanation had a measure of truth, the framing of Hitler as the sole determining agent in the process and an inability to suggest how such a 'dream' (or, indeed, 'irritation') translated into the deaths of up to a quarter of a million people, rendered Jeremy's account deficient in its level of sophistication.

The almost instinctive pull towards Hitler as the primary causal factor for the 'euthanasia' programmes was equally strong among other older students, some of whom introduced notions of superiority and inferiority into their explanations. In the words of Paul (Year 12, LON7), 'Hitler saw them [the disabled] as unequal and unworthy of having a life like they were subhuman and so he thought they were a waste of space'.

Paul was quite right that disabled people were viewed as 'unworthy of having a life'. However, he was incorrect in thinking this led to disabled people being viewed as 'subhuman' (a status generally reserved for Jews, Roma/Sinti (Gypsies) and Slavs). Similarly, while Hitler did indeed believe that disabled people neither deserved nor warranted existence, he was by no means alone in harbouring these kind of ideas.

In 1920, the jurist Karl Binding and the psychiatrist Alfred Hoche argued, in their publication *Permitting the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Living*, that people with certain mental and physical disabilities should be euthanised. Such calls were by no means uncontroversial, but they drew sustenance from deeper traditions in the German eugenics and 'race hygiene' (*Rassenhygiene*) movements, including concern for 'national efficiency' (Weiss 1987; Weindling 1989).

So Paul's account can be seen then to commix truth and accuracy with misunderstanding and 'mis-knowledge'. In his reasoning that negative views of disabled people were at least partly related to perceptions of use and utility, Paul hit on a core causal factor for the 'euthanasia' programme.

This understanding was also presented by other, younger students. In one interview, a group of Year 9 girls (LON5) explained Hitler's disdain for disabled people as being because, according to Juliette, 'They weren't able to fight in the First World War'. 'He basically blamed them for not being able to fight', she continued, with his hatred coming from the fact that 'they weren't able to fight for his country and that is all he wanted people for'. The girls were asked if this meant that disabled people were seen as having no real purpose, and Chloe assented, remarking poignantly, 'It is like they were just dust on top of a box, just get rid of them when you open it up. You don't need them, just get rid of them'. 'You have to blow it away', concluded her classmate Courtney.

While aspects of all these explanatory accounts contain some truth, their major flaw – the recourse to Hitler as ultimate agent – is the result of a lack in broad knowledge and/or detailed understanding. Unaware of the history of eugenics, race hygiene or the sociocultural animosity towards disabled people, most students compensate by reasoning that the very notion of killing disabled people began and ended with Hitler who objected primarily to disabled people's 'difference'.

The one exception to this came from Jake, a solitary Year 12 student (LON7), who – in presenting perhaps the best account from all of the focus groups – widened the circle of agency when he said, 'It was about genetics as well, the Nazis were about genetics and stuff … so they didn't like disabled people because they thought they were genetically inferior, and that they were weakening the German race'.

With the exception of Jake, the majority of student explanations lacked not only awareness of the long- and short-term developments which helped to facilitate the murder of disabled people but also an appreciation of the many individuals and agencies who made killing a reality. In one focus group there was evidence that some students were conscious of their inability to fully account for what happened:

**Nathan:** The worst thing about him [Hitler] hating disabled people was, like … the thing is his mum or someone in his family was disabled. So I don't actually get why he went … and killed most of disabled people.
**Suzie:** He thought they were a pain to society, that they were slowing him down … the disabled people.
**Ben:** But the thing is, his mum was disabled, but they didn't knock it to her.
**Suzie:** They went around doing it to other people instead.
**Ben:** Year, that's what I don't actually get (Year 9, SE1).

## Roma and Sinti (Gypsies)

The third main non-Jewish victim group cited by students was the Roma and Sinti, or Gypsy, population. In some cases, relevant survey results could be interpreted as indicating familiarity with the experience of this victim group. The Nazi regime did not, for example, aim 'to kill every last person from this group, wherever they could reach them' (survey question 54), and so the majority of students who did not assign this statement to the Roma and Sinti were quite correct (see Figure 5.2).

**Figure 5.4** Student responses to the statement, 'They could avoid Nazi persecution if they gave up their beliefs' (survey question 56)
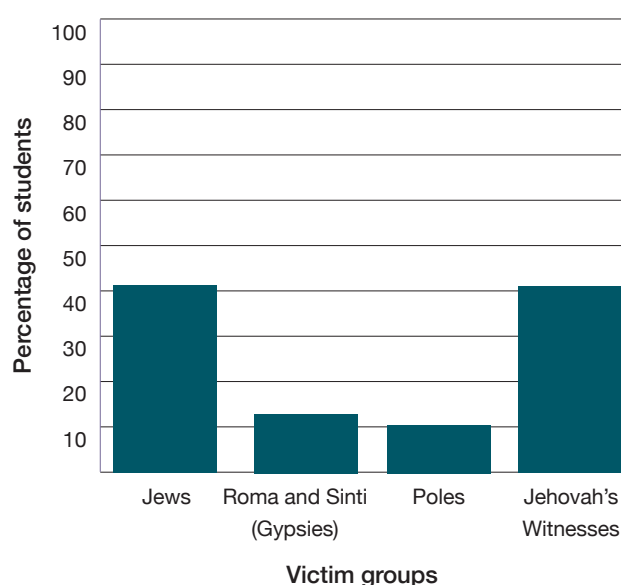


Yet, while such totality was neither planned nor intended (Bauer 2002: 66), genocidal policies were still enacted against European Roma and Sinti. How many were subsequently killed remains a subject of debate; while 'most estimates put the figure in the 190,000-250,000 range, there is the possibility that it could be as high as half a million' (Levene 2013: 132) or even more (Crowe, 2000: 197).

A similar remark could be made about responses to the 'first victims of mass murder' statement (see Figure 5.3). That only 7.3 per cent of students associated this statement with Roma and Sinti might again be interpreted as a positive sign – an indication that students were sufficiently familiar with the Gypsy experience to recognise this was not a characteristic of Nazi policy. However, a positive reading of this kind is complicated by the fact that students were actually more disposed to seeing Jehovah's Witnesses as 'first victims of mass murder' even though this group was never targeted for systematic, state-sponsored killing. Yet, while the 'first victims' statement was not applicable to either Roma/Sinti or Jehovah's Witnesses, the regime's policy towards the former was far closer to the spirit of the statement than it's policy towards the latter.

The suspicion that there was little substance to students' knowledge and understanding of the Roma and Sinti experience was furthered by their responses to survey question 56 which asked them to ascribe the statement, 'They could avoid Nazi persecution if they gave up their beliefs' to victim groups (see Figure 5.4).

The most striking results relate to the large percentage of students who correctly ascribed this statement to Jehovah's Witnesses (41.4 per cent) and the equally large number who incorrectly associated the statement with Jews (41.6 per cent), on which more is said later in this chapter. Less spectacular was the 13.1 per cent of students who saw the statement to be applicable to the Roma and Sinti (Gypsies). Implicit in this figure were two notable intimations, that:

■ more than 1,000 students understood Gypsies as defined by a particular set of beliefs
■ those convictions were understood as the reason why Gypsies were targeted by Nazism.

What could not be determined from these results was whether students' conceived of 'beliefs' in a religious framework or in reference to cultural customs and traditions. Either way, while Nazi persecution drew on a wellspring of religious-cultural intolerance, it sought legitimacy not from this heritage but from the principles of race science.

The overall picture presented by the survey data relating to Roma and Sinti victims was similar to that

for homosexuals and disabled people: a notable though not overwhelmingly impressive proportion of students recognised the Roma and Sinti as victims of the regime and understood this experience as being defined by ultimate death. There were indications that students did not think the Roma and Sinti occupied the same position in the Nazi 'world view' as, say, homosexuals and disabled people. Significantly, there was sufficient cause to suspect these understandings were, in many cases, not founded upon secure or substantial epistemological foundations.

Focus-group discussions reinforced these findings. Younger students (Years 7 to 11) made reference to Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) as Nazi victims, but these were by no means as frequent as citations of homosexuals or disabled people. In keeping with a general trend highlighted by this chapter, Gypsies were often named as victims in focus-group interviews but students were invariably silent once asked to provide further detail. In this regard, Holly (Year 10, LON5) was perhaps speaking for the majority when she conceded, 'I don't really know about them [the Gypsies] that much'. As her classmate Imogen went on to explain, 'We do get taught that lots of people were involved, were like victims, but we mostly focus on the Jews and homosexuals sometimes.'

In comparative terms, Gypsies were more fre-quently referred to by older students – corroborating the finding that those in Years 12 and 13 appear to be more conscious of the Roma and Sinti as a victim group (see Figure 5.1). Older students also had slightly more to say, including explicit talk of mur-der: 'A lot of Gypsies were killed as well,' said Luke (Year 12, EE1), while Alex ventured a definition of the Holocaust as 'the German policy of extermination of Jews and Gypsies and other minorities during World War Two'.

In a rare and impressive, if somewhat confused, demonstration of knowledge interfacing with spatial understanding, one particular student – Jeremy (Year 12, LON7) – contrasted the experiences of disabled people and Roma/Sinti, stating, 'There's more cases of Slavs and Gypsies who, as they [the Nazis] begin to go to Russia, kind of in this huge, big advance, I think the order was just to kill Russians and Slavs who were in the way.'

These were all noteworthy remarks and came in sharp relief to the muted response of younger students. Even so, some older students still conceded their knowledge was piecemeal; having named the 'Roma community' as a victim group, when asked to expand further, Jake (Year 12, LON7) said, 'I'm not one of them so I'm not really best qualified to speak about it, I don't really know anything about it, but I know he killed a lot of them as well.'

The focus-group interviews thus confirmed that general knowledge and understanding of the fate of the Roma and Sinti under Nazism was severely limited across the majority of students. In the main, the Gypsy experience appeared to register on the periphery of student consciousness – something acknowledged as being present when thinking about the Holocaust and victims of Nazism, but nonetheless shrouded in a fog of uncertainty. Although, with age, students appeared to become more aware of the Roma and Sinti as a victim group, this did not translate into greater substantive knowledge of policy.

This situation is problematic. As much as 'Nazi policy toward the Roma' may or may not have been 'hazy' (Bauer 2002: 47), the course of its development reveals particular qualities of the regime – especially in regard to how policy was formulated and its relationship to ideology. With regard to policy formulation, it has been argued that the absence of the Roma and Sinti from Hitler's theorising and promulgations meant that 'anti-Gypsy initiatives emerged from numerous agencies, above all the police and the SS, but also the academic community' (Connelly 2010: 275).

Such informal policy-making and policy implementation was apparent from the earliest days of the regime. As Burleigh and Wippermann (1991: 116) have shown, while Gypsies were not 'specified' in the racial legislation of 1933–4 this didn't stop authorities applying the laws in such a way that Roma and Sinti 'were sterilised without any legal basis whatsoever'. In so doing, agents and agencies were taking cues not just from the ideological atmosphere of the fledgling regime, but from a discriminatory tone set by regulations implemented in Wilhelmine Germany and the Weimar Republic. Moreover, so ingrained was cultural animosity towards Roma and Sinti that Donald Bloxham (2013: 149) suggests 'it was unnecessary for the Nazis to enact a web of legislation deemancipating and stigmatizing Romanies'.

If aspects of policy evolved organically, central government still made telling interventions which radicalised the persecution of the Roma and Sinti. Indicative here was the decision in late November 1935 to extend the Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour, which criminalised sexual relations between Germans and Jews, to include Roma and Sinti (Friedländer 1997: 153). Together with illegal sterilisation, this move encapsulated how 'the main domestic concern about Romany-German relations was miscegenation' (Bloxham 2013: 142).

The state also tried to solve the regime's preoccupation with just 'who' was a Gypsy partly through sponsorship of race hygienists and researchers like Robert Ritter. In the years before

the war, Ritter and others attempted to register, record and classify Gypsies living in Germany with the support of government financing and logistics. Believing Roma and Sinti 'racial characteristics inclined them towards an "asocial" and criminal way of life' (Burleigh and Wippermann 1991: 119), the importance of Ritter's findings to the regime was signified by the centralisation of his research and Himmler's circular of December 1938 on the 'Fight Against the Gypsy Nuisance', which pointed towards some future 'final solution of the Gypsy question' (Burleigh and Wippermann 1991: 120).

Matters were complicated by the genealogical relationship between Roma and Sinti, on the one hand, and the envisioned 'Aryan' on the other – since both were seen to share the same historical origins. Mark Levene (2013: 132-9) has shown how this idea of shared genealogy came more sharply into view following the move to deport Gypsies eastwards *en masse* in 1942, although this did not prevent thousands dying either in death camp gas chambers or in overcrowded ghettos. Nor did it stop many more being killed by Nazis and their collaborators throughout Eastern Europe and the occupied territories within the Soviet Union.

The above paragraphs provide just a cursory overview of measures enacted by the Nazi regime against the Roma and Sinti population. However, even these sparse details provide an insight into the workings of Nazism and the dynamics of its ideology with regard to the Gypsy population. They also show up powerful connections between policies enacted and attitudes held towards other victim groups. Equally, in ways not seen in the persecution of homosexuals or disabled people, the evolution of anti-Gypsy policy has much to say about how radicalisation grew over time and with the regime's expansion across Europe.

None of this analysis featured in student accounts of the Roma and Sinti experience, revealing their underdeveloped knowledge and understanding of this aspect of life under the Nazis. Only two clear attempts at explanation appeared in interviews with younger students (11–16 year olds), one of which occurred in discussion with a group of Year 8 students who had not studied the Holocaust, but who nevertheless named Gypsies as a group victimised by Hitler. On being asked what happened to Gypsies these students understandably resorted to 'informed' speculation:

**Interviewer:** What happened to the Gypsies?
**Una:** Were they put into concentration camps as well?
**Charlotte:** Yeah.
**Interviewer:** Okay, and why do you think Hitler went after the Gypsies?
**Una:** Because he wasn't too fond of what they

were doing.
**Interviewer:** Okay…
**Zoe:** And he didn't have much power over them, as much power as he did over other people living in the city houses in Germany, because they were more free people that did whatever they wanted to do really. He wanted to probably have more power over the people, but he couldn't, he didn't have in the first place. (LON5).

It would be unfair to criticise these students for the quality or accuracy of their explanation. In one sense they were right to identify (if not name) how the nomadic way of life followed by some Roma and Sinti was regarded with hostility by the regime. Their suggestion that Hitler objected to the 'freedom' Gypsies were assumed to have is also reasonable given popular portrayals of Hitler as tyrannical and the common understandings of the nature of dictatorship. Interestingly, the only other account of Roma and Sinti experience offered by younger students echoed aspects of the same narrative:

He [Hitler] didn't like their living style because he was more kind of like traditional and in the old way kind of stuff. And I think they lived in caravans, like he didn't really like the way they lived I would say or their lifestyle and stuff, so yeah
(Holly, Year 10, LON5).

The inability of students to offer any sort of developed explanation for why Gypsies were targeted and murdered by the regime was a departure from the pattern observed in the case of homosexuals and disabled people. In those instances, while they did not have extensive knowledge, students still felt able to forward an account or point to an explanatory framework which – however obscure in reality – they regarded as reasonable, justified or valid. To some extent this can be attributed to levels of knowledge, understanding and confidence: even in the case of homosexuals and disabled people students appeared more assured in 'knowing that' these groups were persecuted.

Another explanation may lie in the frameworks that students drew upon to account for these groups' experiences, and the conceptual understanding underpinning them. It is possible that students had a surer grasp on the nature of homosexuality and disability and how these could relate to Nazi perceptions of 'difference' – particularly of biological or physiological difference – than on the nature of Gypsy lifestyle and culture.

The considerable gaps in students' knowledge and understanding of the Roma and Sinti experience – and their accompanying inability to account for it – constitute a significant finding of this research. They warrant further consideration and require action

to redress them. Importantly, data collected from focus-group discussions with students in Years 12 and 13 indicate that these shortcomings were not necessarily transformed with age. Of the older students who offered or hinted at an explanation during interview, Kylie (Year 13, LON3) suggested that, 'They just didn't fit the social norm', while Patrick (Year 12, LON7) framed 'Gypsies or Roma' as not fitting 'Hitler's perfect ideal' – possibly because 'they had less a sense of German identity, they didn't conform to his sense of perfect Aryan, perfect brotherhood'.

The third (and only other) attempt at explanation saw Harrison (Year 12, LON3) simply admit that he was 'not a 100 per cent sure, to be honest'.

## What, if anything, do students think was distinctive about the fate of the Jews?

Although students had a tendency to believe that all Holocaust victims shared a similar fate, they nevertheless regarded the Jewish experience as noteworthy. Indications of this came from various areas of the research. As seen in Chapter 3, for example, the majority of students made some sort of allusion to Jewry when asked to describe the Holocaust, and commonly they referred to large-scale killing. This pattern was mirrored in the opening remarks with focus groups. When asked to brainstorm information related to 'the Holocaust', 'Jews' (or versions thereof) and associations of mass death were among the very first replies in all age groups. The data produced by both of these exercises, while not a perfect barometer, revealed that Jews and the killing of Jews were at the forefront of many students' minds when they were asked about 'the Holocaust'.

### Totality

These impressions were augmented by responses to the question 'Who were the victims of the Holocaust?' (survey question 40, discussed at the beginning of this chapter), and by data produced from responses to questions 54 to 57. This chapter has already noted how students ascribed the statement 'The Nazis planned to kill every last person of this group, wherever they could reach them' (see Figure 5.2). This statement, which focuses not on grading the suffering of victim groups but on determining the perpetrators' intentionality, was correctly identified by the majority of students (86.6 per cent) to be associated with the Jews. The strength of this result implies that most students don't just recognise that a lot of Jews were killed, they know that Jews were killed *en masse* and in an organised, intentional, determined fashion. Further, given the wording of the statement, the results suggest that most students also have a hold on the scale and scope of the measures enacted against the Jews.

The findings are muddied because nearly a third of students believed the statement also applied to the experience of homosexuals, while over a quarter saw it as applicable to disabled people. These tendencies only increased with age, suggesting that students become increasingly less disposed to regard totality as limited only to Jews. This has particular resonance for thinking about what students take 'the Holocaust' to mean and to involve. However, as students were able to select more than one answer for this statement, the results produced should not be taken as conclusive evidence that they either did or did not have a sense of the specific totality of Nazi exterminatory policy towards Jews.

Commonly, the starting point for establishing the centrality of 'the Jew' within the Nazi 'world view' is to look at what was said by the perpetrators themselves. Infamous pronouncements such as Hitler's Reichstag speech of January 1939 on the prospective 'annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe' are accordingly taken as proof positive of long-term intent. However, as Bloxham (2013: 222) cautions, although declarations like these are 'important', 'precisely the same phrases could mean different things at different times'. Similarly, unforeseeable events and circumstances were crucial in turning 'the abstract idea' of continental genocide into 'a concrete possibility' (Bloxham 2013: 223).

Development of policy is a far better gauge of intentionality than the rhetoric of principal Nazi ideologues. In this respect it is evident that, by the winter of 1941/42, the envisioned scope of anti-Jewish measures was acquiring continental proportions. This is evidenced by the Wannsee Conference, held on 20 January 1942. Although popular history long presumed this to be the point when genocide of the Jews was decided upon, this meeting of 15 high-ranking officials from the state, the NSDAP and the SS was in fact more concerned with discussing issues arising from the decision already taken to extend existing anti-Jewish measures to a transnational scale.

As a 'keyhole through which we can glimpse the emerging final solution' (Roseman 2003: 79), the surviving minutes of the meeting have been subject to different interpretations, principally due to contrasting accounts for why references were made to both the extermination of Jews and their use as a source of slave labour (Lawson 2010: 139). What is readily apparent is that the meeting envisaged 'the conception of a gigantic deportation programme'

(Longerich 2010: 307), indicated by the circulation among attendees of a statistical breakdown of Europe's '11 million' Jews, sorted by country – all of whom would be 'evacuated' to the East as part of an eventual 'final solution'. In a telling indication of the correlation between war and anti-Jewish policy, Heydrich, in his position as meeting chair, emphasised that these 'larger evacuation actions will largely depend on military developments' (Dawidowicz 1976: 78).

As a major milestone in the history of anti-Jewish policy, and one which points to a totality emerging in the Nazi imagination, knowledge and understanding of the Wannsee Conference is elemental. So it is all the more remarkable that most student respondents (84.4 per cent) said 'no' or that they 'did not know' when asked whether the Wannsee Conference had any connection with the Holocaust (survey question 31). When responses were cut by age, less than a fifth of 11 to 16 year olds answered 'yes', and it was only in Year 13 that the proportion rose substantially to reach 40 per cent.

These trends could also be observed in focus-group discussions. At no point in interviews with younger students (Years 7 to 11) was the Wannsee Conference referred to by name, although it was vaguely alluded to on a couple of occasions. In the first of these Abby (Year 8, LON6) explained: 'They say that Hitler was in a meeting and I can't remember the exact what he called it, the Final Plan … like that day when he declared that that was going to happen'. In the second, Tom (Year 10, NE1) described 'a meeting in a big room where they had all big Nazi leaders and when they decided that they would use the "Final Solution", which was killing people in death camps.' These were the only gestures to the Wannsee Conference, and also among just a handful of instances where younger students referred to a 'Final Solution' or 'Final Plan'.

Interviews with older students saw a sharp increase in references to Wannsee and the notion of a 'Final Solution'. On the former, some students were able to name the conference but not to provide more detail about it; others did not (or could not) provide the specific name of the meeting but were aware that a gathering had taken place and had some sense of its content. For example, Will (Year 12, LON7) thought that the purpose of the conference was 'to decide what they were eventually going to do with the issue of like Jews and minority groups', while Max said that (Year 12, EE1) 'they met and they decided the "Final Solution."'

Where both of these statements incorrectly framed the conference as a decision-making exercise, others demonstrated more accurate knowledge and/or nuanced understanding. Responding to a question on responsibility, Aimee (Year 13, EE1) asserted that 'Hitler instigated it' but emphasised 'it was more of a proposition towards the leading Nazis on what the solution was', such that by the time of the meeting 'it was almost already decided'. Perhaps the most profound remark came from Simon (Year 13, LON7) who declared: 'In terms of the Holocaust you'd say that the Wannsee Conference is when it started to take shape.'

All told, while older students' familiarity with the Wannsee Conference was by no means perfect, it was undeniably more advanced than seen in younger cohorts. The 16 to 18 year olds who tied the meeting to the 'Final Solution' exemplified this more advanced knowledge, although a larger number of students referred to the phrase outside of the Wannsee context. Some who did were quite specific in their usage: 'Rather than putting the Jewish population into huge camps', said Mike (Year 13, LON7), 'the "Final Solution" was basically the initiation of death camps and the extermination of the Jewish population'. Others expressed similar sentiment but with less precision, for example Paul (Year 12, LON7) remarked that 'the sort of "Final Solution" clearly wasn't intended from the beginning, that was more a result of a situation where they perceived the need for a result, and that result was getting rid of the Jews'.

A third type of response displayed familiarity with the term, yet confusion as to its referent: 'It was sort of put into practice' when Germany saw it would lose the war and 'thought we need to hide this' (Lucas, Year 12, LON7); and 'he [Hitler] got everyone to sign about the "Final Solution"' (Nikki, Year 13, EE1).

Older students were therefore more familiar with the term 'Final Solution', even if they were not always confident in how to use it. Equally, there was a distinct impression that students saw the term as having direct and even exclusive association with Jewry, and with their extermination: indeed, the word 'extermination' itself was employed extensively in the older focus groups.

Overall, the above findings suggest that students develop a sharper sense of some of the particular dimensions of the Jewish experience as they get older. It also appears that students become more attuned to seeing these aspects in policy terms, with some developing the potential to move beyond purely Hitler-centric accounts and explanations, and to approach the reality of power relations and decision-making within the Third Reich.

## Scale

Further indications of an evolving programme of continental genocide can be found in the

development of Nazi policy towards Jewish children. The resolve to mark both adults and children for death first emerged in early August 1941.

Following the invasion of the Soviet Union on 6 June 1941 the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing squads), together with other SS and police units, had principally focused on killing adult males. This was in accordance with the regime's instructions that all would-be political opponents and partisans be eliminated, and reflected its conviction of a synergy between Jews and Communism. However, Browning (2004: 260) suggests that 'the last taboo – the killing of women and children – eroded' very quickly, partly as local populations made no distinctions in their pogroms (Arad 2009: 88).

In an excellent example of policy developing organically as broad central directives were implemented in varying local contexts, by mid August 1941 'units and formations of various types' were increasingly including children in mass shootings (Longerich 2010: 250). Just over two years later in October 1943, Himmler gave a speech to leading Nazi officials where he outlined the rationale for this radicalisation: 'The question came to us: what happens with the women and children?', the SS leader explained, and so as to avoid creating 'avengers', 'the difficult decision had to be made, to let this entire people disappear from the earth' (Wittmann 2008: 563–4). By May 1945, around 90 per cent of Jewish children (around 1.5 million previously living in pre-war Europe) had been killed.

In order to determine students' awareness of the measures taken against Jewish children, respondents to the survey were asked, 'Approximately what percentage of Jewish children

living in Nazi controlled Europe were murdered?' The results for each year group are presented in Figure 5.5.

These statistical results indicate that 15.9 per cent of all students answered the question correctly, with this becoming less likely as they got older. Conversely, most students tended to incorrectly think that either 50 per cent or 75 per cent of children were murdered, with the latter figure becoming the more popular response as students got older. These results must be handled with some care: the nature of statistical 'facts' like 'what percentage were murdered' is such that students may simply not have come across the right percentage in the course of their studies. Indeed, many students couched their response by indicating some degree of uncertainty to their answer.

However, the results do highlight that students are generally unfamiliar with the policy of murder pursued against Jewish children. This speaks to student knowledge of the scale of genocide more generally. Today, it is widely accepted by governments, authorities, and the academic community that, by 1945, around six million Jewish men, women and children had died. This figure is calculated via various sources, including the size of the pre- and post-war Jewish population in Europe as well as documentation compiled by the perpetrators themselves.

To determine the extent of student knowledge on this matter, the survey asked, 'Approximately how many of Jews in all of Europe were killed during the Holocaust?' Figure 5.6 captures responses sorted according to age.

At first glance these results appear positive:

**Figure 5.5** Student responses to survey question 48, 'Approximately what percentage of Jewish children living in Nazi controlled Europe were murdered?' (percentage by year group)
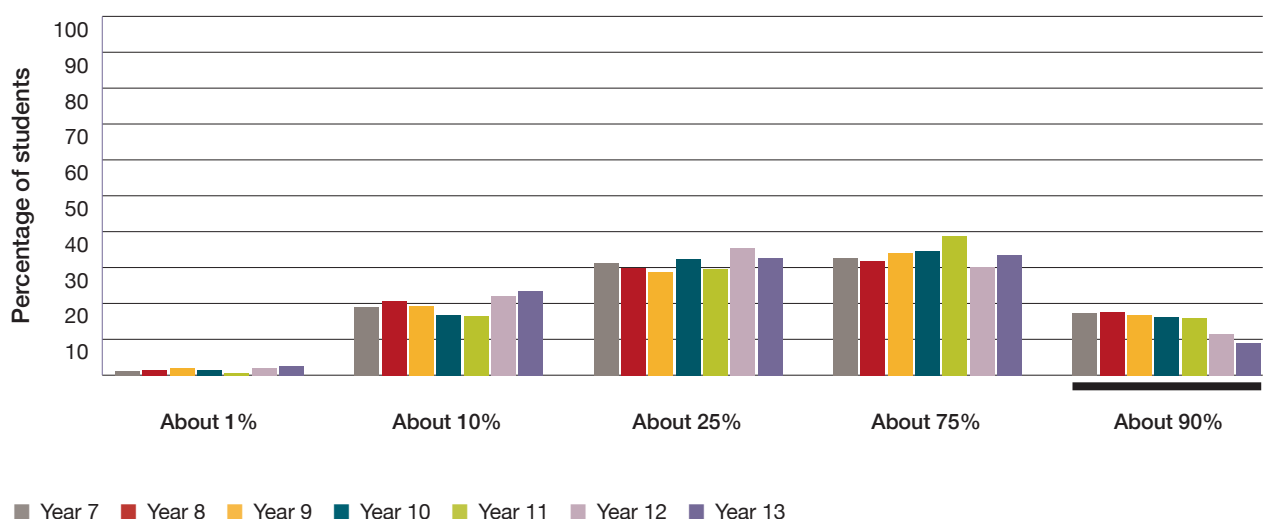
after all, across the age range, the majority of all respondents (52.9 per cent) selected the most historically accurate choice. However, closer inspection reveals a more complicated picture. For example, of the 3,958 students who answered six million, 1,161 indicated their response was either a guess or made with some uncertainty. When added to the fact that a third of all students also massively underestimated the total number killed, these findings take on considerable importance.

When filtered by age the mixed nature of these results continues. For instance, that just 31.6 per cent of Year 7 students (11 to 12 year olds) selected the most historically accurate answer could at once be said to be impressive and unsurprising, given that the majority would not have studied the Holocaust in history lessons at this age. The same might be said of the 53.5 per cent of Year 9 students, since some of these had not begun their studies at the time of the survey.

However, the results among these younger students are concerning when we recall that students encounter the Holocaust in other subjects outside of school history and may well participate in whole-school initiatives such as Holocaust Memorial Day commemorations. Moreover, so pervasive is the Holocaust in Britain's contemporary culture it is reasonable to expect that more 13 to 14 year olds would be familiar with the figure of six million, regardless of whether the subject had been formally studied. That said, the data suggested that even among students who had theoretically learned about the Holocaust (the 15 to 18 year olds) just under 20 per cent still believed that only one or two million were murdered.

Focus groups with younger students (11 to 16 year olds) provided further illumination. Many visibly struggled to provide a precise figure. Of those who did, responses ranged from two million to six million, although this latter figure was invariably delivered with an inquisitive tone. More often than not, students would speak vaguely in terms of 'millions' or simply 'a lot'. On one occasion, a group of Year 10 history students disagreed over a member of their group's over-estimation of the total number of Jews killed. Asked if they would put any key factual information of a mind-map of 'the Holocaust', the following exchange ensued:

**Tom:** Oh it is 60 million.
**Daniel:** Six million.
**Tom:** No, 60 million.
**Daniel:** There is definitely a six and a million in it. Six million Jews.
**Tom:** No, but wasn't it 60 million in total?
**Daniel:** Something like that like for the whole war.
**Tom:** But then not all the people who died in the Second World War were like part of the Holocaust. (NE1)

To their credit, these students demonstrated an uncommon attempt to position anti-Jewish policy within the context of the war, although this example is arguably most illustrative of the misunderstandings which can occur when contextual understanding is coupled with absent or insecure content knowledge. This is an especially valuable reminder, given the general finding that older students tend to have a better appreciation of the contexts in which Nazi policies developed.

In line with data from the survey, the oldest students interviewed were most likely to talk of six

**Figure 5.6** Student responses to survey question 46, 'Approximately how many Jews in all of Europe were killed during the Holocaust?' (percentage by year group)
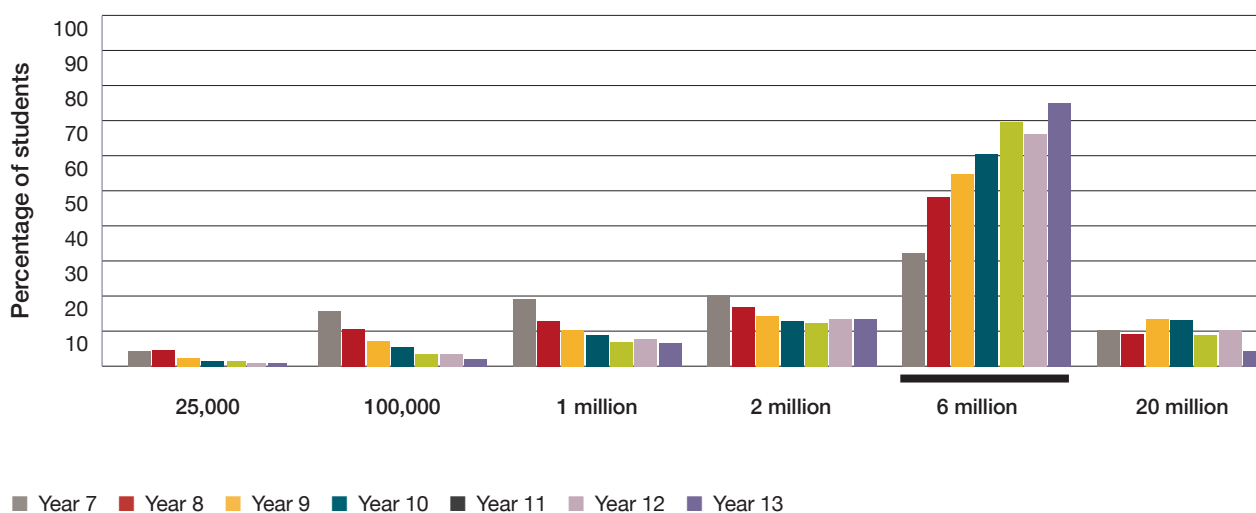
million Jews being killed – although even here Jake (Year 12, EE1) admitted, 'I don't know the exact statistics' and others in the same group spoke of 'something like six million-ish'. Similarly, some older students also over-estimated the total figures, with a couple of students citing a figure of nine million. Paradoxically, in one of these instances the student also forwarded a rare estimate of the number of children killed, putting this at one million.

Given how the figure of six million has become totemic and a cultural shorthand for the fate of the Jews under Nazism, the survey and interview findings have a sensational quality. The overall number of students of all ages who are seemingly ignorant of the number of Jews killed during this period is itself troubling, but what perhaps makes for the most uncomfortable reading is the indication that ignorance can still persist even after students complete programmes of study. This poses serious and pressing questions about what is being taught, the way content is being delivered and the extent to which students are developing core knowledge of the most fundamental aspects of the Jewish experience.

The discovery that a considerable proportion of students do not know how many Jews were killed helps to account for other findings of this research project, some of which have been outlined in this chapter. For example, one might justifiably presume that, if a larger number were aware of the scale of killing directed at the Jews of Europe, then students might have more to say on how the Jewish experience is to be understood in correlation with other groups. This cuts both ways, of course: greater knowledge and understanding of what happened to each of the groups targeted by the Nazi regime would in turn open up the space for greater insight into overlap, intersection and particularities across the victim groups. But, for such higher-order thinking, core knowledge remains a prerequisite.

## Scapegoating

This chapter has shown that students' perceptions of the distinctive aspects of the Jewish experience are complicated and at times contradictory. On the one hand, most students recognise that total extermination of Jews became an intentional Nazi strategy and many correctly know how many lives this claimed. On the other hand, a significant number believed that total extermination was pursued against multiple victim groups and do not know, or are not sure, how many Jews were killed in this process. So the scope and scale of the destruction of European Jewry are not necessarily regarded by students to be distinct – let alone defining – characteristics of the Jewish experience or of Nazi policy. This raises the question of what exactly students see as being particular or specific to the Jews.

An indicator was provided by responses to question 57 of the survey. Presented with the statement, 'They were blamed by Hitler for Germany's defeat in the First World War', students were asked to indicate to which group(s) this applied. The results are shown in Figure 5.7.

The majority of all students (64 per cent) correctly indicated that the statement applied to the Jews. Once the data was broken down by year groups, it became evident that this finding was distinctly age-related:

- in Year 7, 50.2 per cent of students answered 'Jews', with 23.4 per cent 'Poles' and 14.1 per cent 'Jehovah's Witnesses'
- by Year 10, 69.7 per cent of students ascribed the statement to 'Jews', 16.8 per cent to 'Poles', and 8 per cent to 'Jehovah's Witnesses'
- among Year 12 students these figures stood at 80.2 per cent, 13.4 per cent and 3.6 per cent, respectively.

This data indicates that, over time, students become more acquainted with one of the key indictments made by Hitler and the Nazis against the Jews – that of the *Dolchstoss*, or a 'stab-in-the-back', which promulgators employed to account for the loss of the First World War. The idea of conspiratorial betrayal found root among soldiers and military leaders in the last days of the First World War, and acquired public legitimacy following endorsement by the revered

**Figure 5.7** Student responses to the statement, 'They were blamed by Hitler for Germany's defeat in the First World War' (survey question 57)
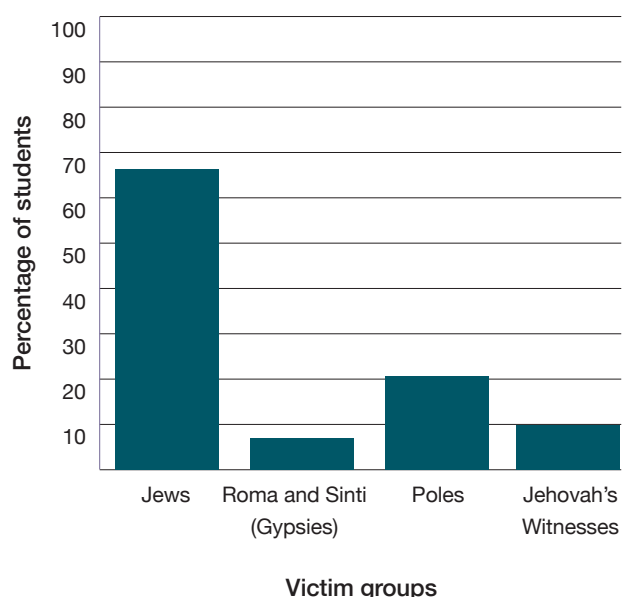
Generals Erich Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg, who was later President of the Weimar Republic. While Hindenburg did not explicitly tie this charge to the Jews when he famously invoked the *Dolchstoss* at a parliamentary hearing in November 1919, he did not really need to. Following the armistice and the widely despised Versailles Treaty, accusations of Jews conniving with Bolsheviks and others to first undermine the Wilhelmine regime and then sell Germany out by signing the Versailles 'Diktat' only grew in currency. Although this view was by no means subscribed to by all Germans, the *Dolchstoss* – together with other antisemitic critiques of the Weimar Republic – ensured that 'the language of antisemitism became embedded in mainstream political discourse as never before' (Evans 2006: 152).

The *Dolchstoss* and its avengement was both part of Hitler's 'personal fire' and a 'central element' in the Nazi 'propaganda armoury' (Kershaw 1998: 97, 2008: 91). For these reasons, the results of responses to survey question 57 were positive. The findings were also borne out in focus-group interviews, with youngest students making little or no reference to the *Dolchstoss*, and Year 9 and 10 students making greater note, as with occasional mention of Jews being seen by Hitler as 'backstabbers' (Sarah, Year 10, NE1). References increased again in discussions held with students in Years 12 and 13, where a greater number of students directly using the phrase 'stab-in-the-back'.

An interesting feature of the focus groups was the framing of the legend of the *Dolchstoss*. A few students – particularly younger ones – narrated the 'stab-in-the-back' theory in such a way that responsibility for it began and ended with Hitler. Indicative here was Juliette (Year 9, LON5), who advanced that Hitler blamed the Jews 'severely' for defeat in the war 'and then he convinced everyone, antisemites especially, that it was their [the Jews'] fault'. Others, like Annie (Year 10, NE1), instead depicted the myth in a matter-of-fact fashion, forwarding statements like 'Jewish people were blamed for World War I'. One or two stuck to description but added an unusual twist, for instance Jack (Year 12, EE1), who spoke of 'the stab-in-the-back theory, which is like a theory that suggests why the Germans lost World War I, and they suggested that it was the Jews and politicians were going against their country and shooting members of their team.'

Broadly speaking, the focus groups thus confirmed awareness of the *Dolchstoss* to be age-related but underlined that this didn't always lead to secure understanding. In addition, there were instances when students' talked of how and why Jews were blamed for the war but displayed a low level of criticality. For example, Ben (Year 9, SE1) asserted that, after the First World War, the German

people 'needed somebody to blame and most of them didn't really like them [the Jews] anyway, so it was just a natural push for them to blame someone else. It was unfortunate that it happened to be the Jewish people'. One might see this as insight into the cultural heritage of anti-Jewish sentiment, but there is an inflection to the phrases 'just a natural push' and 'it was unfortunate' which is unquestioning and lacking in critical thought.

More will be said about similar instances in the section below. But Ben's comment also highlights how a number of focus-group participants linked the blaming of Jews for the loss of the First World War to other causes of discontent, particularly economic turmoil in the 1920s. This was well captured by Elliot (Year 9, EE1), who remarked that, 'Germany needed somebody to blame for the loss of the First World War and the amount of money they lost afterwards in the economic crash that they had'. In a separate interview, Grace (Year 9, LON6) echoed these remarks but emphasised Hitler's role in realising the potential in linking the two themes. He was, Grace claimed, 'very clever in the sense that after World War I, Germany was like in a really bad way and they had no money and they had, like, a really bad economy and stuff and everyone was, like, poor and unemployed'. She concluded that Hitler used people's desperation 'to his advantage', secure in the knowledge 'they were very vulnerable and easily manipulated'.

Comments like these command attention for two reasons. First, they reveal students' ideas about how and why people supported Hitler and the Nazis (of which more will be said in Chapter 6) and second, they demonstrate how students can draw on broader contextual knowledge to make sense of the Jewish experience. It is pertinent to remember that contextual knowledge is not divorced from conceptual understanding, but intrinsically entwined with it; the shape of students' ideas don't just underpin and influence knowledge, but are themselves impacted by what a student 'knows' and 'understands'.

This is especially significant in the case of students being familiar with the blaming of Jews for military defeat and economic turbulence, because the assumptions and inferences that students drew from this came to variegate many accounts for why Jews would be targeted by the regime. However, while employing contextual 'knowledge' in this way is useful, it can become counterproductive if students do not recognise the spurious nature of many of the charges levied against the Jews. Here we clearly see how absolutely crucial students' critical awareness can be.

To summarise, the focus-group interviews revealed that students see scapegoating as a

distinctive and exclusive feature of the Jewish experience. Beyond this, they spoke in other, less well formed ways about the particularity of actions against the Jews. For example, a number of younger students described Jews as being 'singled out' or 'treated the worst' (Ellie, Year 9, EE1). If they expanded on these ideas, students often became muddled, with some indicating that treatment merely constituted the Nazis 'doing more' to Jews – the notion, as expressed by Lachlan (Year 10, EE1), that 'there was more focus on them'.

Others provided more description while centring on a certain experience which they saw as illustrative of Jews being treated 'worse', for example Ellie (Year 9, EE1) suggested that 'they were put into concentration camps and stuff'. Finally, there was a smattering of students like Hamish (Year 9, SE1), who suggested, 'I think they [the Nazis] particularly really hated Jewish people and they did more to them.'

In some cases the simplistic quality of responses such as these can be explained away in terms of limits to individuals' powers of expression. However, they should also be seen as evidence of a general shallowness in student knowledge and understanding of just what happened to 'the Jews' beyond being killed. This is especially true of students' familiarity with the experience of German Jews between 1933 and 1939. More will be said on this in Chapter 7.

However, what can be said here is that – as with the other victim groups – the breadth and depth of students' knowledge of the Jewish experience evidently has implications for the accounts that students can (and do) construct to explain why Jews became victims of the regime.

Students' awareness that Jews were used as scapegoats is welcome, as is the discovery that many students have a field of vision which looks beyond 1933 to take in at least the immediate period after the First World War. Elements of this contextual knowledge was found to be wanting at times, and/or sitting in front of skewed understandings or even unchallenged misconceptions. This latter finding has particular significance since what students know and understand about the scapegoating of the Jews is linked to what they know and understand about who the Jews 'were' and what Jews had (or had not) 'done', both in the years directly preceding the Third Reich and in the longer term. The consequences of these ideas were most emphatically seen in student responses to the question 'Why the Jews?'

## How do students explain 'Why the Jews?'

Explaining why events have happened in history (and why others have not) is a fundamental component of historical thinking. It moves beyond 'raw' knowledge, or the capacity to simply describe something from the past, towards being able to comprehend the intersection of different forces and determine their role in bringing that something about.

These forces are myriad. They can be intentional or unintentional; the direct product of human intervention or the unpredictable outcome of other developments. Crucially, they are context-bound and context-dependent, meaning that the manner in which they interact and intersect with one another is complex and unpredictable. When these 'forces' are directly tied to a historical event or occurrence they acquire the status of 'causes', since they have become associated with consequences and/or effects. Identifying causes and relating them to an event or occurrence are therefore the building blocks of historical explanation and, by extension, of historical understanding.

Historical explanations vary in levels of validity and sophistication. This is determined not just by whether an explanation notes the various causes of an event, but how these are narrated, accounted for and woven together. Just as an explanatory account that fails to incorporate all of the causes of an occurrence will be flawed, so an explanation which merely lists or cites causes without determining their importance or relating them to one another will be reductive and simplistic.

The issue of historical explanation in relation to students' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust became a concern for this research in light of pilot studies. Undertaken in advance of the national survey as a means of developing methodologies and refining approaches (see Chapter 2), part of these investigations saw 342 students aged 11 to 18 years old invited to note any questions they might have about the Holocaust. Three dominant questions emerged from their responses, all of them explanatory in nature. Two centred on responses to the Holocaust, namely, 'Why didn't anyone stop them?' and 'How did they get away with it?' The third, and by far the most common question across all age groups, was concerned with rationale or, as students' phrased it, 'Why the Jews?'

Revealingly, it wasn't just students who were yet to study the Holocaust who honed in on this question, as 63 per cent of Year 9 students – all of whom had recently completed a programme of study on the Holocaust – raised it as well. Although the number fell slightly for Year 10 (52 per cent), it then increased among Year 12 students, with 69 per cent explicitly

asking 'Why the Jews?' or a derivative thereof.

These results were remarkable because they suggested that, even after learning about the Holocaust, many students remained perplexed as to why the Jews of Europe had been murdered. Elsewhere in these pilot studies students framed Hitler and the Nazis as being driven by general racism and prejudice, and/or a desire to create a 'master' Aryan race, but when it came to the Jews these young people did not feel such causes adequately accounted for the specificities of the Jewish experience.

To further explore these findings from the pilot studies, 'Why the Jews?' became a core question put to students in the focus-group interviews for the final research. At times it was met with outright ignorance. While 'I don't know' was not a common refrain, it did appear on a handful of occasions, even prompting Bianca (Year 10, SE1) to ask, 'Shall we Google it?'

More frequently students responded with a self-inquisitive tone and/or couched their replies with caveats and admissions of uncertainty. Generally, however, when asked 'Why the Jews?' most students were able to forward some kind of answer. The quality of these responses, and the extent to which they constituted developed historical explanations, varied considerably. In most instances, students began – and in a number of cases, ended – with some remark of who 'the Jews' were. Primarily these directly or indirectly centred on either on German Jewry or on 'Jews' in the abstract, a tendency symptomatic of a narrow field of vision used and limited understanding of the Holocaust's geographical spread held by many students. More is said about this in Chapter 7.

Insight into understandings of 'who the Jews were' came from both the focus groups and the survey. Broadly speaking, students' ideas related to one of three categories: population size, socioeconomic status and beliefs. Sometimes in interview, students' comments would straddle or directly link more than one of these. This was usually, but not always, an indicator of the student trying to construct or move towards a more robust historical account.

## Population size

Question 44 of the survey asked, 'In 1933, what percentage of the German population was Jewish?' (see Figure 5.8).

The results revealed that just 8.8 per cent of all respondents answered this question correctly. Of these, over 40 per cent indicated they were either not very confident in their response or simply guessing. The answer most favoured by the students (38.6 per cent) indicated that Jews made up 15 per

cent of the total German population in 1933, closely followed by estimates of over 30 per cent (35.3 per cent of all students). As Figure 5.8 indicates, the oldest students (Years 12 to 13) were the most likely to answer correctly. That said, it can equally be seen that, with age, students became more inclined to dramatically over-estimate the number of Jews living in Germany in 1933.

Focus-group discussions verified these findings. Students 'thought' or confirmed there were 'lots' of Jews in Germany, a few even suggesting that 'over half the population was Jews' (Jess, Year 9, SE1). In coming to their conclusions some employed deduction, for example Paige (Year 10, EE1), who said, 'There must have been quite a lot of people because it says in all the diary passages about how if you looked around you would see gold stars and stuff on what they were wearing'. While the occasional older student spoke about the number of Jews with assurance – '5 per cent of the population' (Isaac, Year 13, EE1) – most resorted to presumption – 'I'm pretty sure there were quite a lot of Jews in Germany' (Will, Year 12, LON7) – or guesstimation – '3 or 4 per cent, maybe' (Alex, Year 12, EE1).

On one occasion, a pair of students simultaneously recognised the minority status of Jews in Germany yet still inflated their size. 'It was a small percentage wasn't it?' said Damien (Year 12, LON3), 'I can't remember the exact statistic but it wasn't a massive amount, it wasn't like it was half the population'. Interjecting, Harrison (Year 12, LON3) was more specific: 'It was around eight per cent', he said, and Damien agreed.

The importance of these findings derives from how a central plank of Nazi propaganda was the assertion that Jews were a dominant group in Germany, intent on destroying the country from within. 'Knowing' that in June 1933 just 0.75 per cent – 505,000 people – of a total population of 67 million was Jewish is therefore paramount if students are to recognise the falsity and scurrilous nature of Nazi propaganda for what it was. It is all the more essential in light of the misunderstandings which can arise from incorrect 'knowledge' about the size of the Jewish community in Germany.

Some of these misunderstandings were readily apparent in the focus-group interviews when students moved to thinking about population size as a causal factor for hostility towards the Jews. For example, a few drew a correlation between the number of Jews and the potential for blame to be levied against them:

> I think there was quite a lot of them in the
> population in Germany so maybe they [the
> Germans] thought that because there is a lot
> of them there is a lot of them to blame for why

Germany was like broke and stuff (Deena, Year 9, LON6).

This underlying sense of there being a lot of Jews and of Jews 'being to blame' pointed to a linking of causal factors, but in a manner that lacked criticality.

The combination of presumption and speculation was seen elsewhere, for instance in this suggestion from Ben (Year 9, SE1): 'Germany had more Jewish people than really anywhere else and they like overpopulated the actual … the thoroughbred German'. Rather than 'thinking' there was a large Jewish population, this students' positive assertion that this was the case is made more troubling by its marrying with the fallacious notion of 'the thoroughbred German'.

A response like this is not only a historical simplification; its lack of criticality risks providing rationalisation for the perpetrators' actions. This problem was well illustrated by the remarks of Rachael (Year 10, LON6), who contended in a matter-of-fact manner that Hitler and the Nazis 'believed' the number of Jews was at the root of difficulties: 'partly the cause of the problems was overcrowding in Germany, so they thought that by killing these people they would get like less crowded'.

There is a danger of misinterpreting these examples, of inferring that these students hold malevolent views and lack sensitivity. Neither can be determined, but what can be said is that they indicate the types of erroneous ideas or defective conclusions which can arise from inaccurate knowledge, or knowledge based principally on presumption. With the exception of Rachael, the students cited above do not draw direct causal links between population size and mass murder. However, incorrect understandings about how many Jews were in Germany in the 1930s can (and does) intersect with and inform other knowledge domains.

## Socioeconomic status

Just as the above findings revealed that some students held worrisome misconceptions about the size of German Jewry, so the focus groups also found that some young people entertained troubling myths about the socioeconomic position of German Jews. Many of these gravitated around or stemmed from ideas about employment, both in the sense of having or not having jobs and with regard to the economic benefits that students believed came from particular occupations. These themes were pointed to by students of varying ages.

In many interviews students demonstrated general awareness of Germany being afflicted by economic crises prior to the Nazi period. Most recognised the inherent severity of these, loosely sharing the assessment made by Candice (Year 9, LON6) that, 'everyone was like poor and unemployed'. However, any evidence that students understood the fluctuating nature of Weimar economics was commonly absent. There was, for example, hardly any indication that students recognised the difference between the hyperinflation of 1923 and the depression after 1929, or any appreciation that there was a period of relative stability between these two events. Instead, students appeared to understand the years of the Weimar Republic marked by

**Figure 5.8** Student responses to survey question 44, 'In 1933, what percentage of the German population was Jewish?' (percentage by year group)
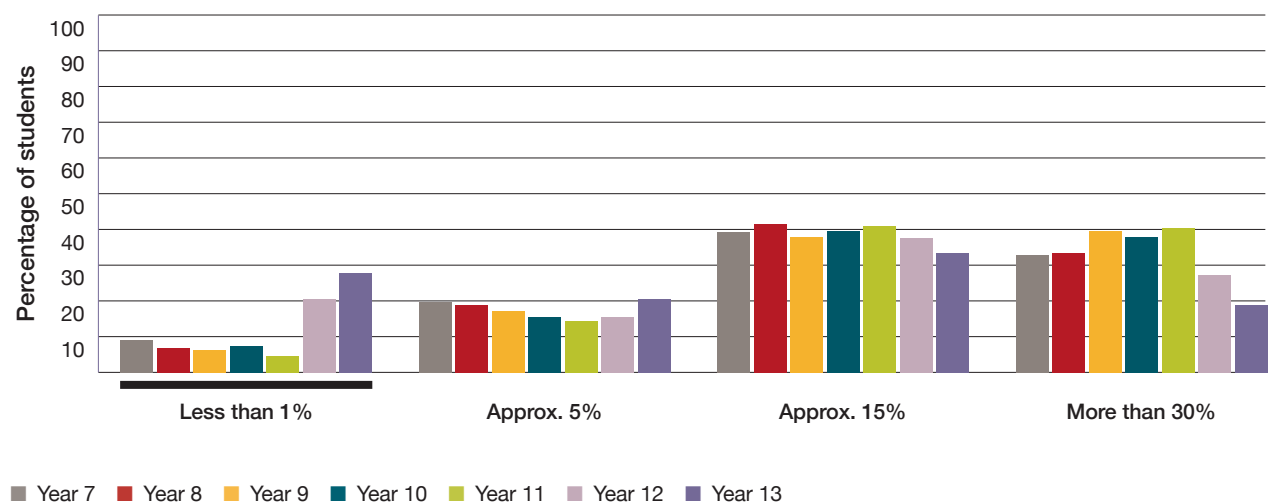
unending poverty and continual unemployment.

Although it would be unreasonable to expect students to have extensive knowledge of the economic history of the Weimar period, the one-dimensional understanding demonstrated by many had consequences. In effect, students seemed inclined to present a picture of 'haves' and 'have nots', with a number colouring this portrait in a way that framed 'Jews' and 'Germans' as two amorphous masses fundamentally separated from each other. 'The Jews', some indicated, 'had the best jobs' (Aaliyah, Year 10, LON5) or were 'taking up homes and jobs and stuff' (Carrie, Year 10, EE1). Meanwhile, 'the Germans' either had no jobs or did not have 'good' jobs.

This artificial separation of Jews from Germans – together with the notion that Jews 'were doing well when the rest of Germany was doing badly' (Kristy, Year 9, LON6) – was occasionally depicted in a way where scapegoating became inevitable: 'Like, they [the Germans] had no money and everything and they were looking for someone to blame', said Aaliyah (Year 10, LON5). In turn, she suggested that Germans were 'already eager to receive anything' and 'then Hitler was like "all the Jews have all the jobs, duh duh duh duh dah"…so when he said that I think they had someone to blame'.

Some students remarked on the type of jobs that they understood Jews to have at this time. Interestingly, a few who did so prefaced or coupled their remarks with positive references to Jews having a 'hardworking' attitude or being able to hold certain occupations thanks to a 'better education' (Catherine, Year 9, EE1). Such remarks could, on occasions, still coexist with misunderstandings, for instance in the case of Annie (Year 10, NE1), who stated that 'Jews were the type of people who had the most money because they had the education'.

For a few students, then, 'education' was actually seen as a privilege – one that allowed Jews to have 'quite qualified, quite academic jobs,' and meant they 'were paid well … high-powered' (Will, Year 12, LON7). This correlation was picked up by a number of focus-group participants: 'They were doctors, lawyers, they owned shops so they were rich, I guess you could say', said Holly (Year 10, LON5), who also noted that this led to 'jealousy or some animosity'. Fahima (Year 10, LON5) put it more colourfully when asserting that 'the Germans, when they saw that the Jews were better off than them kind of, I don't know, it kind of pissed them off a bit'.

It is important to remember that these claims did not appear in every single focus group and were by no means shared by all students. However, perceptions of and ideas about Jewish wealth were observed to have quite wide currency across different age groups and different schools. Among younger students these were sometimes qualified by admissions of uncertainty. For example, Lucy (Year 8, LON6) – who was yet to study the Holocaust at school – couched her comments about why Jews were targeted in the following terms:

> I have an idea but I'm not very sure: is it because they were like kind of rich, so maybe they [the Germans] thought that that was kind of in some way evil, like the money didn't belong to them it belonged to the Germans and the Jewish people had kind of taken that away from them.

In a separate interview, Una (Year 8, LON5), displayed more certainty in saying that 'the Jews were like had a rich community … and I think Hitler was jealous of their power'.

It is tempting to explain away comments like these by pointing to the fact that these students had not formally studied the Holocaust. However true this may be, it does little to account for where these ideas came from or why they had not been dismissed out of hand. Moreover, any assumption that students come to reject such conceptions by learning about the Holocaust in school is called into question by indications that even students who had studied the subject retained incorrect and injurious ideas about Jewish wealth. For example, in an interview with Year 9 students (LON6), Kristy said, 'I think Jews were rich at the time?' before continuing:

> I think they had a lot of money and things like that. They invented jewellery or something like that, I'm just guessing. And I think because they invented a lot of stuff and they had lots of money and they were quite wealthy. They weren't really – the other Germans weren't as wealthy as them, they like owned business and stuff so I guess they [the Germans] were asking 'okay why are they all so good with money and how come they have got so much money.'

Further signs of how far misconceptions, misunderstandings and misrepresentations endure were seen in discussions with Year 12 and 13 students. Some endeavoured to root their ideas in the history: 'My memory's a bit hazy', said Lucas (Year 12, LON7), but 'a lot of small German stores were sort of taken over by big Jewish businesses during the 1920s, before the Wall Street Crash and it's that fear of sort of German identity being taken away'.

Meanwhile, Samuel (Year 12, LON7) attempted to introduce social class as an explanation for 'Why the Jews?' when he said, 'Didn't he [Hitler] hate the wealth of the Jews as well, how they dominated society, because they were predominantly upper class?' Answering his own question Samuel concluded that Hitler 'didn't like' how 'upper-class

Jews were living quite a nice life'. The issue of class was also taken up by Steve (Year 13, LON7), who boldly argued that the Holocaust

> can be explained by different sort of analytic methods, like didactic materialism … it could be explained as sort of a class conflict between generally rich business-class Jews, and sort of working-class Germans, or at least some classes of working-class Germans, yeah.

While it was impressive to hear these older students trying to provide sophisticated explanations, their incorrect ideas about Jewish wealth rendered those explanations inherently flawed. This capacity for insight to be undermined by erroneous 'knowledge' was illustrated in the response of Alex (Year 12, EE1) who suggested:

> They [the Jews] are stereotypically much richer than other German people, and they are always viewed as sort of separate and different, and the Nazis sort of used them as a scapegoat for a lot of Germany's problems, especially with losing World War I they were blamed a lot for that.

In linking issues of wealth with perceptions of difference and the proclivity towards scapegoating, this student was hinting at what could have been an impressive explanation for why Jews were targeted by the regime. But, despite the merits of the account, its inaccurate and potentially injurious conceptual framework meant it could never be a wholly satisfactory explanation.

The above findings make it clear many students hold a number of highly problematic ideas about the socioeconomic status of Jews in Nazi Germany. A large proportion of focus-group participants had clear misconceptions about the work done by Jewish people and the financial rewards this work supposedly brought. Furthermore, there was a concerning tendency to talk about the impact of economic turmoil in Weimar Germany in ways that differentiated and distinguished Jews from Germans – as if one could be either, but not both. This process of 'differing' may be interpreted as students having some understanding of the Nazi perception of Jewish 'difference', but the lack of reflexive thinking was concerning.

As for wealth, a lot of student understandings were far removed from historical reality, and these were often combined with assumptions that upheld common stereotypes. While students were in some ways correct when they cited the perception of wealth as a causal factor for 'Why the Jews?', the repeated failure to explicitly refute or challenge stereotypical notions is highly unnerving. If assumptions about Jewish wealth are accepted uncritically, there is a risk that students will come to regard the Jews' apparent socioeconomic position as a causal factor rather than the defamatory work of the Nazis' propaganda against the Jews.

## Belief

The third dimension of students' understandings of 'Why the Jews?' concerned ideas about belief, and it was possible to get a sense of these from their responses to question 56 of the survey (see Figure 5.4). The intended purpose of this question was to discover students' understanding of perpetrator intentionality, although the findings yielded something else as well. The fact that 41.6 per cent of respondents thought Jews could avoid persecution 'if they gave up their beliefs' suggested that a substantial proportion of students understood Nazi policy to be predicated on religious grounds. In turn, this implied that students understood Jews (and Jewishness) to be defined by religion alone.

Broken down by age, this statistic gained a different complexion as the percentages were found to be age related, with 52.6 per cent of Year 7 indicating that Jews could avoid persecution by relinquishing their beliefs, 41.5 per cent doing so in Year 9 and 30.1 per cent in Year 11. Although there was a small increase in Year 12 (to 33 per cent), by Year 13 just 23.1 per cent of students indicated that the statement applied to Jews. Meanwhile, this reduction in the number of students answering 'Jews' was mirrored by an increase in the percentage correctly ascribing the statement to Jehovah's Witnesses (22.7 per cent in Year 7, 48.4 per cent in Year 10, 63.3 per cent in Year 13).

The most common-sense explanation for these results is that, as students get older, they come to recognise that Jews were not persecuted because of religious intolerance and that Jewishness is not just an article of faith. This account would align with trends noted in Chapter 3 regarding student descriptions of 'what the Holocaust was', where older students became less prone to depicting Jews or Jewish persecution in terms of religion or beliefs. Nevertheless, even on this question the religious optic did not disappear completely, as seen by instances in which Year 12 or 13 students rejected the Nazi attempt to define Jewishness in racial terms by actually reasserting a religious frame. As one Year 12 student put it in the survey, 'Hitler attempted to end the Jew race, however he was wrong as they were a religion not a race'.

The persistence of religion and/or belief as explanatory frames was observable in focus-group discussions. There were numerous examples, for instance, of Jews being framed as, defined by or seen to be fundamentally religious. 'They are normal people really,' said Suzie (Year 9, SE1), 'just of a

different religion'; or 'a whole religion of people' (Fadil, Year 13, LON3). A couple of students (Year 9, EE1) had something to say about the nature of this religion: 'Because of their beliefs they didn't really want to fight back', said Catherine, to which Harry added, 'According to their religion they can't fight back'.

Jews as a collective 'religion' or as adherents to a form of ill-defined (and, one suspects, misunderstood) belief system, was thus seen by some students as an explanation for 'Why the Jews?' A few younger students like Chloe (Year 8, LON5) were quite clear on this: 'Jews were persecuted simply because of their religion'. Similarly, Una (Year 8, LON5) suggested that Jews were victimised because Hitler 'didn't want any other religion' while Jim (Year 13, LON7) took a slightly different tack by saying 'he doesn't really like the religion itself'. These were notable occurrences, of course, but they were not as frequent as the references that approached religion from the perspective of the perp-etrator rather than the victim. This was the charge of deicide – that is, the myth, widely cited by students, of Jews being responsible for the death of Christ. References appeared in a number of focus groups with students of various ages. Some younger students merely alluded to the legend: 'I think that it was that they [Christians] believed that the Jews killed Jesus or something like that' (Rachael, Year 10, LON6). Others, like Lara (Year 9, SE1), hinted at the consequences of this idea: 'Jews have always been picked on because Christians believed it was the Jewish people's fault that Jesus died on the cross. So basically everyone is blaming the Jews'.

A larger number of students who referenced deicide attempted to tie this to Hitler. A few, like Courtney (Year 9, LON5), did so by indicating that Hitler 'had his reasons because of the Bible, somewhere in the Bible it says that the Jewish people killed Jesus'. Meanwhile, Hamish (Year 9, SE1) offered a more insightful assessment. For him,

> Hitler was lucky in a way because Germany was quite a Christian country and … the Christians really blamed the Jewish people for the death of Jesus. Because there were so many Christians it wasn't hard to convince them to hate Jewish people.

This noteworthy instance of drawing on broader knowledge in the attempt to both contextualise Nazi persecution and offer some sort of long-term causal factor for it was echoed by one or two older students. However, some elemental misunderstandings remained evident, such as in the ideas expressed by Gian (Year 12, LON7), who said:

> There's also a religious aspect there, because most of the countries in Europe are Christian …

> so obviously the church played a large role, and because I suppose it was the Jews who killed Jesus there was a clash in religion and that meant they were convenient scapegoats for them.

Taken together, the survey and focus-group data indicates that religion – in the broadest sense – plays a very important role in shaping many students' understandings of 'Why the Jews?' It equally operates as an influential viewfinder through which a sizeable number of students perceive Nazi persecution and extermination. Although the notion of religious intolerance as a causal factor does lose currency as students get older, the endurance of this idea is nonetheless telling.

In theory, the awareness of many students that anti-Jewish hostility is related to religious doctrine could allow for nuanced understandings; it could direct students towards thinking in terms of long-term causal factors, considering what was distinctive about Nazi anti-Jewish sentiment and contemplating the multifaceted nature of anti-Jewish feeling in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s. However, findings from both survey and focus groups indicate that students rarely think along these lines.

## Antisemitism

So far, it has been demonstrated that students approached the question of 'Why the Jews?' by drawing on varying degrees on 'knowledge' about who 'the Jews' were: the number living in Germany, their social and economic situation, the beliefs they held. For each of these, this chapter has shown 'knowledge' to be inseparable from concepts and conceptual understanding. Moreover, the evidence has suggested that students do not often interrogate or reflect on the overarching ideas they hold.

Antisemitism is a key concept for any explanation of the Holocaust, and in particular the specifically virulent form of Nazi antisemitism. While on the surface this may appear obvious, it is made more complex by the complicated relationship between Nazi antisemitism, racial antisemitism more generally and the long history of Christian anti-Judaism, all of which coexisted in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s.

As Christian Wiese (2010: 167–8) notes, according to the 'classic' approach antisemitism is distinguished from anti-Judaism on account of the former's self-perceived objectivity and 'murderous hatred'. This distinction is not uncontested. Wiese writes:

> In today's historical research the term 'antisemitism' is frequently applied to all the periods and varieties of Jew-hatred, while distinguishing, say, 'religious', 'political' or 'racial' antisemitism. However, the clear

distinction between 'anti-Judaism' and 'antisemitism' is classic and widespread. It can claim that the term 'antisemitism', used as a self-description, did not appear till the second half of the nineteenth century. As is well known, the term was originally intended to indicate that the antisemites were not concerned with religious prejudice, or the conflict between Christians and Jews, but with the allegedly objective contrast between the 'Aryan' and the 'Semitic race'.

Wiese continues to outline how anti-Judaism has at times been framed as being fundamentally concerned with theology alone, as contrasted with antisemitism. He actually presses against such a neat separation, emphasising this sort of distinction is 'susceptible to the trivialization of religious Jew-hatred' and ignores the politics which also drove anti-Judaism. His aim (one of them) is to highlight what he calls the 'continuities and discontinuities' of 'Christian antisemitism and modern antisemitism. In this way, Wiese echoes the pioneering work of James Parkes, who differentiated anti-Jewish (Christian) hatred from (racial) antisemitism, but regarded the former as absolutely necessary to ensure the second succeeded with the Holocaust' (Parkes 1963).

Some scholars identify an underlying continuity of intolerance throughout history, or – as with Daniel Goldhagen – they conceptualise 'antisemitism as a deep pattern of behaviour and beliefs already established in the era of the French Revolution' (Eley, 2000: 5). Something of a 'third way' has been suggested by Saul Friedländer, with his perceptive concept of 'redemptive antisemitism'. For Friedländer (1997: 86-7), redemptive antisemitism shared presumptions of biological difference with late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century racial antisemitism, but also drew on 'a decidedly religious vision, that of a German (or Aryan) Christianity'. Infusing the two was a 'mythic dimension', founded on a presumed 'struggle' with Jewry, from which 'redemption would come as liberation from the Jews'.

There are consequently several different interpretations around whether the term 'antisemitism' should be used inclusively to refer to all forms of anti-Jewish thought and deed throughout history, or if it should be exclusively reserved to refer to manifestations of these in the modern, generally secular world. While the latter would uphold the underlying spirit of the term's original author Wilhelm Marr as he introduced it in his 1879 publication *The Victory of Jewry over Germandom*, Wiese (2010: 169) astutely warns that this risks ignoring 'the complex interplay' between theological, Christian anti-Judaism and the avowedly racial antisemitism of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In order to avoid any *impasse* in this regard, and to achieve optimum accessibility, the survey took a broad approach in defining antisemitism as 'prejudice against Jews'. To establish levels of student understanding, survey respondents were asked, 'What does "antisemitism" mean?' and requested to tick one answer from a possible five (survey question 25). From the total number of respondents, just 31.8 per cent selected the correct answer, 'Prejudice against Jews', suggesting that over two-thirds of the students who answered this question did not know the meaning of 'antisemitism'. When filtered by age, other notable findings emerged, as shown in Figure 5.9.

On the surface, this data indicates a relation between age and familiarity with the word 'antisemitism', yet closer inspection complicated this finding. It is, perhaps, understandable that few students in the youngest cohorts (Years 7 to 8) answered this question correctly, but the relatively low percentages in Years 9 to 11 are striking. One might assume that, as part of a programme of study on the Holocaust, students would encounter the term 'antisemitism' and become familiar with its meaning, but this is true of less than half of the 14 to 16 year olds who completed the survey, despite these students having theoretically learned about the subject. Although there is a sharp corrective to this trend in Years 12 to 13, this masks how only 25.9 per cent of all 11 to 16 year olds responded to this question correctly.

Substance was added to these statistics in focus-group interviews. Among younger students, the terms 'antisemitism' and 'antisemitic' were introduced or alluded to on a handful of occasions. When this occurred, students were asked to explain their understanding of these words, with varying results. Some struggled to recall or remember the words, while others, like Ian (Year 10, SE1), sought to piece together a vague response: 'I think it's just when you basically are against … maybe like other people, or a few people in particular just for being them'.

More frequently, students forwarded terse or generalised answers, but answers nonetheless centred on the Jews. Indicative here were: Imogen (Year 10, LON5), for whom antisemitism meant 'against Jews basically'; Hannah (Year 9, EE1), who framed antisemitism as 'hatred against Jews'; and Ariella (Year 9, LON6), who saw antisemitism as 'against Jews or for laws that are kind of discriminating against them'. Meanwhile, in a notable demonstration of the power of religious frames of reference, Ellie (Year 9, EE1) indicated that she understood the term to mean 'hatred for Judaism'.

Given the centrality of antisemitism both to

the Nazi 'world view' and the Holocaust, it was significant that the term was not used by more students. In this respect, the focus groups confirmed the survey findings that the word 'antisemitism' was absent from the lexicon of most 11 to 16 year olds, probably due to lack of understanding about the term's meaning. A more complex and complicated question, however, is whether this finding should be taken as evidence that younger students do not know or understand the history of anti-Jewish discrimination. A second, related question is how far unfamiliarity with the word 'antisemitism' reflects an uncertainty about the nature of Nazi prejudice.

Findings already outlined earlier in this Chapter are helpful in trying to answer the first of these. It has been noted, for instance, that in tracing the scapegoating of the Jews to events of the 1920s, a few students nodded in the direction of historical antecedents which made blaming 'easier' and more likely to succeed. Jews were 'easy targets' (Alice, Year 9, NE1); 'they have always been a scapegoat for problems' (Erin, Year 12, EE1); and so Hitler 'didn't just go round choosing random people; it was like a section, a group of people who he'd chosen as specific' (Hannah, Year 9, EE1).

Similarly, a large number of focus-group participants pointed to the existence of Christian hostility towards the Jews – what one student referred to as 'like a deep history of antisemitism' (Holly, Year 10 LON5) – with some grounding this in the charge of deicide. In these and other more ephemeral instances the interviews did provide evidence that 11 to 16 year olds had some varying levels of awareness that Jews had experienced animosity prior to the Nazi period. However, the depth of knowledge on which this consciousness rested was commonly shallow, as students appeared

unfamiliar with the history of Christian hatred of the Jews, the myths and misconceptions borne out of this and the relation of Jewish prejudice to broader historical developments.

Given this slight understanding it is unsurprising to find that younger students tended not to recognise antisemitism either as a substantive concept or as a particular form of anti-Jewish sentiment. Commonly unaware of what anti-Judaism looked like, its under-pinning rationale or its development within European history, most students do not 'know' that for many of those hostile to Jews, modernity saw the terms on which Jews were determined to be 'different' undergo substantive change. As a consequence, the notion of anti-Jewish prejudice rooted in ideas of race and biology is not something necessarily recognisable to the vast majority of students.

In some respects this is paradoxical. In nearly all focus groups reference was invariably made at some point to the Nazis (or, more commonly, to Hitler) being obsessed with people having 'blonde hair and blue eyes'. These allusions to the Aryan ideal were equally prominent in free-text responses made by students to the survey questions on describing the Holocaust and its victims. The 'racial paradigm' as a means of both understanding the Nazi regime and accounting for the victim groups was thus generally pervasive.

However, this finding sat alongside other indications that, when it came to the Jews, some students struggled to make the paradigm fit. This was true of the youngest students, but also occurred among the oldest too. Addressing the question of 'Why the Jews?', Charlotte (Year 8, LON5), who was yet to study the Holocaust in history, wondered, 'Is it because they did not have blonde hair, blue eyes that he [Hitler] mistreated them maybe?' At the

**Figure 5.9** Students in each year group who correctly identified the meaning of 'antisemitism' (percentage by year group)
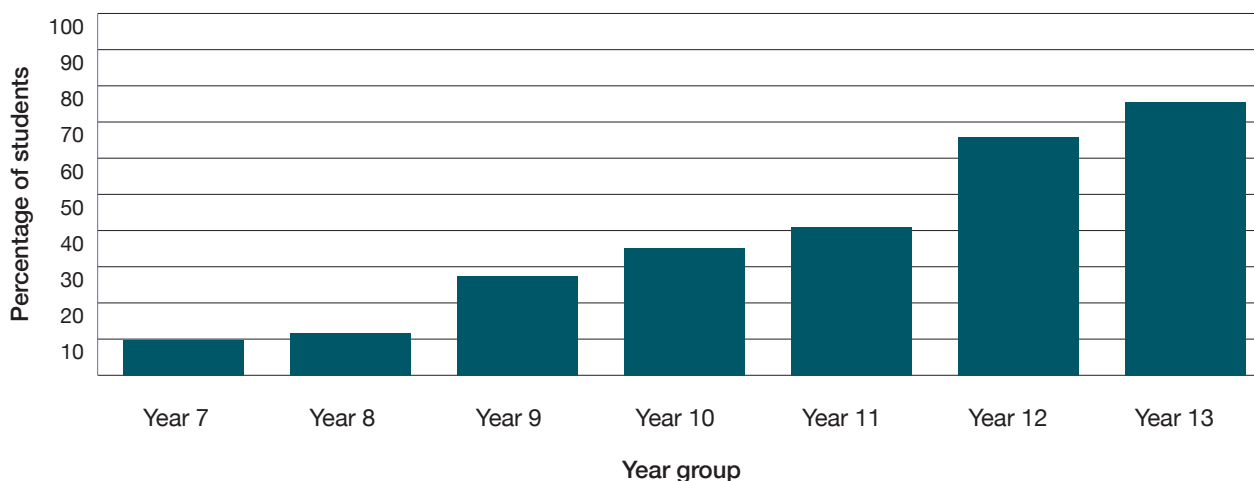
other end of the age spectrum, Jack (Year 12, EE1) said, 'Obviously they couldn't have been Aryan, you had to be like tall, blond hair, blue eyes, and broad shouldered', while Nikki (Year 13, EE1) was even more specific: the Aryan idyll 'was the perfect model and obviously Jews are naturally brunettes, dark eyes, dark hair'.

When these examples are placed alongside other findings, like insights into who the Jews were, questioning whether students really grasp the nature of Nazi antisemitism becomes more justified. Certainly a significant proportion of students seem acquainted with some of the objections and charges made against Jewry – accusations of overpopulation, inflated perceptions of wealth, the *Dolchstoss* – and a number of students hint at some sort of recognition that the Nazis were not the first to be hostile towards the Jews. Yet it is rare to find repeated evidence of students contemplating changes and continuities between medieval anti-Judaism and Nazi prejudice, or fully comprehending the distinctive contours of Nazi antisemitism.

In light of the substantially larger percentages of older students who correctly answered the survey question it is worth considering whether these observations can be extended to 16 to 18 year olds. In simple numerical terms 'antisemitism' did appear more often in these focus-group discussions, with students more generally assured in conversation. There was also widespread acknowledgement of a history of anti-Jewish animosity, with some students, like Gian (Year 12, LON7), explicitly noting 'a religious aspect' and the 'large role' played by the Church.

It was equally encouraging to find a number of these older students positioning Nazi antisemitism – or, rather, Hitler – in relation to these longer-term trends. Accordingly, Will (Year 12, LON7) noted that antisemitism 'doesn't just stem from Hitler's antisemitism' but was rather 'something that Hitler just latched onto'. Others echoed this sentiment and extended it. Aimee (Year 13, EE1), for instance, spoke of how 'Hitler played on such feelings that existed already, and sort of twisted and warped it to them being less of a race than other[s]'. Similarly, Jamie (Year 13, LON3) pointed to 'old views that were held, through much of Europe', with Hitler taking these 'one step further' by believing 'in an entire sort of global conspiracy'.

These were positive findings, suggestive of students more confident in their understanding of antisemitism as a substantive concept, conscious of its historical development, and – as symbolised in the latter two examples – able to identify characteristics specific to the Nazi/Hitlerite brand of antisemitism. Having said this, potential misconceptions and mis-understandings did not disappear completely among these older cohorts. Jamie (Year 13, LON3) in fact

demonstrated this when, in outlining the 'old views' developed by Hitler, he pointed to 'antisemitism of how Jewish people sort of keep wealth amongst themselves, and are very insular and things like that'.

It would be unfair to say that Jamie was agreeing or endorsing such ideas, but the issue of Jewish wealth and unjustified ideas about it was prominent in a number of discussions with older students. Paul (Year 12, LON7), for example, talked of how 'there's just always been a fear and disliking of Jews; they are blamed if something goes wrong it's their fault', before suggesting this was 'partly because of jealousy, because historically Jews are quite rich, have a lot of money'. Others spoke of 'that reputation for being stingy, for not spending' (Nikki, Year 13, EE1), of Jews being 'stereotypically much richer than other German people … always viewed as sort of separate and different' (Anton, Year 12, EE1). Still others referred to Jews as being 'seen as the people that had a lot of money' with 'never seen to have a homeland, they always seemed to be the foreigners in another country that wasn't where they came from originally' (Steve, Year 13, LON7).

As with similar remarks outlined in this chapter, it would be easy to seize upon these comments as 'proof' that students harboured unsavoury attitudes. Instead, they are best viewed as indicators of how key misconceptions are not necessarily dismissed with age and as compelling evidence of the need to further develop students' critical faculties.

While, in overview, we can say that older students are more secure in their knowledge and understanding of antisemitism, and – as a result – are in a better position to contemplate its role in the Holocaust, this does not always mean they were able to construct compelling and convincing explanations for 'Why the Jews?' Indeed, there was much to suggest that biological determinism and irrational, mythical hatred was in some cases seen by students to be of secondary importance behind more long-standing 'causes'. Tellingly these included a number of myths and misperceptions of who the Jews were.

## Hitler

By now it will be apparent that students' explanations for 'Why the Jews?' are shaped by more than content knowledge alone. For example, 'knowing' that there were far fewer Jews in Germany than was claimed or being aware that not all Jews were rich or religiously pious can only take a student so far in constructing a rounded explanatory account for why the Nazis specifically targeted the Jews. Likewise, consciousness of historical anti-Jewish prejudice may help a student recognise that antisemitism is 'historically embedded' (Short

and Read 2004: 76), but without an appreciation of how this animosity waxes and wanes, changes and develops, students are unlikely to grasp the particularities of Nazi antisemitism or to understand how it was possible for a continent to descend into genocide.

Historical knowledge alone cannot therefore help students explain the Holocaust. Students require conceptual understanding of second-order disciplinary concepts, such as causation, and of substantive concepts, like antisemitism, if they are to get beyond fragmented descriptions of the events and ideas that enabled the Holocaust to happen. It is only with this conceptual apparatus that students can become able to move from description to explanation. Some explanations are, of course, stronger than others. As Lee and Shemilt (2009: 42–9) have shown, explanations that are more rigorous and nuanced tend to take better account of links between causes, the contextual and conditional quality of human behaviour and the general contingent nature of human existence.

Improving the quality of students' explanations thus requires not just extended content knowledge, but the development of conceptual understanding. This has particular relevance for the question 'Why the Jews?' because, as this chapter has repeatedly shown, the majority of students work with concepts and conceptions that are either invalid or inadequate. Further demonstration of this came from students' positioning of Hitler as an explanatory factor for the Jewish experience specifically, and the victim groups more generally.

More will be said on this in Chapter 6, but the centrality of Hitler to students' understandings of why particular groups were targeted has been apparent throughout this chapter. In the case of each of the non-Jewish victim groups, for example, we've encountered strong evidence of students explaining and attributing policy to Hitler and Hitler alone. With regard to the Jewish experience this was no different.

In focus-group interviews with younger students, Hitler was repeatedly framed as the key causal factor in the persecution of the Jews. Attempting to account for Hitler's own personal hatred, the vast majority of students cited personal history. Many suggested his antisemitism was in some way related to his parents. This ranged from Kristy (Year 9, LON6), who wondered if 'like was his stepdad a Jew or something?', to Grace (Year 9, LON6) who thought 'his mum … kind of taught them, she kept saying "oh those Jews"'.

However, most students framed the familial connection in terms of Hitler's mother dying at the hands of a Jewish doctor. In its most rudimentary form this took the shape of the comment, 'Hitler was, like, annoyed at the doctor and that is why he

went out and killed all the Jewish people' (Allie, Year 9, NE1). Although this straight line was generally not so explicitly drawn by students, the notion that 'he blamed the Jewish doctors for allowing his mother to die' (Paul, Year 12, LON7) and that this had a bearing on his world view was one gestured to even by some at top end of the age range.

The tale of Klara Hitler's death in 1907, and the notion that Hitler levied blame at her Jewish physician Dr Bloch, is one with roots in popular history. There is no doubt his mother's death had a profound impact on Hitler, but the idea that this somehow contributed to the development of his antisemitism has no empirical foundation, nor was it an interpretation ever forwarded by him. That this common myth has such currency among students is revealing, but it was by no means the only personal narrative evident in the focus groups. At least as prominent were references to Hitler's failure to secure a place in art college. It was notable that many references to this disappointment were framed in a self-consciously speculative fashion, with students qualifying their remarks with 'I think that' or 'I've heard that'. Yet even the oldest students still gave some credence to the idea, for example Samad (Year 12, LON3), who remarked, 'I think he had a hatred for the Jews because he didn't get accepted into art college or something like that, and the art college was Jewish'.

Alongside the death of his mother and his aborted artistic ambitions, students invoked other supposed reasons for Hitler's antisemitism, including his experience of homelessness and having a Jewish person as a superior officer in the army. Even where students did not refer directly to any of these, there was still a palpable sense of trying to rationalise Hitler's 'personal hatred': 'maybe something happened with a Jewish person when he was younger and he just felt that every Jew was the same' (Annie, Year 10, NE1). According to Kristy (Year 9, LON6), this elusive negative experience prompted Hitler to project his trauma on to the Jews 'because, like, he suffered a lot in his life I think he wanted the Jews to actually suffer all that he had been through'.

The desire of students to establish the origins of Hitler's hatred of the Jews is an understandable and worthy endeavour. But it should be seen in conjunction with the impulse of many to perceive the persecution and murder of the Jews through Hitler's thoughts and deeds. Since this is addressed further in Chapter 6 it is enough to say here that this tendency reveals 'common-sense conceptions of intentional action' among students. This in turn leads to understandings of causation that are simply 'agency-based' (Howson and Shemilt 2011: 81), where the answer to 'Why the Jews?' is reduced

to a single cause: Hitler.

Such a monocausal explanation is, of course, not shared by all – but iterations of it do appear to be held by many. Aside from how it constitutes an impoverished explanatory account, the notion that Hitler alone explains 'Why the Jews?' both reflects the state of students' knowledge and understanding, and also has a negative impact on them. It encourages students to engage in teleology, to decontextualise Hitler and his antisemitism from the rest of European history, making it possible for Tom (Year 10, NE1) to suggest, 'I don't think anyone knows where Hitler got his ideas of being against Jewish people from'.

It also opens up a murky space where students attempt to rationalise Hitler and his deeds, with mixed results. Out of this exercise, Juliette (Year 9, LON5) reassuringly concludes that 'Hitler had his reasons and we have to respect that that was how he was brought up to live', and Amanda (Year 9, LON6) emphasises, 'He is only human, like people make mistakes, it is just that the extent of his mistake was just a lot bigger than the rest'.

### Why the Jews? – Concluding remarks

This section has outlined the many ways in which students engage and wrestle with the question of 'Why the Jews?' It has been shown that student approaches reflect and reveal levels of historical knowledge and understanding as well as conceptual frameworks. The latter are immensely influential, for they help 'students to contextualise, organise and evaluate' (Howson and Shemilt 2011: 73) their substantive knowledge and so construct explanatory accounts.

Contrary to the pilot studies mentioned at the start of this section, it was found (especially in interview) that most students were not necessarily paralysed by the question 'Why the Jews?' – they could and did offer answers to it. However, the extent of responses, not to mention their rigour, was often found to be wanting. Rather than forward secure and developed accounts which took into consideration a selection of causal factors, students were prone to gesturing in a fragmented fashion towards ideas about who the Jews were or accusations levied against them. Often, there was a lack of reflection or reflexivity as to how these notions were framed, with students describing common myths and misconceptions in ways which made it unclear as to how far they knew of their invalidity.

A headline finding was student ignorance of 'antisemitism' as a term or substantive concept. While there was awareness that Jews had been subjected to prejudice and discrimination at other times in history, students rarely framed this as a long-term 'cause' of the Holocaust. Nor did most students show familiarity with the historical development of anti-Jewish sentiment or the relationship between anti-Judaism and racial antisemitism. This was apparent not just in discussion of antisemitism, but also in the ways that students tried to account for Hitler's personal hatred. On this, the majority of students seemed unaware of how Hitler's views related to his historical context.

## Summary

- The majority of students identify Jews as victims of 'the Holocaust'. With age, students become more likely to include other groups alongside Jews as Holocaust victims. This suggests students' conception of 'the Holocaust' is not fixed and immutable, but fluid, dynamic and malleable. However, in running counter to conventional definitions (see Chapter 1), the trend towards broad, inclusive notions of 'who were the victims' of the Holocaust is inherently problematic.
- Homosexuals are the group most likely to be included by students when they extend their definition of Holocaust victims. Many incorrectly believe homosexuals were subjected to a programme of systematic, organised extermination.
- Disabled people are the second non-Jewish victim group included by students in broadened definitions of Holocaust victims. Paradoxically, student knowledge and understanding of the disabled experience is severely lacking.
- Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) are the third non-Jewish group students see as victims of the Holocaust. Students are, in the main, completely unfamiliar with the fate of the Roma and Sinti.
- Students of all ages have broad awareness that a variety of victim groups were targeted by the Nazi regime and their collaborators. Jews, homosexuals, disabled people and – to a lesser extent – Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) appear at the forefront of students' consciousness. Other groups including Jehovah's Witnesses, Poles, Slavs and Russian Prisoners of War are familiar to only some students.
- There is considerable ambiguity around and uncertainty about the precise policies enacted against victim groups and each group's experience. More is 'known' about the experience of some groups compared to others, and older students tend to demonstrate greater breadth of knowledge and understanding. In general, though,

many students cannot talk with confidence about the particularities of each group's experience.

■ What students present as knowledge is often the product of assumption and/or deduction, with guesswork sometimes employed as well. As a result, what students think happened to each victim group is usually not commensurate with historical reality. For example, most students believe the victim groups ultimately shared a common fate, namely death.

■ When attempting to explain the reasons why victim groups were targeted, students tend to invoke notions of 'difference'. Difference is understood to take various forms, but 'Aryan' and religious paradigms tend to dominate. As students try to fit victim groups into one of these, they often run into explanatory difficulties.

■ Students do demonstrate awareness that there were distinctive dimensions to the Jewish experience, although there is confusion around just what this was. For instance, most students (70.7 per cent) indicated in their survey responses that Jews 'were the first victims of the Nazis' mass murder programme', while only 14.4 per cent recognised this was in fact true of disabled people not the Jews. Similarly, a large majority of students (86.6 per cent) correctly noted the intended totality of Nazi anti-Jewish policy – that the Nazis planned to kill every last person from this group, wherever they could reach them. However, just under a third intimated that this also applied to homosexuals, and over a quarter believed it to be true for disabled people as well.

■ Students also struggle to articulate the particularities of the Jewish experience. Since most believe all victim groups were killed *en masse*, many students do not see the scale of death experienced by European Jewry to be a primary point of distinction. This is related to substantive knowledge as well: the survey indicated that a large swathe of students do not realise the extent of killing enacted against the Jews. While a majority (53.2 per cent) correctly indicated that around 6 million Jews were murdered, a notable proportion of these expressed a lack of certainty about their answer. Furthermore, over a third of other students dramatically underestimated the number of Jews who died. Younger students (up to and including Year 9) were the most likely to do this; older students by contrast were more familiar with the figure of 6 million.

■ In trying to identify what was specific about the Jewish experience, younger students are likely to gesture towards Jews as having a greater aggregate of 'bad' or unpleasant experiences, or to the strength of anti-Jewish feeling being higher than that felt towards other victim groups. Older students, principally those in Years 12 and 13, point instead to the regime's fixation with Jewry and tend to characterise the Jewish experience with reference to 'extermination'.

■ The use of Jews as scapegoats tends to be highlighted by many students as something which set the Jewish experience apart from other victim groups. In describing some of the ways in which Jews were subjected to scapegoating, many students show themselves to be familiar with the charge of *Dolchstoss* – the 'stab-in-the-back' myth – made against the Jews in the aftermath of the First World War.

■ Many students demonstrate awareness that Jews were blamed for the economic turmoil of the 1920s and 1930s. In describing this process, a significant number of students displayed a tendency to offer stereotypes and rehearse misconceptions in distinctly uncritical ways.

■ Generally speaking, students are able to offer explanations for why the Jews were targeted by the regime, but the quality of these accounts is far from ideal: they frequently lack depth and nuance, and invariably fail to note the multiplicity of causal factors.

■ In accounting for 'Why the Jews?', students draw on their knowledge and understanding of 'who the Jews were'. However, many were found to have skewed, distorted or plain incorrect ideas about how many Jews lived in Germany, about their socioeconomic status and their personal beliefs.

■ Findings from both the survey and the focus groups indicated that a large number of students understand Jews and Jewishness in religious terms, with Nazi persecution of the Jews seen as an exercise in religious intolerance. This is related to a discernible lack of student understanding of antisemitism – either as a substantive concept or as a particular form of Jewish hatred within Nazi ideology.

- While many students had some consciousness of the longevity of anti-Jewish sentiment in history, few had any sense of how this related, compared and contrasted with Nazi antisemitism. As a result, the distinctive characteristics of Nazi antisemitism are not grasped by most students.
- Student explanations for 'Why the Jews?' displayed (and are undermined by) not only insufficient levels of substantive knowledge, but also underdeveloped conceptual understanding. Students tend to hold flawed ideas of causation, as is captured by the positioning of Hitler as the primary reason for the murder of the Jews.

# 6.

## Who were the perpetrators and who was responsible?

### Key questions

1. Why should students know about who the perpetrators were and who was responsible?
2. What do students know about key individuals and organisations?
3. What do students know and understand about the role and responsibility of Hitler in the Holocaust?
4. How do students conceive of 'the Nazis'? What role and responsibility do students ascribe to them?
5. What do students know about the actions and reactions of the German people to the Holocaust? How do they explain these actions and reactions?[1]

### Key findings

1. Very few students exhibited knowledge of the role played in the Holocaust by collaborating regimes (such as the Vichy government), Axis allies or local populations across Europe.
2. Students' recognition and knowledge of leading Nazi agencies (e.g. the SS) and individuals (e.g. Eichmann) was limited, although this improved with age.
3. More than half (56.1 per cent) of younger students (Years 7 to 9) believed that the Holocaust was solely attributable to Adolf Hitler.
4. Many students referred to the Nazis as an elite paramilitary group loyal to Hitler. Very few students appreciated that the Nazi party enjoyed significant, broad-based support across all sectors of the German population.
5. With age, students increasingly appreciated that the Nazis and key Nazi leaders played a significant role in the Holocaust.
6. Most students believed that the German people supported Hitler and his actions because they were 'brainwashed', 'scared' or they 'did not know' about the Holocaust.
7. Only a small number of students considered if the German people were complicit in, or responsible for, the persecution and mass murder of Jews and other victim groups.

### Why should students know about who the perpetrators were and who was responsible?

The primary focus of this chapter is to explore and illustrate secondary students' knowledge and understanding of two fundamental questions. First, who do students believe were the perpetrators of the Holocaust? And, second, who do students believe was responsible for the Holocaust?

Regarding the first of these, the focus here is on students' knowledge and understanding of significant individuals and agents – their attitudes, actions and role in the initiation, decision-making and enactment of persecutory and exterminatory policies. These persons are loosely collected under the banner of 'perpetrators'. As to the second question, the primary focus is on how students translate their knowledge and understanding of individuals' and

groups' behaviour into assessment of responsibility.

The term 'perpetrator' is not neutral. Over the last generation it has become a central component in the tripartite division of the world of the Holocaust into perpetrators, victims and bystanders (Hilberg 1993) – all of which come with an array of connotations. Each of these terms are enwrapped with political, philosophical and legal dimensions, and charged with moral and ethical urgency. Moreover, their

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[1] The term 'the German people' is problematic - it overlooks the fact that some of the 'German people' were Jewish, as well as the differentiation in the beliefs, attitudes and actions of the non-Jewish German majority. Some directly carried out the crimes of the Nazis or actively supported them; a small number rescued their Jewish neighbours; many more were passive. So when we discuss the 'complicity' of 'the German people' we speak in generalisations. It is important to state that we do not mean each and every individual living in Germany but rather the complicity of society; and while individuals who were passive should not be viewed uncritically, we of course do not regard them as bearing equal responsibility as those who actively participated.

employment as a means of categorisation presses against the reality that human behaviours do not lend themselves to static templates applied retrospectively with the benefits of hindsight. Eschewing historical complexity in order to fit people into delineated and distinct categories potentially has severe repercussions for historical understanding.

Advances in scholarship over the last quarter of a century together with a 'flood of revelations' around Allied knowledge and widespread 'economic collusion' has brought an 'erosion of [the] pre-existing conceptual partitions' of perpetrator-victim-bystander (Cesarani and Levine 2002: 2). Meanwhile, for a number of years some educationalists have emphasised the need for teachers and students to 'assiduously avoid accepting stereotypical views regarding the motives and actions of individuals and groups' (Totten 2002: 105).

Yet these developments have not necessarily filtered down into popular consciousness nor found their way into many classrooms. Instead, in much cultural representation, memorial work and educational activity, 'the seeming moral clarity of the Holocaust' – both in terms of 'its overarching wrongness' and 'the clarity of its actors' roles' – is commonly upheld and perpetuated (Schweber and Findling 2007: 2).

There is, therefore, a strong case and urgent need to problematise the categories that are commonly employed to order and organise individuals and groups involved in the Holocaust. At a fundamental level this requires knowledge of 'what people did' and contextual understanding of the possible reasons for their behaviour. In terms of perpetration, developments in knowledge and understanding of the agents of genocide continue apace, having passed through various stages since the end of the Second World War. In the process, perspectives have changed from 'early images of habitual murderers and social outcasts' to now 'encompass a range of people, functions, actions, and motives'. As a result, 'the blurred, monochrome picture of earlier decades with Himmler's black elite as its most prominent feature has been replaced by a multi-coloured, complex, but no less depressing mosaic' (Matthäus 2008: 327) where hardened, fanatical Nazis sit alongside 'ordinary' men and women from all walks of life.

This development has not been restricted to knowledge of German perpetrators. As long ago as 1987, Michael Marrus – in his imperious survey of secondary literature – emphasised that 'the Nazis were heavily dependent on foreign help in carrying out the declared purpose of the "Final Solution"' (Marrus 1987: 56), and in the years since, further research has only served to underline the point.

While the importance of 'collaborators' to the enactment of the Holocaust has never been in doubt, the lines separating collaboration from perpetration have become even more blurred with greater knowledge of how events unfolded on the ground, and many of those previously assumed to be mere 'bystanders' are now recognised to have been accomplices to genocide. The spate of regional and nation-specific studies to emerge since the 1990s has been considerably influential in this regard. It has opened up, for example, new debates over the relationship between the 'centre' and the 'periphery' in the formulation and implementation of anti-Jewish policy. In this way, perpetrator research has not just shed light on the behaviour of individuals and groups; it has also added sophistication to long-standing debates over the decision-making process and dynamics of continental genocide.

Cumulatively, these advances have produced a 'wealth of detail' which makes it 'almost impossible to make any sort of general statements about perpetrators, so varied and heterogeneous do they appear' (Stone 2010: 96). While there remains much work to be done (Matthäus 2008: 337), the weight of evidence suggests that students need to 'understand the concept of the Holocaust perpetrator as a collage, rather than a uniform image claiming universal validity' (Windham 2009: 57). This subtlety of understanding requires, therefore, a broad knowledge and understanding of the range of individuals and agencies involved in the genocide.

As a starting point, students should be familiar with major figures like Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler, Josef Goebbels and Reinhard Heydrich. Deeper understanding might also be enhanced by knowledge of a potentially much larger cadre of key lieutenants such as Odilo Globocnik, Christian Wirth, the *Einsatzgruppen* commanders and the commandants of the principal death camps. The ideological fervour of these and others was the central dynamo in driving events, so it follows that not knowing about such individuals might severely limit understanding.

At another level, students should acquire knowledge of the role played by the Nazi Party as well as key organisations, like the SS. As the political vehicle for people like Hitler, Himmler and others, the National Socialist German Workers' Party was indispensable in securing access to the organs of the state and its resources – elemental components of genocide. Meanwhile, since the actual act of mass murder requires willing and able personnel, students need to appreciate the nature of the SS as the ideological well of Nazism and its core function as a recruitment pool for those willing to commit genocide. Furthermore, it is arguable that students' core knowledge should also include the crucial role played by other, theoretically non-political entities,

such as the Wehrmacht (the German army), the police force and the German bureaucracy more generally. If taken to mean 'people who played a specific role in the formulation or implementation of anti-Jewish measures' (Hilberg 1993: ix), then of course not all Holocaust perpetrators were German. Indeed, one of the telling outcomes of recent research has been the expansion of 'the community of perpetrators' (Lawson 2010: 163) which now spans a host of countries. The most spectacular and visceral examples of non-German perpetration are to be found throughout the 'bloodlands' of Central and Eastern Europe (Snyder 2010). Here, in places like the Baltic States, local populations were not only important in facilitating genocide, but were themselves keen participants.

On a larger scale, research has uncovered various instances where 'local participation went beyond engaging in a German-led project'; on this Dan Stone (2010: 32) has identified Slovakia, Croatia and Romania as examples of 'indigenous Holocausts' – a notion by no means limited to 'the East', but which can very much be extended westwards as well.

Taking 'perpetrators' simply at face value, it is clear to see there are a great many individuals and organisations that students could – and arguably, should – 'know about'. To this has to be added a much larger swathe of people across Europe whose actions and behaviour were instrumental in the successful implementation of the Holocaust. Traditionally, this multinational cohort of hundreds of thousands is crudely divided up between the categories of 'collaborators' and 'bystanders' – although what distinguishes these two from each other, or from the 'perpetrator' grouping, is frequently unclear. This traditional and potentially inappropriate division of roles requires critical examination, not least because it can inhibit students' understanding of complicity, culpability and responsibility.

Given the passing of the perpetrators – for none but a tiny handful are likely still to be alive – determining who was responsible for the Holocaust for the purposes of punishment and retribution will lamentably only have increasingly limited practical outcomes. Whether or not there are moral and ethical imperatives for doing so is another matter, and one not beyond the comprehension of young people.

This aside, there remain other compelling arguments for why students should consider questions of responsibility that arise from the Holocaust. On one level, there is the need for students to contemplate responsibility in the pursuit of historical understanding: determining who did what, why, and the consequences of these actions is essential if students are to comprehend how the Holocaust happened. It is also paramount in developing students' more general understanding of the relationship between the individual and the collective. On another, much broader level, many of the objectives of much Holocaust remembrance and education – preventing the repetition of genocide, encouraging tolerance, and the like – cannot hope to be realised if students do not have an understanding of how agency relates to accountability and responsibility.

The question of who was responsible for the Holocaust necessarily draws on substantive knowledge and understanding of what happened – where, when, and why. It follows then that, where one or more of these facets is missing or underdeveloped, understandings of responsibility will be less refined and sophisticated. Yet the question of responsibility also requires students to go beyond 'conventional treatments of the Holocaust' which 'emphasize a three-dimensional analysis that concentrates on perpetrators, victims, and bystanders' (Hayes and Roth 2012: 3). Students should come to recognise the complexities of behaviours during the Holocaust and their contextual nature, and contemplate the forces and motivations which informed (or determined) the choices people made. This is particularly necessary in the case of the perpetrators where, in much memorial and educational work, 'the dead end of demonizing' (Schilling 1996: 199) tends still to hold sway.

In the analysis that follows readers will notice a fundamental incongruity between the rationale presented here and the subsequently narrow focus on Hitler, the Nazis and the German people. While this may appear contradictory, the structure actually reflects the student responses encountered in schools. This is particularly true of the focus-group interviews in which students were asked directly about perpetration and responsibility. On these questions there was an overwhelming tendency to centre responses exclusively on these three 'agents' (i.e. on Hitler, the Nazis and the German people). By contrast, references to the brutal actions of local people, fascist paramilitary organisations and other collaborationist regimes in the Axis (e.g. in Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Bulgaria, and Vichy France) were conspicuous by their absence.

There are various possible explanations for this, but two are of particular note. First, it seems likely this gap in student knowledge is at least partly the result of teaching practices, and potentially also a reflection of trends within Britain's Holocaust culture. Second, and related to these, is how knowledge of perpetration relates to students' understanding about 'where' the Holocaust happened, a topic discussed in greater depth in Chapter 7.

## What do students know about key individuals and organisations?

Respondents to the survey were not asked to name perpetrators or to describe what a perpetrator was. As outlined in Chapter 3, it was possible to glean a sense of students' general knowledge through responses to question 31 of the survey. Here, students were presented with the names of some notable individuals and organisations who might be described or understood as perpetrators. Students were then asked to indicate whether or not these person(s) were connected with the Holocaust or, if unsure, to mark 'don't know'.

One individual named in this list was Adolf Eichmann – the SS Lieutenant Colonel whose trial in the 1960s famously spawned the notion of the 'banality of evil', and the man who has come to be seen in popular culture as 'a metonym for the entire history of the Nazi persecution and mass murder of the Jews as well as its legacy' (Cesarani 2005: 1).

But the extent to which this characterisation is wholly justified has been questioned. Eichmann was, fundamentally, not part of the Nazi leadership elite, he certainly played no part in the decision-making process which led to continental genocide and he had little direct influence over policy. Nevertheless, he did have agency and, through his work on emigration and deportation, became a significant 'manager of genocide' (Cesarani 2005: 12). So, in the context of behaviours during the Holocaust there is no doubt that Eichmann falls under the category of a 'perpetrator' – and, within that, one who raises elemental questions around motive, intent and responsibility.

**Figure 6.1** Percentage of students who responded 'yes', 'no' and 'don't know' when asked if the name Adolf Eichmann was connected to the Holocaust (survey question 31)



Percentage of students

■ Yes  ■ No  ■ Don't know
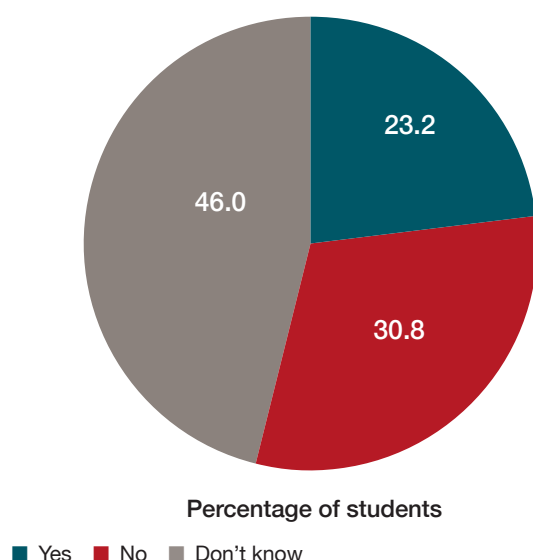
In response to the question of whether or not Eichmann had a connection to the Holocaust, students responded as follows: of all respondents, 23.2 per cent indicated that Eichmann did have a connection with the Holocaust, 30.8 per cent said he did not and 46 per cent marked 'don't know'. When broken down by age, there were similarities in responses of students from Years 8 to 12 (among whom approximately 20 per cent thought that Eichmann was connected to the Holocaust), before the proportion leapt to 40.9 per cent in Year 13.

With the exception of those in Year 13, the majority of students simply did not know if Eichmann and the Holocaust were linked. These survey results were mirrored in focus-group interviews. Among younger students (11 to 16 year olds), Eichmann was not referred to by a single student during interview. Discussions with students in Years 12 and 13, however, included reference to Eichmann on a couple of occasions; indeed, in one such instance, a student in fact credited him with 'coming up with the "Final Solution"' (Phil, Year 12, LON7), while another suggested that 'he got the title of the architect of the Holocaust because … he kind of drew up these plans for mass deportations' (Jeremy, Year 12, LON7).

Such remarks are clearly of note. They indicate that some students associated Eichmann with the Holocaust and also illustrate the level of their knowledge and understanding. Yet these instances were very much the exception to a rule: in the main, both the survey and the focus-groups depicted Eichmann as a figure generally unfamiliar to students. The same can be said of another individual referenced in a few focus groups, Heinrich Himmler. Himmler was Head of the SS, Chief of the German Police and the man whom Peter Longerich (2012: 571) positions at the very centre of the transition to 'the Europe-wide extermination programme' in 1942.

Among discussions with younger students (11 to 16 years old) there were only rare instances where Himmler was named or alluded to. On one of these, Fahima (Year 10, LON5), who was unable to recall his name precisely – described the SS leader as 'the real perpetrator'. On another occasion, Lachlan (Year 10, EE1) asserted that Himmler 'was, I think, more forward for it or more jumpy at the "Final Solution" than Hitler was perhaps. I think he had more of a drive in it than Hitler'. With older students (Years 12 to 13), Himmler appeared a few more times, usually again with remark on his relation to the Holocaust. Of note here was Jamie (Year 13, LON3), who commented, 'I believe he was in charge of the extermination camps, as opposed to Hitler, Hitler was sort of the guy who conjured the idea'.

However simplistic these explanations appear, and leaving to one side their historical imprecision,

they correctly pointed to the instrumental role that Himmler came to occupy in the development of anti-Jewish policy. In this sense, these students' responses implied an appreciation of Himmler as the 'architect of genocide' (Breitman 1991) – insights that went beyond simply connecting a name to an event, and into the realm of assessing role and significance. There is much to suggest that, in the roster of key figures related to the Holocaust, Himmler's importance was second only to Hitler; after all, Himmler 'eventually succeeded in either gaining control of or co-ordinating virtually every institution involved in both racial policy and organised terror' (Burleigh and Wippermann 1991: 59). With that in mind, while the students who referred to him in interview deserve merit, it is potentially problematic that he was not cited by students more frequently.

A similar conclusion could be drawn about students' knowledge and understanding of the organisation headed by Himmler – the SS. The SS were also listed as part of survey question 31, with students' responding as shown in Figure 6.2.

Of those who responded to the question, 44.4 per cent of all students believed there was a connection, with 39.3 per cent indicating their uncertainty. Significantly, the likelihood of students answering correctly increased exponentially with age. Whereas just over a quarter of Year 8 students (12 to 13 year olds) made the link, this doubled with Year 10 students (14 to 15 year olds) and grew again to over two-thirds of students in Year 11 (15 to 16 year olds). Although uncertainty did correspondingly decline, over a fifth of Year 11 students remained unsure of the SS and its association with the Holocaust.

**Figure 6.2** Percentage of students who responded 'yes', 'no' and 'don't know' when asked if the SS were connected to the Holocaust (survey question 31)



Percentage of students

■ Yes  ■ No  ■ Don't know
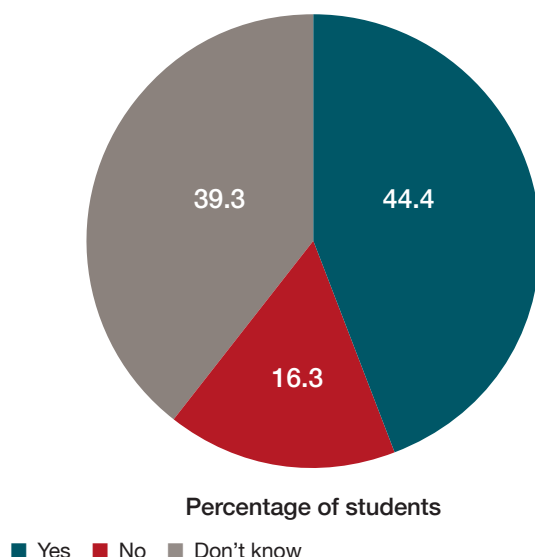
The SS was mentioned sporadically in focus groups with younger students. When reference was made, it mainly took the form of just naming the group without providing any further detail. Some students demonstrated slightly more knowledge: Elliot (Year 9, EE1), for example, described the SS as Hitler's 'elite minions', while Anthony (Year 9, SE1) indicated 'it wasn't Hitler that thought of it [the Holocaust] before the SS'. Yet only once did a student explicitly tie the SS to acts of murder, and even then with a qualifying admission of uncertainty: 'I think they were the ones killing everyone,' said Rachael (Year 10, LON6), 'killing all the Jews. I can't remember'.

Older students (Years 12 and 13) generally proved more proficient in describing the multifunctional nature of the SS, identifying various roles performed by the organisation. In this vein they were described as 'the guards in the concentration camps who obviously did most of the persecution in the name of Hitler' (Mike, Year 12, LON7) and members of the *Einsatzgruppen* (Simon, Year 13, LON7); they were 'in control of the chambers' (Jack, Year 12, EE1) or 'ran the camps' and 'were there' – that is, in German society – 'to instil fear in people' (Joe, Year 12, EE1). They were also 'Hitler's kind of personal army' (Damien, Year 12, LON3). While implicit in all these responses was the sense of the SS having a crucial relation to the Holocaust, not all students were as explicit as Jeremy (Year 12, LON7) who asserted 'they were quite pivotal'.

As the 'Nazi vanguard' (Bloxham 2009: 162) which provided bureaucratic administration, oversight of the running of the camp system and personnel to carry out the killing, it is hard to overstate just how essential the SS were to the Holocaust. Furthermore, since key organs of the state like the police force and intelligence services came to be brought under the authority of the SS, knowledge and understanding of the organisation carries potentially productive lines of enquiry around issues related to responsibility and culpability. For all of these reasons students' limited knowledge of the SS is a cause for concern, and should arguably prompt consideration of how students' awareness and understanding might be expanded.

In a similar vein, student recognition of another collective integral to the Holocaust – the *Einsatzgruppen* – was also limited. As noted in Chapter 5, these mobile killing units were given open-ended instructions to operate behind the front line, removing those regarded as political and military opponents – now, or in the future. Quickly, the routine of rounding up Jewish men was extended to include all Jews found in cities, towns and villages. The modus operandi of these killers saw men, women

and children executed close to their homes through mass shooting. In certain areas mobile gas vans, developed during the 'euthanasia' programme, were also employed. In the main, however, killing was conducted at close quarters, leading in effect to a 'Holocaust by bullets' (Desbois 2008). Essential to this operation was logistical support provided by the German army and the cooperation of local populations – the latter of whom would, on occasions, brutally massacre their Jewish neighbours with little or no prompting.

The number of people killed by the *Einsatzgruppen* is estimated to have been more than 1.5 million. This phenomenal scale of killing raises a plethora of questions about who the perpetrators were and how they were able to complete their grim work. Numbering only 3,000 at its height, the *Einsatzgruppen* comprised four groups, sub-divided into smaller commandos. The four leaders of the *Einsatzgruppen* were all intellectuals, hand-picked for the job by Heydrich and Himmler. Many of the officers below these men were also highly educated, with years of loyal service in the SS and security police. The bulk of *Einsatzgruppen* personnel were drawn from various sources within the SS.

Over time, these units were supplemented and supported by battalions of regular uniformed police officers. Among these were 21 battalions of Order Police – 'a manpower pool of some 11,000 men' (Browning 2004: 229) – who since the outbreak of war had been 'transferred to the occupied territories, charged with the task of pacifying

their locale' (Lawson, 2010: 194). Crucially these were not ideological fanatics, but rather 'ordinary men' (Browning 1992). This insight, together with Christopher Browning's findings that these men wilfully participated in killing out of peer-pressure and self-interest more than ideology or bestiality, evidently has much to contribute in developing students' thinking on agency and accountability.

While the men of the *Einsatzgruppen* were undeniably 'perpetrators', their involvement in the Holocaust was fundamentally of a different nature to the likes of Eichmann and Himmler. In turn, the questions they raise – particularly in terms of role and responsibility – are not necessarily the same as bureaucrats and leading policymakers. Exploring these with students clearly opens up numerous teaching and learning opportunities, but such an exercise requires knowledge of the *Einsatzgruppen* in the first place. On this, the results of student responses to survey question 31, shown in Figure 6.3, are extremely revealing.

The majority response of 'don't know' (59.1 per cent) speaks plainly of a chasm in student knowledge, although it was evident that the number of students who did link the Holocaust and the *Einsatzgruppen* generally grew year-on-year from a low of 13.1 per cent in Year 7. That said, by Year 10 this was still less than a quarter of students (24.4 per cent) and it was not until Year 13 that the majority (51 per cent) correctly linked the *Einsatzgruppen* to the Holocaust.

During focus-group interviews with 11 to 16 year olds, reference to the *Einsatzgruppen* was strikingly absent. Only once did a student use the term correctly, indicating that these were 'death squads', but not making further remark on what they actually did (Allie, Year 9, NE1). A handful of others did refer to or motion towards mass shootings, but with a distinct sense of uncertainty and noticeable absence of detail. Illustrative here is the following exchange among a group of Year 10 students (NE1):

> **Sarah:** But didn't they shoot Jews, like before they gassed them they shot them and they ended up in mass graves because they just shot them dead.
> **Tom:** Then Hitler decided that that wasn't very efficient, it was using up too many bullets and therefore they decided to make it cheaper which is…
> **Sarah:** More efficient.
> **Tom:** Yes, which is more efficient because, but that is even worse because he didn't really care about how the people died, he just wanted to make sure that they died.

Of note, this same interview also saw Annie (Year 10, NE1) talk of 'a process of the killing stages',

**Figure 6.3** Percentage of students who responded 'yes', 'no' and 'don't know' when asked if the *Einsatzgruppen* were connected to the Holocaust (survey question 31)



Percentage of students

■ Yes  ■ No  ■ Don't know
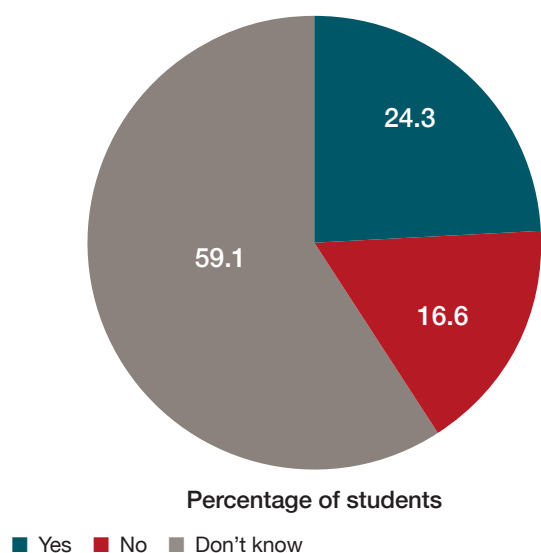
explaining that when 'not as many people [were] dying [in the ghettos] as they would like … then they started shooting them'. However rudimentary, as an attempt to place mass shooting with some sort of a sequence and begin to think about causation, this is a commendable start. But it was very much an isolated incident. In the main many younger students simply did not show awareness of mass shooting being a mode of killing, let alone a phase in the history of the genocide.

Older students typically displayed a greater level of familiarity with the *Einsatzgruppen* and their actions. Levels of depth and detail did vary at times: at base, there were those students like Amelia (Year 13, EE1) who spoke of 'death squads that were sent to Eastern Europe and they'd just round Jews up and shoot them'. A more advanced account saw the introduction of time and place, as with the student who commented, 'They invaded Russia, they had specific groups of people who'd go off and just shoot Jews, just to kill them' (Paul, Year 13, EE1). Further still were those students who explicitly used the term *Einsatzgruppen*, and – like the following (exceptional) student – reflected on the significance of these actions:

> the *Einsatzgruppen*, who were the SS soldiers who followed behind the main German advance going into Russia, rounding up prisoners at war but also specifically tasked with looking for Jews to just shoot them, and I think incorporating that into an offensive in a battle shows just how seriously the Nazis took exterminating the Jews (Simon, Year 13, LON7).

Examples like these are evidently impressive and at the higher end of student responses, but they are excellent illustrations of how broad and deep knowledge and understanding is crucial for students to be able to advance more sophisticated historical accounts. In general, levels of knowledge and understanding of the *Einsatzgruppen* were more robust among students in Years 12 and 13 than those held by younger students. However, it is salient that when older students were asked to estimate the scale of killing enacted by the death squads, responses fell dramatically below historical actuality: an estimate of 'thousands, at least, hundreds of thousands maybe' (Amelia, Year 13, EE1) was the closest a student came to the reality.

The above findings into students' knowledge of Eichmann, Himmler, the SS and the *Einsatzgruppen* suggest that students in general have a very limited awareness of key individuals and agencies of the Nazi state. While it is evident that some students have heard of a few or all of these individuals and groups, this is certainly not the case for the vast majority. This raises the issue of who students do associate with the perpetration of the Holocaust. The answer for many students, was simply Adolf Hitler. Indeed this Hitler-centric focus on the Holocaust was revealed in numerous contexts.

To begin with, as Figure 6.4 demonstrates, overwhelming numbers of students did associate Hitler with the Holocaust. As can be seen, 91.4 per cent of all students associated Hitler with the Holocaust, with 6.3 per cent uncertain. Among the youngest students (Years 7 to 8) this percentage of 'don't knows' was higher – registering at 12.5 per cent and 9.5 per cent, respectively. That said, over 80 per cent of these students still answered 'yes', and between Year 9 to Year 13 percentages only grew, from 92.7 per cent to 97.4 per cent. Students' explicit focus on Hitler and assertion of his centrality in the Holocaust was in keeping with findings already presented in this report. For example, as outlined in Chapter 3 Hitler figured prominently in students' conceptions and descriptions of the Holocaust. Similarly, responses to survey question 35, in which students were asked to identify specific images, revealed that 97.6 per cent of students identified a photograph of Adolf Hitler.

Students' widespread recognition of Hitler's role in the Holocaust is perhaps of little surprise. However, when these findings are juxtaposed against the absent knowledge of key agents like Eichmann and the *Einsatzgruppen*, then it is legitimate to consider why students appear to know so much about Hitler and so little about other key individuals and organisations. It

**Figure 6.4** Percentage of students who responded 'yes', 'no' and 'don't know' when asked if the name Adolf Hitler was connected to the Holocaust (survey question 31)



Percentage of students

■ Yes   ■ No   ■ Don't know
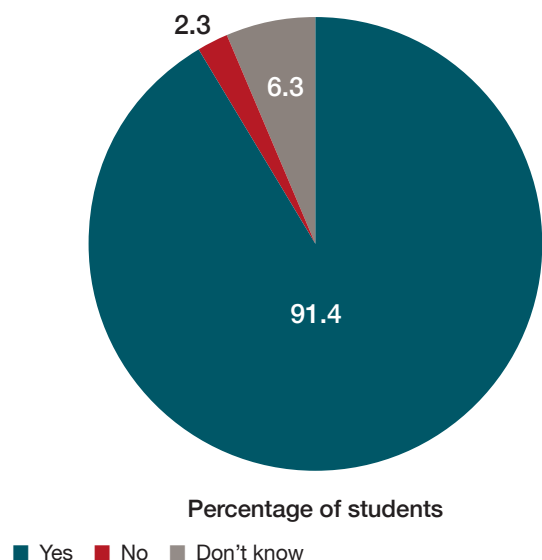
also begs the question of what students actually know and understand about Hitler's actions in terms of policy formulation and implementation.

## What do students know and understand about the role and responsibility of Hitler in the Holocaust?

### Hitler's role

While the question of Hitler's role in the Holocaust would appear facile and superfluous, it is one that remains a source of dispute and a spur to continuing research. It is also a query that touches on a raft of matters, some specific to the Third Reich – its system of rule, its power structures, the decision-making process behind genocidal policies – and others more general, such as the notion of 'great men' in history, the functions of the modern State and the very nature of historical explanation. At root, 'the central issue' – in the words of Hitler's biographer Ian Kershaw (2008: 238) – is 'how Nazi hatred of the Jews became translated into the practice of government, and what precise role Hitler played in this process'. Interpretations of these questions spawned two contrasting schools of thought in the 1980s – 'intentionalism' and 'functionalism' – which, in their essence, can be traced to contrasting arguments forwarded during the post-war trials. According to the former, the Holocaust was attributable to a direct instruction from Hitler who, by virtue of his extreme antisemitism, was committed to embarking upon a policy of mass murder. This, broadly conceived, was the central framework onto which intentionalist scholars like Lucy Dawidowicz (1975) or Gerald Fleming (1984) grafted their own particular tracts – explanatory accounts that, at their core, prioritised agency as the most influential causal factor in history.

The challenge to this orthodoxy began to emerge in earnest in the late 1970s, with social historians such as Martin Broszat (1981) contesting the idea of a single 'Hitler-order'. For Broszat and others, Hitler was not the omnipresent dictator many presumed, but rather the structure of Nazi Germany was fundamentally polycratic. In this sense, different Nazi leaders often wrestled for power and favour in capricious circumstances and shifting contexts, while policies were often formulated in a haphazard, hand-to-mouth fashion. To structuralists, explanation for the Holocaust lay not in individuals but in the forces embedded within and between social structures.

So polarised were these positions that, perhaps inevitably, they eventually led to concessions and the emergence of 'a middle ground of moderate functionalism or moderate intentionalism' (Confino 2012b: 43). At the same time, new avenues of research during the 1990s posed questions to both frameworks, leading more recently to a 'return of ideology' where questions around how and where agency and circumstance come together are now conducted in 'a much broader, empirically rich, and analytically sophisticated historical context' (Stone 2010: 72). Debates over the precise role of Hitler, for instance, or the exact course of the decision-making process, have not therefore gone away but have become more nuanced.

These have been the debates within scholarship over the past two decades, but it is arguable as to how far these advances have found their way into popular culture and educational practice. Certainly, just from the findings of this research study it would seem that a considerable distance exists between the academy and the classroom. For example, Chapter 5 revealed the tendency of students to approach the question of 'Why the Jews?' by constructing Hitler-centric accounts which – in some instances – framed the Nazi leader as the causal factor. Similarly, when Hitler's role was broached directly in focus-group interviews, students – particularly those in younger cohorts – typically saw him as the principal agent in the development of the Holocaust.

Perhaps the clearest example of this was how younger students would personalise their narration of the Holocaust or specific events related to it through reference to Hitler. At its most extreme, this led to such assertions as, 'He got all the Jews and put them in concentration camps and gassed them' (Michael, Year 8, NE1), or 'He forced them to live out in ghettos' (Zoe, Year 8, LON5), or 'He killed people in mass groups' (Charlotte, Year 8, LON6) and 'He was the person who put people in the concentration camps' (Candice, Year 8, LON6). These and other similar statements often came from students at the youngest end of the age range, but they were also a periodic feature of interviews in many other year groups.

More commonly, students would place Hitler at the centre of the action by framing him as someone who directed events. For example, Liam (Year 9, NE1) reasoned the power structure in Germany was 'like a triangle with Hitler at the top and then he is like telling the people below him to go and do stuff for him'. Fahima (Year 10, LON5) similarly reasoned that Hitler 'would just give commands' and Alex (Year 12, EE1) noted that he was 'the driving force behind it [the Holocaust]'.

On the surface, these sorts of comments suggest that many students held outmoded understandings of Hitler, as – in Norman Rich's well-worn phrase – the ultimate 'master in the Third Reich' (Rich 1973:

11). Where such readings were commonplace in the immediate decades after 1945, research as long ago as the late 1960s began to debunk this perception and gave rise to 'the notion of polycratic rule – a multidimensional power-structure, in which Hitler's own authority was only one element (if a very important one)' (Kershaw 2000: 74). Yet while some students undoubtedly did hold dear the idea of Hitler directing events, as suggested in Chapter 3, there were occasions when individuals would recognise the flaws in this interpretation.

This became apparent when, in conversation, students were asked whether or not Hitler had actually killed anyone himself. Students (of all ages) were acutely aware that Hitler could not have carried out the persecution or mass killings by himself, as the exchange below illustrates:

> **Interviewer:** Could Hitler have done it [killed Jews in mass numbers] by himself?
> **Anthony:** No.
> **Lara:** No.
> **Jess:** No.
> **Lara:** He needed an army behind him.
> **Anthony:** Yeah, he needed people to support him (Year 9, SE1).

When asked to explain this issue further, students across all the interview groups variously commented: 'he got other people to kill them' (Michael, Year 8, NE1); 'he was the leader … he just told them and they did it' (Scott, Year 8, NE1); 'he controlled it – he had the power to open the camps but not kill the people so he employed people to do that' (Elliot, Year 9, EE1).

Where some simply refuted the idea, others were more assertive that he was not a 'hands-on' killer: 'I don't think he touched blood', remarked one student (Kristy, Year 9, LON6); 'he didn't get his hands dirty', said another (Annie, Year 10, NE1).

Comments like these were not confined to those sites where mass atrocity occurred. Many students emphasised Hitler's involvement from the very beginning: 'He started it off' (Nick, Year 9, EE1), and 'it started around when Hitler came to power' (Amanda, Year 9, LON6) were sentiments expressed on more than one occasion. Where sometimes the 'it' in question was quite clearly killing, at other times this referred not to murder but to persecution, as with the student who explained, 'I can't remember when Hitler came into power, but he started making restrictive laws for the first couple of years, then set up camps where he sent people' (Nick, Year 9, EE1). For other students, it was clear that learning about certain restrictions had made a particular impression on them; this was clearly evident in the

following exchange between Year 10 (NE1) students (emphases added):

> **Samantha:** And *he* liked stopped Jewish people from being able to go certain places, like the cinema or like certain schools, they weren't allowed to go to and stuff, because *he* stopped them.
> **Interviewer:** How did *he* stop them?
> **Samantha:** *He* made laws, yeah *he* made like laws.
> **Tom:** Separate schools and buses. Well not buses, but like…
> **Samantha:** It was like apartheid. Like they made Jewish people sit at the back or away from everyone else. Like that was earlier on before the actual Holocaust had started. Because that is what I learned from Anne Frank's diary.
> **Interviewer:** What do you think … Why pass these laws? What was the purpose?
> **Samantha:** *He* was trying to get rid of all the Jewish…
> **Tom:** *He* didn't really, at the time I think, have the power or conviction to actually deal with them like in the way **he** wanted to.
> **Samantha:** And *he* blamed them for the First World War, like called them backstabbers and it was like their fault for the First World War so…
> **Annie:** Didn't *he* want the Jews to give, like didn't *he* want to take everything the Jews had off them, because the Jews were the type of people who had the most money because they had the education and *he* wanted to kill them off so there was more money for people that *he* wanted…
> **Daniel:** …the German People.

This interview exchange is interesting on many levels. First, students' repeated reference to 'he' demonstrated an explicit focus on Hitler and his actions as central to events. Indeed, in keeping with findings in Chapter 3, Hitler appeared to act as the 'personification' of the Holocaust for these (and other) students. Second, the dialogue suggested the students appreciated that Hitler's primary method of securing his aims at this time was through legislation (passing laws) and not directly through killing. Third, it is striking that while the exchange invests Hitler with considerable power and influence, there is simultaneously an undercurrent of him not being able to carry out his wishes and 'deal with them like in the way he wanted to'. In other words, this dialogue revealed that although some of the understanding is limited, there is some attempt at explanation and some recognition that Hitler's power was not absolute.

The following Year 10 (LON5) exchange typified how many students saw the relationship between Hitler and his agents (emphases added):

> **Aaliyah:** *He* got people to do it for him.
> **Interviewer:** How did *he* do that?
> **Aaliyah:** Well *he* had the armies and then they would, like, build the concentration camps and that would then … *he* wouldn't actually do it like himself.
> **Fahima:** *He* would just give commands.
> **Aaliyah:** Yeah, *he* would get other people to take the Jews out of their houses, what was it, the night of…?
> **Fahima:** The Night of the Broken Glass.
> **Aaliyah:** That's it, where…
> **Fahima:** *He* ordered the…
> **Holly:** Synagogues and Jewish shops.
> **Aaliyah:** Yeah Hitler didn't do that but *he*…
> **Fahima:** Organised it.

Once again, in students' minds, 'he' (Hitler) was central to events. But in their view Hitler did not personally carry out the actions, rather he gave 'orders' and 'commands' and got others to do his bidding.

In general, Year 12 and Year 13 students possessed a slightly more sophisticated understanding of Hitler's role in the Holocaust. To begin with, however, their understandings mirrored those of younger students. For example, there was broad awareness that Hitler did not personally kill any individual or group: 'He never did any of the dirty work himself', Erin (Year 12, EE1) remarked, in the process echoing similar sentiments expressed by those further down the age range. Instead – again in keeping with younger cohorts – many 17 and 18 year olds cast Hitler in an 'executive' role.

However, where students in Years 7 to 11 believed that Hitler remained the ultimate arbiter of life and death, students in Years 12 and 13 tended to present the image of someone with oversight of a project or programme. Importantly, this sense that Hitler 'just got other people [to do it for him]' (Erin, Year 12, EE1) did appear in discussion with some younger students as well, but unlike those conversations, students in Years 12 and 13 were generally able to provide more detailed and considered accounts of how this happened. An illustrative exchange in this respect is the following response of two students to the question 'What did he [Hitler] do?'

> **Phil:** Well he sort of delegated it, didn't he? He didn't actually have much role in the day-to-day running of the camps, but he sort of delegated it. I can't remember the guy's name, but it was under his instruction, all of it.
> **Mike:** He provided the political thinking, ideology I suppose, and … in *Mein Kampf*, he outlined his political basis for it. Yes, I think he delegated a lot, yeah (Year 12, LON7).

These remarks touched on a number of issues, of course, but the notion of 'delegation' is clearly of a slightly different nature to that of 'ordering'. It also suggests a different complexion to understandings that power within the Third Reich merely resided in and emanated from a single individual. This does not so much deny Hitler a central – even the central – role within the system of government, as hint at a more complex configuration of rule. In this respect a number of older students reasoned that Hitler was an influential 'figurehead' who 'set the agenda' and 'provided the political thinking [and] ideology' behind the actions of the Nazis. For example, one Year 12 student, Jamie (LON3), referred to Hitler's 'inner circle' of 'Goebbels, Goering and Himmler' and reasoned that, while Hitler always remained 'number one', these key individuals turned his plans 'from idea to reality'.

Such contentions hinted that older students were more aware of other key figures in the Nazi regime and had a sense that these persons did have some measure of agency and influence. Further indications that many students in Years 12 and 13 exhibited a more nuanced appreciation of the politics and power behind the Holocaust came across in discussions of the Wannsee Conference. Not only were older students far more aware of this event than younger ones, there was also a more developed impression of Hitler's relationship to it. Most knew that Hitler did not attend the meeting, yet they did not see his absence as an indication of ignorance or lack of involvement; rather, it was taken as evidence of his working practice.

This understanding was further evidenced by how students talked about what happened at Wannsee and what was produced from it: while many incorrectly believed something was signed at Wannsee, a number of students emphasised it did not matter that Hitler did not put his name to this document. 'He never put his name on any of the documents or anything', commented one student (Jake, Year 12, LON7), while another remarked, 'He got everyone else to sign about the "Final Solution"' (Danielle, Year 13, EE1).

The approach of some Year 12 and 13 students to the Wannsee Conference thus provided various insights. As much as 'knowing' that the meeting took place gave students the opportunity to develop potentially more sophisticated chronologies of the Holocaust and a more multidimensional appreciation of the agents and agencies involved, it was clear that something of a fundamental flaw remained with the understanding of a notable number of students.

On the one hand, there was the positive that these older students appreciated that Hitler didn't need to be present in order to be involved, and a

related recognition (however implicit) that 'others' were participants in a process. This suggested many would have disagreed with the student who reasoned that 'he [Hitler] just put forward policies, he just gave orders and the people that supported the Nazi Party followed' (Samad, Year 12, LON3). Although Hitler clearly remains 'the leader of it all' (Fadil, Year 13, LON3) for the majority of these students, it would appear this does not preclude more dynamic understandings of the workings of power within the regime.

On the other hand, there is the paradox that these insights come from a fundamental misunderstanding: namely, that the 'Final Solution' began at Wannsee, and was made manifest in some sort of physical document appended by signatories. Year 12 and 13 students' positioning of Hitler *vis-à-vis* the Wannsee Conference is a good demonstration, then, of how knowledge and understanding is not a fixed entity: it is possible to 'know' and 'understand' more in some respects, and at the same time also hold incorrect 'knowledge' and invalid 'understandings'. What can also be observed is that, where older students can have a more sophisticated appreciation of the power structure of the Third Reich than their younger counterparts, this does not fundamentally alter their understanding of the decision-making process behind the Holocaust.

In their depiction of Hitler and fixation on a signed document, these older students still present an interpretative account of his role which is skewed much more towards intentionalism than to structuralism. Consequentially, there is no sense that other forces beyond Hitler had any influence on the resolve to embark on genocide. Distinctly absent in this respect was any appreciation of what Hans Mommsen famously described as 'cumulative radicalization' – either in terms of the 'dynamic process' of 'improvised bureaucratic initiatives' (Kershaw, 2000: 99) or the static electricity generated by those groups and individuals implementing policy 'on the ground'. This unavoidably has repercussions for how students understood and ascribed responsibility.

## Hitler's responsibility

The student survey contained very few open-text questions in which students were invited to provide their own unmediated responses. However, not wishing to influence students' responses in any way, question 42 provided a blank box in which students could write down their responses to the question, 'Who was responsible for the Holocaust?'

A response to this question was provided by 6,897 students. Responses ranged in length, detail and variety. Some students offered single-word or short answers to the question of responsibility, for example, 'Hitler'; 'Nazis'; 'Hitler and the Nazi Party'; 'Hitler, Himmler and the SS'; 'Hitler and the Germans'. Other students offered more multifaceted answers, for example:

■ 'The Nazi party was responsible for the Holocaust. However their ideas came from Adolf Hitler – their leader.'
■ 'Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler, the SS, the Gestapo and Nazi collaborators.'
■ 'The leading members of the Nazi Party for example Josef Goebbels, Adolf Hitler and Heinrich Himmler.'
■ 'The German people and those who would turn in their own people to survive.'

In addition, a number of students offered more detailed and, at times, impressive explanations as the following two examples illustrate:

Adolf Hitler began the persecution of Jews and caused people to believe they were an inferior and evil race. However, it was the population of Germany at the time that followed his orders and carried out the persecution of the Jewish race, so ultimately it is a vast number of soldiers and Gestapo that are responsible for the slaughter of millions of people.

Hitler was clearly the main reason for the Holocaust's happening, although there were a multitude of people who allowed him to obtain power. For instance, the Germans got him elected, countries such as Great Britain took too long to prevent Hitler and throughout history there were many incidences of Anti-Semitic oppression, causing general prejudice against the Jewish religion.

All responses to the question, 'Who was responsible?' were carefully analysed and coded in both qualitative and quantitative ways. As an example of how the responses were coded in a quantitative way the Table 6.1 provides an overview of how student responses were categorised to reflect different agents of responsibility.

As Table 6.1 reveals, in responding to the survey question of who was responsible for the Holocaust, the overwhelming majority of students (79.4 per cent) made some reference to Hitler. Half of all students (50.7 per cent) ascribed responsibility to Hitler alone and one in five students (20.6 per cent) claimed that Hitler was responsible for the Holocaust in association with the Nazis.

As a general trend the majority of students (56.1 per cent) in Years 7 to 9 deemed Hitler solely responsible for the Holocaust. In Years 7 and 8, for

**Table 6.1** Percentage of students, by year group, giving each answer in response to the question, 'Who was responsible for the Holocaust?' (survey question 42)

| Total sample (n=6,897) | Year 7 (n=892) | Year 8 (n=1,026) | Year 9 (n=2,468) | Year 10 (n=1,123) | Year 11 (n=477) | Year 12 (n=552) | Year 13 (n=341) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Hitler** | | | | | | | |
| 50.7 | 62.4 | 58.2 | 52.9 | 48.8 | 43.2 | 33.3 | 25.5 |
| **Hitler and the Nazis** | | | | | | | |
| 20.6 | 11.1 | 17.0 | 18.5 | 24.6 | 29.6 | 33.5 | 25.2 |
| **Hitler and the SS and/or other named individual** | | | | | | | |
| 3.3 | 0.7 | 1.9 | 2.7 | 3.4 | 3.6 | 7.2 | 12.0 |
| **Hitler and the Germans / Germany** | | | | | | | |
| 3.1 | 3.7 | 3.8 | 3.2 | 3.0 | 2.9 | 1.8 | 2.1 |
| **Hitler, the Nazis and Germany** | | | | | | | |
| 1.1 | 0.6 | 0.9 | 1.0 | 1.2 | 0.6 | 0.7 | 3.8 |
| **Hitler, the Nazis and the SS** | | | | | | | |
| 0.6 | 0.8 | 0.6 | 0.4 | 0.7 | 1.3 | 0.5 | 0.9 |
| **Total who referenced Hitler** | | | | | | | |
| 79.4 | 79.3 | 82.4 | 78.7 | 81.7 | 81.2 | 77.0 | 69.5 |
| **Nazis with no reference to Hitler** | | | | | | | |
| 10.6 | 7.5 | 7.6 | 12.0 | 8.5 | 11.7 | 14.3 | 16.7 |
| **Germans / Germany / German people** | | | | | | | |
| 3.9 | 6.1 | 5.2 | 3.9 | 3.1 | 1.9 | 2.0 | 2.1 |
| **Nazis and Germans** | | | | | | | |
| 0.9 | 0.3 | 0.7 | 1.1 | 0.8 | 0.6 | 0.7 | 1.8 |
| **A relevant answer that did not fit the categories** | | | | | | | |
| 3.6 | 3.3 | 2.5 | 2.9 | 4.7 | 2.7 | 4.3 | 9.1 |
| **Inaccurate answer** | | | | | | | |
| 1.6 | 3.5 | 1.6 | 1.4 | 1.2 | 1.9 | 1.7 | 0.8 |

example, it was 62.4 per cent and 58.2 per cent, respectively. In contrast, older students attributed less individual responsibility to Hitler. In Years 12 and 13, for example, only 33.3 per cent and 25.5 per cent, respectively, claimed that Hitler had sole responsibility for the Holocaust. This is neatly illustrated in Figure 6.5.

In a similar vein, older students (Years 10 to 13) were more likely to attribute responsibility to Hitler *and* other individuals or organisations within the Nazi state than younger students (Years 7 to 9). For example, whereas 43.7 per cent of Year 12 students held Hitler *and others* responsible for the Holocaust, only 16.9 per cent of Year 7 students offered a similar perspective.

In overview, it appears that although Hitler is seen as the person most responsible for the Holocaust across all age groups, older students are more likely to appreciate that he was not solely responsible

than their younger counterparts. For many younger students, Hitler's role in the Holocaust was all-encompassing and emphatic. At the most simplistic level he is seen to be personally involved in the persecution and murder of Jews; however, the vast majority of students also understood that Hitler could not have carried out the Holocaust by himself. These students subsequently believed he ordered and commanded others to fulfil his goals. Typically, these acts were seen as a top-down process, with Hitler as executive director and other individuals blindly following his will.

Students in Years 12 and 13 often exhibited a more sophisticated understanding of this process. For example, several older students appreciated to some degree that the power structures in the Third Reich were complex and multifaceted. Many, although by no means all, of these older students argued, therefore, that an uncomplicated top-down power

Figure 6.5 Percentage of students who named Hitler as solely responsible for the Holocaust when answering survey question 42 'Who was responsible for the Holocaust?' (by year group)
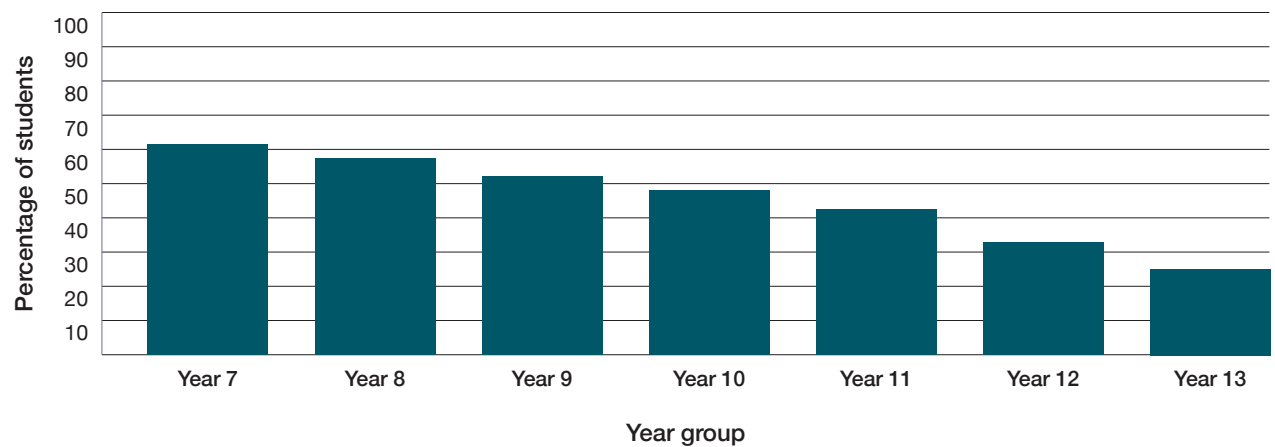


structure was too neat and too simplistic to fully explain issues of responsibility. Indeed, one student vigorously challenged what he termed 'the Great Man Theory' of history that accords primary responsibility for historical events to a single individual (in this case Hitler). Recognising a degree of complexity not mentioned by younger students, he reasoned that Hitler was 'an expression of the German people' and that 'Hitler couldn't have come to power if a large portion of Germany didn't want him to' (Lucas, Year 12, LON7). For this student, then, and for many other older students interviewed and surveyed, while Hitler played a significant role, he could not be held solely responsible for the Holocaust.

## How do students conceive of 'the Nazis'? What role and responsibility do they ascribe to them?

As noted above, in the course of detailing students' knowledge and understanding of Hitler's role it was apparent that, in spite of Hitler's pre-eminence in most students' consciousness, other individuals and agencies also featured. One of the key groups mentioned in this regard were the Nazis.

To many readers, the fact that students linked 'the Nazis' to the Holocaust will be of little surprise and regarded as self-explanatory. Moreover, given its cultural familiarity, most would understandably expect the phrase 'the Nazis' to itself require no explanation. However, Richard Overy's (2013) recent critique of the 'indiscriminate use of the term "Nazi"' should not be dismissed out of hand. There is, indeed, much to suggest that 'uncritical use of "Nazi" distorts the German reality during the Hitler years', and at the same time 'obscures more than it explains'. This is only more salient when Nazism seemingly continues to 'have a strong hold over us', in part because 'the

world of the Third Reich and the people who lived through it all appear as a kind of moral drama' (Evans 2015).

An added complication to cultural understandings of 'the Nazis' concerns their relationship to Hitler. While Hitler-centrism as a framework for understanding National Socialism has long been out of fashion in academic circles, there nevertheless remains a strong tendency in culture, politics and society to frame Hitler and Nazism as one and the same. What makes this problematic, as Kershaw (2000: 45) has observed, is:

…the equation Nazism = Hitlerism unnecessarily restricts the vision and distorts the focus in explaining the origins of Nazism; deflects away from rather than orientates towards consideration of the political manifestations in other European countries which shared (and continue to share today) important affinities and common characteristics with Nazism.

Put differently, the abstraction of National Socialism – either to the status of a cipher of evil or simply the expression of Adolf Hitler – is potentially very problematic. With this in mind, students' repeated reference to 'the Nazis' as being in some way related to the Holocaust prompted the question of exactly to whom, or to what, they were referring?

## Who were the Nazis?

Determining who the Nazis were, what they did, and what they were responsible for were key discussion points in all focus-group interviews. Students were initially asked 'who' the Nazis were, and – depending on their answers – various lines of enquiry were pursued.

In some instances, students were asked to describe or depict 'a Nazi'. Responses from 11 to 16 year olds were varied and diverse. Words used

ranged from 'puppets' and 'slaves', to 'determined' and 'obedient'; Nazis were variously 'strategic' and 'strong', 'disrespectful' and 'really extreme'; they were also 'cowards', 'frightened' and – notably – 'not women'. Among those words to appear least frequently were in fact 'evil', 'monstrous' and 'inhuman', an interesting finding since it is commonly presumed that these notions are dominant within young people, and representations of Nazis in historical culture do very much tend towards these caricatures.

The picture was only made more intricate when students turned to consider the perceived sanity – or otherwise – of 'the Nazis'. Inevitably, a few students saw Nazis as 'a bit insane' (Annie, Year 10, NE1), although some qualified this sentiment with 'not all of them' (Tom, Year 10, NE1). However, a larger number refuted any description of the Nazis as 'crazy', with some asserting they were 'usually quite normal', 'just people', and 'men who had families' (Lara, Year 9, SE1). Notably, some went further. In an incident further described below – where students commented on having seen images of a Nazi officer with his family – they believed this was evidence that they could have been 'nice people', with one remarking, 'I think, like, individually they probably were nice people but together, their job, they did their job' (Ariella, Year 9, LON6).

That so many students rejected notions of Nazis as insane, and that some were even able to speculate on whether Nazis were capable of benevolence, were interesting findings. They suggest students are able to move beyond stereotypes and tropes which have high cultural circulation, and can hold multidimensional, multifaceted understandings of human behaviour. Yet, while Ariella's reflection on group behaviour is considerably astute, her reference to 'they did their job' does gesture to questions of agency and, by extension, responsibility.

In addition to outlining the qualities and character traits of Nazis, students also spoke more directly about the relationship between the Nazis and Hitler. Among younger students there was a distinct tendency to frame the Nazis as acolytes of Hitler. He was their 'ruler' (Lucy, Year 8, LON6), and they were 'the believers', or 'people who he sent to do his work' (Charlotte, Year 8, LON5).

This sense of Nazis as, effectively, fervent disciples of Hitler did become less pronounced – or at least, more unstated – with age. For example, by Year 9 (13 to 14 years old), the initial responses of students cast the Nazis in increasingly militaristic terms: they were 'his [Hitler's] army' (Juliette, Year 9, LON5); 'Hitler's personal hit squad' (Hamish, Year 9, SE1); and 'a disciplined core group' (Anthony, Year 9, SE1). Similarly, depictions of Nazis increasingly accented

certain facets of their appearance: 'You could say they were like the big boys, they were like the main people and they would dress up in army-like wear, so they would look kind of like soldiers' (Deena, Year 9, LON6). Sometimes students added guns to the Nazi kit list.

Furthermore, reference to uniforms sometimes came with added comment about the implications of this attire. In one interview, for instance, a student suggested that the uniform accorded respect – 'they had this uniform and they were seen as like fathers of the country I guess; like, people looked up to them to save their country' (Amanda, Year 9, LON6). This student further reasoned that 'the soldier's uniform was actually quite appealing to German people because I think people were actually quite patriotic and they liked the fact that there was a party that really cared about Germany.'

Other students who spoke of the 'Nazi uniform' saw things slightly differently. In an enlightening comment, Grace (Year 10, LON6) recalled a religious education lesson in which students saw a PowerPoint slide showing 'a picture of a man' with his family who 'looked really happy'. In the following slide, Grace explained, 'he was all dressed up in the Nazi uniform and he looked completely different'. She intriguingly suggested that, 'as soon as you put them in a Nazi uniform … they look scary no matter how nice they could have been'.

## Role and responsibility

Typically, interview discussions with students moved from exploring who they thought the Nazis were to examining in more depth what role the Nazis played in German society and what, if any, responsibility they had for the Holocaust. In general, it was evident that there were some noteworthy age-related changes in students' conceptualisation of 'the Nazis'.

For the most part, students in Years 7 to 9 viewed the Nazis as a relatively small and powerful group who ruthlessly carried out Hitler's orders. As one student remarked, 'I think they were like robots, because Hitler, like, controlled them. They had to do what Hitler said. They had to follow his commands really' (Chloe, Year 9, LON5). What was particularly striking in the interviews was that most 11 to 14 year olds simply did not understand that 'Nazi' referred to members of the National Socialist German Workers' Party. Indeed, almost without exception, 11 to 14 year olds did not appear to appreciate that the Nazi Party became a broad-based political entity that, for example, enjoyed the electoral support of more than 13 million Germans in July 1932.

The limited understanding among younger students (Years 7 to 9) of who the Nazis were often contrasted with those of older students (Years 10

to 13). Among students in Years 10 and 11, for example, more frequent reference to the Nazis as 'a political party' (Fahima, Year 10, LON5) emerged. Furthermore, these older students generally offered more contextual knowledge about the Nazis and Hitler's rise to power. Typically, they knew that the Nazis were a political party which enjoyed considerable electoral success during the early 1930s. They often appreciated that the failings of the Weimar Republic and the devastating consequences of the economic depression that engulfed Germany after 1929 led to increasing popular support for Hitler and the Nazis. Many older students also realised that, at this time, Hitler and the Nazis proved an appealing political alternative to large numbers of Germans and that they did not simply impose their will by force.

Nevertheless gaps in understanding remained. For example, the following exchange between a group of Year 10 students offers a good demonstration of both the extent and limitations of students' understanding of the relationship between Hitler and the Nazi Party:

> **Interviewer:** And did he go round killing people?
> **Daniel:** No, not him.
> **Sarah:** Not him directly, no. He didn't get his hands dirty.
> **Interviewer:** So, sorry, you were saying…
> **Samantha:** He gave orders to other people to do it, but he didn't do it himself.
> **Sarah:** The people that followed him did it.
> **Tom:** Yeah, there was the SS, like, were Hitler's main, well he had politicians in the party and the SS was his little army, sort of, and then they had generals and that … so he gave them orders and then they gave the soldiers orders.
> **Interviewer:** Okay, tell me more about this, the SS. Who were these people?
> **Sarah:** It was basically Hitler's force, the Nazi Party.
> **Tom:** Yes, it was his manpower sort of that gave him the power to do what he wanted. And they were very violent and very unforgiving towards people that didn't…
> **Sarah:** They followed him, his every word. And they thought that was the right thing to do because he was the leader.
> **Tom:** And they, like, they didn't let … their job was to deal with people that didn't agree with Hitler (Year 10, NE1).

On the one hand this dialogue revealed that some students did have some rudimentary understanding of the Nazi Party incorporating different factions (generals, politicians, the SS). On the other hand, it suggested that Hitler's will was carried out by a 'violent' and 'unforgiving' elite group who followed 'his every word'. While there is no denying that

violence played a key role both in the years before Hitler's appointment as Chancellor and in the immediate weeks and months afterwards, the notion that power was exercised only through these means neither takes account of nor explains the evolution of anti-Jewish policy.

Evidence of some of the oldest students having a more sophisticated understanding of the Nazis as a political entity was provided in interviews with students in Years 12 and 13. Here, nearly all students spoke of the Nazis as a party; some listed certain figures, like Himmler, Goering, Hoess and Goebbels; others added descriptors like 'extremist' (Paul, Year 12, LON7) and 'far right-wing' (Isaac, Year 13, EE1), with one student even suggesting that 'it' [National Socialism] was 'Bolshevik in style' since it was 'a small, extreme group, working together to then seize power and then spread the ideas' (Mike, Year 12, LON7).

A sizeable number of other students also emphasised that the Nazis had once been small and marginal. In one example, a student claimed that 'the Nazi Party used to be just a movement; they weren't after the Munich Putsch, when Hitler's organised himself and made this party into like an official political party' (Damien, Year 12, LON3). On another occasion, a student asserted that 'the Nazi Party wasn't just this faceless organisation that was always the same throughout all of its history, it changed radically from the start to the end' (Lucas, Year 12, LON7).

In particular, students in Years 12 and 13 noted that the Nazi Party grew in significance and influence after 1933 when Germany 'became a one-party state' (Cassie, Year 13, EE1) under Hitler's leadership. Other older students also distinguished between those who supported the Nazis because of the promise of a better future and those who were fervent members of the party. Accordingly, one Year 13 student commented that people 'who aren't ideologically aligned to the party joined for the benefits and not the ideology, those people would be called Nazis, but they wouldn't be ideologically Nazis' (Aimee, Year 13, EE1).

Insights like these were testament to the breadth and depth of the historical knowledge and understanding shared by some students in Years 12 and 13. This enabled them to not only demonstrate a more secure and accurate grasp of 'who were the Nazis' at a basic level, but to also position National Socialism as a phenomenon into a temporal context. In turn, ideas of Nazis as disciples, 'robots', or foot-soldiers did not feature during interviews with 17- and 18-year-old students. Instead, in one interview, these notions were countered. For example, one student reasoned: 'Didn't they start as a political party, and then they basically created different segments of their party, which were basically

the police force, the army' (Jim, Year 12, LON7). Though not strictly true, the idea that different organs of the state came within the sphere of Nazi influence was correct and showed a more nuanced understanding than notions of Nazis as a crack, guerrilla force.

In a further interview example, which followed immediately after Jim's comment, a student addressed the issue of uniforms as iconic shorthand for Nazis: 'I think that's a result of the war', he stated, 'because the Nazis effectively ended up being the German Army, and the German force, but before that I think it's the same as any party' (Phil, Year 12, LON7). Neither of these assertions grasps deeper complexities, of course, but they do indicate that in certain respects many students in Years 12 and 13 were able to attempt more complex approaches to understanding Nazis and Nazism than were younger students.

In a similar vein, older students were typically more sophisticated in their appreciation of the complicated issue of assigning responsibility for the Holocaust. As noted earlier, more than half of younger students (56.1 per cent) believed that Hitler was solely responsible for the Holocaust. This basic understanding, however, shifted with age. As Figure 6.6 illustrates, older students were more likely to move beyond Hitler and include the Nazis when ascribing responsibility.

In overarching terms, if all references to Nazis are included (i.e. Nazis plus Hitler, SS or Germans/Germany) more than a third of students (33.8 per cent) believed that the Nazis were in some way responsible for the Holocaust (see Table 6.1). Furthermore, 10.6 per cent of students stated that the Nazis were solely responsible for the Holocaust.

Figure 6.6 also neatly demonstrates how this understanding developed with age. For example, in Year 7 only 20.3 per cent of students held the Nazis in any way accountable for the Holocaust, compared with 33.0 per cent in Year 9 and 49.7 per cent in Year 12. This undoubtedly shows that, in the eyes of many older students, the Nazis are central to the Holocaust (and responsibility for it extends beyond Hitler).

By way of summary, with age students tended to develop a more substantial, historically accurate perception of 'the Nazis'. It does not necessarily follow, however, that this was accompanied by more detailed, comprehensive outlining of what 'Nazis' did and did not do, and some flawed assumptions still persisted. Nonetheless, in general it is possible to observe the emergence of more sophisticated understandings among older students, thanks in large part to a greater depth of knowledge and appreciation of context.

It can be seen that students' knowledge of who the Nazis were has a direct bearing upon understandings of 'what they did' and for what they were 'responsible'. For the majority of students aged 11 to 14, the Nazis were little more than instruments of Hitler's will: they were generally nameless and faceless, erroneously understood by many as a small group of devotees who bring Hitler's wishes and whims to life. They 'do' whatever their 'ruler' tells them, without question – generally either out of fear, conviction or diligence. However, this generalisation does not preclude occasional flashes of insight or prohibit some students from pressing against certain common misconceptions.

Furthermore, these general observations about younger students should not lead to the conclusion that those further down the age range are unable

**Figure 6.6** Percentage of students who made any reference to the Nazis when answering survey question 42 'Who was responsible for the Holocaust?' (by year group)
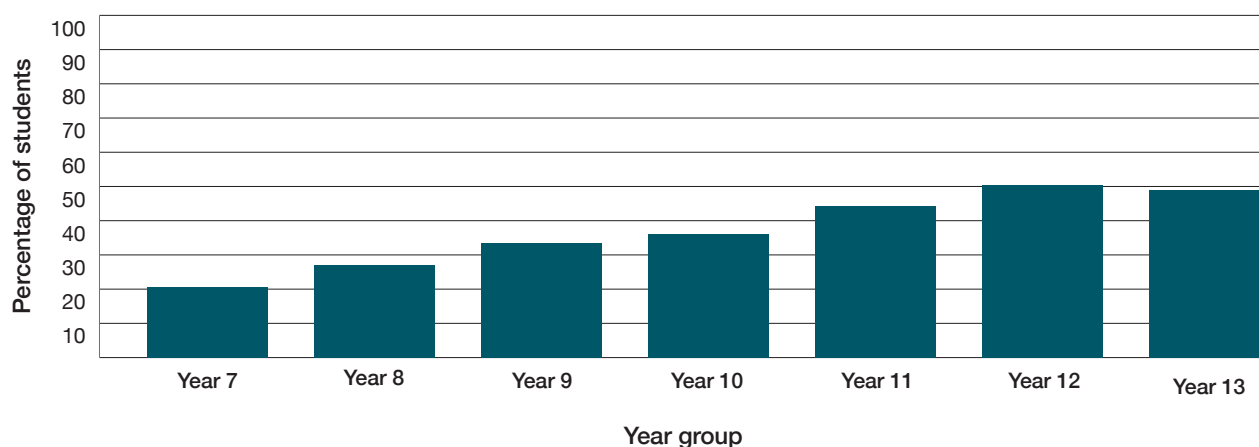
to hold on to or operate with complicated ideas or themselves contest misconceptions prevalent within contemporary culture. On the contrary, as noted earlier, excellent examples of younger students' ability to engage in reflective thinking was clearly evidenced in conversations about the character and characteristics of 'Nazis'. However, it was evident that, overall, a large proportion of students had substantial gaps and/or flaws in their contextual understanding of just 'who the Nazis' were.

In a country where it is often said there is 'too much Hitler' in English secondary schools, that there has been a 'Hitlerisation' of the post-14 curriculum, or that 'you should study your own history first' (Ferguson, 2010; Smithers, 2005; Rowley, 2011), these findings into students' general knowledge and understanding of 'the Nazis' are striking. And they are not without consequence. If students do not 'know' that Nazism was, first and foremost, a political movement it becomes impossible for them to understand the configuration of events and circumstances that led to their rise to power. Not appreciating the political dynamics of the ascension of the Nazi Party also potentially inhibits knowledge and understanding of how far-right, extremist views can develop and take root in any society. More specifically with regard to the Holocaust, not fully appreciating the pivotal role played by millions of Nazi Party members undoubtedly impairs students' ability to comprehend the possibility and enactment of genocide.

### What do students know about the actions and reactions of the German people to the Holocaust? How do they explain these actions and reactions?

#### Framing the actions and behaviour of the German people

As the home of many of the leading individuals behind the Holocaust, the culpability of the German nation – and, by extension, the German people – would appear to be self-evident and beyond doubt. Here, according to Hilberg (1993: 196), 'the difference between perpetrators and bystanders was least pronounced; in fact it was not supposed to exist'.

For a large proportion of the postwar period however, understanding of the role of Germans in the Holocaust and their reactions to it tended to be filtered through political prisms rooted in judicial proceedings enacted by the Allies in the aftermath of the war. Themselves part of Allied 're-education' policy, the postwar trials – in particular the International Military Tribunal held in

Nuremberg – were not only not concerned with the extermination of the Jews in itself, but were also centred on presenting a particular reading of Nazi Germany. The defendants at Nuremberg, for instance, were principally accused of a criminal conspiracy to wage aggressive war – a framing which saw 'the homogenization of the motivations for Nazi genocide, and the simplification of the decision-making structure of the agencies of the Third Reich' (Bloxham 2001: 185–6).

As Donald Bloxham (2001: 11–12) has explained, the 'Nuremberg legacy' played itself out in the early Cold War climate where 'Allied policy shifted rapidly from enforcing the idea of collective German guilt to differentiation between Germans, then, somewhat more gradually, to appeasement of German indigna-tion at the earlier punishment of war criminals'. Well into the 1970s the 'obviously central issue: the behaviour, attitudes, and opinion of the German non-Jewish population towards the Jews during the era of Nazi persecution' (Kershaw, 2008: 140, 210-211) was thus both under-researched and narrated through generalising frames of collective guilt or collective paralysis in the face of totalitarianism. However, major scholarship conducted during the 1970s and 1980s underlined the inadequacy of these interpretations. Thanks to the work of Lawrence Stokes, Ian Kershaw, Otto Dov Kulka and Aron Rodrigue among others, it became clearly apparent that rumours about the fate of the Jews were rife in German society throughout the war years – so much so that in 1980 Walter Lacquer (1998: 30) would argue that 'knowledge about the fate of the Jews … was widespread even in early summer of 1942'.

Precisely what this knowledge in German society was, its means of transmission and the response of those who encountered it were enquiry questions that drove new research, resulting in more sophisticated understanding and debate over the attitudes and responsibility of the German people. Where the likes of Kershaw (2008: 5–8) placed weight on the notion of 'indifference' as a means of capturing the response of German society, Kulka accented 'passive complicity' (Marrus 1987: 93). Meanwhile, Browning's (1992) work on 'ordinary men' catalysed new deliberation around the role of societal pressures in inducing participation in genocide – a trend given added pungency following Daniel Goldhagen's (1996) assertion that, *contra* Browning, the Holocaust was to be explained by an 'eliminationist antisemitism' embedded within German society and, by implication, shared by all Germans.

While these discussions continued – in both public and scholarly arenas – further research only magnified the looting and plundering of German (and European) Jews, raising new questions about

who was responsible, and for what.

Within academia, therefore, understanding of the relationship between the German people and the Holocaust long ago transcended questions of 'Did they or didn't they know?', and 'Were they or weren't they involved?' In this context, students' thinking on these matters was very much of interest. Notably, free-text responses to the survey question 42, 'Who was responsible?' revealed that very few students assigned responsibility to the German people for the Holocaust (see Table 6.1). In total only 3.9 per cent of the 6,897 students who responded to survey question 42 ascribed responsibility directly to the Germans or Germany. Indeed, even if the four possible coding categories that refer in some measure to 'Germans' or 'Germany' (including, for example, 'Hitler and the Germans') is aggregated, the overarching total is only 9.0 per cent. Figure 6.7 shows that this trend was prevalent across all year groups.

While this survey data indicated that only a small number of students believed that ordinary Germans bore any responsibility, a key aim of the focus-group discussions was to acquire a much clearer sense of how students understood the relationship between the German people and the genocide of the Jews. From the outset it was evident that the vast majority of students steadfastly rejected the idea that all Germans were Nazis or that Nazis were symptomatic of Germans. Indeed, most students sharply differentiated between Germans and Nazis. As interesting as this was to discover, it opened up lines of enquiry centred on what students thought German people had 'done' in relation to the Holocaust – what they may have known or not known, and how these factors related to responsibility. Pursuing these issues was of particular interest, given the long struggle of

British culture and society to process the nature of National Socialism (Kushner 1994) and determine its relationship with the German people (Ramsden 2006).

For the majority of younger students (11 to 16 year olds), the German people 'did' three things. The first of these was to help, support or allow Hitler to come to power. Interestingly, only a few students could actually talk about the means by which this happened. When they did, students were liable to speak in terms of Hitler being elected or voted into power by the German people – which, of course, was not strictly the case; Hitler was appointed Chancellor in January 1933 by a coalition of Conservatives hoping to utilise the Nazis' electoral support to buttress their own positions and forestall the rise of communism. The claim – made by one of the few Year 9 students to explicitly mention the political process – that 'he [Hitler] was elected prime minister because people thought that he was the right person to do this job' (Juliette, Year 9, LON5) is therefore something of a double-edged sword. Although it suggests that Hitler did not 'just' become the nation's leader, its central premise is incorrect and leads to erroneous conclusions about his popularity and his possession of a mandate.

The general absence of knowledge and understanding among most students from Years 7 to 9 about how Hitler and the Nazis came to hold political office is striking. It is, however, not altogether surprising given how most younger students do not conceive of 'the Nazis' as a political movement or party; these two realms of knowledge are intrinsically linked.

Yet these shortcomings carry real implications. As much as they sideline the very crucial role played by violence and intimidation (in particular of opposition parties) both in the months immediately

**Figure 6.7** Percentage of students who made reference to the Germans/Germany when answering survey question 42 'Who was responsible for the Holocaust?' (by year group)
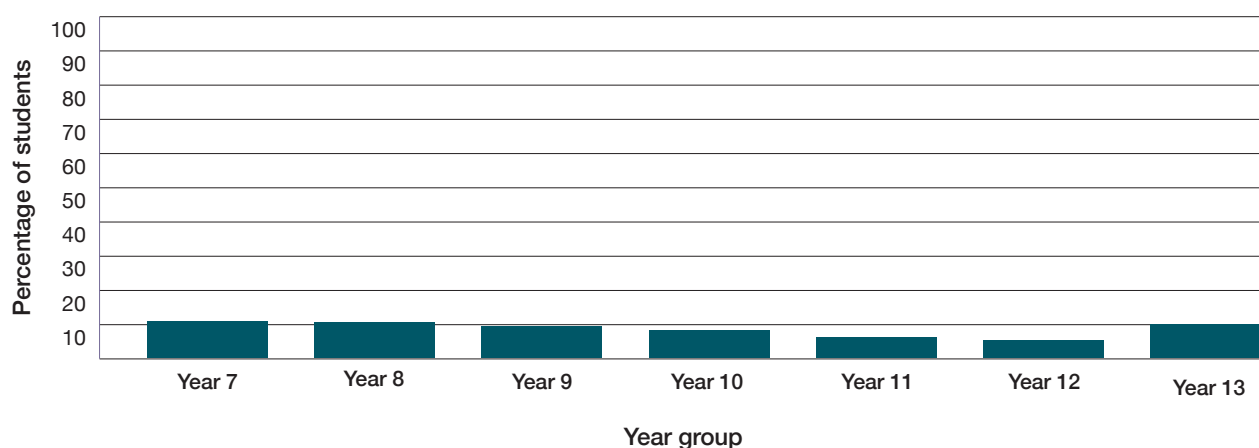
before and after January 1933, the notion of Hitler being elected to power as part of a democratic process also ignores how authoritarian the last years of the Weimar Republic had already become and obfuscates understanding of the grounds on which the National Socialist German Workers' Party acquired popular support. Given how prevalent 'intentionalist' ideas were among students, the assumption of many that Hitler was clear, from the beginning, of his wish to target Jews could lead students to equate electoral support for Nazism as a glowing endorsement of Nazi antisemitism.

Unlike younger cohorts, students in Years 12 and 13 generally exhibited deeper contextual knowledge and spoke more assuredly about the Nazis 'coming to power'. Having a greater awareness of the party's origins and early history was important here, as was familiarity with sociocultural turmoil and the implications of economic crises such as the Wall Street Crash. And yet, despite these improvements, a noticeable proportion of these older students still advanced the idea that Hitler and the Nazis were elected into government. Indeed, only one student explicitly spoke of this with a measure of scepticism – 'they [the German people] sort of elected the Nazi Party' (Alex, Year 12, EE1) – although it can't be determined if this was intentional or otherwise. For older students it seemed the notion of the Nazis being 'voted in' (Samuel, Year 12, LON7) was commonplace.

The second activity that most young students ascribed to the Germans was, in fact, that of inaction. As one Year 10 student commented, 'they [the German people] did nothing; they just went along with it and didn't try to fight it' (Lauren, Year 10, LON6). Students' explanation of the actions of the German people is addressed more fully in the next section. It is, however, worth noting here that many students saw the German people as passive actors on the historical stage. For many students it was if the Holocaust happened around the German people, with events unfolding without their involvement or engagement.

The idea of German people not 'doing' anything stands, of course, in sharp relief to the weight of agency that students accord to Hitler. As much as this may reflect more generally on students' attitudes towards and understanding of historical agency, it can also be read as an illustration of how they perceive the role played by other 'non-Nazi' collectives in the Holocaust.

The reasons behind students' interpretation of the Germans as a passive mass are closely related to their comprehension of the Third Reich more broadly, and to their knowledge of the Holocaust more specifically, both of which are detailed below. That many students saw the German people as

passive bystanders, with the events of the Holocaust developing without their involvement or engagement, also evidently has considerable consequences for ascriptions of responsibility. In the main, it can lead to the presumed inactivity of the German people being framed as resulting from ignorance, disinterest or paralysis – a deduction that shows little regard for context or complexity.

The final set of actions and exercises which students designated to the German people was that of actually helping Jews. More specifically, it was revealing to discover some students talked of Germans 'hiding' Jewish people – one student even suggested 'I think some of them … had Jews in their houses, like in their attics' (Rachael, Year 10, LON6), while another (Samantha, Year 10, NE1) offered Anne Frank as an example. Although some Germans did indeed help Jews to hide, or while in hiding, this practice was by no means as widespread as most young students appeared to presume; according to Hilberg (1993: 197), of the few thousand 'who found refuge or help', the majority were 'relatives of the rescuers by reason of a mixed marriage, or they were of partial German descent or converts to Christianity'. That students held a different perception may perhaps be accounted for by familiarity with the story of the Frank family: a family which, of course, went into hiding not in Germany but in the Netherlands, and did so in an annex within their own property, not a German's.

Unlike younger students, those in Years 12 and 13 were less likely to place such emphasis on Germans helping Jews. Offering shelter or supporting hiding was mentioned by a few, but by no means as frequently. Indeed, on one occasion this was actually in reference to Germans who 'used to denounce people, like, if they had someone who was hiding next door … they used to report it to the Secret Police' (Cassie, Year 13, EE1). This was echoed by another student who said, 'Lots of the average German people would do the sort of dobbing people in to the SS or whatever if they weren't being Nazi enough, or were Jewish, or gay, or whatever' (Alex, Year 12, EE1).

Such observations demonstrated greater familiarity with the workings of a totalitarian state and hinted at an awareness of choice and agency which went beyond ideas of Germans wanting, but not being able, to act for fear of the consequences. An insightful example of this complex understanding came with the perceptive remark of Alex (Year 12, EE1), who highlighted that 'the Germans really stayed loyal to the Nazi Party even, you know, towards the very end in 1945, whereas in World War I they started to get mutinies, like 1918'.

Inherent in all three of these behavioural frames employed by students were questions of explanation,

of how students accounted for the actions of the German people and, in turn, how far these behaviours rendered the population responsible for the events which occurred. In the following sections, three dominant student explanations are outlined. First, that the German people were 'brainwashed' into supporting the Nazis. Second, that 'fear' prevented the German people from opposing Hitler and the Nazis. Third, that most Germans simply 'did not know' about the unfolding events of the Holocaust.

## Explanatory accounts: Brainwashing, propaganda, speeches

The first explanation offered by many students during interview was that somehow, ostensibly innocent German people were 'brainwashed' by Hitler and the Nazis during the 1930s and 1940s. For example, the following selected quotes are typical of phrases and explanations used by many students in Year 9:

> I think he kind of brainwashed people because he put those sorts of posters up and things and people like saw them all the time and it just kind of got into their head that he was the boss and he was going to tell them what to do (Julia, Year 9, NE1).

> Hitler created these stereotypes about how Jews were bad and Gypsies were bad and people were bad and … it was drilled into their brains (Ariella, Year 9, LON6).

> I think everything leads back to Hitler in the end because he was like passionate about what he said in the speeches and I think he almost brainwashed the Nazis and the whole of Germany (Grace, Year 9, LON6).

> He persuaded people obviously, like in schools – he starts teaching people how Jews are inferior to them. Brainwashing them (Harry, Year 9, EE1).

What was significant about the interviews (particularly with those aged 11 to 14) was the sense that the German people had no agency, no choice and, as a result, no responsibility. In the view of many students the German people were cunningly 'manipulated', 'brainwashed' or even 'tricked' by Hitler and the Nazis. For example, when asked about the role of ordinary German people in the Holocaust one Year 9 student remarked, 'I think Hitler tricked them into believing it [blaming the Jews] was right, though. So they went along with it' (Marie, Year 9, SE1).

To support the repeated claim that German people were often 'brainwashed' or vigorously 'persuaded' by Hitler and the Nazis, a number of younger

students referred to the power of Nazi propaganda. For example, Aaliyah (Year 10, LON5) commented, 'There was a lot of propaganda as well handed out by the Führer on hatred of the Jews'. Another student said, 'They were just brainwashed with propaganda. He showed them how bad the Jews were and then he fooled everybody into thinking they were the bad guys and they should be killed' (Elliot, Year 9, EE1).

However, when asked to talk in more detail about propaganda many younger students (particularly in Years 7 to 9) floundered. For example, a couple of students said that Hitler used or 'put up, like, posters' (Julia, Year 9, NE1). Some intimated that the media (especially newspapers) and the education system were used to promote Nazi ideas, while Ariella (Year 8, LON6) drew on the experience of the fictional character Bruno from *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* who 'was like watching a film that he wasn't supposed to see about the concentration camps and how they were good'.

The fact that these were all isolated references suggested that a significant amount of younger students may not have a secure grasp on what propaganda is, or the myriad of ways in which it was employed in German society. Given the important function that propaganda played in the process of social and cultural ostracisation of the Jews and other victim groups, it is disconcerting to think that younger students were not more confident and/or familiar with its different manifestations in Nazi Germany. This is especially so since the vast number of students spoke of Hitler bending people to his will by 'brainwashing' them.

By contrast, many students in Years 12 and 13 appeared to hold more sophisticated ideas about Nazi propaganda techniques and the pivotal role played by Joseph Goebbels. Older students were typically more likely to focus on Nazi efforts to use the education system to indoctrinate young people. Students also variously commented on the emphasis placed by the Nazis on the Hitler Youth movement and also noted changes to the curriculum and textbooks to inculcate antisemitic propaganda and 'infiltrate schools' by 'teaching eugenics' (Holly, Year 10, LON5).

Of note was how students of all ages were able to speak in reasonable detail about the force and significance of Hitler's speeches. Students variously described Hitler's speeches as 'passionate', 'persuasive', 'convincing' and 'powerful'. As the following brief exchange between two Year 10 students revealed, the importance of Hitler's speeches in persuading the German people was very clear to young people:

**Holly:** The speeches, it would be like small amounts of people coming and then start building up and like eventually people that were friends with the Jews would even like turn against Jews.
**Fahima:** He was charismatic.
**Holly:** Those speeches he just like brainwashed them and he made them think that Jews were bad people (Year 10, LON5).

Similarly, a number of students reported seeing film footage of Hitler speaking and were impressed by its apparent dramatic impact on the German people:

I think all in all they were quite convinced and persuaded by him. Because we watched one of his speeches and like after every three sentences the whole crowd would cheer. Like he kept referring to Germany as the motherland I think it was and it just seemed like everyone was agreeing with him and everyone was convinced that what he was doing was right (Una, Year 8, LON5).

Through speeches I guess. I mean when you watch … we have watched a couple of them or at least one of them anyway, in History, and when you listen to what he says, or with subtitles in this case, it is like you think why is he saying all this stuff. I mean half of it is just his views but he puts it across in a way that it seems as if they are facts and like other people agree with him. So he tries to … he repeats himself but like trying to get it into people's heads that a certain race is not good for the world and I think most of it is just through manipulation (Juliette, Year 9, LON5).

Referred to in virtually all interviews, 'the speeches' (Fahima, Year 10, LON5) clearly imprinted themselves on students' consciousness. For many, these speeches served as the main conduit through which Hitler communicated his 'thoughts'. Crucially, they are also perceived as the principal means through which Hitler persuaded and manipulated the German people.

Various ideas emerged as to how precisely this 'persuasion' occurred. Some students implied it just happened, in an osmosis-type fashion: 'He gave speeches to a mass crowd of people so he started saying his beliefs and then the people in the crowd were agreeing with him' (Una, Year 8, LON5). Others suggested he was more tactful and tactical in his approach: that he would 'just sort of stand on a balcony and give really powerful speeches; and he just addressed his people like equals and made them feel like they are all sort of all equal together' (Bianca, Year 10, SE1). Anthony (Year 9, SE1) depicted Hitler as mindful of his audience:

…say[ing] things to people he felt would be with him; like if someone hated the Jews he would focus on telling them how much they would do to get rid of them. But if someone like supported them he would try and move on to something else.

The question of how Hitler's ideas translated into action also revealed some interesting changes and continuities among different age groups. As seen above, younger students placed considerable primacy on his speeches – less as a means of disseminating ideas, and more as a transformative means of affecting action. By contrast, students in Years 12 and 13 generally made far less mention of this approach, although where they did they displayed familiar views. One student emphasised how 'he was a very, very inspirational speaker. He was really great at public speaking' (Will, Year 12, LON7), just as another suggested 'due to the fact that he was such a good motivational speaker … he could use people at will' (Joe, Year 12, EE1). Other students shared these sentiments but also emphasised more directly Hitler's skill as a communicator: 'When he like stood up and spoke to people, people really understood what he was saying, he could tailor what he was saying to groups of people' (Cassie, Year 13, EE1).

A larger proportion of students took this idea of Hitler tailoring his approach in a slightly different direction, emphasising that he made 'promises' to people. For some, this effectively ensured support for – or at least acceptance of 'his' more radical 'thoughts'. As Harry (Year 9, EE1) put it, 'he promised them they'd get more food and money for their jobs and people thought "well we need that, so we'll go along with him"'. This sense of 'coming round' to Hitler's way of thinking was also outlined by another Year 9 student in the following terms:

He used different ways to get people believing that that was the right thing to do. And that's why people kind of started to believe everything. Because it was what he believed in and he was quite strong and powerful, so people would believe him and think that he was right (Amanda, Year 9, LON6).

These remarks were often made in the context of more general comments about the economic condition of Germany in the years before the Third Reich. As noted in Chapter 5, students often demonstrated at least a basic level of awareness that times were especially tough during the Weimar Republic, although detailed historical knowledge did often prove to be distinctly shallow. Nevertheless, in suggesting that Hitler employed a strategy of making promises and tailoring his speeches, students were consciously (or more often, unconsciously) pointing to two significant implications: first, that some people

at least had to be persuaded; and second, that those who bought into the promises being made were – crucially – *choosing* to support the Nazi leader.

The notion that some Germans made a conscious, rational decision to support Hitler, having concluded that this was the best option in the circumstances, was coupled with references by some students to other considerations. Particularly strong here were ideas of patriotism, and familial bonds.

Other Year 12 and 13 students also offered further rational attempts to explain why Hitler enjoyed popular support. For example, one student argued that Hitler 'had quite a personal relationship with the electorate, so they really believed in him and believed in what he was saying that maybe made it easier for him to … impose his policies on Germany' (Lucas, Year 12, LON7). Another student argued that, at a time of economic and political crisis, Hitler 'convinced them [the German people] over the course of his campaign that they needed someone like him' (Jake, Year 12, LON7). Meanwhile, Jamie (Year 13, LON3) reasoned why Hitler gained the people's support: 'You can see why in a time when Germany were in despair and upheaval, you can understand why a man who is so well spoken, able to sort of get the people onside in his radical speeches.'

Many other older students also referred to the political and economic context in Germany in the early 1930s to explain why ordinary people turned towards extremist parties. For example, by drawing comparisons with contemporary issues in Greece and Britain, one Year 13 student rationalised why people might potentially turn towards extremism:

> I think there was a vacuum where the country [Germany] was obviously in decline and it was struggling for a variety of reasons, partly because people like him were deliberately whipping it up and making it worse, but he then presented himself as I am the leader… the one you need, I am the radical alternative and … the mainstream has failed. I saw the Channel 4 news special thing on the situation in Greece, where obviously things have got very dire and they are talking about it becoming the first country to go from being developed to being semi-developed, to actually go backwards, which obviously is massive, and there was a thing about Golden Dawn, who are neo-Nazis and pretty open about it, their logo is basically a swastika, it's a sort of modified version… And there were people in the streets making jokes and generally talking about the Holocaust as if it was nothing, and there's that idea that in a country where things are going downhill, people feel that the mainstream has failed so people go to extreme alternatives. And maybe in the same way that the BNP here got a bit of a, you know, had a bit of a rise in European elections maybe five

years ago, there was the sense with the economic crisis – that of course it wasn't clearly anywhere near as extreme as it was in Germany, or as it was in Greece – but people felt that a radical alternative was needed and perhaps didn't necessarily, people when they vote for BNP aren't necessarily going, 'We need to remove all people of this ethnicity from the country', and they are not necessarily complete racists, and they are not neo-Nazis in the same way the leadership is, but they sort of go along with it because they just feel we need something radical, and it's not maybe thinking directly about each individual policy (Kadir, Year 13, LON3).

This and other attempts to both contextualise and utilise broader knowledge and understanding about the rise of National Socialism was a distinct feature of discussion with many older students. It often enabled students to give more substantial accounts and even emboldened some to enter into deeper reflection – a good example of which featured in the following exchange:

> **Jake:** He was a really good orator as well. He didn't just get elected because people decided we want someone like Hitler, I think he convinced them over the course of his campaign that they needed someone like him.
> **Interviewer:** So do you think Hitler just brainwashed everyone?
> **Lucas:** I think he set the agenda, I think you're right. Whether he actually put his name on the plans – he channelled energy of the sort of views of the Nazis, he set a platform for the Holocaust to eventually take place. Whether he actually put his name, stamp on it or not, I think without someone guiding it in that direction it probably wouldn't have been on the same level that it would've been, whether people took it too far after him is another matter, but he definitely takes some responsibility (Year 12, LON7).

This student was not alone in refuting, or at least questioning, the assumption that Hitler 'brainwashed' everyone; others conceded they too thought that brainwashing could not entirely explain why so many German people appeared willing to support Hitler. However, just as some students in Years 12 and 13 sharply departed from younger students in this way, it should be said this was not true of everyone. Some were adamant that Hitler did 'brainwash' people – so much so 'he's able to basically, like as a demigod just rile up the population over time, and secure their support' (Mike, Year 12, LON7).

Nevertheless, a more common intonation from Year 12 and Year 13 students was that of Hitler 'influencing', or being an 'influencer of people's opinions' (Paul, Year 12, LON7). This idea was introduced on a number of occasions by older

students, and appeared within a general assurance in speaking about propaganda and its mechanics. As a result many older students appeared to have a much better grasp of how Hitler appealed to and influenced the German people.

In general, older students placed less emphasis on Hitler 'tricking' or 'brainwashing' the general populace and gave more consideration to why Hitler's views might have been attractive to a broader range of German citizens during the 1930s and early 1940s. Moreover, a lot of students were able to move beyond the idea of Hitler alone being responsible for Nazi propaganda, naming Joseph Goebbels as an important figure. Indeed, one student argued, 'Hitler was incredibly lucky, he had by his side a very intelligent man in Goebbels who used propaganda to really reach out to the German people at the time' (Jim, Year 13, LON7).

Overall, therefore, students in Years 12 and 13 seemed to hold conceptualisations of propaganda that were able to either allow them to move beyond, or at the very least rethink, perceptions of Hitler as simply the figurative snake-charmer or spell-casting wizard. This did not necessarily prevent the persistence of 'brainwashing' as an explanatory idea for some Year 12 and 13 students, but it did see – in the accent of 'influence', for example – those German people exposed to propaganda actually being invested with a greater measure of agency.

## Explanatory accounts: Fear, terror and intimidation

The second set of student explanations for the behaviour of the German people gravitated around a conviction that they lived in a climate of fear and intimidation which typically led them to support or go along with the extreme actions of the Nazi state. Although this strongly echoed the Cold War 'self-image of the Germans as the helpless victims of totalitarian terror incapable of voicing their dissent from Nazi policies' (Kershaw 2008: 140), there was an implicit recognition embedded in this explanatory framework that Germans had some degree of awareness of what was being enacted against the Jews of Germany and later the Jews of Europe. However, the extent to which students themselves acknowledged and addressed this varied.

Students of all ages, but particularly younger students in Years 7 to 11 often believed that the German people acted either as bystanders or collaborators because they were paralysed by 'fear'. The use of the word 'fear' or associated words such as 'frightened' or 'scared' proved a dominant feature of all interviews, as evidenced by the following indicative student remarks:

I think if they were forced into it, it showed like that they were really, really scared of Hitler and of what he could do to them if they didn't do what he wanted (Candice, Year 8, LON6).

They were probably scared that he would do something if they didn't follow his path (Charlotte, Year 8, LON5).

I think it would be very difficult for an ordinary German person to stand up [to Hitler]. Even all of them to do it at once would be very difficult (Lachlan, Year 10, EE1).

They didn't really have a choice so if like one or two people didn't really vote for Hitler and everyone else did then he would just get rid of them because that wouldn't be helping his country and all he really wants is to make the country better again (Kristy, Year 9, LON6).

I think many of them did it out of fear of going against him and not knowing what would happen to them … so they were acting out of fear (Juliette, Year 9, LON5).

As these selected quotes illustrate, the repeated emphasis on 'fear' as an explanatory factor dominated many interviews. Furthermore, the interviews also revealed a strong sense that this fear and terror was personified in the character of Adolf Hitler. It was evident that the tendency to see fear through a 'Hitler-centric' lens was prominent among younger pupils, but a number of students in Years 12 and 13 also shared this perspective:

It speaks for how powerful Hitler must have been as a person, they must have been in absolute fear of him, they mustn't have wanted to put a foot wrong, and it shows that Hitler as a person had reached that level in Germany where if you went against him there was no going back for you. And I think that's where he had complete reign over the nation (Kadir, Year 13, LON3).

If the people didn't follow his orders they would be treated the same way as the Jews, forced into labour camps or shot dead (Harrison, Year 12, LON3).

To further emphasise the existence of a repressive climate of fear and intimidation under Nazi rule, student explanations also broadened to suggest that anyone who did not support the regime would face severe consequences. For example, Nina (Year 9, LON5) said they 'were scared that if they had a family maybe Hitler would kill their family or something'. Another student reasoned that if they intervened to

help the Jews they would probably 'get killed or their family would get killed' (John, Year 9, EE1). A similar point was made by Rachael (Year 10, LON6), who declared that they were scared of 'what he could do to them because, like, he could just send someone to kill them … I think they were just scared'.

Such comments were not only limited to younger students, as several students in Years 12 and 13 shared the view of Nikki (Year 13, EE1), who said, 'I reckon if you stood up to the Nazis you would've been killed yourself'.

In light of the comments above it is perhaps not surprising that a number of students argued that the German people remained obedient or loyal to the Nazis due to an instinct for self-preservation. In this sense, of course, fear and self-preservation are very much linked. As one student said, 'Sometimes people just joined the Nazis just because they did not want to go through what the Jews were going through' (Rob, Year 9, EE1). Other students noted that the German people often were 'bystanders' because 'they were afraid to speak up or to do something' (Fahima, Year 10, LON5). Meanwhile, Lucas (Year 12, LON7) reasoned, 'fear is one of the determining things that would make people Nazis, because if you are asked … are you a Nazi? Or do you support Hitler? You'd almost have to answer, "yes" for your own safety'. Interestingly, in a moment of critical self-reflection, one student further reasoned, 'If I was in that time I probably would have been afraid to like say something about it or stop it, I don't know' (Aaliyah, Year 10, LON5).

A number of students did recognise that there were people in German society who opposed Hitler. However, as the following three comments illustrate, they also subscribed to the view that repression and fear prevented them from acting in any significant ways:

> Some people, like, really, really believed Hitler was a bad man, like they believed that he was completely wrong and they would have felt like they had to protect the Jews, but there were just some people who were so terrified of the consequences if they did (Annie, Year 10, NE1).

> Sometimes they were pressured into [attacking Jews] so they might not have wanted to but sometimes they did. So, like, there might be some Nazis who didn't want to be Nazis and were either pressured into it or forced into it (Alice, Year 9, NE1).

> I mean they [German people] probably have a conscience, like they don't want to do this [persecute and murder Jews], but they must have been scared out of their pants (Amanda, Year 9, LON6).

Of significance, some students reasoned that the German people were themselves 'victims' of Nazi oppression. As one student explained, 'I feel sorry for some of them, because some of them were maybe forced to [follow] Hitler's orders' (Lara, Year 9, SE1). Another student argued that you really couldn't blame the German people or see them as evil as they were like 'slaves' following Nazi directives without question:

> But if you know what you are doing, like, then, yes, you are evil but if you are not, like, not really sure, if you are just really scared, you can't call them evil. Like if they are doing it out of fear or they don't know what they are doing, if they are, like, in the wrong state of mind then you can't really call them evil (Samantha, Year 10, NE1).

> They're almost like … you'd say like … you might almost say they're like slaves because they are literally just killing people for him. Because it's whatever he says they do, because otherwise it's, like, they die almost (Hannah, Year 9, EE1).

What was clearly evident in all the interviews was the belief that, due to fear, terror or intimidation, ordinary German people had very little choice or agency. In this context, most students believed that the German people could not be held responsible or blamed for the devastation of the Holocaust. Rather, the responsibility and blame was firmly attributed to Hitler and a core group of leading Nazis. This overarching perspective is neatly summarised in the following observation by a Year 9 student who reasoned, 'They probably felt quite scared to stand up for themselves. There was a small group of people that were probably supporting him, but the others were just based on fear' (Catherine, Year 9, EE1). In other words, this student, along with the majority of other younger students interviewed believed that most German people did not overtly support Hitler and the Nazis, but were nevertheless compelled to support their actions because they were afraid of the consequences.

This sense of an overtly oppressed society in which fear was a dominant force and individuals had little choice or agency was a perspective often repeated in interview with students of all ages. For example, Dameer (Year 12, LON3) argued:

> And if you are a soldier and you have these orders and you don't do them you don't want to be branded a traitor by your country, and probably just get into as bad a situation as the Jews were. I don't know, were the traitors like shot, or were they put in camps as well?

In many respects, students' responses to survey question 62 echoed this commonly held view. The

question asked, 'If a member of the military or police refused an instruction to kill Jewish people, what do you think would be the most likely to happen to them?' From a historical perspective, leading academics (e.g. Browning 1992; Friedlander 1998; Goldhagen 1996) suggest that the most likely consequence was that a soldier would be excused from the killing and given other duties. Indeed, although at the Nuremberg trials threat of death was considered as a possible line of defence for how and why senior Nazi figures acted during the Holocaust, no record has ever been found that a German soldier was killed or sent to a concentration camp for refusing an order to kill Jews.

However, as illustrated in Figure 6.8, most students did not share this historical understanding. In fact the vast majority of students incorrectly assumed that a member of the police or military would be shot for refusing an order to kill Jews. Moreover, two-thirds of students who provided this answer were at least fairly confident it was correct. By comparison only 5 per cent of students provided the most appropriate answer, 'given another duty'.

What these findings potentially reveal is that many young people hold misconceptions about the Holocaust that are prevalent in public discourse about the period. Arguably, these misunderstandings have important consequences for how students make meaning of the Holocaust. For example, a commonly held and widely articulated goal of learning about the Holocaust is that students should 'learn the lessons of the Holocaust' by understanding how and why people acted in the past. Fundamentally, however, there are very different 'lessons to be learned' if students believe that

Nazi perpetrators faced a real risk to their lives if they did not carry out orders from above. In recent decades historians have paid increased attention to the complex behaviours of those involved in the Holocaust (Bankier 1992; Browning 1992; Cesarani 2005). The findings from this research study suggest, however, that the fruits of this important historical scholarship have not been passed on to students in many English school classrooms.

Furthermore, it was abundantly clear in all the interviews with students in Years 7 to 11 that few had a clear sense of how the Nazi state was organised and controlled and what freedoms and agency ordinary Germans enjoyed. Students typically believed that the German people had little room for manoeuvre in a society controlled by fear and intimidation. However, for the most part their understanding of life under Nazi rule was both limited and dominated by a Hitler-centric view of authority. Many such limitations were also in evidence in interviews with students in Years 12 and 13. Nonetheless, understandings did generally prove more developed in two fundamental ways.

First, in terms of language used, the words 'dictatorship' and 'totalitarian' were exclusive to older students. Moreover, unlike younger students, Year 12 and 13 students were not as prone to personalise authority in terms of Hitler. In this vein, one student observed, 'Hitler was smart in a sense because he created that platform of fear, he's got his SS and … this whole basis of fear that kind of kept people in check' (Damien, Year 12, LON3).

The notion of there being an apparatus in place that is not enforced or administered by Hitler as such, but which does reflect (or at least uphold) his

Figure 6.8 Student responses to survey question 62, 'If a member of the military or police refused an instruction to kill Jewish people, what do you think would be the most likely to happen to them?' (percentage by year group)
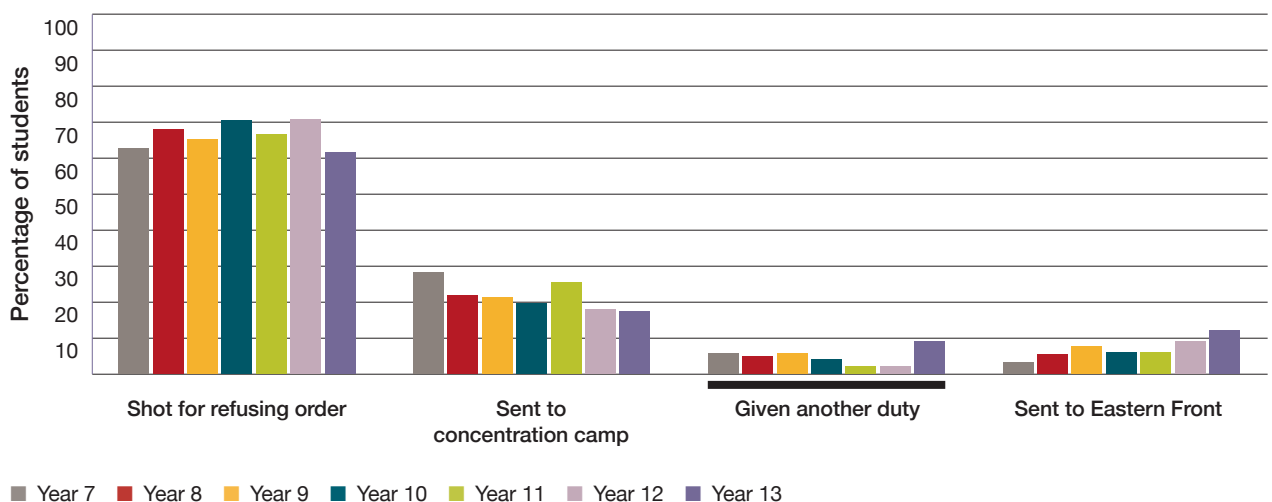
interests, reinforces the appearance of students in Years 12 and 13 having a slightly more complex perception of the Nazi state and Hitler's role within it. Similarly, students in Years 12 and 13 were more likely to refer to organisations and agents of the state, such as the Gestapo, the SS and the SA (the *Sturmabteilung*, better known as 'Brownshirts' or 'Stormtroopers') than their younger counterparts. Older students also recognised that Germany 'was a secure police state' in which power and authority was, for example, 'built up through the youth and … entrenched in society' (Harrison, Year 12, LON3).

Indicative of the views of other older students, one Year 12 student (Harrison, LON3) also noted that 'the Nazi Party had built up such a big power base that it was next to impossible to get your views across' and oppose the state. Several students noted how this 'power base' had been built up over time and that, by 1933, Hitler was in a position of clear authority. As one student said, 'it was a police state and there wasn't a lot people could do once he got into power because he acted quite quickly' (Jake, Year 12, LON7). In a similar vein Damien (Year 12, LON3) argued:

> People forget it was a dictatorship; it wasn't something like, say, the Conservatives now, where we don't do this sort of thing. It was a dictatorship, people were forced to go along with what he [Hitler] was saying because of the powers he had, first it was the SA then it went on to the SS, people were being killed daily. So it's kind of in that sense it's that fear of not going along with things.

Overall, therefore, in contrast to many younger students, those in Years 12 and 13 typically understood that the apparatus and culture of the Nazi state evolved over time and ultimately determined the agency and freedom of the German people.

The second way in which the views of students in Years 12 and 13 differed from younger students was in reference to the choices made by the German people. For, while younger students almost exclusively believed that the German people were forced to follow Hitler and the Nazis out of fear, a number of older students challenged this assumption. For example, Alex (Year 12, EE1) argued, 'I don't think … the majority of Germans went along with it [Nazi policy] because they were frightened. I do think there was some support for it among the German people'. In a further staunch rebuttal of the 'fear thesis', Jake (Year 12, LON7) argued:

> I'm going to have to disagree with you saying lots of people went along with it because of the fear, because you can see by the fact there are still neo-

Nazis around today that there was a genuine hatred of these people [Jews and other victim groups] at the time, whether it was due to years of propaganda or people desperate to have an enemy … there was a whole culture of hating these people, and lots of people did go along just because they either didn't care, or, you know, like there's a reason people signed up to be camp guards, or, you know, there's a reason German companies used slave labour from the Jewish people in the camps, like it wasn't because they were scared of the Nazis.

Although such an argument was rare among older students, the sense that not all Germans blindly went along with the Nazi policies out of fear or intimidation featured on more than one occasion during interviews with students in Years 12 and 13. Such a position was in stark contrast to the views of younger students who, almost without exception, believed that the German people, willing or not, followed Hitler's' orders due either to indoctrination or fear.

## Explanatory accounts: Ignorance

In contrast to the other two explanatory paradigms, the final set of dominant explanations offered by students emphasised that Germans 'did not know' about the fate of German and European Jewry. As noted, this train of thought runs directly counter to the established historical canon, and – indeed – to the recognition of students that German Jews were subjected to discriminatory treatment prior to murder. More will be said on students' chronological understanding in Chapter 7, but in terms of 'ignorance' this tends in the main to refer to knowledge of anti-Jewish measures during the war years.

Many of the remarks made by students about the 'ignorance' of the German population pivoted on a number of strong assumptions. For example, a prominent assumption was that murder was conducted in such a way that the German people were generally unaware of events:

> I'm not sure that they knew the extent of what was going on as well. I think they sort of knew that Hitler was treating Jewish people badly and different ethnicities differently, but I don't think that they knew that he was going off and killing them. That wasn't really known until like after the war (Tom, Year 10, NE1).

> …they didn't really know what was going on. They just knew that the Jews may have been a problem, but they didn't know about the concentration camps and the torture (Sabir, Year 10, EE1).

They just … they didn't know it was happening (Sabir, Year 10, EE1).

Hitler didn't make it as blatant … Perhaps it wasn't widely known that these events were happening (Fadil, Year 13, LON3).

I'm not saying they [the German people] are not at fault but I'm saying I doubt that they knew they [the Jews] were being shipped off to death camps [and] being killed, they probably didn't know (Jake, Year 12, LON7).

Many students also reasoned that ordinary Germans were unaware of the extreme horrors of the Holocaust because the mass killings were carried out in remote locations, often erroneously placed within Germany:

Interviewer: So what about the rest of the German population?
Nina: Yes they probably didn't know about it. That is what I learned in history that some of them were like unaware…
Chloe: Yes that's true, because Auschwitz was actually hidden from everybody in the more outskirts, not the outskirts … but in a small area of Germany so…
Juliette: In the countryside.
Chloe: Yes in the countryside, so nobody actually knew about it. So I guess half the population didn't know (Year 9, LON5).

Although the view that the German people were ignorant of the Holocaust was more pronounced among younger students, a significant number of students in Years 12 and 13 also subscribed to the belief that the German people were typically unaware of the systematic mass killing of Jews and other victims groups. Thus, although several older students argued that the German people knew about Nazi discriminatory policy and acts against the Jews, most reasoned that the Germans were often not familiar with the systematic extermination of Jews because they occurred in lands beyond Germany. As Jack (Year 12, EE1) commented:

I don't think they [the German people] realised the full extent, I think they knew that there was obviously discrimination, the German people, if they did see a Jew they would be mean to them … but I don't think they realised, recognised, the full extent of what would actually happen to the people in the concentration camps, because they weren't all in Germany.

There is no doubt that the Nazi regime wanted to ensure that mass murder did not become common knowledge. As Breitman (1996: 71) points out, 'secrecy was essential for the Final Solution, but it went beyond that; it was Hitler's and Himmler's general style of operation'. The Nazi elite, for instance, was of the belief that 'a good many Germans … were still shackled by Christian morality and, until their re-education was complete, the grand scheme could not be uncovered' (Bankier 2002: 44–5). And yet there was, as Bankier goes on to say, the 'paradox' that 'the extermination of the Jews was publicized in declarations printed in the Nazi press and announced over German radio'.

At the same time, those living in the vicinity of the death camps were only too aware of their function, as were passers-by: as Mark Mazower (2008: 384–5) notes, 'passengers on the Lviv-Lublin railway could smell the Belzec camp hidden behind the pine trees and talked to one another openly about the bodies starting to rot'.

In truth, then, the reality was that if the Holocaust was ever wrapped in a shroud of secrecy, this garb quickly fell away. As it did, the distance between Germany and the loci of the killing was not necessarily a barrier for knowledge; thanks to word of mouth, personal correspondence and various other means, 'knowledge of the fate of the Jews' was 'widespread' – though as Kershaw (2008: 225) cautions, 'demonstrating what attitudes followed from the knowledge' is 'less straightforward'.

The second prevalent assumption among students was the belief that the Nazis used propaganda as a means to camouflage Nazi actions against the Jews and others. Notably, many students appeared to be influenced by a fictitious scene in the film *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas* in which the German protagonists were shown a propaganda film that depicted life in the camps as pleasant and comfortable. Seemingly, many students accepted this as evidence that the German people were duped into believing that the Jews were often well treated. Kristy (Year 9, LON6) noted, for example:

I think they had the videos as well, because like in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* they were watching, like, a video and it is like a picture of a camp that Jewish people can go to … and it is like a holiday camp that is what it looked like. So I don't think they knew the extent … of how extreme the camps were or how bad they were.

The following exchange between students in Year 10 (EE1) similarly shows how many students believed that German people were ignorant of the fact that innocent Jews were slaughtered *en masse*:

Sabir: They knew that there were Jews going to

live somewhere else, but they didn't know where that was or what it was like. In fact they were shown films where it was quite happy so they were happy for it … the German people.

**Interviewer:** So in a sense they sort of bought into it. They knew about it at some level.

**Sabir:** Yeah … but not the extent. Not the mass murder.

Interestingly, a number of students in Years 12 and 13 argued that the German people could not have known about the extreme consequences of the Holocaust or they would have acted differently, possibly even spoken out against it. This view is captured in the following comments of students from Years 13 and 9:

There was propaganda that said they were taking them to holiday camps, so obviously they [the German people] didn't know that they were going to be gassed at the time that they were denouncing them, so if they'd realised how immoral it was they might have acted differently (Amelia, Year 13, EE1).

I've always assumed they didn't know […] Because I feel like they couldn't have known, I feel like it couldn't have happened if people had known what was going on (Sally, Year 13, EE1).

…if they had known what was going on in Auschwitz I'm sure they would have done something (Chloe, Year 9, LON5).

Other students shared in this sense of incredulity, typically arguing that if the German people knew more about the mass killing, 'I don't think it would have been allowed to happen' (Sally, Year 13, EE1) or, as one Year 13 student put it, 'if they'd known the extent of the immorality that was going to be committed a lot of people would have refrained from joining in' (Amelia, Year 13, EE1).

Large numbers of students interviewed exhibited the strongly held belief that the ordinary German person would have been horrified if they knew the true scope and scale of the Nazi Holocaust. Accordingly, Samad (Year 12, LON3) reasoned, 'I don't think they would have supported Hitler directly if they knew his true intentions'. In a similar vein, one Year 9 student asserted that the German people were shocked when they eventually found out about the extreme nature of the persecution and murder. When asked if the German people knew about the mass killing, he candidly announced: 'No. I think people freaked out when they heard about it' (Anthony, Year 9, SE1).

Once again, what these comments revealed is that many young people were unaware of key historical scholarship which provides powerful and illuminating evidence of what people in Germany

and elsewhere knew about the Holocaust. It is, of course, perhaps unrealistic to suggest that students should read historical tomes but, at the very least, it is reasonable to expect that key evidence emanating from historical scholarship should be made accessible to young people. Essentially, the historical record shows that people in Germany and other countries did know about the Holocaust and most either stood by and/or collaborated. Crucially, very few resisted.

Directly related to the point above, it was noticeable that very few students held the view that the German people were aware of the unfolding genocide and should accept some responsibility for its implementation. Indeed, the following comments from two Year 12 students appeared as rare examples of such a perspective:

Many of them [German people] must have realised that something was going on, I think the disappearance of whole groups of people, in the area around Germany, I think, and for them to constantly continue to support the Nazi Party they are maybe not intentionally but they are essentially supporting and therefore are like collaborators of the Holocaust (Jeremy, Year 12, LON7).

…you could put some blame on, you know, the German people, because they sorted of elected the Nazi Party and … a lot of people knew it was happening, at least there was a lot of discrimination towards the Jews, even if they didn't entirely condone the complete extermination (Alex, Year 12, EE1).

Other students, however, were more reluctant to attribute blame to the German people, instead suggesting that at worst the German people were 'kind of complacent'. As Paul (Year 12, LON7) argued: 'I think if we are going to charge them [the German people] with anything it would probably be complacency, because regardless of why they did it they still let it happen, and they still elected Hitler'.

Despite these rare examples of students suggesting that ordinary Germans did know about the Holocaust and, in consequence, that they must accept some responsibility for its devastation, most students across all ages held a completely different view. For example, many students reasoned that, due to deceptive propaganda or the fact that mass killing was carried out in remote locations, the German people were unaware of the Nazis' crimes against the Jews. Indeed, several students reasoned – as illustrated above – that if the German people had known, they would surely have acted to prevent the Holocaust from happening. More typically students across all ages asserted that, while ordinary people may have known about general prejudice against the Jews, very few knew about the enormity

of mass extermination. Put simply, for the most part students erroneously believed the German people 'didn't know'.

## Summary

- Typically, students from all age groups had little or no sense of the crucial role played by other agents and agencies across Europe in facilitating – and at times carrying out – mass murder. Students were not familiar with collaborating regimes (such as the Vichy government), Axis allies, or the role played by local populations. This has repercussions for identifying culpability and responsibility. Both of which are discussed further in Chapter 7.
- Many students were not familiar with key agents and agencies connected to the Holocaust. Just 23.2 per cent of all students indicated Adolf Eichmann was linked to the genocide, while 46 per cent did not know.
- During interviews a tiny minority of students referred to the role played by Heinrich Himmler in the Holocaust and 75.7 per cent of all survey respondents either did not believe, or did not know, if the *Einsatzgruppen* was connected. Findings from the focus-group discussions confirmed these gaps in students' knowledge – especially among younger students.
- Year 12 and Year 13 students showed greater awareness of some key Nazi figures, and are more acquainted with the *Einsatzgruppen* and its actions. However, among these students upper estimates of the number of victims claimed by mass shootings in the East did not exceed a few hundred thousand; in actuality, around 1.5 million were killed as a result of the 'Holocaust by bullets'.
- Despite 44.4 per cent of survey respondents identifying the SS as having a connection with the Holocaust, many students either did not refer to the organisation in focus-group interviews or were unclear as to its precise role in the genocide.
- The individual whom most survey respondents associated with the Holocaust was Adolf Hitler (91.4 per cent) although, in interview, the vast majority of students recognised that he did not kill anyone himself. More than half (56.1 per cent) of younger students (*Years 7 to 9*) believed that the Holocaust was solely attributable to Adolf Hitler. This figure decreased with age. By Year 13, for example, only a quarter of students (25.5 per cent) ascribed full responsibility for the Holocaust to Hitler. Typically, older students appreciated that Hitler acted with support from others including key members of the Nazi party.

- That said, many students from across the age range tended to personalise and narrate their understanding of Holocaust-related events through Hitler: he passes laws, he creates camps, and the like. This was especially prevalent among younger students, where Hitler was depicted as the primary agent of death, if not the omnipresent murderer.
- Where younger students see Hitler as having 'thoughts' or 'ideas', older students more explicitly frame these as ideology. Notably, although students of all ages referred or alluded to ideas of race, racism and Aryan ideals, nearly all show little to no awareness of where these respective ideas historically originated. The central notions in Hitler's ideology were, therefore, attributed solely and exclusively to him, with no recognition of their roots in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western culture and society.
- Year 12 and 13 students tended to move away from the idea of Hitler as the only political force in Germany, positioning him within a broader framework. This does not reduce his centrality, but it does see him framed in a more managerial manner: he is said to 'delegate' to others; it is noted that he does not always attend meetings, and that in many respects that he does not need to. Among older students, Hitler is presented as an overseer in a project which included agents and agencies other than him. Their knowledge of his absence from the Wannsee Conference was illustrative here, despite a narration which erroneously suggested the existence of a document produced at the meeting that expressed commitment to the 'Final Solution'.
- Most students in Years 7 to 9 were not aware that 'the Nazis' referred to the Nazi Party nor that the party enjoyed significant, broad-based support across all sectors of the German population. Moreover, these 11 to 14 year olds also tended not to know how the National Socialist German Workers' Party came to acquire political power. Where there were exceptions, students believed the Nazis were elected to rather than being invited in to government. Older students (Years 12 to 13) were considerably more familiar with the history of the Nazi Party prior to 1933, although many similarly believed the party was voted into power.
- The youngest students of the age spectrum (11 to 13 years old) depicted 'the Nazis' as 'believers' or disciples of Hitler. By contrast 14 to 16-year-old students were more likely to frame 'the Nazis' as a paramilitary organisation, characterised by violence and visually distinctive uniforms. Students in Years 12 and 13 (17 to 18 years old) were the most able to name individual Nazi figures, and to

identify the political affiliation that 'the Nazis' had.

- With age, students increasingly appreciated that the Nazis were centrally involved in the Holocaust. Whereas, for example, 20.3 per cent of Year 7 students and 33.0 per cent of Year 9 students held the Nazis in some way responsible for the Holocaust, by Year 12 the figure had climbed to 49.7 per cent.

- Many younger students (11 to 16 years old) did not describe Nazis in terms of being 'evil', 'inhuman' or monstrous. In fact, a large proportion asserted that Nazis were human beings, who – some indicated – were capable of benevolence and being 'nice'. There were indications from a few students that Nazis 'changed' once in a group or when doing their 'job'.

- In various ways all students showed disdain and abhorrence for the actions of the Nazis, but a number did intimate that Nazis acted out of self-interest – in terms of providing for their family – and/or out of patriotic fervour. Although not condoned, the patriotic dimension was seen by some to be understandable.

- Only a small number of students (fewer than 10 per cent) considered that the German people were complicit in, or responsible for, the persecution and mass murder of Jews and other victims groups. The vast majority of students separated 'the Nazis' from 'the German people'. In terms of the latter, they were variously regarded as having had some role (often undetermined) in Hitler's coming to power, not having 'done anything' in relation to the Holocaust (due to ignorance and/ or fear), and having offered help to Jews (most commonly specified in terms of hiding). Students in Years 12 and 13 not only had more to say than younger students on all of these issues, but were also alone in suggesting that some German people were more directly involved – principally through denouncing people to the authorities.

- Many students believed that the German people succumbed to the will of Hitler and the Nazis because they were 'brainwashed'. Most younger students, and a number of older students, regarded speeches as the principal means by which Hitler's 'thoughts' and 'ideas' were communicated. Hitler is presented as a talented orator, often to the extent that his speeches 'brainwash' his audience into doing his bidding. Some Year 12 and 13 students, although by no means all, displayed more sophisticated understandings of propaganda and showed some scepticism towards 'brainwashing', with some preferring to cast Hitler as an 'influencer'.

- Many students believed that the German people did not know about the mass killing of Jews and other victim groups. Students typically believed that, due to secrecy, propaganda and the remote locations of the death camps, it was difficult for ordinary people to know about the extremes of the Holocaust. Some students even reasoned that if the German people had known they would not have allowed it to continue. Others suggested that the German people were truly shocked when they found out about the extermination camps after the war.

- Alongside 'brainwashing' many students believed terror and intimidation explained why the German people supported the Nazis. Younger students personalised obedience in terms of fear of Hitler; older students framed terror in more systemic terms. This partly reflected older students' more developed conceptions of the Nazi state.

- Nevertheless, a significant majority of all students incorrectly believed that if a member of the military or police refused to kill Jewish people they would be shot. Only 5 per cent selected the most appropriate answer: they would be given another duty. In general, students did not accord the German people and their collaborators with agency, choice or responsibility.

- On many occasions, students' understanding of the Holocaust stood in direct contrast to prevailing historical scholarship. For example, many students adopted an 'intentionalist' perspective on the Holocaust and typically assumed a Hitler-centric focus on all events. Students also seemed less aware of the pivotal role played by the Nazi Party and the broad-based support it received. Furthermore, students' evaluation of what the German people 'knew' about the Holocaust and the role they played in the persecution and mass murder was at odds with the historical record.

Emile Holba, 2014

# 7.

## When and where did the Holocaust take place?

### Key questions

**1.** Why is it important that young people know when and where the Holocaust took place?

**2.** What do students know about when the Holocaust happened and how it developed?

**3.** What do students understand about the relationship between the Second World War and the Holocaust?

**4.** How do students understand and explain Britain's response to the Holocaust?

**5.** Where do students think the Holocaust took place?

**6.** What do students know about ghettos, the 'Holocaust by bullets', the camp system and the end of the Holocaust?

### Key findings

**1.** Specific knowledge and understanding of where and when the Holocaust took place was often limited among younger students (Years 7 to 9). However, older students (Years 12 to 13) were more able to detail policies, places and events.

**2.** 40.2 per cent of students incorrectly believed that the 'organised mass killing of Jews' began in 1933 when Hitler came to power.

**3.** Most students had limited understanding of the Holocaust and its relationship to the Second World War. Knowledge of the *Einsatzgruppen* and mass killing in Eastern Europe during the war was also very limited.

**4.** When surveyed, 50.7 per cent incorrectly believed that the largest number of Jews murdered during the Holocaust came from Germany, and 54.9 per cent thought that mass murder took place in Germany.

**5.** Many students believed that Britain fought the war to save the Jews or that the British did not know about mass killing until the end of the war.

**6.** Most students (71.0 per cent) recognised that Auschwitz was explicitly connected to the Holocaust, however knowledge of other camps such as Treblinka and Bergen-Belsen was very limited.

**7.** Many students were uncertain about how and why the Holocaust ended and only 46.1 per cent correctly knew that the end of the Holocaust came as a result of the Allied liberation of lands occupied by the German army.

### Why is it important that young people know when and where the Holocaust took place?

As Chapter 1 has already described, there is arguably a tendency in Holocaust education to draw universal 'lessons' from its history; to believe that, unless we are vigilant – against racism, in defence of toleration and democratic values – something like the Holocaust could happen anywhere and at any time. This claim is clearly false. Not all societies, at all times, are in danger of collapsing into mass violence. But some places, at some times, undoubtedly are. If we are to improve our efforts at genocide prevention, it is important to recognise warning signs and to make appropriate interventions.

Knowledge of when and where the Holocaust took place – locating it within its historical context – will not provide a failsafe guide to where other examples of genocide may occur. However, it may help to deepen understanding of the patterns

and processes involved, especially if compared to other cases in the past. After all, the mass murder of European Jewry did not occur in the abstract and 'is not beyond space-time' (Katz 1992: 173). Rather, 'the Holocaust was a real historical event, in real time…; in real space marked in every child's geography book' (Dawidowicz 1990: 29).

Understandings of when the Holocaust happened therefore go hand in glove with understandings of where it took place. Absolutely central to an informed understanding of the relationship between the 'when' and the 'where' of the Holocaust is that students have a clear knowledge of the distinction between before and after September 1939. In order to fully appreciate the development of the Holocaust they should be aware that, before September 1939, Nazi persecution against Jews and others – while often extremely violent and in many cases lethal – did not yet amount to programmes of systematic mass murder. Moreover, it is crucial that students recognise these discriminatory policies were contained within a particular geographical space – Greater Germany – albeit one which had emerged during the course of the 1930s as a result of the Nazi regime's foreign policy.

During the pre-war years, Nazi anti-Jewish policy focused first on excluding German Jews from society, politics and the economy and, later, on the enforced migration of Jews out of the Reich (Friedländer 1997). However, in the years immediately after September 1939, as the German army conquered more territory across Europe during the Second World War, Nazi anti-Jewish policy acquired continental dynamics and became more murderous. Increasingly, policies of persecution and murder engulfed a host of European countries, proving particularly catastrophic in Eastern Europe, the Baltic states and the Nazi-occupied territories of the Soviet Union, but also devastating in the Balkans, in some countries of Western Europe such as the Netherlands and, of course, in Germany itself.

The reality that Nazi persecution of all victim groups markedly increased during 1939 to 1945, and in some cases descended into genocide, only confirms how knowledge of the outbreak and course of the Second World War is crucial in accounting for the radicalisation of Nazi policy. However, as Confino (2012a: 31–2) notes, when it comes to the Holocaust, 'the question is not whether the context of a brutalizing war is important (of course it is), but in what way and what it explains'.

For example, it is not only critical for students to recognise that the conquest of new lands in the East caused millions of Jewish people to fall under Nazi rule, they also need to understand the consequences of this development: that for a variety of reasons it led to the enactment of increasingly radical and brutal policies towards Jews in a variety

of countries. The precise nature of these policies was affected by multiple factors, including the terms of Nazi occupation, administration or collaboration; sociocultural and political factors at a local level; and, of course, broader contextual issues such as the course of war.

Having a clear understanding of the Second World War's chronological and geographical development is thus fundamental for students' acquisition of an informed understanding of how and why the Holocaust happened. So too is an appreciation of how the war context itself relates to the years which preceded the conflict (Confino 2012b: 93).

With awareness of these contexts, students will become more able to move beyond erroneous or undeveloped understandings of who did what during the Holocaust. They will also be better equipped to deal with complex questions surrounding levels of responsibility and complicity than those who view the Holocaust through a narrow German-centric or Hitler-centric lens. Accordingly, students who appreciate that the Holocaust developed over time to become a continental genocide in which the perpetrators ultimately sought to kill every Jew, everywhere, will be more able to understand the significance, impact and true enormity of its scope and scale than those who, for example, believe it was confined solely to Germany.

At another level, how much – or how little – students know about the geographic sweep of the Holocaust can also directly affect the manner in which they order and organise their historical knowledge. This can be exemplified in various ways at various levels. For example, knowing that the greatest number of Jewish victims came from German-occupied Poland and not Germany forces students to reassess and rethink presumptions they might have about the size of the Jewish population in Germany. Similarly, knowing that the bulk of killing took place not in Germany but in German-occupied Poland requires students to consider the accuracy of the chronological knowledge with which they are working. In this way it is indeed possible to 'see new chronologies emerging from close geographical study of the Holocaust' (Giordano *et al.* 2014: 6).

Taking these examples further, it is evident that students' geographical awareness of the Holocaust will also have consequences for the accounts and explanations they construct. Understanding that the largest number of Jews killed came from and were murdered in German-occupied Poland, for instance, calls into question the notion, expressed by some students in our research, that 'Hitler' only 'attacked' the Jews because they held 'power' in Germany. Likewise, it follows that a student who knows most Jews killed came from and were murdered in German-occupied Poland, is less likely to believe that organised mass murder began as soon as Hitler

became leader of Germany in 1933.

To fully appreciate the scope and scale of the Holocaust, students' understanding of the geographies of the Holocaust should be particularly underpinned by substantive knowledge of ghettos, the actions of the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units) and the development of the camp system. The 'ghetto phenomenon', for example, was not only 'central to Jewish life under the National Socialist regime', it is also 'a keystone of Holocaust consciousness and memory' (Michman 2011: 1). Tellingly, it is partly in servicing this latter function that popular knowledge and understanding of the ghettos has incorrectly framed the nature and purpose of these sites. To address this, it is necessary for students to understand that ghettos were established in different places, at different times, for different reasons. Chronologically they were first set up soon after the German invasion of Poland in September 1939 and typically the Nazi leadership in Berlin regarded them as a provisional measure to control and segregate Jews who they considered an existential threat. Understanding what the ghettos were and why they were established in the places they were located allows young people more fully to comprehend the cumulative radicalisation of anti-Jewish policy over time and its evolutionary, at times *ad hoc*, nature.

The key agents in the transition to widespread murder was, as outlined in previous chapters, the *Einsatzgruppen*. Accordingly, absent knowledge of these mobile killing squads and their actions has numerous repercussions since it impedes understanding of how genocide unfolded.

Following the invasion of Poland in September 1939, Jews in this German-occupied territory were exposed to unprovoked and random acts of violence, including murder. However, systematic mass murder of Jews in Eastern Europe began with the German invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. This was in part a product of the realisation that mass deportation of Europe's Jews to 'reservations' in the East or Madagascar was impossible. More obviously it was also the result of the Nazis' growing insecurity and their long-established and virulent antisemitism.

Furthermore, knowledge of the camp system is also essential if students are to understand the progressive development of the Holocaust. As with ghettos, much representation of the camp system in popular history encountered by students is counterproductive so that, 'instead of the intricate detail and subtle shades of historical scholarship, we see broad brushstrokes and vivid colours' which uphold 'one-dimensional' understandings (Wachsmann 2015: 14). In place of these, students should be aware that the concentration camps

established from 1933, and the subsequent expansion of a vast network of slave labour camps – however murderous they became – still served a very different purpose from the very small number of death camps, the first of which (Chelmno) began killing in late 1941.

While huge numbers from many victim groups suffered, and tens of thousands died in the concentration and slave labour camps, the death camps were established with the explicit purpose of murdering Jews as quickly as possible. The *Einsatz Reinhardt* camps of Bełżec, Sobibor, Treblinka and (for a short period) Majdanek were employed for the total annihilation of Jews living within the General Government – that area of Nazi-occupied Poland that had not been incorporated directly into the German Reich.

In the case of the death camps, students must confront the confluence of geography and chronology, for their creation cannot be understood without reference to their geographical and temporal contexts. Knowledge and understanding of the death camps also allows students to appreciate how the history of the camp system was complex and fluid, with the 'murder of the Jews … a later development and one that changed the shape of the camp system altogether' (Stone 2015: 11).

As the killing programme expanded to encompass all of Nazi-dominated Europe, so Auschwitz-Birkenau became the major site for the murder of Jews from across the continent. In this respect, it would be instructive if students appreciated that Auschwitz, though the most iconic of all camps, was not typical of the Holocaust's killing centres.

In contrast to the likes of Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka, 'Auschwitz' had multiple functions, as a concentration, labour and death camp. This meant that whilst over a million people died at Auschwitz, a small yet significant number survived. Survival of any kind was, of course, exceptional in the death camps. Indeed, the experience of survival itself was not the norm in the history of the Holocaust. Although millions were killed in the gas chambers of the death camps, millions more were shot near their own homes, died of disease or starvation in overcrowded ghettos, or perished in the death marches. Thus, while the imagery associated most closely with Auschwitz – arrival on deportation carriages, dehumanising selection and registration procedures (shaved heads, numbered tattoos and striped uniforms) and brutal barrack life – looms large in collective popular consciousness, this was by no means typical of the 6 million Jews across Europe who lost their lives (see also, Snyder 2009).

There are compelling reasons, then, why students need knowledge and understanding of when and

where the Holocaust took place. These domains do not exist in isolation from knowledge and understanding of 'who were the victims' and 'who were the perpetrators' of the Holocaust; rather, they are intimately and intrinsically entwined.

## What do students know about when the Holocaust happened and how it developed?

### Chronological parameters of the Holocaust

In order to establish a rudimentary benchmark of students' chronological knowledge of the Holocaust, question 38 of the survey asked, 'When did the Holocaust happen?' As Figure 7.1 illustrates most students (68.5 per cent) correctly identified 'in the 1940s' as the answer.

Students' correct responses improved with age. Thus, whereas 55.3 per cent of Year 7 students provided an accurate response, this rose to 90.5 per cent in Year 13. However, while the number of correct responses was generally strong among most year groups, it is also important to note that approximately one in five students in Years 7 to 9 (11 to 14 year olds) thought that the Holocaust occurred in the 1920s.

Furthermore, while the survey findings suggest that most students were able to identify the decade in which the Holocaust took place, focus-group interviews revealed that they typically found it difficult to provide more accurate chronological detail. Some students believed, for example, that the Holocaust happened in '1936' (Tim, Year 9, EE1) or '1937' (John, Year 9, EEI). One suggested it

happened in '1940' when 'Hitler constructed the concentration camps' (Alice, Year 11, NE1), while another claimed it took place 'alongside World War II' (Rachel, Year 10, LON6) and a group of Year 9 (SE1) students reasoned that '1918' was the significant starting point.

Of course, some justification can be made for some of these ideas, but the interviews revealed that most students did not have a secure understanding of the chronological sweep of the Holocaust. Indeed, when asked for a more specific date range, even Lauren, a Year 10 student who recognised the connection between the Holocaust and the Second World War, tentatively offered, 'Was it 1949 to 1954? I can't remember exactly'. Typically, as the two exchanges with Year 10 students below demonstrate, students struggled to offer a precise time frame for the Holocaust:

> **Interviewer:** If we were creating a chronology – a time line of the Holocaust – are there particular dates that we would start and end, and would there be any kind of key events between those dates?
> **Tom:** Yes, but I've forgotten them.
> **All:** Yes.
> **Sarah:** I don't think it was when the Second World War began, I think it was earlier.
> **Daniel:** I think it was 1942 maybe.
> **Tom:** Yeah 41, 42, that sort of…
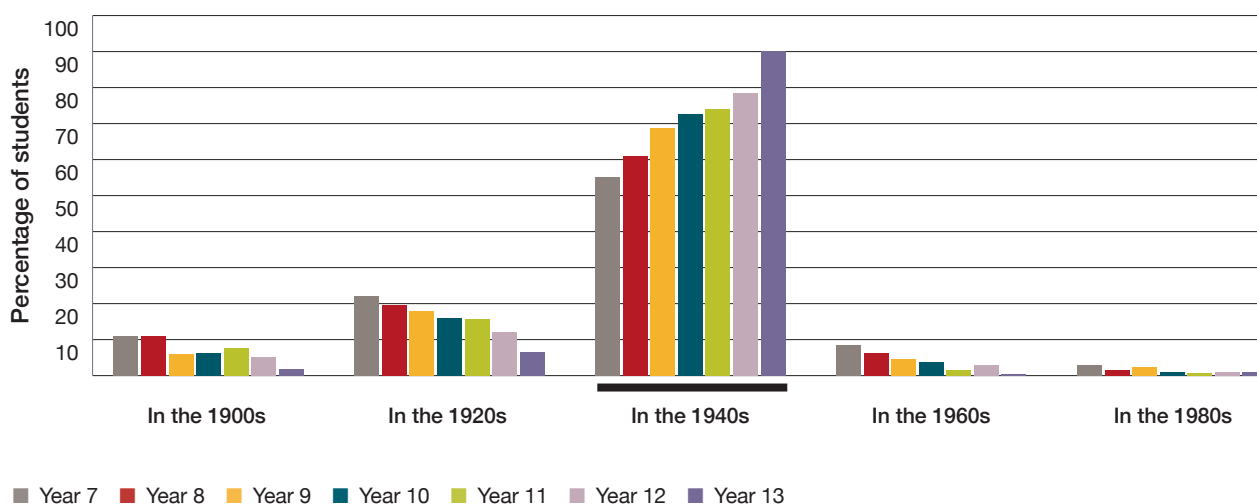> **Sarah:** It was in the middle.
> **Sarah:** In the middle of the, like, war period (Year 10, NE1).

> **Leah:** I thought it was 1930 something.
> **Aaliyah:** I thought it was 1941 maybe.
> **Holly:** 1944.

**Figure 7.1** Student responses to survey question 38, 'When did the Holocaust happen?' (percentage by year group)

**Leah:** 1940 I don't know, something like that.
**Interviewer:** So we are saying the 30s and the 40s?
**Aaliyah:** It was, like, nearer to the end of the 30s.
**Holly:** Yeah, like nearer to the end of all this stuff
(Y10, LON5).

These exchanges revealed that many students do have some sense of when the Holocaust occurred – very few suggested a widely inaccurate time frame. Nevertheless, it was strikingly evident during the interviews that many students in Years 7 to 11 were far from secure or confident about the accuracy of their responses.

In contrast, students in Years 12 and 13 appeared much more able to provide a strong chronological framework of the unfolding genocide. Many of these older students, for example, recognised that the persecution of Jews began soon after Hitler came to power in 1933 and increased in intensity throughout the remainder of the decade. Importantly, they were able to distinguish between the widespread discrimination and persecution of the 1930s and the systematic mass killing that began in the early 1940s.

## The development of the Holocaust over time

Michael Gray (2014a) has suggested that students often see the Holocaust as a simple monolithic event, rather than as a *process* that developed, changed and radicalised over time. Certainly there was some evidence from student interviews (particularly among younger students) that suggested a number of them believed the Holocaust started as soon as Hitler came to power and

that actions against the Jews remained the same throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

Student responses to survey question 60 seemed to substantiate this finding, and Figure 7.2 illustrates how many students specifically connected the 'organised mass killing of Jews' with the appointment of Hitler as leader. Revealingly, 40.2 per cent believed that the mass killings began when Hitler was appointed Chancellor in January 1933 and more than a third of students in all year groups, from Year 7 to Year 12, incorrectly selected this answer as their primary choice.

However, data from the focus groups offered a more promising story. Many students interviewed recognised that the Holocaust was not a single event, but a phenomenon that developed and changed over time. Younger students' explanations of this change over time were often limited and detailed historical knowledge was rare, but most students understood, at a basic level, that Nazi policy towards the Jews was not the same throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Many students interviewed, for example, appreciated that Jews were not immediately sent to concentration camps or death camps *en masse* in the 1930s. Rather, students had a vague, but not inaccurate understanding of the treatment of Jews in the period after Hitler came to power. Students variously commented:

> They [the Jews] were, like, bullied first; like the Nazis would go into their homes and destroy things and torture them maybe and then take them away (Michael, Year 8, NE1).

**Figure 7.2** Student responses to survey question 60, 'The organised mass killing of Jews began immediately after a particular historical event. What was it?' (percentage by year group)
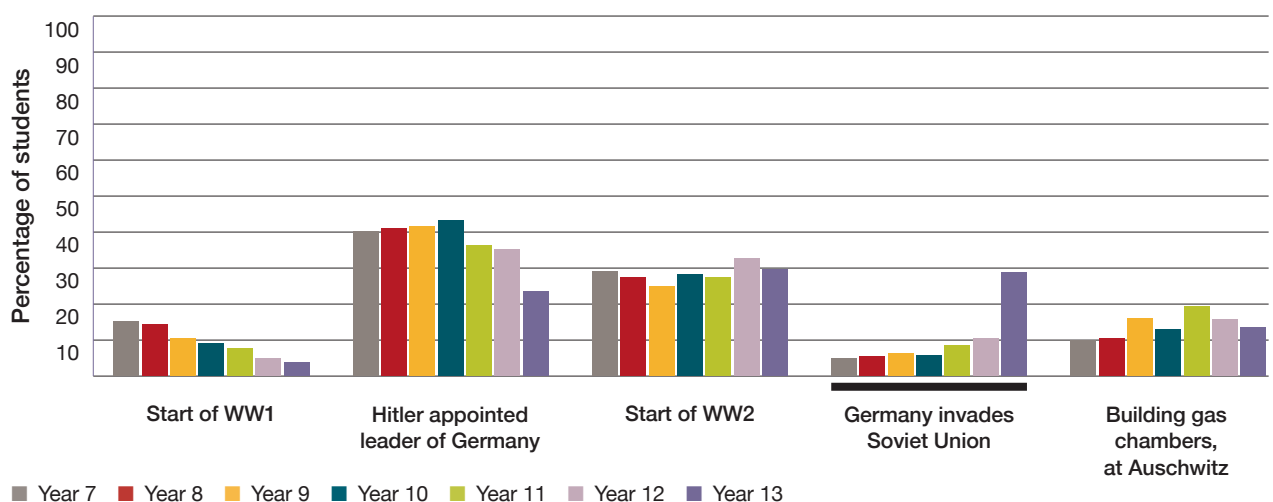
I think that in their local communities where they lived, like with the neighbours, some of their neighbours may have turned on them. Like some verbal abuse and maybe some physical abuse as well (Charlotte, Year 8, LON5).

I can't remember when Hitler came into power, but he started introducing laws that restricted people (Rob, Year 9, EE1).

In another interview Year 9 students agreed that Hitler did not order the killing of Jews as soon as he came to power. Rather, as the exchange below illustrates, they reasoned that a series of measures were enacted to gradually make things worse for the Jews:

John: He started to introduce the posters and then…
Georgia: He had to get people on his side first.
John: Like teaching at school about the stereotypical Jewish people – how they're evil…
Tim: They take all the jobs and everything.
Harry: He slowly introduced … He doesn't want everyone to know suddenly. He wants to tell them in a way where they think he's not trying to tell them but this happens to be where they go, so…
Interviewer: So it's a gradual process.
All: Yeah (Year 9, EE1).

However, as can be seen, a feature of the interviews was the imprecise nature of the historical knowledge students used to make sense of this period. The interview dialogue below with a group of Year 9 students represented a rare, albeit limited, incidence in which students attempted to offer some factual or contextual knowledge focused on the Nazi treatment of Jews during the 1930s:

Interviewer: Were there key events? I think you mentioned the Night of Broken Glass, didn't you? Were there other important events?
Fahima: The boycott.
Leah: The Nuremburg Law thing where there were laws that Aryans can't marry Jews.
Aayliyah: That was in 1938.
Leah: Yeah that was a turning point I would say.
Interviewer: Why was that important do you think?
Leah: It…
Aayliyah: What, that Aryans can't marry Jews?
Leah: Yeah that Aryans can't marry Jews.
Aayliyah: It told the people of Germany that Judaism is wrong, so it kind of like it gave them that idea and excluded them, yeah, from the rest of…
Interviewer: So we have got the Nuremburg Laws as being an important kind of date or event. The Night of Broken Glass, why was that important do you think?
All: [No answer]
Interviewer: Or what actually took place on that event?

Leah: Burning the synagogues.
Aayliyah: Like their businesses were – shops and things were burnt.
Interviewer: Okay.
Holly: Yeah, and then I think afterwards people weren't allowed to shop in Jewish shops any more.
Leah: I think it showed that the German population did have a hatred of the Jews because I don't think directly the army came and started killing Jews, it was the people of Germany that chose to engage and join in with things.
Interviewer: So we have got Nuremburg Laws, we have got the Night of Broken Glass, are there any other particularly important events that…?
Leah: Is the Jewish star one, the one where the Jews had to start wearing the Star of David to be identified and how they said, 'Oh Jews don't sit on this bench' (Year 10, LON5).

The significant feature of this interview exchange is that it was not typical of other interviews with students in Years 7 to 11. In this example, students are attempting to draw on and organise their historical knowledge to make sense of the period. But, even here, the details are often sketchy (e.g. in reference to the implementation of the order for Jews to wear the Star of David) and/or inaccurate (e.g. reference to the Nuremberg Laws which were enacted in 1935, not 1938).

The lack of reference to specific Nazi policies or acts against the Jews is very illuminating. For example, across all interviews with students in Years 7 to 11, the April 1933 Boycott – an event which revealed much about the regime's approach to anti-Jewish policy at the time (Koonz 2003: 41; Evans 2006: 382–3) – was cited by only one student, while *Kristallnacht* (the so-called 'Night of Broken Glass') – which is widely regarded by scholars as a 'major turning point' in the history of 'pre-war anti-Jewish persecutions' (Friedländer 1997: 270) – was referred to by only two students. This finding further related to the survey question that asked students to identify words related to the Holocaust. Here, only 36.1 per cent associated *Kristallnacht* with the Holocaust (63.9 per cent did not associate it or did not know if it was an associated term).

Students' general lack of specific historical knowledge unquestionably hindered their ability to distinguish between critical periods in the development of the Holocaust. For example, it was evident that students had not considered that between 1933 and 1939 Nazi persecution was confined to German (and then Austrian and Sudeten) Jews. Few appeared to appreciate that, with the outbreak of war in September 1939, new and extensive Jewish populations increasingly came under the control of the Reich and the development

of continent-wide antisemitic persecution began on an unprecedented scale.

In contrast to younger students, some in Years 12 and 13 were more able to offer both precise historical detail on how events developed over time and more robust causal explanations. While the survey questions revealed significant gaps in knowledge and understanding among many students in Years 12 and 13, the older students who took part in interviews were generally able to articulate how things became 'progressively worse' for Jews as events unfolded (Danielle, Year 13, EE1). As one Year 12 student remarked, in the early years of Hitler's rule:

> …they boycotted lots of Jewish shops … and there were the Nuremburg Laws where they sort of outlined that Jewish people didn't get German citizenship and they couldn't marry, and lots of other things. [There were] areas they couldn't go into, like they couldn't go into the same parks as German people, couldn't sit on the same benches. It was complete separation to increase the hate (Alex, Year 12, EE1).

Other students in Years 12 and 13 also variously described 'restrictions on where Jews could go' (Paul, Year 13, EE1), the imposition of 'curfews' (Cassie, Year 13, EE1) and the 'burning of Jewish books' (Anna, Year 13, EE1). In one school, Year 12 students referred to the development of the Holocaust as analogous to a whirlwind that intensified over time:

> **Jack:** Well, we were taught it's like a whirlwind – there's four solutions to deal with the Jews, and then each time it's not good enough for Hitler, so it goes to the 'Final Solution' which is like using the concentration camps to kill them.
> **Interviewer:** OK, that's interesting, so this whirlwind starts at some point, and it gets worse does it?
> **Jack:** Yeah, there's more serious like discrimination against them.
> **Interviewer:** So what would be the levels? Tell me more about that.
> **Max:** Starts with, like, boycotting their shops and eventually works up to violence, after the non violence, just boycotting shops, and like sort of just affecting them other than violence, like economically or something, and then it eventually progresses to the 'Final Solution'.
> **Interviewer:** OK, so it starts with a bit of smashing of shops, and the violence.
> **Max:** Taking away property.
> **Interviewer:** Taking away property.
> **Max:** They weren't allowed to have their own businesses, or be doctors, I think, all of them.
> **Interviewer:** OK, so this was happening in the earlier days of Hitler's rule?
> **Jack:** Yes, they were all fired on one night, the Jewish doctors.
> **Interviewer:** So this is your whirlwind analogy, it starts off and it gets worse over time.
> **Max:** Yeah.
> **Interviewer:** So can you give me any sense of when this is, then? Any dates, any time, any years?
> **Max:** 1933 until 1939.
> **Jack:** It's like escalating treatment, so it starts off literally just they are not allowed to use public services that the German people can, and then it gradually gets to separation, where, like, Jewish children shouldn't be with German children, then it keeps on going to boycotts, then violence, then…
> **Max:** Ghettos.
> **Interviewer:** Ghettos, yeah, tell me about ghettos.
> **Max:** It's where they, it was like a separate town with walls around it where they'd send the Jewish population from a different town into there and they'd sort of put lots of people in there so that they weren't with the German population, so that they couldn't interact or be together, so they had to run their own towns, so they could be controlled.
> **Interviewer:** OK, so when does it get to mass killing? You mentioned earlier, gas chambers and mass killing, when does that, any idea when that happens in this whirlwind, just roughly?
> **Max:** 1942, and after.
> **Interviewer:** So in the '40s.
> **Max:** The last three years of the war (Year 12, EE1).

This interview exchange is indicative of other similar discussions with students in Years 12 and 13, all of whom were studying history. Typically, these history students understood the progressive developments of Nazi persecution and were often able to identify key events. For example, the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 and *Kristallnacht* were referred to in every group interview and students were often able to provide additional contextual information about their significance. Indeed, in the example above, it is noticeable that Max resists the generality of the interviewer who asks 'when does it get to the mass killing … just roughly' by confidently stating '1942, and after'. He further insists on the point when the interviewer summarises, 'So in the '40s' with his more precise and accurate response: 'The last three years of the war'. The older students' more sophisticated understanding of the process of history and how circumstances change over time was thus apparent during interviews. For example, another student said:

> …the Nazi Party wasn't just this faceless organisation that was always the same throughout all of its history, it changed radically from the start

to the end. Hitler and the Nazis didn't always want to exterminate the Jews, it can clearly be shown by the fact that Hitler let thousands of Jews escape his Nazi state. He did take their money but he let lots of them go to America and Britain and he was thinking about setting up a sort of Jewish colony to send all of the Jews into Madagascar, and it was only about 1940 to 1941 he and the top Nazis started thinking about actually implementing a 'Final Solution'. They had debates about this, so it wasn't always the same policy and they got a bit more hard line towards the end (Steve, Year 13, LON7).

Similarly another student commented that attacks on the Jews were:

slowly building … they were stripped of citizenship and had businesses taken away, and they had to wear the yellow stars and then they got sent to the concentration camps, and in Eastern Europe they did just kill them, like the *Einsatzgruppen* just went into villages and shot everyone, basically, and put them into mass graves, and then they started building death camps towards the end of the war, and then they sent loads of people there as well (Jake, Year 12, LON7).

It should be noted that all the Year 12 and 13 students involved in focus groups were studying for A level history. As such, while none were taking courses that explicitly focused on the Holocaust, they had a particular interest in the past and were among the small number of students (around 6 per cent of all A level students entered for exams in England) who had consciously chosen to study history in Years 12 and 13. Their relatively mature understanding of the development of the Holocaust should not be seen as typical of other students of their age; the survey results for students in Years 12 and 13 showed that many 17 and 18 year olds continue to have only sketchy knowledge of the Holocaust. However, the focus groups provided an indication of the level of understanding that can be attained by the end of school education without studying the Holocaust as part of an examination course.

Overall, most students interviewed across all age groups appeared to understand that things did get significantly worse for all Jews during the 1940s. Students in Years 12 and 13 were not only able to understand this development, but could also provide specific examples and details to explain it.

In contrast, younger students generally found it more difficult to provide precise details, although generally they understood the Holocaust as a changing process. For example, as Rob (Year 9, EE1) explained, 'He started making restrictive laws for the first couple of years, set up camps where he sent people; but things only really got really bad when he

started exterminating people in the 1940s'. A feature of the interviews, therefore, was to explore more fully with students why the Holocaust occurred when it did and what relationship the Second World War had to the unfolding genocide.

## What do students understand about the relationship between the Second World War and the Holocaust?

### Key dates and events

Despite 'the immediate context of the war' being 'key to historical explanations of the origins of the Holocaust' (Stone 2010: 73), it was abundantly clear during interview that most younger students (Years 7 to 11) did not have a general chronicle of significant events of the Second World War on which to draw in order to make sense of the Holocaust.

Although many history students in Years 12 and 13 noted the significance of the invasion of Poland in September 1939 in the development of more widespread and murderous policies against the Jews, very few younger students made this important connection. Notably, while 60.6 per cent of all students selected the correct multiple-choice definition of what 'Nazi ghettos' were in the survey (question 58), during interviews very few placed the establishment of ghettos – originating in Nazi-occupied Poland in October 1939 – into a robust chronological framework. Thus, although many students did know what ghettos were and had some knowledge of conditions within them, few connected their establishment to developments in the Second World War.

Students in Years 12 and 13 differed slightly from their younger counterparts in this regard. Typically, these older students were able to identify what ghettos were and, despite some difficulty in identifying the precise year in which ghettos were first created, were often able to appropriately link their establishment to events following the invasion of Poland. Similarly, during interview, a number of Year 12 and 13 students were able to appreciate the significance of Operation Barbarossa (the Nazi invasion of the USSR in June 1941) in the shift to mass killing.

More students in Years 12 and 13 than in younger age groups were also aware of the actions of the *Einsatzgruppen* in occupied Soviet territory. For example, Mike (Year 12, LON7) noted that the '*Einsatzgruppen* were SS soldiers who followed behind the main German advance going into Russia', and added that they were 'specifically tasked with looking for Jews just to shoot them, and I think incorporating that into an offensive in a battle shows

just how seriously the Nazis took exterminating the Jews'. Other Year 12 and 13 students interviewed shared similar understandings and it was evident that, although many underestimated the numbers killed by the *Einsatzgruppen*, knowledge of their actions was widely held.

These findings were especially encouraging given how important such substantive knowledge is to grasping the symbiosis of war, ideology and genocide (Bartov 2003: 3–8). In stark contrast, only one younger student in Year 7 to 11 interviews explicitly mentioned Operation Barbarossa. Most did not articulate the profound and devastating relationship between the Nazi prosecution of the war in the East and the subsequent mass murder of Jews.

Students' responses to survey question 60 further emphasise this point. As Figure 7.2 (page 175) shows, the most accurate answer to the question asking students to identify the historical event that triggered 'the organised mass killing of Jews' (the German invasion of the Soviet Union) was only selected by 7.4 per cent of students across all age ranges. Indeed, it was the least likely to be selected by students and, even by Year 13, more than 70 per cent of students did not provide this answer. Significantly, not a single student interviewed in Years 7 to 11 explained that, as the German army advanced east and millions more Jews came under Nazi control during 1941 and 1942, this proved a catalyst for mass murder.

Other iconic events and developments in the history of the Holocaust which very few younger students referred to in interview included the Wannsee Conference of January 1942 and the 'Final Solution'. Where these historical phenomena were mentioned the details were sketchy, as illustrated in the exchange below:

> **Daniel:** I can't remember when it was but they decided; there was a meeting in a room where they had all big Nazi leaders and when they decided that they would use the 'Final Solution', which was killing people in death camps.
> **Annie:** But didn't they shoot Jews, like before they gassed them they shot them and they ended up in mass graves because they just shot them dead.
> **Daniel:** Then Hitler decided that that wasn't very efficient, it was using up too many bullets and therefore they decided to make it cheaper which is…
> **Annie:** …more efficient.
> **Daniel:** Yes which is more efficient because but that is even worse because he didn't really care about how the people died, he just wanted to make sure that they died (Year 10, NE1).

Clearly, some of these students recognised that Nazi decisions were often underpinned by the need for brutal 'efficiency', and that both bullets and gas chambers were used in the extermination process. Nevertheless, not one student interviewed in Years 7 to 11 was able to provide any details of the actions of the *Einsatzgruppen* or the events which occurred at the Reinhardt camps (Witte and Tyas 2001). Typically mass shootings and mass gassing were lumped together in the consciousness of most younger students in a brutal killing period that occurred in unspecified places some time in the early 1940s.

This apparent lack of precise historical and contextual information was also revealed by responses to survey question 31, which asked students to identify words connected with the Holocaust. Notably, only 24.3 per cent of all students associated the *Einsatzgruppen* with the Holocaust (see Figure 6.3) and only 15.2 per cent of students across all age groups believed the Wannsee Conference was connected with it. Knowledge of the Wannsee Conference was limited even at Years 12 and 13, with only about 30 per cent of the 17 and 18 year olds surveyed associating the term with the Holocaust.

Despite these findings, the research indicated detailed and accurate understanding of the course of events and of the decision-making process is not beyond school-age students, particularly if they have been given the opportunity and curriculum time to study the subject in some depth. Typically, the Year 12 and 13 students who were interviewed had not studied the Holocaust for the past two years and yet they often referred to both the Wannsee Conference and the 'Final Solution'. One student remarked that 'rather than putting the Jewish population into huge camps, the "Final Solution" was basically the initiation of death camps and the extermination of the Jewish population' (Simon, Year 13, LON7). He went on to say: 'The Wannsee Conference was, I think, the 20th January 1942' and 'from that time onwards … the systematic persecution of Jews reached new levels [and] … in terms of the Holocaust the Wannsee Conference is when it started to take shape'.

### The relationship between the Second World War and the Holocaust

For the most part, younger students (Years 7 to 11) found it difficult to offer a clear and rational explanation of the connection between the Second World War and the Holocaust. This was curious, as large numbers of students seemed aware that the Holocaust happened 'around the time of World War II' and, as illustrated in Figure 7.2 (page 175), 27.7 per cent of students explicitly indicated that 'the start of the Second World War' was the catalyst for the 'mass killing of Jews' (answers to survey question

60). However, students typically struggled when asked to offer a description of or explanation for the relationship between the Second World War and the Holocaust.

This may be because, as noted elsewhere in this study, most students' picture of the Holocaust is German-centric. They overestimate the number of German Jews killed, believe that the perpetrators were virtually all Germans and assume that most people were killed inside Germany itself, so that a connection with the Second World War is perhaps less clear than if one's conception is of a continent-wide genocide.

Many students suggested that Hitler's desire for war and his subsequent treatment of Jews was connected to a thirst for 'power'. Typically, however, as the examples below suggest, these explanations were often vague and not underpinned by any substantive historical knowledge:

> **Interviewer:** So does World War II have a link to all of this?
> **Alice:** I think it does because it was during that time, but I think they both had their separate reasons for the cause of it and I think the Holocaust was just kind of a way of showing off their power really … Yeah, I just think it was kind of to show off power (Year 9, NE1).

> **Interviewer:** Why was World War II important?
> **Makda:** Is it because the Germans were trying to show how brave they were?
> **Interviewer:** How do you mean?
> **Makda:** Like, because they were going to do all these things to the Jews in Germany they thought that, okay, if we go to other countries then we can show – we can try to tell the other countries that they should be scared of us because if they challenge us we will do the same thing to them (Year 8, LON6).

> **Interviewer:** So you were saying that World War II maybe had some sorts of connection to this. What sort of connection might it have?
> **Zoe:** The idea of wanting power.
> **Interviewer:** Okay.
> **Charlotte:** Because wars happen sometimes because countries don't agree on the same terms. They fight for land sometimes; they want to overthrow someone else, so they can rule – so, yeah (Year 8, LON5).

> **Interviewer:** It sounds like we are saying that the war is quite important to the Holocaust. Why? What is the link?
> **Annie:** Just him coming to power, really. I think he wanted to use the Jewish people as his slaves.
> **Sarah:** When the war started that is when he realised just how much power he had, which is why maybe he was then just, like, well if I have that much power

to start a war and I think he was probably winning at this point, and there was a point when he was winning wasn't there?
> **All:** Yes.
> **Sarah:** And if he realised that he had so much power he thought he could (Year 10, NE1).

The examples cited above proved typical of the vague explanations that students appeared able to offer about the relationship between the war and the Holocaust. However, as the example below suggests, a few students were able to link Hitler's quest for power to Nazi racial ideology (see Chapter 5 for discussion):

> **Tom:** I think he thought that if he had won the war he had done it so that Germany could be this sort of master country and it sort of goes back to like the First World War and when the Kaiser of Germany wanted Germany to be a world power and have a massive empire. So it sort of goes back to the fact that Hitler realised that when he wins the war he wants Germany to be this massive power and perfect. So to do that he has got to get rid of all the people who are imperfect in his mind – yeah.
> **Annie:** Because he wasn't just killing, like, he was making people do things so he had his perfect race (Year 10, NE1).

Despite the hints of historical understanding evidenced here, it is important to note that this group of Year 10 students was unable to offer any specific chronological detail on how German expansion to the East led to the systematic and organised mass killing of Jews, particularly in lands previously ruled by Poland and the Soviet Union.

In contrast to the more limited views and understandings of younger students, it was found those in Year 12 and 13 typically had a clearer understanding of the relationship between the Holocaust and the Second World War. Most students understood that as the German army conquered more land, particularly in Eastern Europe, millions of Jews came under their control. It was in this context, Year 12 and Year 13 students typically reasoned, that the Nazis implemented a policy of mass extermination. The following explanations show how they made this explicit and important connection:

> The further they [the Germany army] invaded east and west the more Jews are then coming under their control, so as the war goes on the more and more countries they are occupying, they've got a greater number of Jews, so in the '30s some of the Jews that they exiled and sent, escaped to countries east of them, they've got now under their control, so they've just got like basically too many

of them, they don't know what to do with them (Amelia, Year 13, EE1).

Yeah, I think it was when they invaded Poland in 1939 they set up the ghettos, the Warsaw ghetto and others, you know, where Jews were contained and other Poles. And only until after they'd beaten France and they didn't really know what to do with these big Jewish populations, because whereas in Germany the smaller Jewish population that they sort of controlled or forced to leave, whereas with millions and millions in Poland, and then later in the Soviet Union, they had to sort of solve the problem of it, and so that's what led to the 'Final Solution' and the extermination camps (Alex, Year 12, EE1).

… as the Nazis expanded and went over into Poland, which was a very large Jewish country itself, and then when they expanded into Russia they had the death squads that would go out searching for Jewish people and killing them (Anton, Year 12, EE1).

I think as Germany expanded their empire throughout Europe they did take on a lot of populations and therefore they did take on a lot of Jews, and I think as a result of the overpopulation to Hitler he had to have a 'Final Solution' in a way to get rid of them. And I think there was a population in a lot of the camps and he thought, so you could see it as a result of German's success in the war as they were taking on more and more people I think they went to the 'Final Solution' as a way to get rid of them (Sam, Year 12, LON7).

Students in Years 12 and 13 were also increasingly likely to try and provide more detailed explanations for events than younger students. For example, in one group interview students argued that Hitler's thirst for 'world domination' and the quest for more '*Lebensraum*' (living space) for the German people were linked to his racial ideology and the mass killing of Jews (Damien, Year 12, LON3). As Samad (Year 12, LON3) said, 'he wanted to create a master race … and he wanted a stronghold over Europe but maybe he felt he couldn't do so if there were still these minorities living there'.

Other students reflected on how Nazi policy towards Jews changed over time and that the mass killing of Jews was a direct result of German expansion in the Second World War. As one Year 12 student said:

I don't think the intention initially was to exterminate all of the Jews in Germany, I think it was just to basically highlight them as a minority and keep them away from society. Neglect them, but I don't think it was initially to exterminate them, because

as said previously I think a lot of powers and a lot of superpowers and a lot of European powers would have not approved of it. So I think when the war happened the fact that they were expanding their own part in it, basically forced the fact of the 'Final Solution' (Samuel, Year 12 LON7).

## Conceptions of 'accelerated' mass killing and Nazi defeat

In offering an alternative explanation for the relationship between the war and the Holocaust, a number of students argued that developments in the Holocaust were not directly connected to the early phases of the war. However, a number of students (particularly in Years 8, 9 and 10) reasoned that, as the German army suffered setbacks and defeat, the Nazis responded by accelerating the killings. As Rob (Year 9, EE1) argued, 'When he [Hitler] starts losing the war … he gets a last-ditch attempt to decide to kill as many as he can'. In this context, Rob mentioned that this happened when the 'Russians' started fighting back following 'Operation Barbarossa'. He further argued: 'The Russians got very angry because they [the Germans] killed lots of their people. So they pushed back and they were coming close to Germany so Hitler decided to ramp up the Jew killings'.

The idea that mass killing was somehow accelerated because the German army was losing the war was also shared by a number of students in Years 12 and 13. One student noted, for example, that around 1943, 'when the German war effort was slowing up they … move[d] to towards their "Final Solution" with the Jews before they lost the war' (Peter, Year 13, EE1). In a similar vein another Year 12 student remarked:

…towards the end of the war the German authorities saw that they might actually lose the war, and it almost created an increased sense of fever about this genocide of the Jews; they wanted to try and, it sounds horrible to say, but get it over and done with, I guess. Like, we are going to lose this war possibly, we should try and finish what we started, the genocide of the Jews, and at that point it was almost like they got on the train, arrived at Auschwitz and they were gassed instantly (Will, Year 12, LON7).

However, a number of students in Years 12 and 13 did not agree with this perspective. Indeed, in one interview exchange, Steve (Year 13, LON7) emphatically declared that 'at the time of the "Final Solution" … the Germans did not think they were losing'.

Notably, several younger students (Years 8 to 10) remarked that US entry in the war was a

particularly significant turning point in this process of 'accelerated' killing (a view not generally expressed by older students). For example, Paige (Year 10, EE1) reasoned:

> I think at the start of the war Germany had the upper hand. So they thought, oh no, we can just do it slowly; it doesn't matter. But when America joined the war they began to lose it, so they speeded everything up to sort of a desperate last attempt.

The following extended dialogue further illustrates the significance placed by some Year 10 students on US entry into the war:

> **Lauren:** I think it was harder because when the US got involved, because they were like a powerful country I think the Nazis were killing the Jews faster so that the US army wouldn't find out what they had been doing.
> **Interviewer:** Okay so you think that America entering the war was an important turning point in this, or important because … why is it important do you think?
> **Lauren:** I think it is important because people started to see that it wasn't right what they had been doing. But then the Nazis were just killing the Jews faster.
> **Interviewer:** Okay, so they increased the speed at which they were killing them?
> **Lauren:** Yes.
> **Interviewer:** Why did they do that? Why was there this kind of escalation?
> **Lauren:** Because they knew that they might not win, so they decided that if they were not going to win they might as well kill them faster.
> **Interviewer:** Is that an idea that you would all agree with? Do you think that they just thought that well we are going to lose so we should kill people anyway?
> **Rebecca:** I think they were scared of other countries finding out what they were doing, I think, and they were going to be treated more harshly. It would stand out what they were doing, because it was so terrible, so they thought if they could just get rid of the Jews and get rid of the camps then they might be treated slightly nicer?
> **Interviewer:** So even though they were losing the war they thought they still needed to kill these people, is that what you are saying?
> **Rebecca:** Erm, I think that they were trying to hide what they were doing.
> **Interviewer:** Okay.
> **Rebecca:** So, well, they had all these Jewish people and, well, they couldn't really return them to their homes because they would tell everyone what was going on so, as they thought they were just going to kill them, then they would.
> **Rachael:** Maybe when they started to find out that the war was almost over and that they were losing there was obviously a time limit on it because, once the war was finished, then people would maybe start

investigating and then realise what they were doing so they had to speed up (Year 10, LON6).

Certainly, there was a concerted effort by the Nazis and their collaborators to cover up these mass crimes. In August 1942, Himmler appointed SS officer Paul Blobel to lead *Aktion* 1005, an attempt to destroy all evidence of mass murder. Over the next couple of years, mass graves were exhumed in order to cremate the bodies of the victims, gas chambers were torn down, crematoria blown up and incriminating documents were destroyed. In addition, in the final months of war, particularly with the advance of the Red Army from the east, Jews and other prisoners were forced to journey west in the infamous 'death marches'.

The deliberate hiding of the crimes, as well as the complexity of overlapping organisations and jurisdictions within the Nazi system, all make it difficult to be certain precisely when the decision was taken to kill all of the Jews of Europe, and historians still debate this issue of timing (Cesarani 1994). For Christopher Browning (2004), the decision was taken in the autumn of 1941 – in the 'euphoria of victory' – when startling military successes in the Soviet Union promised a quick end to the war and elements of the Nazi leadership turned their attention to the final and complete destruction of their 'Jewish-Bolshevik enemy'. During this period, Browning argues, Jewish emigration from the Third Reich was forbidden, the first extermination sites were chosen and experiments were made with different killing methods.

However, Christian Gerlach (1998) has argued that US entry into the war in December 1941 was indeed crucial; this was the moment at which the war became global and (with the slowing down of Operation Barbarossa in the East) Germany had to face the prospect of a defeat for the first time. In this context, the imagined fear of 'the Jew' as an existential enemy of the German people became an even greater 'threat' in the distorted world view of the Nazi ideologues.

Peter Longerich (2010) has a different view. While recognising the summer and autumn of 1941 as crucial for the systematisation of mass murder in the East and for the formation of the plan to murder all Jews in the General Government (*Einsatz Reinhardt*), he argues that a decision for total, continent-wide mass murder was not taken until the summer of 1942, when the leadership realised there would be no imminent victory over the Soviet Union. At this point, the idea to deport Europe's Jews to conquered territories in the USSR was abandoned and the extensive killing programme already underway in the Eastern territories was expanded to include every Jewish man, woman and child within the Nazi grasp.

Given there is no consensus on this crucial issue, it is not surprising that young people disagree about when and under what circumstances the decision to murder was taken. However, if their ideas are to have substance and if they are to have some understanding about how modern Europe could descend into genocide, they need to know something about the broader context in which that decision was taken. Once again, however, the student interviews reveal that – while a few younger students and many in Years 12 and 13 displayed some awareness of key events in the Holocaust – substantive and chronological knowledge was generally limited and often imprecise.

## How do students understand and explain Britain's response to the Holocaust?

Students' knowledge of the chronological development and geographic focus of the Holocaust potentially has a significant impact on the understanding of their own history, and in particular Britain's role during the Holocaust. To assess this role and locate Britain's response to the Holocaust within a historical context, young people need a clear grasp of:

- the timing and stages of the radicalisation of Nazi policy
- when and how much Britain knew about the mass murder
- what scope of action was available to the Allies when these details were known and understood.

The issues of when and what Britain and the Allies 'knew' about the extermination of Jews have long been the subject of deep historical interest and debate (Breitman 1998; Gilbert 1981; Lacquer 1998; Wyman 1984). News of the systematic mass killing reached the Allies as early as the summer of 1941, as the British were able to understand secret German radio signals reporting the actions of the SS murder squads following the invasion of the Soviet Union. What is less clear is what the Allies made of this information, how much they understood, and how quickly the intent and scale of Nazi mass murder became clear to them. Where some have highlighted the importance of a 'liberal imagination' in filtering and conditioning British responses (Kushner 1994), others have intimated that Britons were more concerned with what news of atrocities said about the Germans than with the plight of the victims (Wallis 2014).

Throughout 1942, reports of an emerging Nazi plan to murder all of Europe's Jews began to reach the West, from the Bund (a Jewish socialist organisation) in the Warsaw ghetto, the Riegner telegram from Switzerland, and from Jan Karski – a courageous Polish courier who reached London and provided the first eyewitness account.

There is no question, then, that by the summer of 1942, the British government had a sufficiently reliable body of information about the ongoing mass murder of Europe's Jews. There is more debate over its attitude and response to this, which acquired its first – and last – articulation with the Allied Declaration of 17 December 1942. Delivered in the House of Commons by Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, the declaration condemned 'in the strongest possible terms this bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination' of Jews by Germans in occupied Europe. Eden also made a 'solemn resolution to ensure that those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution' (Hansard 1942).

It was publicly evident, then, that by the end of 1942 the British government knew in detail how the Jewish ghettos were being 'systematically emptied' and how the transportation of Jewish men, women and children to Eastern Europe was being carried out 'in conditions of appalling horror and brutality'. Eden also revealed a sense of grasping the bigger picture, declaring that all such actions were aimed at carrying out 'Hitler's oft repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe' (Cesarani 1996: 607–8). Yet the extent to which these words translated into meaningful action over the remainder of the war remains open to debate. Just how much could be done given the circumstances, and how far anyone in Britain truly understood what was taking place, are continued points of interpretation. However, that the historical connections between Britain and the Holocaust are highly complex and controversial is certainly irrefutable – more than is often the case in popular representations and memory-work.

To understand what secondary school students knew and understood about Britain's role in the Holocaust, the issue was explored in both the student survey (see Figure 7.3) and focus-group interviews. For example, in the survey students were asked, 'What happened when the British government knew about the mass murder of Jews?'

Figure 7.3 clearly shows that the most frequently selected answer, chosen overall by 34.4 per cent of students, was that Britain 'declare[d] war on Germany'. As the bar chart illustrates, this erroneous understanding was more prominent among younger students, although around a quarter of students in Years 12 and 13 also held this view. The answer is, of course, incorrect as Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939 following the German occupation of Poland, whereas the Nazi policy of systematic mass murder did not begin until the summer of 1941.

The second most frequently selected answer was that Britain 'didn't know anything until the end of the

**Figure 7.3** Student responses to survey question 64, 'What happened when the British government knew about the mass murder of Jews?' (percentage by year group)
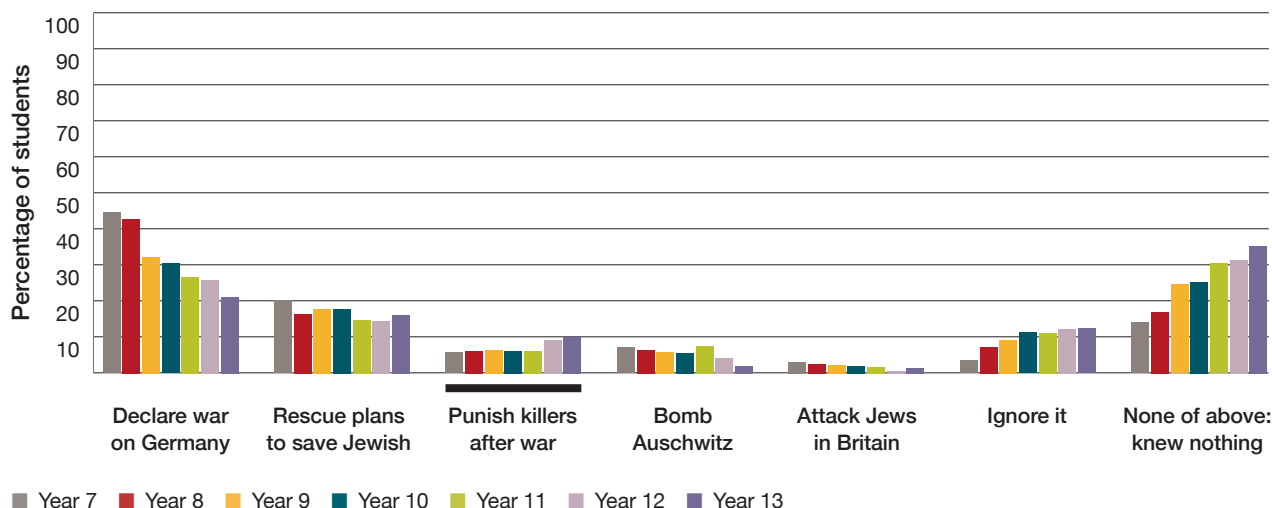


war' about the mass killing of Jews and so the British government was not motivated to act. In total, this view was shared by 23.8 per cent of students. Notably, approximately a third of students in Years 12 and 13 selected this answer, significantly more than the younger age groups. However, as mentioned above, it is evident that, at some point during 1941 and in 1942 the British government did know about the systematic mass murder of Jews. Indeed, by the end of 1942 these crimes had become very public knowledge (Kushner 1994: 172–7).

The third most popular answer (selected by 17.6 per cent of students) was that the British government drew up 'rescue plans to try and do everything to save the Jewish people'. While it is true that the British played a role in supporting Jewish people before and after the war, actions to save or rescue Jews during the war years were extremely limited (Wasserstein 1988). Although many people in Britain were sympathetic to the plight of the Jews, few took part in campaigns to save them. The Bermuda Conference convened by the British and Americans in April 1943 failed to produce any new plans to rescue the Jews of Europe; indeed, saving Jews never became an explicit war aim of the British government. Significantly, the most appropriate answer (i.e. the British said 'they would punish the killers when the war was over') was only identified by 6.7 per cent of the 7,166 students who answered this question. Overall, then, survey responses suggested that students of all ages had a limited and often erroneous understanding of Britain's response to the Holocaust. Accordingly, subsequent interviews

with students endeavoured to explore this finding in more depth.

The issue of the extent to which Britain knew about the mass extermination of Jews was the subject of all student interviews. Students shared a variety of perspectives on this, however it was very clear that the majority believed the British government either didn't know or, alternatively, only knew about mass killing at the end of the war. For example, Catherine (Year 9, EE1) said simply, 'They didn't know about it. People didn't know about it'. Similarly, Fahima (Year 10, LON5) reasoned:

I don't think they knew a lot. I mean they knew Hitler was passing laws but I don't think they knew the extent of the genocide really. I mean they probably would have known that people had been killed but not the scale.

As the survey results suggested, this understanding was not only confined to younger students. A number of students in Years 12 and 13 also believed that Britain and the Allies knew very little about the full extent of the Holocaust until the end of the war, as the following extracts illustrate:

They [the British] only really found out about it towards the end of the war, so initially … they didn't really think it was, like, this massive killing spree and tragedy of killing all of them [the Jews]; it was just they found out towards the end when they started discovering the camps (Paul, Year 12, LON7).

I know a lot of them [British people] weren't aware about the concentration camps and the mass killing,

because when they discovered it they were quite shocked about what they found (Jim, Year 12, LON7).

I don't think anyone knew until they'd sort of liberated them, and then they saw what was happening (Max, Year 12, EE1).

…the true extent of the concentration camps wasn't really realised until towards the end of the war (Harrison, Year 12, LON3).

When invited to explain why they believed Britain and the Allies did not know about the Holocaust a number of students suggested that the killing was often conducted in remote locations, kept secret under the cover of war. For example, Lucas (Year 12, LON7) believed that the British knew very little about the mass killing, and further argued:

I think even if there were hints of it going on, I think when you are in a war and there is so much at stake that would always take precedent … I genuinely think Hitler did a good job of keeping it quiet, because they managed to stifle opposition so early on that it got to the point where there [were] no voices to hear anyway.

Many students also believed that if Britain and the Allies knew about the mass killing they would have acted sooner. For example, Hannah (Year 9, EE1) argued, 'If they did know about it you would assume they'd do something.' She also declared, 'I don't think they knew it was on that wide a scale though. I mean, if you knew that millions of Jews were being murdered you would do something about it.'

A number of older students shared a similar view. For example, Jack (Year 12, EE1) said, 'If they'd have known how bad it was or how bad it would have gotten, something would have happened sooner, but I don't think it could have been known how extreme it would've gotten so quickly.' He also suggested, 'If we did know we would have done something, but that's one thing that you can't say to yourself, why didn't we do that, because we didn't know.'

As stated above, although those who believed that the British government didn't know about the Holocaust were in the majority, a number of students did suggest that the British did know about the mass killing at an earlier point in the war. For example, Carrie (Year 10, EE1) said, 'I think that the British leaders must have known something … Because it's not something you can just blank over.' Similarly, Hannah (Year 9, EE1) stated that the British knew 'quite early in the war'. The following brief exchange between a group of students of a similar age exemplifies this view further:

**Marie:** I think they knew.

**Hamish:** After a while they knew.
**Marie:** Yeah.
**Ben:** I think, yeah, because you know when other countries would know so they would get it from other countries to say this is going on in Germany or Poland (Year 9, SE1).

In a similar vein, Isaac (Year 13, EE1) confidently asserted, 'They knew everything, Churchill knew.' Others said, 'I am pretty sure Churchill was aware' (Peter, Year 13, EE1) and 'I think they did have some knowledge of what was going on' (Joe, Year 12, EE1). The realisation or acceptance that the British were aware of the Holocaust well before the end of the war provided the opportunity to explore in interview what students believed the British did, or could have done.

It was very evident that many of the younger students (particularly those in Years 7 to 9) found this a difficult issue to consider, primarily because they appeared to have insufficient contextual knowledge at their disposal. Accordingly, simplistic answers were common. A few students, for example, suggested that 'killing Hitler' offered the best way to end the Holocaust. Furthermore, younger students seemed to have a confused understanding of the chronology of the war and its relation to the Holocaust. Numerous students, for example, argued that Britain did not act to prevent the Holocaust because this would mean starting a war:

Maybe the British were scared that they would create another war or something and some people just said, 'No we can't do this because it creates a war. What if things happen to our country?' (Ariella, Year 9, LON6).

[Britain did not want to act] because there might be another war, like … they were trying to avoid another war like World War I (Deena, Year 9, LON6).

They might have been scared that they would have caused a war by getting involved (Lara, Year 9, SE1).

Going against Germany, that is quite a big pressure. It's like starting a whole other war, isn't it? And there's no point in doing that (Hannah, Year 9, EE1).

What these comments revealed is that many Year 9 students appeared not to recognise that, when Britain knew about the excesses of the Holocaust, the nation had already been at war with Germany for more than two years.

Several students did, however, offer some more plausible reasons as to why it would have been difficult for the British government to prevent the Holocaust in the early 1940s. As one Year 9 student noted, clearly the British would want to stop the

killing 'but the problem is what would you do about it?' (Hannah, Year 9, EE1). Other students believed that liberating Jews from the camps would be difficult because 'they were embedded deep behind German ranks' (Nick, Year 9, EE1) and 'even though they [the camps] were remote they were probably quite well guarded' (John, Year 9, EE1). Another Year 9 student, Hamish (SE1) further added that it would have been difficult to act 'because there were other countries in the war that supported Hitler, like Italy'.

It was evident that very few students were able to offer any significant historical or contextual knowledge to help them assess Britain's situation. The following comment and exchange, however, illustrate how some students in Years 9 and 10 attempted to offer a rational explanation for Britain's response:

> I think that it was hard for people to do anything because Britain and most of Western Europe was still recovering from the First World War. There was, like, low weapons and supplies and stuff like that, so it's hard to try and do something so big as stop the Holocaust (Carrie, Year 10, EE1).

> **Nick:** It was quite difficult though. At that point Germany had taken most of Europe – they were quite powerful. And England was quite weak. They'd had to run away from France quite fast.
> **Hannah:** They had to retreat, didn't they?
> **Nick:** Yeah. And they were losing the battles in North Africa. They won eventually but they were losing at some points. And they didn't want to go in headstrong and try and find these camps that they didn't know where they were (Year 9, EE1).

More typically, however, younger students offered explanations with vague and imprecise historical knowledge. For example, when asked why Britain did not act to prevent the Holocaust at an early stage in the war, Lucy (Year 9, EE1) suggested:

> Well … if you were in that position of being the government you wouldn't really know what to do so you can't … I mean maybe [British] troops were doing something else. They're fighting another battle and they couldn't really just gather up random people, could they, and send them off to Germany? They'd die surely.

In contrast to many younger students, some Year 12 and 13 students were able to provide a reasonable explanation as to why it would have been difficult for Britain to take more strident action to stop the Holocaust. Indeed, several students suggested the British were limited in what they were able to do: 'I think the question people pose is what could they do even if they knew?' said Simon (Year 13, LON7). 'From D-Day the Allies were always advancing

towards Berlin.' The British, he explained, would say, 'We can't get there any quicker than what we are doing already', so 'there's nothing they could do except what they did'. Other students variously reasoned that stopping the Holocaust would have been difficult because 'you have to go through enemy ground' (Max, Year 12, EE1), or 'I don't think there was anything the British could have done, because there were so many camps … it wasn't just a few in a concentrated area; there were quite a few throughout Europe and especially Poland' (Jim, Year 13, LON7). Alex (Year 12, EE1) also neatly expressed the potential limitations of Britain's position:

> I think the UK did sort of condemn the actions during the 1930s in the build-up to the war, when the Nazis were starting to discriminate against Jews, they did condemn the actions but they didn't want to go to war over it, because both Britain and France were fairly sort of neutral, and then finally when Germany invaded Poland and the war started, that's when they got involved, but I think when the actual Holocaust started in 1941 the British didn't really have the ability to stop it at that point because how could they get to Poland?

Although many students recognised that the British government was limited in what it could do once the Second World War had started, several students suggested that Hitler should have been stopped at an earlier point, possibly in the 1930s. As one student argued:

> They could have stopped Germany taking over all the countries, like, before he started getting so powerful. Because they didn't do anything while he was taking over most of Europe (Rosie, Year 8, NE1).

Other students (aged between 12 and 15) agreed, suggesting, 'A lot of things would have been prevented if they had, like, fought against him earlier' (Rosie, Year 8, NE1), or 'I think one of the leaders of the country [Britain] should have come up, got a plan and they could have saved more lives' (Suzie, Year 9, NE1).

However, when asked to provide specific details many students experienced difficulty or offered fragmentary contextual information. Exceptions did exist. For example, Ben (Year 9, SE1) suggested that 'they should have stopped Hitler at Munich', and Sabir (Year 10, EE1) said, 'I think we really should have acted sooner. Especially since Germany broke … I think it was the Armistice.' Perhaps pointing to the Treaty of Versailles and the terms of peace following the First World War, Sabir further added, 'They broke the Armistice so many times that Britain should have intervened … they should have intervened especially when they found out that

Hitler was increasing army numbers and submarines and stuff like that' (Sabir, Year 10, EE1). However, attempts to illustrate points with specific historical or contextual information generally proved rare among students from Years 7 to 11.

Students in Years 12 and 13 also commented on the issue of whether or not Britain could have done anything at an earlier stage to prevent Hitler from executing his plans to dominate Europe. One student, Jeremy (Year 12, LON7), reasoned that the British shared 'a certain guilt about not intervening during the 1930s when persecution [of the Jews] was going on' and criticised British attempts 'to negotiate with Hitler and appease Hitler'. Other students, however, countered this argument by suggesting that Britain could not have known in the late 1930s about Hitler's plans to murder all the Jews in Europe. This argument is neatly illustrated in the following exchange with Alex (Year 12, EE1):

> **Interviewer:** Do you think the British should have done more here?
> **Alex:** Some people make the argument that Britain should have got involved in 1938 when Germany annexed Czechoslovakia, or even Austria.
> **Interviewer:** So before Hitler starts invading Poland.
> **Alex:** Yeah, but the British and the French couldn't have known that the Germans were actually going to exterminate all the Jewish people at that point, because that was before it really started.

What was demonstrated in many interviews, therefore, was the belief among students that it would have been difficult, due to existing circumstances, for Britain to pre-empt the Holocaust. This perspective was also illustrated in debates among older students that focused on whether or not Britain and the Allies should have bombed the death camps or the transport networks leading to them. This issue is, of course, one that commentators and historians have vigorously debated, particularly in relation to the potential bombing of Auschwitz (Feingold 1995; Neufeld and Berenbaum 2000; Wyman 1984).

Almost without exception, however, students in Years 12 and Year 13 rejected arguments to bomb the camps. Students generally reasoned that bombing the camps would not only 'give away to the Nazis that the Allies had quite good surveillance systems and they knew that the camps existed,' but also that it would provoke the Germans to 'just kill everybody in the camp and hide all the evidence' (Mike, Year 12, LON7). One student even argued that bombing the camps would have been disastrous, as it would have induced the Nazis to react in 'a terrible manner' and accelerate the killings (Phil, Year 12, LON7). As such, he argued that the British 'hold no

moral responsibility over the death of people in the camps' as they were not in a position to do anything of significance.

Overall, it appeared that while several students believed Britain might have done more to prevent Hitler from invading countries across Europe and so potentially stopping the Holocaust, most appreciated this would have been difficult for many reasons.

The general tenor of the interviews, then, was that – despite undoubted sympathy for the Jews – students believed it would be unfair to blame Britain and the Allies for not acting sooner and/or more decisively. Many historians today accept how limited the scope for action was, but there remains criticism that so little time, energy and resources were committed to even trying to come up with rescue plans – that rescue of the Jews simply did not figure highly in Allied thinking (Kushner 1994: 197–201) – and most students did not consider this.

A striking feature of the survey findings was that more than a third of students believed that Britain declared war on Germany when they found out about mass killings. Indeed, among the youngest students (Years 7 and 8), more than 40 per cent selected this option. Furthermore, 17.6 per cent of all students believed that once they knew about the killings the British government drew up rescue plans to save the Jews. As explained above, both these positions are, of course, historically inaccurate. Accordingly, during interviews, an attempt was made to understand student perspectives on this more clearly.

For the most part, it appeared that students in Years 7 to 11 did not have the necessary contextual information to explain Britain's reaction to the Holocaust. Consistent with the survey findings, a number of younger students said that Britain did go to war to save the Jews. For example, Rosie (Year 8, NE1) said that, on hearing of the mass killing, 'they [the British government] started attacking the Nazis in France, like pushing them back'. Similarly Rebecca (Year 10, LON6) said, 'I think Winston Churchill, yeah, I think he was the Prime Minister, I think he was the first one to say that England should go to war with Germany.' Other younger students appeared less certain and although many suggested that the British 'tried to help', few were able to provide historical detail. In general it was clear that most students from Years 7 to 11 were confused about the extent to which Britain went to war to save the Jews.

By contrast, in a slight contradiction to the survey findings, many older students interviewed (i.e. those studying history in Years 12 and 13) appeared to appreciate that Britain did not go to war to stop the Holocaust from happening. This is exemplified in the following exchange:

> **Interviewer:** Do you think that Britain went to war

because of what Germany was doing to the Jews?
**Samad:** No.
**Damien:** No, it was the treaty with Poland, Poland got invaded, Britain intervened, I don't think they were either aware of the extent of what was happening in Germany, or it didn't bother them, until something happened that they had to get involved in (Year 12, LON3).

Indeed, most took a pragmatic view of events, suggesting that, for the most part, Britain's primary objective was not to stop the Holocaust but to defend Britain and defeat the Nazis:

> I think it wasn't a priority, I think winning the war was more of a priority, however awful it sounds (Aimee, Year 13, EE1).

> I think they were more focused on defending their country than helping the German Jews (Nikki, Year 13, EE1).

> Britain would have struggled to do more. We fought a world war, and it wasn't as if we were like putting half effort into it (Patrick, Year 12, LON7).

> They prioritised other things, the British were putting more effort into bombing German industry, whereas they could, if they really wanted to, try to bomb the railways or whatever to stop the Germans getting the Jews to the death camps, but it wasn't hugely prioritised (Anton, Year 12, EE1).

> I think they were kind of reluctant to really intervene, like go full throttle and try and save the Jews. They wanted to try and win the war (Joe, Year 12, EE1).

According to these Year 12 and Year 13 students, Britain's pre-eminent consideration was winning the war and, as Jamie (Year 12, LON3) explained, the Holocaust 'wasn't a primary concern for the Allies'. He approached the question with clinical reasoning:

> I think with Britain it would have been a secondary measure to sort of aid the Holocaust, because you are in a full-scale war with a nation. I mean, 30 years ago you beat them in a war and now they are starting a war again, and it's sort of OK, first we must defeat these in the war, because the implications of losing are far too great to consider, over sorting out a domestic issue in Germany. I mean if you were that concerned about the extermination of the Jews in Germany then you were probably approaching a wartime effort in the wrong way. If you are dedicating resources, troops, time and sort of everything that you have in your war economy towards liberating these camps it doesn't make too much sense (Jamie, Year 12, LON3).

Other students shared similar views, although many made the important observation that winning the war and preventing the Holocaust were not mutually exclusive. As Patrick (Year 12, LON7) explained, 'The war was a big effort towards stopping Hitler's Germany and the Nazi Germany system, and that was our biggest commitment towards stopping genocide.'

In this respect, it was clear in all the interviews conducted that most students who spoke on this issue believed that the British did not become directly involved in preventing the Holocaust because it was 'all too far away' and/or that it 'had nothing to do with them'. In fact, the prevailing sentiment was one of deep sympathy and sadness for what the Jews had to endure. However, the overriding perspective strongly held by many students was that there simply was not much the British could do in practical terms during the Second World War.

In sum, then, survey and interview findings revealed a complex and diverse picture of students' knowledge and explanation in relation to Britain's response to the Holocaust. Unquestionably, the survey findings point to some serious causes for concern. Strikingly evident was that many students were not clear about Britain's response to the systematic mass killing of the Jews by the Nazis. For example, significant numbers of students across all age groups erroneously believed that Britain went to war to save the Jews and/or drew up rescue plans to ensure their safety. Similarly, many younger students and more than a third of Year 12 and Year 13 students mistakenly believed that the British government did not act because they did not know about the Holocaust.

Fundamentally, interviews with students confirmed the principal findings from the survey data. At one end of the spectrum many students, particularly those in Year 12 and 13, appeared to have a reasonable grasp of Britain's wartime relationship with the Holocaust. Some, but not all, of these students were able to provide relevant contextual information and intelligently consider the constraints under which the British government operated. At the other end of the spectrum, student knowledge and understanding was limited and inaccuracies, uncertainties and misconceptions were commonplace.

Furthermore, although not a prominent feature of the interviews, very few students appeared to know about the *Kindertransport* (the rescue of up to 10,000 young people, most of whom were Jewish) or Britain's general policy towards Jewish refugees both before 1939 and after 1945. Similarly, many students were confused about who liberated the camps and the distinctive roles played by the USSR, the USA and Britain in the final months of the war in Europe. As evidenced in Chapter 3, student responses to

question 31 of the survey also showed that only 15.2 per cent associated Bergen-Belsen with the Holocaust and, revealingly, no student mentioned the liberation of this concentration camp by the British Army in April 1945 during group interviews.

Overall, then, while there were exceptions, it was very apparent that most students did not possess sufficient contextual and historical knowledge to fully appreciate or understand Britain's multifarious roles in, responses to and representations of the Holocaust (Sharples and Jensen 2013).

## Where do students think the Holocaust took place?

### Jewish victims: origins and nationalities

Both the survey and the focus-group interviews provided opportunities to explore students' understanding of the geographic range of the Holocaust. As a starting point it was deemed important to find out from which country the students believed the largest number of Jewish victims of the Holocaust originated. The correct answer to this question is Poland, from where more Jews were murdered than from all of the rest of Europe combined.

Estimates of the numbers killed vary among historians, unsurprisingly given that numbers were not always recorded by the killers and many documents that did exist were later destroyed as the perpetrators attempted to conceal evidence of the genocide. Still, it is commonly believed that around 200,000 German and Austrian Jews, more than half a million Hungarian Jews and up to two million Jews

from the Soviet Union were killed. The number of Jews from Poland estimated to have been killed is some three million (Benz 2001). Student responses to this question are recorded below in Figure 7.4.

Half of the students surveyed (50.7 per cent), incorrectly thought that the largest number of Jewish people murdered during the Holocaust were from Germany. Furthermore, 59.8 per cent of these students were at least fairly confident about their answer. However, despite this prevailing German-centric view of the Holocaust, the correct answer (Poland) was identified by a just over a third of students (35.6 per cent); of these students, two-thirds were at least fairly confident in their answer. A very small number of students indicated that the USSR was the correct answer (2.8 per cent).

Figure 7.4 also shows that the likelihood of students selecting Poland as the correct answer typically increased as they grew older. For example, whereas only 20.2 per cent of Year 7 students selected Poland, 47 per cent of Year 13 students made that choice. Figure 7.4 also highlights that the percentage of students who selected Germany as an answer is broadly similar across most year groups, ranging from 48.6 per cent to 55.6 per cent, except for Year 13 students, among whom only 40.6 per cent believed the answer was Germany.

In interviews with students in Years 12 and 13, frequent reference was made to the fact that a high proportion of Jews lived in countries to the east of Germany. For example, older students referred to the existence of significant Jewish populations in 'countries' which 'became Eastern bloc Soviet Countries' (Damien, Year 12, LON3). Other students in Years 12 and 13 frequently referred to Jewish

**Figure 7.4** Student responses to survey question 50, 'Which country did the largest number of Jewish people murdered during the Holocaust come from?' (percentage by year group)
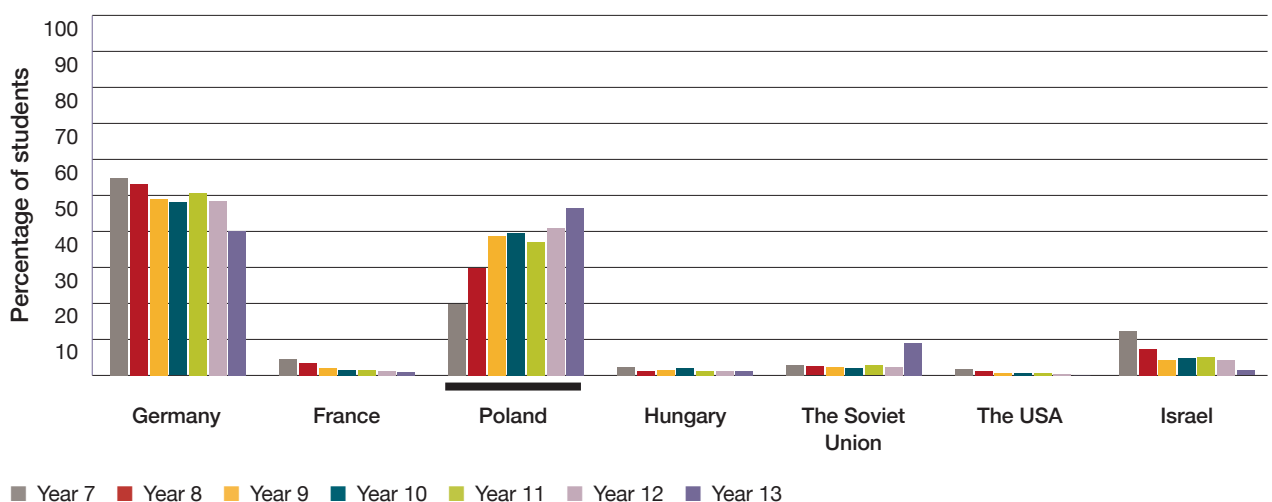
populations in 'Poland', 'USSR' and across 'Eastern Europe'. Less common, but equally consistent with the more detailed knowledge of some older students, were references in interview to Jewish settlement in 'the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania', 'the Czech Republic', 'Bosnia', 'Romania', 'Hungary' and other 'Slavic areas'.

In a similar vein, many Year 12 and 13 students appreciated that Jews also lived in countries in western and northern Europe. Accordingly, references to Jewish populations in 'Britain', 'France', 'Belgium', and 'Norway' were evident. Indeed, one student was keen to point out, that 'there weren't as many Jews there' [western Europe] as 'in Poland and Russia' (Alex, Year 12, EE1).

## The location of mass killings

The majority of Jews killed in the Holocaust were murdered in the Nazi extermination camps of German-occupied Poland. Historians estimate the death toll in the camps at approximately three million (Hilberg 1985: 338). The student survey and follow-up interviews, therefore, offered a way to explore students' understanding of where the Holocaust occurred.

Figure 7.5 shows that more than half of students (54.9 per cent) incorrectly thought that the largest number of killings of Jewish people took place in Germany, and 58.5 per cent of these students were at least fairly confident about this selection.

Just over a third of students (35.2 per cent) correctly identified that the largest number of killings of Jewish people took place in German-occupied Poland, with two-thirds of them being at least fairly confident about this response. Given the explicit

relationship between the Holocaust and the invasion of the USSR in June 1941 it is notable that very few students (2.3 per cent) selected 'The Soviet Union' as an option.

More than 90 per cent of students thought the answer was either 'Germany' or 'Poland', and very few students believed that other countries could be the loci of mass killing.

Figure 7.5 also shows that, as students get older, they are more likely to answer this question correctly. The contrast, between Year 7 (16.4 per cent correct) and Year 13 (58.6 per cent correct) is particularly striking. Nevertheless, it is notable that the majority of students in Years 9, 10, 11 and 12 shared the view that Germany was the correct answer.

Interviews with students in Years 12 and 13 added complexity to this portrait. Typically, older students appeared to be aware that most of the mass killings occurred in Eastern Europe, and references to Poland and the USSR as sites of the Holocaust were numerous. Jews 'were spread across Europe, and indeed around the world', said Phil (Year 12, LON7), 'but of course the ones we tend to think about are those in Eastern Europe, and there had to be a lot there for the simple fact that six million of them were killed in the end'.

## The centrality of Germany in students' Holocaust consciousness

The very strong focus on Germany as the central place from which victims of the Holocaust originated and in which they were murdered was a common feature of student interviews for those younger than 17 or 18 years of age. It was very evident that

**Figure 7.5** Student responses to survey question 51, 'In which country did the largest number of killings of Jewish people actually take place?' (percentage by year group)
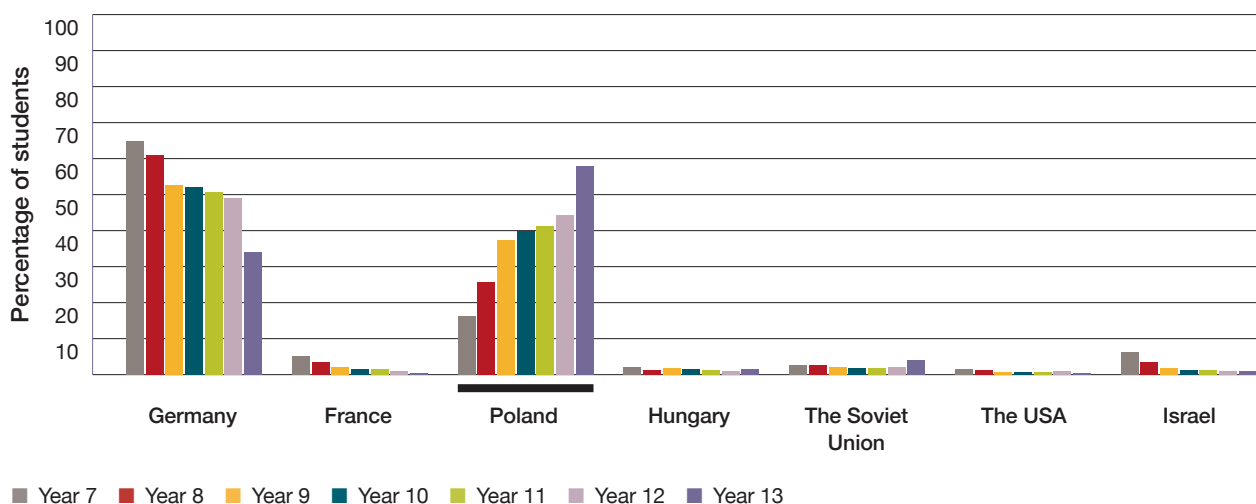


Legend: Year 7, Year 8, Year 9, Year 10, Year 11, Year 12, Year 13

many students held the erroneous belief that Jews constituted a significant proportion of the German population during the 1930s. For example, Gary (Year 9, SE1) noted that, 'Germany had more Jewish people than really anywhere else', while Hannah (Year 9, EE1) said, 'they were all in Germany'.

As evidenced elsewhere in this study (see Figure 5.8, page 127), students grossly exaggerated the number of Jews living in Germany in the 1930s. Although less than 1 per cent of the pre-war population of Germany was Jewish, survey responses suggested that students believed the percentage was considerably higher. For example, in answer to survey question 44, 'In 1933, what percentage of the German population was Jewish?', only 8.8 per cent of all respondents provided the correct answer. Over a third (38.6 per cent) believed that the Jewish population of pre-war Germany was around 15 per cent, closely followed by 35.3 per cent who considered it to be over 30 per cent. Cumulatively, these figures suggest that 73.9 per cent of the total sample – almost three-quarters – dramatically overestimated the size of the Jewish population in Germany in 1933.

With this in mind, it is not surprising that younger students believed or concluded that most Jews killed during the Holocaust came from Germany. As outlined in Chapter 5, overestimations of the size of this population were also evident in interviews. 'I think… just over half the population was Jews' (Erin, Year 9, SE1), and, 'like 60 per cent, maybe' (Kayley, Year 9, SE1).

Although the survey revealed that large numbers of Year 12 and 13 students overestimated the size of the Jewish population in pre-war Germany, interview exchanges with 17 and 18 year olds studying history provided a more complex picture.

On the one hand, for example, a number of students believed that Jews were a relatively small minority of the German population. The students who attempted to quantify the size of the Jewish population in pre-war Germany variously estimated it to be '3–4 per cent', '5 per cent', '8 per cent' or '10 per cent'. One student said, 'I don't think Jews [were] widespread over Germany; there was definitely a group of Jews like there is Muslim people in this country' (Patrick, Year 12, LON7), and another added that it was only 'a small percentage' (Samad, Year 12, LON3). Students further explained that the Nazis 'over-exaggerated' the influence of Jews for political gain and cited the influence of Goebbels in this regard. One student, for example, argued that 'it was embellished and hyperbolised just due to the fact that based on his [Goebbels's] pure hatred he used the Jews as a scapegoat' (Samuel, Year 12, LON7).

On the other hand, a number of students in Years 12 and Years 13 took a different view. For example,

Phil (Year 12, LON7) reasoned, 'I wouldn't be surprised if there were quite a lot of Jews in Germany' while Paul (Year 13, EE1) commented that the pre-war Jewish population of Germany constituted 'a large amount'. Some students also presented the stereotypical view that Jews were a dominant and unsavoury influence in German society:

> There was a fair amount and I think they were quite rich, they were seen as the people that had a lot of money, and also in Germany, and historically, Jews were never seen to have a homeland, they always seemed to be the foreigners in another country that wasn't where they came from originally. So people just saw them as people that had no homeland, people that kept just taking off of the country, like leeching into a country and then just taking off in it and getting rich (Paul, Year 12, LON7).

Overall, therefore, interview responses from students in Years 12 and 13 presented a mixed picture and, on this issue, not even their knowledge was secure. Some students believed the percentage of Jews in pre-war Germany to be relatively small, whereas others grossly exaggerated it. What is clear, is that very, very few Year 12 or 13 students who were interviewed accurately understood the pre-war Jewish population to be extremely low and a significant degree of uncertainty existed among even these older students about the scale and influence of Jews in German society during the 1930s.

Interviews across all age groups revealed that students typically had some knowledge of the rise of Hitler during the 1930s, of Nazi propaganda techniques and the treatment of the Jews in Germany. It was evident, however, that while Germany was a key locus of the Holocaust for many students, understandings of the development of the Holocaust and its geographical reach after 1939 was much weaker. Nevertheless, as the survey revealed, about a third of students (and this improved with age) did understand that Poland was geographically significant in relation to the Holocaust.

The interviews provided supporting evidence that some students were aware that Poland was home to a sizeable Jewish population. 'Poland was very Jewish' (Liam, Year 9, NE1) and 'mainly in Poland' (Jacob, Year 9, SE1) were two illustrative observations, while Carrie (Year 10, EE1) concluded that Jews were in Poland 'a lot – because lots of the concentration camps were in Poland'.

The fact that a number of students (albeit only about a third of the total sample) recognised that the Holocaust went beyond Germany is potentially encouraging and suggests that younger students are able to grasp the relationship between the Holocaust and German military expansion to the east in an elementary way. In one interview exchange, for

example, a student explained that the Holocaust took place 'in countries that Germany invaded' (Nick, Year 9, EE1) before the group proceeded to list Poland, Netherlands, Ukraine, Russia and Belgium. On one level, however rudimentary this chronicling may be, it revealed recognition of the series of connections between the war and the Holocaust.

In a similar vein a few students spoke of areas or regions during interview. Some, for instance, spoke of Eastern Europe – 'because that's the countries he took' (Holly, Year 9, SE1); others, like Paige (Year 10, EE1), grappled with their thinking and knowledge base: '…across Eastern Europe. Wasn't the majority of all the work and concentration camps in Poland … I think?' Evidence of students wrestling with the unfolding historical events also appeared in the following exchange between Year 10 students:

> **Interview:** Does the Holocaust happen in Germany?
> **Carrie:** I don't think it does that much. I think they ship them out of the country so they can work on building up the Aryan race.
> **Sabir:** Yeah.
> **Lachlan:** We don't build prisons next to our schools, so it's sort of like having their area clean as they look at it and then having the messy stuff in the other countries (Year 10, EE1).

Here, the students expressed their ideas about why the Holocaust moved beyond Germany and offered the beginnings of an explanation. However, both student survey responses and interviews (particularly among students from Years 7 to 11) suggested that students' understanding of where victims came from or were killed typically did not extend beyond Germany and/or Poland. Indeed, there were only a small number of instances in which a country other than Germany or Poland was referred to by name. On such occasions references either seemed to be linked to exposure to particular stories – 'there were some that like Anne Frank was from Amsterdam, Holland[1]' (Abby, Year 8, LON6) – or constituted an ill-formed list: 'Poland, Germany and Britain' (Beth, Year 9, LON5); 'There was another country. Austria. And the Netherlands' (Scarlett, Year 9, LON5).

Slightly more frequent were allusions or gestures to Jews being found outside of Germany/Poland: 'Lots of them in lots of different countries' (Rob, Year 9, EE1) was one of the best examples of this, alongside 'there was a lot in Europe' (Leah, Year 10, LON5). Less sophisticated, but arguably more symptomatic, was the simple refrain 'all over' (Tom, Year 10, NE1).

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[1] Anne Frank and her family were German, of course, but the student here repeats the (fairly common) misconception that they were Dutch.

As indicated above, some students in Years 12 and 13 had a much greater awareness that mass killing occurred outside Germany than many younger students. For example, almost 60 per cent of Year 13 students knew that German-occupied Poland was the country in which the largest number of killings of Jewish people actually took place. Students in Years 12 and 13 also typically appreciated that the Holocaust occurred in many countries across Europe but that German-occupied Poland and other lands in Eastern Europe provided a particular focus for mass slaughter. Furthermore, as indicated in the next section, these older students typically appreciated that Nazi deaths camps often were situated in German-occupied Poland.

## What do students know about ghettos, the 'Holocaust by bullets', the camp system and the end of the Holocaust?

### Ghettos

Following the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, ghettos were established to separate Jewish communities from the non-Jewish population. The first ghetto was established in Poland in Piotrków Trybunalski in October 1939. Often places of horrific deprivation and suffering, larger ghettos were also set up in Lodz (April 1940) and Warsaw (October 1940). In total, more than 1,000 ghettos were created in German-occupied and annexed Poland and the USSR during 1940 and 1941.

Ghettos were not killing sites, but they did mark 'the restructuring of the spaces of the urban and rural environment' (Cole 2003: 18) for nefarious purposes, and they were places of mass suffering and mass death, thus making them important spaces in the geography (and history) of the Holocaust. They were also places of extraordinary resilience, resistance, and spiritual and physical courage in which Jews struggled to cope with the unfolding genocide.

Students' acquisition of deeper knowledge of how Jews responded to events are of course critical if they are to move towards seeing Jewish victims as individuals with human agency rather than merely as objects of persecution. As reported above, in response to survey question 58, which asked what the ghettos were, the majority of students (60.6 per cent) correctly identified ghettos as areas where Jews were forced to live separately from non-Jews. While this is positive, it is noteworthy that a quarter of students incorrectly thought that Nazi ghettos were places where the Jews of Europe were killed in gas chambers.

As illustrated in Figure 7.6, responses to question 58 also highlighted that while a large number of

students answered the question correctly, this was more the case as students got older and in particular with those in Year 11 and over. Indeed, the survey data suggested that many younger students (particularly in Years 7 and 8) have limited understanding of what ghettos were and, potentially, how their existence relates to the development of the Holocaust.

The focus-group interviews with students from Years 7 to 11 also contained a number of references to 'the ghettos'. When mentioned, students were seemingly confident in talking about and describing both features of ghettos and characteristics of living within them. 'Really like dirty and stuff' (Natalie, Year 9, LON6); 'unsanitized places' (Kayley, Year 9, SE1); 'where conditions were bad and stuff' (Ian, Year 10, SE1) were remarks made by students across the age ranges. Some referred directly or indirectly to ghettos being isolated or physically separated from other parts of a town or city, saying that they 'were away from everybody' (Bianca, Year 10, SE1). Others noted how 'there wasn't much for them [the Jews] to do and then lots of them starved and died' (Jacob, Year 9, SE1), although this same exchange with Year 9 students also saw the implication that ghettos differed from concentration camps because 'in the ghetto they all lived there' (Jacob, Year 9, SE1).

However, when asked for more details about ghettos – where they were located, for instance – students appeared less assured. Carrie (Year 10, EE1) conceded, 'I don't know' and Paige (Year 10, EE1) was unsure of whether ghettos were in cities and villages, while Danielle (Year 9, LON6) positioned ghettos 'in the ruins of Germany, the dirty parts where no-one goes'.

The inability to geographically locate ghettos was accompanied by little or no remark about ghettoisation in terms of its relation to the development of anti-Jewish policy; as Jacob (Year 9, SE1) put it, 'they built ghettos for them to stay in then they were moved out to the concentration camps'. There were a couple of exceptions where students attempted to construct explanations, for example: 'I don't think Hitler wanted them near him almost. So he wanted them … so he put them in ghettos on the outside of things' (Hannah, Year 9, EE1). Overall, although many students associated ghettos with unpleasant and harsh living conditions, interviews with those younger than 16 typically revealed that their knowledge of the ghetto system was limited and that significant misconceptions existed.

In contrast, those students studying history in Year 12 and Year 13 had a more developed understanding of ghettos. For example, one Year 12 group recognised that ghettos were established 'mainly in Poland' and were 'just sort of Jewish communities that were, like, boxed in and contained … where Jews were not allowed to leave, and they were run in a military way by the SS' (Alex, Year 12, EE1). 'The most famous one [ghetto] was in Warsaw in Poland,' Phil (Year 12, LON7) said. 'I don't think they are sort of camps, but it's more sort of things like curfews and segregation of living and things like that, in specific areas.'

Older students were also more likely to provide

**Figure 7.6** Student responses to survey question 58, 'Beginning in October 1939, the Nazis created ghettos. What were Nazi ghettos?' (percentage by year group)
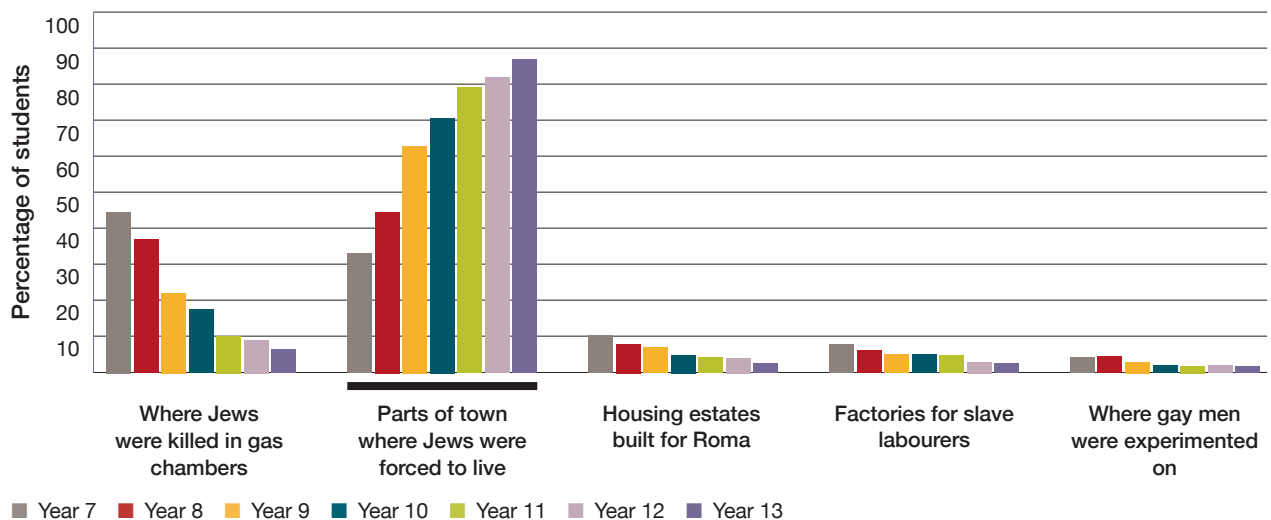
reasonably accurate detail about the conditions in ghettos than their younger counterparts. For example, students in Years 12 and 13 often understood that conditions in the Polish ghettos became murderous and that many Jews 'died through starvation, malnutrition' and 'disease' (Cassie, Year 13, EE1).

A number of students in Years 12 and 13 also appeared to understand that the establishment of ghettos was part of the developing process of the Holocaust. Often, students acknowledged that ghettos were established after the invasion of Poland and before the accelerated mass killing of Jews in death camps in the early 1940s. For example, Cassie (Year 13, EE1) noted that, 'they put the Jews in the ghettos before they took them to the extermination camps', while Amelia (Year 13, EE1) said, 'I think they began to clear people out from the ghettos and into the death camps'.

However, even in Years 12 and 13, not all students shared these understandings. A number thought that ghettos were established before the war, some were uncertain where they were situated and others were unclear about how 'ghettoisation' fitted into the chronological sweep of the Holocaust. In addition, some students appeared not to know how the ghettos operated. As one Year 12 admitted, 'I know they had ghettos where several groups lived, which were persecuted, but other than that I am not sure how they were segregated' (Mike, Year 12, LON7).

In overview, even though some students – particularly older students – demonstrated an elementary understanding of the establishment of ghettos, knowledge and understanding of this phenomenon was typically limited. The majority of students, for example, did not appear to fully grasp the relationship between the invasion of Poland and the process of ghettoisation, and few were able to place it into a coherent chronological framework of developments within the Holocaust.

## The *Einsatzgruppen* and the 'Holocaust by bullets'

As mentioned above and in Chapter 6, student knowledge of the *Einsatzgruppen* and the devastating role played by these mobile killing squads in the Holocaust was very limited. In fact, over three-quarters (75.7 per cent) of students either did not associate the *Einsatzgruppen* with the Holocaust or did not know they were connected. This is a telling finding, given that the mass shootings committed by them are estimated to have killed more than 1.5 million people, of whom the overwhelming majority were Jews. Furthermore, it is potentially significant that students were unaware of the actions of the *Einsatzgruppen* because they were primarily

centred in Nazi-occupied territories of the Soviet Union. As demonstrated elsewhere in this chapter, many students considered the Holocaust to have taken place in Germany (and to a lesser extent Poland) and so unfamiliarity with killings in Eastern Europe is not surprising. Indeed, taken together, they appear to confirm that the narrative of the Holocaust 'in the East' is not familiar to most students.

Group interviews with students from Years 7 to 11 supported this finding. For the most part, direct references to 'death by shooting' were few and far between, and even on the sole occasion when a student did invoke the murders of the *Einsatzgruppen*, this knowledge was muddled. For, after suggesting some Jews were gassed but others were beaten or shot, Rosie (Year 8, NE1) explained that they were not shot where they lived, but 'like, in the camps, they would just shoot them and they would fall into a pit thing'. It is not clear whether she had precise knowledge of an areas such as the *Lazaret* in Treblinka or if she was confusing the methods of the *Einsatzgruppen* to that of the death camps.

The absence of the 'Holocaust by bullets' in younger students' historical consciousness not only reduced their geographical understanding of the genocide but was also a product of it. Furthermore, it limits – even removes completely – the capacity to comprehend how the Holocaust evolved and developed. As a result, comprehension of what the Holocaust was becomes telescoped; focus is concentrated on the camps and gassing so that the far less 'industrial' process of mass shooting at close quarters – a procedure which necessarily touched and involved non-Jewish populations in various ways – is disregarded and left out of the stories students construct about the Holocaust.

However, some students who were studying history in Years 12 and 13 did recognise and understand the term *Einsatzgruppen*, and added appropriate detail. For example:

> The death squads that were sent to Eastern Europe and they just round up Jews and shoot them … it was when they invaded Russia so, like, in the early 1940s (Amelia, Year 13, EE1).

> The *Einsatzgruppen* … were the SS soldiers who followed behind the main German advance going into Russia [and were] … specifically tasked with looking for Jews just to shoot them (Simon, Year 12, LON7).

> Killing squads … who shot Jews … put them into mass graves (Luke, Year 12, EE1).

In general, though, many older students did not

know the scope and scale of the operations involving the *Einsatzgruppen* (see Chapter 6). Some believed these killing squads killed 'thousands' and others suggested 'hundreds of thousands maybe', but no student claimed the number of those murdered exceeded a million. Furthermore, students typically underestimated how big the military operation was. As Luke (Year 12, EE1) remarked, it consisted of 'a couple, like three, four or five death squads … it wasn't huge I don't think'. This is partially correct – there were four groups, *Einsatzgruppen* A to D.

In overview, while many Year 12 and 13 students were aware of the *Einsatzgruppen* and their actions, specific detail of the huge numbers involved and the devastation they caused was not readily apparent. Nor was there evidence of knowledge about the vital role played by locals in these mass killings; the level of local complicity and perpetration seems to have been missed by students and is an essential part of the picture. Arguably of greatest significance, however, is the fact that very few students were able to connect the invasion of the USSR in June 1941 with the actions of the *Einsatzgruppen*. Students' general inability to geographically situate 'where' the 'Holocaust by bullets' chiefly occurred and how it related to the chronological development of the Holocaust was particularly revealing.

## The camp system

As explained earlier, during interviews students were asked where the Holocaust took place and responses often focused on countries (e.g. Poland or Germany). However, students often referred to locations that were not national boundaries, such as the 'camps'. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 3, 'camps' and 'concentration camps' featured prominently in students' collective conceptions of the Holocaust.

Here, Auschwitz was considered the 'main one' or, as John (Year 9, EE1) remarked, 'the main one you get taught'. The primacy of Auschwitz in students' thinking was evident in most student interviews. As Matt (Year 9, SE1) explained: 'The main one that everyone knows of is Auschwitz because that was where the gas chambers were.'

Their locating of the gas chambers exclusively within Auschwitz suggested that many students did not know about other camps and this was borne out in both interviews and survey responses. Although a couple of younger students hinted at the existence of 'other camps' – Erin (Year 9, SE1) even noted, 'I had to do this for homework a couple of weeks ago and there were loads', while Kayley (Year 9, SE1) explained, 'there's another one; there's one beginning with M … I don't remember' – no students below Years 12 and 13 were able to name another camp

in interview.

Interviews with students in Years 12 and 13 did, however, produce references to camps other than Auschwitz. Several students referred, for example, to the Nazi concentration camp established in 1933 at Dachau in Bavaria. Students from one school, several of whom had recently been to the site of Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin, also provided brief details of this camp and its function and history. Two students referred to Treblinka, although they were unsure where it was located and what type of camp it was. Additionally, Amelia (Year 13, EE1) said, 'I read a book about Sobibor and it talked quite a lot about death camps.' Another student declared that his knowledge of Sobibor came from reading *Horrible Histories* (James, Year 13, EE1). Of potential significance, given its celebrated liberation by the British Army in April 1945, only one student referred to Bergen-Belsen, and even then he struggled with its pronunciation.

In general, across all age groups, the centrality of Auschwitz in students' consciousness was striking. This was echoed by student responses to question 31 of the survey in which 71 per cent of all respondents associated the word 'Auschwitz' with the Holocaust: the second highest connection after Hitler (91.4 per cent of respondents).

Meanwhile, only 14.9 per cent of students correctly associated Treblinka with the Holocaust, while the overwhelming majority (60.4 per cent) said they didn't know if it was connected. Given the Bergen-Belsen's strong place in the collective memory of Nazi crimes among earlier generations (Kushner 1994, 2008; Reilly *et al.* 1997; Pearce 2014), it is surprising that just 15.2 per cent of young people connected it with the Holocaust.

Although the survey data suggested that most students 'know about' Auschwitz, student interviews complicated this picture. For example, when asked what Auschwitz was, Hannah (Year 9, EE1) replied, 'it's a concentration camp or a death camp', while Beth (Year 9, LON5) said, 'Auschwitz was actually hidden from everybody in the more outskirts, not the outskirts, but in Germany, but in a small area of Germany'. Further insights into understandings of Auschwitz came out of another exchange with Year 9 students about the very nature of a concentration camp:

**Tim:** Didn't they make them all work there really hard and it was mainly like a prison for them; make them work and…
**Catherine:** Hardly any food.
**Tim:** Just … nothing.
**Interviewer:** So tough conditions … but earlier we said they got gassed and killed.

**Tim:** Yeah. It is sort of…

**Interviewer:** So is it both?

**Catherine:** Didn't they use them and use the ladies for prostitution, and then when they got bad or old or weak, then they killed them. When they were useless.

**Harry:** The men were used for, like, builders and … like really hardly … like other people didn't need…

**Catherine:** I think the women and the children got killed first.

**Interviewer:** So some people got killed almost straight away?

**Catherine:** The weaker ones. But if they were strong and capable…

**Catherine:** And the old ones, yes.

**Tim:** Yeah. If they were strong and capable then they would be used to provide a purpose.

**Interviewer:** Is there a difference between a concentration camp and a death camp?

**Catherine:** I think they're the same.

(Year 9, EE1).

The notion that concentration camps were similar to prisons is quite wrong, of course – these places which 'were initially used for the purpose of crafting the racial community and eliminating political opponents' (Stone 2015: 10) were outside the due process of the law and people could be sent there without formal legal charge or trial. Nevertheless, the camp as an archetypal prison was a misconception prevalent among a large number of younger students interviewed. One consequence of this may be that, in attempting to explain how or why someone might end up in a concentration camp, students might presume that the victim bore some responsibility for their imprisonment – the conflation with the prison system may lead them to assume that there was some due process of law.

Another consequence is the inability to differentiate between camps established for work, imprisonment, punishment or 're-education', and the death camps created for the purpose of extermination. In this regard the prevalence of 'Auschwitz' is doubly problematic. Not only does it exclude other camps, but its own hybrid and complicated nature as both concentration camp and death camp is obscured. It is, of course, potentially possible that students' familiarity with the film *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* might add to this apparently confused picture (see Chapter 4).

The dominance of the concentration camp in popular imagination is also problematic here, because – while huge numbers of 'other victims' were incarcerated, suffered and murdered – the vast majority of Jews never had the concentration camp experience. Too frequently Jews were shot in pits near their homes or else they were deported to killing centres where they went straight to their

deaths in the gas chambers on arrival. The imagery of arrival, selection, registration, head shaving and striped uniforms, of barracks and roll calls that so dominates our picture of this past, in fact depicts an experience atypical for most victims of the Holocaust.

The death camp was a wholly different place to the concentration camp. While both may have been surrounded with barbed wire, there were only five true death camps (Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka II and Auschwitz-Birkenau) when there were thousands of concentration camps and sub-camps. While the mortality rate in concentration camps was indeed appalling, particularly in the war years when they became increasingly murderous places, the purpose of the death camp was mass murder. Typically, those who arrived were dead within hours. The death camps were all built for the specific purpose of murdering Jews, although some people from other groups were also killed in some of them (Arad 1987: vii). Conversely, the vast majority of the inmates of the concentration camp were not Jews.

The distinction between concentration camp and death camp is as little understood as is the distinction between the mass crimes that the Nazis committed against many victim groups and the totality of the Holocaust: a Nazi programme that intended to murder every last Jewish man, woman and child wherever they could reach them. The dominance of concentration camp imagery in the collective imagination, and the conflation of the genocide of the Jews with the terrible violence of that camp system, has distorted popular and student understanding of the Holocaust.

Among the group interviews with students in Years 7 to 11 (age 11 to 16), there was little evidence of widespread familiarity with the notion of death camps. Exceptions to this tended to be found among the older of these students. For example, Tom (Year 10, NE1) observed that:

…there was the ghettos before they went to the concentration or death camps. They were like in isolation, they wanted them to live away from the rest of the German people so that they didn't sort of interfere with their lives and it was sort of a really basic standard of living. And then the concentration camps, they weren't actually killed it was where they wanted people to work for them for free and at the death camps they killed them. But they could also choose whether they wanted to keep them alive and do work or kill them straight away.

It should be noted that, while this student correctly recognised that the function of the death camps was different from that of the concentration camps, he nevertheless fails to appreciate just how murderous the concentration camps were. His statement, 'they

weren't actually killed' is certainly wrong, as vast numbers were deliberately killed in the camp system.

More commonly, where reference was made to death camps, knowledge and understanding was fragmentary and/or confused. For example, Paige (Year 10, EE1) suggested:

> There could have been a few death camps before the war. But some of them were work camps and it wasn't until the war had got really started that they all turned into death camps and they weren't work camps any more.

Or, as Matt (Year 9, SE1) suggested while the focus group attempted to recall other death camps:

> I know there was another one; it was like another big one. I don't actually know the name of it but it was like either in Holland or Poland. It was in that kind of area.

There was, of course, no death camp located in the Netherlands, although there were other types of camps which possibly influenced this student's understanding, and very large numbers of deportees from the Netherlands were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau and Sobibor.

We perhaps see in these examples how low-level knowledge of there being 'lots of camps' in occupied Europe, together with familiarity with the concentration camp model, leads to a limited and skewed understanding of the nature of death camps and the means by which they came into existence. As with Allied perceptions during the war itself, the image of the pre-war concentration camp (a brutal and at times murderous institution, where many people from different victim groups suffered and died) dominates the imagination. Many fail – now, as then – to conceive of a wholly new, unprecedented mass crime – one centred on the death camps and targeted to killing all Jewish people, wherever the Nazis and their collaborators could track them down.

The absence of clearly defined and securely held conceptualisations of the different types of camps that existed in Nazi-occupied Europe led in some instances to students having fragments of knowledge or pieces of information which inhibited deeper understanding. A good example is seen in this dialogue, where students were involved in a discussion about whether Auschwitz was hidden turned a question about whether victims knew what was going to happen to them:

**Scarlett:** Well, they didn't.
**Beth:** They were captured and taken on a train and I think they thought that…
**Beth:** A fake train station.
**Scarlett:** Yeah, a fake train station (Year 9, LON5).

In this exchange we find the students drawing on general knowledge that the perpetrators employed techniques of deception, and on specific knowledge that fake train stations were constructed. However, this knowledge of the constructions at Sobibor and Treblinka – both death camps – is incorrectly applied to Auschwitz, where no such station was erected.

Some of these tendencies were also evident in focus groups where a handful of students referred to camps being 'isolated places'. In one sense this is correct, although this is only true of some of the death camps (Auschwitz-Birkenau, for example, was situated in the relatively large town of Oswiecim), and even then this did not prevent people coming to know about even the most remote of these sites.

Concentration camps, by contrast, were very much a part of the larger society – so much so that they were an integral part of the local and national economy (Horwitz 1990; Tooze 2007). Similarly, students who go on to refer to railways and trains in relation to victims arriving in these remote locations are also correct – although knowledge is often muddled and/or insecure ('they were put on trains, I think' – Rosie, Year 8, NE1). However, due to the dominance of 'the concentration camp' in most students' understanding, it is unclear whether the true nature and purpose of these places is fully understood. Furthermore, the notion that Jews were simply tricked into going willingly to these remote areas raises the potential that the violence and trauma of deportation may be ignored.

Older students in Years 12 and 13 appeared to have a slightly more nuanced and detailed understanding of the camp system. Indeed, many students were able to begin to distinguish between different types of camp although, where the particular nature of the death camp was better understood, there was also sometimes a tendency to neglect the very high death rate in concentration camps. Emily (Year 12, EE1), for example, explained that a 'concentration camp is where you put a lot of people there, and a labour camp is where you put people to work, and the death camp is where you just put them to be killed'. Other students reasoned:

> I thought concentration camps were just for, were basically labour camps, well before the war started they were more for re-educating, like, Communists or whoever, but then once the war started concentration camps were just for sort of labour, and prisoner of war camps were similar as well. Whereas there were only a few extermination camps that were sometimes combined with labour camps, only about six or seven of them, I think, and all of them were in Poland (Alex, Year 12, EE1).

The work camps were built, I believe, before the 'Final Solution', and then the death camps were built after (Simon, Year 12, LON7).

I know there was the death camps and there were working camps, but I think the death camps were specifically made to exterminate people, and then there were the work camps which were basically where they took the able-bodied and political prisoners, and used them to help Germany's economy and the war effort (Samuel, Year 12, LON7).

Other Year 12 and Year 13 students appreciated that there were a limited number of 'death camps' situated in Geman-occupied Poland. Danielle (Year 13, EE1), for example, remarked that, 'there were about five big ones and loads of little ones'.

Generally, these older students knew that large-scale killing did occur in death camps that were primarily situated in German-occupied Poland. However, uncertainties remained. All students struggled to name the camps and even older students found it difficult to adequately differentiate between the different types of camp. Certainly, references to 'concentration camps' and not 'death' or 'extermination' camps dominated the discourse. Furthermore, many students in Years 12 and 13 argued that, as these camps were hidden away from the German people, very few knew about the horrendous crimes committed. One student, apparently frustrated by an apparent lack of detailed knowledge about the Holocaust and the camp system, declared:

Usually people, when you speak of a concentration camp, the ones that come to mind are Dachau and Auschwitz, because they are sort of infamous, I think Dachau was the first one they created, and Auschwitz was the most potent in how many people were actually taken there and wiped out, [but] it's not taught enough in schools about the Holocaust … you don't get a full spectrum of knowledge on what actually happened (Brendan, Year 13, LON3).

## The 'end' of the Holocaust

Both the survey and the interviews attempted to find out more about students' understanding and knowledge of when and why the Holocaust ended. Question 66, for example, asked students, 'Why did the Nazi-organised mass murder of the Jews end?'

As Figure 7.7 shows, students mainly thought that the organised mass murder of Jews ended either because Hitler committed suicide or, more accurately, because the Allied armies liberated the lands controlled by the Nazis where the Holocaust was

taking place. Thus, while 46.1 per cent provided the most accurate answer, a broadly similar proportion (41.5 per cent) incorrectly selected Hitler's suicide.

Significantly, fewer than half of students in Years 7, 8, 9 and 10 provided an accurate answer. Many of the students in these year groups believed that the Holocaust ended because Hitler committed suicide. For example, more than 50 per cent of students in Years 7 and 8 held this belief. This finding further confirms the Hitler-centric view of the Holocaust internalised by many students, particularly those in Years 7 to 9.

In historical terms this understanding is, of course, grossly inaccurate. By the time of his death in April 1945 the vast majority of concentration and death camps had been liberated. Simply, Hitler's suicide had no direct bearing on the end of the Holocaust. Rather, it was the Allied military advance, especially to the east and west of Germany, that led to the end of the mass extermination of Jews and other victim groups.

The development in knowledge and understanding evident in Figure 7.7 is striking, with a year-on-year decline in incorrect answers mirrored by a steadily increasing appreciation of the military defeat of Nazi Germany by the Allies as a decisive factor. Even so, many students did not fully understand this important explanation, confusing the fact that the Allied advance ended the genocide with this being the reason why the Allies waged war against Nazi Germany in the first place. During interviews, several students harboured the belief that the Allies fought the war primarily 'to rescue the Jews'. As Catherine (Year 9, EE1) explained, 'Well, we won the war, because we didn't want the Jews to be in that state so we stopped it'. Another student similarly asserted:

Other countries realised what was happening [to the Jews] and they pushed forwards through Germany and found the concentration camps. And then loads of countries joined in the fight and just destroyed the Nazis (Jacob, Year 9, SE1).

By contrast, a few students recognised that Allied attempts to defeat the Nazis were not motivated by the desire to save the Jews. As Jacob (Year 9, SE1) noted, 'Russia was defending itself from the Germans because they got to Stalingrad', and the primary goal of the Red Army was 'to take down Hitler' (Kayley, Year 9, SE1). Of those students who did appear to understand the primary reason for the end of the Holocaust, knowledge was often patchy and uncertain as the following example illustrates:

I think it, I'm not 100 per cent sure how it ended, but some people from, like, other countries, like the

**Figure 7.7** Student responses to survey question 66, 'Why did the Nazi-organised mass murder of the Jews end?' (percentage by year group)
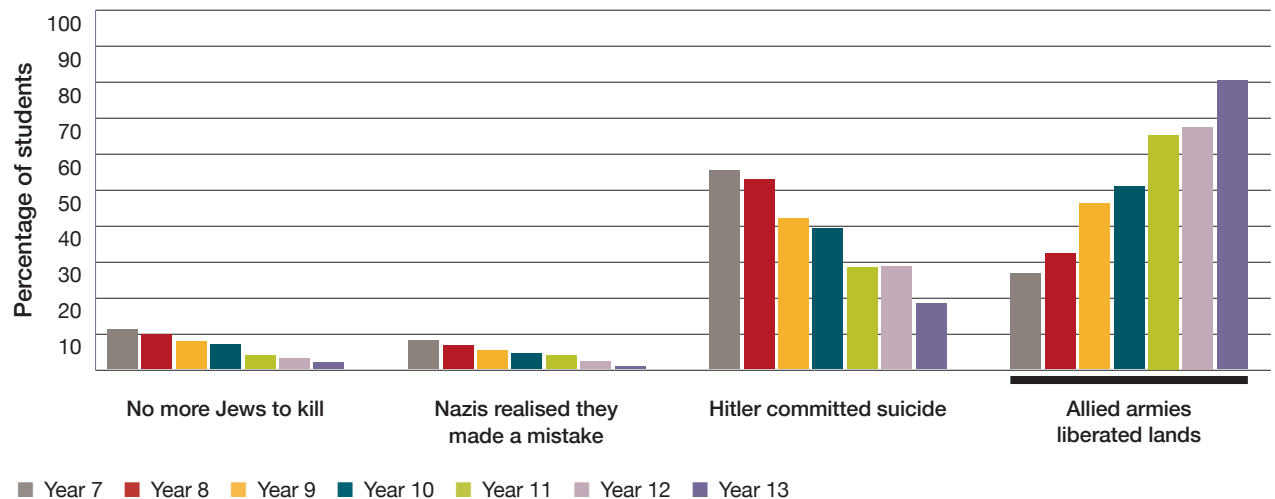


big countries like France, the UK, the USA and they came and they found the concentration camps and they let the people inside them free and then, yeah, I think that is what happened but I don't know when it happened, but I think that was the case how most of the Holocaust ended, like, with the concentration camps and gas chambers (Daniella, Year 9, LON6).

During interviews with Year 12 and Year 13 students it was abundantly clear that the vast majority appreciated that the Holocaust ended because the Allied armies liberated camps that stood on land previously controlled by German authorities. Equally, most students appreciated that the Red Army in the east and British and US armies in the west often liberated the camps. Indicative of the responses of other students of his age, Alex (Year 12, EE1) reasoned:

> Well, Germany starts to lose the war, really, and when they start getting pushed out of the Soviet Union in sort of '43 and then '44, the Russians, you know, liberate lots of the death camps, and so do the Americans and the British from the west as well, and then basically the Germans can't continue doing the Holocaust when they don't control the camps any more, and then when they finally lose in '45.

Overall, as was the case with other elements of the Holocaust, while older students studying history in Years 12 and 13 had a reasonably robust understanding of how and why the Holocaust ended, many younger students did not. Gray (2014a: 278–9) noted in a recent research study that knowledge of the end of the Holocaust among 13- and 14-year-old

students was replete with 'serious misconceptions', and suggested 'that this is perhaps the area of the Holocaust where pupils know and understand the least'. Certainly, findings from both the survey and student interviews broadly concur with this concern and suggest that students' understanding of how the Holocaust ended is often fragmentary and limited.

## Summary

- The majority of students (68.5 per cent) correctly identified the main decade in which the Holocaust happened (the 1940s). Students' correct responses improved with age. For example, whereas 55.3 per cent of Year 7 students offered an accurate response, this rose to 90.5 per cent in Year 13.
- Typically, students in Years 7 to 11 did not have a secure or confident understanding of the chronology of the Holocaust. By contrast, during interviews, students studying history in Years 12 and 13 were able to provide a much more robust chronological framework of the Holocaust and were also more likely to precisely detail a number of significant historical events.
- When asked about the start of the Holocaust, 40.2 per cent of students incorrectly believed that the 'organised mass killing of Jews' began when Hitler was appointed Chancellor in January 1933. By contrast many older students appreciated, at a basic level, that the persecution and murder of Jews increased in intensity and scale throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s.
- Very few students in Years 7 to 10 were able to detail specific policies or events that

dramatically impacted on the lives of Jews in the 1930s (e.g. the April 1933 Boycott, the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, the so-called 'Night of Broken Glass' (*Kristallnacht*) of 1938). Survey data revealed that most students did not even recognise that some key events were connected to the Holocaust (e.g. only 36.1 per cent associated *Kristallnacht*).

■ Very few students appeared to fully grasp the significance of the relationship between the Second World War and the Holocaust. Revealingly, only 7.4 per cent of students correctly understood that the event which primarily triggered the 'organised mass killing of Jews' was the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. The understandings of some (although not all) students in Years 12 and 13, however, proved more sophisticated than those of their younger counterparts. Many older students, for example, were also more likely to appreciate the significance of, for example, Operation Barbarossa, the Wannsee Conference and the 'Final Solution'.

■ Students typically had a very limited and often erroneous understanding of Britain's role during the Holocaust, with 34.4 per cent incorrectly believing that the Holocaust triggered Britain's entry into war. This perspective improved with age, but approximately a quarter of students in Years 12 and 13 also held this view. For the most part it appeared that many students did not have the necessary contextual information to accurately explain Britain's response to the Holocaust.

■ More than half of the students surveyed (50.7 per cent) incorrectly believed that the largest number of Jewish people murdered during the Holocaust came from Germany. Typically, the accuracy of student responses improved with age. For example, whereas only 20.2 per cent of Year 7 students selected Poland, 47.0 per cent of Year 13 students did so.

■ More than half of the students (54.9 per cent) incorrectly thought that the largest number of killings of Jewish people took place in Germany, and just over a third of students (35.2 per cent) correctly identified that the largest number of killings of Jewish people took place in German-occupied Poland.

■ The very strong focus on Germany as the central place from which victims of the Holocaust both originated and in which they were murdered was a common feature of student interviews. It was evident that many students held the erroneous belief that Jews constituted a significant proportion of the German population during the 1930s. For example, whereas only 8.8 per cent correctly identified the pre-war Jewish population to be less than 1 per cent, 73.9 per cent of students grossly overestimated the pre-war Jewish population by 15 to 30 times. These findings further suggest that many students potentially see the Holocaust as a consequence of the perceived Jewish 'threat' within Germany that Hitler and his collaborators sought to extinguish.

■ Very few students in Years 7, 8 and 9 reported that the Holocaust occurred in locations or countries other than Germany and Poland. In contrast, some older students interviewed were able to name other countries involved, particularly those in Eastern Europe.

■ A majority of students across all age groups (60.6 per cent) were able to correctly define what ghettos were but, generally, students in Years 7 to 10 had a limited understanding of why they were established and where they were located. Fewer than a quarter of students in all year groups (24.3 per cent) recognised that the term *Einsatzgruppen* was connected to the Holocaust and very few students beyond Years 12 and 13 knew about the estimated mass killing of more than 1.5 million people – the overwhelming majority of whom were Jews – following the invasion of the USSR in June 1941.

■ The primacy of Auschwitz in students' Holocaust consciousness was evident in most student interviews, and large numbers of students (71.0 per cent) recognised that Auschwitz was explicitly connected to the Holocaust. However, knowledge of other camps was severely limited. For example, only 14.9 per cent and 15.2 per cent of students recognised Treblinka and Bergen-Belsen, respectively. Furthermore, many students were unable to differentiate between different types of camp or to identify their geographic location.

■ A total of 46.1 per cent of students across all year groups correctly knew that the end of the Holocaust came as a result of the Allied liberation of lands occupied by the German army. However, a broadly similar proportion (41.5 per cent) incorrectly thought that the organised mass murder of Jews ended because Hitler committed suicide. Accurate responses improved with age and a wide discrepancy existed between Year 7 students (26.4 per cent correct) and Year 13 students (79.6 per cent correct). Significantly, a majority of students in Years 7 and 8 believed that the Holocaust ended because Hitler committed suicide. This finding suggests a Hitler-centric view of the Holocaust remains common among many students in Key Stage 3.

# Part IV
# Reflections and the way ahead

Olivia Hemingway, 2014

# 8.

# Considerations and recommendations

## Introduction

As the opening chapter of this report emphasises, at the point of writing, representations of the Holocaust proliferate within popular and political consciousness in the UK. Critically, the Holocaust continues to occupy a central position in the formal National Curriculum for England's secondary schools. While the power of a single curriculum has been weakened considerably in recent years (as will be discussed below) 'the Holocaust' is positioned, symbolically at least, as part of the canon of valued and valuable knowledge that successive Westminster governments have judged important for the nation's school students to acquire.

In as far as it is able to demonstrate that England's secondary school students do indeed know something of this history, elements of the research reported in previous chapters could be interpreted as 'good news'. Overwhelmingly, the students who took part in this study recognised the term 'the Holocaust', and the majority most clearly associated it with the persecution and mass murder of Jews or were at least familiar with this history. Moreover, they appeared to place great value upon learning about the Holocaust and expressed high levels of interest in engaging with the subject both inside and beyond school. This offers a strong counter to any claim that there could be a widespread sense of over-exposure, 'fatigue' or even resistance among students towards encountering the Holocaust in classroom contexts. On the contrary, even those students who had already learned about the Holocaust at school regularly reported that they wanted to learn more.

However, beyond these general levels of awareness, interest and enthusiasm, the preceding chapters also documented several concerning gaps, confusions and significant inaccuracies in the accounts and responses that most students were able to provide. There is, therefore, a crucial caveat to the 'good news' that students consider it important to learn about the Holocaust given that, as this research suggests, many continue to operate with significantly truncated – and in some cases inaccurate – understandings of the Holocaust even after they have learned about it.

In reflecting on this, it is helpful to remember the words of caution sounded by Stevick and Michaels (2013: 11) earlier in this report: that while erroneous understandings and common misconceptions are important to document, '[l]ittle is accomplished by criticizing people, particularly students, for where they are when that location is broadly determined by the broader culture'.

For this reason, Chapter 1 attempted to characterise the wider context of Holocaust consciousness in contemporary Britain since this broader culture is likely to inform the students' perspectives. In particular, it suggested that most dominant popular and political framings placed an emphasis upon memory and commemoration and on drawing universal, present-oriented and/or redemptive 'lessons' to be learned in place of critical engagement with this most challenging, complex and confronting history.

Employing the notion of 'collective conceptions', Chapter 3 offered a wide-angle overview of students' overarching frameworks for understanding the Holocaust. On the basis of short, free-text descriptions volunteered by the students who completed the research survey, a clear and remarkably consistent core collective conception of the Holocaust was discerned. Across all year groups, students overwhelmingly prioritised the identification of an action or series of actions (most commonly 'killing', 'murdering' or 'taking to concentration camps') committed by named perpetrators (most commonly 'Hitler' and/or 'the Nazis') upon named victims (most commonly 'the Jews').

Students were considerably less likely to explicitly position these actions and agents within a specific geographical or temporal frame. Where such references were made, they were almost invariably restricted to 'the Second World War' and 'Germany'. Critically, it was noted that the emphases – and related absences – most commonly reflected in students' core conceptions were consistent with the forms of contemporary Holocaust consciousness characterised in Chapter 1 and, moreover, that they foreshadowed many of the most striking and significant confusions, misunderstandings and gaps in student knowledge and understanding that were

examined in detail in the later chapters of this report.

For all and any with an interest in the 'future' of the Holocaust, it is paramount that both the significant gaps and inaccuracies in students' knowledge of this history and the limitations of the dominant, shared collective conceptions upon which their understanding is likely to draw are recognised and addressed. Doing so means confronting underlying issues within Britain's Holocaust consciousness more generally. Put simply, there is a real need, and a pressing urgency, to go beyond sociocultural narratives that uphold common myths and misconceptions, perpetuate simplified historical narratives and unthinkingly use this most traumatic, most horrific of pasts in the service of various moral and political agendas in the present day.

Herein lies a critically important role for education systems and for schools. It is a central contention of this chapter – indeed of this whole report – that educational spaces must be found or reclaimed in which it is possible to critically examine, deconstruct and challenge many of the core ideas and assumptions which underpin dominant contemporary British discourses on the Holocaust.

Chapter 3 suggests that it is perhaps considered axiomatic that teaching – on any subject – should begin with, or at least acknowledge, what students already (think) they know. It is, presumably, equally uncontentious to assume that one of the central functions of teaching is then to help students identify any limitations in their own prior thinking and to build further, or revise, their knowledge and understanding from there.

Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 both demonstrated clearly that students are exposed to the Holocaust in various and multiple ways before encountering the subject in the classroom and that their core conception of what this history is – and what it might 'mean' – is shaped in large part by representations and discourses that circulate outside of schools. However, it is striking, and sobering, to note that many of the most common areas of student misunderstanding remain even among those who have been formally taught about the Holocaust within school.

The study was not intended, and cannot serve, as a basis on which to judge current pedagogical practice, and our intention is emphatically not to lay blame at the feet of teachers for errors in student knowledge and understanding – not least because they also are likely to be impacted upon by the wider sociocultural frames identified by Stevick and Michaels (2013). However, this research does suggest that the current education system does not offer an effective or compelling challenge to the limited and – in too many important respects –

inaccurate popular conceptions of the Holocaust. Indeed, there appear to be a number of ways in which schools may unwittingly serve to reproduce these, for example where a popular but problematic text such as *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* is used without critical commentary in a classroom context (see Chapter 4) or, at the level of policymaking, where what could and should be understood as the distinctive functions of 'education' and 'commemoration' are presented as though one and the same.

To move beyond criticism, the rest of this chapter considers the implications of key research findings reported here and recommends appropriate actions to be taken – by teachers, by those who support teachers, by policymakers and by future researchers – so that these might be addressed. The chapter, therefore, focuses on five key areas and offers commentary and recommendations on each one. It begins by considering a central question that arguably underpins everything in this research: 'What should young people know and understand about the Holocaust?' The ensuing discussions around specific areas of Holocaust history aim to explain why some aspects of knowledge and understanding are especially valuable (so 'should' be learned), and lead towards recommendations for change in planning for teaching and learning about the Holocaust.

## I. Teaching and learning

### What should young people know and understand about the Holocaust?

Given the staggering wealth of academic scholarship on this vast and complex subject it is, of course, very difficult to capture in brief and accessible ways all that is important to know about the Holocaust. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assume that secondary school students need to be able to draw on both substantive knowledge and informed conceptual understandings. In terms of the former, students should know something about:

- the roles of collaborating regimes, Axis allies, and local populations in the perpetration of genocide
- the long history of anti-Jewish sentiment and persecution, and the particularities of Nazi antisemitism
- who 'the Jews' were, where they came from and the nature of European Jewish experiences prior to, during and after the Holocaust
- the specific policies enacted against the various victim groups targeted by Nazism and how these related to ideology
- knowledge and responses of Britain and the Allies

■ how the Holocaust ended, its legacy, significance and impact.

As to the conceptual understandings, these might include students knowing something about:

■ specific substantive concepts like 'Nazis', power and politics
■ 'second-order concepts' such as causation (see 'Introduction to the history chapters')
■ other important organising concepts like 'perpetrators', 'victims' and 'bystanders'.

To these must be added crucial conceptual frames, principally the geographies and chronologies of the Holocaust, both of which are indispensable for understanding changes and continuities in policy.

This is clearly a long wish list, and simply 'knowing' all of the above will by no means ensure that students are able to construct sophisticated, nuanced accounts of the Holocaust; the condition of knowledge and its relationship with understanding is more complex than this, as has been emphasised throughout. However, it is reasonable to assume that acquisition of more developed conceptual and substantive knowledge will allow students to recognise and challenge narrow and erroneous narratives of the Holocaust which circulate in the broader culture, including in some aspects of the education system itself. It will also allow them to understand the Holocaust in deeper and more profound ways. This will be explored in the next section.

Of course, it is reasonable to ask how realistic it is for young people to learn about this important substantive and conceptual knowledge in the current educational system. This important question triggers a number of others that are addressed in later sections of this chapter, for example:

■ What continuous professional development (CPD) do teachers need to help improve students' knowledge and understanding?
■ What challenges do they face in terms of curriculum time and curriculum priorities?
■ What adjustments in existing practice are required (in terms of aims, content knowledge and pedagogical expertise)?

The call for more developed substantive and conceptual knowledge also raises the question of age-appropriateness. Later in the chapter, the notion of progression in students' learning and the potential for a spiral curriculum are developed in more detail, though it is important to say now that this structure is not intended as a means of students acquiring all the items listed above at an early age. Instead, their knowledge and understanding would, with careful planning, develop and deepen over a period of time so that most students will acquire key fundamental knowledge and understanding by age 14, with these important fundamentals providing a platform for students to study the Holocaust in deeper and more sophisticated ways until aged 18 and beyond. Other related research on progression of knowledge under way at the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education suggests that these hopes are realistic.

## How far does the acquisition of specific knowledge and understanding matter?

It bears repeating that the authors of this report do not adhere to the idea of historical knowledge as detached knowledge – that is, as knowledge for knowledge's sake. As stated in the introduction to Part 3, historical knowledge allows for and compels students to countenance difficult questions and confront challenging and important issues. The same line has been advanced by, among others, John Tosh (2008: ix–x), who has powerfully argued that:

> The real value of history lies in equipping young people with a distinctive mode of thinking which can be critically applied to the present. Without such a perspective they will have a greatly impoverished sense of the possibilities inherent in the present; they will be unlikely to be able to distinguish between what is ephemeral and what is enduring in present circumstances; and the ongoing processes of change unfolding in their own time will be closed to them.

At a time when the Holocaust has never been more 'present' in contemporary Britain, when representations of it abound and when its memory is highly politicised, Tosh's remarks echo resoundingly. If our young people are to purposefully 'think with' the Holocaust, it follows that key substantive and conceptual knowledge is a prerequisite.

With this in mind, it is perhaps instructive to look again at how students make sense of some of the most important features of the Holocaust and to outline what the primary implications are for holding or not holding this knowledge. In this respect what follows is an analysis of four broad areas of knowledge and understanding:

1. victims of the Holocaust
2. perpetrators and issues of responsibility
3. space and place in the Holocaust
4. Britain's role in the Holocaust.

### 1. Victims of the Holocaust

As Chapter 5 demonstrates, students of all ages were able to recognise that a number of different groups were subjected to persecution, even murder, by the Nazi regime. However, the vast majority of students did not know what, specifically, happened

to each of the victim groups targeted by Nazism, let alone why they became victims in the first place. Because of their lack of substantive knowledge, a tendency exists to lump all victims groups together and adopt a more universal and generalist view of victimhood. Furthermore, *in lieu* of important knowledge, students often resorted to – even depended upon – informed guesstimation and/or popular mythology. This was true even of 'the Jews': the victim group with which, surface appearances would suggest, students are most familiar.

These shortcomings had two direct consequences. First, as students struggled to fill the gaps in their knowledge, their explanation of a given victim group's experience often became distorted and inaccurate. Illustrative here is students' framing of the persecution of homosexuals (who they incorrectly see as victims of systematic mass murder) and disabled people (whose murder is erroneously located within concentration camps). Through this process came a secondary, related consequence: namely, the amalgamation of all groups into one critical mass. In other words, the victims were not recognised as separate groups or individuals – often with distinctive experiences – but perceived as a homogenous and universal collective whose experiences were indistinguishable from one another.

The practice of lumping all victims together has a strong tradition in Anglo-Saxon countries (Kushner 1994), but a distinctive development of recent years has been the collating of these victims under the banner of 'the Holocaust'. As a process this does not preclude the naming of individual groups, but it carries the connotation that all groups were victims of the same policy, for the same reasons, with all ostensibly sharing the same (or a very similar) experience. Not only does this broader approach raise serious issues about what the Holocaust was, it also ignores the historical reality that different crimes were often enacted against different victim groups for differing reasons.

It matters, therefore, that students have a much better understanding of the particular experiences of different victim groups and why the Nazis and their collaborators targeted them. Consequently, educators need to find ways to ensure that students have greater knowledge and understanding of what happened to each victim group, how they were treated, and why. A need also exists for students to have a better appreciation of who the groups actually were. Student narratives of the Roma and Sinti (Gypsies) and their experience under Nazism are indicative here, for as is seen in Chapter 5, misunderstanding of the Roma and Sinti culture and lifestyle renders students unable to explain why they were murdered and persecuted.

Arguably, students' widespread inability to explain why the Jews were persecuted and murdered was one of the most important findings of this research. Many students lacked understanding of Nazi antisemitism and racial ideology, and some worryingly showed a tendency to uncritically adopt various myths and misconceptions widely circulated in contemporary culture (for example, the sense that Jews did well in economic crisis when others suffered, and the irrational sense that Jews posed a 'threat' to Germany in the 1930s). Others, meanwhile, presented only monocausal explanations, attributing the murder of six million Jews to Hitler and/or the Nazis.

It is critical, then, that teachers are able to explain to students why the Jews were specifically targeted by the Nazi regime. The answers to that question lie within an understanding of the perpetrators' motivations and of the social and cultural fabric of early twentieth-century European history rather than in any sense that it was somehow related to Jewish-ness or what it means – or meant – to be a Jew.

## 2. Perpetrators and issues of responsibility

An equivalent process is required for students' knowledge and understanding of the perpetrators. The impulse to believe that the horrors of the Holocaust were primarily the work of Hitler and a small group of leading Nazis, rather than the result of the actions (and inaction) of hundreds of thousands of people across Europe, is understandable. Such an explanation is also culturally ingrained, in keeping with the trend seen in the last two decades where victims are understood as 'just like us' and perpetrators are always, ultimately, 'Nazi(s)'. Furthermore, the process of 'othering' Nazism, of rendering it antithesis through 'negative definitionalism' (Bloxham 2008: 243), is strongly featured in British culture and is tied up both with the collective identity construction and vestiges of anti-German sentiment.

Student approaches to the question of 'Who were the perpetrators?' confirmed the influence of cultural representations. The research suggested that students were not fully aware of even some of the most central agents and agencies of perpetration. This is starkly outlined in Chapter 6, which reveals students' distinctly limited knowledge of individuals like Eichmann and Himmler, of organisations like the SS, and of groups such as the *Einsatzgruppen.* While some of these appeared to sit on the margins of students' consciousness, others were conspicuous by their absence.

The findings of this study suggest that educators would also do well to consider an approach to teaching and learning which 'rehumanises' the perpertrators. This is certainly not a call to sympathise or empathise with them; rather it is an approach

towards education which appreciates that the Holocaust was perpetrated by human beings in a modern European society. Efforts to understand and explain how this genocide occurred can only be addressed by a more nuanced and intelligent understanding of the perpetrators, their motivations and the sociopolitical context in which their crimes unfolded.

The dominance of a Hitler-centric view of the Holocaust demands a serious challenge. Not all students indicated that the Holocaust began and ended with Hitler; as students got older, it became more likely that they would append 'the Nazis' to their conceptions of the perpetrators. However, deeper enquiry revealed that many students either did not know who (or what) 'the Nazis' were, or conceived of them in wholly erroneous ways. Many students believed the Nazis to be Hitler's elite guards who unquestioningly carried out his will. Few of the younger students interviewed, for example, appreciated that the Nazis represented a mass political party which enjoyed popular grassroots support in the early 1930s.

This finding is even more significant in light of how students apportion blame and responsibility for the Holocaust. Chapter 6 outlines how having little or no knowledge and understanding of National Socialism, of its course to power and system of rule, reinforces erroneous ideas that responsibility extended no further than an omnipresent Hitler and hard-core elite. As a result, the complex and uncomfortable question of the role of 'non-Nazis' in the genocide was either unaddressed or answered in simplistic ways. This was captured in students' depiction of the German people as a collective who were poignantly adjudged to be either brainwashed, forcibly compelled to participate or totally ignorant of the Holocaust.

In the past 40 years, major academic advances into German culture and society under Nazism have helped reveal a rich picture of 'everyday life' during the Third Reich. This has furthered what we know of the relationship between the National Socialist German Workers' Party and the German people, revealing greater awareness of and response to persecutory policies among the population than previously thought, and showing how knowledge of genocide was circulated and received in Nazi Germany.

Tellingly, our research shows that this dense corpus of historical knowledge has yet to find its way into classrooms, suggesting an urgent need for educators to ensure that the results of this important scholarship are introduced into their teaching. Here, broader issues of complicity and responsibility are key and should raise profound questions about what the decisions and choices made by individuals in the 1930s and 1940s reveals about the human condition.

As Welker (1996: 102) reminds us, the Holocaust 'provides stark and chilling evidence of the fragility of character and the susceptibility of ordinary people to acts of unspeakable cruelty'.

## 3. Space and place in the Holocaust

Chapter 7 illustrates that many students do not have a secure understanding of how the Holocaust developed over time or of its geographical scope and scale. For example, many students were unable to reference significant and relevant events from either the pre-war period or the war years. Very few younger students knew much (if anything) of the 1933 April Boycott, the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, or *Kristallnacht* in 1938. As a result, they could not identify or say much about the nature of the Jewish experience during these years or of the regime's policy.

Simply knowing the sequence of historical events and being able to chronicle them does not mean one understands their relationship or significance. Without such knowledge, though, students' ability to consider how policies were formulated, developed and revised, or to identify the possible forces that affected these processes, is severely curtailed. This was exposed in how unaware younger students were of the nature of the relationship between the Second World War and the Holocaust. In interview, few could provide any noteworthy events or developments, and it was only among older students that reference was regularly made to the seminal moment of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. That nearly all younger students (11 to 16 years old) did not refer to this event and its importance was further evidence of their limited chronology of the Holocaust.

As mentioned above, knowing about an event does not necessarily mean that broader understanding is derived from it. Understanding also operates at different levels of sophistication. However, it is possible for all teachers to emphasise the important distinction in the development of the Holocaust between events before and after the outbreak of war in 1939. Furthermore, students should be aware that the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 prompted a further step in the radicalisation and development of the Holocaust. These fundamental events and frameworks are accessible to even the youngest students in secondary schools and suggest that it would not be too much of a challenge to improve students' understandings of some of the fundamental aspects of the Holocaust's chronological development.

Helping students to appreciate that, as the Holocaust developed over time, so too did its geographical location, is also an important aspect

of securing a more robust understanding of the Holocaust. Extending and expanding students' knowledge and understanding of developments in Eastern Europe is particularly important in this regard, as it is key for students to be aware that the Holocaust was not a phenomenon confined to the borders of Germany. Once again, a gap appears to exist between what historians know about events 'on the ground' in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, and what is often taught in the classroom. For example, as a result of local and regional studies, the participation and acquiescence of millions in the enactment of continental genocide is now starkly clear. However, this knowledge does not appear to have entered the classroom in significant ways. Indeed, both the survey and the focus groups indicated that many students do not think of the Holocaust as something that occurred throughout Europe. They are unaware of regimes like Antonescu's in Romania that embraced murder with no prompting from the Germans or of the Vichy government's willingness to deport 'foreign' Jews, and they know little of the townsfolk in the Baltic States, Ukraine and elsewhere who participated in mass shootings of their neighbours.

It would be unreasonable to expect students to hold in-depth knowledge of the multiple 'histories of the Holocaust' (Stone 2010) across Europe during the war years. But it is not at all implausible for students to be more cognisant of its geographies, and this is certainly necessary. On one level, this would refer to its geographical expanse, to an awareness of continental parameters and recognition of the vagaries of experiences within them. Without these, students will continue to think of the Holocaust as a parochial, localised occurrence, a 'German' event and not a phenomenon that engulfed an entire continent.

Helping to develop students' geographical literacy of the Holocaust also involves improving their comprehension of spaces within the history. Chief here is the camp system; students not only need to know where 'the camps' were located but also their multifaceted nature.

Again, we cannot expect students to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of all the camps in Nazi-occupied Europe but, by the end of Year 9 (age 14), students should at least have a conceptual clarity about the different types of camp, the function and purpose of these, and an understanding of where principal camps were sited. Instead, our research revealed that while the vast majority of students correctly associated the notion of 'concentration camps' with the Holocaust, some believed that the Holocaust was reducible to it. This may be understandable, but it reveals important gaps in

knowledge, as the vast majority of the six million Jews who were murdered did not experience concentration camps; most were murdered in extermination camps on arrival or were killed by the *Einsatzgruppen* and their local accomplices. A similar expectation might be made for the ghettos – spaces which are generally familiar to students, but whose *raison d'etre* and development is unknown to most.

## 4. Britain's role in the Holocaust

A final area of focus worth noting is the problematic conception of Britain's role in the Holocaust that is prominent among many students. As Chapter 7 describes, 34.4 per cent of students surveyed believed that the Holocaust triggered Britain's entry into war while a further 17.6 per cent believed the British government drew up rescue plans to save the Jews. Moreover, 23.8 per cent of all students incorrectly reasoned that the British 'did not know' about the Holocaust. Evidence from both the survey and focus-group interviews clearly demonstrated that many students did not have the necessary contextual knowledge to accurately explain Britain's response to the Holocaust.

The implication of these findings is that teachers need to find ways to ensure that their students have access to important and historically grounded information about Britain's role during the Holocaust. As a result, students will be better equipped to answer and assess vital and challenging issues such as: when and what Britain knew; what choices and possibilities were open to Britain and her Allies; and what actions were and were not taken. Armed with appropriate substantive information students will be able to arrive at meaningful conclusions to complex questions. However, if this knowledge is absent they may potentially revert to common myths and misconceptions that surround Britain's role in the Holocaust.

By way of conclusion, it is worth returning to some of the key issues raised at the beginning of this chapter in relation to broader framings of the Second World War, the Holocaust and Britain's cultural memory. For it is abundantly clear that popular conceptions of this history emphasise British probity, courage and heroism. It is significant that, despite the position of the Holocaust in the school curriculum for almost 25 years, this narrow and inappropriate conception of Britain's role in the Holocaust has not been challenged. Indeed, this research reveals that major inaccuracies, uncertainties and misconceptions are commonplace among young people and, as a consequence, Britain's 'mythical' role in relation to the Holocaust is alive and well.

This is perhaps surprising given that, as Chapter 4 reports, in other contexts students themselves were

able and willing to offer more critical commentaries on the most celebratory narratives of British values and of British history. However, even the most critical of these students did not appear to readily question the notion that the history of the Holocaust 'shows the British in a positive light'.

## Developing critical faculties and confronting difficult and profound questions

It is important to end this section by bringing together some of the most vital issues in relation to teaching and learning about the Holocaust. Throughout this report emphasis has been placed on the importance of improving students' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust so they can begin to make deeper and more profound meaning of it. In this respect it is imperative that educators provide opportunities for students to deal with some of the most complex and difficult questions exposed by a study of the Holocaust.

With this in mind, it is worth contemplating the suggestion made by Zygmunt Bauman (1989: 152) that 'the most frightening news brought about the Holocaust and by what we learned of its perpetrators was not the likelihood that "this" could be done to us, but the idea that we could do it'. Here, Bauman points towards an educational necessity: to teach and learn about the Holocaust in ways which sensitively and responsibly support students in confronting dark, stark, challenging realities.

Not only do 'we live today in a world which contains a holocaust as a possibility' (Bauman 2000: 3), but we cannot escape what Bauman (2000: 11) calls the 'most terrifying and still most topical aspect of the "Holocaust experience"' – namely:

> that in our society, people who are neither morally corrupt nor prejudiced may still participate with vigour and dedication in the destruction of targeted categories of human beings, and that their participation does not call for the mobilization of their moral or any other convictions.

Facing these truths is no easy task. It requires students to effectively 'look' at what Lawrence Langer (1995a: 3) calls the 'naked and ugly face' of the 'disaster'. Yet, however difficult and unpalatable such an exercise may be, if we are to better understand how and why genocide happens, it is unavoidable. To do so requires thoughtful pedagogy, founded on the principles of authentic learning and underwritten by a rejection of presentist, instrumentalised approaches to history.

Developing students' critical faculties must also lie at the heart of any such endeavour. Broadening and deepening students' substantive knowledge is clearly central to realising this, as is the enhancement of relevant conceptual frameworks. However, both advances must be coupled with helping students to think more purposefully and profoundly about the nature of knowledge. Enhancing young people's metacognitive skills in this way – enabling them to understand how they 'know' what they know – becomes only more crucial as the Holocaust recedes further from lived experience and students become increasingly reliant on variously mediated accounts. It could also provide an important basis from which students might be better able to determine how best to interpret and derive meaning from multiple forms of representation, including popular fictionalised accounts.

Critical thinking of the kind outlined here is paramount if teaching and learning about the Holocaust are to be student-centred. Since this approach is grounded in enquiry, it seeks to cultivate an analytical approach within students – one which they can apply to all and any sources they encounter, whether historical or contemporary. This requires skilful teaching aimed at responding to and facilitating student learning, but also supporting the development of their emotional literacy.

Educational strategies that work towards these objectives do not seek to use the Holocaust as a vehicle to achieve social or moral aims. Instead, they:

- focus on ensuring students' knowledge and understanding takes better account of the complexities of that genocide
- seek to aid young people in becoming reflective learners, able to contemplate the challenges posed by the Holocaust with independent thought
- aim at ensuring students acquire the levels of reflexivity necessary to act on the unsettling ramifications that the Holocaust has for humanity.

The need for an approach to Holocaust education that is reconnected to teaching and learning in these ways is well illustrated throughout this research report. In response, the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education has produced a series of programmes and resources that help teachers and their students address many of the issues raised here. The Centre's approach places emphasis on the importance of robust content knowledge, key conceptual frameworks, age-appropriate resources, pedagogical innovation and active, thought-provoking enquiry. Above all, it seeks to confront the myths and misconceptions so dominant in our culture and compel teachers and students to engage in a meaningful and profound understanding of the Holocaust.

## Key recommendations:
## I. Teaching and learning

1. It bears repetition that, as with most school subjects, teaching and learning about the Holocaust should begin with an acknowledgement of what students (think they) already know. If teachers are cognisant of some of the likely limitations and inaccuracies in students' prior conceptions, attention can instructively be focused on supporting students in recognising and addressing these problematic understandings.

2. With only partial, and in some cases inaccurate, historical knowledge and understanding, it is difficult for students to identify limitations in or to challenge dominant cultural narratives of the Holocaust. Ensuring that students have broader, deeper and more secure substantive knowledge must be a priority. This requires closer ties between the academic community and the classroom, such as university-led teacher development and creation of classroom resources.

3. Alongside prioritising secure knowledge acquisition, the problematic popular discourses that currently frame much of students' understanding themselves require recognition and redress. This should occasion open and honest dialogue about the purpose of Holocaust remembrance and Holocaust education in contemporary Britain.

4. Substantive knowledge needs to be developed in conjunction with conceptual understandings. This relates to key concepts such as 'camps', 'antisemitism', 'ghettos', 'the Nazis' and second-order concepts like causation and significance, as well as geographical and chronological frameworks.

5. Students' knowledge and understanding of Britain's relationship to the Holocaust reflects popular myths and mythologies. Improving students' understanding of Britain's historical links with the Holocaust – warts and all – is key if these common misconceptions are not to be perpetuated.

6. These issues will not be addressed simply through 'more education'. New approaches to teaching and learning are necessary – approaches which are research-informed, rooted in the historical record and centred on pedagogy.

7. Students must be helped in confronting the challenging realities of the Holocaust, not primed in mantras and maxims. This requires developing their critical faculties. Criticality, independent thinking and reflexivity should be promoted alongside improving students' emotional literacy.

## II. Teachers' professional development

This research study has revealed that most students who have studied the Holocaust at school do not have a clear understanding of some of its most fundamental aspects, and few are able to critically explore its relevance and significance for contemporary society. Teachers require considerable knowledge and expertise to robustly address these limited understandings and to confidently challenge common myths and misconceptions.

Unfortunately, our national study into teaching about the Holocaust revealed that many teachers found it a complex subject to teach effectively (Pettigrew *et al.* 2009). For example, the study showed teachers' widespread confusion over aims, their uncertainty about definitions of the Holocaust and a paucity of subject knowledge. Many teachers appeared to have derived their knowledge from popular culture rather than academic sources and very few had received any specialist professional development in how to teach about the Holocaust.

Strikingly, 83 per cent of teachers declared themselves to be 'self-taught' (that is, they had not participated in any professional development since they began teaching) and almost half of the 2,108 teachers surveyed reported that they struggled to teach this complex subject effectively. Furthermore, many teachers found it difficult to articulate the distinct historical significance of the Holocaust. More regularly, the Holocaust was framed by teachers in terms of 'universal lessons' often divorced from any historical context.

On a more positive note, 93 per cent of history teachers agreed 'it will always be important to teach about the Holocaust' and 86 per cent asserted it was right that the Holocaust should be a compulsory part of the National Curriculum. Many teachers expressed a strong professional commitment to teaching about the Holocaust effectively and 78 per cent welcomed the opportunity to engage in specialist professional development focused on teaching and learning about the Holocaust.

Given the limitations in classroom practice and the commitment among teachers to improve teaching and learning revealed by the 2009 research, the question remains: what continuing professional development (CPD) is needed? It would not be appropriate to detail here all the possibilities that exist for meaningful professional development but, based on the findings of this new research with students, it is instructive to outline five areas which require investment in high-quality CPD and its content:

1. improve students' knowledge and understanding
2. challenge accepted representations of the Holocaust

3. relate to progression in students' learning
4. help students make the most of engagement with Holocaust survivors
5. deal with complex issues.

## 1. Improve students' knowledge and understanding

It is strikingly evident that students of all ages do not have a secure understanding of the answers to many of the key questions which frame a study of the Holocaust (including: Who was responsible? Why did they do it? Who were the victims? Why were they murdered and persecuted? Why were the Jews specifically targeted? How did they respond? When and where did the Holocaust happen? What was Britain's role? What is the significance of the Holocaust?). Furthermore, as this new research has confirmed, a considerable gap still exists between the findings of current academic scholarship and what is often taught in the classroom.

There is consequently a need for professional development courses that will help teachers improve their content knowledge and subject expertise. Crucially, CPD course providers must find innovative and pedagogically compelling ways to make complex historical scholarship accessible to teachers and students. The UCL Centre for Holocaust Education has pioneered several CPD initiatives to help teachers develop their content knowledge and pedagogical expertise, and these courses have had considerable impact on the teachers who have participated in them. But if teachers are to be meaningfully supported nationwide, much more investment into programmes of this nature are required and school leaders need to be encouraged to make teaching and learning about the Holocaust a curriculum priority, enabling their teachers to attend such programmes.

## 2. Challenge accepted representations of the Holocaust

As has been reported throughout this study, the Holocaust enters students' consciousness in myriad ways outside the classroom, and this deeply affects their broader conceptions of the Holocaust. There is consequently a need for CPD programmes to provide clear guidance to teachers on how to challenge and critically evaluate representations and appropriations of the Holocaust in popular culture and the media – in art, theatre, TV, cinema, literature, films, newspaper articles, the Internet, blogs and social media.

A good example of the need for critical engagement is the impact of the book and film, *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas*. Rather than condemning

and just dismissing them, it is potentially important for teachers to engage with the story as a cultural phenomenon, to critique it, discuss and assess its accuracy and, despite its failings, consider why it has become so popular. In other words, more attention needs to be paid to helping teachers mediate and critically engage with many of the powerful cultural forces that appear to be shaping students' understanding of the Holocaust.

Equipping teachers with the skills and expertise to support young people as they engage with this traumatic history and the associated atrocity images that are often encountered on the Internet is also of vital importance. It entails combining what we understand about young people and their moral and spiritual development with intelligent, sensitive and pedagogically appropriate ways of representing the experiences and catastrophic losses of the victims of the Holocaust. It also demands a recognition that, as Chapter 4 notes, given appropriate opportunity and support, students are able and willing to confront complex moral, philosophical and intellectual questions regarding issues of 'representation', 'memory' and the 'truthfulness' of competing accounts.

## 3. Relate to progression in students' learning

This study has shown that students encounter the Holocaust in a number of subject areas (e.g. religious education, English, citizenship) and across a range of age groups. It is therefore vital that teachers working in all relevant contexts should consider how to plan and develop their teaching to ensure that new learning builds on students' existing knowledge and understanding.

This is complex but important terrain and requires teachers to consider a more coherent approach to teaching about the Holocaust across their school. Meaningful CPD would, therefore, oblige teachers to think carefully about aims, content and assessment, and pedagogical practice. It would also demand that subject teachers consider, from their own disciplinary perspective, the particular and distinctive contribution that their subject can bring to the study of the Holocaust. Effective CPD would in turn compel teachers to contemplate how different subject specialisms might work together to deepen understandings and what progress might look like across the school at various key stages.

## 4. Help students make the most of engagement with Holocaust survivors

Our research indicates that hearing testimony from Holocaust survivors often proves a uniquely affecting experience for young people which can facilitate distinctive ways of 'understanding' and of drawing

personal meaning from this history.

Students spoke of the inspiration they drew from hearing a survivor speak. They also spoke of the sense of awe they felt when listening to survivors as they candidly related their darkest moments and lingering struggles. Students also commented on the indomitable spirit and resilience of the survivors and the powerful impact of hearing them give their testimony. Unquestionably, the experience of meeting a survivor and hearing his or her testimony proved a deeply affective experience for most young people and suggests that teachers also need to very seriously consider the ethical and emotional challenges that such encounters provoke.

Unquestionably, these rare encounters with those who had survived the Holocaust were deeply empowering for young people and strongly suggest that while survivors are still here to do this extraordinary work, they should, where possible, be given the opportunity to meet a survivor and witness them give their testimony. This is all the more important given that the current generation of young people is perhaps the last who will be able to meet and hear from survivors in person. It also raises the increasingly important educational role that written and/or recorded testimony is likely to take on in the future.

The development of new technologies that capture Holocaust testimony in innovative and dynamic ways provides both opportunities and challenges for classroom practice. CPD programmes must help teachers develop their pedagogical expertise in using various forms of testimony in sensitive, respectful and historically appropriate ways. Critically, teachers should be asked to reflect upon their specific rationales and expectations of working with survivors and with survivor testimony within schools.

## 5. Deal with complex issues

This is arguably the most important area for CPD. It entails helping teachers find ways to deal with the most profoundly difficult and uncomfortable questions that the Holocaust raises about the human condition. It necessitates carefully constructed CPD that will allow teachers and students to understand and explain how it was that, not so long ago and not far from where we live, ordinary people across Europe became complicit in the murder of their neighbours.

Thought-provoking CPD must help to equip teachers with the confidence, resources, skills and expertise to prompt students to wrestle with these complex issues of responsibility and complicity. It should provide teachers with guidance on how to use questioning, discussion and other effective pedagogical practices to foster critical and independent thinking.

Holocaust education is often so focused on condemning the perpetrators and distancing ourselves from their position and acts that scant attention is paid to the deeply important question of whether or not, in a particular context or situation 'we', could become complicit. Addressing such profound questions has immense significance for citizens in the modern world and should arguably be considered by teachers as part of any professional development programme. This is a crucial step towards moving beyond the perpetuation of simple moral lessons.

The challenges posed by these five areas are exacerbated by two key issues. First, there is the matter of access. In the current climate schools are increasingly reluctant to release teachers to attend external CPD courses due to the cost of 'covering' their teaching. As a result, even though our 2009 study of teachers demonstrated that many teachers are keen to develop their expertise and improve their practice, too often they find it difficult to be released to attend such courses (even though most of them are offered free of charge by leading national organisations).

The second issue relates to quality of CPD provision. Currently, no regulations or framework exist to monitor the quality of CPD courses offered by Holocaust education organisations. In other words, outside of the university sector which operates in a closely regulated environment (through Ofsted inspections or nationally recognised quality assurance standards), no organisation is required to meet any nationally agreed standards. Consequently, there is no guarantee of the quality of CPD provision in Holocaust education across the country, and practice is understandably variable.

These issues of access and quality are of serious concern and, if Holocaust education is to improve in this country, they require urgent attention. Clearly the five areas and two key issues outlined here must be addressed. CPD programmes need to be constructed in intelligent and effective ways.

The UCL Centre for Holocaust Education is uniquely equipped to respond to the challenges by expanding and tailoring its CPD provision accordingly. For the first time, anywhere, the Centre offers a comprehensive programme in which applied research and academic scholarship directly informs CPD provision. A cornerstone of the Centre's work is its innovative and ground-breaking approach to teachers' professional development and ongoing evaluation of its practice.

The work of the Centre is nationally acclaimed. In January 2015, the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission report (Cabinet Office 2015: 46) recognised the Centre's 'world class research, teacher education, MA, PhD and Beacon School

programme' and recommended that it should work with Teaching Schools and other parties 'to create an in-depth programme to promote high-quality Holocaust education among their networks and alliances'. In addition, the February 2015 report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism (APPG 2015: 115) recommended 'that the government increases its grant for the evidence-based teacher training conducted by the Centre for Holocaust Education … with a view to expanding its work and the number of teachers it is able to train'.

One of the clear findings of this study is that those who work in the field of Holocaust education will have to think very carefully about the issues raised by this research and respond in appropriate ways when developing their CPD programmes. As outlined above, the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education has already begun to address some of the most salient and urgent issues.

## Key recommendations: II. Teachers' professional development

1. Organisations working in the field of Holocaust education should seriously consider the findings of this study and critically evaluate their existing CPD offer. Subsequently, professional development programmes should be designed to help teachers address the limitations in students' knowledge and understanding identified by this research. A range of new and innovative CPD courses to improve practice are required. Of particular importance are the five areas identified above: improving students' knowledge and understanding; challenging representations of the Holocaust; considering progression in students' learning; planning for engagement with survivors; and dealing with complex issues.

2. Professional development courses for teachers should be regulated by national standards to ensure they are of the highest quality. Greater priority should be given to releasing teachers who wish to attend high-quality CPD courses in Holocaust education from their daily commitments and this should be supported at the highest levels of government.

3. CPD which is university led, research informed and empirically tested has the potential to provide the most positive, quality-assured, long-term impact on improving teaching and learning about the Holocaust. It is important that the government continues to invest in such programmes.

## III. Curriculum, policy, accountability

The study of the Holocaust has been a mandated feature of the National Curriculum for history in secondary schools in England since its inception in 1991. As a result there is little doubt that, at a basic level, advances have been made in ensuring that most students in England know something about the Holocaust. This awareness has also been strengthened by the establishment of:

- a national permanent Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum
- the institution of a national Holocaust Memorial Day
- the recently convened Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission and the subsequent UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation
- the proliferation of organisations focused on Holocaust education
- regular visits to schools by Holocaust survivors
- numerous other educational and artistic initiatives around the country.

And yet, despite these laudable efforts to ensure that secondary school students learn about the Holocaust, this research reveals some serious limitations in students' substantive knowledge and conceptual understandings. The purpose of this section is to examine the educational landscape more broadly in order to understand some of the reasons why limitations in students' knowledge and understanding potentially exist and to offer a series of recommendations to address identified problems and improve teaching and learning about the Holocaust.

### The Holocaust and the National Curriculum

In examining the tensions that exist in the field an obvious and important starting place is the National Curriculum. Compulsory study of the Holocaust has been a consistent feature of National Curriculum history since it first came into force in 1991. Indeed, the current mandate for students in Key Stage 3 (Years 7 to 9; 11 to 14 year olds) gives the Holocaust a pre-eminent position in the history curriculum as it appears as the only historical subject in the twentieth century that students must study. Further emphasising the important status of the Holocaust in the curriculum, it is notable by way of contrast that the First and Second World Wars, the Great Depression and the rise of the dictators are all optional topics of study. Given this prominent position in the history curriculum, it would be logical to think that most students experience a robust education in the history of the Holocaust. Unfortunately, four important factors serve as

obstacles to this prospect:

1. lack of guidance
2. lack of an assessment framework
3. lack of curriculum time for learning about the Holocaust in history
4. increase in schools that do not follow the National Curriculum.

## 1. Lack of guidance

Although learning about the Holocaust is mandated in the curriculum, no official guidance exists on what should be taught, how it should be taught or how much time teachers should spend teaching about the subject. Practice consequently varies considerably, as was demonstrated in the Centre's 2009 study of teachers (Pettigrew *et al.* 2009). For example, some schools teach the Holocaust in just one hour of curriculum time per year, while others devote considerably more classroom time to the subject (the average in Year 9 is six hours per year).

Furthermore, the way in which the Holocaust is taught depends crucially on the expertise of the teacher. As the Centre's 2009 study demonstrated, most teachers appear not to have appropriate professional development and many found teaching about the Holocaust a difficult proposition.

## 2. Lack of an assessment framework

Study of the Holocaust is not underpinned by any national assessment framework and, as a result, no accepted mechanism exists for evaluating what students know about the Holocaust or the effect that any curriculum model might have on their knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, teachers' reticence towards assessing students' learning about the Holocaust, reported by the Centre's 2009 research, was chiefly the result of their lacking expertise in what form appropriate assessment should take. Once again, how the curriculum is enacted and assessed in schools varies considerably, and robust systems to ensure high-quality teaching and learning about the Holocaust do not exist.

## 3. Lack of curriculum time for learning about the Holocaust in history

The persistent squeeze on curriculum time available for history also has an impact on how the Holocaust is taught in schools. Although history features in most school curricula, calls for improved standards in core subjects – mainly maths, English, science – over the past three decades has led to a typical decrease in the time allocated to history (Canadine *et al.* 2011). In addition, many schools now adopt a two-year Key Stage 3 curriculum (as opposed to the traditional three-year curriculum), so that students can begin working towards their GCSEs a year earlier. This has effectively reduced curriculum time for history, as those not intending to take a history GCSE drop out of history lessons in Year 9 (the recommended year for learning about the Holocaust).

Some comfort may be derived from the fact that the Holocaust is often taught in subjects beyond history and so exposure to the subject is occasionally strengthened in other parts of the curriculum. For example, the 2009 report indicated that the Holocaust was often taught in English and religious education lessons. However, the Holocaust is not mandated in any subjects other than history, and curriculum time is far from guaranteed.

Once again, practice varies considerably and, without careful curriculum planning, it is possible that tensions and contradictions will exist between how the Holocaust is taught in history and in other curriculum areas. For example, study of *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas* in English lessons may be at odds with what is taught in the history classroom.

## 4. Increase in schools that do not follow the National Curriculum

Arguably the most serious potential challenge to the study of the Holocaust is the increasing number of schools that do not have to teach the subject. Following a series of educational reforms, including the Academies Act of 2010, secondary schools that become academies no longer have to follow the National Curriculum for history and, by extension, no longer have to teach about the Holocaust.

The number of secondary schools across England that have converted to academy status has grown exponentially in recent years – while whereas 203 academies existed in May 2010, by June 2015 the figure had risen to 4,676 – and now a clear majority of secondary schools are academies. It is too early to assess the impact of this on school curriculum practices in general and on teaching and learning about the Holocaust in particular. Many academies continue to implement the National Curriculum fully, but it is only logical to assume that some will elect not to include the Holocaust in their curriculum, knowing that they are no longer mandated to teach it. Indeed, evidence already exists to suggest that this has happened in some secondary schools.

As a result of these four educational trends it is legitimate to argue that the place of the Holocaust in the secondary school curriculum for 11 to 14 year olds is far from secure. Indeed, despite successive governments' apparent support for Holocaust education, it is legitimate to argue that this area of study is under increasing threat.

## Additional exposure to the Holocaust in schools

Notwithstanding the obstacles and challenges outlined above, three further issues demand serious attention and provide both barriers and opportunities for meaningful study of the Holocaust in English secondary schools:

1. the Holocaust, exam specifications and study beyond age 14
2. progression in students' learning and the 'spiral curriculum'
3. SMS, Ofsted and the Holocaust.

### 1. The Holocaust, exam specifications and study beyond age 14

International observers of the English educational system are often surprised to learn that the study of history is not compulsory for students beyond 14 years of age. Indeed, this particular feature of the educational system in England is very much at odds with practice across the world and contrasts sharply with curriculum frameworks in Europe and North America where the study of history often forms a staple of students' education until age 18 (Fracapane and Haß 2014).

By comparison, just over a third of secondary-school students go on to study history beyond age 14 in England, and typically only about 6 per cent will go on to study history after age 16. The introduction of government initiatives such as the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) – which encourages schools to direct their students towards studying the core subjects of English, maths and science; a modern foreign language; and either history or geography – may lead to a slight growth in students who study history in the future. However, by international comparisons the numbers will be small and it is likely that a majority of students in England will continue not to study history beyond aged 14.

In England, what history students learn in schools from ages 14 to 16 is determined by the exam specifications of major national awarding organisations, of which there are three principal bodies: OCR, Pearson/Edexcel and AQA. Typically, students follow a two-year course in chosen subject areas and receive a final grade under the assessment framework of the GCSE (General Certificate in Secondary Education).

In recent years a review of GCSE courses (or specifications) has been undertaken and new draft specifications are available which clearly detail what students must study across a range of subject areas (for teaching about the modern world, these are OCR 2015; Pearson/Edexcel 2015; AQA 2015). These new courses will be taught from 2016 with the first

awards made in 2018. In history, new specifications have to include five elements:

- a thematic study covering a long period that spans medieval, early modern and modern history
- a period of study covering at least 50 years
- a British depth study
- a non-British depth study from different eras (modern, early modern and medieval)
- a study of the historic environment.

Under the new mandates, at least 40 per cent of the GCSE history curriculum must focus on British history.

In relation to teaching about the Holocaust, analysis of the new GCSE specifications for students aged 14 to 16 reveal three key issues. First, the increased emphasis on British history (which does not include reference to the Holocaust) means that less attention will be paid to European history than in previous iterations of the GCSE.

Second, if it features at all, the Holocaust is only included as an optional element within the non-British depth study. In other words, it forms part of a course that only accounts for 20 per cent of the time allocated to study.

Third, in most specifications the study of the Holocaust is very much an optional feature within a broader framework. For example, the OCR national specification offers seven possible depth studies. Of these, 'Germany 1925–1955: The People and the State' is one option, but six other possibilities exist (OCR 2015: 8, 16). Within that option, students are required to study a raft of topics, of which 'the persecution of the Jews and other groups' and 'the escalation of racial persecution leading to the final solution' feature as a relatively small element. In the Pearson/Edexcel specification, the Holocaust does not explicitly feature at all. Indeed, the optional depth study offered to students and teachers focuses on Weimar and Nazi Germany, 1918–39. Within this vast topic, 'the persecution of the Jews, including the boycott of Jewish shops and businesses (1933), the Nuremberg Laws and Kristallnacht' are mentioned among an extensive list of other topics (Pearson/ Edexcel 2015: 41). However, because the time frame of the study ends in 1939, the mass killing of Jews during the Holocaust is entirely absent.

So, the persecution and murder of the Jews and other groups typically appears as a very small element of an optional topic worth, at best, only 20 per cent of students' final GCSE grade. In some specifications the Holocaust does not feature at all and, given the distinct possibility that many schools will elect not to focus on Germany as an in-depth study, it is possible that only a small percentage of GCSE students will leave school having studied

anything meaningful about the Holocaust.

As the number of students who study history narrows in the final years of compulsory education (in 2014 it was 6 per cent of the total entry for all subjects), so too do the opportunities for studying the Holocaust, and there are some key issues of concern regarding the history curriculum in the final two years of secondary education, at Advanced Level (A level) or Advanced Subsidiary Level (AS level):

- As with the new GCSEs, A level students (typically aged 16 to 18) are expected to devote a large amount of time to the study of British history, which does not include the Holocaust.
- None of the new A level and AS level specifications intended for study from September 2015 specifically mentions 'the Holocaust' in any of the optional course units (OCR 2014a, 2014b; Pearson/Edexcel no date; AQA 2014).
- Students are offered a vast array of choice when selecting which units to study, for example the OCR (2014a: 7) specifications provide 24 units that could possibly be studied as part of non-British history and these range from 'The Rise of Islam c. 550–750' to 'Apartheid and Reconciliation in South Africa 1948–1999'. Given the vast amount of choice available, it is very unlikely that large numbers of students will select units focusing on German history or other histories in which the Holocaust might feature.
- Where attention is paid to the study of Nazi Germany, issues related to Nazi racial policy and the murder and persecution of Jews is often included as part of a broader examination of German history. In this respect, the OCR (2014a) and Pearson/Edexcel (no date) specifications are very similar. Both include attention to 'racial policies' and the 'Final Solution' but these are subsumed under a broader study of 'the impact of war and defeat on Germany, 1939–1949' (OCR) and 'Aspects of life in Germany and East Germany, 1918–1989' (Pearson/Edexcel).

Analysis of the specifications for A level study reveals that it is very unlikely that secondary school students aged 16 to 18 studying history will focus on the Holocaust in any detailed way. Indeed, in contrast to many of their peers in other European and North American countries, only a very small percentage of students who leave school at 18 will have studied the Holocaust in any detail during their final years of secondary education.

## 2. Progression in students' learning and the 'spiral curriculum'

Evidence from both this study and the 2009 teacher study revealed that teaching and learning about the Holocaust often occurs in *ad hoc* and uncoordinated ways in schools across the country. As mentioned above, if teaching and learning about the Holocaust is to be significantly improved, the issue of progression in students' learning deserves critical attention. A powerful way to address this issue and to ensure that learning is coherent, age-appropriate and developmental is for schools, or networks of primary and secondary schools, to consider adopting a 'spiral curriculum' in Holocaust education.

The notion of a spiral curriculum is attributed to the acclaimed US educator and psychologist Jerome Bruner, who reasoned in his classic work, *The Process of Education* (1960: 33), that 'any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development'. Fundamental to Bruner's theory was the idea that, if teaching is structured appropriately, any student can understand any subject at any age and that it is possible to return to that subject in ever-deeper ways, building on prior knowledge and layering in more complexity as students progress through the school system.

Based on analysis of the findings in this research and from ongoing engagements with schools across the country, the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education has already begun to develop a framework for a meaningful national spiral curriculum in Holocaust education. The curriculum is founded upon a coherent and developmental approach to curriculum design in which considerations of aims, content, pedagogy, assessment and the contributions of different subject specialisms are central.

Significantly, the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission recently endorsed the need for a spiral curriculum in its key recommendations and noted that such a curriculum would 'enable teachers to plan lessons and outcomes for each stage with an understanding of progression and a framework for teachers to assess impact' (Cabinet Office 2015: 47). In addition, the Commission views the establishment of the spiral curriculum as a central feature of its recommendations to establish 'a world-class learning centre' that drives 'national educational activity.'

This emphasis on an intelligently designed spiral curriculum is undoubtedly welcome as, together with a carefully aligned national programme of professional development for teachers, it promises to dramatically improve teaching and learning about the Holocaust across the country. However, the potential for this exciting development to impact on the field in positive ways has to be tempered by the problematic curriculum and examination realities outlined above. Accordingly, ways must be found to incentivise and support schools that wish to undertake such a bold curriculum initiative.

## 3. SMSC, Ofsted and the Holocaust

Teaching and learning in schools has always been influenced by a range of factors that shape particular priorities and needs. However, in recent decades the influence of the Ofsted framework and its accompanying inspection regime has focused the attention of head teachers across the country.

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. It is responsible for inspecting and regulating services that care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages. In practical terms, if a particular issue or subject forms part of the Ofsted (2014, 2015) framework it is very likely that schools will give it priority and focus. As with many other curriculum subjects, it is perhaps not surprising that the Holocaust is not mentioned in the current broad-based Ofsted frameworks. Nevertheless, a thoughtful study of the Holocaust in many ways relates to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) framework which schools are required to address as part of their curriculum planning in response to Ofsted mandates.

According to Ofsted, 'the spiritual development of pupils' is shown by a range of indicators, including their 'ability to be reflective about their own beliefs, religious or otherwise, that inform their perspective on life and their interest in and respect for different people's faiths, feelings and values' (Ofsted 2015: 34). Additionally, students' moral development should include 'understanding the consequences of their behaviour and actions', offering 'reasoned views about moral and ethical issues, and being able to understand and appreciate the viewpoints of others on these issues'.

Notably, if a school's SMSC is not judged to be 'outstanding' by the Ofsted inspectorate, the school's overall rating cannot be 'outstanding'. According to the criteria, an 'outstanding' school will ensure 'thoughtful and wide-ranging promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their physical well-being enables them to thrive in a supportive, highly cohesive learning community' (Ofsted 2015: 35).

Significantly, it is possible for schools that incorporate high-quality Holocaust education in their curriculum planning to demonstrate some, and perhaps all, of the SMSC elements inspected by Ofsted. For example, high-quality teaching about the Holocaust compels students to consider their pre-existing views and knowledge and to reflect upon and question the new information they acquire. Furthermore, through learning about the consequences of the diverse actions and behaviours of people during the Holocaust (including, for example, Jews, perpetrators and the German

people), students can appreciate the complexity of human behaviour and reflect on their own attitudes and behaviours. They can also explore the ethical and moral dimensions of people's decisions and actions during the Holocaust. Meaningful study of the Holocaust can also help students develop critical and independent thinking skills that are transferable to other subject areas and topics.

Using the Ofsted framework and its particular reference to SMSC it is perhaps easy to see how some schools have used Holocaust education as a vehicle to develop some of the complex moral, spiritual and ethical understandings important to any student's education. Indeed, some schools have been very successful in developing a whole-school, cross-curricula approach to SMSC using study of the Holocaust as both its focus and engine. What is instructive here is that these schools – typically staffed with innovative and reflective practitioners – illustrate that it is possible to use a study of the Holocaust as part of an effective SMSC curriculum.

However, other schools have been less successful in developing a coherent approach and have faced two major criticisms. First, that the Holocaust has sometimes been smuggled in to the curriculum to serve a school's instrumentalist need to meet the Ofsted criteria, rather than primarily for its educational value. Second, if taught inappropriately, it is possible for Holocaust education to exacerbate some of the problems identified by this research. For example, a rush to arrive at neat moral lessons from the Holocaust rather than a critical engagement with unsettling moral and ethical issues is likely to perpetuate simplistic moral tales of good versus evil.

Arguably, what is required, is an Ofsted framework that compels schools to include a study of the Holocaust as part of their SMSC focus. To be effective this should be supported by guidance material, pedagogically sound rationales, curriculum frameworks and recommendations for achieving progression in students' learning. Above all, consideration must be given to how teaching and learning about the Holocaust under the SMSC framework accords with the exam specifications and curriculum guidelines of other subject areas, including history.

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### Key recommendations: III. Curriculum, policy, accountability

1. Schools require clearer guidelines to ensure that access to high-quality teaching about Holocaust education is the entitlement of every student. Central to this should be clear and intelligent articulation of why the Holocaust should be taught.
2. Specific guidance should be provided on what

young people should know and understand about the Holocaust both at the end of their compulsory schooling and at different stages of their school career (as, for example, articulated through the spiral curriculum framework developed by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education). In both cases such guidance should be informed by robust empirical research.

3. Clear recommendations should be given on the minimum amount of time required to teach about the Holocaust within each key stage of the National Curriculum and better guidance provided on how the subject can most appropriately be approached from different curriculum areas. In particular, clear suggestions should be made as to how teaching and learning about the Holocaust can support and enhance current developments within SMSC.

4. In order that students are provided with adequate opportunities to develop their knowledge and understandings beyond compulsory Key Stage 3 history (that is, up to age 14), GCSE and A level awarding bodies should be required to ensure that the study of the Holocaust is strongly featured in relevant subject areas.

5. To ensure the highest quality pedagogical practice, Ofsted inspection frameworks should include provision for the inspection of teaching and learning about the Holocaust and teachers should be better supported in order to attend quality assured professional development programmes in this field.

## IV. The aims of Holocaust education

Without question, the most important finding of this research study is that, too often, secondary-school students have both an inappropriately narrow conception of the Holocaust and limited historical knowledge. As a result it is very clear that most students are insufficiently equipped to address the complexity of the Holocaust and to derive meaning from it. The implications of these findings for individuals and organisations that teach young people about the Holocaust are, of course, profound. A vital issue that requires attention relates to the aims of Holocaust education and the ways in which individuals and organisations translate these into classroom practice. Accordingly, this section focuses on some of the most common aims of Holocaust education and on evaluating the extent to which the pursuance of these aims either improves or inhibits students' knowledge and conception of the Holocaust.

Investigation into the aims of Holocaust education

immediately reveals a striking contradiction. On the one hand, there is extensive critical reflection, scholarship and commentary regarding the aims of teaching about the Holocaust. A vast array of academics, critics, philosophers and public figures has wrestled with the vagaries and idiosyncrasies of this complex subject (for example, Kaiser 2010; Pearce 2014; Russell 2006; Salmons 2010; Schweber and Findling 2007; Stone 2010). On the other hand, certain exceptions aside, there has been strikingly little attention paid to the aims of teaching and learning about the Holocaust among practitioners and policymakers.

Despite the repeated inclusion of the Holocaust in the history curriculum in England, at no point in the last 25 years has a formal rationale been provided for why the Holocaust should be taught (Russell 2006; Pearce 2014). Similarly, the Centre's 2009 research with teachers revealed that few had seriously considered the rationale for Holocaust education and considerable confusion existed about what its principal aims were (Pettigrew *et al.* 2009).

In some respects, many of the leading UK Holocaust education organisations in England occupy a middle ground. Whereas few engage in extensive, critical and public debate about the purpose of Holocaust education most articulate key aims for teaching and learning about the subject via their websites, outreach events or informational materials. Analysis of these aims suggests that two are particularly dominant. The first centres on the importance of remembering and/or commemorating the Holocaust, while the second emphasises the need to study the Holocaust in order to learn 'lessons' from it. It would not be appropriate to enter into a deep philosophical examination of the aims of Holocaust education, but it is important to examine these two core aims in the light of the findings of this extensive research study.

### Holocaust commemoration

Remembrance activities and commemorative events such as those in which tens of thousands participate each Holocaust Memorial Day are undoubtedly important. All societies need spaces in which to express their values, and it is easy to see why remembrance of the Holocaust can serve to articulate those of the liberal-democratic tradition. Hitler and the Nazis are emblematic of racist, fascist, totalitarian ideals and their crimes stand as stark warning of the need to value diversity in society, to protect minority groups, respect the rule of law and safeguard human rights. Commemoration also provides members of society with an opportunity to acknowledge and reflect on the horrors of the past and pay their respects both to those who perished

and those who survived.

Many Holocaust education organisations see commemoration as one of their primary goals, and it is clear from our research that young people and their teachers across the country understand and value the importance of commemoration. In this sense, the findings of this research can be seen as reassuring. Young people are overwhelmingly convinced of the importance and significance of what they understand to be the Holocaust. They speak movingly, for example, of the power of meeting a survivor, and the vast majority believe that the Holocaust is something that all young people should learn about. So it may appear that memorialisation and the place of the Holocaust in students' collective consciousness are secure, at least for the coming generation. However, to adopt such a complacent position would be to misinterpret some of the key findings of this research. Two principal issues are salient here.

The first centres on the question of whether it is possible to commemorate something in meaningful ways without a full appreciation of what is being commemorated. The findings of this research reveal that many students do not know about some of the most important elements of the Holocaust, so that legitimate questions remain regarding how far that memory is secure and meaningful. How secure, for example, is Holocaust memory if students:

- don't know more about the people who they are commemorating?
- don't really understand why and how the Holocaust happened?
- don't understand the catastrophic impact of the Holocaust on millions of individuals and broader European society and culture?

The possibility that memory could be based on shaky and shallow historical foundations is one that should concern us all.

Of course, this is not to undermine the special importance of Holocaust commemoration. Rather, it is a call for those working in the field of Holocaust education to consider ways in which knowledge, understanding and memory can be more robustly related. The argument here is not to replace commemoration but to strengthen and deepen it. The challenge is to pursue a new framing that both emphasises the testing of common knowledge (which is often based upon myths and misconceptions) against the historical record and seeks to bring the insights of historiographical scholarship into the public arena. In this respect Schweber and Findling (2007: 275) argue that, for remembering to be authentic, the Holocaust needs to be understood in greater depth and complexity:

While it may be comforting for us to shape Holocaust memory, commemoration and education efforts around heroes, survivors, optimism and hope, ultimately the Holocaust must be remembered in all of its tragedy and in all of its complexity. Only then can dignified commemoration be offered in memory of the millions of voiceless victims whose stories never reached us.

The second issue warranting attention is acknowledgment that an important distinction must be made between commemoration and learning. Chapter 1 argues that commemorating a past event is not the same as grappling with the complexities of why it happened. Accordingly, while participation in memorial acts and events is very important, educators must move beyond this commemorative function and help students develop deeper and more profound understandings of the Holocaust. Indeed, the classroom should become a space where young people construct their own meanings of this complex past and reflect more critically upon the present memorial culture. Ultimately, such an approach will allow students to think more deeply about the past in order to better consider the significance that others place upon it in the present.

This research reveals that students' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust is often limited and narrow. It could be argued, therefore, that empty commemoration of a subject which often appears as vague and ambiguous to young people has no merit. As such, the findings of this research suggest that perhaps one of the most important aims of Holocaust education should be to deepen young people's knowledge and understanding of this history in order to develop their own independent capacity for critical thinking. Armed with such an education it is possible that young people will be equipped to construct meaning for themselves, weigh the truth claims of others and critically evaluate (and potentially support) commemoration of the Holocaust.

It is also notable that publication of this research coincides with key recommendations in the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission Report to establish a 'striking and prominent new National Memorial' and a 'World-Class Learning Centre' in central London (Cabinet Office 2015: 13), both exciting and potentially powerful developments. In this regard it is significant that, throughout their report, the Commission noted their concern over many of the emerging findings from our study and recognised the need for deeper knowledge and understanding if this memory is to be secure and meaningful.

In the light of our research findings, it is of immense importance that the 'Learning Centre' and the 'National Memorial' are regarded as symbiotic developments and that critical attention is paid

to ensuring they are both underpinned by robust and research-informed considerations. It is also important that these developments do not support and perpetuate existing and narrowly framed conceptions of the Holocaust so prevalent in contemporary culture.

## Learning lessons from the Holocaust

Arguably the most common and repeated rationale for teaching and learning about the Holocaust is that its study provides lessons for students in contemporary society. The proposition that a study of the past can provide straightforward 'lessons' for the present is problematic for a number of reasons. Prominent among these is the dubious notion that the specific and contingent historical context of any previous era can provide 'lessons' for a very different contemporary world. As the Holocaust historian and educator Wolf Kaiser (2010:39) neatly summarises, 'we should not try to deduce from historical examples a set of rules of conduct that are universally applicable … history encourages reflection, but it does not provide signposts for the right way to go in a quickly changing world'. Similarly, the historian Tim Cole (2004: 54) shares a sceptical view of using the Holocaust in the quest for simple moral lessons:

> There is … a place for questioning broader contemporary concerns with the Holocaust that reduce its complexity to a number of simplistic moral lessons. To do so is not to suggest that the Holocaust is unimportant, but rather that it is too important to be reduced to the sentimental and moralistic.

An additional problem in using the complexities of the Holocaust as a means to provide universal lessons and simplify understandings in the present is that it may lose its distinctive educational value. Arguably, what makes the study of the Holocaust so important is its particular nature and historical distinctiveness. After all, while racism, xenophobia and fear of 'the other' is often a feature of all societies, genocide is not. An imperative exists, then, to know and understand more deeply why and how the Holocaust happened in a particular historical context and in a particular time and place.

In defence of those individuals and organisations who advance the idea of 'lessons' from the Holocaust, one might generously suggest that the use of the term is shorthand for a more sophisticated process whereby the study of the past offers more nuanced perspective on the present. Even so, whether the term 'perspective' or 'lessons' is invoked an essential problem remains which, again, relates to issues of knowledge and understanding. For, if students are even to begin to 'learn lessons'

(or make meaning) from the Holocaust, it is imperative that they have a robust and secure understanding of it as a historical phenomenon. Without such knowledge it is impossible for students to derive any legitimate 'lessons' or understanding from the past. Unfortunately, the findings of this study suggest that levels of knowledge and understanding among students are often deeply problematic. By extension, it is unlikely that they will be able to draw any meaningful lessons or perspective from the past. For example:

- If students believe that only Hitler (and possibly a core group of Nazis) were responsible for the Holocaust, how can they understand how and why the Holocaust happened? And how can they begin to assess the implications of knowing that 'ordinary' people across Europe became complicit in genocide?
- If students do not know about the scope and scale of the Holocaust, how can they consider the devastating impact it had on Jews and other victims and the implications of this for modern society?
- If students see the Holocaust in German-centric ways and don't appreciate its geographical and chronological development, how can they understand how genocide took root, evolved and became more radicalised? And, without this knowledge, how can they begin to consider the implications of this for the contemporary world?

If students are to make sense of the Holocaust their understanding must be based on sufficient enabling knowledge. A simple recourse to 'learning lessons' has no value if students do not have an intelligent understanding of what the Holocaust was and why it happened.

Fundamentally, this research demonstrates the importance of moving away from a lessons-focused approach in Holocaust education towards one that provides students with a deeper understanding of a complex past through ongoing critical reflection and the search for more profound meanings. It also requires that education goes beyond easy moral lessons and engages with the deeply unsettling flaws in our modern world from which the Holocaust sprang. Ultimately, it involves students thinking critically about how and why the Holocaust happened in an ostensibly modern, educated, European society, and intelligently considering the implications of this stark reality for contemporary society.

## Key recommendations: IV. The aims of Holocaust education

1. Educators and organisations should carefully consider their educational aims in light of these findings. More attention must be paid to developing students' historical knowledge and understanding so that deeper and more informed meanings can be explored in history and across a range of subject areas and disciplines.

2. Those teaching and learning about the Holocaust need to be clear about the distinctions between commemoration and education.

3. Despite its popular appeal, serious consideration should be given to avoiding a simplistic 'lessons from' approach to education. It risks becoming tokenistic when not actually grounded in substantive historical knowledge and it may prevent critical and deeper understanding of the Holocaust.

4. The establishment of the new National Memorial and World-Class Learning Centre must take into account the serious findings of this research. It is vital that these exciting developments are positioned to challenge common misconceptions rather than perpetuate them.

5. The UCL Centre for Holocaust Education – underpinned by its research-informed approach, acclaimed pedagogical expertise and engagement with leading historians – should support the Government in ensuring that the national Learning Centre and future developments in Holocaust education are world class.

## V. Future research and evaluation

The Centre's national study into teaching about the Holocaust (Pettigrew *et al.* 2009) and this national study adopted a rigorous mixed-methods approach in which detailed surveys were accompanied and substantiated by semi-structured interviews.

In both studies, the use of survey instruments to uncover key data on a large scale was profoundly informative and proved a useful platform from which to explore key issues in more detail during interview. Notwithstanding the use of these highly appropriate surveys, it is important to emphasise the particular benefit derived from standalone qualitative studies. In its review of the existing literature, Chapter 1 notes that some of the most insightful and rich studies into teaching and learning about the Holocaust were drawn from long-term ethnographic fieldwork and other qualitative research involving much smaller numbers of students, teachers or schools.

More research like this that examines and critically considers the socially situated and context

dependent way in which meaning of and from the Holocaust is made will be hugely beneficial to the field. Not enough is currently known about a range of issues central to understanding how students encounter and make sense of the Holocaust. Accordingly, the potential to enrich our understanding of a range of important issues by drawing on research methodologies such as ethnographic observations, in-depth interviewing and classroom case studies is compelling. Such studies might, for example, examine the influence of ethnicity, religion, identity and community on a range of issues including:

- how students relate 'school knowledge' of the Holocaust to accounts and perspectives they might encounter in other contexts (e.g. from their family or wider community)
- how students from different ethnic communities encounter, approach and make sense of the Holocaust
- how students from particular religious groups (e.g. Jewish or Muslim students) relate to and/or make sense of and from the Holocaust
- how students who have their own personal/ familial experience of being refugees or of escaping persecution relate to or make sense of the Holocaust
- how students' understandings of racism and antisemitism are related to or impact upon their understanding of the Holocaust.

Another area in need of more research focuses on how teaching and learning about the Holocaust is pursued in a range of school contexts. Such studies might ask questions like:

- What forms of knowledge/understanding are prioritised within different areas of the curriculum? What impact does this educational practice have on student learning?
- In what ways and to what extent does a cross-curricular approach and/or whole-school approach to Holocaust education enhance or inhibit students' understandings?
- What is the relationship between the aims of Holocaust education articulated in a particular department or school and how they are enacted or implemented in the classroom?
- What challenges and issues do teachers (across a range of subjects) face in teaching about the Holocaust, and how are these addressed?
- What pedagogical practices appear to be most effective in developing students' knowledge and understanding?

Future research could also instructively examine the manners in which students encounter and learn about the Holocaust at different ages. As this study

has shown, young people learn about the Holocaust in every year of secondary education (that is, from ages 11 to 18). The research also reveals that many students (approximately 30 per cent) learn about the subject in primary school (typically before age 11). To add to this complexity, the study also illustrates how students learn about the Holocaust both inside and beyond school, and across a range of curriculum areas within school. It is therefore imperative that more is known about some of these vital areas of learning. Fundamental questions that demand attention include:

- What do students learn about the Holocaust in primary school? In what contexts? To what extent is this considered age-appropriate?
- How does this learning relate to teaching and learning about the Holocaust in secondary school? How coherent, connected and developmental is this learning?
- How do students encounter and learn about the Holocaust throughout secondary education? To what extent is their learning based on considerations of progression in students' cognitive and affective understanding?
- What does progression in student learning about the Holocaust look like? How do teachers and schools assess students' learning about the Holocaust? How appropriate and co-ordinated is this learning?

As suggested by the research possibilities outlined above, the potential for a series of detailed qualitative studies is enormous. Well-crafted studies might provide rich insights into how individual teachers approach teaching and learning about the Holocaust or examine how film, TV and the Internet shape students' understanding of the Holocaust. International comparative studies of Holocaust education in different national contexts would add a much-needed critical dimension to the field. Other focused qualitative research might also centre on attitudinal and behavioural changes derived as a result of studying the Holocaust. Indeed, within the broader framework of this research study, an enormous amount of data remains to be reported which focuses on students' attitudes to learning about the Holocaust.

Beyond focused qualitative research studies, it is imperative that more research and evaluation is conducted which examines the impact of an educational intervention or programme on teaching and learning. Currently, a range of educational programmes or interventions are offered to teachers but very few are underpinned by robust empirical research, including some quasi-experimental studies which examine the impact of the programme on

students' learning and or attitudes.

Research to be conducted by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education (beginning in 2016) will address this gap in existing practice and explore issues of 'impact' by looking at how different pedagogical approaches affect students' learning. More studies of this kind will undoubtedly provide the field of Holocaust education with rich and meaningful data from which informed decisions could be made about effective practice.

In overview, this study suggests that much more needs to be known about Holocaust teaching and learning across the country. Additionally, a need exists for educators, organisations and policymakers to critically reflect on the findings of key research studies and impact evaluations, and to adjust or develop appropriate educational programmes and/or interventions accordingly.

For a quarter of a century a large-scale, research-informed approach to Holocaust education has been absent. As a result of the pioneering national research studies conducted by UCL Centre for Holocaust Education, it is now clear that there is a need to ensure that future developments in the field are underpinned by the principles and findings of robust research and evaluation. If this practice becomes more widespread the potential to improve teaching and learning about the Holocaust in schools across the country will be both significant and profound.

## Key recommendations: V. Future research and evaluation

1. A need exists for more qualitative research focused on understanding in detail how students encounter and make sense of the Holocaust both in and out of school, across all age ranges and in different subject areas.
2. If Holocaust education is to improve it is imperative that more evaluation studies are conducted which examine the impact of educational interventions or programmes on teaching and learning.
3. The UCL Centre for Holocaust Education is uniquely placed to develop focused qualitative studies, larger-scale research studies and impact evaluations. The results of these studies should be shared with educators and organisations nationally and internationally in order to improve how young people learn about the Holocaust. If this important work is to advance it is essential that continued funding for research and evaluation is provided.

# Appendices

# Appendix 1

# The survey

## All about you

01. What is the name of your school?

........................................................................................................

02. What year group are you in?

☐ Year 7 ☐ Year 8 ☐ Year 9 ☐ Year 10 ☐ Year 11 ☐ Year 12 ☐ Year 13

03. How old are you?

........................................................................................................

04. Are you a girl or a boy?

☐ Girl ☐ Boy

05. Were you born in England?

☐ Yes ☐ No

06. If you were not born in England how old were you when you came here?

........................................................................................................

07. Which country were you born in?

........................................................................................................

08. Do you or your family belong to a particular religious group? If so, which one(s)?

☐ No religion

☐ Christian *including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations*

☐ Buddhist

☐ Hindu

☐ Jewish

☐ Muslim

☐ Sikh

☐ Other *please write the name of the religious group*

09. How important is religion to you personally? *Please tick one box that best applies to you*

☐ Not at all important

☐ Quite important

☐ Very important

10. What is your ethnic group? *Please tick one box that best applies to you*

**White**

☐ British, English, Welsh, Scottish or Northern Irish

☐ Irish

☐ Gypsy or Irish Traveller

☐ Any other white category

**Asian / Asian British**

☐ Indian

☐ Pakistani

☐ Bangladeshi

☐ Chinese

☐ Any other Asian background

**Black / African / Caribbean / Black British**

☐ African

☐ Caribbean

☐ British

☐ Any other Black / African / Caribbean background

**Mixed / multiple ethnic groups**

☐ White and Black Caribbean

☐ White and Black African

☐ White and Asian

☐ Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background

**Other ethnic group**

☐ Arab

☐ Any other

11. What is your postcode? *If you live at more than one address, please give the postcode of the house where you spend the most time*

12. About how many books are in your home? *Do not count newspapers, magazines or school books*

☐ None (0 books)

☐ Very few (1–10 books)

☐ Enough to fill one shelf (11–50 books)

☐ Enough to fill one bookcase (51–100 books)

☐ Enough to fill two bookcases (101–200 books)

☐ Enough to fill three or more bookcases (more than 200 books)

☐ Don't know

## How do you see the world?

13. An important thing that schools do is prepare students for exams like GCSEs, to help them get jobs and/or go on to further education. From the list below please tick **one** other important thing that schools should do for young people.

☐ Teach young people to help those who are less fortunate than themselves

☐ Teach young people about what is morally right and wrong

☐ Teach young people how to behave well and to follow the rules

☐ Teach young people how to value and respect people from different cultures

☐ Encourage young people to think for themselves

14. For each statement below, please tick one box to show how much you agree with it.

|  | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I feel that people get what they are entitled to in life | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| I feel that people's efforts are noticed and rewarded | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| I feel that people are treated fairly in life | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| I feel that people earn the rewards and the punishments they get | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| I feel that people get what they deserve | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| I feel that people are treated with the respect that they deserve | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| I feel that the world treats people fairly | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

15. People sometimes move from one country to another, and are often know as 'immigrants'.
How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about immigrants.
*Please tick one box for each statement*

|  | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Immigrants should have the opportunity to continue speaking their own language | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Immigrant children should have the same opportunities for education that other children in the country have | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Immigrants who live in a country for several years should have the opportunity to vote in elections | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Immigrants should have the opportunity to continue their own customs and lifestyle | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Immigrants should have all the same rights that everyone else in the country has | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

16. How would you feel about having neighbours belonging to the following groups?
*Please tick one box for each statement*

|  | I would dislike it | I wouldn't mind it |
|---|---|---|
| People with a different skin colour than yours | ☐ | ☐ |
| People of a different social class than yours | ☐ | ☐ |
| People of a different religion than yours | ☐ | ☐ |
| Homosexuals (gay men and/or lesbians) | ☐ | ☐ |
| People who come from another part of the country | ☐ | ☐ |
| People with physical disabilities | ☐ | ☐ |
| People with mental health problems | ☐ | ☐ |
| People of a different nationality than yours | ☐ | ☐ |
| People with HIV / AIDS | ☐ | ☐ |

# Word quiz

Now we are going to ask you about a number of words. This part of the survey is a bit like a quiz.
For each question below please match the first word (in bold) with the word that means the same.

17. **Begin** means the same as…

☐ Ask ☐ Start ☐ Plain ☐ Over ☐ Away

18. **Reward** means the same as…

☐ Notice ☐ Golden ☐ Prize ☐ Stable ☐ Marine

19. **Conceal** means the same as…

☐ Advise ☐ Hide ☐ Gather ☐ Freeze ☐ Conciliate

20. **Neutral** means the same as…

☐ Anxious ☐ Huge ☐ Settled ☐ Origin ☐ Unbiased

21. **Discrimination** means the same as…

☐ Credible ☐ Charitable ☐ Prejudice ☐ Estimate ☐ Decimal

22. **Inevitable** means the same as…

☐ Moist ☐ Jubilant ☐ Jealous ☐ Avid ☐ Unavoidable

23. **Obsolete** means the same as…

☐ Execrable ☐ Secret ☐ Innocuous ☐ Rigid ☐ Redundant

**Now some words we are particularly interested in**

24. What does '**racism**' mean? *Please only tick one box*

☐ Prejudice against people because of gender

☐ Prejudice against people because of ethnicity

☐ Prejudice against people because of social class

☐ Prejudice against people because of age

☐ Or tick here if you're not sure or don't know

25. What does '**antisemitism**' mean? *Please only tick one box*

☐ Prejudice against poor people

☐ Prejudice against Jews

☐ Prejudice against Hindus

☐ Prejudice against homeless people

☐ Or tick here if you're not sure or don't know

26. What does '**Islamophobia**' mean? *Please only tick one box*

☐ Prejudice against Sikhs

☐ Prejudice against Jews

☐ Prejudice against Muslims

☐ Prejudice against Hindus

☐ Or tick here if you're not sure or don't know

27. What does '**homophobia**' mean? *Please only tick one box*

☐ Prejudice against people because of their sexual orientation

☐ Prejudice against homeless people

☐ Prejudice against Jews

☐ Prejudice against disabled people

☐ Or tick here if you're not sure or don't know

28. What does '**genocide**' mean? *Please only tick one box*

☐ A violent disturbance of the peace (e.g. a riot)

☐ The accidental killing of one human by another

☐ The deliberate attempt to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group

☐ The deliberate killing of one human being by another

☐ Or tick here if you're not sure or don't know

# Exploring your knowledge of a particular historical topic

**The next questions in the survey are going to ask you what you know about a particular historical topic that you might have studied in school or heard about elsewhere.**

29. Can we just check with you, have you ever seen or heard the word '**Holocaust**' before? *Please tick one of the boxes below and then follow the instructions about what to do next.*

☐ Yes, I have definitely heard about the Holocaust  *Please go onto the next question*

☐ Yes, I think I've heard about the Holocaust  *Please go onto the next question*

☐ No, I don't think I have heard about the Holocaust *Please put your hand up and the researcher will help you*

☐ No, I definitely have not heard about the Holocaust *Please put your hand up and the researcher will help you*

30. Please can you describe in one or two sentences what you think the Holocaust was?

31. Please go through the following list of words which includes the names of various events, people and places.

   *If you think the word is connected with the Holocaust please tick 'yes'. If you do not think it is connected with the Holocaust please tick 'no'. If you're not sure tick 'don't know'.*

| | Yes | No | Don't know | | Yes | No | Don't know |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adolf Eichmann | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | The SS | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The CIA | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | Auschwitz | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The Iran–Iraq War | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | The Battle of the Somme | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Adolf Hitler | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | Oscar Schindler | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Kristallnacht | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | Slobodan Milosevic | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The Nuremberg Trials | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | Bergen-Belsen | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Treblinka | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | The Einsatzgruppen | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Franz Ferdinand | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | Primo Levi | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Lenin | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | The Suffragettes | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Wannsee Conference | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

# Do you recognise these people and places?

This section includes some pictures of people and places. For each picture please tick one box that best describes what is being shown. If you're not sure or you don't know what the picture is showing, just tick the 'don't know' box.


© Huw Jones/Lonely Planet Images

**32. This place is:**

☐ The entrance to the Warsaw Ghetto

☐ The entrance to Auschwitz concentration camp

☐ The entrance to the Nazi headquarters

☐ The entrance to the 'Eagle's Nest' – Hitler's mountain retreat

☐ I don't know what the picture is showing


© ANNE FRANK FONDS, Basel, Switzerland

**33. This girl is:**

☐ Hana Brady

☐ Anna Freud

☐ Anne Frank

☐ Marie Curie

☐ I don't know what this picture is showing

If using this questionnaire with your students, please insert an image of the character 'Schmuel' from the film *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*.

**34. This picture is…**

☐ a photo of a Jewish boy taken during the Holocaust

☐ an actor playing a Jewish boy in a film about the Holocaust

☐ a photo of a German boy taken during the Holocaust

☐ an actor playing a German boy in a film about the Holocaust

☐ I don't know what this picture is showing


© Everett Historical/Shutterstock.com

**35. This man is…**

☐ Adolf Hitler

☐ Benito Mussolini

☐ Heinrich Himmler

☐ Josef Stalin

☐ I don't know what this picture is showing

© Ian Waldie/Getty Images News

36. The tattoo on this man's arm shows that he was…

☐ a member of the Nazi party

☐ a member of the French resistance

☐ a member of the German navy

☐ a prisoner at Auschwitz

☐ I don't know what this picture is showing

37. This picture is of…

☐ a memorial to the Holocaust in Berlin

☐ a cemetery in Germany

☐ the remains of a concentration camp

☐ a secret Nazi bunker

☐ I don't know what this picture is showing



© Joakim Lloyd Raboff/Shutterstock.com

**This section asks a bit more about what you know about the Holocaust**

38. When did the Holocaust happen? *Please tick one box*

☐ In the 1900s  ☐ In the 1920s  ☐ In the 1940s  ☐ In the 1960s  ☐ In the 1980s

39. How confident are you of this answer? *Please tick one box*

☐ I don't know the answer – this was just a guess

☐ I am not very confident in this answer

☐ I am fairly confident in this answer

☐ I am very confident in this answer

40. Who were the victims of the Holocaust? *Please write your answer in the box below*

41. How confident are you of this answer? *Please tick one box*

☐ I don't know the answer – this was just a guess

☐ I am not very confident in this answer

☐ I am fairly confident in this answer

☐ I am very confident in this answer

42. Who was responsible for the Holocaust? *Please write your answer in the box below*

> (blank box)

43. How confident are you of this answer? *Please tick one box*

- ☐ I don't know the answer – this was just a guess
- ☐ I am not very confident in this answer
- ☐ I am fairly confident in this answer
- ☐ I am very confident in this answer

44. In 1933, what percentage of the German population was Jewish? *Please tick one box*

- ☐ Less than 1%
- ☐ Approximately 5%
- ☐ Approximately 15%
- ☐ More than 30%

45. How confident are you of this answer? *Please tick one box*

- ☐ I don't know the answer – this was just a guess
- ☐ I am not very confident in this answer
- ☐ I am fairly confident in this answer
- ☐ I am very confident in this answer

46. Approximately how many Jews in all of Europe were killed during the Holocaust? *Please tick one box*

☐ 25,000    ☐ 100,000    ☐ 1 million    ☐ 2 million    ☐ 6 million    ☐ 20 million

47. How confident are you of this answer? *Please tick one box*

- ☐ I don't know the answer – this was just a guess
- ☐ I am not very confident in this answer
- ☐ I am fairly confident in this answer
- ☐ I am very confident in this answer

48. Approximately what percentage of Jewish children living in Nazi controlled Europe were murdered? *Please tick one box*

☐ About 1%    ☐ About 10%    ☐ About 50%    ☐ About 75%    ☐ About 90%

49. How confident are you of this answer? *Please tick one box*

☐ I don't know the answer – this was just a guess

☐ I am not very confident in this answer

☐ I am fairly confident in this answer

☐ I am very confident in this answer

---

50. Which country did the largest number of Jewish people murdered during the Holocaust come from? *Please tick one box*

☐ Germany        ☐ France        ☐ Poland        ☐ Hungary
☐ The Soviet Union    ☐ The USA      ☐ Israel

51. How confident are you of this answer? *Please tick one box*

☐ I don't know the answer – this was just a guess

☐ I am not very confident in this answer

☐ I am fairly confident in this answer

☐ I am very confident in this answer

---

52. In which country did the largest number of killings of Jewish people actually take place? *Please tick one box*

☐ Germany        ☐ France        ☐ Poland        ☐ Hungary
☐ The Soviet Union    ☐ The USA      ☐ Israel

53. How confident are you of this answer? *Please tick one box*

☐ I don't know the answer – this was just a guess

☐ I am not very confident in this answer

☐ I am fairly confident in this answer

☐ I am very confident in this answer

The Nazis persecuted (or unfairly treated) a number of different groups of people, including those listed below. Which group – or groups – do you think each of the following statements applies to?
For each statement you can tick as many boxes as you like

54. The Nazis planned to kill every last person from this group, wherever they could reach them

☐ Disabled people        ☐ Homosexuals        ☐ Jews        ☐ Roma and Sinti (Gypsies)

55. They were the first victims of the Nazis' mass murder programme

☐ Disabled people        ☐ Homosexuals        ☐ Jews        ☐ Roma and Sinti (Gypsies)

56. They could avoid Nazi persecution if they gave up their beliefs

☐ Jews        ☐ Jehovah's Witnesses        ☐ Roma and Sinti (Gypsies)        ☐ Poles

57. They were blamed by Hitler for Germany's defeat in the First World War

☐ Poles        ☐ Jehovah's Witnesses        ☐ Jews        ☐ Roma and Sinti (Gypsies)

58. Beginning in October 1939, the Nazis created ghettos. What were Nazi ghettos?
*Please tick one box*

☐ Places where the Jews of Europe were killed in gas chambers

☐ Parts of the town where Jews were forced to live, in order to separate them from the rest of the population

☐ Housing estates built for the Roma ('Gypsies') to stop them from travelling around

☐ Factories where the Nazis forced their political opponents to work as slave labourers

☐ Places where gay men were experimented upon to try to make them 'straight'

59. How confident are you of this answer? *Please tick one box*

☐ I don't know the answer – this was just a guess

☐ I am not very confident in this answer

☐ I am fairly confident in this answer

☐ I am very confident in this answer

60. The organised mass killing of Jews began immediately after a particular historical event. What was it? *Please tick one box*

☐ The start of the First World War

☐ Hitler's appointment as leader of Germany

☐ The start of the Second World War

☐ The German invasion of the Soviet Union

☐ The building of gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau

61. How confident are you of this answer? *Please tick one box*

☐ I don't know the answer – this was just a guess

☐ I am not very confident in this answer

☐ I am fairly confident in this answer

☐ I am very confident in this answer

62. If a member of the military or police refused an instruction to kill Jewish people, what do you think would be most likely to happen to them? *Please tick one box*

☐ They would be shot for refusing to obey an order

☐ They would be sent to a concentration camp

☐ They would be given another duty instead

☐ They would be sent to the Eastern Front

63. How confident are you of this answer? *Please tick one box*

☐ I don't know the answer – this was just a guess

☐ I am not very confident in this answer

☐ I am fairly confident in this answer

☐ I am very confident in this answer

64. What happened when the British Government knew about the mass murder of Jews? Did they…? *Please tick one box*

☐ Declare war on Germany

☐ Think up rescue plans and try to do everything to save the Jewish people

☐ Say that they would punish the killers when the war was over

☐ Bomb Auschwitz-Birkenau to destroy the gas chambers

☐ Attack Jews living in Britain

☐ Ignore it

☐ None of the above: they didn't know anything until the end of the war

65. How confident are you of this answer? *Please tick one box*

☐ I don't know the answer – this was just a guess

☐ I am not very confident in this answer

☐ I am fairly confident in this answer

☐ I am very confident in this answer

66. Why did the Nazi organised mass murder of the Jews end? *Please tick one box*

☐ There were no more Jews to kill

☐ The Nazis realised it was a terrible mistake and stopped killing people

☐ Hitler committed suicide

☐ The Allied armies (including USSR, Britain, USA) liberated the lands controlled by the Nazis where the Holocaust was taking place

67. How confident are you of this answer? *Please tick one box*

☐ I don't know the answer – this was just a guess

☐ I am not very confident in this answer

☐ I am fairly confident in this answer

☐ I am very confident in this answer

# Learning about the Holocaust

**We would like to know a little about your experience of learning about the Holocaust.**

68. Do you think that all students should learn about the Holocaust while at school?

☐ Yes            ☐ No            ☐ Don't know

69. Have you ever learned about the Holocaust in school? *Please tick one box*

☐ Yes, definitely

☐ Yes, I think so

☐ Maybe

☐ No, I don't think so

☐ No, definitely not

70. If you have learned about the Holocaust in school, can you remember what year you were in when you first learned about it? *Please tick one box*

☐ Before year 7 (at primary school)        ☐ Year 10

☐ Year 7        ☐ Year 11

☐ Year 8        ☐ Year 12 or 13

☐ Year 9        ☐ Don't know

71. If you have learned about the Holocaust in school, which subjects have you learned about it in? *You can tick more than one box*

☐ English

☐ Citizenship and/or personal, social and health education

☐ Drama

☐ History

☐ Religious education

☐ School assembly

☐ Don't know

☐ Other *please explain in the box below*

72. If you have learned about the Holocaust in school, have you learned about it in your history lessons since September 2013?

☐ Yes                    ☐ No                    ☐ Not sure

73. Have you ever heard about the Holocaust outside of school? *Please tick one box*

☐ Yes, definitely

☐ Yes, I think so

☐ Maybe

☐ I don't think so

☐ Definitely not

74. Have you read any books about the Holocaust?

☐ Yes                    ☐ No                    ☐ Don't know

75. If you have read any books on the Holocaust, please tick all those you have read

☐ The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas

☐ Hana's Suitcase

☐ The Diary of Anne Frank

☐ School textbooks

☐ Other *please write the name of the book in the box below*

76. Have you seen any films or television programmes about the Holocaust?

☐ Yes                    ☐ No                    ☐ Don't know

77. If you have seen any films or television programmes about the Holocaust, please tick the ones you have seen

☐ The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas

☐ A TV documentary

☐ The Pianist

☐ Schindler's List

☐ Defiance

☐ Other *please write the name of the film/television programme in the box below*

78. Have you learned about any of the other genocides or mass killings listed below?
*Please tick as many as apply*

☐ Armenians (in the former Ottoman Empire)

☐ Cambodia

☐ Rwanda

☐ Bosnia (in the former Yugoslavia)

☐ Darfur (in Sudan)

☐ Democratic Republic of Congo

☐ No I haven't learnt about any of these

☐ Other *please name the other genocide(s) or mass killing(s) you have learnt about, in the box below*

**Returning to questions about the Holocaust, please tell us which of the following you have experienced while learning about the Holocaust.**

79. Have you heard a survivor talk about their experience of the Holocaust?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Not sure

80. If you have heard a survivor talk, please tell us about that experience by ticking one box for each statement.

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| It helped me to understand how and/or why the Holocaust happened | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It made what happened during the Holocaust feel more real to me | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It was upsetting | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It was boring | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

81. Have you visited a site of a former concentration or death camp?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Not sure

82. If you have visited the site of a former concentration or death camp, please tell us about that experience by ticking one box for each statement.

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| It helped me to understand how and/or why the Holocaust happened | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It made what happened during the Holocaust feel more real to me | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It was upsetting | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It was boring | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

83. Have you used textbooks on the Holocaust?

☐ Yes                    ☐ No                    ☐ Not sure

84. If you have used a textbook on the Holocaust, please tell us about that experience by ticking one box for each statement.

|  | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| It helped me to understand how and/or why the Holocaust happened | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It made what happened during the Holocaust feel more real to me | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It was upsetting | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It was boring | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

85. Have you visited a museum to learn about the Holocaust?

☐ Yes                    ☐ No                    ☐ Not sure

86. If you have visited a museum about the Holocaust, please tell us about that experience by ticking one box for each statement.

|  | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| It helped me to understand how and/or why the Holocaust happened | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It made what happened during the Holocaust feel more real to me | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It was upsetting | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It was boring | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

87. Have you taken part in an event to mark Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD)?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

88. If you have taken part in a Holocaust Memorial Day event, please tell us about that experience by ticking one box for each statement.

| | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| It helped me to understand how and/or why the Holocaust happened | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It made what happened during the Holocaust feel more real to me | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It was upsetting | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| It was boring | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

89. Pick one statement from the list below that you think best describes how much you know about the Holocaust.

☐ I don't know anything about the Holocaust

☐ I know a little bit about the Holocaust

☐ I know quite a lot about the Holocaust

☐ I know lots about the Holocaust

90. Would you like to learn more about the Holocaust?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

# Attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust

91. Below is a list of statements showing different opinions about whether or not the Holocaust should be taught in schools. *For each statement, please tick one box to show how much you agree with it*

|  | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Too much time in school is spent learning about the Holocaust | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Young people should learn about the Holocaust to stop something like that from happening again | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Young people should learn about the Holocaust so they understand where prejudice and racism can lead | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Young people should learn about the Holocaust to deepen their knowledge of the Second World War and twentieth century history | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Young people should learn about the Holocaust to respect the memory of the people who were killed | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The Holocaust is not related to my life because it happened in another country | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Young people should learn about the Holocaust so that they will be more likely to stand up for people who get picked on/bullied | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The Holocaust does not really interest me | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Young people should learn about the Holocaust so that they have more sympathy for refugees coming to this country to escape discrimination and murder | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| Young people should learn about the Holocaust so that they can learn about the different things that caused it | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| The Holocaust is not related to my life because it happened so long ago | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

# Appendix 2

# Attitudinal scales used in the survey

Please note that the data collected from the survey questions described below will be reported in a future publication. (The research survey is reproduced in Appendix 1).

## Thinking about school question

In order to contextualise the findings from the 'Attitudes towards Learning about the Holocaust scale' (survey question 91), students were asked to identify what they thought the purpose of school was, aside from preparing for examinations (survey question 13).

The introduction to this question said: 'An important thing that schools do is prepare students for exams like GCSEs, to help them get jobs and/or go on to further education. From the list below please tick one other important thing that schools should do for young people'. Students were then asked to pick one option from the following:

- teach young people to help those who are less fortunate than themselves
- teach young people about what is morally right and wrong
- teach young people how to behave well and follow the rules
- teach young people how to value and respect people from different cultures
- encourage young people to think for themselves.

## 'Just world' beliefs

The Beliefs in a Just World (Others) Scale – adapted for use with adolescents by Fox *et al.* (2010) from the Lipkus (1991) Just World scale – was used to measure the extent to which respondents believe the world is a just place and that people get what they deserve (survey question 14). The scale comprises seven items including, for example, the statement 'I feel that people's efforts are noticed and rewarded'.

Responses are made using a four-point Likert scale where 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 4 = 'strongly agree'. A mean score for the seven items was calculated for each respondent, so that a high score represents strong beliefs in a just world. Fox *et al.* (2010) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87 when using this subscale with a sample of young people aged 11–16 years, indicating that the scale has good reliability. Similarly, the scale was found to be a reliable measure when completed by students in this study ($\alpha = 0.81$).

## Attitudes towards equal rights for immigrants

The Attitudes Towards Equal Rights for Immigrants Scale (Schulz *et al.* 2010) was used in the 2009 International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS). The authors found that the scale had a high level of internal reliability ($\alpha = 0.90$) for the combined international dataset.

In our survey, the scale was introduced with the following information: 'People sometimes move from one country to another, and are often known as "immigrants"'. Students were then presented with a list of statements about immigrants and asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each item, using a four-point Likert scale in which 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 4 = 'strongly agree'. A mean score was calculated for each student and the higher the score, the more positive attitudes that students expressed towards the rights of immigrants.

The Cronbach's alpha in this study was 0.87, indicating that the scale was a reliable measure.

## Attitudes towards neighbourhood diversity

This scale was also used in the 2009 ICCS, though it was used with the Latin American sample (Schulz *et al.* 2011), not the European sample. The scale comprises a list of nine different groups of people, and students were asked to indicate how they would react to having each of these groups as their neighbours. Groups included 'People with a different skin colour than yours' and 'People with mental health problems'. In the version used by the ICCS, three response options were used: 'I would like it', 'I wouldn't care' and 'I would dislike it'.

For our study, this was amended to a dichotomised scale where 0 = 'I wouldn't mind' and 1 = 'I would dislike it' (survey question 16). This also resonates with the findings of the ICCS Latin America Report (Schulz *et al.* 2011), where students who indicated either 'liking' the groups as neighbours or 'not caring' were deemed to be 'unconcerned' (that is, neutral), thus exhibiting acceptance of neighbourhood diversity. For our study a total score was calculated so that the higher a student's score the more groups they said they would not want as neighbours (and so the less accepting of neighbourhood diversity they were).

# Appendix 3

# Coding frameworks for free-text questions

## Coding framework for survey question 30

This question asked students, 'Please can you describe in one or two sentences what you think the Holocaust was'. The content of each student's response was coded to indicate whether their answers contained reference to the:

■ victim(s) of the Holocaust

■ perpetrator(s) of the Holocaust

■ action(s) of the Holocaust

■ date when the Holocaust took place

■ scale of the Holocaust (for example, how many Jews were killed).

Students' answers were coded in relation to each element using the following codes:

■ **Code 0:** There is no reference to the element – either correct or incorrect, meaning that this aspect of definition is simply not there.

■ **Code 1:** The student has referred to the element, but the reference is incorrect and/or nebulous and/or lacks clarity and/or is missing a critically important component (for example, under 'action' no mention of purposeful killing is made).

■ **Code 2:** There is relevant and 'broadly accurate' reference to the element. (Note that we wanted to use this coding system to examine the content of students' answers and determine if the content was broadly relevant. Thus we were lenient when assigning this code and acknowledge that, where we assigned this code, students' answers were not always strictly historically accurate).

## Additional coding

After doing the element coding, we went through students' definitions to determine how many of them referred to countries where the Holocaust happened, and if so which country or countries were identified.

Students were only asked to give a description of the Holocaust, but where they had also provided an explanation for the Holocaust occurring, these answers were highlighted for further examination.

Answers were also highlighted for further examination if they explicitly recognised the Holocaust as the intent to kill all Jews everywhere, that is the student demonstrated that they understood the totality of the genocidal intent of the Holocaust.

**Table A3.1** Coding framework for, and examples of, students' answers to survey question 30

| Element | Code 1 – examples considered incorrect and/or nebulous | Code 2 – examples considered relevant and 'broadly accurate' |
|---|---|---|
| Victims | Others (without reference to Jews)<br>Polish<br>People (with no further elaboration)<br>Anne Frank (that is, she is the only identified victim and there is no reference to other Jewish people) | Jews<br>Jews and other relevant victims |
| Perpetrators | One man<br>Some people | Germany<br>Adolf Hitler<br>Other named individuals e.g. Himmler, Goebbels<br>The SS<br>The Nazis<br>German soldiers |
| Actions | Tortured (no reference to killing)<br>Treated people differently (no reference to killing)<br>Persecution (no reference to killing)<br>Put Jews in concentration camps / took the Jews to concentration camps (no reference to them being killed there)<br>Left to die in concentration camps | Genocide<br>Mass killing<br>Mass murder<br>Extermination<br>Systematic killing<br>Reference to killing, e.g. killed many, killed a lot, killed and tortured<br>Persecution and execution / killing<br>Massacred<br>Gassed |
| Date | 1900s<br>In the war<br>1930s<br>1933–39 (restricting the date to the period pre-1941 is an error as it omits the period when the systematic killing occurred) | The Second World War<br>1940s<br>1939–45 (and/or any years within that period named)<br>1933–45<br>Third Reich |
| Scale | Thousands<br>A million<br>Less than 5 million<br>More than 7 million<br>A large number of them / loads of people<br>Many Jews | 6 million<br>Millions |

**Table A3.2** Examples of students' answers to survey question 30, and how they were coded

| Student answer | Victims | Perpetrators | Actions | Date | Scale | Additional coding |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The Holocaust was during world war 2. This was when the Nazis kept Jewish people in concentration camps. | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | N/A |
| The Holocaust was the killing of around 6 million Jews, in world war 2, mainly because Hitler didn't like them. | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | Brief explanation given |
| The Holocaust was the isolation and killing of the Jewish people of Germany by the Nazis. The Nazi's were led by Hitler; they also killed other large groups of people who they thought were less superior to themselves. For example homosexuals and the disabled. | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | Identified Germany |
| The Holocaust was an attempt by the Nazis to wipe out the Jewish race because they didn't believe in their ways and thought they were vermin. | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | Totality of genocidal intent mentioned. Explanation given. |

## Coding framework for survey question 40

Students' answers to the question 'Who were the victims of the Holocaust?' were coded in two stages. In the first stage, students' answers were given a code from 0 to 4, as follows:

**0.** If they had not answered this question

**1.** Jews, Jewish people, the Jewish, etc.

**2.** Inaccurate answers, e.g. 'suffragettes'

**3.** Reference to any other victim group(s) without reference to the Jews

**4.** Jews and other victim groups identified.

In stage two of the coding, answers that were coded as a '4' in stage one (that is, Jews and other victim groups) were given additional codes to indicate which other victim groups the students had identified, as follows:

**1.** Disabled people / people with physical disabilities

**2.** Roma / Sinti / Gypsies

**3.** Homosexuals

**4.** Jehovah's Witnesses

**5.** Poles / Polish people

**6.** Black people

**7.** People with mental health problems

**8.** Any other groups named

## Coding framework for survey question 42

Students' answers to the question 'Who was responsible for the Holocaust?' were typically brief and identified specific person(s) and/or groups. Consequently, their answers were coded from 0 to 11 to show the persons/groups they identified:
If they had not answered this question

**1.** Hitler

**2.** Hitler, the SS and/or named individual(s) (Goebbels, Himmler, etc.)

**3.** Hitler and the Nazis

**4.** Hitler, the Nazis and the SS

**5.** Hitler, the Nazis and Germany

**6.** Hitler and the Germans / Germany

**7.** Nazis (with no direct reference to Hitler)

**8.** Germans / German people / Germany

**9.** Nazis and Germans

**10.** Inaccurate answer

**11.** Accurate and/or relevant answer not outlined above

# Appendix 4

# Schools that participated in the survey

**Table A4.1** Overview of schools that participated in the survey

| Region | School type | Faith | FSM (% eligible) | BME (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| East Midlands | Community school | – | 24.8 | 2.1 |
| | Academy sponsor led | – | 29.7 | 42.5 |
| | Academy converter | – | 5.4 | 23.6 |
| | Academy sponsor led | Christian | 33.7 | 10.7 |
| | Academy sponsor led | – | 27.5 | 17.4 |
| East of England | Academy converter | – | 10.5 | 11.4 |
| | Community school | – | 30.8 | 9.3 |
| | Academy sponsor led | – | 45.7 | 48.5 |
| | Foundation school | – | 33.2 | 51.7 |
| | Community school | – | 25.3 | 8.6 |
| | Foundation school | – | 37.3 | 19.9 |
| | Academy converter | – | 15.6 | 11.6 |
| | Academy converter | Christian | 5.7 | 26.8 |
| | Academy converter | – | 26.9 | 11.5 |
| | Academy converter | – | 21.5 | 35.5 |
| | Academy converter | Jewish | 7.1 | 1.9 |

| Region | School type | Faith | FSM (% eligible) | BME (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| London | Voluntary aided | Roman Catholic | 38.7 | 50.7 |
| | Voluntary aided | Church of England | 46.7 | 85.0 |
| | Foundation school | – | 42.2 | 50.1 |
| | Academy sponsor led | – | 35.5 | 27.4 |
| | Academy converter | Roman Catholic | 23.0 | 59.0 |
| | Voluntary aided | – | 31.3 | 67.4 |
| | Academy converter | – | 33.4 | 16.4 |
| | Voluntary controlled | – | 79.0 | 68.3 |
| | Academy converter | – | 10.1 | 13.7 |
| North East | Community school | – | 18.3 | 9.4 |
| | Academy sponsor led | – | 48.4 | 0.7 |
| | Academy sponsor led | – | 60.1 | 2.8 |
| | Community school | – | 38.5 | 0.0 |
| | Foundation school | – | 36.3 | 0.7 |
| North West | Community school | – | 61.2 | 78.0 |
| | Academy sponsor led | – | 25.3 | 15.1 |
| | Voluntary aided | Roman Catholic | 17.7 | 4.5 |
| | Voluntary controlled | – | 18.0 | 4.5 |
| | Community school | – | 38.0 | 53.7 |
| | Academy converter | Roman Catholic | 12.7 | 8.5 |
| | Voluntary aided | Roman Catholic | 45.0 | 28.9 |
| South East | Independent | Church of England | No data | No data |
| | Academy converter | Roman Catholic | 12.4 | 45.6 |
| | Academy converter | – | 22.4 | 3.2 |
| | Academy sponsor led | – | 33.1 | 8.3 |
| | Academy converter | – | 20.1 | 4.4 |
| | Community school | – | 9.8 | 7.5 |
| | Community school | – | 21.1 | 3.0 |
| | Academy sponsor led | – | 53.9 | 36.4 |
| | Community school | – | 24.6 | 17.5 |
| | Community school | – | 28.3 | 13.4 |
| | Voluntary aided | Roman Catholic | 9.4 | 17.7 |
| | Academy converter | – | 1.2 | 21.0 |
| South West | Voluntary aided | Roman Catholic | 13.2 | 9.4 |
| | Academy converter | – | 21.6 | 1.8 |
| | Academy sponsor led | Christian | 51.7 | 7.2 |
| | Community school | – | 26.6 | 12.5 |
| | Academy sponsor led | – | 50.2 | 63.9 |
| | Academy converter | – | 28.5 | 2.0 |
| | Academy converter | – | 13.3 | 9.3 |
| | Academy converter | – | 19.8 | 1.9 |
| | Academy converter | – | 11.1 | 7.7 |
| West Midlands | Academy converter | – | 18.9 | 12.6 |
| | Academy sponsor led | – | 37.8 | 31.4 |
| | Community school | – | 45.5 | 76.0 |
| | Academy converter | – | 52.0 | 79.3 |
| | Voluntary aided | Roman Catholic | 14.0 | 7.9 |
| | Academy converter | – | 34.0 | 41.5 |
| | Voluntary aided | Roman Catholic | 57.7 | 81.9 |
| | Foundation school | – | 14.5 | 2.9 |
| | Academy converter | – | 21.9 | 20.9 |

| Region | School type | Faith | FSM (% eligible) | BME (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Yorkshire and the Humber | Academy converter | – | 28.8 | 42.4 |
| | Academy converter | Roman Catholic | 15.7 | 11.0 |
| | Academy converter | – | 19.4 | 4.1 |
| | Community school | – | 17.5 | 3.7 |
| | Academy converter | – | 14.7 | 30.5 |
| | Academy sponsor led | – | 48.9 | 81.1 |
| | FE college | – | No data | No data |

FSM refers to the percentage of students in receipt of free school meals.

## Key to school types

- Academies are publicly funded independent schools. They get money direct from the government, not the local council. Academies don't have to follow the National Curriculum. Sponsor-led academies are usually underperforming schools that are allocated to a sponsor (e.g. businesses, universities). A converter academy is often a high-performing school that has voluntarily converted to academy status.
- Community schools are controlled by the local council and are not influenced by business or religious groups.

- Faith schools can be different kinds of schools including voluntary-aided schools and academies, but are associated with a particular religion. A voluntary-aided faith school receives funding from a religious organisation.
- Foundation schools are similar to community schools, but they have more freedom to change the way they do things than community schools do.
- Grammar schools are run by the council, a foundation body or trust – they select all or most of their pupils based on academic ability and there is often an exam to get in.

(see Department for Education 2015)

# Appendix 5

# Schools that participated in the focus groups

**Table A5.1** Overview of schools that participated in the focus groups

| Focus group topic | School code | Region | School type | Faith | FSM (% eligible) | BME (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Survivor testimony | LON1 | London | Academy converter | Roman Catholic | 23.0 | 7.5 |
| | LON2 | London | Voluntary aided | Jewish | 11.0 | 21.6 |
| | SW1 | South West | Academy converter | None | 13.4 | 13.0 |
| | YH1 | Yorkshire and the Humber | Academy converter | None | 14.7 | 30.5 |
| *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* | LON3 | London | Foundation school | None | 42.2 | 50.1 |
| | LON4 | London | Voluntary aided | Roman Catholic | 49.9 | 94.2 |
| | WM1 | West Midlands | Academy converter | None | 18.9 | 12.6 |
| Knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust | EE1 | East of England | Academy converter | None | 10.5 | 11.4 |
| | LON5 | London | Voluntary aided | Church of England | 46.7 | 85.0 |
| | LON6 | London | Voluntary aided | Roman Catholic | 38.7 | 50.7 |
| | LON7 | London | Academy converter | None | 1.2 | 21.0 |
| | NE1 | North East | Community school | None | 18.3 | 9.4 |
| | SE1 | South East | Academy sponsor led | None | 53.9 | 36.4 |
| Attitudes to learning about the Holocaust | LON8 | London | Community school | None | 72.3 | 99.4 |
| | SE2 | South East | Voluntary aided | Roman Catholic | 9.4 | 17.7 |
| | EE2 | East of England | Foundation school | None | 33.2 | 51.7 |
| | WM2 | West Midlands | Academy converter | None | 64.5 | 99.7 |

# Appendix 6

# Multiple regression analyses

Multiple regression analyses were used to compare attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust among students from different religious groups and after controlling for year group, vocabulary scores, gender and number of books in the home.

Following the approach of Sullivan and Brown (2015), the dependent variables were treated as percentage scores in this analysis to make the coefficients interpretable as percentage point differences.

As shown in Table A6.2, the numbers of students in each religious group varies considerably so these results should be interpreted with caution due to very high standard errors.

Table A6.1 indicates that Christian students and Jewish students have attitudes which are significantly more positive about learning about the Holocaust compared to students with no religious affiliation. However, this equates to 1.69 percentage points for Christian students and 4.54 percentage points for Jewish students. Furthermore, it should be noted that Table A6.2 shows that, in the main, the variables we controlled for were also related to students' attitudes.

In sum, our analysis found no evidence that Muslim students differed from the non-religious majority in their attitudes to learning about the Holocaust once relevant potential confounders had been controlled. Indeed, vocabulary scores, number of books in the home and gender all contributed to differences in students' attitudes. It should also be noted that other variables (including those not measured) will have also influenced students' attitudes.

**Table A6.1** The mean total score for the Attitudes towards Learning about the Holocaust scale, by religious affiliation

| Religious group | Number of students | Mean total score (out of 44) | Standard deviation | Mean score as a percentage[a] |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| No religion | 2,775 | 34.19 | 11.11 | 77.69 |
| Christian | 2,396 | 35.28 | 11.18 | 80.17 |
| Buddhist | 30 | 36.37 | 10.42 | 82.65 |
| Hindu | 50 | 34.60 | 14.26 | 78.64 |
| Jewish | 105 | 36.53 | 11.67 | 83.03 |
| Muslim | 704 | 33.75 | 12.51 | 76.71 |
| Sikh | 86 | 33.10 | 11.57 | 75.24 |

[a] When conducting multiple regression analysis, the mean total scores were converted to percentages to aid interpretation. For example, a score of 34.19 out of 44 equates to 77.69 per cent.

Table A6.2 Multiple regression analysis of attitudes towards learning about the Holocaust, percentage scores (n for all models = 5,500)

| | Model 1 | Model 2 |
|---|---|---|
| Intercept | 66.59* | 65.87* |
| Year group | –0.05 | 0.02 |
| Vocabulary | 1.48* | 1.45* |
| Gender (Ref = girls) | –2.19* | –2.04* |
| Books in the home (Ref = no books) | | |
| Very few (1–10 books) | 2.90* | 2.96* |
| One shelf (11–50 books) | 5.56* | 5.51* |
| One bookcase (51–100 books) | 6.61* | 6.45* |
| Two bookcases (101–200 books) | 7.58* | 7.25* |
| Three or more bookcases (more than 200 books) | 8.53* | 8.16* |
| Religious group (Ref = no religion) | | |
| Christian | | 1.69* |
| Buddhist | | 3.20 |
| Hindu | | 1.00 |
| Jewish | | 4.54* |
| Muslim | | –0.22 |
| Sikh | | –1.67 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.10 | 0.10 |

*$p < 0.05$

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UCL's programme was developed in partnership
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