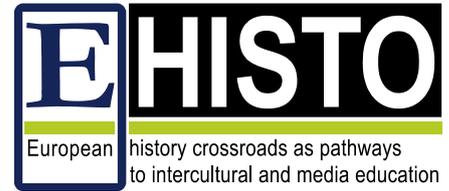




Lifelong
Learning
Programme



How the outbreak of World War One is covered in the UK: textbooks, popular history magazines, and newspapers

Students in the UK sometimes study this topic at the different age levels. World War One is a compulsory topic in the National Curriculum for History, so all students study the topic at the age of 13 or 14. At this level, brief attention is given to the outbreak of the war, with substantive focus tending to spend most of the curriculum time on the war on the Western Front.

At GCSE exam level (15/16 year olds), for students who have chosen to continue with the study of history, there is more detailed treatment of the outbreak of war, with coverage typically focusing on the crises leading up to the war, 1905-14, and causes of tension (arms race, colonial rivalry, alliance system etc). For students studying A level history (16-18 year olds), syllabuses which included the First World War would expect students to have some grasp of the historiography surrounding the outbreak of war, and the differing views of historians on which country was most responsible for the outbreak of war, why the war broke out in 1914 and not at another time, the extent to which the situation in the Balkans was responsible for the outbreak of war and other contested aspects of the outbreak of war.

The approaching centennial anniversary of the outbreak of World War One has brought about a plethora of magazine and newspaper articles about the causes and outbreak of war, which many eminent UK historians have contributed to. Different views are expressed, particularly over whether Great Britain should have entered the war or stood aside. Niall Ferguson is quite critical of Britain's role in the lead up to the war, but several other historians (for example, Gary Sheffield) have argued that we had to get involved or accept German hegemony over Europe. There are therefore some interesting comparisons with the debate in Germany – see below.

We feel that one of the key things that learners get out of the project is that historians, journalists and politicians disagree about the past, but there are ways of trying to ascertain which versions of the past are most trustworthy and authoritative.

