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University of Birmingham in First World War collaboration

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The University of Birmingham is linking up with the BBC to create an academic first – a unique distance learning course marking the centenary of the First World War next year.

The 'World War 1: Aviation Comes of Age' course, developed by the University's Centre for War Studies in conjunction with the BBC, was announced during a press conference outlining the BBC's forthcoming World War One Centenary coverage today (Wednesday 16 October). It will be a pilot Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) looking at the evolution of airborne conflict, published on the FutureLearn platform.

Controller of Learning Saul Nassé says: 'The BBC continues to be excited about the development of MOOCs – Massive Open Online Courses that will enable mass participation in learning online. We are keen to explore opportunities with a number of University partners as part of our WW1 coverage. The first one to be developed will be with the University of Birmingham, the short course will cover the deployment of air power during the First World War and attitudes to the use of new technology.'

Dr Jonathan Boff (/staff/profiles/history/boff-jonathan.aspx), Lecturer in War Studies at Birmingham, commented: 'This exciting initiative will give us a chance to share our passion for First World War history with the widest possible audience. It also enables us to continue our pioneering use of digital technology both to support existing students and to attract new ones. Students stimulated by the MOOC can easily pursue their interest by exploring our wide range of full-time and part-time undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, online and face-to-face, in war studies and the history of warfare.'

Director of the Centre for War Studies **Dr Peter Gray (/staff/profiles/history/gray-peter.aspx)** added: 'The University of Birmingham has, in the Centre for War Studies, the largest and longest-established centre for specialist research and teaching of the First World War anywhere in the world. It is also internationally renowned for excellence in the study of Air Power.

'The 'World War 1: Aviation Comes of Age' MOOC will bring together our strengths in both areas to allow students to explore, not only the Great War in the air, but also the impact the war had on aviation more generally, and more broadly still to examine developing attitudes to technology in a time of revolutionary change. Although we often take aeroplanes for granted today, the story of how we got to this point is a fascinating one whose roots lie in 1914-18.'

In a separate but related development, the **Centre for War Studies (/research/activity/warstudies/index.aspx)** is one of the Universities providing academic advice and support to the BBC's digital content for the First World War centenary.

This will cover a range of material designed for audiences from as young as five years up to those as old as the war itself and is evidence of the commitment of both organisations to explaining the history of the Great War to the widest possible audience.

Notes to editors

Dr Jonathan Boff is Lecturer in War Studies at the University of Birmingham, where he leads the MA in British First World War Studies and an online-only MA in Military History by Distance Learning.

Dr Peter Gray is the Royal Aeronautical Society Senior Research fellow in Air Power Studies at the University of Birmingham and Director of the Centre for War Studies. He has published widely on a range of air power subjects from historical issues through to contributing to current debates on remote warfare such as the employment of drones. He has extensive practical experience from his time in the Royal Air Force and is in demand worldwide for his knowledge of air power history, theory and practice.

The **Centre for War Studies (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/warstudies/index.aspx)** at the University of Birmingham is one of the leading institutions of its kind in the United Kingdom. It brings together academics from around the globe to research and teach military history. With particular strengths in the study of the two world wars and the history and theory of air power, it offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses and maintains a unique network of alumni and associates active in the field of military history and war studies.

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