

13<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

## UCL Centre for Holocaust Education's Continuity and Change Research Study – Second Data Release:

### IMPROVING TEACHERS' SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLOCAUST.

#### KEY MESSAGE

**New research for the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education reports improved subject knowledge among those teaching about the Holocaust in English secondary schools over the last ten years. However, the same data also raises concerns. Notwithstanding these improvements, many teachers still appear to share a number of widespread misunderstandings, enduring misconceptions and common historical inaccuracies all of which have potentially profound consequence for the teaching and learning of this important history.**

More encouragingly, the research also provides compelling evidence of a strong relationship between continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers and secure subject knowledge. This relationship is especially pronounced where such support meets or exceeds the Department for Education's current Standards for teacher professional development as exemplified by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education's flagship Beacon School Programme.

#### SUMMARY

Although the Holocaust has featured as a compulsory component of the national curriculum at secondary level since 1991, previous research conducted by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education warned of important limitations in the subject knowledge and understanding of both school students (in 2016) and their teachers (in 2009). As commentators from the Centre have argued, this likely reflects the deep-rooted and enduring nature of several widespread myths and misconceptions surrounding what might otherwise be assumed to be a 'well known' and very familiar history (Foster et al. 2016, Pettigrew et al. 2009).

Encouragingly, the Centre's most recent research with teachers suggests that, **over the last ten years, knowledge levels have improved overall** (Fig 1). However, the survey responses given by almost 1,000 teachers who had recently taught about the Holocaust in 2019 and 2020 suggest that **a number of significant gaps and common confusions remain**. For example, **fewer than half of all teachers were able to correctly identify that Jews comprised less than 1% of the pre-war population of Germany or that the**

**systematic mass murder of Jewish people began with the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941<sup>1</sup>** (Figure 2).

The research also makes a clear case for **the value of sustained, collaborative and evidence-led programmes of specialist CPD in directly addressing misconceptions** such as these. In 2009, the majority of those teaching about the Holocaust had received no specialist training in this area but the provision of support for teachers has expanded significantly over the last ten years, not least with the establishment of the Centre's own programme of free courses which have been attended by almost 22,000 participants since late 2009. By 2020, 62.9% of teachers who completed the survey had taken part in specialist training with an external organisation and 48.3.% received input on teaching this history within their Initial Teacher Training Year. However, **almost one fifth of those with recent experience of teaching about the Holocaust had received no formal specialist training at all** (Figure 3).

Across all the knowledge questions asked in the 2019/20 survey, the experience of any **formal specialist training on teaching about the Holocaust was associated with greater historical accuracy** and for some forms of CPD, this relationship was especially pronounced. The best available international research evidence and the Department for Education's own Standards for Teacher' Professional Development emphasise that CPD is most effective when it: has a focus on improving and evaluating pupil outcomes; is underpinned by robust evidence and expertise; includes collaboration and expert challenge; is sustained over time; and is prioritised by school leadership (DfE 2016; Cordingley et al. 2015). The UCL Centre for Holocaust Education's flagship Beacon School programme exemplifies all these attributes and across all questions, teachers' who had participated in this programme demonstrated the highest levels of historical accuracy. In some cases these teachers were almost **two times as likely to answer a question correctly as those who had taken part in other forms of CPD** and up to **four times more likely than those who had received no specialist training at all**. Crucially, **a clear majority of Beacon School teachers answered all of the knowledge-based survey questions correctly while this was not true of all forms of CPD** (Figure 4).

## BACKGROUND

In 2009, researchers from what is now the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education conducted extensive national research to document when, where, how and why the Holocaust was being taught within secondary schools across England. Their findings provided the foundations for the Centre's extensive and acclaimed programmes of continuing professional development and significantly re-shaped the field of teaching and learning about the Holocaust both nationally and internationally.

---

<sup>1</sup> The exact wording and full response categories offered for each knowledge-based survey question are included in the Appendix to this document.

The Centre provides a portfolio of professional development courses tailored for each stage of a teacher's career. All courses are research-informed, designed and led by experts and focused on improving teaching practice and student outcomes. As the Centre's most immersive course, the Beacon School Programme exceeds the Department for Education's current Standards for teacher professional development and fulfils the criteria identified in the Teacher Development Trust's international review into effective professional development (Cordingley et al, 2015). According to the review, to be effective in producing profound, lasting change, professional development interventions have to be prolonged (lasting at least two terms), comprised of a "rhythm" of activities (through multiple instances of ongoing support and follow-up activities), rooted in content knowledge while also developing generic pedagogic approaches, focused on pupil outcomes and delivered by external experts who act as mentors to the teachers.

The Centre's Beacon School Programme runs for one year initially, with teachers then encouraged and supported to continue their engagement with the programme through initiatives such as the Beacon School Quality Mark, ongoing dialogue with Centre experts and participation in evaluation research to explore student outcomes. During the programme, teachers are assigned a mentor who is a specialist educator at the Centre and partners with them as they evaluate, adapt, implement, reflect on and refine their schemes of work and classroom practice to positively impact on their students. Centre specialists run a series of knowledge-building, interactive sessions and model pedagogical approaches and resources that teachers can use in the classroom. The programme also supports collaboration within and between schools through whole school and/or cross-curricular approaches, and the development of local Beacon School networks. These features, along with empirical evidence demonstrating development in teachers' specialist knowledge and pedagogical expertise, and greater knowledge in students, mean the Programme is uniquely positioned within the field of Holocaust education and warrants particular attention when exploring the current landscape of Holocaust education in England.

In 2019 and 2020, UCL's researchers returned to the field surveying almost 1,000 teachers with recent experience of teaching about the Holocaust and conducting group interviews with 134 teachers from 45 different schools. The survey included a series of 12 multiple choice questions, 8 of which were asked in a similar manner in 2009. It also captured extensive detail on teachers' varying experience of different forms of continuing professional development offered by the Centre and other specialist organisations working in this field. Further information on the Centre's current study, *Continuity and Change: Ten Years of teaching about the Holocaust in England's Secondary Schools* (planned for full publication in Autumn 2021), and its 2009 report, *Teaching About the Holocaust in English Secondary Schools: An empirical study of national trends, perspective and practice* can be found at <https://holocausteducation.org.uk/research-page>

## SUMMARY OF SELECTED FINDINGS (See also Figures 1-5 below)

- In 2009, 73% of teachers with experience of teaching about the Holocaust who took part in UCL Centre for Holocaust Education's original survey indicated that they believed themselves to be 'very knowledgeable' about the subject. However, the responses these same teachers gave to a series of knowledge-based questions included within the survey revealed some important and widespread gaps in historical understanding. For example, only 25.2 % of those teaching about the Holocaust were able to accurately estimate how big the pre-war Jewish population of Germany was and only 20.9% understood the likely consequence for a member of the German occupying forces if they were to refuse an instruction to kill Jews.
- In 2016, the Centre's research with almost 10,000 secondary school students presented an even more concerning picture. While some students, particularly those studying history at A level, were able to share more developed accounts of the Holocaust, the majority appeared to lack core knowledge and understanding of key features of this history. Like their teachers, many students held the erroneous belief that Jews constituted a significant proportion of the German population during the 1930s, for example. While 8.8% correctly identified the pre-war Jewish population to be less than 1%, 73.9 % of students grossly overestimated this population by 15 to 30 times.
- Moreover, the 2016 study also emphasised the gap between what students *believed* they knew about the Holocaust and the actual accuracy of their answers. For example, while 60% of students were at least fairly confident they knew what would happen to a member of the military if they refused an order to kill Jewish people, only 5% were actually able to correctly identify that the most likely consequence was that they would be excused from the killing and reassigned other duties.
- 8 of the same – or very closely comparable – knowledge-based questions were asked in both the 2009 study and UCL's most recent research with teachers. Across all 8 questions, in 2019/20, the base level of teacher knowledge had improved. In some cases, teachers were twice as likely to answer correctly in 2019/20 than they had been in 2009 (Full detail in Figure 1.).
- However across all 12 multiple choice knowledge questions asked in 2019/20, there were 4 questions where a majority of respondents still could NOT correctly identify the most historically accurate answer and a further question where only just over 50% were able to. These findings suggest that significant confusion and/or misunderstanding continues to exist around several critically important historical issues including: the chronology of mass murder; the factors that did - and did not - influence perpetrators' decisions to kill; the minority status of Germany's Jewish population; and the response of the British government to the Holocaust' (Further detail in Figure 2.)

- Encouragingly, the research suggests both that experience of CPD is very clearly associated with higher levels of accurate historical knowledge and that CPD provision has considerably expanded over the last 10 years.
- In 2009, 27.4% of respondents taken part in any form of training in Holocaust education provided by organisations outside of their school since becoming a teacher, 5.7% received formal training in teaching about the Holocaust in their NQT/first year and 22.7% had specific focus on teaching about the Holocaust in their ITT course. By 2020, these figures had grown to 62.9%, 20.8% and 48.3.% respectively.
- The overall improvement in accuracy of answers from 2009 and 2019/20 appears closely related to this expanded provision. Across all questions, those who had taken part in any form of specialist training were more likely than those who had not to answer every question more accurately. (Figure 3.)
- Where knowledge levels among teachers without any formal training were already high this difference was least pronounced, (for example, 93.1% of teachers without any formal training recognised that the majority of Jews were forced to live in ghettos from September 1939, this rose just 2.3 percentage points to 95.4%). But for other questions the difference was striking (Figure 3.)
- **The relationship between experience of CPD and accuracy of answers was especially profound amongst those respondents who had taken part in the highest engagement programmes such as the UCL CfHE's flagship Beacon School programme.**
- While only **28.8 % of teachers with no formal specialist training** in teaching about the Holocaust accurately identified that the Jewish population of Germany in 1933 was less than 1%, among those with any form of specialist training, this rose to 49%. However, **among teachers who had taken part in the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education's Beacon school programme, 88.3% answered correctly.**
- And while **only 19.2% of teachers without specialist training** correctly understood that the most likely outcome if a member of the German occupying forces refused an instruction to kill Jewish people would be reassignment to other duties, this rose to **48.4 % among those with any form of specialist training and a striking 91.8% among Beacon school teachers**
- Within the survey, Beacon School participants themselves emphasised the transformative impact of the programme on their teaching, and ultimately upon their students' outcomes:

*The CPD I've undertaken with the IOE or UCL Centre for Holocaust Education has completely transformed my approach to Holocaust education. **It made me realise that I was teaching and reinforcing misconceptions that students had because they were the misconceptions that I also had.** (Religious Education teacher, East of England).*



*I think it has enabled me to have a far more accurate understanding of the facts of the Holocaust but most pertinently **it's given me an understanding of how best to communicate key ideas and tackle misconceptions in the classroom** (Religious Education teacher, London).*

*The research, CPD and Beacon School Programme carried out by the CfHE has **helped identify problematic misconceptions and their implications as barriers to learning**. This has meant **our learning scheme directly addresses these misconceptions**. (History teacher, North West England).*

*Being a Beacon School has **given me so much confidence whilst teaching the Holocaust**. I no longer worry about how to answer question the students have. **My knowledge had improved too and I can see the complexity** of the Holocaust and how individuals experienced it in different ways depending on which country, ghetto or camp they were in. (History teacher, London).*

## REFLECTION AND COMMENTARY FROM CENTRE STAFF

Dr Andy Pearce, Associate Professor in Holocaust and History Education reflects,

*'The findings in this data release clearly indicate that formal specialist training – in the form of CPD – makes a significant impact on teachers' subject knowledge of the Holocaust and its history. Given that secure subject knowledge is an essential ingredient for effective teaching, it follows that the general improvement in teachers' subject knowledge over the past ten years carries beneficial effects for students' learning.*

*However, this positive news comes with an important caveat: despite the improvement, there remain a number of key areas where teachers' subject knowledge is not as strong as it should be. Indeed, in these areas, the majority of teachers do not appear to have the subject knowledge required to combat myths and misconceptions that are prevalent in wider society and which we know are held by many young people. These include misunderstandings about the minority status of the Jews in Germany, when mass murder of the Jews of Europe began, the motives that influenced perpetrators and the actions of the British government in response to the genocide. Not having this knowledge has profound repercussions. It means that teachers are less likely to be able to identify misconceptions among their students, it increases the risk that misunderstandings will be perpetuated, and it undermines the notion that by learning about the Holocaust young people will be able to better understand and respond to persecution and atrocity.*

*It is troubling that such myths and misconceptions as these remain among large sections of the teaching profession. Robust subject knowledge matters not in and of itself, but because of what – and who – it enables. In the case of the Holocaust, subject knowledge is cavernous, complex, complicated. It requires time to develop and establish, space to reflect upon, and expert guidance on how to apply the knowledge acquired into practice. In the context of CPD, this is about a sustained and highly-engaged commitment – from teachers, from schools, and from CPD providers.*

*The research indicates however that such a commitment can reap rich dividends. This is clear from how participants on the UCL Beacon School programme consistently out-performed teachers on all of the knowledge questions. This includes those questions mentioned above that the majority of teachers answered incorrectly – where in all cases, the difference was dramatic.*

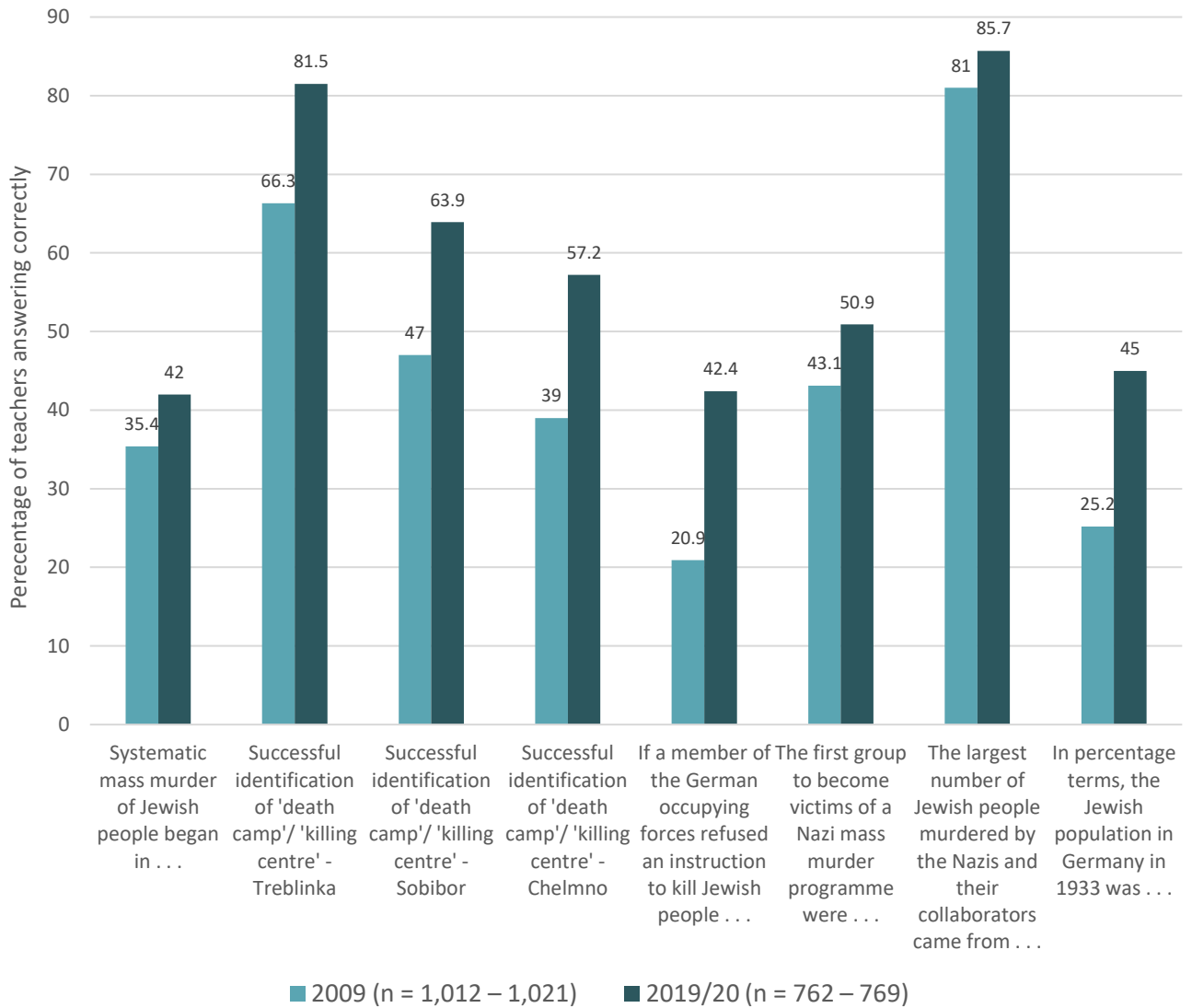
*Taken as a whole, this data can be read as a two-part tale. The first part is that CPD has made a significant contribution to improving teachers' subject knowledge – something to be welcomed, and duly noted. But the truism 'CPD works' does not capture the whole picture. For the second part of this data tells us that CPD which is research-informed and built on the Department for Education's Standards, has an extremely powerful effect on teachers' subject knowledge. In essence, some CPD works more effectively than others, and has the potential to be transformative for students' learning'.*

## REFERENCES

- Cordingley, P., Higgins, S., Greany, T., Buckler, N., Coles-Jordan, D., Crisp, B., Saunders, L., Coe, R. (2015). *Developing Great Teaching: Lessons from the international reviews into effective professional development*. Teacher Development Trust.
- Department for Education. (2016). *Standard for Teachers' Professional Development*.
- Foster, S., Pettigrew, A., Pearce, A., Hale, R., Burgess, A., Salmons, P., & Lenga, R. A. (2016) *What do students know and understand about the Holocaust? Evidence from English secondary schools*. London: UCL.
- Pettigrew, A., Foster, S., Howson, J., Salmons, P., Lenga, R.-A. and Andrews, K. (2009) *Teaching About the Holocaust in English Secondary Schools: An empirical study of national trends, perspectives and practice*. London: Holocaust Education Development Programme (HEDP).

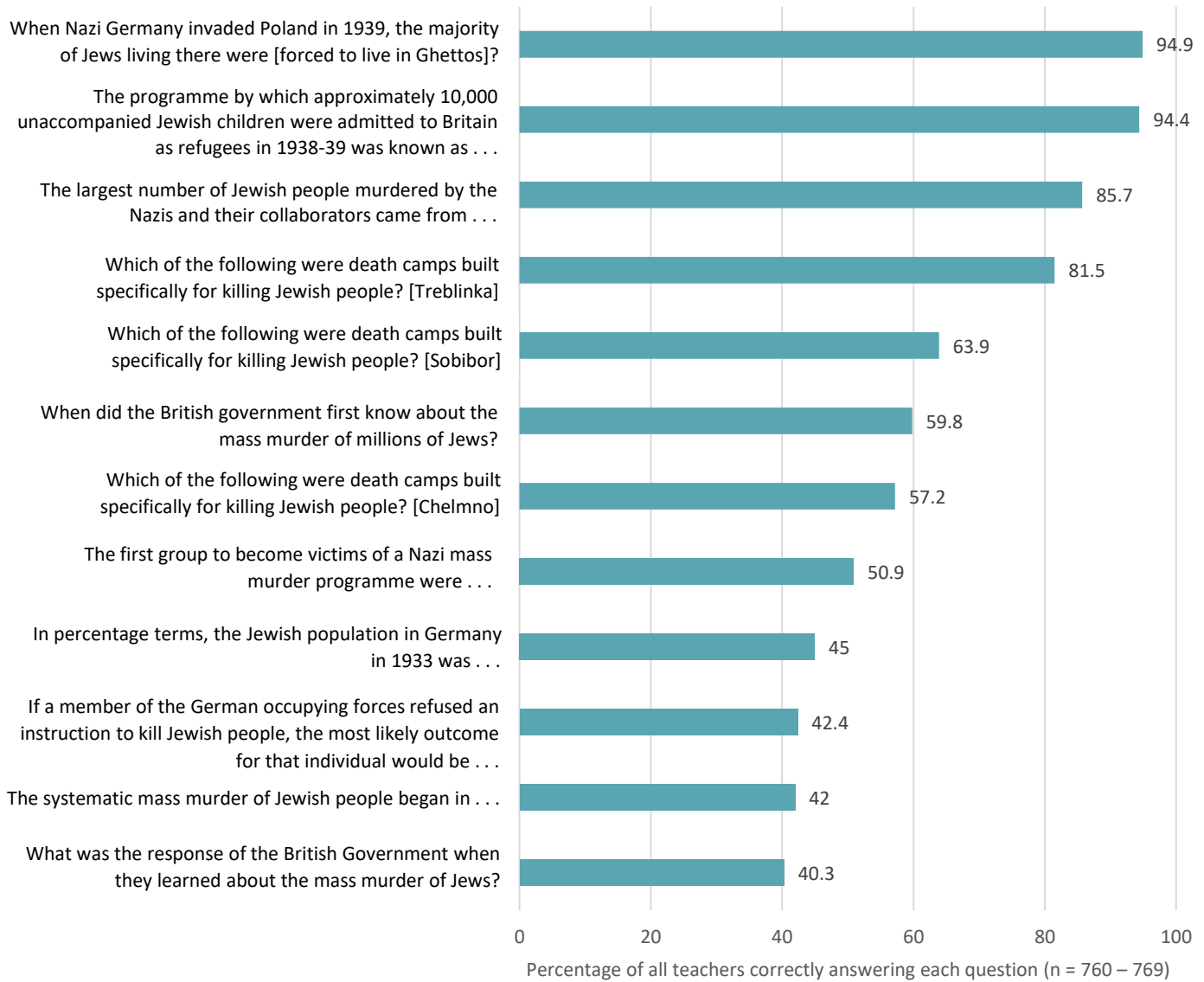
**FIGURES**

**Fig 1. Improved teacher subject knowledge between 2009 and 2019/20**

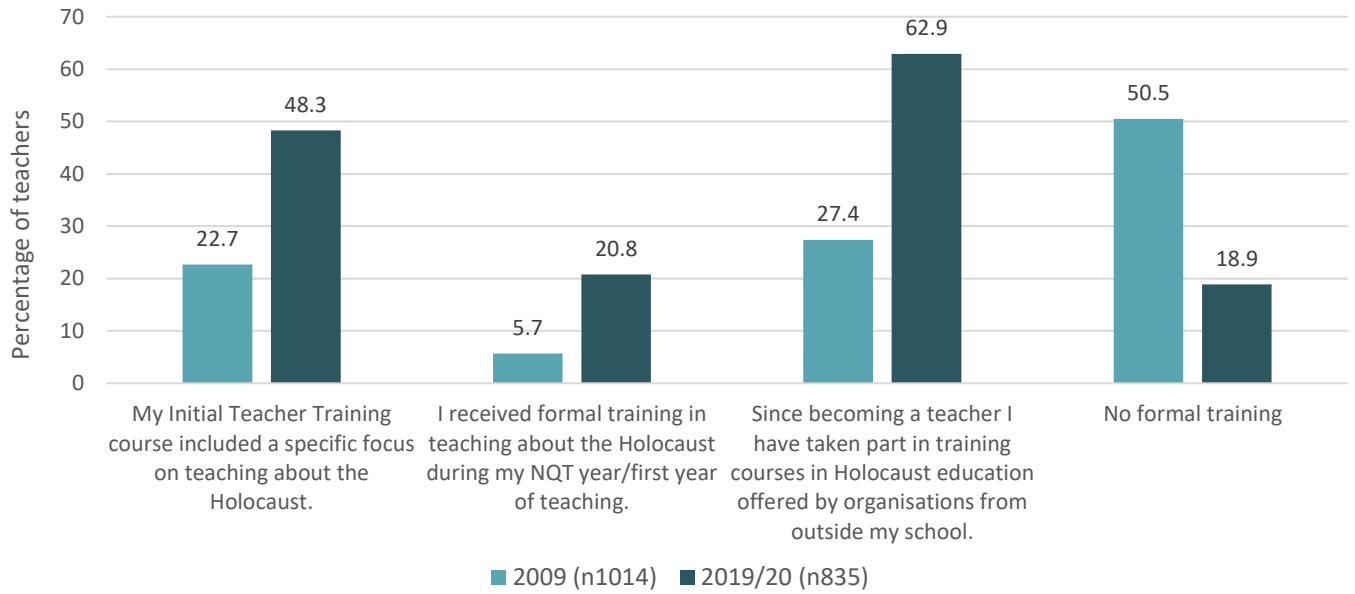




**Fig 2. Accuracy of all teacher answers, 2019/20**

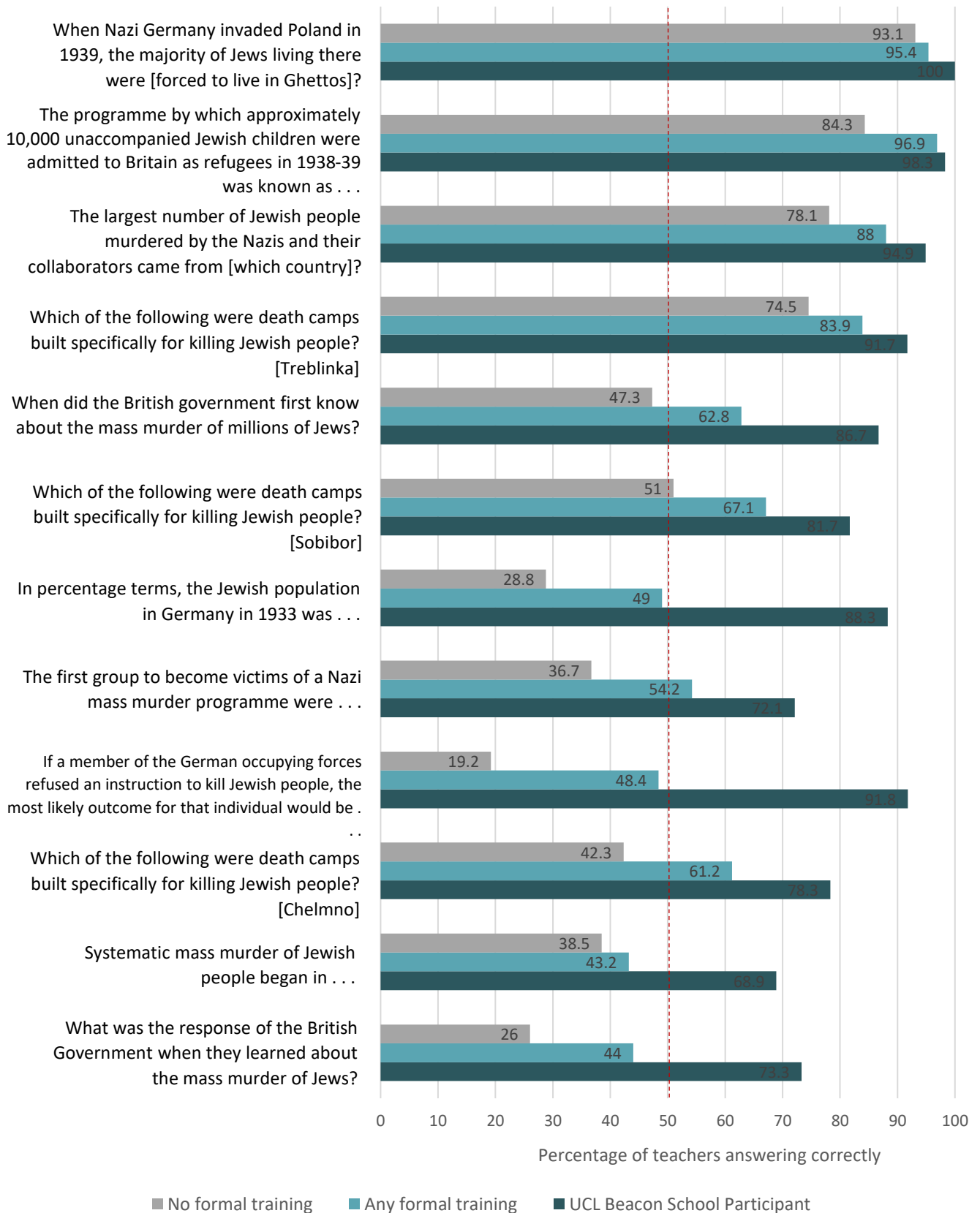


**Fig 3. Expansion of formal training 2009 – 2019/20**



**Fig 4. Variation in accuracy of responses by CPD experience.**

*NB, 'Any formal training' and 'UCL Beacon School Participant' are not mutually exclusive categories.*



**APPENDIX:**

**Exact wording and response categories for knowledge based multiple choice questions included in survey (\* denotes question asked in comparable form in both surveys, most historically accurate answers underlined).**

**2019/20 SURVEY:****\*Systematic mass murder of Jewish people began in:**

- 1933, with the Nazis' rise to power
- 1935, with the Nuremberg Laws
- 1938, with Kristallnacht (the November Pogrom)
- 1939, with the outbreak of war
- 1941, with the invasion of the Soviet Union
- 1942, with the construction of gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau
- Not sure

**\*\*\*Which of the following were death camps built specifically for killing Jewish people? Please tick all that apply:**

- Treblinka
- Bergen-Belsen
- Sobibor
- Chelmno
- Hadamar
- Katyn
- Not sure

**\*If a member of the German occupying forces refused an instruction to kill Jewish people, the most likely outcome for that individual would be that they were:**

- Shot for refusing to obey orders
- Sent to a concentration camp
- Excused from the killing and given other duties
- Sent to the Eastern front
- Not sure

**\*The first group to become victims of a Nazi mass murder programme were:**

- Disabled people
- Jews
- Homosexuals
- Trade Unionists
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Black people
- Communists
- Political opponents of the Nazis
- Roma and Sinti ('Gypsies')

- Not sure

**\*The largest number of Jewish people murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators came from:**

- Germany
- Poland
- Ukraine
- France
- Netherlands
- Hungary
- Not sure

**When did the British government first know about the mass murder of millions of Jews?**

- They knew it was happening in the years between 1933 and 1938
- They knew it was happening when war broke out in 1939
- They knew it was happening in 1941-42
- They knew it was happening in 1944, after the British were involved in the Allied invasion of occupied Europe
- They only knew about it after the war ended in 1945
- Not sure

**What was the response of the British Government when they learned about the mass murder of Jews? They...**

- Declared war on Germany
- Thought up rescue plans and tried to do everything possible to save the Jews
- Said they would punish the killers when the war was over
- Bombed Auschwitz-Birkenau to destroy the gas chambers
- Attacked Jews living in Britain
- Ignored it
- None of the above, the British knew nothing until the end of the war
- Not sure

**\*In percentage terms, the Jewish population in Germany in 1933 was:**

- Fewer than 1%
- Approximately 5%
- Approximately 15%
- More than 30%
- Not sure

**When Nazi Germany invaded Poland in 1939, the majority of Jews living there were...?**

- Forced to live in ghettos
- Made to convert to Christianity
- Sent straight to gas chambers
- Put into concentration camps
- Not sure

**The programme by which approximately 10,000 unaccompanied Jewish children were admitted to Britain as refugees in 1938-39 was known as...**

- The Einsatzgruppen
- Operation Rescue
- Kindertransport
- Evacuation
- The Eisenbahn
- Not sure

**2009 SURVEY:**

**Systematic mass murder of Jewish people began in:**

- 1933, with the Nazis' rise to power
- 1935, with the Nuremberg Laws
- 1938, with Kristallnacht (the November Pogrom)
- 1939, with the outbreak of war
- 1941, with the Invasion of the Soviet Union
- 1942, with the construction of gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau
- Not sure

**Which of the following were killing centres built specifically for killing Jewish people: (please tick all that apply)**

- Treblinka
- Bergen-Belsen
- Sobibor
- Chelmno
- Hadamar
- Katyn
- Not sure

**If a member of the German occupying forces refused an instruction to kill Jewish people, the most likely outcome for that individual would be that they were:**

- Shot for refusing to obey orders
- Sent to a concentration camp
- Excused from the killing and given other duties
- Sent to the Eastern front
- Not sure

**The first group to become victims of a Nazi mass murder programme were:**

- Disabled people
- Jews
- Homosexuals
- Trade unionists
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Black people
- Communists
- Political opponents of the Nazis
- Roma and Sinti ('Gypsies')
- Not sure

**The largest number of Jewish people murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators came from:**

- Germany
- Poland
- Ukraine
- France
- Netherlands
- Hungary
- Not sure

**In percentage terms, the Jewish population in Germany in 1933 was:**

- fewer than 1%
- approximately 5%
- approximately 15%
- more than 30%
- not sure