

HTAA RESPONSE TO THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM BOARD'S HISTORY FRAMING PAPER, 11 February 2009



1. INTRODUCTION

This History Teachers' Association of Australia (HTAA) is the peak body representing the History Teachers' Associations of the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia. This response to the National Curriculum Board's (NCB) History Framing Paper is the outcome of long term discussions between HTAA and its affiliates, an intensive period of consultation that took place during December 2008 and January 2009 and a final meeting attended by state and territory representatives in late January. While different emphases were apparent, at the end of this process there was very substantial agreement about areas of serious concern. This informed national consensus shapes this response.

HTAA has been an enthusiastic supporter of the initiative to develop national curriculum courses in history, is appreciative of the NCB's open development process and has endorsed the broad direction of the Framing Paper. Indeed, HTAA has consciously contributed to building the goodwill that currently surrounds national curriculum development through, for example, the time and energy it has invested in both supporting the NCB's work and engaging teachers with the process. HTAA remains committed to this very positive approach. Nevertheless, we are now down to questions of detail, classroom feasibility and implementation, some of which require urgent answers and all of which give rise to some anxiety. Of necessity, this response will focus on areas of concern.

2. CONSULTATION AND THE SYLLABUS WRITING PROCESS

As will be evident in what follows, HTAA does not feel that the Framing Paper has been developed to the point where it can be used as a foundation on which to base useful syllabus writing briefs. This places enormous importance on the NCB's response to what comes out of the current consultation process and raises questions about the timelines and procedures that will clearly impact on the quality of syllabus development.

Recommendations

- There needs to be greater transparency in relation to how the next stages of syllabus development will be approached.
- It is essential that there be a further period of focused consultation before syllabus writing briefs are developed. For example, HTAA feels that each of its recommendations needs a response.
- There is a very clear need to ensure that classroom practitioners have a strong representation and role on syllabus writing committees.

3. THE PRIMARY YEARS (STAGES 1 – 2)

There is a strong feeling that what is proposed for the primary years is far too ambitious in terms of both content to be covered and the conceptual capabilities assumed for students at this stage. While HTAA welcomes the introduction of history as a discrete discipline in the primary years, more thought needs to be given to how this will be done in a diverse range of primary settings and with appropriate methodologies. The prevalence of composite classes and the fact that Year 7 is part of the primary sector in some states, for example, appear not to have been taken into account. Primary teachers have also asked whether the proposed content is to be regarded as mandatory core content or the only content to be covered. Finally, there are significant implications for pre-service teacher

training and professional development if we are expecting primary teachers to present history in a way that is consistent with 'historical understandings'.

Recommendations

- All content proposed for the primary years needs to be much more closely scrutinised by primary practitioners. All of what is suggested for Stage 2 (68-83), for example, could be dramatically pruned. This would be consistent with concerns expressed later about the actual teaching time that will be available and the perceived persistence of repetition between Stage 2 and 3. There needs to be a reduction in specific core or mandatory content and specific recognition that the diverse structural arrangements of primary schools demand great flexibility.
- Similarly, there needs to be much closer scrutiny by primary practitioners of the conceptual abilities assumed for students at this stage. The standards outlined in clause 83, for example, will appear wildly optimistic to most secondary teachers.
- Most importantly, experienced primary teachers with a history background need to be engaged to produce model units of work that demonstrate how history can be integrated into the primary curriculum in ways that are consistent with a range of accepted primary teaching methodologies. There would be enormous benefit in allowing teachers to access fully-developed models that demonstrated a range of approaches appropriate to different locations, class structures etc.
- In Queensland, South Australia, Northern Territory and Western Australia, Year 7 is part of the primary sector. It is very difficult to see how these students, taught in a primary environment by primary teachers, will achieve the same outcome as their peers in the remainder of the country. While addressing such entrenched structural challenges may prove difficult, it would seem unwise to ignore this one. At the very least, it would suggest that the scrutiny that must be applied to Stages 1 and 2 by primary practitioners must also be applied to what is proposed for Year 7. Moreover, the sort of modelling suggested for the primary sector as a whole may be even more useful here. (It is also worth noting the recommendations for a *What is History?* unit below.)

4. JUNIOR SECONDARY (STAGE 3)

This is the area of the Framing Paper that appears to have been most well-developed. Secondary teachers are generally comfortable with what has been proposed in terms of the overall organisation into four chronological periods and the approach to Australian history. However, there are too many topics listed and no clear guidelines on the selection and weighting of topics for study. The overly-ambitious nature of the suggested content outline has worrying implications for pedagogy and articulation with the Stage 4 courses. There will also be many teachers who will be unfamiliar with the content and historical understandings – effective professional development will be required to support this stage. These issues are addressed below under points 5, 6, 7 and 12.

5. SENIOR SECONDARY (STAGE 4)

HTAA feels that this area of the Framing Paper has been inadequately developed and raises far more questions than it answers. While the apparent intention of building on the best of what is already on offer around the country in the senior years has considerable merit, it is simply not possible to offer meaningful feedback on what is merely a list of course titles. What is presented in the Framing Paper fails to take account of a number of important issues relating to senior secondary courses:

– Most states and territories currently run courses that enjoy considerable popularity amongst students and generate loyalty amongst teachers. While this does not mean that the courses are incapable of being improved or adapted to a national curriculum, the stakes are high and there is justifiable anxiety about a proposal that is so lacking in detail.

- Current senior courses are inseparable from considerations of quite diverse approaches to pedagogy, assessment, course structure, course length and tertiary entrance procedures.
- While the notion of a proliferation of senior options will be attractive to many teachers, there must be some consideration of how state and territory curriculum authorities would respond to this.
- Stage 3 courses cannot be developed in isolation from Stage 4 courses. At the moment, for example, there is potential for considerable overlap between what is proposed for Year 10 and any senior Modern History course.
- While the proposal to offer new courses such as Asia-Pacific History and Extension Study in History has the potential to generate considerable interest and excitement, it must be emphasised that such courses would demand a very considerable effort in their development. There would also need to be thought given to guarding against excessive overlap between Asian history in Stages 3 and 4 – in Stage 4 the focus could be on modern Asian history.

Recommendation

- The Stage 4 area must be revisited before there can be any progress to syllabus development. This may mean a delay in implementation at this stage. This may be a good thing, as long as it did not lead to Stage 3 course being developed in isolation from plans for Stage 4.

6. PEDAGOGY

The Framing Paper is explicit in not focusing on pedagogy even though it does incorporate a relatively sophisticated overview of ‘historical understanding’. While most history trained teachers will applaud what is outlined in the ‘historical understanding’ section, there is some concern that this is not what has guided the proposals for Stages 1-3. Most importantly, there is a strong view amongst primary and secondary teachers from most states and territories that there has been insufficient emphasis placed on the need for an inquiry based approach to history. It may be necessary to note that this is not a reflection of any simplistic rejection of the importance of content. HTAA strongly endorses the view that there should not be an artificial separation of content and process or a focus on historical method at the expense of historical knowledge. The concern is that the Framing Paper, in presenting an overly ambitious content outline, may not have arrived at an appropriate balance. Indeed, there is the danger of promoting a default pedagogy that focuses entirely on a ‘race’ through content. This would be a tragedy for history. While there is some variation in emphasis when it comes to differing interpretations of the inquiry approach, there is near unanimity amongst history trained teachers that what is needed is the time to engage students’ interest and to develop skills.

Recommendations

- All history courses must be informed by an inquiry based approach that allows scope for a full range of teaching and learning activities. It would be valuable for the NCB to develop a clear description of an inquiry approach. HTAA has prepared a draft description (see Appendix A) for consideration by the NCB.
- While HTAA endorses the survey/depth approach envisaged in the Framing Paper, care must be taken to ensure that an overload of prescribed content does not in practice eliminate the ability to pursue some topic studies in genuine depth.
- Consideration must be given to all of the following issues that broadly impact on pedagogy.

a) Time

10% of primary time is envisaged for Stages 1-2 and 400 hours is envisaged for Stage 3. Even with this seemingly generous provision, however, HTAA is strongly of the view that the current content outline is far too ambitious. It must be recognised that skills development and the genuine engagement of students require time. Any further syllabus development must be approached with

recognition of the critical impact that actual time allocation will have on teachers' ability to successfully implement what is prescribed.

b) Core & Options

At the moment it is not clear whether the content proposed for Stages 1-3 will be mandatory or optional, with teachers having the ability to develop Depth Studies from a range of suggested topics. The second alternative is very strongly recommended, perhaps with provision for some mandatory/core topics amongst the options in each year. There would be many advantages to such an approach:

- It immediately deals with some of the concern about content overload.
- It allows teachers and students to work in areas of interest.
- It allows teachers to construct courses that complement what they plan to offer in Stage 4.
- The provision of some mandatory topics would address concerns about 'core knowledge' and/or offer a common opportunity for developing 'essential skills'.

c) Templates and Model Units

There is strong support for a proposal that syllabus writers be required to produce some model units or templates. There may be a number of interesting ways to approach this, including the pooling of units of work from primary and secondary teachers from each state and territory. While such a project will add some complexity to the syllabus writing process, it would have many benefits:

- The syllabus writers would be required to demonstrate the feasibility of what they are doing.
- The units of work would 'demonstrate' pedagogy, something that may be particularly important in the early years of the course.
- The units of work could be used in professional development.
- With the fully developed units remaining optional, this may be the ideal way of catering for both teachers who would benefit from significant support and those who prefer to exercise their own professional autonomy.
- Particularly in areas like research, site studies and local history studies, the provision of templates may significantly improve the general quality of work undertaken.

(d) Depth Studies

The Framing Paper is not clear about what a Depth Study actually is even though this has obvious implications for pedagogy. It will be essential for the NCB to develop a clear description of a Depth Study prior to any syllabus writing. HTAA has prepared such a draft description (see Appendix B) for consideration by the NCB. HTAA also recommends the development of model Depth Studies.

Further, there needs to be clarification about the minimum number of depth studies required in a given year. HTAA proposes the inclusion of a statement such as:

Year 7 has a MINIMUM of 6 Depth Studies of a MINIMUM 9 hours duration each.

Year 10 has a MINIMUM of 4 Depth Studies of a MINIMUM 12 hours duration each.

e) Local History & Teacher Autonomy etc

The Framing Paper recognises the need to allow for the study of local history and acknowledges the importance of teacher autonomy. Nevertheless, it is not clear how provision will be made in these areas. This is particularly worrying given the already crowded content outline. The suggestion here is that these areas must be specifically addressed in any syllabus. A reduction in prescribed content, the ability of teachers to develop units from options and the provision of templates or model units would all be relevant here.

f) ICT, Museums, Site Studies, Film Studies etc

ICT, Museum Studies, Site Studies and Film Studies are all very relevant to the study of history. The suggestion here is that these areas must also be specifically addressed in any syllabus. Again, a reduction in prescribed content, the ability of teachers to develop units from options and the provision of templates or model units would all be relevant. The development of national ICT resources, mentioned below under CROSS CURRICULAR PERSPECTIVES has enormous potential.

g) What is history?

There is considerable support for the inclusion of a *What is history?* unit that might introduce and/or consolidate students' historical understanding. This might be best introduced at the start of secondary school (Year 7 in some states and territories and Year 8 in others).

7. REPETITION OF TOPICS

Student perception of repetition is acknowledged as a significant reason given for the sometimes negative reactions to Australian history. In the Framing Paper, this potential problem is not limited to the Australian history content. It would be a great disappointment if the development of national courses was not able to address this concern. At the moment, however, many teachers have identified areas where there could be significant topic overlap between Stage 1-2 and Stage 3. There may be even greater overlap between the extensive content outlines envisaged for Stage 3 and what it is assumed will be topic areas for Stage 4 courses. The potential for a negative impact on the current popularity of history in the senior years is a matter of major concern. It is not suggested that this is an absolutely straight-forward area to deal with. Revisiting topics to extend understanding or develop more depth is desirable. Often, too, students will have their appetites whetted by an early introduction to a topic.

Recommendations

- There needs to be a careful audit of what is currently being proposed to identify areas where there is potential for repetition to be of concern. This is consistent with HTAA's view that there needs to be a significant rationalisation of proposed content across Stages 1-3.
- Stage 3 and 4 courses need to be developed with a close scrutiny of how they will articulate.
- Stage 3 courses must provide for options. This will allow teachers to construct courses that will complement, rather than conflict with what they will offer in Stage 4.

8. IMPLEMENTATION

With the start of implementation planned for 2011, HTAA feels that it is now time to make firm decisions about the stages of implementation. Otherwise, we face a long period of uncertainty and difficulty in planning for professional development, resource provision etc. Similarly, school systems and curriculum authorities will very soon need clear direction in order to address a range of complex areas involving staffing, timetabling and assessment. Finally, any decisions about the staged introduction of courses will affect the time that is available to develop courses.

9. COMPLIANCE, TESTING, ASSESSMENT

The Framing Paper is explicit in not focusing on assessment. This poses some interesting questions. It is difficult to imagine going to the trouble of devising new courses without any intention of monitoring compliance, measuring effectiveness etc. Are there any plans for this? What about national testing regimes, existing and proposed? What impact will they have on history in the primary school, for example, if they appear to focus on literacy and numeracy? Finally, while there

may be considerable wisdom in allowing different state assessment procedures to continue to operate, there must be some concern about how these diverse approaches can be applied to the one course that has been developed in isolation.

Recommendations

- Developing curriculum in isolation from assessment seems fraught with difficulty. Even if ‘local assessment’ is thought to be desirable, there needs to be some discussion about how this will work in practice. The impact of existing and proposed testing and assessment needs to be reasonably anticipated.
- Syllabus writers need to have some concept of appropriate student outcomes. If this were linked to the recommendation to produce some model units, it is possible to envisage the syllabus writers *suggesting* forms of assessment appropriate to the syllabus intentions.

10. VISION AND IMAGINATION

National curriculum courses, we are told, are being developed as part of an educational revolution and will have a ‘futures orientation’. This sets up expectation in terms of the ability to excite and engage. At the moment, the internationalist context for Australian history has been welcomed by many as a new approach that has the potential to reinvigorate the teaching of Australian history. More generally, it is worth keeping in mind that teachers will be looking for inspiration in the final syllabus documents.

Recommendations

- Asia-Pacific history is one area that offers the potential for the development of new topics. This needs to be done with imagination, rather than a heavy hand, in Stage 3. In Stage 4 an Asia Pacific course based around options and themes would offer teachers around the country the flexibility to pioneer an exciting and fresh course for senior students. Such a course is worth some considerable effort in the planning.
- Vision and imagination needs to be evident in the structure, flexibility and level of support provided by course documents. This may be the single most important factor affecting the ability to engage teachers and generate enthusiasm for the new courses.

11. CROSS CURRICULAR PERSPECTIVES

The Framing Paper notes that an ‘integrated approach’ is favoured in primary school and this appears to have the support of primary teachers. On the other hand, the Framing Paper also notes that ‘connections should arise naturally out of the history curriculum’. This would appear to have very strong support from secondary teachers – a concern about imposing artificial cross-curriculum perspectives on history was very strongly expressed by those who attended the NCB’s forum in Melbourne in October 2008.

Recommendations

- Cross-curriculum priorities should be addressed through the provision of resources, model teaching units, site study ideas and suggestions for opportunities to collaborate with other subject areas, but *not* through prescription.
- ICT is one area that may provide for an interesting opportunity to introduce elements of programming or resourcing that ‘arise naturally out of the history curriculum’. It is possible, for example, to imagine a series of Depth Studies that are produced as a national online resource, perhaps making use of the resources of our national institutions. Among other benefits, this

could be one obvious way of addressing the issue of equity in access to resources for remote schools.

12. TEACHER TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

HTAA strongly endorses the Framing Paper’s concluding remarks on the need to address the issue of teacher training. At one extreme, it will be futile to develop history courses that are framed around historical understandings and expect them to be successfully implemented by those who have no foundation in those understandings. More generally, new national history courses will present challenges to all teachers and there will be need for a significant professional development effort.

Recommendations

- There must be real concern about the adequacy of political, bureaucratic and tertiary sector response times in the face of the very real challenges in this area. It is strongly recommended that the NCB take up an advocacy role in relation to the next point.
- HTAA would like to see a commitment from education ministers, universities, state curriculum authorities and teacher employment bodies to a minimum standard, it being that:
 - A secondary history teacher will have completed at least one history major in their first degree AND a one year history method program (which may have been undertaken in conjunction with another discipline method).
 - A primary teacher will be familiar with the content dealt with in the primary section of the syllabus and have an appropriate understanding of historiography and history pedagogy.
- Professional development must not be seen as a substitute for appropriate pre-service training. Nevertheless, professional development will be of critical importance in the short to medium term. HTAA urges the NCB to consider a much stronger role than is currently envisaged in giving direction to professional development and in evaluating proposals that will come from numerous providers to ensure that they are both well-targeted and cost-effective.
- HTAA and its state affiliates must be given the opportunity to collaborate in the planning and delivery of professional development.

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## **APPENDIXES**

### **APPENDIX A – DESCRIPTION OF STUDENT INQUIRY – DRAFT**

#### *Student inquiry in history*

1. In an inquiry-based history curriculum, students investigate questions and construct well-supported responses.
2. A key aspect of inquiry is the study of primary and secondary sources of evidence. Students analyse, interpret and evaluate historical sources and organise the evidence they produce to make an informed decision about an inquiry question.

3. Teachers describe, explain, model and monitor the process of historical inquiry with students, who develop increasing initiative, self-direction and expertise in inquiry.

4. In an inquiry curriculum, different teaching and learning approaches and activities – including teacher exposition, use of historical narrative etc – contribute to the overall progress of student inquiry.

## **APPENDIX B – DESCRIPTION OF A DEPTH STUDY – DRAFT**

### ***Depth studies in history***

1. A study in depth is an inquiry-based, resource-rich study in which students develop a response to a key question.

2. Depth studies can vary substantially in allocated time, but should involve a MINIMUM of 9 hours of timetabled time in Years 7-8, 12 hours in Years 9-10 and 15 hours in Years 11-12.

3. In a depth study, the teacher plays a crucial role – using direct teaching methods to (for example) set the scene and establish the direction of the study; highlight key events and debates; guide the critical viewing of films; coordinate dramatic and other student activities; manage class and group discussions and debates; and consolidate learning at key stages of the study. The teacher also monitors and advises individual students and small groups during their periods of research using primary and secondary sources. There should be considerable flexibility and variety in the extent of ‘teacher-centred’ or ‘student-centred’ activity.

4. In a depth study, students engage in a range of activities – for example, listening, responding and note-taking during teacher exposition; participating in role play, simulations, discussions and debates; critical study of primary and secondary sources to construct evidence relevant to the key question; one-on-one discussions with the teacher about the progress of their inquiry.

5. A depth study is usually assessed using a substantial piece of student work such as a research assignment, seminar presentation, IT project or summative examination. Increasingly, teachers are also formally assessing student progress during the research process, for example, requiring students to submit draft key questions, research plans, notes of research and draft plans of the final piece of work.