



## **HTA Response to Draft Ancient History Syllabus**

### **General**

The Ancient History draft syllabus is likely to be well received by the majority of teachers. There has been some interesting revision of the Preliminary course which should appeal to teachers. The very limited changes presented for study for the HSC will no doubt be popular with teachers who are comfortable with the offerings provided in the current course. However, it is disappointing to note the narrowing of the range of syllabus topics with the reduction in the range of options for study at Year 12 level, particularly within the historical periods. The suggestion in the Draft Brief regarding 'reduction in content' was surely meant to apply to content within syllabus topics. The loss of some niche, albeit smaller candidature, topics hardly guarantees 'flexibility to meet the needs of all students' (Draft Writing Brief, Broad direction 1, p.6).

It is also disappointing to note that the opportunity to introduce greater breadth of study by including Asian topics is not being taken up in the HSC course. This is especially concerning given the emphasis in promoting the cross-curriculum priority of an Asian focus as expressed in Broad directions of the Draft Writing Brief (October 2015, p.5). Another concern here is the lack of 'appropriate progression between the Preliminary and HSC content' (Broad Direction 5). For example, students studying an Asian topic in Year 11 cannot continue with an Asian study in Year 12.

It is encouraging to see that some attempt has been made to reduce the content within the HSC Core Study of Pompeii and Herculaneum and this will be welcomed by teachers. We have offered some further suggestions for fine tuning non-examinable and examinable content in this study. Please see below in the more detailed comments on the HSC course.

### **Assessment and examination**

The proposals regarding assessment and examination specifications will prove problematic. The rationale for the suggested changes has not been articulated – and was not a point of discussion in the October 2015 draft presented at the last stage of consultation. In addition, the changes are not adequately explained or developed. These are likely to generate a great deal of concern from teachers. More detailed comments are provided in the relevant section.

For HTA the same issues as raised in our response to the Modern History draft syllabus are also relevant for Ancient History. We are disappointed to note the failure to take account of a number of important recommendations that have been consistently put to BOSTES throughout the curriculum development process:

- New history courses need to address the challenge of catering for the diverse range of students in Years 11 and 12, across all schools and throughout the state. This diversity is not addressed by

the three discrete categories mentioned in the draft documents, i.e Special Education, Gifted and Talented, and EAL/D students.

- There should be absolute transparency about assessment and assessment should be developed at the same time as course content, not added on at the end. There will be changes to assessment but it is not clear what rationale these changes will be based on and the exam specifications in the draft documents give little certainty.

### **Historical Concepts and Skills**

The integration of historical concepts and skills is a positive step which better reflects the interplay between them in the practice of history, although some could be expressed more clearly and concisely. Some suggestions are provided in Appendix 1. Explicit reference to the need to 'Acknowledge sources appropriately in historical texts', is a welcome addition.

### **Outcomes**

Some of the outcomes need to be revisited. It is far from clear, for example, what AH12-4 or AH12-5 mean, or what they might look like in practice. The concern is that there may be an unnecessary attempt to introduce an artificial distinction between the Year 11 and Year 12 outcomes. (p. 15)

### **Assessment**

Assessment is very difficult to evaluate. There has been very limited prior discussion, no clear rationale for change has been announced and the detail in the draft document only gives a few clues about what a HSC exam might look like.

#### *Internal Assessment*

- The restriction on the number of assessment tasks (3 in Year 11 and 4 in Year 12) will probably be welcomed by many who see it as a way of lessening stress on students.
- However, the reduction in the number of assessment tasks may increase the challenge of devising an assessment schedule that deals with all components according to the weightings specified in the tables on page 21. Indeed, given that the goal should be 'assessment for/as/of learning' it could be asked if these weightings tables are as simple as they might be. There is always the danger that the mathematical juggling required to conform to the weightings means that demonstrating syllabus compliance becomes a higher priority, with the result being overly-complex, multi-tiered assessment documents.
- Specifications about formal written examinations and the weighting that can be given to them are generating considerable concern amongst teachers. If we assume that the apparent restriction means that students in Year 12 cannot do both a half-yearly and a trial HSC exam, for example, there will be considerable concern amongst those teachers who feel that their students need two formal exams to prepare for the high stakes HSC exam. The students most likely to benefit from formal exam practice will be the most disadvantaged.
- The Trial exam in most cases is a school's last assessment task. Restricting it to a 25% weighting limits the flexibility teachers currently have in assigning weightings to earlier tasks. Will they be prevented, for example, from giving lower weightings to earlier assessment tasks, as recommended by BOSTES as best practice?

### *HSC Examination*

- The proposal to make the Personality Study non-examinable in the HSC has generated considerable discussion with probably the majority of teachers expressing concern about the potential for devaluing this component. Whether or not this will happen is uncertain but without access to the thinking behind the proposal or a clear idea of how it will impact on the exam as a whole, it is difficult to evaluate.
- In the draft exam specifications for Ancient History it would appear that the current examination format for Parts I and II (The Core and the Ancient Societies sections) will be retained.
- However, it is unclear what is intended for Section III – Historical Periods. The wording has raised some concern that essays will play a lesser role. For example, ‘one short response and one extended response question for each topic’ is cryptic in the extreme. An adequate range of structured responses is already provided in the Core and Societies questions. In the interests of maintaining rigour and equipping those students who plan to study at tertiary level with the requisite skills, it would be preferable to retain the traditional essay format of the Historical Period section of the examination.
- Once again, will any decision making be based on a full evaluation of the role of essays in Ancient History assessment?
- How long will the exam be? The proposal to make the Personality Study non-examinable suggests that the exam will be shorter but this is by no means certain.

### **Timeline**

The new syllabuses will be released in 2017, to be introduced in Year 11 in 2018.

- Will this allow enough time for sample assessment and support material to be developed in plenty of time to assist long term planning, programming and the development of assessment schedules across Years 11 and 12?
- Would it be wise to build in time for a thorough evaluation of HSC assessment and sample assessment material before these areas are finalised?
- It will be important not to overlook the special circumstances of many schools that use a compressed or accelerated model for the HSC. Will the timeline, and the production of support material, take account of their need to plan for an earlier transition?

### **The Year 11 Course**

The proposed course has been well designed and will provide students with an opportunity to explore a number of engaging topics, themes and civilisations from the ancient world while providing them with the necessary skills.

#### *Investigating Ancient History - The Nature, Methods and Issues of Ancient History*

This is an attractive, well-designed section with some interesting new topics which will be welcomed by teachers and students. The requirement to investigate at least TWO options and TWO case studies also allows teachers flexibility in programming this section of the course to cater for the needs and interests of their students.

- *Study 3 – ‘Preservation, Conservation and/or Reconstruction of Ancient Sites’*: We are concerned that in the final dot point, the distinction between ‘reconstruction’ and ‘representation’ has been

lost. We would suggest an additional option be included that allows students to explore representations of the ancient past in a variety of media, including literature, film, art and virtual representations.

- *Study 4 – ‘Cultural Heritage and the role of Museums’*: We recommend the addition of ‘The Dancing Shiva’ to this study. This is an Australian example of recent times and has the additional merit of having an Australian/Asian focus.

#### *Investigating ancient History – Case Studies*

- The requirement for students to engage with a case study from outside of Egypt, Greece and Rome is also an excellent idea and should encourage a greater appreciation of the ancient world. There should be an equal number of case studies for both ‘List A’ and ‘List B’ in the final syllabus.
- We would suggest adding another case study to List B, e.g. B8 Palmyra. We recommend rephrasing topic B7 in this list as an inquiry question, ‘Where was the cradle of civilisation?’ This would have the potential to engage more able students to explore an important contested issue in the ancient world.
- We note that two Asian Case Studies have been included in this section: Ashoka and Entombed Warriors of Xian. Why have the options of Mohenjo-Daro and the Mauryan Dynasty (as suggested in the 2015 draft syllabus) been removed? Both would be very viable options – especially with the archaeological focus of Mohenjo-Daro.
- We strongly support the retention of the option for teachers to develop their own case studies.

#### *The Nature of the Ancient Past*

This section of the Preliminary course would be better entitled “Features of Ancient Societies”, a phrase taken directly from the rationale (p.10).

The new approaches (comparative and thematic) suggested in the options provided in the November 2015 draft of the Preliminary course, have not been adequately developed in the new draft. For example, the opportunity to compare a theme across two societies to provide a broader understanding of the ancient world has been lost. See ‘The Nature of the Ancient Past’ (July draft, p. 55).

Is it seriously suggested that students will study ONE feature of ONE society for 40 hours?

- In the first place 40 indicative hours for the study of ONE feature in ONE society is tantamount to a depth study. This has the effect of narrowing the Year 11 course which should be seen rather as an opportunity to foster a breadth of knowledge and understanding of the ancient world.
- Secondly, a major inconsistency exists in the instructions for this section between the use of the singular and plural. The Content Focus refers to students investigating ‘key **features** of ancient **societies** to develop an understanding of the nature of the ancient past’. This is immediately

followed by 'Students undertake a study of an ancient society focusing on ONE key feature' etc. The addition of 'Teachers *may wish* to develop an additional study of a different society which could include either the same or an alternate key feature' is not adequate to develop a coherent thematic or comparative study. Stronger directions are required – with the mandatory requirement to study at least ONE key feature across at least TWO societies.

- The challenge of comparing and contrasting the features and impact of the theme across at least two societies would encourage critical thinking and provide a broader understanding of ancient societies which could serve as foundation knowledge for Year 12 topics.
- If we are aiming for some breadth of understanding, then the list of possible studies on p.56 should include a second society, e.g. Women in Ancient Greece and Rome.

### *Historical Investigation*

We are pleased to note the retention of this section of the Preliminary course. As noted in our response to the 2015 draft, this has been very popular with teachers and students – and continues to provide for freedom of choice/depth of study and the development of essential research and historiographical skills.

### **The Year 12 Course**

In addition to the comments provided in the general introduction, the following more specific feedback is offered.

### *HSC Core Study – Pompeii and Herculaneum*

The reduction in examinable content in this section will be welcomed by teachers. We note especially the transfer of the changing nature of 19th and 20<sup>th</sup> century excavations from section 3 to non-examinable content.

In the interests of reducing content and introducing a more logical format to the Core topic, we would recommend that the examinable topics should focus on the sources for the study of society (Section 2) and 'Interpreting, reconstructing and preserving the past' (Section 3).

Non-examinable topics would include those already in the current syllabus, in addition to the general geographical and historical context. Plans and streetscapes could either be included in the non-examinable section or as part of the range of sources for study of the society. The removal of material to the non-examinable section would enable it to be studied as an introduction to the Core, without the necessity for the kind of close and detailed treatment required for examination preparation.

It is doubtful whether the reorganisation of content in the middle section of the Core topic actually represents any significant reduction as such. For example, the relocation of 'public and private buildings' to the section on 'evidence provided by etc.' will still require the buildings to be studied, albeit with a different emphasis.

The inclusion of the eruption in both the non-examinable and examinable sections is confusing. We would suggest that this topic be included in the non-examinable section by way of introduction to the topic. This middle section is essentially a source-based study of society in Pompeii and Herculaneum – and the eruption is not strictly speaking, a feature of society.

A further reduction in content is suggested by changing the requirement to consider the influence of Greek and Egyptian culture on religion – rather than on all aspects of culture.

It is suggested that site management be included as a topic for consideration in the final section on ethics.

### **Asian topics in Year 12**

We would strongly urge the inclusion of Asian topics in Year 12 for the reasons previously mentioned. Appropriate Asian topics for the Historical Period and Personality could include the Qin and Han Dynasties (as suggested in the earlier Draft) and Qin Shihuangdi. To avoid overlap with Year 11 topics, The Entombed Warriors of Xian (List B Case Study, p. 38) could be replaced by a different Asian Case Study, e.g. Mauryan Dynasty, Mohenjo-Daro.

### **Personalities in their Times**

Apart from the removal of some personalities from the current syllabus – and the proposal to make this section non-examinable – the structure and content of the Personalities in their Times section remains unchanged. Many teachers who have developed expertise and a wide range of resources for the teaching of these Personalities will welcome this decision.

The addition of a new section in the Personality content, focusing ‘on ONE particular source or type of source’ will provide teachers with the opportunity to sharpen students’ historiographical skills. This may be useful direction for teachers, especially those new to the teaching of Ancient History. In most cases, the written and archaeological sources suggested for each personality are well chosen.

## **Appendix 1**

### **HISTORICAL CONCEPTS AND SKILLS**

Analysis and use of sources.

Explain the meaning and value of sources for an historical inquiry.

Identify and analyse problems of sources for investigating and understanding the past.

Analyse, interpret and synthesise evidence from different types of sources to develop reasoned claims.

#### **Historical interpretation**

Analyse the nature and extent of continuity and change over time.

Identify and prioritise varying causes to develop historical arguments about causation.

Form judgements about historical significance, recognising that significance may be attributed in different ways and for different purposes.

Analyse and account for different perspectives of individuals and groups in the past.

Analyse and evaluate contested interpretations of the past.

#### **Historical investigation and research**

Frame questions to guide historical inquiry and develop a coherent research plan.

Use evidence from a range of sources to inform research.

Acknowledge sources appropriately.

#### **Explanation and communication**

Develop texts, particularly historical accounts and arguments, supported by relevant evidence from sources.

Communicate historical understanding, using historical concepts and terms, in forms appropriate to purpose and audience.