



HTA Response to Draft History Extension Syllabus

General

The draft History Extension syllabus is generally very encouraging. While it proposes a number of significant refinements, it will result in minimal change to a very successful course that will remain dynamic and capable of refreshing itself over time. Some of the comments that follow are aimed at generating more discussion in areas where it will be critical to anticipate the potential impact of even minor changes, on teaching and assessment practice over the long term, and in all schools. This is especially important because of the challenge History Extension will always present to novice teachers and the equity concerns that flow from this.

Indicative Hours

The indicative hours for the three components of the course are unrealistic in allocating 24 hours to the Project. Even though experienced Extension teachers will have little trouble with this and it is noted that an integrated approach is expected and that these hours are a 'guide for programming', there seems to be an obvious risk that a misleading message will be given to novice teachers working directly from the syllabus. (p. 15)

Historiography

What is signified by changing the name of this component from 'What is history?' to 'Historiography'? The current question has served us well and it is not clear what benefit the change will bring.

While the key questions listed on page 15 seem fine, it is not immediately clear why they simply cannot be 'investigated' by students. The introduction of the words 'by applying significant historiographical ideas and methodologies, which have evolved over time' seems an unnecessary complication at this point and it is unclear what this 'application' should look like in practice. (p. 15)

The 'unpacking' of this component on pages 27-28 will be critical in introducing the course to beginning teachers and it may be worth close examination:

- The Content Focus, the first dot point in the Content outline and the first question under Key Questions seem to indicate an intention to push for more blending of what is now called the Historiography component and the Case Study. Confusingly, while the question about historical debates in the Case Study appears as a 5th Key Question on page 28, it does not appear as one of the 4 Key Questions when the Historiography component is introduced on page 15. A number of questions could be asked here. What is the intention behind the apparent integration on pages 27-28? What feedback or discussion is it based on? What is the anticipated outcome in terms of teaching, student achievement, assessment and manageability for beginning teachers?
- Can the detail under the Key Questions be more helpful to beginning teachers? While it is very important to maintain an open-ended approach to discussion in History Extension, it may be possible to offer a little more direction here without introducing inappropriate prescription.

Case Studies

Teachers should welcome the retention of currently popular Case Studies along with the introduction of some well-selected and potentially very interesting new ones. While there may be discussion about particular areas of debate identified for different Case Studies, the result is that all Case Studies appear to be more feasible and comparable than in the current course.

History Project

There has always been some tension between those who insist that the Project must have a strictly historiographical focus and those who are keen for students to have the opportunity to develop their own historical skills by carrying out an original investigation. In practice, with no external marking, there has been latitude for differing approaches to operate. In the current draft there is a clear intention to come down on one side and insist that the Project 'must focus on the fundamental historiographical concepts and issues of History Extension and should allow students to address some of the key questions' (pp. 16, 26, 38). We should ask questions about the level of discussion and evaluation this decision is based on. It deserves to be carefully thought about in terms of current practice and what is desirable and possible across all schools, for all students. Having sampled, evaluated and showcased Extension Projects since the inception of the course through its Extension Essay Prize, HTA may be in a good position to offer worthwhile input should there be opportunity for wider discussion.

The new dot points listed under the Process Log provide more guidance and should help teachers and students to make better use of this important element of the Project. (p. 17)

Abandoning the synopsis is a simplification that will probably be welcomed by most teachers. (p. 38)

While the advice given to students and teachers about the Project on page 39 is generally helpful, the following points require scrutiny:

- 'Finalise their focus ... no later than one month before the final deadline for submitting the project.' Does the timeline implied here reflect current best practice? Is it good advice for all students?
- 'Use a variety of inquiry and research methodologies at an early stage of their project, to allow them to choose those methodologies that are best suited to their particular topic.' Is this useful/practical advice for all teachers and students?

Assessment Requirements

The increased weighting given to 'knowledge and understanding' for internal assessment better reflects the time teachers and students need to devote to this component. At the same time, a 60% weighting given to the Project will maintain the significance of this component. Questions may be asked about the intention in specifying that one task 'may' be a formal written exam with a maximum weighting of 25%. Presumably this does not preclude another assessment task also being in exam format when teachers judge this to be appropriate, both as an assessment for/as/of learning and as preparation for the demands of the Extension HSC exam. (p. 21)

The HSC exam specifications appear to be proposing an exam that is very similar to the current one. This will probably be welcomed by most teachers. However, there might be more discussion around

the issue of similarity between the two questions and whether this poses a concern, particularly when there appears to be greater emphasis on integrating the different components of the course.

It is difficult to evaluate a proposed requirement that students '*may also* be required to draw on their History Project' in the exam. Why is this necessary and/or what exactly does it mean? Would it create unnecessary complications for assessment? Would it create another of those issues where there is uncertainty about syllabus interpretation? (p. 21)

For the moment there appears to be no allocation of assessment marks to the various components of the project. With the weighting reduced from 80% to 60% (40 to 30 marks) there is likely to be a range of views on how best to allocate fewer marks. There is the opportunity to add more weight to the research process by retaining the current mark of 10 and allocating 20 for the final essay. It is an area that will generate discussion and it is to be hoped that the marking guidelines that are produced will be based on careful consultation.