



The History Teachers' Association of New South Wales (HTANSW) welcomes the opportunity to contribute a response to the Interim Report of the NSW Curriculum Review.

As stated in the HTANSW's November 2018 initial submission to the Review, we are supportive of the goal outlined in the Review's Terms of Reference: 'to enhance the effectiveness of school education in NSW'. At the same time, it is again worth highlighting the context acknowledged by the Review's Terms of Reference: NSW already has a 'high performing' education system.

HTANSW's November 2018 submission (HTANSW 2018) remains relevant, particularly its discipline specific observations, and is included at the end of this response.

Responding to the Interim Report poses some challenges:

- While the proposed reform directions are wide-ranging, there is little detail about how they might be implemented. Any final recommendations will be filtered through prolonged political and bureaucratic processes. Envisaging a final outcome is very difficult.
- It is an awkward time of the year to consult with teachers. In November and December, most definitely for secondary teachers, we are very busy with the needs of current cohorts of students. Many teachers have had little time to engage with the Interim Report.
- The Interim Report offers very limited insight into how the proposed reform directions might impact upon the teaching and learning of well-established disciplines. This means that any response from a subject association must incorporate a degree of guesswork.

### General Response

A number of the Interim Report's reform directions will have broad support, particularly where they address the need to de-clutter the curriculum and offer more autonomy for teachers.

Other reform directions either relate to areas where our current history courses could serve as a model or address long-standing concerns. Promoting deep understanding is an example of the former, developing senior courses that integrate theory and application may be an example of the latter.

The bulk of the reform directions focus on developing practices and structures that will better meet the needs of individual learners. While the overall goal will have strong support, there will be a range of views about how practical some of the proposals in this area are. On the one hand, they appear to assume a precision around teaching and learning that is not always able to be reflected in practice. On the other hand, if implemented, they may give rise to a whole new area of curriculum administration and compliance that undermines efforts to de-clutter the curriculum and promote greater teacher autonomy. The Interim Report is wise to prompt discussion about how 'realistic' some of these reform directions are.

While there is little specific reference to history in the Interim Report, the work of Canadian history educator Peter Seixas is quoted. As in our 2018 submission, we also encourage the reviewers to familiarise themselves with the recent work of leading British history educator Christine Counsell, both for what she

has to say about history education and for her research-based insights into teaching and learning more generally.

The relevance of reform to pre-service teacher education is not highlighted in the Interim Report and does not figure in any of the reform directions. This is something that should be addressed in the final Report. We would also expect the final Report to deal in some detail with how implementation will affect current practitioners.

## **Response to Reform Directions**

### **1. Creating a less crowded curriculum**

This first reform direction will have very strong support from the majority of practitioners. The Review must result in a less crowded curriculum, restore a greater degree of teacher autonomy and, above all, ensure that any of its own reforms do not produce elaborate new compliance regimes. Two observations:

- Even though the suggestion that syllabus content might be reduced by '15 to 20 per cent' is only meant to be a discussion starter, it raises concern about the potential for generic solutions to be applied across the board. In terms of content to be covered, and how this is approached, there are major differences between syllabuses for different stages of schooling and different disciplines. We also cannot separate perceptions about 'content to be covered' from pedagogy, assessment and the needs of particular disciplines. In the case of history, for example, there needs to be an appropriate degree of content to come to grips with if students are to develop a range of abilities, such as selecting and prioritising, that support the critical thinking at the heart of history. An assessment task such as an essay then offers history students an open-ended question that requires them to use knowledge selectively to support their own understanding.
- Apart from syllabus content, the Interim Report mentions extra-curricular activities and non-specific 'compliance activities' as contributing to the crowded curriculum. What it does not highlight is the over-engineered nature of many syllabuses. Syllabus 'content' is only one part of an often complex document that also requires teachers to deal with skills, concepts, cross-curricular priorities and general capabilities etc. Notwithstanding the good intentions behind these multiple priorities, there is the danger that they atomise approaches to teaching/learning and contribute to a compliance culture that, at worst, documents syllabus compliance rather than actual teaching/learning. If this is a widespread problem, it should be something the Review is alert to. Importantly, the Review needs to be very alert to the potential for some of its own reform directions to generate similar non-productive compliance activity.

### **2. Promoting deep understanding**

This seems sensible. As acknowledged in the Interim Report (p. 105), it is what history syllabuses, pedagogy and assessment have been modelling for some time.

### **3. Building skills in applying knowledge**

Again, this seems sensible and, again, we would argue that it is already happening with history. At the very least, there is provision for it to happen, depending upon approaches to assessment and pedagogy. Whether or not establishing 'applying knowledge' as a 'learning priority' in every syllabus would be useful is open to question. Supporting teacher autonomy with attractive options for pedagogy and assessment may be more productive than establishing yet another priority. Another consideration here is

that the richness of learning experiences in any discipline will always be subject to the amount of classroom time allocated.

#### **4. A common entitlement**

We support the Review's position that 'there is some learning that should be both an entitlement and an expectation of every student'. We also support the current NSW arrangement whereby history is mandated as part of every student's learning entitlement in Years K - 10 and offered as a viable, and very popular, option when students are able to make their own choices in Years 11 - 12. Beyond this, we also note a major challenge when mandating areas of learning: the longer the mandatory list, the less time there is to allocate to any learning area, the more we move away from deep understanding.

#### **5. Creating a more flexible curriculum**

The creation of a more flexible curriculum is a worthwhile goal. However, with the limited detail available, it is very difficult to envisage how this reform direction might translate into practice. As with some of the other reform directions addressed below, there are implications for the precision of assessment and the provision for effective individualised learning that would need to be carefully explored before embarking on changes that may impose a great deal of work on teachers for limited learning benefit. The Interim Report's Consultation Workbook appears to be alert to these challenges when it invites exploration of how 'realistic' an alternative might be.

#### **6. Restructuring the curriculum**

This is an interesting proposal that is linked to others aimed at reforming the structure of the curriculum. Without moving away from age-based progression through school classes, it proposes to recognise and cater for the reality of students working at different 'attainment levels' in the one class. Anticipating the concerns of practitioners already struggling with the administration burden of 'differentiation', the Interim Report suggests that individual learning plans would not be 'a prerequisite of this approach' and that 'explicit, whole-class teaching would remain important'. While this is somewhat reassuring, it remains difficult to envisage how any new approach would work without some more radical rethinking of current school structures which would affect, if not how students are allocated to age-based classes, then how teachers are allocated to those classes.

#### **7. Setting high expectations**

This seems a reasonable reform direction, with the proviso that we set standards with the diverse range of students in mind. In regard to senior courses, for example, HTANSW is very supportive of the proposal contained in reform direction 11.

#### **8. Monitoring whether learning is on track**

Linked to thinking about creating more flexibility and measuring individual student attainment, this reform direction is similarly appealing in principle and difficult to envisage in practice. It appears to assume that we have, or will have, assessment and reporting procedures that are up to the task. The clear danger is that we will generate administrative procedures to support new structures without necessarily improving teaching and learning.

#### **9. Ensuring continuity of learning**

It is difficult to assess the significance of the issue being dealt with here. For history there would appear to be no barriers between Years K - 10, and senior Modern and Ancient History are 'un-streamed'.

However, there are challenges to catering to the needs of all students in senior history courses and this makes reform direction 11 appealing.

### **10. Assessing and communicating learning**

Effective reporting is critical to engaging students in the progress of their own learning and any attempt to improve reporting is to be welcomed. Providing students (and their parents/carers) with information about their own long term progress could be a significant improvement. However, it would be critical that the information is accurate and designed to meet the needs of students and parents/carers rather than those of the educational measurement experts who will undoubtedly have a hand in generating the jargon to be used. It may also be useful to explore whether abandoning grades, percentages or comparison with year level averages, either achieves greater accuracy or meets the needs of all students and parents/carers.

### **11. Creating a more integrated curriculum**

For some time now, HTANSW has been drawing attention to the need to cater for a greater diversity of students at senior level. For example, even though history is popular with many students and able to address many of the 'attributes' now being identified as important 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, the current senior courses are academically demanding and not able to meet the needs of all students. This can be a particular problem in regional schools with small cohorts, where senior history may not be viable. In 2014 HTANSW proposed the development of senior history courses that would include applied history modules (Kiem and Cameron, 'Our new senior courses – is there a vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?', *Teaching History*, December 2014). While it would take some imagination to get such an idea fully developed and implemented, we are encouraged by the goals of this reform direction and particularly support the concept of studying history for 'further learning, life and work'.

### **12. Recognising progress and entitlement**

The benefits to be achieved by this proposal need to be more clearly spelt out. What is concerning is some of the discussion around the proposal. There appears to be an assumption that the senior years are dominated by 'preparation for end-of school examinations' and that this automatically equates with 'less focus on how students' knowledge, skills and understandings develop during these years'. While the suggestion that maximising exam performance works against meaningful learning will have support in some quarters, it is hardly a balanced view of what goes on in the senior years. It certainly does little justice to the achievements of the many thousands of students who apply themselves to their senior studies each year. While the HSC and associated ATAR must be evaluated, there is some unease beyond the Review that a largely negative view of the current arrangements fails to capture the reality and is not a good foundation for reform.

### **13. Introducing a major project**

All senior history students currently complete a historical investigation for Modern and Ancient history and History Extension students are required to submit a major project, which is internally marked. For the past twenty years HTANSW has sponsored the History Extension Prize, which offers prizes to the best projects and showcases them in *Teaching History*. We are interested in the concept of a project and how this might be built on current practice.

### **14. Redefining learning areas**

Re-grouping disciplines or re-labelling learning areas is something that happens periodically and it is not always clear what the benefit is. The latest proposal appears somewhat ad-hoc. However, it may have

serious implications for the future if it contributes to 'replacing and consolidating some existing courses'. This is an area where we need much more clarity about long term intentions.

### **15. Reviewing ATAR**

This is an appropriate area for the Review to deal with. However, as noted within the Interim Report, the ATAR is something that is 'not widely understood'. It would be essential to bring balanced and well-informed views to any discussion about the ATAR and how it works within the current HSC framework. The Interim Report has tended to highlight only perceived shortcomings of the current system.

### **Final Recommendations**

HTANSW has three concluding recommendations:

1. We need to safeguard the integrity of history as a discipline. This is something HTANSW would be expected to say. Nevertheless, at a time when there is much discussion about the need to prepare students for life and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a strong case for suggesting that the study of the discipline of history may provide one of the best opportunities for equipping students with the foundational knowledge, adaptable skills and flexible outlook they will need for an uncertain future.
2. For a number of good reasons, including the fact that they will be the ones shouldering the burden of implementation, the Review must inspire teachers. Many classroom teachers look on the prospect of major change with caution. The challenge is there for those promoting change to inspire teachers with a vision that is both exciting and practical. Above all, any change needs to create the conditions in which passionate experts can flourish and, in turn, go on to inspire their students.
3. Teachers must be meaningfully involved with every stage of the process. This includes when recommendations are being developed and when decisions are being made about how those recommendations will be implemented. As the one group most critical to ensuring the long-term success of the Review, teachers and their professional associations deserve to be fully engaged from the beginning.



The History Teachers' Association of New South Wales (HTANSW) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the current Review of NSW curriculum. HTANSW is supportive of the aim of the Review, as stated in the Terms of Reference, 'to enhance the effectiveness of school education in NSW'. At the same time, we are encouraged by an acknowledgement of the context in which the Review will be conducted: NSW already has a 'high performing' education system.

This submission is organised under four headings:

1. History
2. Broader Curriculum Issues
3. Review Processes & Recommendations
4. HTANSW Member Survey Results

### 1. History

The area that is of particular interest to HTANSW concerns the identification of 'essential knowledge, skills and attributes' and 'how skills and attributes are acquired through knowledge based disciplines'. We submit that history has a special place in the curriculum both because of the range of knowledge, skills and attributes inherent in the study of the discipline and because of history's role in helping to develop more generic skills and attributes. We offer the following observations:

- As illustrated in the following point, the discipline of history is very healthy in NSW and this good health has deep roots. For many decades now, we have maintained the integrity of the discipline against the trend towards various social science formulations (HASS/HSIE/SOSE). Particularly at a time when trends in other jurisdictions are seeing a turning back to distinct history courses, we see an absolute priority in maintaining the integrity of the discipline of history.
- The mandatory 7 - 10 syllabus, implemented in 2013, has enjoyed widespread support from teachers, as noted in responses to our Professional Learning program and informal surveys. When students have completed their mandatory K - 10 courses, 20 - 30% of the Stage 6 candidature each year chooses to continue studying history by selecting Ancient History or Modern History. Given the large number of courses students are free to choose from in the final years of school and the deserved reputation of the history courses for academic rigour, the large candidatures for both Ancient (9174 in 2017) and Modern History (11,482 in 2017) suggest that students see great value in the study of history. Up to 2000 students each year also go on to study History Extension in Year 12. This is a unique course, highly regarded by academics and envied by history teachers wherever there is an awareness of it. It engages and extends our most able students.
- History provides students with essential foundational knowledge about themselves, their local area, Australia and the global community they are part of. It equips them for active citizenship and enables informed participation in national discussion. As Professor Stuart Macintyre wrote in the History Shaping Paper for the Australian Curriculum:  
We fail students – both those who have arrived recently and those with many earlier generations in this country – if we deny them a familiarity with the national story, so that they can appreciate its values and binding traditions. We fail them also if we do not foster the skills of historical understanding that equip them, by the end of their studies, to take an active part in the debates over the legacy of the past, to understand and make use of new sources of information, to distinguish the unimportant from the important, to find truth and meaning in history and contribute to democratic discussion of national issues.

- The basic skills of historical inquiry and analysis are the same skills that are most highly valued as essential transferable skills for the workplace or further study. For example, we have heard a great deal about ‘critical thinking’ recently and yet it has always been a foundational skill in history. It could be argued that history, with its combination of engaging narrative and analytical writing, offers the best vehicle in the curriculum for developing functional literacy. Moreover, the range of pedagogies that support the teaching of history means that students engage in a wide variety of learning activities that help to develop skills associated with everything from creativity to collaboration to effective public speaking. Many of these activities lend themselves to cross-curricular work.
- History is particularly well-placed to offer students an Indigenous perspective. In providing historical context and working from evidence, history allows students to develop the sort of understanding in depth that is essential to an effective appreciation of Indigenous perspective. Reconciliation is an important national goal that can only be built on historical knowledge.
- In addition to its traditional disciplinary role concerned with inquiry into our past, history is also flexible, able to offer many links to other subjects and remarkably responsive to new developments. There are numerous examples of this: Ancient History includes a study of the latest scientific methods affecting archaeological work and examines ethical issues associated with heritage, conservation and the display of ancient remains; the Stage 5 Australian history course is regularly updated, especially in the areas of social and cultural history; the way in which Indigenous history has been incorporated and developed over recent decades highlights both history’s responsiveness to broader historiographical developments and its important contribution to leading change; a number of new topics in the current Modern History course offer students the opportunity to deal with contemporary history and History Extension is simply a wonderful example of a dynamic course that is acutely attuned to current developments. As in the wider world of historical inquiry and dissemination, our school history courses make use of a range of modern technologies to support teaching, research and student presentation – history teachers and students, like practicing historians, have absolutely embraced the digital revolution.
- For ‘evidence of how skills and attributes are acquired through knowledge based disciplines’, we recommend the reviewers access the most recent scholarship of history educators. For example Christine Counsell, who will be presenting at HTANSW’s Teaching History Symposium in April 2019, has done important recent work on the significant role of historical knowledge as both an ‘enabler’ and key ‘transferable’.

## **2. Broader Curriculum Issues**

HTANSW is supportive of the Review examining broader issues, including school organisation, assessment, student pathways, pedagogical practices and teacher workload. A wide-ranging review of long-standing educational priorities, structures and practices is overdue. While we look forward to the development of imaginative recommendations, HTANSW offers a number of observations:

- The curriculum is overcrowded. This affects everything from teacher workload to the ability of students to pursue their learning in depth. Any change must result in a less crowded and more flexible curriculum.
- There needs to be a balance between prescription and supporting teacher autonomy. We may have reached a point where teacher autonomy needs to be restored. We certainly do not need to go further down the track towards greater prescription and a compliance culture.

- We need more discussion and imagination when it comes to catering for the diverse student population. Such discussion would need to deal with not just subject offerings but a range of issues including school structures and assessment.
- In the senior years NSW has a centralised assessment regime that, despite internal assessment, still focuses on a Wyndham era external HSC. As we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century there will be increasing pressure to review this approach. Any such review needs to be balanced and well-informed about the merits of the current system, which continues to meet the needs of perhaps the majority of students.
- Any significant change to assessment must occur alongside curriculum revision and approaches to assessment must be informed by the priorities of the discipline being assessed rather than be imposed as generic assessment.
- It is encouraging to see ‘teacher preparation’ mentioned in the Review’s Terms of Reference. Any new approaches to curriculum design or educational processes will have implications for teacher preparation courses. This Review may also be an opportunity to examine what universities are delivering in their teacher preparation courses and assess how responsive these courses are to the needs of schools and the profession.
- It is also encouraging to see ‘professional learning’ mentioned in the Review’s Terms of Reference. Since its inception, HTANSW has provided opportunities for professional learning on a collegial model. In recent decades we have also offered endorsed professional learning courses aligned to the Australian Professional Standards for teachers. With these standards in place for some time and professional learning now mandatory for all teachers in NSW, it may be an opportune time to review how it all works. As a major professional learning provider HTANSW has a keen interest in this area.

### **3. Review Processes & Recommendations**

HTANSW brings a historical perspective to the role of reviews in NSW education. The association was established in 1954 and much of its early work was devoted to responding to the late 1950s Wyndham Inquiry and the consequences of its recommendations being implemented over the following decade. The Wyndham Scheme introduced far-reaching changes that, arguably, still have a very strong influence over NSW education.

The current Review has the potential to radically reshape school education for the first time since the 1960s. However, there have been other reviews and much syllabus revision and curriculum development in the more than half century between Wyndham and now. If there are problems with the current NSW education system – the cluttered curriculum identified by many is a good example – then there is a sense in which these problems are the legacy of all earlier reviews, syllabus revision and curriculum development. It is worth reflecting on this as we embark on yet another review. How will this review’s processes, and the way in which its recommendations are dealt with, improve upon past practice and avoid embedding long-term problems that will need to be addressed by future reviews?

Many teachers are justifiably cynical about review processes that lack transparency, appear to pay lip-service to genuine consultation and result in recommendations that add layers of compliance rather than contribute to any significant improvement in education. There is particular concern about worthwhile recommendations being distorted by the need to serve multiple political agendas or as a result of implementation by heavy-handed bureaucracy.

To help safeguard against such outcomes, there needs to be a strong practitioner voice at every stage of the process. Grassroots experience and insight must be able to balance top-down expertise and broader

imperatives. This goes well beyond merely allowing teachers to ‘have a say’ at the start of the Review or when draft recommendations are published.

#### 4. HTANSW Member Survey Results

10-15% of the membership responded to the 2018 survey.

##### A. Response to Questions

Q1. The study of history assists in developing critical thinking skills.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
	90.51%	8.76%	0.00%	0.00%	0.73%	
	124	12	0	0	1	137

Q2 The study of history assists in developing literacy.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
	86.13%	12.41%	1.46%	0.00%	0.00%	
	118	17	2	0	0	137

Q3 The study of history develops creativity.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
	41.91%	46.32%	9.56%	2.21%	0.00%	
	57	63	13	3	0	136

Q4 The study of history assists in developing numeracy.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
	21.01%	48.55%	26.09%	3.62%	0.72%	
	29	67	36	5	1	138

Q5 The study of history engages students in learning at school and beyond.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
	72.79%	24.26%	2.94%	0.00%	0.00%	
	99	33	4	0	0	136

Q6 The study of history is essential in developing informed citizens.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
	94.93%	5.07%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	
	131	7	0	0	0	138

Q7 It is important to retain history as a distinct discipline.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
	91.97%	7.30%	0.00%	0.73%	0.00%	
	126	10	0	1	0	137

Q8 I am supportive of the broad scope of the current curriculum review.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
	17.65%	40.44%	32.35%	7.35%	2.21%	
	24	55	44	10	3	136

Q9 I am confident that there will be transparency in the decision-making process.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
	8.03%	8.03%	29.93%	35.04%	18.98%	
	11	11	41	48	26	137

Q10 Subject associations such as the HTANSW should be participants in the decision-making process.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
	87.68%	10.14%	2.17%	0.00%	0.00%	
	121	14	3	0	0	138

## B. Selected Extracts from Survey Responses

“The main issues (as someone within a school who deals extensively with compliance and staff development) that face teachers currently are: workload and curriculum change that is not justified.”

“Any focus on any type of skills, and it doesn’t matter what you call them – soft skills, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills etc., is meaningless without the basis of deep domain knowledge. It is impossible to be creative or imaginative with any authenticity without deep knowledge of any subject.”

“In the current information age it is vital that people develop their abilities to be critical of the information they receive each day through social media, news etc. History is vital for developing an ability to question a source and to ‘test’ its reliability. History delivers this skill in a way no other subject presently does.”

“Research skills are developed through historical inquiry. Collaborative group work ... contributes to life-long learning and associated skills.”

“The ‘transferable’ skills learned from studying History at school have been shown to benefit university students studying Medicine, Science, Law and Mathematics.”

“Our History curriculum, as it stands, is a rich, diverse and excellent curriculum. It is essential for developing critical thinking skills and its current diversity is so important in creating dedicated, life-long learners.”

“As a history teacher who teaches special education, I know that learning history builds skills for life. Understanding the past allows my students, regardless of their complex needs, to learn how to be active citizens. The students love the narratives they are taught as long as they are taught with passion and relevant resources to augment learning.”

“History also enables students to consider their identity as Australians and in the wider world. They consider how identity has been shaped by our particular history. This allows informed engagement with an increasingly globalised community.”

“I think a crowded curriculum can make it hard to extend students in history or find time to make links across subjects. Therefore, I would like to see more choice and less content and the inclusion of some units that are written as cross- curricular units. I know there is scope to do this in the current curriculum but it is rarely a priority and school timetables can make it hard.”

“History provides the foundational narrative from which children can build their understanding, and this needs to be done early in a child’s schooling process.”

“It is worrying that there is a push towards a less discipline specific focus as students need deep knowledge upon which to pin the development of any skills and attributes. The idea that they can simply ‘google’ the knowledge is absurd and has been clearly shown to be so by leading researchers such as Sam Wineberg, Professor of Education and History at Stanford University. History is absolutely essential for students if they are to develop the knowledge and skills to be ‘information literate’.”