



HTANSW Statement on NESA's Draft HSC Examination Specifications Consultation May 2017

HTANSW is disappointed with the consultation NESA is currently conducting on exam specifications for the new senior history courses. With very limited information on which to base a decision, the survey is essentially asking us to vote on the length of Modern and Ancient History examinations.

Three positive aspects of the draft specifications can be acknowledged. Multiple choice questions have been eliminated, extended responses have been retained and there is no option for permanently excluding one section of the 2 unit courses from external examination. These outcomes are likely to be welcomed by the majority of history teachers.

Nevertheless, for both **Modern History** and **Ancient History** we have little idea of the how Core questions will be approached and there has been no explanation of what Survey and Focus of Study will mean when it comes to examinations. For Modern History there has been no explanation of the purpose of the Key Features, which could be used to help address concerns about topic comparability, but only if they have a clearly specified role in relation to the examination.

A decision that already appears to have been made without any consultation or explanation is that students will no longer have a choice of questions in any of the topics. This is a very significant change in a history examination. Especially when viewed in the context of Stronger HSC rhetoric about 'greater depth' and 'reducing predictability', there must be serious concern about how this measure will affect less academically able students. HTA's disappointment that genuine student diversity was not addressed in the syllabus development process is now compounded by real fears that the 2 unit examinations may be put beyond the reach of less able students.

NESA's own 'Principles for Written Examinations' (Principle 13) acknowledge, specifically in relation to history, that examinations 'will allow students a choice of questions on a topic or area of content when the nature of the subject is such that a single question on the topic may be restrictive for students'. NESA also acknowledges the need for questions to be 'appropriate and relevant to the full range of students so that every student can demonstrate achievement and experience success'. At the very least, there needs to be much more transparency and discussion around how these principles have been applied.

For **History Extension** the survey is simply a matter of endorsing a single option. This is not consultation. It ignores a range of views about the Extension examination and significant equity issues affecting beginning teachers and isolated Extension students.

While the release of sample examination questions may offer a little more clarity, we have not been given a date for this and it is not clear how they will reveal the thinking behind assessment or address the full range of concerns outlined above.

In the meantime, we encourage colleagues to complete the surveys by offering extensive comment if they feel that information is inadequate or if they have their own concerns with either the process or the proposals.

Consultation will run until 12 June 2017. NESA's survey can be found on its website:
www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au