

An Overview of History Education in Australia (2026)

History Teachers' Association of NSW (HTANSW)

With the support of the Australian Historical Association





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Foreword

Anne Gripton (President, History Teachers' Association of NSW)

It is a privilege to introduce this important overview of History education across Australia. As History teachers, we know that our subject sits at the heart of civic understanding, cultural literacy and critical thinking. This research offers clear and timely mapping of where History stands today; its strengths, its challenges and its evolving role in shaping engaged citizens.

Two decades ago, the landmark Taylor and Clark report (2006) provided a snapshot of a landscape defined by the History Wars. Today, while some of those ideological contests endure, they are joined by a new set of formidable challenges: a systemic teacher crisis, the rapid ascent of generative AI, as well as the study of the humanities being under fire.

This overview offers a vital 'story of change and continuity'. It documents the significant shift toward national cohesion following the implementation of the Australian Curriculum, while highlighting the persistent diversity in senior secondary assessment across our states and territories. Most importantly, it amplifies the voices of practitioners who, despite being time-poor, continue to advocate for the 'value and joy of History'.

And yet, this research also affirms what our community has long understood – that History endures because it matters. Students remain captivated by stories of the past, teachers remain committed to fostering historical thinking, and our collective efforts continue to strengthen the discipline.

As President of HTANSW, I recommend this overview to educators, policymakers and researchers alike. It is both a valuable resource and a reminder of the vital work undertaken daily in History classrooms across Australia.

Professor Michelle Arrow (President, Australian Historical Association 2024-26)

The Australian Historical Association is very proud to support this discussion paper on History education in Australian schools, produced by the History Teachers' Association of New South Wales. It follows the report by Tony Taylor and Anna Clark created for the 2006 Australian History Summit, convened by then-Prime Minister John Howard. Together, these two snapshots enable us to track longitudinal patterns and trends in History education over two decades, and to trace the uneven impact of the Australian National curriculum in History, which was rolled out in the 2010s.

In 2006, John Howard's pointed intervention into the teaching of history in schools was deeply ideological, and the process of developing and implementing the curriculum was intensely politicised. In hindsight, this was very useful for History, because it moved the discipline out of the undifferentiated HSIE space and gave it a more distinctive disciplinary identity in the Australian Curriculum, especially with the new emphasis on historical literacy and the disciplinary concepts and skills to be infused with knowledge and content. It is heartening to see that, overall, History enrolments in schools have remained steady, although school History still faces some staffing challenges. This overview also makes it clear that student experiences of History still differ considerably between states – not a negative in and of itself. Secondary school History has not only survived the History Wars, it has, in important respects, thrived.

The future of History in Australia depends on dynamic and rigorous programs in Australian schools, taught by dedicated History teachers with strong content knowledge and disciplinary expertise. In universities, the picture is grim: research commissioned by the Australian Historical Association (AHA) found that between 2016 and 2022, university History programs lost almost a quarter of their student load. The kind of data in this discussion paper can help teachers and academics work together to strengthen History in schools and universities, to ensure a healthy shared future.

This paper provides a crucial snapshot of History in Australian schools today that will inspire further research. For example, we need to know more about the nexus between school, university and back again, as many university students (who have studied History in schools) enter university programs to train as History teachers. How do we balance the familiar and the unknown in university History classes? It should also help generate further research about student experiences of History in schools and their views on the benefits of studying history. In an era of mis- and disinformation and social polarisation, it is more important than ever to ensure that young people have opportunities to study history.

The HTANSW is to be congratulated for this important piece of work: those of us who teach History in schools and universities can build on its findings and work together to ensure that a dynamic history education continues to be available to all students, regardless of postcode or school sector.

Cathy Baron (President, History Teachers' Association of Australia)

There is an old saying that 'to know your past is to understand your future', however, it is much more than this. We all know it is important to study History. It enables our children to create a sense of belonging and connection with their community, it builds empathy and understanding and it makes them less vulnerable in our complex modern world. The more students who study History, the greater our community builds an understanding of our similarities and our diversity and differences, making our nation stronger.

This study, undertaken by the History Teachers' Association of New South Wales (HTANSW), gives us an important snapshot of History education in Australia in the mid-2020s, providing current data to inform future decisions and identify areas of future growth. The History Teachers' Association of Australia (HTAA) Board is grateful for all the hard work undertaken by HTANSW in producing this overview.

We have amazing History teachers across Australia making a difference every day, teaching a subject that is so important for creating the Australia we want. They already do a wonderful job, and this study provides direction for how we can better support that work. The study demonstrates the ways the states and territories are both similar and unique in the delivery of our great subject. By understanding this diversity, we can build a better, stronger and more rigorous system that improves outcomes for our precious children across Australia, regardless of their state, education system or ICSEA.

Acknowledgments

The History Teachers' Association of New South Wales would like to acknowledge the contribution of many people in the creation of this overview. First, Professor Michelle Arrow and the Australian Historical Association for their generous financial contribution to the completion of this work. Thank you to Dr Hannah Forsyth for her invaluable work in helping to compile research throughout 2025 and 2026. Without this financial and practical support, this valuable work would never have been completed.

Also, early drafts of this overview were circulated to many teachers, historians and researchers around Australia. Their suggestions were crucial in ensuring that the final summary presented here reflects, as closely as is possible in a summary document, the state of History education across the various states in Australia in the mid-2020s. Specifically, thanks to Professor Anna Clark (UTS), Dr Alison Bedford (USQ), Dr Kerri Garrard (Deakin), Dr Rebecca Cairns (Deakin), Professor Heather Sharp (Newcastle University), Liz McGinnis, Dr Denis Mootz, David Boon, Alison Corliss, Dr Louise Zarmati, Becky Gill, Nick Ewbank, Adam Dicks, Deb Hull, Tully MacPherson and Crystal Wieringa.

Finally, HTANSW would like to thank all the teachers who responded to the survey that has informed part of this overview. The work of teachers is ultimately the most crucial in ensuring that History remains a strong and vibrant part of the education landscape in Australia.

Introduction

This document provides a broad overview of the state of History education in Australian secondary schools, with a primary focus on the period 2006–2026.

The overview is inspired by 'An Overview of the Teaching and Learning of Australian History in Schools' produced by Tony Taylor and Anna Clark in 2006 for the National History Summit held in Canberra in August of that year. Taylor and Clark's report provided a snapshot of the place of Australian history in Australian schools, produced in the context of specific public interest in the teaching of Australian history. This interest was generated by the 2006 Australia Day address of then Prime Minister John Howard, when he called for a 'root and branch renewal' of the teaching of Australian history. It offered a broad description of some of the key issues and challenges the subject faced at the time, and presented a succinct insight into the similarities and differences in the way the Australian states and territories approached History as a school subject.

This current overview is offered in a similar spirit, though the context has changed considerably over the past twenty years. The Taylor and Clark report was written at the tail end of the Howard-era Culture and History Wars. History was in the spotlight then and was widely acknowledged to be central to contemporary politics and democratic citizenship. This recognition persists today. At the time, this was extraordinarily disruptive to History, though it has perhaps been overshadowed by the types of challenges the discipline now faces. A combination of a teacher crisis in schools and a crisis in university History departments is now set against significant global political challenges, including open conflict, economic stress and the rise of authoritarian and populist regimes. In this context, History, particularly in the university sector, is beleaguered, but remains as important as ever.

In this overview then, we take a wider perspective beyond the teaching of Australian history, to encompass the subject as a whole. We provide a brief and accessible introduction to the History education landscape in Australian schools by comparing primary, secondary (7–10) and senior secondary (11–12) History across Australia.¹

It is important to note from the outset that the insights presented in this overview are primarily designed to be descriptive rather than analytical or evaluative. The key emphasis is on providing a general record of the state of History education in Australia after a decade of implementation of the Australian Curriculum. The central question shaping this document is: what has (and has not) changed in History education in Australia since 2006?

The overview aims to be practical in four key ways.

First, this overview aims to help consolidate a stronger collective understanding of how the various Australian states and territories frame History education in the mid-2020s. The comparisons and contrasts developed throughout the document highlight the common and unique elements of History as a school subject across the nation. This is particularly useful for early career teachers, those moving between states and those in teacher education programs. It is often difficult for teachers, academics, journalists and policymakers to access succinct insights into how History education is similar and different across various jurisdictions, which can make public discussions about the subject complicated. By providing a brief overview of the History curriculum landscape in Australia as it currently stands, this document hopes to support better conversations about the direction of the subject in the twenty-first century.

Second, this overview should contribute to continued efforts to advocate for quality History education in Australia. By offering a snapshot of the History education landscape in Australia, the document should be helpful for teachers, professional History teachers' associations and university academics, who are keen to promote the value and joy of History. The overview should offer them some common language about the subject's current place in schools and help further discussions about where major efforts for advocacy might be placed.

Third, the content of this document is designed to stimulate new avenues of deeper, more analytical research. This could, for example, include more complex state and territory comparisons, robust curriculum histories of different jurisdictions, or more complex questions about the reasons for changing senior History enrolments in many parts of the country. Although Australia already benefits from some excellent research into History education, the hope is that this report can provide additional ideas for future analysis of the History curriculum and related issues.

¹ The report specifically focuses on curriculum material explicitly addressing History-specific content. While we recognise that there are other subjects in which students engage with important historical material, such as Aboriginal Studies, Sociology, English literature and Studies in Religion, it is simply impractical to trace all of these threads across all Australian states and territories.

Finally, the structure and content of the report are designed to facilitate future longitudinal analysis that might provide further insights into the evolution of History in Australian schools. It is anticipated, for example, that in five to ten years' time this exercise could be completed again, asking further questions about what has (and has not) changed in History education in Australia. If this is presented in a similarly structured report, it may provide important longitudinal insights that support future advocacy.

Overall, this document presents a story of change and continuity in History education in Australia between 2006 and 2026. Perhaps the most important change since 2006 has been the release of the Australian Curriculum from 2010, which has reshaped the education landscape in Australia in important ways, including the place of History in many states and territories. In addition, it is deeply concerning to see evidence of continued cuts to academic History in Australian universities, which have played a crucial role in training many generations of dedicated and professional school History teachers.² Responses from a nation-wide teacher survey also reflect the fact that new challenges have emerged, including new forms of technology such as Artificial Intelligence (AI).

There are, however, also some clear continuities between 2006 and 2026. Even with the implementation of the Australian Curriculum, there is still some diversity in the shape of the History curriculum in Australia, particularly at the senior level (Years 11 and 12). These differences reflect natural and, in many ways, healthy variation in the curriculum, given that education in Australia is fundamentally shaped by the overarching federal structure of government. In addition, concerns about declining senior History enrolments in Australia continue to shape many public discussions about History education in the 2020s, just as they did twenty years ago.³ There are also continuing politicised debates about the nature and role of History in schools that are unlikely to disappear any time soon.

Ultimately, we hope that this overview will make a modest contribution to a long history of commentary, analysis and advocacy for History as a school subject in Australia.

Structurally, this overview adapts a similar approach to Taylor and Clark's 2006 work. It begins by summarising the place of History in the current Australian Curriculum and then provides a similar overview for each Australian state and territory in alphabetical order. Not only should this make the document relatively easy to follow, it should also make comparisons with the observations developed in Taylor and Clark's 2006 work easier.

Table 1: School History (K–10) in Australia at a Glance (AC in the table stands for 'Australian Curriculum')⁴

Region	Primary	7-10 Content	7-10 Hours	Civics
Australia	AC	AC	No requirement	Separate
ACT	AC	AC	No requirement	AC
NSW	State	State	200 Hours	Integrated
NT	AC	AC	No requirement	AC
QLD	AC	AC	Suggested	AC
SA	AC	AC	No requirement	AC
Tasmania	AC	AC	No requirement	AC
Victoria	State	State	Suggested	Integrated
WA	State	State	Suggested	Separate

² Martin Crotty, 'Addressing the decline of academic history in Australia', *History Australia*, Vol. 21, 2024, pp. 522-525

³ Sarah Duggan, "Fighting against the drift": VIC history teachers battle to save their subject', EducationHQ, 14 July 2023: <https://educationhq.com/news/fighting-against-the-drift-vic-history-teachers-battle-to-save-their-subject-151097/> (accessed 20 May 2026); Natassia Chrysanthos, 'The HSC subjects with plummeting enrolments revealed', The Sydney Morning Herald, 4 October 2020: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/the-hsc-subjects-with-plummeting-enrolments-revealed-20200930-p560m1.html> (accessed 20 May 2026).

⁴ There is variation in some jurisdictions. For example, in Victoria, some independent and Catholic schools opt to follow the Australian curriculum.

Australian Curriculum (Version 9.0)

Background

Although questions about an Australian curriculum were periodically discussed in the second half of the twentieth century, the key period of the development of the Australian Curriculum was 2006–2012.

In January 2006, the Coalition Prime Minister John Howard called for a ‘root and branch renewal’ of the teaching of Australian History, which led to a National History Summit in August of the same year.⁵ This stimulated major questions about the teaching of History in Australian schools and produced the *Guide to the Teaching of Australian History in Years 9 and 10* (2007).⁶ Plans to implement these approaches to Australian History in Years 9 and 10 across Australia were met with some resistance by states and territories.⁷ These developments towards a national approach to the teaching of History were then more substantially interrupted when Howard lost the federal election in November 2007 and the Coalition was replaced by an Australian Labor Party government under the leadership of Kevin Rudd.

In 2007, while in opposition, the Labor Party had already committed to the creation of an Australian Curriculum as part of a broad ‘education revolution’.⁸ In 2008, the states and territories then formally agreed to develop an Australian Curriculum. In December that year, the Federal government established the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), which would ultimately manage the curriculum.⁹ Following a lengthy process of drafting, consultation and re-drafting, the Australian Curriculum took shape primarily between 2010 and 2012.

In 2015, education ministers agreed that the Australian Curriculum should be reviewed every six years, with the first round scheduled for 2020–21. The most recent curriculum is Version 9.0, which was implemented in 2022, under Scott Morrison’s Coalition government after the first period of review. In 2025, education ministers agreed that the review cycle for the Australian Curriculum would be extended to ten years. At the time of publication, the next major round of review is scheduled for 2032.¹⁰

Importantly, the Australian Curriculum is not imposed on the states and territories – constitutionally, education remains a direct responsibility of the states. Instead, ACARA: ‘has the remit to develop the curriculum and the states the responsibility to implement it’.¹¹ In practice, the states ‘adopt and adapt’ the Australian Curriculum to varying degrees, so there remains some variation in what students learn between jurisdictions.

No formal testing for the Australian Curriculum History content is currently conducted. Some sample testing is done with ‘Civics and Citizenship’ in the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship. The most recent report for this was released in 2024.¹²

⁵ Anna Clark, ‘The Challenge of Teaching Australian History’ in Butcher, J (ed) *Australia Under Construction: Nation-Building Past, Present and Future*, ANU Press, 2008, pp. 33–37

⁶ Department of Education, Science and Training, *Guide to the Teaching of Australian History in Years 9 and 10*, 2007

⁷ ‘States Reject PM’s History Plan’, *ABC News*, 11 October 2007: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2007-10-11/states-reject-pms-history-plan/695556> (accessed 22 April 2026)

⁸ ‘Labor commits to national curriculum’, 28 February 2007: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2007-02-28/labor-commits-to-national-curriculum/2205492> (accessed 17 January 2026)

⁹ ‘Development of the Australian Curriculum’: <https://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/history-of-the-australian-curriculum/development-of-australian-curriculum> (accessed 17 January 2026)

¹⁰ <https://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/curriculum-review> (accessed June 2026)

¹¹ Emily Ross, ‘Why do Australian states need a national curriculum?’, *The Conversation*, 19 November 2021: <https://theconversation.com/why-do-australian-states-need-a-national-curriculum-and-do-teachers-even-use-it-171745> (accessed 18 January 2026)

¹² See ‘National Assessment Program Civics and Citizenship 2024: Public Report’: <https://research.acer.edu.au/civics/80/> (accessed 18 January 2026)

Table 2: Brief timeline of the Australian Curriculum (2006–2022) ¹³

2006	In January, Prime Minister John Howard (Coalition) called for a ‘root and branch renewal’ of the teaching of Australian History. The Australian History Summit was convened by Prime Minister John Howard (August).
2007	<i>Guide to the Teaching of Australian History in Years 9-10</i> was published by the Department of Science, Education and Training (Canberra). The Labor Party (in opposition) committed to the creation of an Australian curriculum. Federal Coalition government was replaced by Labor in the November election.
2008	Australian governments agreed to develop a national curriculum. ACARA was established as a statutory body by an Act of Federal Parliament (December).
2010–2012	Versions 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0 of the Australian Curriculum (including History) were released.
2012	Senior secondary (Years 11-12) curriculum for History, English, Mathematics and Science was endorsed by education ministers (Version 4.0).
2015	All Australian Curriculum learning areas were revised to produce Version 8.0. Education ministers agreed that the Australian Curriculum will be reviewed every six years with the first review commencing in 2020-21.
2017–2018	Version 8.4 of the Australian Curriculum was endorsed in December 2017 and minor editorial changes were added in January 2018.
2020	Terms of Reference for the 2020-21 Australian Curriculum review were agreed upon, beginning a new cycle of review agreed upon in 2015. This included an open public consultation in April-July 2021.
2022	2020-21 cycle of the review of the Australian Curriculum ended, with the publication of Version 9.0 approved in April.

The place of History in the Australian Curriculum

The Australian Curriculum includes three dimensions:

- Eight learning areas
- Seven general capabilities
- Three cross-curriculum priorities

Table 3: Summary of the three dimensions of the Australian Curriculum

Eight learning areas	1. English 2. Mathematics 3. Science 4. Humanities and the Social Sciences (HASS) – History is one component of the HASS learning area 5. The Arts 6. Technologies 7. Health and Physical Education 8. Languages
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¹³ Adapted from: <https://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum> (accessed 1 October 2025)

Seven general capabilities	1. Critical and Creative Thinking 2. Digital Literacy 3. Ethical Understanding 4. Intercultural Understanding 5. Literacy 6. Numeracy 7. Personal and Social capability.
Three cross-curriculum priorities	1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures 2. Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia 3. Sustainability.

The Australian Curriculum embeds History throughout the HASS curriculum in primary school years and establishes History as a stand-alone subject (still within the HASS area) for Years 7–10. The Australian Curriculum stipulates that all students must study History from Years 7–10 as part of HASS, but: 'In Years 9–10, students' access to Geography, Civics and Citizenship, and Economics and Business will be determined by school authorities or individual schools'.¹⁴ Given that school History was a key catalyst for the creation of an Australian Curriculum during John Howard's prime ministership, it is perhaps unsurprising that History retains a distinct place in the Australian Curriculum.

Senior (11–12) History components of the Australian curriculum were also endorsed in December 2012 offering two streams: Ancient History and Modern History.

K-10 History content in the Australian Curriculum

Primary School: Foundation - Year 6

Table 4: History content in the Australian Curriculum for F–6

Content	In F–6, students engage with a variety of History content as part of the HASS learning area. In the earliest years this includes family and personal history and local and community history. In the later Years (4–6), it then moves on to exploring aspects of Australian history including colonisation, the role of significant individuals and groups, Federation (including the constitution and citizenship) and migration.
Skills	While studying this content, F–6 students are also required to engage with various skills including asking questions, interpreting data and sources, exploring perspectives and communication.

Secondary School: Years 7–10

In Version 9.0 of the Australian Curriculum History material, the subject is divided into two main strands: knowledge and understanding and skills. In this latest version of the curriculum, historical skills include:¹⁵

- Questioning and researching
- Using historical sources
- Historical perspectives and interpretations
- Communicating

Secondary History in the Australian Curriculum for Years 7–10 then follows a broadly chronological structure from the ancient world to modern Australia (see Table 5).

¹⁴ ACARA, 'Humanities and Social Sciences Version 9.0: About the Learning Area', 2022, p. 3

¹⁵ ACARA, 'Humanities and Social Sciences Version 9.0: About the Learning Area', 2022, p. 5

Table 5: History content in the Australian Curriculum for Secondary (7–10)

Year 7	Year 7 History focuses on ancient history, including Australia's deep time past. Students learn about a range of methods and techniques used to study the ancient past and some theories and historical interpretations. All students are expected to study Australian First Nations history, including social and cultural organisations, responses to environmental change and technological achievements. Studies of the ancient world can include Egypt, Greece, Rome or China.
Year 8	Year 8 History turns to medieval, renaissance and early modern history with an emphasis on the significance of each period and place. Students focus on cause and effect, culture, religion and society, and study significant individuals, groups or institutions. The curriculum includes medieval, renaissance or early modern Europe, empires and expansions and the Asia-Pacific world.
Year 9	Year 9 begins to focus on the modern world, especially Australia. The Year 9 topics are: • Making and transforming the Australian nation (1750–1914) • First World War (1914–1918) • The Industrial Revolution and the movement of peoples (1750–1900) • Asia and the World (1750–1914)
Year 10	Year 10 topics: • World War II • Building modern Australia • The globalising world

Senior History in the Australian Curriculum (Year 11–12) – Version 8.4

Senior History in the Australian Curriculum includes options for students to select Ancient History and/or Modern History. At present (unlike at the K–10 level), no state or territory currently implements the Senior History material from the Australian Curriculum directly for Years 11–12.

Ancient History (Year 11–12)

The Australian Curriculum content for Ancient History covers the period from the emergence of humans to c. 650 CE. Although it is possible to study sites of significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Ancient History mainly focuses on Europe, and Eastern and Western Asia. Students explore ancient sites, people and events, exposing them to a range of sources and their interpretation. Historical skills include the analysis of continuity and change, power and authority and individuals and their impact. Students complete four units.

Table 6: Senior (11–12) Ancient History content in the Australian Curriculum

Unit 1: Investigating the Ancient World	Students investigate the significant issues related to at least TWO of the following topics: • Historical authentication and reliability • Preservation, conservation, and/or reconstruction of ancient sites • Cultural heritage, ownership and the role of museums • Treatment and display of human remains AND Students study how at least ONE ancient site, event or change, individual or group, chosen from electives. These include Ancient Thera, the destruction of Troy, Alexander the Great and the Celts.
Unit 2: Ancient societies	Students study two topic electives focusing on the key features of societies, including political, economic, social and cultural themes. The electives can be chosen from Ancient Egypt, the Near East (Persia, Assyria, Israel), India, China, Greece or Rome.
Unit 3: People, Power and Authority	In this unit, students study one society and one individual, selected from Ancient Egypt, Rome, Greece, Persia or China. This enables students to focus on political power, the effect of key decisions such as wars, colonisation and expansion, and investigate the nature of historical significance and historical interpretations.

Unit 4: Reconstructing the Ancient World	Students study at least one period from a short list that covers key topics in Ancient Egypt, Greece or Rome, such as the Peloponnesian Wars, New Kingdom Egypt, Julius Caesar and Pompeii.
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Modern History (Year 11–12)

In Modern History for the Australian Curriculum, students examine aspects of the period from the eighteenth century to the recent past, though most of the curriculum focuses on the twentieth century. There are some opportunities to study Australia, especially around the time of the First World War. The curriculum gives a grounding in liberalism, considers selected movements for social change, connects modern nations to the early twentieth century polycrisis that included the First World War, the Spanish Flu and the Great Depression, and culminates in the period from the end of the Second World War to shortly after the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.

Table 7: Senior (11–12) Modern History content in the Australian Curriculum

Unit 1: Understanding the Modern World	Students study TWO topics with at least ONE to be chosen from the topic electives below. An alternative significant development may be chosen as one of the two topics of study in this unit. • The Enlightenment, 1750–1789 • The American Revolution, 1763–1812 • The French Revolution, 1774–1799 • The Industrial Revolutions, 1750–1890s • The Age of Imperialism, 1848–1914
Unit 2: Movements for Change in the 20th Century	Unit 2 centres on the place of human agency by examining 20th century movements for change. Students study two movements selected from: • Women's movements • Recognition and rights of Indigenous peoples • The Civil rights movement in the USA • Workers' movements Teachers are able to select another movement for change (eg anti-apartheid in South Africa) in the 20th century.
Unit 3: Modern Nations in the 20th Century	Students study two options. One drawn from European options: • United States of America, 1917–1945 • Australia, 1918–1949 • Germany, 1918–1945 • Russia and the Soviet Union, 1917–1945 A second is drawn from Asia: • Japan, 1931–1967 • India, 1947–1974 • Indonesia, 1942–1974 • China, 1937–1976 The focus is geopolitical, exploring wars, revolutions and influential political leaders.
Unit 4: The Modern World since 1945	The final topic focuses on geopolitical themes since the Second World War. Students explore ONE topic from: • The Changing World Order • Engagement with Asia • A Globalised World • Movements of People • The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East • The Search for Peace and Security

Senior Assessment in the Australian Curriculum

There is no national assessment system for History content in the Australian Curriculum in primary, secondary or senior secondary years.

Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

Background

The ACT developed an education system independent of NSW in the 1970s. In K–10, the ACT follows the Australian Curriculum but offers a unique framework for senior secondary schooling. The Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS) describes the key distinction of ACT senior education as one that gives teachers and schools primary responsibility for assessment and greater autonomy in curriculum development participation.¹⁶

Table 8: History in ACT schools at a glance

Primary	Follows the Australian Curriculum: History part of HASS.
Secondary (7–10)	Follows the Australian Curriculum: History part of HASS.
Senior Secondary (11–12)	Ancient History Pre-Modern History Modern History History Integrated (integrating units from all three)

The place of History in the ACT Curriculum

ACT uses the Australian Curriculum up to year 10. Senior History is completed on an elective basis.

K–10 History content in the ACT Curriculum

ACT uses the Australian Curriculum up to year 10.

Senior History in the ACT Curriculum

Senior History in the ACT is separated into three strands and is completed on an elective basis:

- Ancient
- Pre-Modern
- Modern History.

Students can also complete the History Integrated course which combines units from Ancient, Pre-Modern and Modern History.

Students can complete a Minor, Major, Minor-Major or Double Major in History each comprising various completed 'units'. Students can complete units at any time during Years 11 and 12.

Senior History courses in the ACT are completed in one of three forms: 'T' Courses are for students studying for an ATAR while 'A' and 'M' Courses are non-ATAR options with reduced demands.

¹⁶ See: https://www.bsss.act.edu.au/act_senior_secondary_system/curriculum (accessed 18 January 2026)

Table 9: Senior History in the ACT

Ancient History	Ancient History includes studies of the past up to 650AD within a focus on Ancient Europe, Asia and the Near East. There are four units: • Investigating the Ancient World • Ancient Societies • People, Power & Authority • Reconstruct the Ancient World Teachers can choose to replace two of these with Reconstruct Ancient Societies, which combines part A of Investigating the Ancient World with part A of Reconstruct the Ancient World.
Pre-Modern History	Pre-modern history covers the period c.400–1750 with a focus on societies, including their institutions, and changing ideas, beliefs and values. Each of the four units focuses on an event, issue, site or source within a defined historical period. Europe is a key site for historical inquiry, but many of the proposed topics of study also enable studies of Asia, South America, Africa or the Pacific. The four main units are: • Transformation • Golden Ages • Conflict • Power
Modern History	Senior Modern History in the ACT seeks to enable students to develop their understanding of historical events, ideas and movements that shape the modern world; develop skills in research, synthesis, analysis and communication; apply historical concepts; and be informed citizens. The four main units are: • Understanding the Modern World • Change in the 20th Century • Modern Nations • The Modern World since 1945

Senior Assessment in the ACT

Senior assessment in the ACT is governed by a continuous, school-based system rather than externally set tasks.¹⁷ A territory-wide system of moderation is in place and overseen by the ACT BSSS. An ACT scaling test is administered for all Year 12 students seeking an ATAR.¹⁸ The scaling test includes three papers: a Short Response Test (2 hours), a Multiple Choice Test (2 hours 15 mins), and a Writing Task (2.5 hours), but does not specifically examine content from the senior History syllabuses.

Practitioner's views

The following responses were selected from a national teacher survey conducted by the History Teachers' Association of NSW as part of this research. For further details and an overview of the data, see Appendix 1 at the end of this overview. The responses below were drawn from the relevant state/territory.

¹⁷ Assessment: https://www.bsss.act.edu.au/act_senior_secondary_system/assessment_scaling_and_the_atar/assessment

¹⁸ ACT Scaling Test: https://www.bsss.act.edu.au/act_senior_secondary_system/assessment_scaling_and_the_atar/act_scaling_test_ast

What do you think students most enjoy about History in Years 7–10?

‘The act of investigation and learning about events or groups they have heard about but do not fully understand’.

‘Intriguing stories, the odd and quirky, finding out about links to their (family's) past’.

‘Stories about the past; learning about different civilisations and cultures’.

What do you think students least enjoy about History in Years 7–10 and what are the main challenges teaching History in Years 7–10 in your school?

‘AI and fake history/news platforms’.

‘Engaging students who are reluctant readers’.

‘The declining literacy levels, it has become fashionable to declare that they are ‘not readers’; spending time in any given class reading for understanding either takes so long to physically read or constantly having to help them understand what is being stated, that it gets challenging to develop a depth of understanding of perspectives’.

‘Apathy from students who no longer read much or even watch news’.

‘History is combined with economics, geography, and civics. It is time poor in our teaching since the introduction of HASS’.

‘Time allocation (less than English, Maths and Science); range of academic backgrounds of teachers; decline in literacy among students’.

‘Balancing the needs of the HASS curriculum across 4 strands, low literacy’.

What are the most important factors strengthening senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

‘Student interest in topics taught; teacher quality; reputation for good results’.

‘Passionate teachers, and opportunities for Senior students to travel on overseas study tours’.

‘The way the course is presented and by having history experts teaching’.

‘Scholarly rigour is appreciated by senior students; the connections they make across topics in developing an understanding of concepts that they begin to see more clearly in their own world’.

What are the most important challenges to senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

‘Reluctant readers and literacy skills, particularly for Ancient History enrolments, and the ability to read and access ancient sources’.

‘Introduction of more HASS-aligned subjects eg Legal Studies, Global Studies; students encouraged to drop a subject between yr 11 and 12. – ludicrous idea. Nature of some assessment requirements especially historiographical emphasis’.

‘Students choosing financial and money making subjects seen as easier and than tough academically challenging subjects’.

‘History in the IB us up against ... [more appealing] ... subjects they have not experienced in junior curriculum, such as: Psychology, Environmental Systems & Sustainability, Economics. In the HSC, we lose numbers to Geography & Economics because the perception is they are easier’.

New South Wales (NSW)

Background

New South Wales has the largest school system in Australia. It has continued to place a relatively strong emphasis on the teaching of History as a distinct discipline in the secondary curriculum. Beginning in 1992, NSW introduced a 100-hour minimum mandate allocated to the teaching of History in Years 7–10. This was expanded to 200 hours in 1998, and this has been retained in the most recent 7–10 History syllabus released in 2024 for implementation from 2027.

As the Australian Curriculum was developed in 2009–2012, NSW also produced a new K–10 curriculum for History (published in 2012), which replaced the existing 2003 version.¹⁹ It then updated the Year 11–12 History content (published in 2017), which resulted in some significant changes, particularly to the Year 12 Modern History content.

New curriculum material for History in NSW was released in 2024, which updated requirements at Primary (K–6), Secondary (7–10) and Senior Secondary (11–12) levels. This new curriculum will generally be implemented from 2027.²⁰ In this latest version of the NSW curriculum, History has been retained as a separate subject, requiring 200 hours of study in Years 7–10, with some change in the content in Primary, 7–10 and Senior History.

Table 10: History in NSW schools at a glance

Primary	History is part of HSIE (History and Geography)
Secondary (7–10)	History is part of HSIE (History and Geography are mandatory and other subjects can be completed as electives) 100 hours of History required in Years 7 and 8 An additional 100 hours of History required in Years 9 and 10
Senior Secondary (11–12)	Ancient History Modern History History Extension (Year 12 only)

The place of History in the NSW curriculum

In the 2012 NSW syllabus, History and Geography formed part of a mandatory learning in Human Societies and its Environment (HSIE) from Kindergarten to Year 6. In Years 7–10 History also remained a separate subject.

The 2012 NSW K–10 History syllabus and 2017 Senior Ancient and Modern History syllabuses also foreground a range of disciplinary concepts and skills that are to be integrated into History content in K–12. Particularly from the secondary level, these concepts and skills are more detailed than those provided in the Australian Curriculum Version 9.0. These concepts and skills are outlined in Table 11.

¹⁹ Jonathon Dallimore and Michael Condie, '50 Years of 7-10 History in New South Wales: An Overview', *Teaching History*, Vol. 56, No. 1, 2022, pp. 30-38

²⁰ The updated History Extension HSC course will be implemented first, beginning in term 4 of 2026 and first examined in 2027.

Table 11: Historical concepts and skills in the NSW Curriculum

Concepts	Skills
Continuity and Change	Comprehension (chronology, terms and concepts)
Cause and effect	Analysis and use of sources
Perspectives	Perspectives and interpretations
Empathetic understanding **	Empathetic understanding **
Significance	Research
Contestability	Explanation and communication

**** Empathetic understanding has been removed from the 2024 NSW 7–10 History syllabus, but the other concepts and skills remain the same.**

7–10 History in NSW is buttressed by the state-wide mandate that all students, regardless of school sector, must complete 200 hours of History between Years 7 and 10 (that is, 100 hours in Years 7–8 and an additional 100 hours in Years 9–10).

NSW also continues to offer the unique HSC History Extension course in Year 12. This is widely recognised as a competitive academic subject, balancing an exploration of key questions in historiography (assessed in an associated HSC examination) with a major individual research project (assessed internally at schools).

K–10 History content in the NSW Curriculum

Primary Years: K–6

In the 2012 K–10 Syllabus for NSW, History and Geography formed the HSIE content for K–6, which remained in place in the 2024 update, though some aspects of the content were adjusted.

Table 12: History content in the NSW primary syllabus

Content	In K–6, NSW students engage with personal and family histories, community remembrance, contact and colonisation and modern Australian history stretching into the twentieth century. Notably, the updated NSW curriculum released in 2024 includes more opportunities to study world history in primary years. This includes opportunities to study aspects of Australian Indigenous history, the ancient Mediterranean, China and Mesoamerica.
Skills	In the 2012 syllabus, as they learn this content, students are also required to engage with concepts and skills such as change and continuity, cause and effect, perspectives, analysis and use of sources research and communication. These specific disciplinary skills and concepts have a less prominent role in the 2024 K–6 syllabus, but some are still embedded in the content that students explore including significance, sources and perspectives.

Secondary Years: 7–10

In Years 7–10 in NSW, mandatory HSIE content includes History and Geography (200 hours each). Students can also take elective courses in Aboriginal Studies, Commerce, Geography Elective, History Elective and Work Education under the HSIE banner.

As in the Australian Curriculum, the mandatory History content for Years 7–10 in NSW follows a generally chronological structure, beginning with the ancient world and moving through to modern Australia. In the 2012 syllabus, the topics were divided into two main categories: ‘overviews’ and ‘depth studies’. Although the 2024 update for 7–10 History in

NSW has adjusted some of the labels and content within topics, this overall structure remains in place.

In the 2012 NSW 7–10 History syllabus there are four mandatory ‘overviews’ in 7–10 History that collectively form a general orientation to key periods of world history. They begin with the evolution of early *Homo sapiens*, and then move through key periods such as ancient civilisations, the medieval period and the modern world. The current syllabus suggests that the overviews will constitute about ten percent of teaching time in each stage (that is twenty hours in total across Years 7–10), but this suggestion has been removed for the updated 2024 version to be implemented from 2027.

‘Depth studies’ are a mixture of mandated and optional topics that require students to explore key events, themes and issues in more depth, complexity and rigor.

Table 13: Summary of Stage 4–5 (Years 7–10) History content in NSW based on the 2012 syllabus

The overall chronological structure will remain in place with the updated 2024 syllabus, but some of the mandatory/optional content has shifted towards a more prescribed syllabus with fewer opportunities for schools/teachers to select options.

	Mandatory overviews (2012)	Mandatory Depth Studies (2012)	Optional (2012) – selection Students must complete five of these options across Stage 4
Stage 4 (Years 7–8)	• The Ancient World • The Ancient to the Modern World	• Investigating the Ancient Past	<i>Students must complete five of the these options across Stage 4.</i> • Egypt, Greece or Rome • India or China (ancient) • Medieval Europe • Vikings • Ottoman Empire • Angkor/Khmer Empire • Japan under the Shoguns • Polynesian expansion in the Pacific • Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples, Colonisation and Contact
Stage 5 (Years 9–10)	• The Making of the Modern World • The Modern World and Australia	• Australians at War (WW1 and WW2) • Rights and Freedoms	<i>Students must complete four of the these options across Stage 5.</i> • Industrial revolution • Progressive ideas and movements • Making a Nation • Asia and the World • Popular Culture • The environment movement • Migration experiences • School-developed topic

Some of the key changes between the current (2012) version of the 7–10 History curriculum in NSW and the 2024 update include:

- Changes to the number and nature of the ‘overviews’ (2012). These have been renamed ‘context studies’, their content expanded and the allocation of ten percent of the teaching time has been removed.
- Adjustments to the number of required depth studies. The 2024 version includes more mandated content than the 2012 version. This includes a topic in Stage 4 (Years 7–8) called ‘Aboriginal Peoples’ Experiences of Colonisation, 1788–1901’ and another in Stage 5 (Years 9–10) called ‘Making a Nation – From Federation to WW1 (1889 – c. 1919)’
- Adjustments to content in older and more familiar topics.
- The removal of cross-curriculum priorities from the 2024 version.

Senior History (11–12) in the NSW Curriculum

History in the senior secondary years (Stage 6 or Years 11–12) in NSW is entirely optional. The two major courses are Ancient History and Modern History (both completed across Years 11 and 12). Students studying either of these courses can then also choose to study History Extension in Year 12, though not all schools offer this option.

Both the Ancient and Modern History courses include a variety of content across Years 11 and 12 and both are ultimately assessed in Year 12 by an external HSC examination. These examinations generally have a profound influence on the teaching and assessment of these courses in schools.

As in 7–10, senior History in NSW is founded on core concepts and skills. These include: causation, continuity and change, perspectives, significance, contestability, analysis and use of sources, historical interpretation, historical investigation and research, and explanation and communication.

Table 14: Summary of the content taught in senior History courses in NSW based on the 2017 syllabus

Note that the main structure of all courses has remained essentially the same in the new 2024 curriculum that will be taught from 2026–27.

	Ancient History	Modern History	History Extension
Year 11	- Investigating Ancient History - Historical Investigation - Features of Ancient Societies	- Investigating Modern History - Historical Investigation - Shaping of the Modern World	None (students can only study History Extension in Year 12)
Year 12	- Core Study: Cities of Vesuvius – Pompeii and Herculaneum - Ancient Societies - Personalities in their times - Historical periods	- Core Study: Power and Authority in the Modern World - National Study - Peace and Conflict Study - Change in the Modern World	- Constructing History: - Key questions - Case study (one selected option) - History project
New Courses	To be implemented in Year 11 from 2027. The first HSC examination will take place in 2028.	To be implemented in Year 11 from 2027. The first HSC examination will take place in 2028.	To be implemented in Year 12 from term 4 of 2026. The first HSC examination will take place in 2027.

Senior History enrolments in NSW are in a strong position relative to many other Australian states and territories. Despite the fact that senior History subjects have declined as an overall percentage of senior school candidature in NSW, they remain popular. For the past several years, for example, Ancient and Modern History have been in the top fifteen most popular subjects of the Higher School Certificate. Modern History has been consistently in the top ten subjects. Although Ancient History enrolments have fluctuated more obviously and have drawn some critical public commentary, it is often less well-publicised that Modern History enrolments have increased appreciably since 2006. Finally, enrolments in senior History in NSW remain among the most popular from subjects within the broad umbrella of HSIE. Senior Modern History, for example, regularly posts larger enrolments than Legal Studies, Economics, Geography and other subjects.

Figure 1: Summary of HSC Ancient and Modern History enrolments in NSW from 2006 to 2025

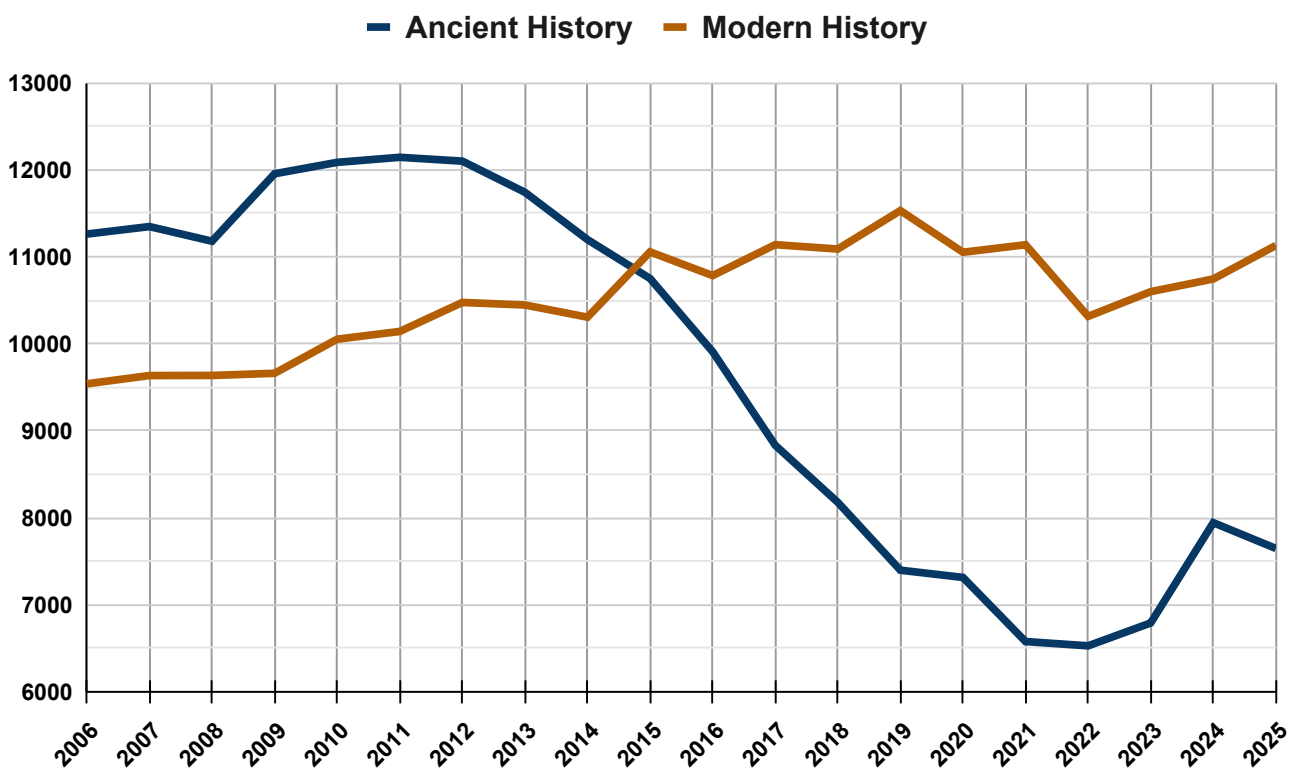
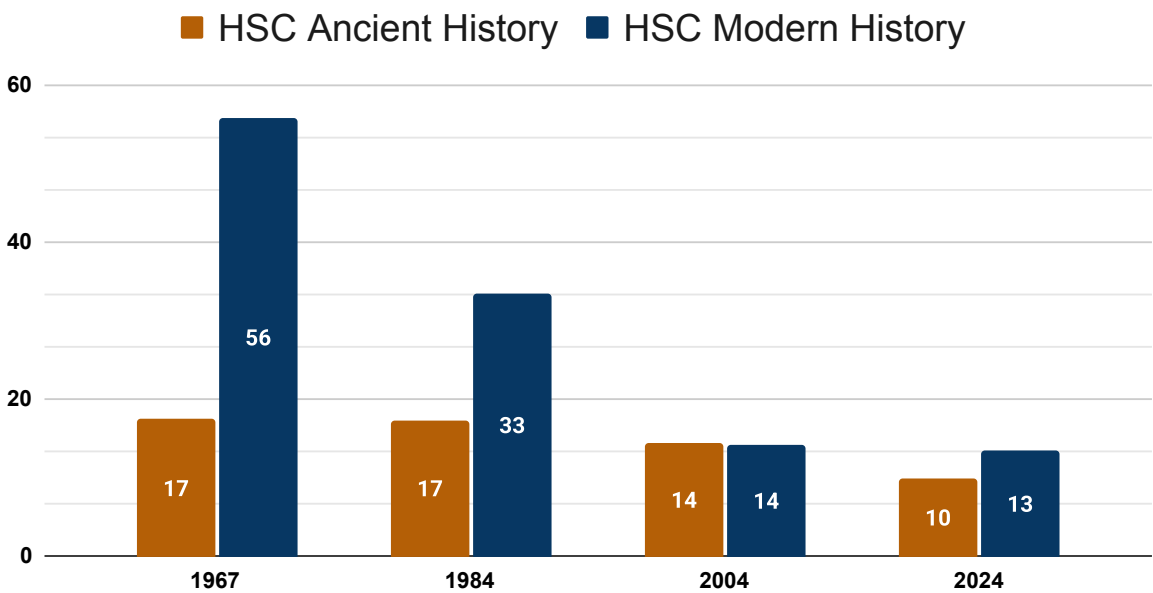


Figure 2: Ancient and Modern History enrolments as a percentage of total HSC enrolments (1967-2024)



Senior History Assessment in NSW

Senior History students in NSW are assessed internally in Year 11 and then through a mixture of internal and external tasks in Year 12. Major external examinations for the Ancient, Modern and Extension History courses take place at the end of the Year 12.

In Year 11 Ancient and Modern History, the only mandatory assessment task is an Historical Investigation. This includes requirements to develop historical questions, complete research and present findings, but the scope, substance and form of the task are reasonably flexible.

In Year 12 Ancient and Modern History, the only mandatory assessment task is an Historical Analysis, which has some stipulations as to content and length. Given the heavy weighting of the HSC examination in NSW and the relative freedom to decide on the nature of assessments at school-level, many internal assessments in Year 12 Ancient and Modern History follow HSC examination patterns of source-based questions and written essays.

Table 15: Summary of the HSC Examinations for Ancient Modern and Extension History

Course	Year 11 Assess.	Year 12 Assess.	HSC Exam Marks	HSC Exam Length
Ancient	Internally set and assessed Must include one Historical Investigation	50% Internal 50% External (HSC Exam)	100 (4 sections)	3 hours plus 10 minutes reading time
Modern	Internally set and assessed Must include one Historical Investigation	50% Internal 50% External (HSC Exam)	100 (4 sections)	3 hours plus 10 minutes reading time
Extension	None	50% Internal 50% External (HSC Exam)	50 (2 sections)	2 hours plus 10 minutes reading time

Practitioner's views

The following responses were selected from a national teacher survey conducted by the History Teachers' Association of NSW as part of this research. For further details and an overview of the data, see Appendix 1 at the end of this overview. The responses below were drawn from the relevant state/territory.

What do you think students most enjoy about History in Years 7–10?

'Narrative of History; hands-on artefact sessions; excursions'.

'The way the teachers bring the subject alive'.

'Students usually enjoy the storytelling side of History, especially when it feels real or cinematic. They respond well to conflict, moral questions, or anything that lets them imagine being in someone's shoes. They also like lessons that are active, like debates, games, or escape rooms, because it feels like a break from copying or note-taking. When visuals, clips or humour are used, it keeps them switched on and curious'.

'School developed options like the Cold War and popular culture'.

'The diverse range of topics and the ability to engage in a range of strategies to build skills and understanding'.

What do you think students least enjoy about History in Years 7–10 and what are the main challenges teaching History in Years 7–10 in your school?

‘The high literacy of history courses’.

‘History Essay writing (because it is difficult and requires cognitive effort); compulsory Aboriginal content in every subject in every year; repeated content across KLA area’.

‘They are not keen on such a heavy concentration of Australian history for all of Years 9 and 10’.

‘Over reliance on learning about facts in detail rather than the transfer of historical skills’.

‘Reading and writing. Content that seems irrelevant to their lives despite their teacher explaining the relevance. Students do not enjoy Australian History or learning about the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. They do not tolerate that we want them to be able to write essays or extended responses’.

‘Source analysis and written work – but it is important’.

What are the most important factors strengthening senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

‘Having teachers that specialise in the subject’.

‘Trust in the dedication and expertise of staff, an awareness that history teaches important professionally relevant skills in particular sectors’.

‘The high calibre of teaching staff and the options we choose’.

‘Reputation of [the] subject within the school’.

‘Engaging and expert teaching (with good reputation), well designed programs and scopes and sequences’.

‘Elective History in Stage 5’.

‘Engaging junior history courses. Passionate history teachers. Support from executive to run the full range of history courses. Limited courses to choose from’.

What are the most important challenges to senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

‘MH and AH are seen as 'hard' subjects with a 3 hour HSC – this means that students are going more to subjects which are considered easier e.g., VET courses or HSC subjects which are not totally essay based’.

‘Competing Science subjects placed on same line. History is seen and difficult, so many students are picking Businesses Studies or Biology instead as there is a visible career pathway’.

‘Common misconceptions about what subjects are needed in order to gain access to more 'prestigious' degrees at University. The devaluing of History studies in the tertiary sector. Career pathways’.

‘An overpacked curriculum in Year 12, particularly in Modern History. To do the HSC well, it pretty much relies on teacher chalk and talk, as there is no time to take pause and have skill focused lessons’.

Northern Territory (NT)

Background

NT has a greater emphasis on distance education and home schooling than some other states, due to the large number of remote communities and families. NT also teaches the syllabus to students for whom English is a second language, and schooling is often completed bilingually, in English and First Nations languages.

Within the Australian context, NT has also had a slightly unique schooling structure. Most notably, secondary school in the NT was divided between 'middle years' (7–9) and 'senior years' (10–12). This structure is currently undergoing major change as secondary schools transition towards a 7–12 system with no 'middle school' bringing them into closer alignment with other Australian states and territories.²¹

Table 16: History in NT Schools at a glance

Primary	Follows the Australian Curriculum: History part of HASS.
Secondary (7–10)	Follows the Australian Curriculum: History part of HASS.
Senior Secondary (11–12)	Ancient Studies (SACE) Modern History (SACE)

The place of History in the NT Curriculum

History to Year 10 is taught as part of the Australian Curriculum. Ancient Studies or Modern History, delivered via the South Australian SACE curriculum, is an option for students to select in Years 11 and 12.

K–10 History content in the NT Curriculum

Apart from the Australian Curriculum History content, Indigenous Language and Culture is offered specifically for First Nations students in the NT. This includes language maintenance and language revival as well as the study of culture. As well as language, students demonstrate that they are familiar with traditional country, songs, dance, local bush foods, kinship terms, skin and clan groups from their mother and father's sides, their family's Dreaming, totems, laws, ceremonies, bush medicine and indicators of seasonal and weather changes. This maintenance of culture and language adds to the stock of historical knowledge in Australia, which fosters historical consciousness among the students and helps to ensure that Indigenous histories are sustained for all Australians.

Senior History in the Northern Territory

In senior years, students are able to select from Ancient Studies and/or Modern History for Stage 1 (usually completed in Year 11) and Stage 2 (usually completed in Year 12) as offered in the South Australian SACE.

Ancient Studies

Ancient Studies encompasses history, literature, religion and culture. Teachers select a society and culture from a list, or can choose another society/culture, from between 3000BCE and 500CE from Asia–Australia, Americas, Europe and Western Asia/ North Africa. Teachers must select a different place for Stages 1 and 2. For more information, see Senior History in South Australia.

²¹ Northern Territory Government: Department of Education and Training, 'NT Secondary Education is Changing': <https://education.nt.gov.au/news/2025/nt-secondary-education-is-changing> (accessed 18 January 2026)

Modern History

Like Ancient Studies, Modern History is taught in Stage 1 and Stage 2. Modern History is a 10-credit subject or a 20-credit subject at Stage 1 and a 20-credit subject at Stage 2.

In Stage 1, students develop an understanding of epochal historical themes, including imperialism, decolonisation and social movements. Stage 2 Modern History splits into two halves, both resembling the 'kings and battles' bias embedded in the national curriculum: the first half is about nations, the second half is global geopolitics.

Senior History Assessment in the Northern Territory

Students complete a NT Certificate of Education and Training (NTCET), which can include vocational and community learning, but for university entrance students complete the South Australian SACE system (see 'South Australia' for further details on SACE).

Practitioner's views

The following responses were selected from a national teacher survey conducted by the History Teachers' Association of NSW as part of this research. For further details and an overview of the data, see Appendix 1 at the end of this overview. The responses below were drawn from the relevant state/territory.

What do you think students most enjoy about History in Years 7–10?

'Making connections to [current] events'.

'... It's going to depend on the teacher, class and presentation. My students enjoyed an excursion and touching real fossils at the museum'.

'[Studies covering] Medieval and Ancient Societies'.

What do you think students least enjoy about History in Years 7–10 and what are the main challenges teaching History in Years 7–10 in your school?

'Remembering dates'.

'Extreme range of abilities across the school, meaning teaching the same skill is incredibly difficult. For example, source analysis is very high order thinking that some of my students are not ready for while other students are quite capable'.

'Australian History'.

What are the most important factors strengthening senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

'Under resourced – we cannot charge for excursions but we still need to pay for buses etc. Students are passed even when they haven't met the capabilities of the previous year and can arrive in year 9 with year 4 levels of skills which means they obviously cannot cope and we cannot teach them year 9 skills – we're constantly playing catch up and it gets worse and harder each year'.

'Trained staff capable of teaching senior students'.

What are the most important challenges to senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

'We are only moving to teach year 11 and 12 in the next 4 years – changes in the NT from middle schools to comprehensive schools starting 2026'.

'Out of field teachers'.

Queensland (QLD)

Background

Queensland schools use the Australian Curriculum from Foundation to Year 10. It is referred to as the Australian Curriculum in Queensland (ACiQ).

Historically, teachers and schools in QLD have had a comparatively high level of autonomy in their assessment of senior syllabuses. From the 1970s, senior subjects in QLD were assessed internally through school-developed tasks, which formed the basis of students' final results. The general system was reformed between the late 1970s and 2000s. Significantly, after an independent review of senior assessment in QLD, external assessment was reintroduced for senior subjects such as Ancient History and Modern History, as part of a new suite of syllabuses and tertiary entrance processes introduced in 2018.²²

Version 2 of the QLD senior History syllabuses was released in 2024.

Table 17: History in QLD schools at a glance

Primary	Follows the Australian Curriculum: History part of HASS (known as the Australian Curriculum in Queensland, ACiQ)
Secondary (7–10)	Follows the Australian Curriculum: History part of HASS (known as the Australian Curriculum in Queensland, ACiQ)
Senior Secondary (11–12)	Ancient History Modern History

The place of History in the QLD Curriculum

History is a compulsory part of the Australian Curriculum as adopted by the QCAA. Senior History is elective.

K–10 History content in Queensland

Until senior years (11–12), History in Queensland follows the Australian Curriculum.

Senior History in Queensland

Senior level Humanities and Social Sciences include 'General' subjects in Ancient History and Modern History. Both Ancient History and Modern History in QLD are structured and assessed in similar ways. In both courses, teachers have some autonomy over both content and aspects of assessment. The 2025 QCAA Modern History syllabus, for example, explicitly states that: 'Senior syllabuses set out only what is essential while being flexible so teachers can make curriculum decisions to suit their students, school context, resources and expertise'.²³

As in other jurisdictions, the 'Rationale' for both senior History syllabuses in QLD places an emphasis on broad historical thinking concepts and skills. The QLD senior Ancient History Syllabus explicitly states, for example, that: 'Students investigate the problematic nature of evidence, pose increasingly complex questions about the past, and develop an understanding of different and sometimes conflicting perspectives on the past'.²⁴ Similar ideas are expressed in the QLD senior Modern History syllabus, which claims that: '[QLD] Modern History aims to have students engage in historical thinking as a form of historical consciousness ...'.²⁵

²² Background to the QCE System: <https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/senior/certificates-and-qualifications/qce-qcia-handbook/1-senior-schooling-qld/1.1-background> (accessed 18 January 2026)

²³ QCAA, 'Modern History 2025, v1.4', 2025, p. 5

²⁴ QCAA, 'Ancient History 2025 v1.4', 2025, p. 2

²⁵ QCAA, 'Modern History 2025, v1.4', 2025, p. 2

Ancient History

Senior Ancient History students in QLD are required to complete four units. Units 1 and 2 are typically completed in Year 11 and Units 3 and 4 are typically completed in Year 12.

Table 18: QLD Senior Ancient History content summary

Unit 1: Investigating the Ancient World	This unit focuses on methodological aspects of history, including archaeology. In Topic 1: Digging up the past, students consider two archaeological sites, one of them an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander site from ancient Australia. No other region is specified in the syllabus, giving teachers and schools considerable scope for selecting sites. This topic covers contextual information by which the archaeological site can be understood, and a 'depth study' that enables students to understand the forms of evidence, ways of analysing them, ethical issues and methods of representing in the past in writing and in museums. A second topic 'Features of ancient societies', also includes contextual study of the selected society (for which no list is provided) and a depth study, which enables students to recognise terms, historical and cultural practices, understand the nature of historical evidence and make a historical argument.
Unit 2: Personalities in their Times	In this unit, students undertake personality studies in a way that will prepare them for the external exam in Unit 4. Teachers select two individuals, and are free to select any for which there 'is sufficient evidence available for a depth study'. Presumably they ordinarily do so based on those previously allocated by the QCAA in Unit 4.
Unit 3: Reconstructing the Ancient World	This unit focuses on analysing, evaluating and synthesising evidence to build a historical argument based on the ancient or medieval world. Students undertake a broad 'contextual' study of the place and period, followed by a depth study, which can focus on an individual, event, social or economic structure, or cultural or religious practices. Teachers can choose two topics from a list of fourteen, including Thebes, Bronze Age Aegean, Assyria, Ancient Levant, Persia, Athens in the fifth century, Macedonian Empire, Roman Republic, Early Imperial Rome, Pompeii and Herculaneum, aspects of Han dynasty China, The Celts and/or Roman Britain, Medieval Crusades or Classical Japan.
Unit 4: People, Power and Authority	In this unit students consider the 'nature and exercise of power and authority' in a particular historical period and in relation to a chosen individual. Student understanding of synthetic and analytical historical evidence is focused on 'decisions about people, power and authority' in forming an argument. Teachers can select from a list of eight periods, including New Kingdom Egypt, Persian Wars, Peloponnesian War, Punic Wars, the decline of the Roman Republic, Augustan Age, Imperial Rome or Byzantine Empire. The QCAA provides a list of individuals for personality studies, which are included in the external examination.

Modern History

QLD senior Modern History explicitly builds on the Australian Curriculum content in Years 7–10. As in senior Ancient History in QLD, students studying Modern History are required to take four units. Units 1 and 2 are typically completed in Year 11 and Units 3 and 4 are typically completed in Year 12.

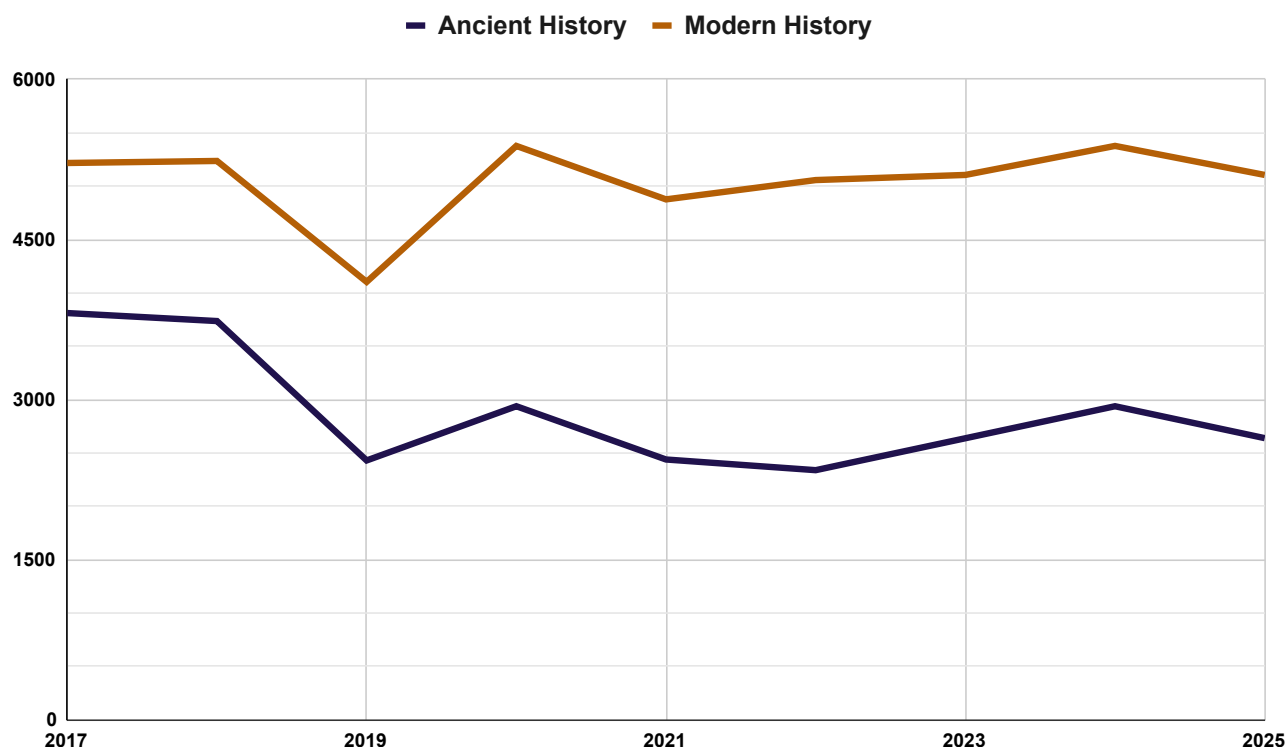
Table 19: QLD Senior Modern History content summary

Unit 1: Ideas in the Modern World	This unit focuses on ideas in the modern world, allowing students to ask historical questions about the importance of ideas, especially in revolutionary moments. Students take two topics, selected from Australian Frontier Wars, Age of Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, American Revolution, French Revolution, Age of Imperialism, Meiji Restoration (1868–1912), Boxer Rebellion and its aftermath, Russian Revolution, Xinhai Revolution and its aftermath, Iranian Revolution and its aftermath, or the Arab Spring. Teachers can select an alternative topic. Students complete a contextual study, giving the big picture. They complete a depth study by which they develop their historical investigation and argumentation skills. Finally, a concluding study helps connect historical analysis to the present.
Unit 2: Movements in the Modern World	Building on Unit 1's focus on revolution and presumably with some background on imperialism, colonialism and power, Unit 2 focuses on social movements for change, with two topics selected from a wide political and geographic range, including Australian First Nations peoples, Indian Independence, British workers' movements, women's movements, Chinese May Fourth movement, Algerian independence, Vietnamese independence, South African anti-apartheid, African-American civil rights, environmental movements, LGBTQI+ movements, Myanmar pro-democracy movement. Teachers are also able to choose an alternative topic. A contextual study helps students see the big picture, learn key terminology and develop an appreciation of the historical evidence. A depth study enables a dive into particular events, evaluating the evidence and developing and communicating narrative and/or argument. A concluding study helps connect the historical evidence to the present and to other related historical events, helping to build transferability of historical analytical skills and establish the 'why' of history in relation to specific events.
Unit 3: National Experiences in the Modern World	This unit enables students to critically analyse the emergence and significance of nations in the modern world by examining specific articulations of nationhood, mostly in the twentieth century. Twentieth century explorations include two topics selected from Australia, the UK, Germany, USA, USSR, Japan, China, Indonesia, Israel, India or South Korea, or they may also choose from earlier national developments in Napoleonic France, or New Zealand since it became a separate colony in 1841. The syllabus does not explicitly say that teachers can select an alternative nation. The unit follows the same contextual, depth and concluding structure as the previous two units.
Unit 4: International Experiences in the Modern World	This unit turns the study of nations into one of international relationships. No whiggish narrative is imposed to blemish what this could mean, which includes conflict, peace, trade and 'engagement', as well as technological competition and cooperation. Students complete two topics. One is selected from options presented by the QCAA for the external exam. The other is drawn from a wide-ranging selection including Australian engagement with Asia, searches for European peace and cooperation, trade and commerce between nations, mass migrations, the information age, genocides, the nuclear age, the Cold War, struggle for peace in the Middle East, cultural globalisation, space exploration, Rights and recognition of First Peoples globally, and terrorism, anti-terrorism and counter-terrorism. The unit follows the same contextual, depth and concluding structure as the previous units.

As in NSW, senior History enrolments in QLD remain in a relatively strong position compared with some other states and territories. In fact, some research suggests that QLD may have the strongest senior History enrolments in Australia relative to total senior student cohorts in the state.²⁶ As in NSW, Modern History is also currently in the strongest overall position at senior level in QLD.

²⁶ Rebecca Cairns and Kerri Anne Garrard, 'Flatlining? National Enrolment Trends in Senior Secondary History', *Agora*, Vol. 55, No. 3, 2020, pp. 59–67

Figure 3: QCE Year 12 Ancient and Modern History Enrolments (2017–2025)



Senior History Assessment in QLD

Units 1 and 2 for QLD Ancient and Modern History are typically completed in Year 11 and graded as satisfactory/unsatisfactory. They do not contribute to a grade level, which is used to award points towards the completion of their Queensland Certificate of Education.

Units 3 and 4 in these courses are typically completed in Year 12 and assessed through three Internal Assessments (worth a total of 75 per cent of their final grade) and one External Assessment (worth 25 per cent of their final grade), to produce a final mark out of 100. At the end of the process, students are then allocated an overall A–E grade by the QCAA.

For Internal Assessments in Ancient and Modern History, task specifications are set out in detail within the QCAA Senior History syllabuses including general task directions and marking criteria specific to each task. Internal assessments are quality controlled by the QCAA through an endorsement process in which schools design and submit each Internal Assessment to the QCAA in advance of the task being administered to students. Internal Assessments are then marked by the teachers within individual schools. The QCAA randomly samples each assessment item, and schools must upload the marked items for ‘confirmation’.

The External Assessments in QLD Ancient and Modern History are completed as examinations that are 120 minutes (plus 15 minutes reading time) in length. The examinations focus on Unit 4 from the relevant syllabus and include up to twelve sources. The examination consists of approximately four to five short response questions. The External Assessments are marked by trained assessors appointed by the QCAA.

The Internal and External assessment results are then combined to determine a Subject Result. This is reported to the Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre, which scales Subject Results from General Subjects to award an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR).

Practitioner’s views

The following responses were selected from a national teacher survey conducted by the History Teachers’ Association of NSW as part of this research. For further details and an overview of the data, see Appendix 1 at the end of this overview. The responses below were drawn from the relevant state/territory.

What do you think students most enjoy about History in Years 7–10?

‘Structured well planned lessons. Learning things! The knowledge we share and invite them to be part of. Class discussions. Feeling successful as we explain clearly what is expected ...’

‘Students enjoy history most when it connects to their lived experiences and their lives. When they have the time to engage in activities and think about what they are learning’.

‘Students still love the narrative of history. Primary source work piques interest as it can be hands on and there is direct link to the narrative. Students then love investigating topics of their choice’.

‘The content. When the subject matter is engaging and well-taught, the students enjoy the subject’.

What do you think students least enjoy about History in Years 7–10 and what are the main challenges teaching History in Years 7–10 in your school?

‘Some find the literacy demands a challenge e.g., interpreting sources’.

‘Assessment – essays/exams. But aside from this compulsory component, in 7–10 the average student can struggle with the relevance of a unit of work. If there is no link to their world, it can be hard to engage them’.

‘The assessment tasks. They don't have a lot of opportunities to be creative or try different assessment types’.

‘Not everyone is a History expert. Rare to have people [teachers] with history degrees. Ever changing staff’.

‘Everything seems so rushed with all the competing pressures within the school, plus we are a highly academic school so the emphasis seems to be more and more on assessment and outcomes rather than the joy of learning’.

‘The topics available in the National Curriculum are not topics that students are naturally interested in, particularly in Year 9 and 10. Australian history and environmentalism, or migrations and popular culture are very hard to engage them with. On a personal level, the National Curriculum needs to be less political and focus more on what students of that age are more interested in’.

‘A crowded curriculum that is assessment driven’.

‘Too much source analysis, they tell me’.

‘There are challenges in terms of perceived relevance of the discipline in the face of government decisions on the cost of Humanities degrees and the whole Job Ready Graduate scheme. There are also challenges that result from the increasing ubiquitousness of GenAI – ie: why learn to think and research when the computer can do it for me?’.

What are the most important factors strengthening senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

‘Quality of teaching in 7–10. Clarity and consistency about what good History looks like’.

‘When students have had positive experiences and enthusiastic, knowledgeable teachers that they connect with in junior years then there's often an uptick in our numbers in senior. We also work hard to explain to students that History can help with mastery of portable skills such as communication and evaluation, so students will often select Modern History because they recognise that it'll help with other subjects, or prepare them for success at uni in non-History fields’.

‘The senior assessment structure in Qld allows students to 'bank' up to 75% of their exit grades prior to the high stakes external examination. This is a powerful incentive in senior enrolment’.

‘Committed and engaging teachers. Students who value humanities’.

What are the most important challenges to senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

‘Ever changing staff. Internal assessment writing is [a] huge workload issue. Maintenance of numbers in current climate of STEM emphasis. Risk of AI making internal assessment invalid’.

‘The continued emphasis by school leadership on STEM and the QCAA concept of scaling which is misunderstood and misapplied by teachers, parents, and students’.

‘Pressures and messaging around scaling and ATAR predictions, a few teachers who are reluctant to try new pedagogical approaches, plus we're a Catholic school and students must study a Religion subject in senior; often students will select Study of Religion because they believe it's quite similar to Modern and it also ticks the RE box on their timetable’.

South Australia (SA)

Background

South Australian schools teach the Australian Curriculum from reception (the first year of primary school) to Year 10, including for History. During 2025–26, South Australian government schools have, however, been phasing in a new K–10 curriculum that adapts Version 9.0 of the Australian Curriculum instead of implementing it in its entirety as the state had done since 2011. In 2025, the South Australian government also announced plans to introduce a new Civics and Citizenship cross-curriculum priority in public schools.²⁷

South Australia also has an innovative senior curriculum for the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) that includes a large selection of subjects, including a wide range of languages including First Nations and Revival languages, Cross-disciplinary Studies, Media Studies, Community Studies, Politics, Power & People, Psychology, Women's Studies and Exploring Identities and Futures, which is about their own learning. There is considerable opportunity for professional or work-connected learning, including a subject called Workplace Practices that includes a unit on unpaid work and clear integration of VET into SACE.

Table 20: History in SA schools at a glance

Primary	Follows the Australian Curriculum: History part of HASS. SA government schools will soon follow a new adapted curriculum to be fully implemented by 2027.
Secondary (7–10)	Follows the Australian Curriculum: History part of HASS. SA government schools will soon follow a new adapted curriculum to be fully implemented by 2027.
Senior Secondary (11–12)	Ancient Studies Modern History

The place of History in the South Australian curriculum

At the time of research, History in SA before Year 10 is drawn from the Australian Curriculum, but this will be replaced by a new curriculum by 2027. History in Years 11 and 12 is completed as an option. History in Year 11 can be studied as a one or two semester course. History in Year 12 is a full year course.

K–10 History content in the SA Curriculum

At the time of research, History in SA is the same as for the Australian Curriculum until the senior years (11–12).

Senior History in the SA Curriculum

Students in SA can take Ancient Studies and/or Modern History, each presented in Stage 1 (typically Year 11) and Stage 2 (typically Year 12). As in many other states, the senior History content in SA includes a combination of knowledge and historical skills. The knowledge components are outlined below and the skills include: historical questions, working with historical sources and evidence, exploring differing perspectives and communicating historical ideas.

Ancient Studies

Ancient Studies in SA encompasses history, literature, religion and culture. Teachers select a society and culture from this list, or can choose another society/culture, from between 3000BCE and 500CE from Asia–Australia, Americas, Europe and Western Asia/North Africa. Teachers must select a different place for Stages 1 and 2.

²⁷ See: <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/department/strategies-and-plans/civics-citizenship-reforms> (accessed 18 May 2026)

Table 21: Overview of SACE Senior Ancient Studies

Ancient Studies: Stage 1 (Typically Year 11)	Ancient Studies is a 10-credit subject or a 20-credit subject at Stage 1. For a 10-credit subject, students explore two ancient societies or cultures. They study an aspect of the compulsory Topic 1: Understanding Ancient History and at least two additional topics in the context of the selected societies or cultures. For a 20-credit subject, students explore four ancient societies or cultures. They study aspects of the compulsory Topic 1: Understanding Ancient History and at least four additional topics in the context of the selected societies or cultures. Compulsory topic • Topic 1: Understanding ancient history. Additional topics • Topic 2: Art, architecture, and technology • Topic 3: Warfare and conquest • Topic 4: Social structures, slavery, and everyday life • Topic 5: Beliefs, rituals, and mythology • Topic 6: Creative representations.
Ancient Studies: Stage 2 (Typically Year 12)	Students study three topics from the list of seven topics: • Topic 1: Daily life • Topic 2: Military conflict • Topic 3: Political power and authority • Topic 4: Religion • Topic 5: Material culture • Topic 6: Literature—prose, narrative, or epic • Topic 7: Literature—drama and poetry.

Modern History

Like Ancient Studies in SACE, Modern History is taught in Stage 1 and Stage 2. In Stage 1, students develop an understanding of epochal historical themes, including imperialism, decolonisation and social movements. This course provides flexibility to help educators engage students in a broad range of topics, depending on their interests and resources available.

Stage 2 Modern History splits into two halves: the first half is about nations, the second half centres on global geopolitics. As of 2026, the 'Modern Nations' study forms part of the end of year examination, and the 'World Since 1945' comprises a school-based assessment.

Table 22: Overview of SACE Senior Modern History

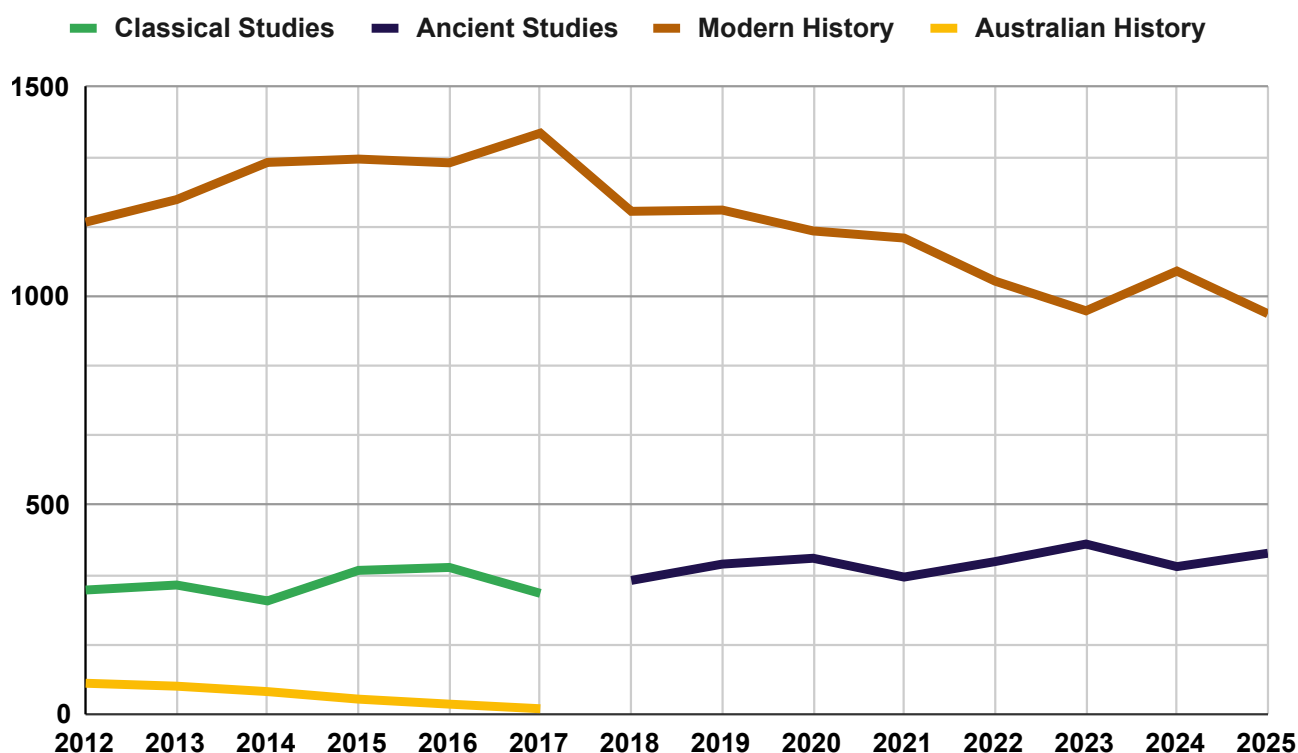
Modern History: Stage 1 (Typically Year 11)	Stage 1 Modern History consists of the following topics: • Topic 1: Imperialism • Topic 2: Decolonisation • Topic 3: Indigenous peoples • Topic 4: Social movements • Topic 5: Revolution • Topic 6: Elective. Each topic includes key ideas and concepts that provide a focus for study. For a 10-credit subject, students study two or more topics, one of which may be an elective topic. For a 20-credit subject, students study four or more topics, one of which may be an elective topic.
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Modern History: Stage 2 (Typically Year 12)	Stage 2 Modern History is a 20-credit subject. Students study one topic from 'Modern nations' and one topic from 'The world since 1945', selected from the following list of topics: Modern Nations Topic 1: Australia (1901–56) Topic 2: United States of America (1919–45) Topic 3: Germany (1918–48) Topic 4: The Soviet Union (1945–1991) Topic 5: Indonesia (1942–2005) Topic 6: China (1949–1999) The World Since 1945 Topic 7: The changing world order (1945–) Topic 8: Australia's relationship with Asia and the South Pacific Region (1945–) Topic 9: National self-determination in South-East Asia (1945–) Topic 10: The struggle for peace in the Middle East (1945–) Topic 11: Challenges to peace and security (1945–) Topic 12: The United Nations and establishment of a global perspective (1945–)
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Senior History enrolments in SA are generally smaller than in NSW and QLD, but Modern History has remained the most popular senior SACE subject for many years. As in other states, Modern History remains in a stronger position in SA than Ancient Studies.

Figure 4: Senior enrolments for Ancient Studies and Modern History in SA (2012–25)

Note: Before 2018, Ancient Studies was named Classical Studies and Australian History was offered as a separate subject (with a peak of 74 enrolments in 2012).



Senior Assessment in the South Australia

Senior assessment in SACE History is completed by internal assessment only in Stage 1 and a mixture of internal (seventy per cent) and external assessment (30 per cent) in Stage 2.

For Stage 2 Ancient Studies in SA the external assessment is an individual inquiry presented in the form of a 'persuasive argument'. This can be submitted in written (2000 words) or multimodal (12 minutes) form.

For Stage 2 Modern History in SA, the external assessment is an 'e-exam' (electronic) comprising two sections worth a total of 35 marks. Section 1 requires the students to write an essay in response to a 'proposition' in relation to the 'Modern Nations' study, and Section 2 is made up of source-based questions. Students are given a total of 130 minutes.

Practitioner's views

The following responses were selected from a national teacher survey conducted by the History Teachers' Association of NSW as part of this research. For further details and an overview of the data, see Appendix 1 at the end of this overview. The responses below were drawn from the relevant state/territory.

What do you think students most enjoy about History in Years 7–10?

'When they can clearly connect it to the modern day, like genocide and fascism'.

'The stories– hearing about people, places, times that are different to their worlds, but also being able to make connections to what they understand of our modern world'.

'Teaching that exposes them to new ideas or different ways of seeing things. Teaching that challenges their thinking while encouraging them to value their own opinions'.

'In my experience, most Students love Ancient & Medieval History and many love learning about WW1 & WW2. They enjoy learning about the past through film ...'

'The gruesome topics like Black Death and world Wars seem popular. They enjoy doing History rather than rote learning masses of information'.

What do you think students least enjoy about History in Years 7–10 and what are the main challenges teaching History in Years 7–10 in your school?

'The amount of reading and writing'.

'Having to evidence their learning. Essays, source analysis, research... they're all valuable skills to have but it turns the students off of the subject'.

'The culture around it. While ACARA does allow for flexibility in content, due to teacher strengths often it means History is quite Euro-Centric'.

'Poor teaching, typically when it draws extensively upon textbook activities'.

'Having to do the subject when they don't have any interest. The literacy rich aspect also puts off lots of students'.

'Limited lesson time to cover content. Lack of teacher expertise'.

'Having a lot of English teachers and other specialisations teaching HASS. Most of our HASS teachers are history minor's who only seem to have selected it because it was all they could do ...'.

What are the most important factors strengthening senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

'Quality educators who are interested in the subject teaching the subject in Yr 10. Flexibility & confidence of classroom teachers in Yr 11 & 12 to follow the interests of students to teach units within the scope of the course that students want to learn about, and assess in the way that they want to be assessed'.

'Teacher passion. Having teachers who actually give the subject some personality and get excited makes a huge difference to inspiring enrolments and retention'.

'A positive experience in History in years 7 to 10. Collaboration between senior history teachers.

'Support for teachers from organisations such as the HTASA ...'

What are the most important challenges to senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

‘Low numbers across the board in each cohort as it is a regional school. Limitations or scaling that occurs, impacting on ATAR. Parent influence – where will this subject lead me child in the future? Spending on STEM facilities within schools and not in Humanities classrooms (look at who gets the flashy resources in most cases). Focus on STEM pathways – who visits regional schools? Generally STEM organisations’.

‘Having an exam in year 12 scares off a lot of students, but the fact that literacy levels seems to have declined has also made senior History less accessible to many students, as there is a lot of reading, writing, research, synthesis etc expected, and for many students it is not manageable. At the same time, being content based subjects, teachers don't want to over-simplify topics either, as that discredits the subject’.

‘[School] ... administration more concerned with saving money than curriculum diversity. Classes have to be large or they don't run and if they're one short of the magic number then they'll get cut’.

Tasmania (TAS)

Background

Tasmania has a three-tiered school system that includes Primary (prep–6), Secondary School/High school (7–10) and Senior Secondary/College (11–12).

Senior schooling can earn various qualifications including the Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE), which is needed to acquire an ATAR for university entrance. A relatively low percentage of students in Tasmania complete Year 12.²⁸

Table 23: History in Tasmanian schools at a glance

Primary	Follows the Australian Curriculum: History part of HASS.
Secondary (7–10)	Follows the Australian Curriculum: History part of HASS.
Senior Secondary (11–12)	Level 2 History Level 3 Ancient History Level 3 Modern History

The place of History in the Tasmanian curriculum

Tasmania uses the Australian Curriculum for K–10, which includes History. Students can elect to take either Ancient or Modern History in the TCE as part of the Humanities and Social Sciences.

TCE Humanities and Social Sciences operates at 4 levels.

Table 24: An overview of TCE Humanities and Social Sciences

Pre-level	This requires some community-focused historical skills, including the objects, people, places and events that form their personal and community histories, and the ways in which these are commemorated, and using historical skills to gather information and constructing a historical narrative.
Level 1	Focuses on family, children, financial literacy and road safety but also includes a course on civics and citizenship that includes some historical knowledge of Australian society and democracy.
Level 2	History becomes a ‘discipline-based’ course, which includes specialist knowledge, theories and concepts as well as methodology and terminology. At Level 2, students may also elect to study Tasmanian Aboriginal Studies, which includes historical and anthropological ideas and approaches.
Level 3	Students may elect to take Ancient and/or Modern History. History-adjacent courses at Level 3 include Australia in Asia and the Pacific and First Nations Studies.

K–10 History content in Tasmania

K–10 History content in Tasmania follows the Australian Curriculum.

²⁸ See, for example: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-02/only-half-of-tasmanian-students-finish-year-12/104284984> (accessed 18 January 2026)

Senior History in the Tasmanian Curriculum

The TCE requires 120 credit points of successful completion of accredited courses. Courses are offered by level, including Pre-level, Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 and 80 Credit Points of the TCE must be from Level 2 and above.

Table 25: An overview of senior History in the Tasmanian curriculum

Level 2: History	Module 1: Ancient History Module 2: Into the Modern Era Module 3: Movements for Change in the Twentieth Century
Level 3: Ancient History	The course has THREE sections. All sections are compulsory. Each section must be studied within the context of one of the five prescribed ancient civilisations: Egypt or Greece or Rome or China or Assyria. Section A: Investigating the Ancient World (50 hrs) Section B: Structure of an Ancient Society (50 hrs) Section C: The Nature of Power and Authority in an Ancient Society (50 hrs)
Level 3: Modern History	Section A: Modern Western Nations in the 20th Century (50 hrs) Section B: Modern Asian Nations in the 20th Century (50 hrs) Section C: The Changing World Order, 1945 to 2010 (50 hrs)

Senior History Assessment in Tasmania

Level 2 History in Tasmania is assessed internally and there is a quality assurance process administered by TASC.

Level 3 Ancient and Modern History are assessed by a mixture of internal assessment (including a quality assurance process) and a 3 hour (plus 15 minutes preparation) external examination each comprising three sections. Student work is graded using an 'extended ratings' system from A+ down to Z.

Practitioner's views

The following responses were selected from a national teacher survey conducted by the History Teachers' Association of NSW as part of this research. For further details and an overview of the data, see Appendix 1 at the end of this overview. The responses below were drawn from the relevant state/territory.

What do you think students most enjoy about History in Years 7–10?

'Learning about topics with relevance to their lives/current events. Working with primary sources. Opportunities to be creative'.

What do you think students least enjoy about History in Years 7–10 and what are the main challenges teaching History in Years 7–10 in your school?

'Topics that lack relevance. Extended writing'.

What are the most important factors strengthening senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

'Great teachers'.

What are the most important challenges to senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

'Retaining student numbers'.

'[Lack of] Time, students general literacy skills'.

Victoria (VIC)

Background

As in WA and NSW, Victoria chooses to adapt the Australian Curriculum rather than adopt it completely. Like many other states, the Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0 emphasises a disciplinary foundation for the subject and for this reason, the VCAA does not combine the F–6 subjects into ‘HASS’ but explores their distinct nature in separate curricula. The F–10 Rationale states that: ‘History is the disciplined process of investigating evidence to develop understandings of the past ... Learning in History is investigative, interpretive and creative’.²⁹

The Victorian F–10 Curriculum 2.0 includes eight learning areas:

- The Arts
- English
- Health & Physical Education
- The Humanities
- Languages
- Mathematics
- Science
- Technologies

The Victorian F–10 Curriculum also includes four capabilities, foundational skills and cross-curriculum priorities.

Senior secondary school in Victoria focuses on the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). Study designs fall under similar learning areas to F–10, with additional options drawn from vocational and higher education, digital technologies and an extended project. Humanities studies in the VCE includes History, Geography, Classical Studies, Philosophy, Politics, Religion and Society, Sociology, Texts and Traditions. At VCE, economics and legal studies are categorised as Business and Commerce studies, even though they are categorised as Humanities subjects from F–10.

Table 26: History in Victorian schools at a glance

Primary	History has its own curriculum and is one of the Humanities subjects
Secondary (7–10)	History has its own curriculum and is one of the Humanities subjects
Senior Secondary (11–12)	History

The place of History in the Victorian curriculum

F–10 Humanities in Victoria comprises four areas. These are:

- History
- Civics and Citizenship
- Economic and Business
- Geography

²⁹ VCAA, Victorian Curriculum F–10 2.0: History: <https://f10.vcaa.vic.edu.au/learning-areas/humanities/history/introduction?tab=Rationale+and+Aims> (accessed 22 April 2026)

In the Victorian F–10 Curriculum 2.0, History has two main sub–strands: historical knowledge and understanding and historical concepts and skills that are designed to be ‘taught in an integrated way’.³⁰ The current list of concepts and skills underpinning F–10 History in Victoria are similar to those in NSW. They are:

- Historical questions
- Chronology
- Using historical sources
- Continuity and change
- Causes and consequences
- Historical significance
- Communicating

There is one study design available for VCE History in senior secondary, encompassing six subject options across Units 1–2 and Units 3–4.

K–10 History content in the Victorian Curriculum

Primary Years: F–6

Similar to other jurisdictions, primary students in Victoria explore personal and community histories, Australian history including First Nations history and the period from 1788 to the twentieth century. Primary students in Victoria are also required to engage with the key concepts and skills through the content.

Secondary School: 7–10

Similar to the Australian Curriculum and other jurisdictions, in Years 7–10, the Victorian History curriculum is arranged in a generally chronological order, beginning with Ancient Australia and moving through to the Modern World. The content is arranged as a series of ‘overviews’ and ‘investigations’.

Years 7–8

In Years 7 and 8, Victorian students explore history from antiquity to the modern period (c. 1750CE) considering Ancient Australia, Ancient Societies, Europe and the Mediterranean World and Asia and the Pacific Region.

Years 9–10

In Years 9 and 10, Victorian students explore the world from c. 1750CE through topics covering Australia (1750–1914), Australians at War (1914–1945), Asia (1750–present), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ rights and freedoms (1938–present) and The globalising world (1945–present).

Senior History in Victoria

VCE teachers have a relatively wide range of options available to them. At Units 1–2, students can study Empires, Modern History and/or Ancient History. At Units 3–4, students can study Australian History, Revolutions and/or Ancient History.

Within each of these choices, three or four options are available, and schools choose to deliver two. For example, in the VCE History: Revolutions subject, schools choose to offer two units from the four options of America, France, Russia and China. Uniquely, VCE History also allows schools to mix historical content from ancient and modern periods (e.g., by offering Unit 1 of Ancient History and Unit 2 of Modern History at Year 11) though most schools do not choose to do this. Students are not required to complete Units 1 and 2 (typically completed in Year 11) to attempt Units 3 and 4 (typically completed in Year 12).

As in 7–10, senior History in the VCE is founded on core concepts and skills. These include: historical questions, using sources as evidence, historical perspectives, historical interpretations, cause and consequences, change and continuity, historical significance and historical argumentation.

³⁰ See: <https://f10.vcaa.vic.edu.au/learning-areas/humanities/history/introduction?tab=Structure> (accessed 22 April 2026)

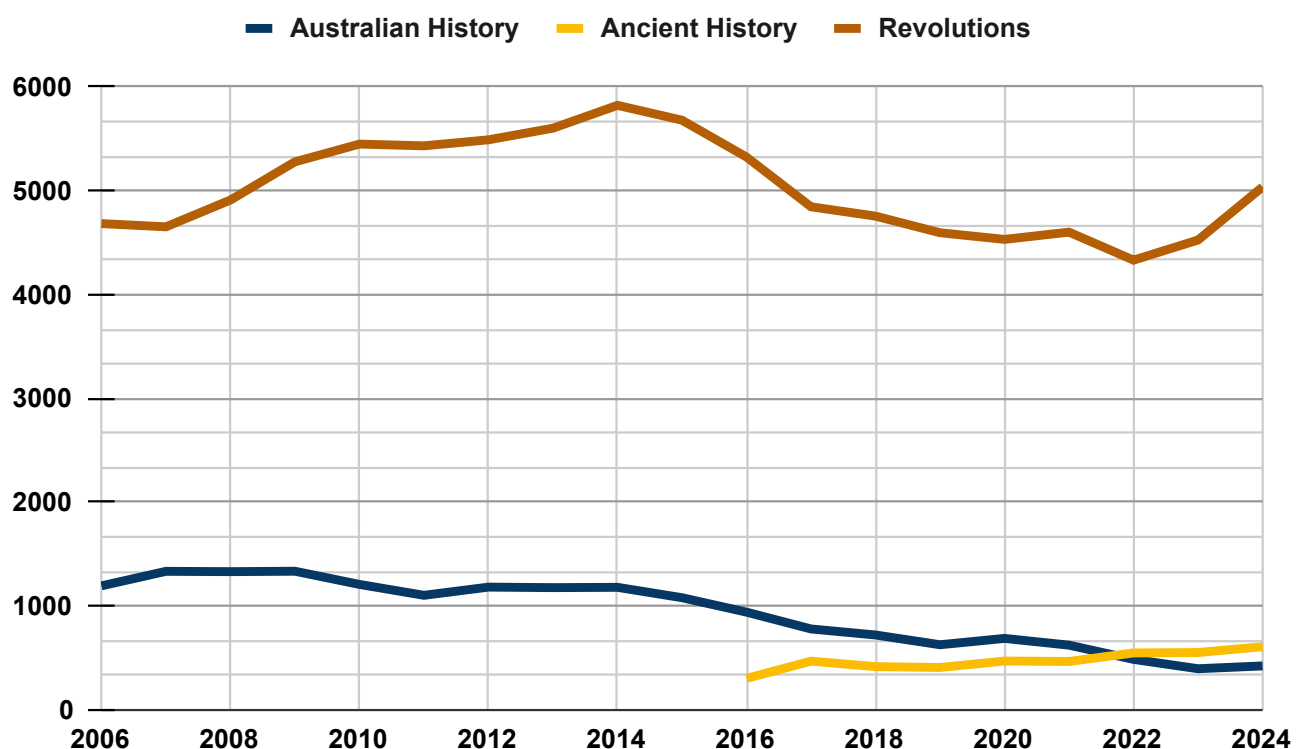
Table 27: An overview of senior VCE History in Victoria

(note: students are not required to complete Units 1 and 2 before attempting Units 3 and 4 in VCE History)

Unit 1 and 2 <i>(Typically completed in Year 11)</i>	The first two units are selected from the following topics: Empires - Units 1 and 2: Empires Modern History - Unit 1: Change and conflict - Unit 2: The changing world order Ancient History - Unit 1: Ancient Mesopotamia - Unit 2: Ancient Egypt - Unit 2: Early China
Unit 3 and 4 <i>(Typically completed in Year 12)</i>	Schools select ONE of the following (to complete units 3 and 4): Ancient history Units 3 and 4: Ancient history Australian history Units 3 and 4: Australian history Revolutions Units 3 and 4: Revolutions

Figure 5: VCE Enrolments for (Unit 4) Ancient History, Australian History and Revolutions (2006–2024)

Note: Ancient History was added in 2016.



Senior History Assessment in Victoria

Assessment in Units 1 and 2 in VCE History is explicitly ‘a matter for school decision’.³¹ Some guidance is provided regarding the nature and purpose of tasks.

Units 3 and 4 are assessed through a mixture of internal and external assessment. For these units, typically completed in Year 12, students are required to complete four assessment tasks for ‘School Assessed Coursework’ (SAC). The SAC items make up fifty per cent of a student’s study score (25 per cent for Unit 3 and 25 per cent for Unit 4). There is then one external examination for Units 3 and 4 (either Ancient History, Australian History or Revolutions) that takes the form of a 2 hour paper (with 15 minutes reading time) worth a total of seventy marks which contributes fifty per cent of a student’s final grades. Each examination includes two sections:

- **Section A:** worth fifty marks and includes a range of questions including one extended response. The questions may require the analysis and use of sources.
- **Section B:** worth twenty marks and is an essay response.

Practitioner’s views

The following responses were selected from a national teacher survey conducted by the History Teachers’ Association of NSW as part of this research. For further details and an overview of the data, see Appendix 1 at the end of this overview. The responses below were drawn from the relevant state/territory.

What do you think students most enjoy about History in Years 7–10?

‘World wars, holocaust and medieval Europe’.

‘Learning specific stories and details about the past’.

‘Interesting content’.

What do you think students least enjoy about History in Years 7–10 and what are the main challenges teaching History in Years 7–10 in your school?

‘Ancient history and colonial Australia’.

‘History being presented as disconnected facts or ... random topics with no ‘through line’ or explanation of purpose’.

‘Lack of consistency between teachers. Lack of support materials. Lack of teacher passion and expertise in content. This is caused mostly by a reliance on out-of-field teachers who are cycled in and out of 7–10 Humanities each year to fill out their allotments’.

‘Ever-expanding curriculum rather than true change’.

‘Teachers teaching ‘out of area’ who may lack interest, knowledge and/or enthusiasm for the subject, and therefore devalue and degrade the subject in the view of students and families’.

‘Lack of staffing stability – who is teaching what changes every year. Junior humanities seems to be allocated last, after all other subject priorities’.

‘How to fit everything in to the limited time available’.

‘Lack of time allocation. Lack of a requirement for History to be taught as a standalone subject by specialist teachers’.

What are the most important factors strengthening senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

‘Experienced and knowledgeable staff’.

‘High quality of VCE curriculum and support materials published by HTAV. Highly engaging content. Specialist teachers are employed in VCE History in virtually all schools (unlike 7–10) which increases the reputation for interesting and engaging content’.

What are the most important challenges to senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

‘VCE History is perceived to be challenging. Students who have had non-specialist teachers in 7–10 Humanities may be ‘turned off’ senior History as a result ...’.

‘Relevance of the VCE options’.

³¹ VCE, p. 5

Western Australia (WA)

Background

The WA School Curriculum Standards Authority (SCSA) manages the school curriculum. K–10 and Year 11 and 12 subjects fall under the same eight categories: English, Health & PE, Humanities and the Social Sciences (HASS), Languages, Maths, Science, Technologies and The Arts. They have adapted the National curriculum for Pre–Primary to Year 10.

Senior subjects are typically offered as ‘General’ or ‘ATAR’ courses, and VET industry-specific options are also available. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the nature of mining, agribusiness and defence industries in WA, there is considerable emphasis on STEM.

Table 28: History in WA schools at a glance

Primary	History is part of the Humanities and the Social Sciences (HASS).
Secondary (7–10)	History is part of the Humanities and the Social Sciences (HASS).
Senior Secondary (11–12)	General Ancient History ATAR Ancient History General Modern History ATAR Modern History

The place of History in the WA Curriculum

In Western Australia, History is one of four subjects that fall under the Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) curriculum in K–10. These are:

- Civics and Citizenship
- Economics and Business
- Geography
- History

HASS is generally framed through three overlapping areas: skills, knowledge and understanding and concepts. In WA, the skills are common to all HASS subjects, but the knowledge and understanding and concepts are unique for each subject.

The subject-specific concepts that underpin the History subject within HASS in WA are: evidence, sources, continuity and change, cause and effect, significance, perspectives, empathy and contestability.³² These reflect a broadly common set of concepts that influence secondary History across Australia.

Unlike some HASS subjects, History is a requirement of every year of study to Year 10. The SCSA suggests that HASS should be taught two hours per week to Year 8, and then three hours per week in Years 9 and 10 across Civics and Citizenship, Geography, Economics and Business and History. Many schools teach one HASS subject per term, which means History is often taught for one term per year.³³

In Years 11 and 12, History remains part of HASS, but at senior level this learning area includes fourteen courses each with distinct knowledge and skills. New syllabus material for Ancient History was released for implementation in 2024 and new syllabus material for Modern History was released for implementation in 2025.

³² <https://k10outline.scsa.wa.edu.au/home/wa-curriculum/learning-areas/humanities-and-social-sciences/humanities-and-social-sciences-learning-area-organisation> (accessed 19 April 2026)

³³ SCSA, ‘Notional Time Allocation Guidelines: Pre-Primary To Year 10’: <https://k10outline.scsa.wa.edu.au/home/resources?a=321714>

In WA, HASS is strikingly applied, especially to enterprise management. In senior years it includes Ancient and Modern History and also Aboriginal & Intercultural Studies, Philosophy and Ethics, Politics and Law, Religion and Life, as well as Economics and Geography, but also Accounting & Finance, Agribusiness, Business Management & Enterprise, an ATAR Careers and Enterprise subject on personal entrepreneurship and career management, and a general-level Careers and Employability and HASS in Action subject.

K–10 History in the WA Curriculum

K–10 History in WA broadly follows the structure of the Australian Curriculum with a stress on historical thinking, heritage and memory. According to the Rationale: ‘Humanities and Social Sciences provides a broad understanding of the world we live in ... [and] students will develop the ability to question, think critically, solve problems, communicate effectively, make decisions and adapt to change’.³⁴

Primary: K–6

Table 29: An overview of primary History content in WA

Content	Students explore topics relating to personal and family history, present and past family life, community and remembrance, first contacts and Australia from 1788.
Skills	These include questioning and researching, analysing, evaluating and communication.

Secondary: 7–10

As in other states, the 7–10 History content in WA is structured in a generally chronological order moving from the ancient past to the more contemporary modern and Australian history. In the most recent syllabus, students in WA are required to study two History topics per year from Years 7–10.

Table 30: An overview of secondary (7–10) History in WA schools.³⁵

Year 7	Deep Time History of Australia and The Ancient World (Egypt, Greece, Rome, India or China)
Year 8	Investigating Medieval Europe and Industrial Revolution (1750–1914)
Year 9	Australian History (1750–1914) and Investigating World War I
Year 10	Investigating World War II and Investigating Rights and Freedoms

³⁴ <https://k10outline.scsa.wa.edu.au/home/wa-curriculum/learning-areas/humanities-and-social-sciences> (accessed 19 April 2026)

³⁵ <https://k10outline.scsa.wa.edu.au/home/wa-curriculum/learning-areas/humanities-and-social-sciences/p-10-hass-curriculum/pre-primary-to-year-10-humanities-and-social-sciences-syllabus> (accessed 19 April 2026)

Senior History in the WA Curriculum

Senior students in WA can elect to take Ancient or Modern History at General or ATAR level.

Ancient History

Table 31: An overview of General and ATAR Ancient History in WA.

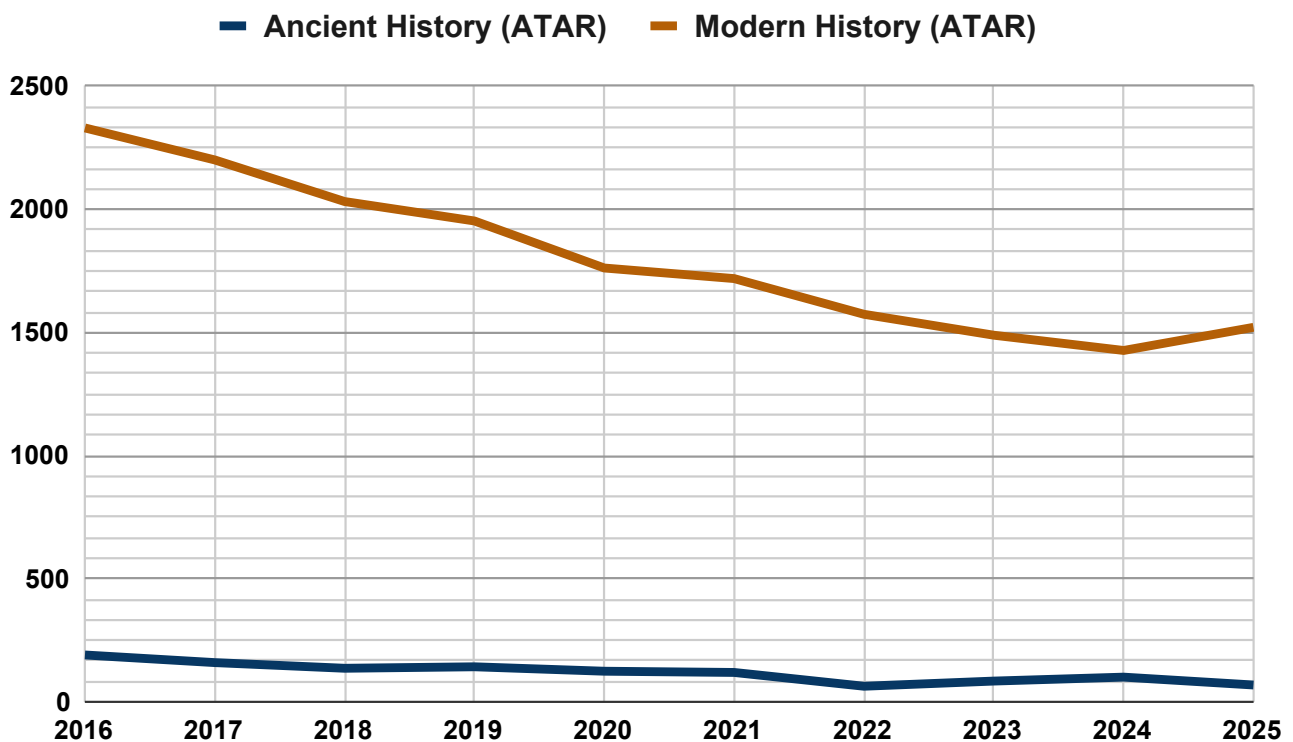
General Ancient History	Year 11 Unit 1: Ancient Civilisations and Cultures Unit 2: Power in the Ancient World
	Year 12 Unit 3: Societies and Change Unit 4: Confrontation and Resolution
ATAR Ancient History	Year 11 Unit 1: Ancient Societies Unit 2: Investigating the Ancient World
	Year 12 Unit 3: People, Power and Authority Unit 4: Reconstructing the Ancient World

Modern History

Table 32: An overview of General and ATAR Modern History in WA.

General Modern History	Year 11 Unit 1: People, Place and Time Unit 2: Power and Authority
	Year 12 Unit 3: Societies and Change Unit 4: Historical trends and movements
ATAR Modern History	Year 11 Unit 1: Understanding the modern world Unit 2: Movements for change in the 20th century
	Year 12 Unit 3: Modern nations in the 20th century Unit 4: The modern world since 1945

Figure 6: Senior enrolments for ATAR Ancient and Modern History in WA (2016–25)



Senior Assessment in WA

Senior History is assessed in Western Australia through a combination of school-based and external assessments. General courses rely more heavily on internal assessment and include one external task (not an examination) of 50 minutes that takes place in Term 2 of Year 12. ATAR courses include internal assessments and a substantial external examination in Year 12:

- Ancient History: 3 hours plus 10 minutes reading time comprising three sections worth a total of 100 marks.
- Modern History: 3 hours plus 10 minutes reading time comprising four sections worth a total of 100 marks.

Practitioner's views

The following responses were selected from a national teacher survey conducted by the History Teachers' Association of NSW as part of this research. For further details and an overview of the data, see Appendix 1 at the end of this overview. The responses below were drawn from the relevant state/territory.

What do you think students most enjoy about History in Years 7–10?

'Passion, knowledge and variety of activities from the teacher'.

'The gross / weird / unusual stuff – but also things that have impacted their world, things that they can see connect with their own lives in some way shape or form'.

'They love ancient history, anything they can do that is practical/hands on (eg. archaeology), they also love parts of history with action or gore (black death/wars/crusades) and as they grow older love topics with contestability or mystery'.

'Narrative and opportunities to connect their own experiences with stories from the past'.

What do you think students least enjoy about History in Years 7–10 and what are the main challenges teaching History in Years 7–10 in your school?

‘Learning subject specific skills that they can't see a connection to in upper school, particularly if they don't plan to do history in upper school, eg. source analysis skills like 'what is the message of this source'. Learning dates/facts off by heart’.

‘The focus on nation-building narratives and the focus on mostly Eurocentric and colonial history. The way we speed through the history to focus on skill and assessment’.

‘Can be a lot of reading and writing’.

‘The higher order thinking is often a difficult learning journey, especially when they’ve not previously engaged with critical thought’.

‘The STEM focus pushed by government and industry filters down to schools which means STEM subjects are often prioritised’.

‘Huge percentage of non specialist teachers in the classroom who are not familiar with the content of the curriculum or how to properly teach the skills’.

‘We have ten weeks (often less when interruptions are considered) to teach a unit and skills, to assess twice, and to hopefully instill a love of learning in the students. In WA, our history units are all about nation-building and drawing a line from Great Britain to Australia today. Limited opportunities to study Modern History that isn't about Great Britain or Australia’.

‘Humanities is not seen as valued in the same way that English and Maths are, despite the fact that critical thinking, inquiry and analysis skills are all essential and transferable skills that apply to a range of post school education and employment’.

‘The lack of confidence by non first nations teachers to teach first nations history and perspectives’.

What are the most important factors strengthening senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

‘Engaging Year 10 students with strong History teachers’.

‘Good teachers engaging students in lower school making them wish to pick subjects. Also teaching students about the clear links to jobs, particularly for Ancient History. In Western Australia there is demand for archaeologists and lots of jobs available, and growing awareness of Australia's involvement in overseas digs (eg. Macquarie University's digs in Egypt) is leading to a strengthening of our ancient history numbers as students can see clear career pathways’.

‘Skilled, enthusiastic lower school teachers; word of mouth from senior students who enjoy the challenge of History; carving out a presence in the school with History Club (after school study group), competitions. etc.’

What are the most important challenges to senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

‘ATAR History is a very difficult subject that many students don't see value in, compared to STEM. General pathway seems to be seen as more of a dumping ground instead of a genuine option for both students and admin’.

‘School policies making it difficult to choose History except almost as a last resort’.

‘Competing with STEM; timetabling putting History against complementary subjects such as Politics and Law, or Literature. Career counsellors sending the message that students should focus on 'useful' subjects – i.e. if they want to study medicine, why bother with history?’

‘Students not seeing the worth in the subject, prioritising STEM and as they have to pick one subject from our line where English is compulsory, they select English over history’.

‘Lots of other choices, admin doesn't necessarily see the value in HASS’.

‘The amount of work/ research and writing’.

Conclusion

The History curriculum landscape in Australia continues to reflect the complexity of the Federal system and the specificity of state and territory economic and cultural priorities. Because the Australian Curriculum is not applied uniformly in each state and territory, variations in the content, structure and assessment of History from the primary to the senior years persist, though some differences between states are larger than others. Although it is difficult to imagine an entirely uniform system, nor is this necessarily ideal, this can be confusing for new teachers, non-specialists and public commentators trying to make sense of History education in Australia.

Compared with the situation reported in Taylor and Clark's work in 2006, however, there also appears to be some greater cohesion in approaches to History in Years 7–10 across Australia due, at least in part, to the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. All but three states and territories use the Australian Curriculum directly for Primary to Year 10, and states that do not have created similar approaches, particularly in Years 7–10. From Years 7–10, for example, the History content in most jurisdictions is arranged in a broadly chronological manner, balancing both global and national history.

Nevertheless, content outlines should not be confused with actual coverage of that material. At present, only NSW currently mandates hours for the study of History in Years 7–10, though some other states such as WA and QLD recommend hours within their syllabus documents. This appears to have significantly strengthened the discipline in some contexts, offering protection against History's marginalisation from other political or generic educational priorities. In contexts that leave the amount of time allocated to History in the hands of schools, there appears to be significant variation in how much of a curriculum's content students actually engage with, and at what depth. This is rarely explored in public commentary about school History, as the controversies tend to remain narrowly focused on the nature of the content.

There also continues to be significant variations in curriculum design and structure across Australia. One noteworthy variation continues to be curriculum approaches to Civics and Citizenship in Years 7–10. The Australian Curriculum, and some states such as WA, offer a separate Civics-oriented subject, whereas other states such as NSW continue to embed Civics in other humanities subjects such as History and Geography. This has recently been the centre of considerable public debate, due to declining student performance in the Civics and Citizenship component of the National Assessment Program.³⁶

From the overview provided here, variation in senior History (Years 11–12) across Australia, which continues to be completed on elective basis in all jurisdictions, is also significant. This partly reflects differences in curriculum content, but also the markedly different formal assessment approaches at senior secondary level across the states and territories. While most states include some form of external assessment in the final year of senior History, these can vary widely in terms of length, style and the weighting it contributes to a student's final result. In some states, such as NSW, these major external assessments can have profound influences on the manner in which the subject is taught and assessed, even in earlier years of secondary schools, as 'exam preparation' is treated as paramount in many school contexts.

It is also clear from an examination of the current History curriculum landscape in Australia, that broader global developments in research and practice continue to shape History as a subject. The ideas of historical thinking, and particularly historical concepts and skills, have become more explicitly embedded in many History curriculum documents across Australia, drawing on decades of work by scholars such as Peter Lee, Denis Schemilt, Sam Wineburg, Carla Peck and Peter Seixas. In some curriculum documents this language is embedded in the content whereas in others such as QLD, NSW, WA and Victoria it is more pronounced.

There also appear to be a range of common and persistent challenges of teaching History in Australian schools. Perhaps most notably, teachers report, and the curriculum documents indicate, that students are required to engage with large amounts of content in History courses. Topics cover a broad range of historical periods, themes and issues, and students are required to practise historical skills including sophisticated forms of written communication. Given that most states do not impose mandatory hours for the study of History, this learning also often appears to take place under time-poor conditions.

³⁶ Tim Friedman, et. al., National Assessment Program: Civics and Citizenship – Public Report, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2025: <https://nap.edu.au/docs/default-source/nap-sample/nap-cc-2024-public-report.pdf> (accessed 18 January 2026)

Many comments from the teacher survey documented here also report that school History courses, particularly in Years 7–10, are often covered by non-specialist teachers. This is affirmed by recent research from the Australian Historical Association which noted that out-of-field teaching in school History has been relatively common.³⁷ This raises important questions about the confidence of teachers assigned to these classes and the quality of instruction they are able to deliver.

Perhaps relatedly, some common challenges across Australia appear to be connected to student engagement. Some teachers responding to the survey noted that the literacy demands of History can be challenging for many students and there is some indication that student perceptions about the relevance of History are negative. In some states, History competes with other Humanities subjects for time and attention, but also with broader educational trends such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths).

Although it was not a dominant theme of the comments submitted to the survey, there is clearly also some concern around the influence of new technologies such as Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) on school History. This has also been reflected in various publications aimed directly at History teachers and is perhaps one of the most significant contextual differences between 2006 when Taylor and Clark were writing and the present.³⁸

Senior History enrolments are generally continuing to decline in Australia, when taken as a percentage of the growing cohorts of students who complete senior schooling. It should be noted, however, that this has been a feature of discussions about History education in Australia for many decades.³⁹

Overall, senior Modern History courses are in the strongest position in Australia, especially reflected in data from NSW, Victoria, QLD, SA and WA. Within the last twenty years, senior Ancient History enrolments have generally declined more than enrolments for Modern History. In some periods, this decline has been significant and drawn attention from the media.⁴⁰

Despite losing ground overall as total student populations in senior schools have grown in many states, some senior History subjects remain well-subscribed, with particularly strong candidatures in QLD and NSW. In NSW, for example, Ancient and Modern History have ranked in the top fifteen most popular HSC subjects overall for about the past decade. In many states, History subjects also often rank among the most popular HASS/HSIE/Humanities subjects in Year 12. In South Australia, for example, Modern History has been the most popular HASS Stage 2 SACE subject for some time, even though it competes with a wide range of other options at that level.

Although public commentary about History education is often focused on the particulars of expression within curriculum documents (i.e. the content), the observations here affirm a long-understood reality for History teachers in Australian schools: History as a school subject is shaped by the curriculum, but also by other important forces such as bureaucratic and assessment structures, the level of expertise within the teaching community and students' access to well-trained History teachers. Constant changes to the content set out in curriculum documents is unlikely to have a profound affect on the teaching and learning of History, if other factors such as teacher training, teacher shortages and professional learning are left unaddressed.

Teaching History matters in the present moment, when democracies, ecosystems and economies are facing confronting risks. Tamson Pietsch and Frances Flanagan describe the 'urgency of our times as pressing on historians in a different way'.⁴¹ For historians, History teachers and, we hope, school History students, the long view that comes with the study of history can enable both hope and action. The centrality of an understanding of history to democratic and civic participation is its strength, and also the reason that curricula remain so contested. Offering Australian students the pleasures, opportunities and challenges that History provides remains a high calling indeed.

³⁷ The Australian Historical Association, 'Out of Field History Teaching in Australian Schools', 8 December 2023: <https://theaha.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/AHA-Out-of-Field-Teaching-in-Australian-Schools-Summary-13-December-2023.pdf>

³⁸ See Volume 57 (No. 3) of the History Teachers' Association of New South Wales journal, *Teaching History*, 2023, which was entirely dedicated to Artificial Intelligence

³⁹ See for example, Stuart Macintyre, 'The Genie and the Bottle: Putting History Back in the School Curriculum', *Australian Journal of Education*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 1997, pp. 189–215

⁴⁰ Natassia Chrysanthos, 'The HSC subjects with plummeting enrolments revealed', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 October 2020: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/the-hsc-subjects-with-plummeting-enrolments-revealed-20200930-p560m1.html>

⁴¹ Pietsch, Tamson, and Frances Flanagan. "Here We Stand: Temporal Thinking in Urgent Times." *History Australia* (Clayton) 17, no. 2 (2020): 252–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14490854.2020.1758577>.

It is crucial therefore, that advocacy for the teaching and learning of History in Australian schools extends beyond curriculum content debate, even though this is often the sole focus of political and media discourse surrounding the subject. History teachers need high-quality support from university History departments, professional associations and other sources to ensure that they can continue to deliver content and manage assessment with professionalism and confidence.

Good History teaching in Australian schools has always been a key part of the infrastructure for the discipline. Many undergraduates and professional and academic historians were inspired to pursue History by quality, engaged History teaching. The discipline's centrality to the story of the Australian Curriculum demonstrates the important place History has in building citizenship, but its value is much deeper. History provides information, entertainment, informs politics and public policy, and is key to our publishing industry where historians document and communicate Australia's changing political, economic, social and cultural landscape. Economically, History is one of the key disciplines that provides the foundation for highly-valued skills, including critical analysis, creative thinking and curiosity. Although it is not often celebrated, these are also skills that are at the top of the list of employer demands in Australia and internationally, especially analytical thinking and creativity.⁴²

Perhaps one of the strongest signs of hope in the broad picture of History education in Australia is that relatively large, committed and networked professional associations remain highly active. Many state and territory associations continue to support a national History Teachers' Association of Australia, and both national and state/territory conferences continue to provide practical and highly-valued professional learning. In their work over many years, these associations have also developed many close and productive links with academics, researchers and professional bodies such as state-based History Councils and the Australian Historical Association. Nurturing this continued professional collaboration should remain a high priority.

In their report in 2006, Tony Taylor and Anna Clark concluded with a sentiment that also rings true in 2026:

... in schools all over Australia, it is evident that there are large numbers of individual teachers at both primary and secondary school level who teach Australian history with great skill and enthusiasm...⁴³

The History teaching community in Australia remains professional, vibrant and active, and this is something that should be both celebrated and protected.

⁴² <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2025/in-full/3-skills-outlook/> <https://www.australianindustrygroup.com.au/news/blogs/2025/whats-in-store-for-skills-and-training-in-2026/>

⁴³ Tony Taylor and Anna Clark, p. 34

Appendix 1

Summary of 2025 Teacher Survey Data

As part of the research process for this report, HTANSW conducted a voluntary survey of practising History teachers in Australia. The survey received a total of ninety-one submissions, which included those from teachers in every state and territory in Australia.

The survey was designed to provide general insights into some of the current issues in History education in Australia, not as a comprehensive quantitative or qualitative piece of research.

Figure 7: Summary of responses to the 2025 Teacher Survey question – To what extent do you think your school executive/administration values History as a subject? (91 responses)

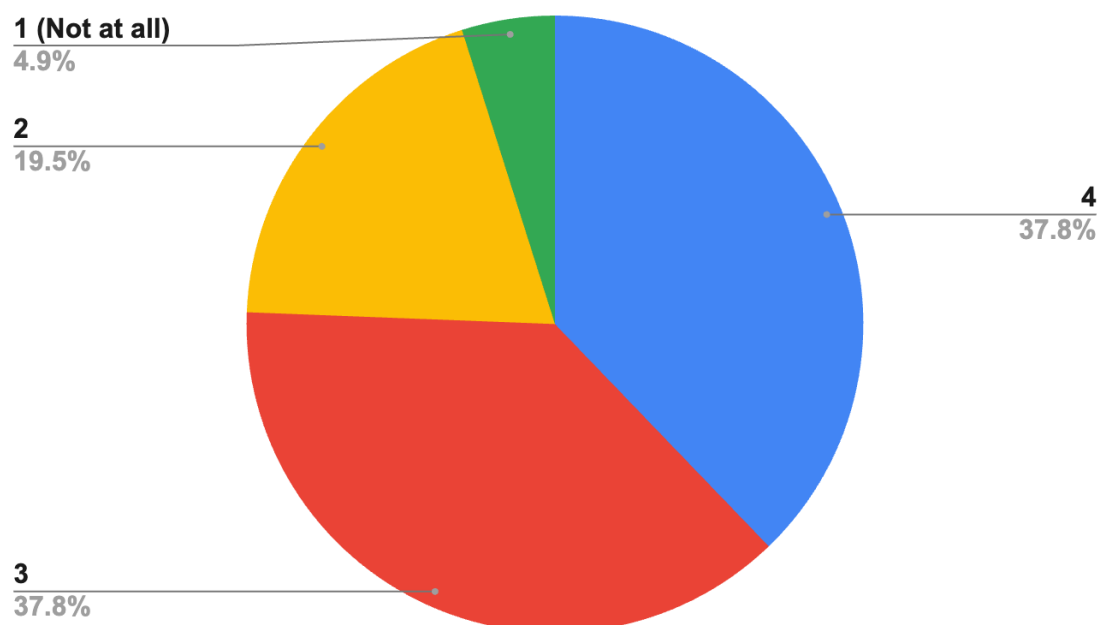


Figure 8: Summary of responses to the 2025 Teacher Survey question – How common is it to have out-of-field teachers responsible for History classes in Years 7–10 in your school? (91 responses in which 5 indicated ‘every year’ and 1 indicated ‘never’).

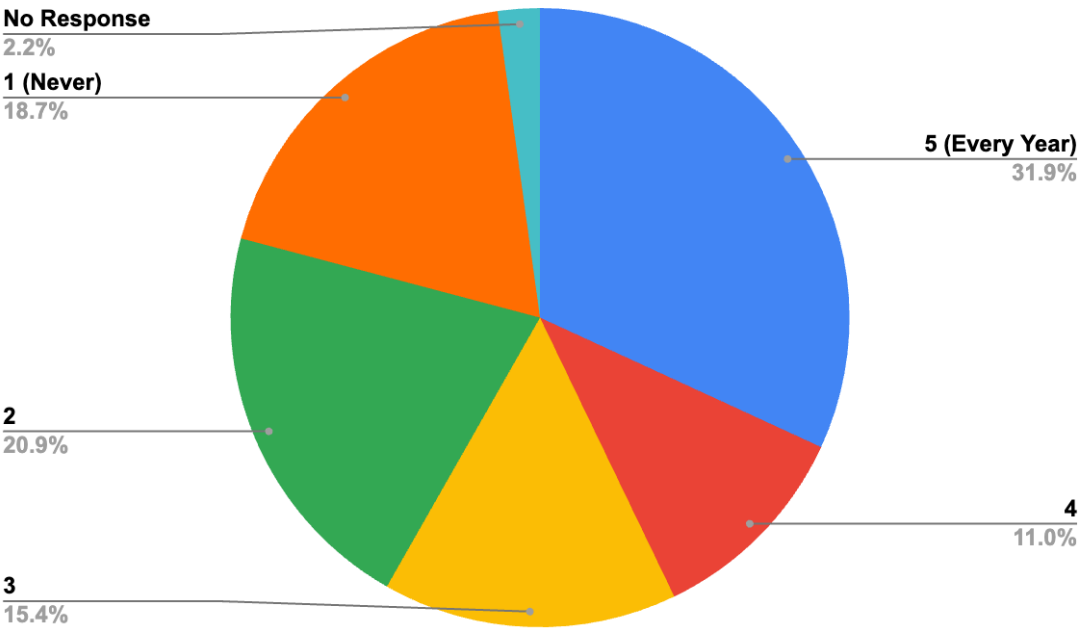
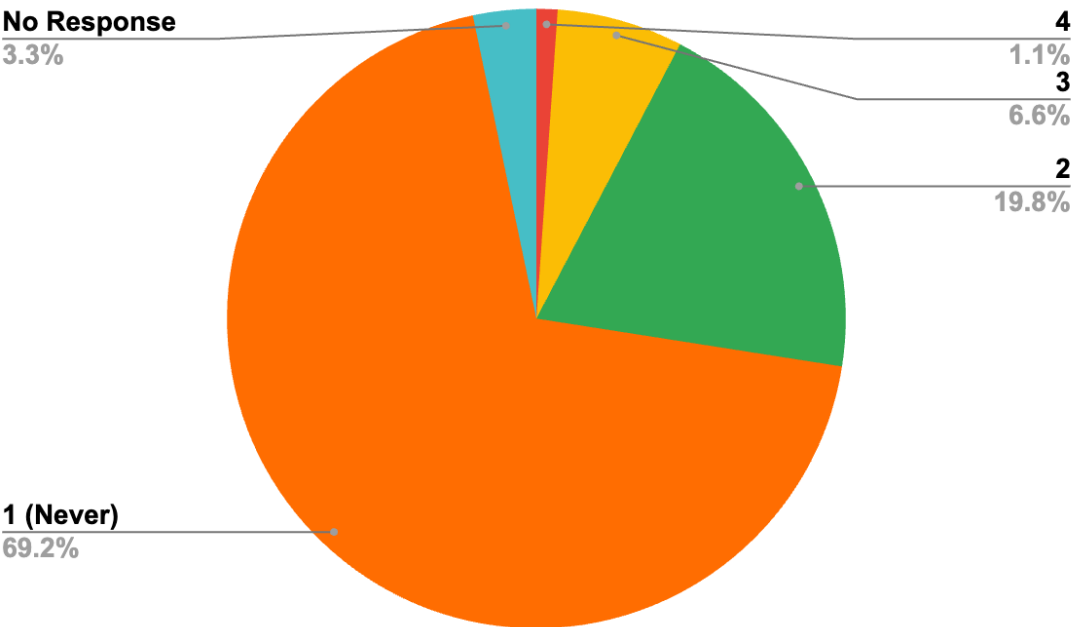


Figure 9: Summary of responses to the 2025 Teacher Survey question – How common is it to have out-of-field teachers responsible for History classes in Years 11–12 in your school? (91 responses in which 5 indicated ‘every year’ and 1 indicated ‘never’).



General analysis of comments provided by teachers in the survey

What do you think students most enjoy about History in Years 7–10?

Of eighty-eight responses to this question, teachers overwhelmingly (thirty-eight) told us that Years 7–10 students engage best with stories of the past, with sweeping, exciting or adventurous narrative. Five teachers indicated that the more gruesome the stories the better, and five mentioned the Black Death specifically. Nine teachers indicated that students like history that is relevant to them and/or the present, while four teachers suggested that they enjoy learning about events and people and that are different to them. Four teachers suggested that historical knowledge and thinking were attractive. Six teachers said that students like Ancient History best, often alongside Medieval History, and eight said that students were most interested in wars, sometimes in relation to Australia's participation. Ten teachers stressed that hands-on investigation, perhaps especially with artefacts, is most engaging – four said that it was best to do this collaboratively. Five teachers suggested that good teaching and well-planned lessons were key, while four suggested the variety of topics available is an advantage.

What do you think students least enjoy about History in Years 7–10?

Of eighty-eight responses to this question, twenty-one teachers reported that assessment, especially essay and other writing, was least enjoyable for Years 7–10 students. Fourteen teachers said that reading and the literary nature of history was a problem for their students – eight mentioned source analysis specifically as not enjoyable. Ten said that students dislike memorising dates, facts and the details of history. According to four teachers, students dislike boring or bad teaching, especially 'death by powerpoint', while another four thought that students struggled with topics that are irrelevant to their lives. Four teachers thought that the complexity of historical analysis and knowledge was difficult for students and two found the curriculum too crowded, others find it too repetitive – one mentioned 'too much WWI&II' specifically. Sixteen teachers reported that certain topics were not enjoyable – seven of these teachers mentioned Australian history and another three Indigenous Australia. Four believed there was too much prescribed material via the national curriculum and two that it is too Eurocentric. One teacher said that students do not like Ancient History, another the Industrial Revolution. Only one teacher reported that students do not like history that makes them 'feel bad'.

What are the main challenges teaching History in Years 7–10 in your school?

Of eighty-six responses to this question, nineteen teachers find the curriculum too crowded, which presents difficulty teaching with sufficient depth to produce either learning outcomes or student engagement. Relatedly, seven teachers said that there were difficulties timetabling sufficient time to teach the curriculum. Student engagement was the next most frequent difficulty, with fifteen teachers describing this as the most challenging aspect of teaching History. This seems to be particularly difficult due to a problem with a growing perception among parents and students that HASS is not valuable, as reported by ten teachers – five said that where there is a choice, students choose STEM subjects. Seven teachers reported low literacy among students – one referred to the poor literacy of junior teachers. Three teachers said that students are using AI inappropriately to produce their written work. Ten teachers said that a key problem was that teachers without History training or expertise are often expected to teach it, which some say reduces student engagement.

What are the most important factors strengthening senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

Of ninety response to this questions, fifty-two (fifty-eight per cent of respondents) indicated that the History teacher's quality, passion, knowledge and experience producing engaging classes was the most important issue in attracting students to History. The next most frequent response (eleven) related to the reputation of History for supporting career development, enabling academic rigour and the development of analytical thinking and as a useful and interesting subject. Having engaging subjects/topics was mentioned by four teachers. Another four discussed the value of high-quality resources, especially ICT resources. Two teachers said that having continuity from Year 10 was an important factor, while three teachers said that History was attractive for senior students for its capacity to give them ownership over their own learning and, in one case, for historical events in the school.

What are the most important challenges to senior (Year 11–12) History enrolments in your school?

Of eighty-nine responses to this question, eighteen teachers cited the difficulty of learning both content and skills in History as the key deterrent to student enrolment. Fifteen teachers indicated that subject choice pressures presented the key challenge to History enrolments at senior level. For some, this meant that there were too many compulsory subjects, others that there were too many competing (and/or 'sexier') HASS options and that History was just one of many electives, making it seem unimportant. Fourteen teachers thought that the key problem was the reputation of History as having little utility or value for university or career plans. Relatedly, eleven teachers said the pull of STEM subjects discouraged students from taking History. Nine teachers referred to system issues, especially the poor scaling of History for the ATAR, but also management issues, changing staff and inexperienced teachers. Four teachers alluded to lack of literacy among students and four to content, including one who found the curriculum too crowded. Two teachers said that History exams were off-putting for students and another two cited a lack of student engagement as their key challenge.

What general challenges for History education do you consider to be most prominent in your state/territory?

Of ninety-one responses to this question, teachers most frequently (twenty-one) said that the poor reputation of the Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) among parents and politicians discouraged students from taking an interest in History and impedes their engagement – two relatedly cited school's stress on STEM as the cause for a decline in interest in History. Eighteen teachers described the crowded curriculum and the time pressures it imposes as the biggest challenge. Fourteen teachers said that the curriculum is the key challenge, with mundane topics with little relevance to students, poor alignment, and topics that keep changing for political reasons. Seven teachers cited a shortage of qualified teachers as their key challenge, while four suggested that those compelled to teach History out of field was their most pressing challenge. Three teachers said that literacy levels were a key impediment to student interest and another four the growing use of AI. Individual teachers reported a range of challenges, including that a lack of confidence in teaching Indigenous history, universities not offering sufficient choice of history subjects to produce good teachers, assessment, scaling, ICT and 'truth telling'.

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