



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

This submission is organised under five headings:

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

1. History

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

- As illustrated in the following point, the discipline of history is very healthy in NSW and this good health has deep roots. For many decades now, we have maintained the integrity of the discipline against the trend towards various social science formulations (HASS/HSIE/SOSE). Particularly at a time when trends in other jurisdictions are seeing a turning back to distinct history courses, we see an absolute priority in maintaining the integrity of the discipline of history.
- The mandatory 7-10 syllabus, implemented in 2013, has enjoyed widespread support from teachers, as noted from responses to our Professional Learning program and informal surveys. When students have completed their mandatory K-10 courses, 25 - 30% of the Stage 6 candidature each year chooses to continue studying history by selecting Ancient History or Modern History. Given the large number of courses students are free to choose from in the final years of school and the deserved reputation of the history courses for academic rigour, the large candidatures for both Ancient (9174 in 2017) and Modern History (11,482 in 2017) suggest that students see great value in the study of history. Around 2000 students each year also go on to study History Extension in Year 12. This is a unique course, highly regarded by academics and envied by history teachers wherever there is an awareness of it. It engages and extends our most able students.
- History provides students with essential foundational knowledge about themselves, their local area, Australia and the global community they are part of. It equips them for active citizenship and enables informed participation in national discussion. As Professor Stuart Macintyre wrote in the History Shaping Paper for the Australian Curriculum:
We fail students – both those who have arrived recently and those with many earlier generations in this country – if we deny them a familiarity with the national story, so that they can appreciate its values and binding traditions. We fail them also if we do not foster

the skills of historical understanding that equip them, by the end of their studies, to take an active part in the debates over the legacy of the past, to understand and make use of new sources of information, to distinguish the unimportant from the important, to find truth and meaning in history and contribute to democratic discussion of national issues.

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

2. Broader Curriculum Issues

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

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

3. Review Processes & Recommendations

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

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

dealt with, improve upon past practice and avoid embedding long-term problems that will need to be addressed by future reviews?

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

To help safeguard against such outcomes, there needs to be a strong practitioner voice at every stage of the process. Grassroots experience and insight must be able to balance top-down expertise and broader imperatives. This goes well beyond merely allowing teachers to ‘have a say’ at the start of the Review or when draft recommendations are published.

4. HTA Member Survey Results

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

A. Response to Questions

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

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

Q2 The study of history assists in developing literacy.

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

Q3 The study of history develops creativity.

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

Q4 The study of history assists in developing numeracy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

B. Selected Extracts from Survey Responses

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

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

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

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

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

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

“As a history teacher who teaches special education, I know that learning history builds skills for life. Understanding the past allows my students, regardless of their complex needs, to learn

how to be active citizens. The students love the narratives they are taught as long as they are taught with passion and relevant resources to augment learning.”

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

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

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

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

5. Recommendations

HTANSW has three concluding recommendations:

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