

Critical mark for history summit

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A NATIONAL summit on history teaching in schools has been criticised for not including enough history teachers and being "stacked" with academics and commentators.

Melbourne University historian and meeting participant Kate Darian-Smith said the event should have a greater number of history teachers who understand the reality of the history classrooms.

Three of the 23 participants invited to Thursday's meeting are now teaching.

Professor Darian-Smith said that while professional historians could make a valuable contribution, "a lot of them will be talking about curriculum and teaching when they are teaching in a very different context or not teaching at all".

"The reality is the decisions of the summit need to be implemented through teachers," she said.

The meeting participants vary from conservative commentator Gerard Henderson to Australian War Memorial historian Peter Stanley and Tasmanian primary school teacher David Boon. With seven females, Professor Darian-Smith also criticised the summit for being "overly male".

The History Teachers' Association of Australia backed the comments about the lack of teachers, saying they had much to add about what could and should be taught.

"If there had been a greater number of teachers, you would have had a wider number of perspectives and a wider debate," association president and summit participant Nick Ewbank said.

The meeting follows Howard Government criticism about the way history is taught. Last month, Education Minister Julie Bishop called for a renaissance in history teaching. She said there was too much political bias and too few pivotal dates and facts being taught.

Ms Bishop said many people had an interest in the teaching of Australian history in schools and a diverse group of leading historians, public figures and educational leaders had been chosen for the summit.

La Trobe University historian and meeting participant John Hirst said enough history teachers were invited to inform the summit. He said the Government's aim in holding the meeting was chiefly to have historians get broad agreement on what students might know or learn if there were compulsory history subjects.

Monash University history educator and participant Tony Taylor said it was crucial the meeting did not become a political solution to a professional problem. "There would be a lot of teacher resistance if it is seen as a political slanging match that has produced an ideological outcome," he said.

Associate Professor Taylor conducted the Government's 2000 national inquiry into the teaching and learning of history.

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