

History Teachers' Association of Australia



Statement on the publication of draft K-10 National Curriculum Documents

Release Date: 1 March 2010

The History Teachers' Association of Australia has been an enthusiastic supporter of the national curriculum project. The development of national courses in the discipline of history represents a great opportunity for students and teachers and today's release of a draft K-10 document has been keenly anticipated.

There will now be a lengthy period of consultation when colleagues and the broader community will be able to evaluate the draft document and contribute to its refinement. Ultimately, the current proposal must be evaluated according to its classroom feasibility. Thus, while there are some very encouraging statements in the rationale and preliminary material, these must now be used as criteria to measure what is presented in Knowledge and Skills outlines. Of particular relevance are the following statements:

- 'History is a disciplined inquiry into the past that develops students' curiosity and imagination.'
- 'Historical study is based on the evidence of the remains of the past. It is interpretative by nature, promotes debate and ... develops transferable skills ...'
- 'History emphasises a skills and inquiry based model of teaching. It is expected that the skills of historical inquiry will be developed through teacher-directed and student-centred learning ...'
- 'In the teaching of history there should not be an artificial separation of content and process nor a focus on historical method at the expense of historical knowledge.'

History teachers will expect to be able to engage students in the way that has been suggested and a priority goal will be the development of significant 'transferable skills' that focus on areas such as critical thinking, literacy and the ability to communicate complex information and ideas.

HTAA will submit a detailed response to ACARA once the document has been examined and colleagues consulted. In the meantime, some preliminary observations may be made:

- What is proposed for primary is predominantly Australian and there will be inevitable concern about the ability of some topics to engage students at this level. There will also be questions asked about implementation in a diverse range of primary settings. For example, how are composite classes catered for or how will the Year 7 program need to be adapted in those jurisdictions where this class is taught in a primary school?
- The period of history to be covered in Years 7-10 is very ambitious. Classroom practitioners will be closely scrutinizing the amount of content to be covered. In Years 9-10, in particular, there is a great deal of content suggested. Even though an Overview and Depth Study approach has been specified, there must be some question about the feasibility of studying any topics in depth. This has serious implications for both student engagement and skills development.
- What is outlined for skills development is encouraging and capable of being refined. The draft achievement standards will also need close examination to ensure that they are establishing a realistic basis for assessment of student achievement.

- The *What is History?* component is well placed in Year 7. It is also very encouraging to see provision for school developed studies in Years 7-9. These will offer opportunity for local options and cater for teacher autonomy and diverse student interest.

For HTAA, the fact that the K-10 draft will be evaluated in the absence of clear information about implementation does raise quite serious concerns:

- While the proposed course has been written with a specific teaching time in mind for each year (for example, 80 hours a year for 7-10), at the moment there is no guarantee that state and territory jurisdictions will allocate this time. This uncertainty effectively undermines any attempt to judge the feasibility of the proposed content outlines or the extent to which they can be delivered as a Depth Study. There is an urgent need for clarification from state and territory authorities.
- We will be evaluating the K-10 document before we have seen proposals for Year 11-12 courses. Articulation between the junior and senior courses is essential and any final response would need to wait until all of the courses can be examined together.
- The proposal for new national history courses relies on the assumption that teachers will have a sophisticated grasp of significant knowledge, historical understandings and historical skills. It could also be argued that history is a 'passion thing' and that this passion is built on confident expertise. Indeed, particularly with history, if a teacher is not a passionate expert there is the danger that any teaching of a mandatory subject will be counter-productive. If we are developing ambitious national history courses, there must be a focus on teacher qualifications. Since the start of the process in 2008, HTAA has been voicing concern about the urgent need to address the issue of teacher pre-service training – our most recent statement was published in February 2010. Further, we are yet to hear anything about professional development or support for current teachers.

Finally, while it is appropriate that the curriculum documents now go to broad consultation, there must be some concern about how consultation feedback will be dealt with. Not only is there an enormous weight of expectation on history, with many influential groups determined to see their particular interests reflected in the content outlines, but ACARA's on-line consultation mechanism would appear to invite feedback at a micro-level. How will all the feedback be processed? HTAA urges ACARA to be guided by some of its earliest commitments:

- that there would be a focus on quality rather than quantity,
- that hard decisions would be made about the 'significance' of proposed content,
- and, above all, that courses would be 'feasible' when placed in the hands of classroom teachers.



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