

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY INTO ACADEMIC STANDARDS OF SCHOOL EDUCATION

Submitted by the History Teachers' Association of Australia (HTAA)

President: Nick Ewbank

Executive Officer: David Murray

Preamble

HTAA is the peak body representing teachers of History from all States and the ACT. It is a federation of History Teachers' Associations representing each of those states and territories. It thus represents in the order of 2 500 teachers across the country.

History curricula and teaching varies significantly between each of the jurisdictions. This variation is most evident in the compulsory years of schooling. In New South Wales, History is a compulsory part of the school curriculum (with a mandated 200 hours across years 7-10). In Victoria, History has been identified as a separate discipline within Humanities and is regarded as an essential learning. History does not exist as a discrete discipline in Queensland, and, to a degree, in the ACT.

Given the importance of History as a way of understand the current world, all states and territories identify historical skills (eg investigation, interpretation), variously described around the country, as part of their key learning areas (or similar nomenclature), sometimes as part of 'strands' within their curriculum (eg 'time, continuity and change').

All States and Territories undertake sample testing of Civics and Citizenship knowledge in students, which is partially related to students' study of History.

The nature of History as an academic discipline is a matter of debate, and has been a matter of contention. Most now agree that History is about more than the ability to recite dates, but educational jurisdictions have taken different approaches to what constitutes the study of History in their schools.

All States and Territories identify important skills associated with History, for example skills in investigation and interpretation. The degree to which these skills¹ are taught well is very difficult to ascertain. Many students are taught these skills by teachers with limited formal training in History. Some of these teachers do an excellent job; others do not. In some cases, students are taught History by teachers with no formal qualifications in the discipline.

The movement towards a mandated study of Australian History as part of the compulsory years of schooling is yet to bear fruit. The Australian History Summit, (convened by Hon Julie Bishop, Minister for Education, Science and Training) did make significant progress towards a core curriculum for the whole nation.

The recent decision by the Council of Australian Federation to abolish SoSE is yet to take effect across the country.

There is a greater degree of comparability across jurisdictions in the post-compulsory years of school, where all States and the ACT provide History as a discrete subject. Generally, these senior classes are more likely to be taught by teachers with an academic background in History and some training in History pedagogy.

Question 1 How well are schools preparing students in History for further education, training and employment?

Whatever form it takes, the study of History develops in students an engagement with the process of inquiry, some understanding of people, events and issues of the past, an appreciation of how human endeavour brings about change, and an understanding of the world around them. These are essential attributes of informed and active citizens in a democratic society.

While each jurisdiction positions History differently within their respective curriculum structures the discipline, because of its core skills, contributes positively to preparing students for further education training and employment. When taught well, History develops valuable discipline specific skills and a range of transferable and generic communication and interpretive capacities: These skills, such as the collection, analysis and evaluation of information, are vital in the emerging “information” rich world and are integral to future employment and participation in a democratic society.

¹ The easiest way to capture what historical skills are is to make reference to the *Historical Literacies* as defined by the National Centre for History Education (NCHE) – to be found on the Centre’s website www.hyperhistory.org.

History as a discipline is grounded in the development of a deep knowledge and appreciation of the past. This knowledge informs understandings of the future and shapes the form of a democratic and civil society. Moreover, the teaching and learning of History develops a broad range of student capacities. These include:

- understanding historical writings
- gathering and analysing data
- interpreting and evaluating different types of evidence
- the empathetic understanding of others' perspectives
- understanding cause and effect
- communicating their findings in various media and modes
- working collaboratively and independently to plan and carry out tasks.

The development of these skills is strongest in schools where the teaching of History is:

- engaging
- well resourced - in terms of both print and digital media
- grounded in a deep knowledge and appreciation of the past, and history's role in forming the future
- respectful (but evaluative) of divergent perspectives
- valued by schools in timetabling and curriculum decisions.

Question 2 **The Core Curriculum in History**

There is no common core curriculum in History, however each jurisdiction structures share common skills, methods and focus over the course of student learning. The outcomes of the Australian History Summit, if brought to fruition, will develop a common core in Australian History in the primary and middle secondary years.

However, those outcomes of the Summit only identify Australian History as a mandatory study. The study of other societies, including those of Europe and Asia, and the recent and distant pasts, are an imperative for developing our students as empathetic and tolerant members of a multicultural, multiethnic national and international community. We are led to believe that the world of the future will be a global village; to look only inwards at the past of our own society is to do only part of the job that the teaching of History could do.

Members of the HTAA National Council would welcome the opportunity to elaborate on these responses by appearing before the Committee.

Nick Ewbank
President

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