

Proposed amendments to the Ancient and Modern History syllabuses prior to implementation in 2019

(26 March 2018)

In this paper the Queensland History Teachers' Association identifies six key areas of concern relating to the senior Ancient and Modern History syllabuses. These are syllabus objectives, ISMGs, assessment, Units 1 and 2 topic requirements, narrow chronological parameters and Unit Four external examination topics for Modern History. Recommendations and strategies to address these issues are also advanced. We recommend that these areas are carefully considered and addressed by the Queensland Curriculum & Assessment Authority before implementation in 2019.

1. Syllabus objectives

Issue: Non-alignment of senior History syllabus objectives with the *Australian Curriculum History: 7-10* and the Australian Curriculum for Modern and Ancient History.

Recommendations:

1. *Revise criterion 1 to achieve a hierarchy of terms – change ‘comprehend terms, issues and concepts’ to ‘**comprehend historical terms, concepts and issues**’ (note the inclusion of the word ‘historical’ to emphasise the specific nature of these terms, concepts and issues);*
2. *Revise criterion 3 to align with Queensland’s assessable elements that link to the Australian Curriculum: History 7-10 by inserting the word ‘interpretation’ after analysis so that it reads ‘**analyse and interpret historical sources and evidence**’;*
3. *Revise criterion 4 to align with Australian Curriculum: History 7-10 and Senior History syllabuses by changing ‘synthesise information from historical sources and evidence’ to ‘**synthesise information to use as evidence from historical sources**’;*
4. *Revise criterion 5 to align with the Australian Curriculum: History 9-10 and Senior History syllabuses by including ‘sources’ and ‘perspectives’ so that it reads: ‘**evaluates historical sources, perspectives and historical interpretations of the past**’.*

(Also recommend swapping criterion 4 and 5 - as it provides a more logical order)

2. Instrument specific marking guides (ISMGs)

- a) **Issue:** The current ISMGs do not help students to clearly know what is expected of them in the assessment; nor do they help teachers make accurate and consistent judgments when marking student work. This is primarily because of:
- i. inappropriate word / language choices
 - ii. inconsistency in words selected across different performance levels
 - iii. a lack of clarity in some descriptors
 - iv. a lack of alignment between some assessment specifications and ISMGs
 - v. a lack of detail in some performance level descriptors and an insufficient mark range
 - vi. some lower performance level descriptors require more demanding cognitions than higher performance level descriptors.

See appendix 1 for further details.

Recommendation: *All instrument specific marking guides be independently reviewed, rewritten and tested by experts in this field to ensure that words used to describe processes or cognitions are meaningful and that performance level descriptors are not simply characterised by a different word*

to describe a process or cognition (or the omission of a descriptor) but consider the typical characteristics of student work at that performance level.

- b) **Issue:** The weighting, mark range and marks allocated for the various assessment techniques undervalue important skills that have been traditionally valued in History. There is a concern that if certain skills are not 'rewarded' with suitable mark allocations these skills will not be taught or learnt well. For example, in the new senior syllabuses, 'Creating and communicating' garners approximately 10% of the marks in the External examination (EA) in comparison to Comprehension with approximately 25% of the marks, and 65% for critical thinking skills (Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation). In the Test essay (IA1) 5 marks out of a possible 25 are for 'Creating and communicating' (20%); similarly, in the Research essay (IA3) 4 marks out of a possible 25 are for 'Creating and communicating' (16%). This suggests that literacy skills are undervalued and under assessed in the new syllabuses. Moreover, the performance level descriptors in the instrument specific marking guides for 'Creating and communication' are narrowly defined, particularly in the External assessment piece (EA).

Likewise, 'Devising and conducting research' has been narrowly framed. In the Independent source investigation (IA2) the performance level descriptors only deal with the development of research questions (key and sub), the *quality* of the information identified, located and organised (significant or not - rather than an effective research process) and whether a recognised and accurate system of referencing has been used. In the Research essay (IA3) research is reduced to one dot point descriptor related to the development of research questions. It is unclear as to how "a logical investigation" can be judged "through a key inquiry question and a reasoned hypothesis".

Critical thinking skills have been an integral part of the current 2004 Senior History syllabuses and the new senior History syllabuses have continued this. However, there appears to be an over-emphasis on critical thinking to the detriment of other key skills.

Recommendation: *Review the number of marks allocated to the various skills to ensure that there is parity. Review descriptors for communication skills to ensure that there is appropriate emphasis on effective written communication, and the use of language over a range of assessment types (particularly the Research essay IA3) as well as the allocation of marks and descriptors for the Research criterion.*

3. Assessment

- a) **Issue:** The QCAA has provided no clarification or guidance to-date around the **External Assessment** (EA), the 'Short responses to historical sources' test. Teachers need advice on how to design this assessment technique. What will be the relationship between test questions and assessment criteria as expressed in the ISMGs? Will specific questions relate to specific criteria in the ISMGs or might questions be marked across criteria in the ISMGs? As the syllabus requires students to "have opportunities in Units 1 and 2 to experience and respond to the types of assessment they will encounter in Units 3 and 4" (p. 5) teachers need explicit instructions from the QCAA on this issue. **Recommendation:** *As stated in the QCAA memo (044/17), dated 21 August 2017, "a sample external assessment instrument that includes an instrument-specific marking guide (ISMG) and an annotated sample response" will be provided in 2018 to help support schools in preparing for the external assessment. These materials need to be released promptly to assist in this preparation. Additionally, it would be valuable if QCAA, with the assistance of QHTA, organised professional development around test design for the EA. This PD might be rolled out in the form of a webinar.*
- b) **Issue:** Sequencing of assessment instruments. It is important that QCAA determine the timing of each assessment instrument in Units 3 and 4 as opposed to Units 1 and 2 as these units contribute to

the students' final results in Modern and Ancient History. However, the *order of assessment instruments* currently outlined in Units 3 and 4 is not pedagogically sound.

In the lead up to the external examination it is important that particular historical skills are focused upon and refined. To this end it would appear to be more pedagogically sound to assess the two essay assessment items in Unit 3 and the short-answer source-based assessment items in Unit 4. In this way students learning would be progressively built upon as particular historical skills would be reinforced across a unit of study. Writing an essay which uses historical evidence and sources to mount a coherent and valid historical argument requires a different skill-set to a short-response which focuses on analysing or evaluating particular aspects of historical sources.

Recommendation: *That the sequence of assessment instruments in Units 3 and 4 be changed so that the Essay-type assessment is tested in Unit 3 and the Short answer source-based assessment is tested in Unit 4.*

- c) **Issue:** There is a lack of clarity in the specifications of the Independent source investigation assessment task (IA2). The current description (pp. 68-69., Modern) confounds rather than clarifies the key features of this assessment technique. While the sample assessment instrument supplied at QCAA workshops sheds light on the nature of this piece of assessment, the description in the syllabus documents do not. One area that requires clarification relates to the 4-6 sources that students are required to identify, locate and organise. A clear explanation of what comprises 'a source' for this task is required. (Example: a 'source' might comprise a short written excerpt of approximately x-number of words or a visual source such as a photograph or propaganda poster).

Recommendation: *An audit of all assessment techniques is undertaken to ensure that there is alignment between assessment and criteria and that the specifications of all assessment instruments are clear, precise and illuminating.*

- d) **Issue:** The limited availability of historical sources and the fragmentary nature of the evidential record in Ancient History will make the 'Stimulus specifications' in the Test essay (IA1) difficult to achieve. This is because some sources (6-7) are to be provided to students one week before the examination. These sources must not be interrogated with teacher assistance; another 3-5 are not provided before the examination. What little evidence remains in ancient history is often critical to a comprehensive understanding of topics investigated. If 9 to 12 sources are unable to be utilised in a classroom investigation, the validity and effectiveness of this investigation may be seriously compromised. Additionally, some ancient (as well as modern) sources are imperative to all historical investigations and need to be part of an assessment instrument if the class investigation and the assessment is to be valid and in alignment with teaching and learning. For example, a study of fifth century Athens would be deficient without introducing students to Pericles' funeral oration; in an investigation of the First Crusade students would need to have encountered Pope Urban's sermon; a study into the changing Australian foreign relations – Curtin's 'Look to America' speech etc. It would only stand to reason that these crucial sources should also feature as part of an assessment instrument if the focus of the class investigation is to align with the assessment.

Recommendation: *The stimulus specifications for the Test essay (IA1) be reviewed so that some seen sources, which have been studied in class are permitted.*

- e) **Issue:** There is a lack of alignment between specifications for particular assessment items and the criteria in the ISMGs. For example:
- in the Research essay (IA3) students are asked to generate a hypothesis in 'Specifications' (p. 87 Modern); however, in the criterion 'Devising and conducting' they are assessed on devising "a key inquiry question" as well as "a reasoned hypothesis" (p. 89, Modern).

- In the Independent source investigation (IA2) in ‘Specifications’ (p. 68, Modern) “accepted standard language conventions apply” and yet these are not assessed in the ISMG criterion ‘Creating and communicating’ (p. 71, Modern).

Recommendation: *Review and revise ISMGs to ensure they are in alignment with assessment specifications.*

4. Topics required to be studied in Units 1 and 2

Issue: Due to time constraints imposed by the new assessment regime, whereby the external examination block will start at the end of October each year, many schools are choosing to start Unit 3 in Term 4 of Year 11. Currently the syllabus requires that two topics are studied in each unit. Given the time constraints, the meaningful coverage of course content and skill development will be difficult to deliver in a pedagogically sound way.

Recommendation: *Amend the syllabus to state that at least one and no more than two topics be studied in each of Units 1 and 2. This would align with the syllabus statement that schools should develop at least one assessment per unit, with a maximum of four assessments across Units 1 and 2.*

5. Narrow chronological parameters

Issue for Ancient History: The chronological parameters given for the ancient societies that may be paired with Topics 2-7 in Unit One (p. 18) are overly limiting.

For example:

- i. The study of *funerary practices in Ancient Egypt* is limited to the Old Kingdom (Dynasties 3-6) which precludes: a study of continuity and change into the Middle or New Kingdoms; engagement with sources such as the Book of the Dead; and the exploration of how changing funerary practices reflect changes to society and the relationship of the king to their people from the Old to New Kingdom.
- ii. The restriction of *Roman Society to 753-133BC* and consequent lack of sources places limitations on investigations into the family or funerary practices in Ancient Rome. As Toynbee, in *Death and Burial in the Roman World*, states, ‘The bulk of our evidence, written and archaeological, for Roman afterlife ideas is not earlier than the first century BC. For the preceding period Plautus is our chief literary authority’ (1971, p. 34). Key evidence on Roman funerary practices, including the material evidence from Pompeii and the Via Appia, and the Amiternum Tomb, which features the only extant depiction of a Roman funerary procession, will not be within the scope of the topic.

The purpose of the time parameters in the syllabus appears either to limit the scope and therefore complexity of topics offered in Unit 1, or to avoid duplication or double-teaching of content in later units. For example, to prevent New Kingdom Egypt being taught in Unit 1 as well as in Unit 4 Topic 1 Egypt New Kingdom Imperialism.

If the latter is the case, the syllabus deals with this matter in Section 1.2.5 “Subject Matter” in the Course Overview (Ancient History syllabus, p. 13), when it states “It is recommended that the topics chosen across a course of study should not significantly overlap or duplicate. For example, limiting topic choice to one civilisation or time period over the four units would not allow students sufficient breadth and depth of understanding of the Ancient World.”

Recommendation: *Remove or significantly widen the chronological parameters associated with the Ancient Societies featured in Unit 1.*

Issue for Modern History: While the inclusion of the 'slice of time' approach is welcomed in Unit 3 (National experiences in the Modern World) to allow for deeper analysis of national histories, the time periods provided, particularly for Western nations are too limited as they do not extend beyond the 1940s. For example, Australia's timeframe is confined to 1914-1949 which is not only similar to the time period covered by the *National Curriculum: History* (Years 9 and 10 - Australia during World War I and II) but it does not allow for the study of significant events and developments after World War II, such as the Menzies' years or the Constitutional Crisis of 1975. Schools are unlikely to choose Australia as a topic of study because of this. Similarly, the time-frame for other Western nations such as Germany, USA and USSR do not extend beyond 1945. This provides students with a very limited understanding of these countries' experiences in the modern world. England's time-frame (1707-1837) denies teachers and their students the opportunity to focus on significant twentieth century developments such as the demise of the British Empire, its relationship with Europe and the wider world, and the Thatcher years.

In comparison to Western nations, Asian nations' time-periods extend to the late 1960s/1970s; whereas Israel extends to the mid-1990s.

Recommendation: *Change Unit 3 to allow Modern History students to study a significant aspect of a nation's history across any part of the twentieth century.*

6. Unit Four external examination topics for Modern History

Issue: QCAA's decision to nominate six of the thirteen topics for the external examination are of a similar 'type' as four of the six are mainly 'political/diplomatic/military' in focus. Additionally, there appears to be significant duplication amongst them, namely, the 'collective security'/'Cold War'/'struggle for peace' overlap. The inclusion of topic 12: 'Rights and recognition of First Peoples since 1982' in the nominated six topics gives undue weighting to this area of history as the syllabus elsewhere mandates that Modern History students are to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives by studying at least one of the following topics: the 'Australian Frontier '(in Unit 1) or the 'Australian Indigenous rights movement since 1967' (in Unit 2). Topics that take a more social, economic, cultural and/or technological focus appear to be 'demoted' by not being chosen for the external assessment. Most obvious here are topic 4: 'Mass migrations'; topic 5: 'Information Age'; topic 10: 'Cultural globalisation'; topic 13: 'Terrorism'. These topics, relegated to a secondary status, are arguably more connected to most young people's situations, interests and concerns (communication; culture; globalisation; technology; terrorism) and they cry out for critical study as preparation for life in the decades ahead. The current choice is thus not in keeping with a futures oriented curriculum that was envisaged in the Australian Curriculum's precursor document, the 'Melbourne Declaration'.

Recommendation: *Review the composition of the topics nominated for the external examination in Unit 4 for Modern History to ensure that a variety of significant topics are chosen. A recommended list would be: 'Australian engagement with Asia', 'Genocides and ethnic cleansings', 'Cold War', 'Struggle for peace in the Middle East', 'Cultural globalisation' and 'Terrorism'.*

APPENDIX 1: Instrument Specific Marking Guides

Specific examples of problems in the current ISMGs are provided below. (Note that all page references are from the Modern History syllabus.)

- i. Inappropriate word choice. For example, in the Essay test (IA1) (p. 65) in the criterion 'Comprehending', the top level descriptor states that the student's work has the following characteristic: "**precise** application of historical terms, issues and concepts placed in historical contexts". By selecting the term "precise" to describe the quality of the comprehension, this descriptor fails to differentiate between explicit and implicit comprehension, and suggests all comprehension is fixed or exact; it does not acknowledge how implicit comprehension might elicit different but valid reasons.

Recommendation: *Scrutinise word choices to ensure that they don't limit student achievement.*

There are many examples misleading or unusual language choices throughout the ISMGs. For example, "astutely integrated evaluation" (shouldn't the quality of the evaluation be assessed here and not the manner in which it has been integrated into the work?); "description of usefulness and reliability" (how do you describe usefulness and reliability?); "narrow identification of the distinguishing features" (meaning?); "arrive at ... corroborated conclusions" (sources/evidence are corroborated, not conclusions).

Recommendation: *Review and rewrite ISMGs to eliminate such language choices.*

- ii. There is inconsistency in the words selected in performance level descriptors in the ISMGs across different assessment items. For example, the word '**reasoned**' has been used across three different performance levels. In the Research essay (IA3) criterion 'Devising and conducting' this word features in the highest performance level (3 marks out of 3) (p.89). However, in the Test essay (IA1) criterion 'Synthesising' is used in the second highest performance level (3 marks out of 4) (p. 66), while in the Test essay criterion of 'Evaluating' it is used in the mid-range performance level (3-4 marks out of 6) (p. 67). The same term being used across what nominally might be termed an A, B and C performance level will create confusion amongst both teachers and students and will not lead to good judgements.

Recommendation: *Avoid using the same word across different performance levels in the ISMGs.*

A similar issue arises with the use of the phrase '**framed to guide**' in the criterion 'Devising and conducting' for the Independent Source Investigation (IA2) (p. 69). This phrase is used in both the highest performance level (5-6 out of 6 marks) and the next performance level (3-4 out of 6 marks) to describe how key questions and sub-questions are used in an investigation. In this case the performance level descriptors are not describing the typical characteristics of student work at the various performance levels.

Recommendation: *At the highest level students might use key and sub-questions to frame and drive or guide an investigation, while a less able student might use key and sub-questions to inform an investigation (i.e. give information). Rather than just repeating the qualifier ('discerning') to describe these research questions might it be stated that 'a discerning key inquiry question and logically derived sub-questions are framed to...'*

- iii. Lack of clarity in ISMGs for the Test essay (IA1) (p. 67) descriptors for 'Creating and communicating' when mention is made to "reference to evidence" – is this referring to the referencing of evidence via in-text citations or footnotes or is it referring to the inclusion of evidence?

Recommendation: *Review and revise ISMGs to ensure that ambiguity is eliminated.*

- iv. There is a lack of alignment between specifications for particular assessment techniques and the criteria in the ISMGs. For example: in the Research essay (IA3) (p. 87) students are asked to generate a hypothesis; however, in the criterion ‘Devising and conducting’ they are assessed on devising “*a key inquiry question and a reasoned hypothesis*” (our emphasis) (p. 89). In this same assessment technique, the assessment of ‘ethical scholarship’ is assessed in the criterion ‘Creating and communicating’ (p. 90) when it is part of the objective ‘Devise historical questions and conduct research’.

Recommendation: *Audit ISMGs to ensure that all ISMGs align with assessment and ISMGs align with objectives.*

- v. Lack of detail in performance level descriptors and sufficient mark range in different performance level make it difficult for teachers to make good judgement. This is particularly a problem with the ISMG for the criterion ‘Creating and communicating’ for the Independent source investigation (IA2) (p. 71).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> complete task (rationale, sources analysis and critical summary of evidence) is <i>clear, succinct and coherent</i>. 	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> complete task (rationale, sources analysis and critical summary of evidence) is <i>coherent</i>. 	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> incomplete task (rationale, sources analysis and critical summary of evidence). 	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not satisfy any of the descriptors above. 	0

The limited number of marks allocated to this criterion, along with the limited number of descriptors, will affect the accuracy of teacher judgements and the reliability of student results. There are notable ‘gaps’ between performance levels separated by one mark. The choice of the qualifying word ‘coherent’ to describe the second performance level is problematic as a student’s written expression might be clear at this level rather than ‘coherent’. Where then, does this leave teacher judgements? In another scenario, if the best-fit approach is to be followed and a student’s work is neither clear, succinct or coherent but is complete, does the teacher then assign the piece of work a mark of 2 out of 3, as a mark out of 1 is for an incomplete task? If the mark out of 2 is decided for the sole reason of ‘completion’, this does not appear to be a good judgement on a criterion which is purporting to assess communication.

Recommendations: *Ensure performance level descriptors provide sufficient details so that teachers can make accurate and consistent judgements and the mark range is sufficient to ensure reliable outcomes.*

- vi. Performance level descriptors for the Test essay (IA1) (p. 67) and Research essay (IA3) (p. 90) for the criterion ‘Evaluating’ do not appear to be hierarchical as a second level descriptor appears more demanding than the first level descriptor. The first level descriptor in ‘Evaluating’ states that the student work has, amongst others, the following characteristics “significant **consideration** of contested views about the past”. According to the glossary to “consider” is to “think deliberately or carefully about something, typically before making a decision; take something into account when making a judgment; view attentively or scrutinise; reflect on”. The second level descriptor states “**discussion** of contested views about the past”. In the glossary “discuss” is defined as “examine by argument; sift the *considerations* for and against; debate; ... *consider*; taking into account different issues and ideas; point for and/or against, and supporting opinions or conclusion with evidence”. Based on these definitions a *discussion* of contested views appears a much more rigorous undertaking than just a *consideration* of them. A similar issue arises in the Independent source investigation (IA2) in the criterion of ‘Analysing’. The word “**elaboration**” is used in the highest level descriptor (which interestingly has no definition) and “**explanation**” in a second level descriptor. To explain something is a more challenging task than elaborating on something.

Recommendation: *Review and revise all ISMGs to ensure that descriptors are hierarchically ordered.*