



21 December 2019

Minister for Education
Hon Grace Grace MP
1 William Street
Brisbane, QLD, 4000

By email: education@ministerial.qld.gov.au

Dear Ms Grace,

Re. Mock external assessments for Ancient History and Modern History

As the peak body for History educators in Queensland, the Queensland History Teachers' Association (QHTA) seeks to inform you of serious concerns that it and its membership have with the quality of the mock external assessment materials. These materials are: the Question and response book, the Stimulus book and the Marking guide and response. The materials were developed and published by Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) in mid-July this year for school use in late 2020.

The mock external assessment materials are hugely significant. They are designed to inform history teachers and their students of what to expect as they face the 'real' external assessment in late 2020. That assessment will be the first externally-assessed senior history examination in Queensland since 1973. Very few current history teachers in Queensland will have experienced those examinations. Thus it is crucial that the mock assessment materials are of the utmost quality if thousands of teachers and their students are not to be poorly informed or even badly misled about the external examination. Further, the ensuing 'real' assessment materials must also be of the utmost quality if they are to challenge students to demonstrate their competence fully and to finely distinguish the levels of achievement by different students in an assessment that contributes to their Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR). If the external examination fails in this regard it will jeopardise students' futures and, inevitably, invite public criticism and ridicule. (In this regard, it is worth noting that it was public uproar about an inappropriate senior physics examination paper that precipitated the government's Radford Report in 1970, leading to Queensland's abolition of both Senior and Junior external examinations.)

QHTA's concerns about the mock external assessment materials build upon earlier concerns about the senior history syllabuses themselves. Since late 2017 QHTA executive members have been involved in ongoing communication with various QCAA officers about significant concerns we had, and continue to have, with aspects of the 2019 Ancient and Modern History syllabuses. Despite three written submissions (March 2018, September 2018, January 2019), four face-to-face meetings (November 2017, June 2018, September 2018, November 2018), and union representation on our behalf in late 2018, we were unable to persuade QCAA to amend unusable and unworkable aspects of the syllabus documents. Consequently teachers and students have had to accept flawed documents which could have been easily amended.

Because QCAA has not seen fit to respond to QHTA's legitimate concerns about syllabus matters in a timely and pedagogically sound manner, we feel compelled to bring our concerns about the recently released mock external assessments for Ancient and Modern History to your direct attention.

The stakes are much higher with the mock external assessments and ultimately the external examinations because students and their immediate futures are directly involved. If external assessments do not allow students the opportunity to meet syllabus objectives due to poorly written assessment instruments, there will be a public outcry. This can only lead to educational authorities and their associates coming under direct criticism and ridicule.

For these reasons QHTA is seeking the following action:

1. QCAA, as a matter of urgency, review and revise all mock external assessment in light of the detailed feedback provided in the attached submission.
2. QCAA, as a matter of urgency, re-issue all Ancient History and Modern History mock external assessments, ensuring they have the attributes of quality assessment.
3. QCAA, as a matter of urgency, revise and rework any assessments developed on the actual external examinations before school use in late 2020 in light of issues raised in the attached submission.
4. QCAA notify schools running courses in Ancient History and Modern History of its intentions to address the flaws in current mock external assessments.
5. QCAA reissue the sample list of content for subject matter relating to the Modern History external examination - Australian involvement in the Vietnam War.

QCAA has indicated that schools should not use the mock assessment assessments with students until they have studied the examinable topics 'Augustus' for Ancient History and 'Australian involvement in the Vietnam War' for Modern History (usually in Term 3, 2020). However, teachers will no doubt be referring to the mock materials from early 2020, as they plan their approaches to teaching and assessment for the year. Thus, it is imperative that QCAA urgently and promptly responds to the detailed feedback provided in this submission and revises and reissues the mock assessment materials.

In its defence QCAA will likely claim that the mock external assessments were developed in close consultation with subject matter experts drawn from schools, subject associations and universities. QHTA was never consulted during the development of these mock external assessments, and key subject matter experts drawn from schools and universities, if consulted, found their advice and recommendations ignored. Additionally, the process of consultation was flawed as it did not allow sufficient time for well-considered feedback. A number of those subject matter experts have been involved in the compilation of this paper and their dissatisfaction with both the process and outcome has motivated them to communicate their misgivings through this submission. The process explains the product. The process was flawed and accordingly the product is too.

Yours sincerely

Julie Hennessey
Chair of the QHTA Curriculum sub-committee

Pip Macdonald
President of QHTA

On behalf of QHTA Executive members

cc. Chris Rider, Chief Executive of the QCAA; QHTA membership

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