



## **QHTA submission**

**Re. Draft 2 for Ancient History and  
Modern History syllabuses**

**22 September 2023**

**Context:** The following comments and recommendations were collated from two Google Docs that were made available to all QHTA members for each subject (Ancient and Modern) and comments on an initial draft sent to all members of the QHTA management team. This document has been compiled by Julie Hennessey (Chair QHTA Syllabus Sub-Committee).

## CLARITY

**Improvement:** Overall, the slim-line version of the Ancient History and Modern History syllabuses has improved the clarity of the documents in terms of accessibility and structure. The use of language is more succinct, clearer and generally more effective. Additionally, the elimination of repetition, particularly in the Modern History syllabus, is welcomed.

### Recommendation for further improvement:

1. Clarity would improve with the inclusion of a **subject-specific glossary**, particularly as it relates to words used in the ISMGs. This would include both i) subject-specific terminology such as ‘perspectives’, ‘usefulness’, ‘reliability’, ‘evidence’, ‘features of evidence’, ‘sources’, ‘primary sources’, ‘secondary sources’, ii) general qualifying words such as ‘discerning’, ‘sophisticated’, ‘effective’, ‘basic’, ‘range’ and iii) other relevant terminology such as ‘Ancient History’, the ‘Ancient World’, ‘Modern History’ etc. While the subject-specific terms featured above have been defined in the body of the syllabuses, having all key terms/words alphabetically listed in one place – in a glossary - would improve clarity and make the syllabuses more accessible for the teachers and students using it.
2. An explanation of what constitutes ‘**different perspectives**’ particularly needs to be clarified. Teachers and students need a clear and precise understanding of this phrase, especially as it applies to both the Reporting standards (p. 12) and the criterion Devising and conducting. A common understanding of how ‘different perspectives’ (top level descriptor) differ from ‘perspectives’ (second and third level descriptors) is imperative.
3. According to the draft syllabus, ‘**features of evidence**’ are “attributes of information obtained from sources that are useful for a particular historical inquiry. These attributes may relate to, for example: origin, motive, audience, perspective, context, explicit meanings and implicit meanings” (p. 9). The problem here is that information used as evidence doesn’t have all of these attributes but rather the historical source from which the evidence is gleaned. This is particularly the case for motive (the author is driven by a motive not the information/evidence) and audience (the creator not the information/evidence produces the source with a particular audience in mind). Additionally, ‘explicit meanings and implicit meanings’ are not a ‘feature or evidence’ nor a feature of a source but rather the outcome of interacting with evidence – students derive/ comprehend/ apply elicit explicit and implicit meaning from the evidence.
4. In the explanation of the **historical inquiry process** (p. 7) it would appear vital to mention in each syllabus that inquiry-based learning is a mix of student-directed learning as well as teacher-directed learning. This is particularly important given the recent criticism of inquiry-based learning and the push to return to an explicit instruction / teaching model.
5. In the section ‘Designing a course of study’ (p. 4) it states that “teaching, learning and assessment activities are ***integrated and enlivened in an authentic setting***”. It is unclear as to what the words in bold and italicised mean. Can you rephrase to make clearer?
6. In the section ‘Assessment’ (p. 5) it is unclear as to what it means by schools having the autonomy to decide “how **authentic** the task will be”. Elaboration or the provision of an example would help here.

7. In **'A' reporting standard** in the **Ancient History** draft syllabus (p. 12) there is a missing word. 'The student's responses demonstrate a thorough and mostly accurate use **of** terms in historical context; detailed explanations of issues; and an informed understanding of concepts.'
8. **Fix discrepancy in the Alternative Sequence resource**: Under 'Course structure' on page 4 it states that "Alternative sequences will be offered commencing with AS units 1 and 2 in 2025 (odd year), AS units 3 and 4 in 2026 (even year), AS units 1 and 2 in 2027, and so on." However, under 'Assessment' (p. 5) it erroneously states: "In Unit 1 and Unit 2 in even (sic) years, and Unit 3 and Unit 4 in odd (sic) years, schools: ..." A similar error is made in the section 'Determining and reporting results' (p. 14) where the second sub-heading should read "Even (not Odd) years: Units 3 and 4; Odd (not Even) years: Units 1 and 2".

## IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

**Issue:** A key implementation challenge that has not been addressed in the syllabus is how to study two topics in depth in each of Units 1 and 2 in three terms (Term 1, Term 2 and Term 3). While the 2019 syllabus has always made provision for the number of assessments schools need to develop for Unit 1 and Unit 2, it has never addressed the number of topics to study.

**Recommendation:** In the section 'Subject matter' under 'Selecting topics' guidelines similar to assessment guidelines for Unit 1 and Unit 2 on page 5 be developed. For example, it might be suggested that no less than three and no more than four topics may be chosen across Units 1 and 2.

## ASSESSMENT PROCESSES: CLARITY, EFFECTIVENESS AND APPROPRIATENESS

**Improvement in assessment (IA2):** There is general consensus that the removal of the rationale in the IA2 is a positive development. As is the inclusion of the 'synthesis' criterion to cover the marking of the critical summary, via the development of an historical argument.

**Observations on investigations (IA2 and IA3):** Some QHTA members believe that labelling Internal Assessment 1 (IA2) and Internal Assessment 2 (IA2) as 'investigations' is confusing because they are not in the same format. Others believe the term 'investigations' is appropriate because an investigation is not defined by the format but rather by the process of independent research.

**Question around the use of the word 'sustain':** Seeking clarity regarding the use of the word 'sustained' in assessment techniques IA1 and IA3. In both the IA1 and IA3 it is stated on page 11 that each essay requires 'sustained' analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. While this specification appears in the current syllabus, clarification is sought. Does 'sustained' mean addressing all cognitive verbs in each paragraph of the essay?

**Recommendation:** Define term 'sustained' in subject-specific glossary.

**Issue:** More specific details about the External Assessment required.

**Recommendation:** Greater clarity would be achieved if the following were identified:

- question-types
- source types
- mark allocation to assessment objectives/criteria
- how marks are determined.

## ISMGs

While there have been improvements in the ISMGs, they need further refinement for teachers to make reliable judgment about student work. Some language needs to be more nuanced to make finer grained judgments, criteria with only one descriptor need to be developed further, and the range of marks across performance levels needs to be reviewed.

### Devising and conducting

- **Issue:** In the first dot-point, the use of the word “development” of a key inquiry question suggests that students need to show the stages of how they developed their key inquiry question.
- **Recommendation:** Replace “development” with “creation” or “formation” or “construction”.
- **Issue:** In the first dot-point, there is no discrimination in the quality of the sub-questions between the top-level descriptor (worth 4-5 marks) and the next level descriptor below (worth 3 marks). In both descriptors the sub-questions are described as “relevant”.
- **Recommendation:** Differentiate between the top and next level descriptors for sub-questions by replacing the top-level descriptor of “*relevant* sub-questions” with ‘*logically derived* sub-questions’.
- **Issue:** Dot-point 3 in the top-level performance descriptor states: “consideration of different perspectives”. The next level performance descriptor effectively says the same thing: “consideration of perspectives” as the plural ‘perspectives’ could imply differences. This confusion is repeated in the ‘2’-mark band.
- **Recommendation:** For clarity, performance levels need to distinguish between ‘different perspectives’ (top-level 4-5 marks) and ‘similar perspectives’ next level (3 marks).
- **Issue:** Given that the cognition ‘Comprehending’ no longer features in the investigations (IA2 or IA3) there is a concern that there is no reference to the factual accuracy of the evidence featuring in these assessment task.
- **Recommendation:** In dot-point 2 of the top-level descriptor add the word ‘accurate’ so that it reads: “discerning selection of relevant and *accurate* evidence from primary and secondary historical sources”.

### Comprehending

- **Issue:** Over-use of the phrase “related to” in the first three performance levels does not allow teachers to discriminate between the various performance levels.
- **Recommendation:** Vary phrasing to help teachers discriminate between different performance levels. For example, if a student’s work is in the top-level performance descriptor it should be addressing the unseen question and hypothesis directly and consistently, rather than just “related to”.
- **Issue:** Concern about the absence of comprehension from the investigations, particularly the IA3. The question has been posed: How can you write an historical essay based on research with no application of historical knowledge or understanding?
- **Recommendation:** In dot-point 2 of ‘Devising and conducting’ add the word ‘accurate’ and ‘address the question’ so that it reads: “discerning selection of relevant and *accurate* evidence from primary and secondary historical sources *to address the question*”.

## Analysing

- **Issue:** Only having one descriptor which focuses on one cognitive verb (i.e. examine) is limiting and deficient as it does not fully describe what students need to do in this cognition. According to the syllabus objective 'Analyse evidence from historical sources' (p. 3), students "examine features of evidence from historical sources. Through this examination features of evidence are interpreted and their relationship with the historical argument/s is explained." So in this objective, students *examine, interpret* and *explain*.
- **Recommendation:** Expand the descriptor to include the other components of the syllabus objective (i.e. interpret and explain). Alternatively, return to the three aspects in the current ISMG for analysing – i.e. *identification* of the features of evidence, the *examination* of historical evidence, and an *explanation* of how this evidence addresses the question or contributes to the argument. The various aspects of the current ISMG for analysis is superior to the current proposal.
- **Issue:** The definition of the 'features of evidence'. The definition of this contrived term is problematic and needs to be revised.
- **Recommendation:** Revise the definition. A possible alternative: 'Features of evidence' refers to "attributes of information obtained from sources that are useful for a particular historical inquiry. These attributes may relate to, for example: origin, perspective, context, and content'. Explicit meanings and implicit meanings are derived from a student's examination of the information/content contained in the source.

## Evaluating

- **Improvement:** The requirement that students demonstrate the evaluation of both usefulness and reliability in investigations IA2 and IA3 is a welcomed development.
- **Outstanding issue:** Only having one descriptor which focuses on one cognitive verb (i.e. judge) is not adequate to make clear, fair and reliable distinctions in the qualities evident in student work. Additionally, it does not fully encapsulate the description of the syllabus objective on p. 3 of the syllabuses. According to the syllabus objective 'Evaluate evidence from historical sources', students "make judgments about the usefulness and reliability of evidence from historical sources. These judgments are explained, with the strengths and weaknesses acknowledged." So in this objective, students *judge* and *explain*.
- **Recommendation:** Expand the descriptor to include all components of the syllabus objective (i.e. judge and explain). The requirement for students to provide reasoning for their judgments, as in the current ISMG for evaluating, is imperative.

## General

- **Issue:** The uneven distribution of marks (1-5) across the assessment objectives. Some top-level performance descriptors have a singular mark (Analysing, Evaluating, Synthesis) while others have a two-mark range (Comprehending, Devising and conducting, Communicating). The concern is that our higher achieving students are disadvantaged as they would presumably need to satisfy all three dot-points in the top performance level to achieve 5/5, whereas students achieving in the lower performance levels would only need to satisfy two out of the three dot-points to secure the full marks (as per the current 'best fit' model). There appears to be a serious equity issue at play here.
- **Recommendation:** Relook at marks distribution across the ISMG to ensure there is no inequity.

- **General Recommendation:** Trial of ISMGs before implementation. **Offer:** *The management team and membership of the QHTA offer their time and expertise to trial the ISMGs before implementation.*

## Syllabus objectives

### Recommendations:

#### Evaluate evidence from historical sources

- Change the word choice from “strengths and weaknesses” to “strengths and *limitations*”. Weakness suggests the condition of being weak, vulnerable, vulnerability and powerlessness. Whereas limitation suggests a limiting condition, lack of capacity, a handicap, or restriction.

#### Communicate to suit purpose

- Change in wording from “Students also focus on their use of spelling, grammar and punctuation” to “Students also focus on applying spelling, grammar and punctuation conventions”.

## CLARITY OF EXPECTATIONS

- Re-label ‘**Assessment techniques...**’ on page 11 to read ‘*Features of techniques...*’ so that it is clear to teachers and students that when reference is made to the inclusion of “its features” in each internal assessment technique (as per Assessment specifications and on the ISMG) it refers to those listed on page 11.
- Include **word guides** for all assessment techniques with the same clarity that is provided for the IA2 investigation on page 11. It would give greater clarity to both teachers and students to have a minimum word guide for the IA1 examination. For example, no less than 800 words. Similarly, a minimum word guide would make expectations clear for the IA3 investigation. For example, up to 2000 words but no less than 1000.
- In **Ancient History** greater clarity is sought around expectations relating to the use of **primary sources**. There is a concern that the current draft syllabus may unintentionally be lessening the requirements for students to engage with primary sources in Ancient History. In the section ‘Using historical sources’ (p. 8) the draft syllabus states “Due to limited available primary evidence for some Ancient History topics, students in Ancient History are assessed on the use of a range of sources in IA1, and the use of ancient and modern sources in IA2 and IA3. Primary sources should be used where available and appropriate for the focus of the inquiry.” Given this statement, it is conceivable that a student might go through an Ancient History course without dealing with primary sources in their assessment because in each internal assessment item there is the option not to utilise them. Some guideline is sought which specifies that across an assessment program it would be expected that primary sources are utilised in order to fulfil the principle that students use a ‘range’ of historical sources. Based on the explanation on page 8 this includes “ancient and modern sources, and primary and secondary sources”.

## SUBJECT MATTER

### Modern History

**Improvement:** The broader date ranges for Unit 3 National experiences are welcomed. However, there is some concern that some inexperienced history teacher may stray into non-historical territory.

## Recommendations

- For Unit 3 (National experiences) devise end dates for all national topics around the early part of the 21 century (in the 2010s) or if not possible the late 20 century (in the 1990s) to ensure that the aspect of the topic is historical and not contemporary issues. This would also bring consistency to the topics listed. Given that the Concluding study for each topic focuses on “past events and the current world”, it is not necessary to make the dates open.
- Broaden the date range for Unit 4 Topic 6 to include the Armenian and Greek genocides.

## Ancient History

- **Issue:** In the Rationale (p. 2), Ancient History is broadly defined as covering “the development of the earliest human communities to the end of the Middle Ages.” Such a definition suggests that the Shang Dynasty China, the Vikings, the Crusades, or even ‘The War of the Roses’ could be studied. In Unit 1, Topic 2 is this definition to be the only direction for “Features of ancient societies”? (Question: Would it be possible to explore ‘slavery’ in Rome now outside the limits of 753-133BCE?)
- **Recommendation:** In Unit 1, Topic 2 bring greater clarity to the term ‘ancient societies’ by providing a sample list which covers the range of possible societies that could be studied.
- **Issue:** In Unit 2, ‘Powerful personalities in their times’, the Alternative sequence resource provides a list of personalities on page 20 but the General syllabus does not.
- **Recommendation:** Include the same list of personalities in the General syllabus as it appears in the Alternative sequence resource.
- **Issue:** In Unit 3, ‘Reconstructing the Ancient World’, on p.21 the second Key inquiry question for the unit uses the term ‘Antiquity’ rather than ‘Ancient World’ as used in the first Key inquiry question. The term ‘Antiquity’ refers to the classical period, that is up to the fall of the Roman Empire whereas in the draft syllabus the term ‘Ancient World’ is defined as the period up to the end of the Middle Ages period.
- **Recommendation:** In Unit 3, in the second Key inquiry question, replace ‘Antiquity’ with ‘Ancient World’, p. 21.
- **Issue:** In Unit 3, Unit objective 5 on p. 21, there is an error in the statement: ‘Synthesise evidence from historical sources to develop historical arguments and decisions (?) historical periods in the Ancient World’.
- **Recommendation:** Correct the wording in Unit 3, Objective 5, p.21.

## MISCELLANEOUS

### Recommendations

- **Word choices.** In the section ‘Historical skills applied in historical inquiry process’ (p. 8) remove the word ‘often’ from the first dot-point under ‘Historical questions’ so that it reads:
  - are points of inquiry about the past that reflect the use of historical concepts.

Historical questions must use and apply historical concepts - whether first order concepts or second order concepts. If they don’t, they are not historical in nature.

- **Comments made by various QHTA members related to the proposed EA topics for Modern History in Draft 1**

“The 2029-30 EA topic of Emergence of WWI is possibly the most limited / fringe topic addressed by any jurisdiction for their external. What are the historiographical debates? If none, then it is mostly narrative. It risks being little more than a moral / philosophical debate re impacts and biases.”

“Agree with the above. The WWI is not an accessible topic for students or teachers. Much of the literature will be inaccessible to many and focus on arcane economic and political debates or non-historical debates.”

“I'd also add my support for the concerns about the non-historical nature of the World Wide Web EA topic - I think this would be incredibly difficult to learn, teach and resource - and does not have the historical debate or scholarship to support it. It seems like an attempt to 'crowd please' teenagers or guess what they might be interested in rather than part of a coherent senior curriculum.”

“Why the options in the External Assessment topics? It would appear to only provide a greater workload for teachers to change EA topics after three years and more work for the QCAA to construct tests for a minority of schools that might elect to study two EA topics over five years. It also would appear to work against building up teacher expertise and resources in a topic area. Appears to be a waste of human capital.”