

# Queensland History Teachers' Association Submission

## relating to the workings of the current QCE system

3 May 2024

**Q1: How fit-for-purpose have you found the new QCE system to be. How suitable is it for your context (please describe)?**

- Context: Ancient History and Modern History classrooms throughout Queensland.
- For Ancient History and Modern History, a key aspect of the new QCE system that is not fit-for-purpose are the Instrument-specific marking guides (ISMGs) in the syllabus documents. The ISMGs, which determine the quality of the judgements that teachers make on student work, do not adequately describe the features of student work for each criterion. For example, in the criterion analysing, the top-level descriptor states that a student response has the following characteristics: “discerning selection and detailed examination of features of evidence from historical sources”. This descriptor does not enable teachers to adequately discriminate between outstanding historical analysis and analysis that has simply ‘ticked the boxes’. Subsequently, the commitment to fairness as well as marker reliability cannot truly be met.
- None of the three Internal Assessment techniques for Ancient History or Modern History (Essay in response to historical sources, Independent Source Investigation and Historical essay based on research) mirror the External Assessment (Short responses to historical sources). This is not the case in other subject areas. This lack of alignment between internal and external assessment techniques directly disadvantages History students and their teachers and consequently is not fair or equitable.
- Additionally, there is a lack of disclosure of the criteria used to make judgements in the External Assessment. This is contrary to best-practice in teaching and learning, and assessment creation. A lack of knowledge of the criteria used in assessment impedes the accessibility of the EA to History students and impacts negatively on outcomes. QCAA maintains a commitment to meeting “high standards of student achievement, fairness and equity”. A lack of transparency in the criteria used to judge External Assessment goes against this commitment.
- The External Assessment for Ancient History and Modern History does not value historical knowledge and understanding. It is solely a skills-based examination that requires no former knowledge of the topic under study (Ancient History: Augustus; Modern History: Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War). This is contrary to what is valued in the discipline of history and wider society – for example, the importance of collective memory. It also disregards recent educational research which has identified the importance of knowledge acquisition to brain development and the processes of thinking.
- The External Assessment in Ancient History and Modern History often lacks academic rigor and often fails to reward excellence. The EA papers and the External Marking Guides do not sufficiently discriminate between the quality of student responses. Mediocre responses often score as highly as insightful responses due to the nature of the questions and criteria. Often our most academically gifted students, who are deep thinkers, score lower on the EA

because it does not value nuance, insight or subject knowledge but rather procedural knowledge.

## Q2: How well do you think the new QCE system is being implemented?

- In Ancient History and Modern History, the implementation of the new system from its inception has been driven by key personnel in the QCAA who have their own vision and agenda of History teaching in Queensland. This vision and agenda have not always aligned with the History teaching community in the state. While the QCAA claims that it is “committed to building strong and enduring partnerships in the education community” this has not been the experience of many History teachers around the state and those involved in the Queensland History Teachers’ Association (QHTA).
- This is in direct contrast to syllabus development under previous State systems and authorities (Queensland Studies Authority and the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies) where teachers and academics drove the development of syllabus documents.
- From the outset, the advice and work of ‘Expert (Teacher) Writers’ along with Academic advisors, who were invited to develop the initial QCAA syllabus documents during 2016, were largely ignored. In many ways, this has been to the detriment of Senior History education in Queensland.
- During the syllabus development of the 2019 syllabuses, QCAA sought and received extensive feedback from stakeholders, including the QHTA, on the various drafts. (It is worth noting that the Modern History draft syllabus recorded the most extensive feedback of any subject.) The QCAA has always maintained that the feedback it received was duly considered and refinements made; however, changes to the 2019 Ancient History and Modern History syllabuses were modest and failed to address some of the most fundamental issues raised – particularly in relation to the process of inquiry, sequence of syllabus objectives, limitations in the topics covered, and the ISMGs.
- In the production of both syllabuses (2019 and 2025) QCAA did not take up invitations from QHTA to trial draft ISMGs to test their useability or veracity.
- The 2019 syllabuses were introduced without having been sufficiently tested. Under previous authorities, syllabuses went through a rigorous ‘trial-pilot’ process where selected schools were part of a pilot program that tested the draft syllabus. This process revealed flaws and shortcomings in the documents before statewide implementation. Had the QCAA followed past practices the syllabus documents would have been of a higher quality and the challenges faced by teachers in syllabus implementation would have been avoided or at least minimized.
- Since the implementation of the new syllabuses in 2019, professional development for Ancient and Modern History teachers has largely fallen to the QHTA with variable support from the QCAA. While in recent times this support has improved it is limited in its reach as only those attending the State Conference are beneficiaries of QCAA personnel who elect to deliver a presentation.
- Much of the professional development provided by QCAA has been via webinars. This mode of delivery has merits because it is accessible, and its audience reach is wider. However, the nature of the sessions offered is highly generic, tend to concentrate on procedure rather

than pedagogy and does not address the key issues that teachers would like dealt with, such as unpacking the meaning of dot-point descriptors in the ISMGs. Consequently, many teachers have viewed these professional development sessions as superficial, lacking in genuine and rich professional discourse and failing to address questions and uncertainties that History teachers committed to excellence have. Effective implementation of the syllabuses has been stymied by this and has significantly added to teachers' workloads, frustrations and despondency about the direction of History education in Queensland.

- Communication during endorsement, confirmation and external assessment is now via 'chat' or some other electronic means so rich conversations to develop shared understandings is not possible. Communication is top-down which does not encourage the Community of Practice that QCAA seeks to foster. This is especially the case for those involved in confirmation and external marking.
- The creation of the QCAA Portal is a great initiative but its benefits are limited to Heads of Department or Heads of Subjects. However, on the Ancient and Modern History Portal-pages, sample responses are outdated, flawed and do not assist with the implementation of the 2025 syllabuses. These exemplars need to be expanded and updated with a wider range of samples responses that have been awarded different marks. These would provide an invaluable resource for both teachers and students.
- As teachers drop out of confirmation in increasing numbers, the training of new and often inexperienced teachers is often deficient and sometimes non-existent. Reliable judgements informed by the commitment to high standards, fairness and equity are not possible in such a scenario.

### **Q 3: How effective have you observed the QCE system is in relation to achieving its intended goals?**

*The intended goals of the QCE are to give students access to flexible learning pathways that respond to the dynamic world of work and learning, and provide them with the skills they need to succeed in a range of post-school pathways.*

- The system is largely effective in terms of providing a range of pathways for students and ways for them to attain a Queensland Certificate of Education.
- The possibility for students to include vocational and university courses in their QCE is very beneficial and allows students to explore a range of options to continue their studies.
- The 50% examinations for some subjects and not others is inequitable and suggests that some subjects are 'worth more' than others. Further, 50% exams place unnecessary pressure on students.

### **Q 4: How sustainable do you think the new QCE system is?**

The current QCE system of endorsement, confirmation and external assessment is in many ways unsustainable.

- Teachers involved in endorsement, confirmation and external marking are required to give up significant amounts of their own time – sometimes all weekend, during holidays or after a full days' work. This is done for minimal pay and is often characterised by frustrations and/or

anger with what they are asked to do. The end product of this is an increasing lack of faith in the system.

- While most teachers report initial benefits of being involved in the processes of endorsement, confirmation and external marking - such as to help understand the system and inform their practice - the nature of the work and workload, in many respects, have become increasingly challenging, less rewarding and less appealing.
- Unlike the former panel process where teachers regularly reported and extolled the professional benefits of this collegial enterprise, those involved in the current system as endorsers, confirmers and/or markers (as opposed to lead endorsers, lead confirmers and/or lead markers), often report that the work is bereft of professional development. Confirmers particularly report that their judgements on student work are made in isolation and without guidance, support or affirmation. Unlike the 'face to face' panel meetings (moderation and verification), there are minimal opportunities in the current system, where all processes are online, for teachers to network, share ideas or ponder problems which regularly and incidentally occurred during the course of the day, particularly during meal breaks and briefings. Moreover, younger/early career teachers who attended these panel meetings and were mentored by those present no longer have these opportunities to learn and grow.
- Experienced and skilled teachers are turning away from the roles as endorsers, confirmers and external markers, often due to dissatisfaction and disillusionment, only to be replaced by less qualified, inexperienced, and increasingly untrained teachers, particularly those involved in confirmation.
- Those teachers who act as 'Leads' regularly report of the professional benefits of their positions but bemoan the increasing workload which falls on the shoulders of limited personnel, due to unreliable or wavering levels of commitment from their team members.
- In summary, many teachers involved in the current system of endorsement, confirmation and external marking feel over-stretched, undervalued, and underpaid.

Another aspect of the current system which is unsustainable is scaling.

- Scaling is having an adverse effect on Ancient History and Modern History in many schools across the state, particularly those in the independent sector. Students see these subjects as 'not scaling' well and therefore elect to study other Humanities and Social Science (HASS) subjects such as Economics or Accounting or choose a Science over a HASS course. This is not only detrimental to the future of these subjects but the health and well-being of society which not only depends on collective memory to function and thrive but also the rich skills, transferable across many fields and endeavours, that lie at the core of the discipline of History.

This document has been compiled by Julie Hennessey (Chair QHTA Syllabus Sub-Committee).