

## **National Curriculum Update – February 2008**

The Rudd government's appointment of Professor Barry McGaw as Chair of the new National Curriculum Board signals the beginning of a process that aims at the development of national courses, K-12, in four subject areas, English, mathematics, the sciences and history.

While it seems that we are at the beginning of what will be a long developmental process and have been given little detail, there are a number of aspects of the new government's proposal that suggest that it is very serious about national curriculum – there is every likelihood that teachers will be asked to implement new national history courses within a few years.

The establishment of an apolitical National Curriculum Board, the realistic time frame, the consideration of all years (K-12) and the undertaking to consult widely are all very encouraging signs. The fact remains, however, that what is being proposed is hugely ambitious and the stakes for our subject are high.

The History Teachers' Association of Australia applauds the implied recognition of history as a core subject and is broadly supportive of the proposal for the development of national history courses as part of a worthwhile national project. However, while there may be some obvious potential benefits, history teachers in all states will have some anxiety about the possibility of poorly developed courses having a negative impact on our subject.

HTAA will maintain a keen interest in what is happening, will seek to be informed about the latest developments and will endeavour to pass information on quickly to state and territory HTAs. In the meantime, we would like to suggest a number of general guidelines for the successful development of national history courses:

1. The goal must be to produce courses that offer a balanced approach to narrative content, skills development and the need to engage students' interest.
2. Any development of new courses needs to take account of what is already being taught successfully in schools in all states and territories. Particularly with regard to Australian history, teachers need to be given the autonomy to develop approaches to state and local histories.
3. There should be an audit of university teacher preparation programs to ensure that any new history courses are entrusted to teachers who have enthusiasm for the subject and appropriate expertise.
4. It will be essential for new courses to be supported with relevant resources and professional development programs. These would need to be available before the courses are due for implementation. At the same time, there should be some care to ensure that this area does not become the province of commercial interests, who will be drawn to a significant commercial opportunity.
5. History teachers are passionate about what they do. They have a great deal of insight and expertise to offer. Ultimately, the success of any new courses will be dependent upon classroom practitioners. Clearly, teachers need to be involved in the curriculum development process from the outset.

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