



HISTORY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

ABN: 59 114 473 264

RESPONSE TO MINISTER FOR EDUCATION CHRISTOPHER PYNE'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF A REVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

On 10 January this year Federal Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne, announced a review of the Australian Curriculum as part of the Coalition's *Students First* policy. The review will be undertaken by Professor Ken Wiltshire and Dr Kevin Donnelly.

In his press release Minister Pyne stated that the Australian Curriculum had been heavily criticised over a 'lengthy period of time' and identified concerns about it being overcrowded and overly prescriptive. He also queried elements such as the cross curricula priorities.

HTAA has been involved in discussions concerning a national History curriculum with the Howard government prior to 2008 and with the development of the current Australian Curriculum since 2008. Whilst HTAA has also been vocal in its concerns about the volume of content in the History curriculum, especially after the recommended time allocation was removed from the final curriculum, HTAA has strongly advocated choice within the curriculum.

In his press release, and in subsequent interviews, Minister Pyne has stated that the curriculum had been criticised for not having 'sold or talked about the benefits of western civilizations'. He has called for a balanced curriculum that 'tells the truth of the way we've treated Indigenous Australians' and celebrates the national story.

HTAA has been vocal in the past regarding the need for students to know their own national history. However the Association questions Minister Pyne's underlying belief that the curriculum has a 'left wing' bias. The curriculum development was undertaken by a number of individuals and underwent numerous consultations involving representatives from a wide range of schools, associations and jurisdictions. HTAA had members involved in the process from the outset. The extent of responsiveness to consultation with specialist educators and historians in the field means that the document presently being implemented is officially version 5. HTAA regrets that comments about political interference and ideological bias have been circulating in the media *before* the recently announced review began.

A key concern for HTAA is for teachers in different jurisdictions who have already invested considerable time and effort in implementing the curriculum. Those teachers require support and certainty to ensure they can focus on delivering the programs they have created. With this consideration uppermost,

HTAA recommends that no mandatory changes be made to the History curriculum.

HTAA is also concerned with Minister Pyne's generalised link between the Australian Curriculum and falling PISA results. As Minister Pyne has noted, Australia's PISA results have been declining for some time, whilst the Australian Curriculum only commenced implementation in 2011. Furthermore, the Australian Curriculum includes disciplines that are not covered by PISA testing. To associate the falling results in international testing with the curriculum in disciplines such as History is unconvincing. The performance of Australian students internationally is too important an issue to be confused with the side issue of perceived ideological bias.

HTAA recognises that Prof Wiltshire and Dr Donnelly have considerable knowledge of international testing models and curriculum in nations that currently outperform Australia. HTAA calls on the Minister to enable Professor Wiltshire and Dr Donnelly to be able to use their expertise to focus their review on those aspects that pertain to international standards.

HTAA is keen to engage in broad ranging discussions regarding the History curriculum that may lead to an evaluation and revision in the future but not before the curriculum has been fully implemented. Furthermore HTAA continues to support genuine moves to address teacher quality and professional learning that will enhance teacher delivery and students' experiences of the curriculum.

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HTAA President
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