

Shape of the Australian Curriculum: History

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: History* will guide the writing of the history curriculum K–12.
- 1.2 This paper has been prepared following analysis of extensive consultation feedback to the National History Curriculum Framing Paper and decisions taken by the National Curriculum Board.
- 1.3 The paper should be read in conjunction with *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum*.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The national history curriculum will be the basis of planning, teaching and assessment of history in schools. It will be useful for and useable by experienced and less experienced teachers of history from K–12.
- 2.2 The development of a national history curriculum provides an invaluable opportunity to ensure that all Australian students learn history. Awareness of history is an essential characteristic of any society; historical knowledge is fundamental to understanding ourselves and others, and historical understanding is as foundational and challenging as other disciplines.
- 2.3 History is the study of the past. It provides knowledge, understanding and appreciation of previous events, people, practices and ideas. It orders them, renders them intelligible and discerns patterns of continuity and change. It provides the means whereby individual and collective identities are formed and sustained. It enriches the present and illuminates the future.
- 2.4 History is a distinctive and indispensable form of understanding practised across many generations. Human civilisation is marked by a preservation of the past in oral memory, documents, artefacts, monuments and traditions.
- 2.5 History is a discipline with its own methods and procedures. It deepens our understanding of humanity, creativity, purposes and values. History draws on and contributes to other bodies of knowledge.
- 2.6 Historical inquiry involves the retrieval, comprehension and interpretation of sources, and judgment, guided by principles that are intrinsic to the discipline. It yields knowledge that is based on the available evidence, but remains open to further debate and future reinterpretation. It develops in students the ability to recognise varying interpretations of history and to determine the difference between fact, opinion and bias.
- 2.7 History stretches from the distant past to the present, and provides a deeper understanding of present-day events as well as the enduring significance of earlier ones. It introduces us to a variety of human experience, enables us to see the world through the eyes of others, and enriches our appreciation of the nature of change.
- 2.8 Young Australians come to school from different backgrounds that are shaped by different family and community narratives. These influences continue to operate as they progress through school and, subsequently, they will be exposed to other forms of collective memory. The school is thus but one agency that shapes historical consciousness.

3. AIMS OF THE HISTORY CURRICULUM

- 3.1** Through school history students develop knowledge and understanding of the past in order to appreciate themselves and others, to understand the present and to contribute to debate about planning for the future.
- 3.2** Students develop a critical perspective on received versions of the past, and learn how to compare different accounts so that the conflicts and ambiguities are appreciated. Through comparative historical analysis and critical appraisal of evidence, history contributes to an active and informed democratic citizenship.
- 3.3** Introducing students to historical understanding involves teaching methods of historical inquiry. Students need to learn about history and practise it. Factual knowledge is essential to historical understanding. Without knowledge of chronology, geography, institutional arrangements, material circumstances and belief systems, no student inquiry on a past period — however well intended — will lead to understanding.
- 3.4** While this knowledge will necessarily be broad, students should have the skills to extend it: if they are not familiar with a specific historical reference, they should be able to locate it in place and time, know how to find sources of information about it and to evaluate them, familiarise themselves with context and grasp the significance of the reference.

4. KEY TERMS

4.1 Historical understanding

Historical understanding denotes the concepts that together define the nature of history as a discipline. These include, for example, evidence, continuity and change and contestability. Historical understanding differs from intuitive, memory-based understanding of the past because it requires negotiating between the familiar and unfamiliar, and involves investigation, debate and reasoning about the past.

4.2 Historical inquiry

Historical inquiry is the process of developing knowledge and understanding in history by asking questions about the past, and applying skills associated with analysing, interpreting and evaluating sources of evidence to develop informed and defensible answers.

4.3 Overview

An overview provides a summary of a period or topic that shows how events are connected in time, in character and by causal relationships. It provides an opportunity to introduce key historical concepts. It involves teaching of an expansive chronology and helps students understand broad patterns of historical change. An overview can occur at the beginning of a unit (providing students with the historical context for a study), at the end (to consolidate understanding), or within a unit (to ensure coherence and direction). An overview is usually relatively brief, occupying just a few lessons.

4.4 Depth study

A depth study is a closer investigation of a particular topic – for example the study of an ancient civilisation – which allows time for more detailed discussion. It provides students with the opportunity to develop and apply the concepts and skills of historical understanding to events, periods, people and societies of particular significance. Depth studies commonly employ close reading of historical texts, investigation of primary sources, activities (such as site and museum visits), teacher exposition and student inquiries. A depth study is a sustained, concentrated and resource-rich exercise.

5. STRUCTURE OF THE HISTORY CURRICULUM

5.1 The content of the national history curriculum will be based on the interrelationship between historical knowledge, understanding and skills.

5.2 Historical knowledge and understanding

Historical knowledge and understanding requires mastery of the procedures, tools and methods of thinking that constitute the discipline of history.

The knowledge of history is reflected in the concepts that are used to explore what happened in the past. These include revolution, imperialism, religion, everyday life and the concept of 'world war'.

Historical understanding is developed through additional concepts that help to make sense of the past. International research on historical pedagogy has identified core components of historical understanding. There are various articulations of these core components, which comprise:

Historical significance: The principles behind the selection of what should be remembered, investigated, taught and learned. Establishing historical significance involves going beyond what is personally interesting or congenial: it requires judgments of contemporary import, consequence, durability and relevance.

Evidence: How to find, select and interpret historical evidence. This involves comprehending the nature of a primary source, locating its provenance and context, asking questions about it, distinguishing between the claims it makes and the assumptions and values that give it its present shape, and the ability to compare competing primary sources.

Continuity and change: Dealing with the complexity of the past. This involves the capacity to understand the sequence of events, to make connections by means of organising concepts including periodisation, and to evaluate change with an informed understanding of the principles of progress and decline.

Cause and consequence: The interplay of human agency and conditions. This involves an appreciation of motivation and contestation, short-term events and embedded circumstances, the ways that the legacy of the past shapes intentions and the unintended consequences that arise from purposeful action.

Historical perspectives: The cognitive act of understanding the different social, cultural and intellectual contexts that shaped people's lives and actions in the past. This involves an understanding of the dangers of anachronism and an appreciation of diverse perspectives on the past.

Historical empathy and moral judgement: The capacity to enter into the world of the past with an informed imagination and ethical responsibility. The discipline of history constrains the practitioner from imposing personal preferences on the evidence but all meaningful historical accounts involve explicit or implicit moral judgement, and historians require an awareness of their own values and the impact of these values on their historical understanding.

Contestation and contestability: Dealing with alternative accounts of the past. History is a form of knowledge that shapes popular sentiment and frequently enters into public debate. This requires the ability to connect the past with the self and the present, and appreciation of the rules that apply to professional and public debate over history.

Problem solving: Applying historical understanding to the investigation, analysis and resolution of problems. History seeks explanation with a particular awareness of context and contingency. Through the components of historical understanding the study of history fosters the capacity to formulate problems in a manner amenable to informed reasoning.

5.3 Historical skills

To acquire a knowledge and understanding of history, skills associated with the identification, comprehension and interpretation of sources, use of chronology, and research and communication need to be developed. The curriculum should allow for the development of skills through a process of historical inquiry.

A key aspect of inquiry in history is the study of primary and secondary sources of evidence. Students comprehend, analyse, interpret and evaluate historical sources and use the evidence provided in the sources to make informed decisions about an inquiry question. Appropriate historical inquiry questions can be framed for students at different stages of development. For example: 'What did people eat in the middle ages?'; 'How did early settlers build their houses?'; 'Why did Australia become involved in the war in Vietnam?'

Teachers describe, explain, model and monitor the process of historical inquiry so that students develop increasing initiative, self-direction and expertise. A variety of teaching and learning approaches and activities can be used, including teacher exposition, student debates, site visits, museum studies, use of historical narrative and hands-on activities such as the use and interpretation of authentic and virtual artefacts. An end result of historical inquiry should be a well-supported response to the question posed. Such a response could be in a variety of formats (ranging from historical models to essays) and of a complexity appropriate to the stage of development of the students involved.

5.4 History across K-12

Although the curriculum will be developed year by year, this document provides a guideline across four year groupings:

- Years K-2: typically students from 5 to 8 years of age
- Years 3-6: typically students from 8 to 12 years of age
- Years 7*-10: typically students from 12 to 15 years of age
- Years 11-12: typically students from 15 to 18 years of age

*Specific advice will be provided to writers on the development of the year 7 curriculum.

History curricula have traditionally moved from a student's personal and family history through to studies of the local, state or territory and national levels, with coverage in the upper year levels of some aspects of world history. This model is based on the need to build from the concrete experiences of young students towards a more abstract understanding of elements further removed in terms of both space and time for older students.

Yet modern technologies have broadened the personal experiences of many young children beyond the immediate sphere of family, home and locality. While these remain major factors of influence, they are not the only influences in young people's lives. Moreover, students come from a far wider range of backgrounds and their personal histories can often have far greater connection to the history of distant countries than that of the local area. The national history curriculum, while building from direct experience towards more abstract understanding, must ensure that learning opportunities allow for relevant national and global connections to be made to personal, family and local history across all years of schooling.

5.4.1 Years K-2 (typically from 5 to 8 years of age)

Curriculum focus

In the early years of schooling the curriculum should enable students to explore their own and their family's history. Through hearing the stories of other students' lives and examining artefacts such as photos and objects, students also recognise that people have different histories.

Students will examine events in their lifetime and in the lifetimes of family members and place them in chronological order; they will use words and phrases that are associated with the passage of time (for example, yesterday and long ago). Students will distinguish between past and present ways of living, for example in means of transport, styles of clothing and housing and modes of communication. They may use fictional stories to provide a deeper understanding of changes over time.

5.4.2 Years 3–6 (typically from 8 to 12 years of age)

Curriculum focus

In Years 3 – 6 life in past times and places will be explored through a range of perspectives and themes. This will provide students with opportunities to gain a broad understanding of the diverse ways in which people organised, thought about and experienced their lives. The focus will be on significant periods, events, personalities and places within and beyond Australia. Students will develop knowledge and understanding about Australian history, covering pre- and post- Indigenous/European contact. Students will learn about Australia's national symbols and key historical events including colonisation, Federation and the world wars. Students will understand that Australia's past pre-dates British colonisation and can recognise and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander influences on our present day society.

Through this learning, students will develop an appreciation of the legacy of the past.

Students will develop historical skills which include:

- using common historical terms for describing time and sequencing events and developments in chronological order
- asking questions, finding relevant answers, and constructing informed responses
- developing a basic understanding of how evidence can be used to provide historical explanations
- developing appropriate techniques of organisation and communication.

The writing process will develop a scope and sequence across Years 3 – 6 that avoids overlap and repetition and ensures a balance of breadth and depth in the development of historical knowledge, understanding and skills in the curriculum.

The curriculum will recognise the needs of non-specialist history teachers by providing sufficient clarity and detail.

The history curriculum across Years 3–6 will be developed around four focus questions:

1. What do we know about the past?
2. How did Australians live in the past?
3. How did people live in other places?
4. How has the past influenced the present?

Organisation of the curriculum around these four questions will enable students to consider local, state or territory, national and global contexts.

The initial focus will be on developing students' curiosity about historical discoveries and introducing them to a range of appropriate sources including stories, oral histories, maps and real or virtual artefacts. Family history, peoples of the local area and Australia, dreaming stories and myths and legends are all relevant contexts for this learning.

A sense of continuity and change over time will be developed through studies of local, state or territory, national and global history. Students will learn about key social, cultural, technological, political and work-related changes that have occurred. Daily life

in Australian pre- and post-contact times, focusing on various aspects of the lives of individuals or groups, will be a significant context. The Years 3 – 6 curriculum will also allow teachers to select contexts such as Japan, China and the European settlement of North America to develop these understandings.

Students' appreciation of difference and diversity will be developed through the study of cultures from other places. They will learn about cultural practices, social organisation, technology and human use of the environment. The Years 3 – 6 curriculum will allow teachers to select from a set of European and Asia-Pacific historical contexts and periods to develop these understandings.

Students will also consider significant events, people and developments that explain our way of life today. Students will learn about pioneers and inventors, national identity, heritage and democratic traditions. The curriculum will include early exploration, the development of Australia's system of government and key events and their commemoration including Anzac Day.

5.4.3 Years 7–10 (typically from 12 to 15 years of age)

Curriculum focus

The Year 7–10 history curriculum will specify the required learning in terms of historical concepts, understandings and skills, through overviews and depth studies. Depth studies may include episodes of key significance to the period of study. Some depth studies will provide options, including comparative options and school developed options where appropriate, so that the required learning can be developed in a range of historical contexts. This will enable teachers to meet the interests and needs of their students. A depth study should incorporate interconnections and comparisons within a historical period where appropriate.

The number of depth studies and the amount of time allocated to each study will be determined according to considerations of feasibility, conceptual ability and student engagement.

Students will develop historical skills which include:

- learning how to use, with facility, common historical terms for dealing with chronology and time-related historical concepts and continuing to acquire a sound grasp of the sequence of events
- asking and exploring inquiry questions in detail, finding relevant and comprehensive answers and providing sound explanations and conclusions for historical events
- using a wide range of different forms of evidence in providing historical explanations, recognising how these forms of evidence may vary in their value
- developing a range of appropriate techniques of organisation and communication.

It is proposed that the history curriculum should follow a sequence:

1. History from the time of the earliest human communities to the end of the Ancient period (c. 60,000 BC–c. 500 AD)
2. History from the end of the Ancient period to the beginning of the Modern period (c. 500–1750)
3. The Modern World and Australia (1750–1901)
4. Australia in the Modern World (1901–present)

Students should have an appreciation of the major civilisations of Europe, Asia, Africa, America and Australia. They should understand Australian history within a comparative framework that embraces the Indigenous and settler components, and they should be aware of its regional and global dimensions.

Unit 1: History from the time of the earliest human communities to the end of the Ancient period (c. 60,000 BC–c. 500 AD)

This period of human history establishes the defining characteristics of civilisations. It encompasses transitions in human society from mobile hunter-gathering to agriculture and the growth of cities. It is in this period that the first identifiable individuals emerge from the historical record. This period also provides an opportunity to trace the movement of peoples across the world and to investigate the early peopling of Australia. The origins of many modern Australian institutions and practices can be traced back to the legacy of ancient civilisations, particularly Greece and Rome.

Themes to be explored in the development of depth studies include:

- movement of peoples
- human transformation of the environment
- characteristics of civilisations — early forms of government, religion, society and culture
- rise and fall of large empires
- heritage
- nature of history, role and methodologies of the historian.

This unit will provide an overview of the period along with depth studies which might include: human migration out of Africa, the early peopling of Australia, Ancient Japan and Ancient Greece.

Unit 2: History from the end of the Ancient period to the beginning of the Modern period (c. 500–1750)

This span of human history was marked by significant change and continuity in major world civilisations; it was the period when the modern world began to take shape, through expanding horizons and increasing differentiation of societies. Through an investigation of civilisations, world exploration and events students develop an understanding of their significance for modern times.

Themes to be explored in the development of depth studies include:

- relationships between religion, rulers and people
- social structure
- health and disease
- scientific and technological change
- impact of beliefs and values
- cultural contact and conflict
- exploration and imperialism.

This unit will provide an overview of the period along with depth studies which might include: life in Medieval Europe, the Crusades, Marco Polo, Elizabeth I, the Aztecs, the scientific revolution in Europe compared with technological advances in China and the extension of European empires.

Unit 3: The Modern World and Australia (1750–1901)

The transformation of the 'Old World' and the creation of 'New World' settler societies such as Australia define this era. The time period provides an opportunity for students to gain an understanding of Asian-European relations including the European discovery and settlement of Australia and the responses of Indigenous peoples. Students will gain an appreciation of the consequences, intended and unintended, that arose from the various actions that occurred.

Themes to be explored in the development of depth studies include:

- forced and voluntary movement of people
- Indigenous-settler relations
- early impact of industrialisation
- social, economic, political and cultural development
- revolution and reform
- nationalism and federation.

This unit will provide an overview of the period along with depth studies which might include: the slave trade, the impact of industrialisation, European settlement of Australia and the American Civil War.

Through direct and comparative study, Australian history will occupy approximately 40 per cent of this unit.

Unit 4: Australia in the Modern World (1901–present)

The twentieth century was an important period in Australia’s social, economic, political and cultural development. The transformation of the modern world through conflict and cooperation provides a necessary context for understanding Australia’s development and Australia’s place within the Asia-Pacific region. Of particular significance is the increasing recognition of the rights of Australia’s Indigenous peoples and the search for reconciliation.

Themes to be explored in the development of depth studies include:

- global conflict and collective peace
- migration and nation building
- mass communication and popular culture
- dictatorship and democracy
- rights and freedoms
- decolonisation and globalisation
- active citizenship.

This unit will provide an overview of the period along with depth studies which might include: Australia’s involvement in World War I, post-war migration to Australia, the civil rights movement in the United States or apartheid in South Africa compared with Indigenous rights in Australia, the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall, the influence of globalised American culture on Australia and elsewhere, decolonisation of the Asia-Pacific and the growth of environmentalism.

Through direct and comparative study, Australian history will occupy approximately 60 per cent of this unit.

5.4.4 Years 11–12 (typically from 15 to 18 years of age)

Curriculum focus

It is recognised that the transition to senior secondary studies occurs at Year 11 in some jurisdictions, and Year 10 in others.

Senior secondary students exercise a choice of subjects, so not all of them will be enrolled in history; but it is to be hoped that the majority will continue with history. History at the senior secondary level typically includes a choice of more specialised courses that are studied in greater depth.

In the first phase of the national history curriculum it is proposed to develop two courses, Ancient History and Modern History. Other senior secondary courses might continue to be offered by individual jurisdictions.

There will be further advice for writers about the nature of the curriculum in the senior secondary years and key considerations in the development of the curriculum.

6. CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 Incorporating a futures orientation

In the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, the ministers note that 'Global integration and international mobility' have heightened the need 'to nurture an appreciation of and respect for social, cultural and religious diversity, and a sense of global citizenship'. The new declaration observes that the growing importance of India, China and other Asia-Pacific nations sparks the need for Australians to become 'Asia literate', as well as the need for greater environmental awareness, information and communication technology (ICT) skills and the augmented importance of educational attainment.

A futures orientation focused on globalisation, the rise of the knowledge economy, the importance of sustainability, the rich diversity of the Australian people and their distinctive position within the Asia-Pacific region make an informed historical understanding all the more important. One reason for teaching history is to foster the capacity to respond to these influences in an intelligent and informed manner so that their full potential for enriching experience is realised.

To equip students to operate in the world in which they will live, they need to understand world history. History should have a broad and comprehensive foundation from which its implications for Australia can be grasped. It is only from such a foundation that the longevity and richness of Indigenous history will be appreciated; that the dimensions of our migrant experience and cultural diversity will be intelligible; that our relations with the Asian region will be comprehended; that the ecological limits of our current practices will be seen in their historical context; and the distinctive as well as the shared and derivative character of our past will be revealed.

Australian history will retain an important place in a national history curriculum. We fail students — both those who have arrived recently and those with many earlier generations in this country — if we deny them a familiarity with the national story, so that they can appreciate its values and binding traditions. We fail them also if we do not foster the skills of historical understanding that equip them, by the end of their studies, to take an active part in the debates over the legacy of the past, to understand and make use of new sources of information, to distinguish the unimportant from the important, to find truth and meaning in history and contribute to democratic discussion of national issues.

6.2 Equity and opportunity

The national history curriculum will provide flexibility and choice for teachers. The factors that influence this choice include school and community contexts, local history learning opportunities, contemporary and local issues and available learning resources.

The curriculum should allow for differences in interests, capabilities and future pathways of students. Through the identification of a common base of historical learning that engages every student though to Year 10, the national curriculum will enable students to make informed decisions about pursuing further study in history. Students will also have the skills to extend their learning after school, with the capacity to acquire new information and the confidence to do so.

The national history curriculum will provide opportunities for students to develop an understanding of aspects of Australia's Indigenous histories and cultures. It will include opportunities to describe ideas developed by Indigenous peoples to explain the world around them and analyse reasons why Indigenous peoples may have different views in relation to history.

6.3 Connections to other learning areas

The learning acquired by students in history contributes to learning in other areas. The curriculum for each area will identify where there are links or opportunities to build cross curriculum learning.

With the integrated approach to history favoured in primary schools, teaching times dedicated to English, mathematics, science, languages, the arts, geography, civics and citizenship and other learning areas can incorporate relevant elements of history. Equally, secondary teachers can enhance learning in these areas.

The successful balancing of competing curriculum demands and the need to provide adequate time for students to fully develop historical understanding as well as to develop understanding in cross-curriculum areas requires that such connections be made explicitly. This should be done in a way that does not displace the fundamental importance of historical content and historical understanding, but enhances them. The connections should arise naturally out of the history curriculum.

6.3.1 English

Strong connections exist between English and history, and literacy is deeply embedded in historical understanding. Through the study of history students learn how to find information, how to read texts with critical discernment and how to create their own texts that present the results of historical understanding clearly and logically. These skills should be developed across a range of textual genres and formats, including art, photography, film, music, fiction and multimedia. With a growing range of multimodal texts in the areas of film and ICT, students should also develop the capacity to use such texts to undertake and present research that demonstrates historical understanding.

From Edward Gibbon to Geoffrey Blainey, writers of history provide models of literary distinction that engage students and enhance their appreciation of prose. Students should be exposed to secondary sources that exemplify these qualities, and opportunities should be taken to include such nonfiction texts in the English curriculum.

6.3.2 Mathematics

Much of the evidence and reasoning in historical understanding is quantitative: chronology, demography, economic activity, and changes in the size and reach of institutions. All of these call for an appreciation of numerical scale and proportion. Complementary disciplines of history such as archaeology, and its use of carbon dating, call for mathematical skills.

6.3.3 Science

A knowledge and understanding of history provides a useful context for student learning in science. The history of invention and discovery provides students with an awareness of the pace of scientific and technological development over time and its implications for the future. An understanding of the past provides opportunities to engage in an informed manner in present debates about, for example, the ethical use of nuclear technology (Hiroshima), chemical and biological agents (WWI) and the scientific study of human remains (Pompeii and Herculaneum). The study of sources of evidence and the conservation of historical sites and materials broadens student understanding of the various applications of science.

6.3.4 Civics and citizenship education

The teaching of civics is commonly linked with history. It allows students to follow the emergence of key principles of citizenship, the arguments they engendered, the changing institutional forms of government and civil society, and the circumstances in which they have flourished or failed. The skills of historical understanding equip students to make informed and morally responsible judgments.

The national history curriculum will include some of the skills, knowledge, understandings and capacities in civics and citizenship specified in the 2006 national Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship, particularly in relation to historical perspectives.

6.3.5 Languages

The national history curriculum is concerned with a large number of non-English-speaking societies, and provides opportunities to draw on materials in Languages Other Than English (LOTE). Language study is enriched by an appreciation of history, literature and culture. By providing substantial opportunities to study Asian history, the curriculum also supports the National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools agreed upon by all Australian ministers of education in 2006.

6.3.6 The Arts

Historical understanding enhances student appreciation of the arts and, in turn, can be enhanced by drawing on a wide range of artistic forms and considering them in their historical context.

6.3.7 Geography

The discipline of history has always had a close relationship with geography, and world history is dependent upon geographical knowledge. The national history curriculum should make use of historical atlases, including those that are enhanced with digital capacity, and it should ensure that students develop and employ skills of mapping and map interpretation. The curriculum will draw on geographical knowledge to enhance understanding of the past, particularly in relation to human use of the environment.

6.4 Role of digital technologies

An important consideration in the structuring of the curriculum is to embed digital technologies so that they are not seen as optional tools. There should also be recognition that the digital technologies available to enhance learning are rapidly changing.

Students and teachers have access to a growing range of online information critical for historical analysis and understanding. These include digitised online materials such as historical documents, books, newspapers, images and items from museum collections, as well as other online resources including databases, reference works (such as dictionaries of biography), and indexes to library holdings.

A range of computer applications provide new and less linear ways of thinking about, interpreting and representing data. These include new ways for capturing oral history, such as digital audiovisual recording, and tools for the creation of online timelines and graphic organisers. A range of other programs and applications for data collection and management enhance opportunities for gathering, interpreting and presenting historical material. ICT tools such as wikis and blogs have the potential to enhance students' analytical thinking capabilities in their study of history.

The new curriculum should use and build upon resources such as online learning objects to provide support in navigating the ever-increasing amount of online materials available for historical inquiry.

6.5 Clarity of the curriculum

The curriculum should be substantial and flexible. It should be sufficiently rich and descriptive to guide teachers with limited experience, but avoid excessive prescription that would hamper experienced teachers from exercising their skills. The curriculum document should be expressed clearly in terms that are accessible to a new teacher, while allowing all teachers to enhance it with their interests and expertise.

6.6 Breadth and depth of study

Learning about the past requires sustained attention to key concepts and skills, which in turn are grounded in specific bodies of substantive historical knowledge. Careful curriculum design will manage the extent of substantive knowledge to ensure there is adequate scope for concurrent development of historical understanding and the skills of historical inquiry.

The curriculum should provide for a sequence of learning, building on and consolidating earlier studies, but avoid excessive repetition — for a consistent complaint of students in history, especially Australian history, is that they repeatedly cover the same ground.

6.7 The nature of the learner (K–12)

In developing the curriculum (both content and achievement standards) consideration must be given to the unique characteristics of learners across the years of schooling. These characteristics influence curriculum decisions about how and when particular content is best introduced and consolidated.

6.8 General capabilities

Skills and understanding related to numeracy, literacy and ICT need to be further developed and used in all learning areas, as do thinking skills and creativity. In addition, there are other general capabilities like self-management, teamwork, intercultural understandings, ethical awareness, and social competence which will be represented in each learning area in ways appropriate to that area.

6.9 Cross curriculum perspectives

There are other cross-curriculum matters related to Indigenous education, sustainability and Australia's links with Asia that can be thought of as perspectives rather than capabilities. Each of these perspectives will be represented in learning areas in ways appropriate to that area. The curriculum documents will be explicit on how the perspectives are dealt with in each learning area and how links can be made between learning areas.

7. PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT: SOME BROAD ASSUMPTIONS

7.1 The preceding discussion on the shape of the national history curriculum is based on some pedagogical assumptions, which include that:

- students' interest and enjoyment of history can be enhanced through a range of different approaches such as the use of artefacts, museums, historical sites and hands-on activities
- the context of learning may vary depending on the students, the school or location
- in the teaching of history there should not be an artificial separation of content and process or a focus on historical method at the expense of historical knowledge
- historical narrative is used so that students experience the 'story' in the history, which can sit alongside or be further extended into investigations of cause and consequence, historical significance or contestability
- teaching is based on what students already know, using the language that is familiar to students, with connections being made to more sophisticated historical terms and concepts
- connections are made between past events and circumstances and modern-day parallels to make learning more meaningful for students and to help students make sense of key ideas
- teachers provide opportunities for students to engage in the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of historical sources
- while engagement with sources is fundamental to historical knowledge and understanding, students progressively engage in higher order tasks, for example, building an historical argument using evidence
- the skills of historical inquiry are developed through teacher-directed and student-centred learning, enabling students to pose and investigate questions with increasing initiative, self-direction and expertise.

7.2 In the implementation of the history curriculum there should be an alignment of expectations, teaching and learning strategies, and various modes of assessment to cater for the diverse needs of learners. Assessment should encourage longer-term understanding and enable provision of detailed diagnostic information to support the work of teachers. It should show what students know, understand and can demonstrate. It should also show what they need to do to improve.

8. CONCLUSION

History is a story, told by many story tellers, that links the past to the present. Through an understanding of their own and others' stories, students develop an appreciation of the richness of the human past and its implications for the future.

For the first time in Australia's history, there will be a national curriculum that will describe what all students should learn in history. The curriculum will enable teachers to engage students in meaningful, challenging and interesting ways to tap into their innate curiosity about the world.