



Addressing the Challenges of the National Curriculum

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Now that the Federal election is over, and despite the uncertainty that a hung parliament presents, the outcome for the National Curriculum will be unchanged as both major parties support its implementation. Nonetheless, the Australian National Curriculum in History still poses a range of challenges and opportunities to teachers, teacher-educators and historians. The History Curriculum calls for a nationwide approach towards the teaching of the past, and it presents a structure for knowledge and skill development that strings together learning outcomes for all year levels from K-12. Of course, one of the key challenges in this new structure, as Tony Joel's recent contribution to *APH* highlights ([‘Australia's New National Curriculum and the Future of History’](#)), is how we, as historians and teacher-educators, are to help prepare teachers to present this material. Joel argues that there is a ‘chronic lack of specialist History teachers’ in Australia; and there is a pressing need to ‘up-skill’ primary and secondary teaching staff to be able to help students learn both the knowledge and skill requirements set by the curriculum. The key crisis for the system, as Joel touches upon, is how teachers are expected to be able to know *what* to teach and *how* to teach it. For example, the new curriculum places significant emphasis, throughout K-12, upon the development of historical skills, yet many primary teachers have never received any form of ‘history’ professional development in their adult lives. The response from the higher education sector to this crisis needs to be swift, but it also needs to be measured; for whilst we are responding to the content of the History Curriculum, we also are addressing the personal professional development needs and wants of teachers.

As Joel touches upon, higher education institutions across Australia currently have a range of accredited units/courses on offer to assist in the professional development of primary and secondary teachers. But the only National History Curriculum-focused course currently on offer from the Australian higher education sector is the [Graduate Certificate in History Curriculum](#) (GCHC) at the University of New England, and as coordinator of the GCHC I would be remiss if I did not mention our work. As coordinator of GCHC I have learnt from recent

experience that the new curriculum in History also presents a range of difficulties for those seeking to prepare an entire cohort of K-12 teachers for the road ahead. The challenge for historians and teacher-educators is not only in identifying appropriate knowledge and skills for professional development, but also in packaging and presenting the information appropriately to suit the learning styles and anticipated/expected learning outcomes of teachers.

With the Graduate Certificate in History Curriculum, UNE is currently leading the charge in helping to address, as Joel identifies, the need to ‘materialise’ the required ‘army of classroom practitioners’. The University of New England may be isolated geographically, but we are well connected pedagogically. As noted above, the GCHC currently is the only course specifically focused on the National History Curriculum and it will be offered to primary and secondary teachers from 2011. We have identified that professional development for teachers needs to be structured flexibly (in both time demands and in content presented) to facilitate the differing work/study patterns of teachers. To address this, the GCHC is designed for fully online delivery throughout the states and territories of Australia – there are no face-to-face teaching/learning requirements. Teachers can study through the flexible module-structure from their home computer – there are no ‘weekly readings’ or ‘weekly requirements’ and teachers can address the learning outcomes and undertake the required study at a time that suits them best. All readings and assessments are closely integrated and directly applicable within the teaching environment – readings/discussion/activities flow *directly* into the assessment items and at the end of each unit teachers will be able to take their GCHC-work (including assessments) and utilise this directly in their classrooms. The four units bring together contemporary ‘best practice’ pedagogy to deliver a course ‘made for teachers’ that promotes student-community engagement, practical knowledge and skill development, ‘real-world’ relevance and utility of content and assessment, and the integration and interrelation of unit material and objectives to ‘reduce waste’ of both time and knowledge.

The four units have been co-designed and developed by the School of Humanities and School of Education for primary and secondary teachers who wish to upgrade their professional qualifications, meet professional development requirements and up-skill for the new National History Curriculum. The units present a flexible array of historical skills and topics that will be updated regularly to facilitate the possible directions of the National History Curriculum, which can be approached by teachers of any year level from K-12. Tony Joel rightly points out that there is a need for the higher education sector to respond to the challenges of the history curriculum, but any response offered (in terms of units, courses, and other forms

of professional development) needs to consider not only the needs of the History Curriculum, but also the needs of the teachers who are to work with it.

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