

**Submission to
Department of Education
Review of the National Curriculum**

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Executive Summary

The National Curriculum is unbalanced, biased, and fundamentally hostile to Australia's Western Civilisation legacy.

The National Curriculum has three cross curriculum priorities – Sustainability, Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures – which are supposed to be taught in every subject.

These priorities are inappropriate and ideologically driven. It is surely not appropriate for a Health and Physical Education curriculum to prescribe learning objectives about Aboriginal cultural identity. Nor should Mathematics classes include instruction on sustainability.

The ideological nature of the National Curriculum is most manifest in the Year 7 to 10 history curriculum.

The history curriculum over-emphasises themes such as environmental determinism, focuses attention disproportionately on the history of European colonialism and multiculturalism, and takes a materialist approach to questions of class.

Conversely, the history curriculum entirely downplays the role of ideas as a driver of historical change, entirely misses the significance of liberalism in the development of liberal democracy in Australia, and downplays and denigrates the development of Western Civilisation and religion.

While the Institute of Public Affairs welcomes the review of the National Curriculum, it remains the case that any National Curriculum will be ideological in some form.

As a consequence, rather than amending or adjusting the National Curriculum to fix these problems, the most sustainable and liberal solution would be to scrap the National Curriculum altogether. The government should focus on eliminating barriers to schools choosing and developing their own curriculum in consultation with their school community.

Introduction

Institute of Public Affairs research demonstrates that the National Curriculum is unbalanced, ideologically-biased and systematically hostile to the legacy of Western Civilisation.

In January 2014, Commonwealth Education Minister Christopher Pyne announced a review of the National Curriculum. Minister Pyne noted that the “truth about the benefits of Western civilisation should be taught in our curriculum. And I think that there is some fair criticism that the curriculum is balanced one way rather than the other.”¹

It is the view of the Institute of Public Affairs that the National Curriculum’s cross-curriculum priorities distort the curriculum’s content across each learning area.

The history curriculum is of particular concern. It over-emphasises the following themes:

- The environment
- Colonialism
- Multiculturalism
- Social history
- Class and minority groups
- Anti-modernism

In addition, the following themes are either under-emphasised or do not expressly appear in the history curriculum at all:

- History of Ideas
- Liberalism
- Economic growth and technology
- Political history
- Western civilisation
- Religion

Curriculums are by their very nature ideological. It is our view that no coherent and ideologically-neutral National Curriculum could be developed that would satisfy the needs of all schools, all parents, and all children. Therefore:

- The National Curriculum should be scrapped.
- The government should focus eliminating barriers that prevent schools from developing and implementing the curricula of their own choosing.

¹ <http://www.pyneonline.com.au/media/transcripts/review-of-national-curriculum>

About this submission

This submission includes a discussion of the problems with the National Curriculum's Cross-Curriculum Priorities and a detailed critique of content of the Year 7 to 10 history curriculum.

It does not address any issues relating to the structure of the curriculum. While we acknowledge that much could be done to improve the coherency of the National Curriculum, particularly in the history learning area, we are only concerned here with the manifestation of the curriculum's ideological and philosophical assumptions. These are explicitly stated as the Cross Curriculum Priorities and are especially evident in the Year 7 to 10 history curriculum.

This submission is particularly concerned with the way the National Curriculum is being interpreted in classroom settings.

To gain insight into how the ideological assumptions in the curriculum documents are being interpreted, we have analysed a number of history textbooks that have been written to comply with the dictates of the new National Curriculum.

Textbooks surveyed include the Jacaranda *History Alive* books, the *Oxford Big Ideas* and the *Pearson History*. These textbooks are currently being used by a large number of schools across the country. We consider these books to provide an insight into how the history curriculum will look in practice.

Obviously, the textbooks do not always represent the intentions and sympathies of the original curriculum writers and are produced by independent publishing companies, not by the government, and schools are not required to use them.

However, the National Curriculum-compliant textbooks illustrate the most pressing shortcomings of the National Curriculum very clearly. Because the curriculum in its current form is extremely explicit, virtually all of the textbooks are structured in exactly the same way, include the same information, and even have the same chapter headings. As such, they all share the same over-emphases and omissions as the National Curriculum, and illustrate them far more clearly than the curriculum documents.

Cross-curriculum priorities

The most significant problem with the National Curriculum is Cross-Curriculum Priorities. At the present, these priorities are:

- Sustainability;
- Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.

Currently, the curriculum is structured in such a way that makes it necessary for each of these priorities to be emphasised across all learning areas. All three of these priorities are clearly political and ideological. As the Institute of Public Affairs' Chris Berg has written,

All [are] worthy topics, of course. How are they ideological? Take sustainability. The sustainability theme is intended to "[create] a more ecologically and socially just world through informed action". That's virtually the definition of ideology: a positive description (we are harming the planet) combined with a normative ideal of a better social order (an ecologically and socially just world).

If this isn't clear enough, well, one of its 'organising ideas' is the sustainability 'world view': "value diversity and social justice are essential for achieving sustainability".

Perhaps this is an ideology you agree with. Ideology isn't a bad thing. Everybody's thought is shaped by ideology, whether they're aware of it or not. But it's ideology nonetheless.²

The cross-curriculum priorities crowd other important content out of the curriculum. An example of this is the English curriculum. In it, students are repeatedly supposed to refer to Dreamtime stories, Asian legends and Aboriginal rock art to learn concepts like the structure of stories, rhythm, and illustrated texts.

The repeated emphasis on these issues throughout the Foundation to Year 10 English curriculum means that other important aspects of 'English' are omitted. The only European literature mentioned in the Foundation to Year 10 curriculum, for example, appears to be *Cinderella* and *Jack and the Beanstalk*. While there are frequent references to the Dreamtime and Asian literature, there is no mention at all of texts that have been foundational to western and therefore Australian literature – for example, Homer, Virgil, the Bible, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton, among many others which could have warranted a mention.

² <http://ipa.org.au/news/3035/the-farce-of-an-ideologically-neutral-curriculum>

The Cross-Curriculum Priorities are also emphasised throughout the Health and Physical Education, Arts, Technologies, and even Mathematics curricula. In the first of these, there is a strong emphasis on 'cultural identity' and 'diversity.' For example, one content description in the Year 3 and 4 Health and Physical Education curriculum reads: "research own heritage and cultural identities, and explore strategies to respect and value diversity."

There is a very strong emphasis on the environment in the Technologies curriculum. Shakespeare is not studied in Drama, yet there is at least one content description for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander drama in virtually every year.

Elaborations in the mathematics curriculum recommend lessons about symmetry in Asian textiles and Aboriginal counting methods.

For the above reasons, the Cross-Curriculum Priorities are probably the most significant underlying problem in the National Curriculum in its current form.

Some critics of the National Curriculum have argued that balance could be restored by adding in a fourth cross-curriculum priority – "the continued recognition of 'western/Judeo-Christian influences on our society.'"³ While we agree that this is extremely important and should indeed appear in any good curriculum, simply adding another Cross-Curriculum priority is unlikely to resolve these underlying issues. It suggests that students will have to study Western culture and Christianity in disciplines like Science, Mathematics, and Health and Physical Education, which is certainly not appropriate in subjects that do not need to include cultural studies at all.

For this reason, the most effective and immediate change that the inquiry could recommend would be to abolish all of the Cross-Curriculum priorities.

There is no need for themes to be repeated in every section of the curriculum. Each discipline should have its own 'priorities,' depending on the purpose and intended outcomes of the particular discipline.

For example, it is the role of history to give students an understanding of how the world came to be in its current state, but the primary priority of mathematics should be to give students at least a basic understanding of numeracy. The two disciplines should be completely separate. They do not need to overlap the content or include the same themes.

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/10/national-curriculum-call-to-boost-western-judeo-christian-influence>

Imbalance in the history curriculum: Over-emphasis

The history curriculum disproportionately focuses on a number of themes that will give students a distorted and ideological vision of Australia's past and the significance of Western Civilisation. This section outlines five themes that are over-emphasised in the history curriculum. It is not intended to suggest that the importance of, for instance, the environment in history should not be taught. Rather, the disproportionate focus on these themes to the exclusion of other themes elaborated later in the submission demonstrates the ideological flavour of the curriculum.

1. The Environment

As one of the cross-curriculum priorities, the environment plays a very prominent role throughout the entire history curriculum, but especially in the Year 7 to 10 curriculum. Overall, it reflects an environmental determinist view of human civilisation. The message repeated throughout much of the content is that "humans and their natural environment are closely interrelated," implicitly taken to an extreme where environmental factors such as climate presuppose the success or failure of any given civilisation.

This perspective is first revealed in Year 7, where all 'depth studies' on the ancient world begin with exactly the same content description:

The physical features of [an ancient civilisation] and how they influenced the civilisation that developed there

The emphasis on this point is the same regardless of which civilisation is being described – whether Egypt, Greece, Rome, India or China. It is one of just five content descriptions that the curriculum prescribes for each.

The environment theme re-emerges in Year 8 – particularly in the Asian section. There, it emphasises that Polynesian societies declined because they exploited their environmental resources, that climate change caused the decline of Angkor, and includes a content description on how the Shoguns used natural resources.

In Year 9, it includes a content description on the Industrial Revolution and its impact on the environment:

The short and long-term impacts of the Industrial Revolution, including global changes in landscapes, transport and communication

Naturally, many of the textbooks follow this trend and emphasise the damage that the Industrial Revolution did to the environment. *Oxford Big Ideas* includes a number of pages

on it, noting – among other things – that “the Industrial Revolution left humanity dependent on carbon fuels” (a bad thing!)

By far the most concerning appearance of the environment in the history curriculum, however, is in the Year 10. This post-WWII section could have included many things. One would have expected a depth study on the Cold War, or at least the Cold War era. Instead, the last two depth studies in Year 10 are a core unit on Indigenous rights and an elective on either pop culture, immigration and refugees, or the environment movement.

In this depth study, they are supposed to learn about the notion of “Gaia – the interaction of Earth and its biosphere,” “limits to growth – that unlimited growth is unsustainable,” and “rights of nature – recognition that humans and their natural environment are closely interrelated.” They are supposed to learn about a range of “environmental impacts” and learn about how they motivated major protests, like the campaign to stop the blocking of Gordon River.

All of the textbooks are similarly biased. For example, the Nelson textbook rendition of this section of the National Curriculum includes lengthy descriptions of events like the Blockage of Franklin Dam and Lake Pedder, and profiles of people such as Jack Munday, Peter Garrett and groups like the Rising Tide Newcastle and Greenpeace. It then insists that the debate over anthropogenic climate change is settled and that scientists find *An Inconvenient Truth* to be “factually accurate.”

Overall, there is a very strong environmental theme throughout the National Curriculum. The theme repeated throughout is that climate presupposes the fate of a civilisation; apparently, it presupposed the fate of ancient civilisations, was responsible for the collapse of various societies throughout history, and will be devastate us in the coming years.

This is not to suggest that the environment and geography did not play an important role in history and in shaping how different civilisations developed. It certainly did – although so did ideas and institutions, which do not get quite the same attention.

This history curriculum, however, emphasises the impact of the environment at the cost of denigrating the role of human agency, and then worsens the situation still by including issues and events that are political in a context very sympathetic to left-wing green movements. A history curriculum is no place to preach these ideas.

2. Colonialism

Another recurring feature in the curriculum is colonialism – or, more specifically, European colonialism and its evils. This begins in Years 5 and 6, which discusses European settlement

in Australia and “the nature of convict or colonial presence” and “experiences of Australian democracy and citizenship” of Aboriginal people.

The Year 7 to 10 curriculum includes many more references to colonialism. Already, Year 8 includes whole depth study on the Spanish Conquest of the Americas. This subject describes the violent conquest of the Aztecs or Incas by the Europeans and the disastrous “longer-term effects of colonisation, including slavery, population changes and lack of control over resources.” The textbook renditions of these depth studies include graphic tables detailing the population declines in the region.

Nearly half of the Year 9 depth study on early Australia is about the damage Europeans did to non-Europeans. Much of the equivalent unit on Asia is about European colonialism. In the *History Alive* textbook, this is transformed into a chapter almost purely about China gaining independence from the oppressive European powers, which conveniently cuts off when the Communist Party comes into power – but this is perhaps not entirely due to the contents of the curriculum. The overview for that year includes an elaboration on “recognising how Asian societies responded to European imperialism, the extent to which they were changed and the influence they exercised on the rest of the world.”

Finally, the Year 10 history curriculum includes a core depth study about civil rights movements and “the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for rights and freedoms” against the European colonists. The Stolen Generations, the Mabo decision, and the Apology are all mentioned in the content descriptions, along with the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).

Overall, there is a strong emphasis on specifically European colonialism throughout the history curriculum and the negative impact that this had on indigenous populations. This is not to say that it should not be included at all, of course, or that much of what the curriculum includes is fundamentally bad or factually flawed in some way; but the emphasis that it places upon these concepts is undue.

3. Multiculturalism

Since one of the cross-curriculum priorities is ‘Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia,’ it is likely to be of little surprise that multiculturalism is another feature of the history curriculum that is strongly over-emphasised.

Throughout Years 7 and 8, virtually half of the content descriptions are about Asian civilisations. Of the other three electives on ancient civilisations in Year 7, two are about Greece and Rome – which are both very important – and one is about ancient Egypt – which is popular but not as relevant to Western and Australian history as the previous two. All strictly European medieval history in Year 8 is grouped under the heading ‘the Western and Islamic World,’ which also includes an elective depth study on the Ottoman Empire.

Similarly, in Year 9 it is not compulsory to complete a depth study on Australian history; an elective on modern Asian history can be completed instead. Much of Year 10 is explicitly about multiculturalism – particularly the depth studies on immigration and human rights movements.

In the Year 10 depth study on immigration, students are supposed to study “the contribution of migration to Australia’s changing identity as a nation and to its international relationships.” This is essentially a summary of one of the main underlying themes in the existing curriculum.

4. Social history

Most history in primary school is either about historical skills or social history. This is understandable, although whether or not it is the best way to introduce history is indeed open to debate and it should not be a given. The curriculum for Years 4 to 6 prescribes various content descriptions on the daily life of Australia’s inhabitants, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and migrants from Asian countries.

There is a problem, however, in the sense that the curriculum continues its strong focus on social history into the secondary school curriculum. The depth studies prescribed in Year 7 on the ancient civilisations are largely about social history – about their values, practices, beliefs, key groups in society, foreign cults, and contacts between Asia and Europe. The medieval history depth studies are also mostly about social history. The Australian history depth study in Year 9 is mostly about “experiences,” as are the depth studies on the Industrial Revolution and the Movement of peoples. The only depth study that is not predominantly about social history in Year 10 is World War II.

Social history is undoubtedly important, and many students may find it more interesting than bare political history. Without proper historical context, however, it is meaningless. The over-emphasis of social history and the corresponding lack of emphasis on political history means that it must be very difficult to derive a sense of chronology from most of the curriculum in its current form, let alone a sense of narrative and long-term developments. The Year 7 and 8 depth studies in particular are severely lacking in context.

For Years 7 and 8 at least, most of the content in the National Curriculum is social history at the cost of providing a chronological and narrative context and illustrating how changes occurred over time.

5. Class and Minority Groups

A more concerning aspect of the curriculum is that there is a strong focus on class and minority groups. For example, the Year 7 overview content includes the following content description:

key features of ancient societies (farming, trade, social classes, religion, rule of law)

This appears to imply that all ancient societies without discrimination had exactly the same features in terms of “social classes,” when the reality was very different. Yet as if to reinforce this view, all the ‘Mediterranean’ and ‘Asia’ breadth studies include the following content description:

Roles of key groups in ancient [specify] Society, (such as...) including the influence of law and religion

In each case, the role of minority groups – women, slaves, plebeians – are emphasised, giving the impression of rigid, strongly class-oriented societies. Often the summaries are actually incorrect or omit important information. It does not mention anywhere that Athens was the first democracy, although one elaboration does include an obscure and possibly misapplied reference to “the invention of freedom” in the ancient Greece depth study. Similarly, it depicts the key groups of Roman society as “patricians, plebeians, women, slaves.” This might have been true in about 300 BC, but it the curriculum does not mention that the distinction between patricians and plebeian *nobiles* was increasingly blurred towards the end of the Republican period, and that the patrician order virtually disappeared in the early empire. Yet the textbooks derived from the curriculum follow it in drawing this rigid depiction of Roman society. As the Pearson Year 7 mistakenly says:

...the plebeians in Rome were the social class who were poor, uneducated and low in status.

Here, some important facts have been omitted to fit into the “key groups” content description in the curriculum. This is a gross oversimplification of the structure of Roman society – which, in reality, was highly complex – and it appears to have Marxist undertones. It is reflected in each of the depth studies from that year and in various places in the textbooks.

The focus on social classes and ‘power’ reappears time and time again as a major theme throughout the curriculum. When it is not a distinct aristocratic class that is oppressing the plebeians, then it is the Christian church instead. The European history depth studies in Year 8 focus on “the dominance of the Catholic Church” and makes the odd suggestion that Gregorian chants and castles were an expression of its power.

The *Oxford Big Ideas* and *History Alive* textbooks for this year both include several pages of quotations from Marx and Engels.

There is also a strong emphasis throughout the curriculum on the development of socialism in the Progressive Ideas and Movements depth study, as demonstrated in the following content descriptions:

The emergence and nature of key ideas in the period, with a particular focus on ONE of the following: capitalism, socialism, egalitarianism, nationalism, imperialism, Darwinism, Chartism

The reasons why ONE key idea emerged and/or developed a following, such as the influence of the Industrial Revolution on socialism

The Movement of Peoples subject the same year is mostly about the slave trade, while the Australian unit is mostly about the experiences of non-Europeans and living and working conditions. In the textbooks, this translates to women's voting rights and old-age pensions.

In Year 9, there is an increasingly strong emphasis on the poor living and working conditions in the Industrial Revolution and how this led to the trade union movement. Of course, Year 10 includes a compulsory depth study on "the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for rights and freedoms" and the significance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the US civil rights movement. Virtually two thirds of the year is spent completing depth studies on protest movements and the plight of minority groups.

Overall, there is a definite focus on class and minority groups in many of the content descriptions, and that in areas the history curriculum – and even more so, the textbooks derived from it – appear to have Marxist undertones.

6. Anti-modernism

In addition to all of the above over-emphases, another theme that is repeated throughout the curriculum is anti-modernism. This theme is related to many of the above – particularly environmentalism and, to some degree, colonialism – and is brilliantly expressed in this very humourless extract from the Pearson Year 7 textbook:

Some historians speculate that the shift from the hunter-gatherer way of life to the settled life of farming was one of the worst mistakes humankind ever made. Studies by anthropologists of the few existing hunter-gatherer societies, such as the !Kung San of the Kalahari in Africa, show that they work far less hard than neighbouring farmers and have a better and more varied diet.

This is followed a few pages later by an exercise in which students are earnestly to debate: "Should modern humans return to the hunter-gatherer way of life?"

While there is nothing in the curriculum itself that is quite as blatant as this, a similar theme nevertheless recurs throughout the Year 7 to 10 curriculum. As a whole, it paints a very dim image of modern society. It includes content descriptions on the impact of the Industrial Revolution and economic growth on the environment and a whole depth study on the environment movement, which emphasises the negative impacts of “population increase, urbanisation, increasing industrial production and trade.”

The curriculum portrays a very negative view of modernity, if not of human civilisation in general. It is a theme that underlies much of the content and is clearly not appropriate in a National Curriculum.

Imbalance: Under-emphasis

The over-emphasis of themes such as environmental determinism and colonialism is matched by a marked under-emphasis of a number of significant themes in the development of human history and of Western Civilisation. First among these is the absence of the history of ideas.

1. Ideas

An especially concerning omission from the curriculum and related textbooks is the history of ideas – or rather, a history of ideas and concepts and their relationship to the institutions, economic growth and the success of any given civilisation or nation. At all stages of the curriculum – with the exclusion of Year 9, which will be discussed in more detail below – it prescribes what is very much a materialist and environmental view of history, in which success is largely determined by environmental and geographical conditions. There is very little in the history curriculum on the role of ideas of how they have developed over time.

To use an example, if there are a handful of stand-alone ‘facts’ that most thirteen year olds should know about ancient Greece, two of them would definitely be that: the ancient Greeks (particularly the Athenians) invented philosophy and democracy; and by extension, both of these inventions have had a profound impact on the institutions of many European nations and their former colonies, including Australia.

At the present, however, although there is much emphasis on the geographic and environmental setting on ancient Greece, the coverage of democracy in the Year 7 curriculum is extremely scant. It introduces the concept from the perspective of social or class history, emphasising that there were still different ‘classes’ in Athenian society – men, women, and children – and remaining silent on the significance of democratic ideas. In fact, it doesn’t actually use the word “democracy” at all; instead, it ambiguously attributes the “the invention of freedom” to the ancient Greeks – which is not strictly justified.

In keeping with this, most textbooks include half a page to a page (usually shared with Sparta) on the development and constitution of Athenian democracy. Some even portray Athenian democracy in a somewhat negative light. An inquiry task on page 203 of the Year 7 Pearson textbook requires students to write an ‘oral history’ by “an Athenian slave working in the silver mines, who talks about his view of ‘democracy’ in Athens.” There is very little emphasis on the historical significance of the development of democracy in historical terms.

The curriculum is even more silent on Greek philosophy, and does not even mention it in the content descriptions, despite the fact that it mandates content descriptions on “the

spread of philosophies and beliefs” in the India and China depth studies the same year. Likewise, at least one textbook – Oxford Year 7, mentions Plato and bolds the word “philosopher,” without explaining what Plato’s contribution to philosophy was or why it was significant.

Just as there is very little on the development of Greek democracy and philosophy and its significance, there is very little on the significance of Roman law. Since Roman law and customs (grouped together under the same content description) get exactly the same vague treatment as every other ancient civilisation, there is nothing in there to suggest that it was a forebear of many European legal systems – and our own. Equally, there is nothing on the development of English Law (the Domesday book, for example, does not earn a mention, nor for that matter does the Battle of Hastings) and there is very little or nothing in the years 7 to 10 on the ideas that influenced the institutions of England, and therefore of Australia.

Nowhere does the curriculum discuss anything about the development of natural law and human rights before the United Nations’ Declaration of Universal Human Rights in 1945, as if it were at this point that ‘human rights’ were invented.

One could read through most of the curriculum and gain the impression that, for the most part, ideas (with the exclusion of socialism) don’t matter. There is very little on how ideas influence institutions, and how institutions impact the success or failure of a civilisation or nation and the wellbeing of its people. Instead, the curriculum places an emphasis on the geographic setting of each civilisation and its relationship with the environment, and the different social classes in society. When ideas are mentioned, the curriculum paints a sketchy and incomplete picture.

2. Liberalism

Closely related to the above is the complete omission of liberalism from the curriculum. This is especially astounding because the curriculum does include a depth study in Year 9 on “progressive ideas and movements” - perhaps, along with the protest movement depth studies in Year 10, the only place in the curriculum where "ideas" do play a role. The ideas mentioned include capitalism, socialism, Darwinism, and Chartism, but liberalism is not mentioned.

Although the depth study emphasises socialism, using it as the example in the "progressive ideas and movements" depth study and suggesting that students learn how the labour movement was influenced by the Industrial Revolution, the concept of liberalism is omitted altogether – an idea that has done much to shape the institutions of modern Australia.

That the curriculum mentions socialism, Chartism and social Darwinism but not liberalism is not acceptable, and is very illustrative of the one-sidedness and selectiveness of the history curriculum.

3. Political history

Given the strongly social, environmental and materialist approach to the history curriculum, it is perhaps unsurprising that political history throughout the curriculum is also severely lacking. The fact is that most of the chronology and political history is currently included in the 'historical overview' content outlined at the beginning of each year - content which is supposed to comprise about 10% of total teaching time in history, or about eight hours of class. Most depth studies focus on social history - daily life, the structure of society, and geographic features - but include very little on names, dates, chronology, historical turning points, and long-term developments.

The Year 7 depth studies each include a content description on the life and achievements of single notable individuals, but this is apparently to be examined in isolation and is therefore not likely to be very informative. This is essentially the extent of political history in the Year 7 curriculum. In the ancient Rome depth study, students are to learn about Julius Caesar or Augustus. The Pearson Year 7 textbook includes a double page on the career of Julius Caesar, depicting his life as a 'timeline of the fall of the Republic,' without examining his relationship with other significant individuals at the time and important developments before and after his lifetime that also contributed to the collapse of the Republic. A very bare timeline of the life of Caesar is not adequate coverage of the history of this period by any account.

This is presumably not because of lack of space - the curriculum is extremely explicit - but because learning about 'big names,' dates, and what actually happened is apparently not as important as learning about how civilisations interacted with the environment and about how the elite groups of society oppressed the less powerful groups, and about social customs in general.

This is very well illustrated in the Pearson Year 7 textbook, which includes a list of important names from ancient Greece for students to memorise. Rather than being the names of important individuals - Pericles, Demosthenes, Alexander - they are the names of Greek gods, heroes and monsters. It is about the culture and religion of ancient Greece, not the history. There is no injunction anywhere else for students to memorise a list of names from ancient Greece.

This trend is largely the same throughout Year 8, where most depth studies include a single content description on one historical event - for example, the fall of Constantinople in 1453 is mentioned in the Ottoman Empire depth study. Nowhere, however, is there an attempt

to link these events with other important events, or to place all of this in a chronological narrative. There are very few places in which basic list of events and developments are listed.

The situation does improve slightly in Years 9 and 10. The depth studies on World War I and World War II are essentially adequate as a basic introduction, and the quality of these chapters in the textbooks is usually quite good.

Ironically, although the last four depth studies in Year 10 are very poor choices for a National Curriculum for various reasons, they are the only depth studies that actually do include lists of events and dates to learn. For example, the depth study on the development of 'human rights' includes a list of events in the 'indigenous rights movement,' leading up to Kevin Rudd's 'Sorry' speech. The depth studies themselves, however, are all at the core about social history, and mostly about social movements; the most important political developments for that period which arguably should have been the focus of the last part of the curriculum – for example, the Cold War – are covered only in the overview content.

The lack of political history – especially in Years 7 and 8, but also in 9 and 10 – means that it must be very difficult for students to gain a sense of how the different pieces of history fit together, and of how developments occurred over time, let alone who the key individuals were and how they relate to other key individuals.

4. Economic growth and technology

The history curriculum includes very little information on economic growth and technology, and very little economic history in general. Of course, it does mention trade between societies occasionally – for example, it is listed as a 'key feature of ancient society' and in the depth study on the Vikings, and the slave trade gets a number of mentions – but the only time that "growth" is mentioned is in a reference to the growth of the environment movement in Australia and the notion of 'limits to growth – that unlimited growth is unsustainable,' both of which appear in the depth study on the environment movement.

Most references to technological innovation appear in Year 7, exclusively with reference to prehistory – for example, the move from using stone tools to woodwork – and Aboriginal technology – including the shell midden and the use of 'natural resources.' There do not appear to be any explicit mentions anywhere of how technology and economic growth has impacted settled civilisations or how it improves living standards.

The omission becomes most obvious in modern history in Year 9 and 10, when the economic side of history should have become extremely important, particularly in the industrial period and beyond. Yet the overview content includes very little information on the economy and how it improved living conditions, although it does mention how

technological innovation affected them (which could be taken either positively or negatively.)

The depth study on the Industrial Revolution discusses the short and long-term impacts, but emphasises ‘global changes in landscapes, transport and communication,’ and not the economy and living conditions; the elaborations emphasise the impact of factories, mines and cities on the environment and population growth, and the development of trade unions. There is a content description on “the experiences of men, women and children” and “their changing way of life,” but this is mostly in terms of “longer working hours for low pay and the use of children as a cheap source of labour” and “the impact of steam, gas and electricity on people’s way of life.”

While some of the textbook renditions of this section of the curriculum are excellent and include much more information on technology and economic changes, the National Curriculum itself focuses largely on working conditions, environmental damage, and the development of socialism in the section on the industrial revolution.

In addition, in Year 10 there is nothing anywhere that emphasises the fact that western countries in the twenty-first century enjoy economic prosperity unprecedented at any other time in history. Instead, most of Year 10 is about protest movements and the impact of modernisation on the environment. All that it does include is a content description on “the intensification of environmental effects in the twentieth century as a result of population increase, urbanisation, increasing industrial production and trade,” within the environment movement depth study.

5. Religion

The curriculum is also extremely silent on the matter of religion – especially Christianity. This is curious, since it neglects that a small majority of Australians (roughly 61%) still identify themselves as Christian, making it – quite aside from its historical importance – by far the most significant religion in the country to this day (by contrast, the second-largest category in 2011 was “no religion,” which now accounts for about 22%).

Yet Christianity is not mentioned in Year 7 ancient history, although it is one of the most important legacies of the Roman Empire. Whenever Christianity is mentioned in Year 8, it is usually in a distinctly negative context or described in terms of its oppressive power – for example, Gregorian chants and castles are somehow supposed to demonstrate the “power” of the church and how it maintained its control over the population. It is mentioned as a motive to the Spanish conquests of the Americas, and in the context of its opposition to the “progressive movements” in Year 9. This is a very one-sided a negative view of Christianity. There is no emphasis anywhere of the more positive contributions it has made – for example, the invention of human rights, the first public hospitals, charities, and the abolition

of slavery were all driven in a large part by Christianity. Yet the history curriculum does not mention any of this and even incorrectly attributes the first public hospitals to Islam.

6. Western Civilisation

A final point that the curriculum neglects is Western Civilisation, and fails to recognise its significance and relevance to modern-day Australia.

Although Greece and Rome are both of key importance to the history of Western Civilisation and the development of Australia's institutions – along with many others, including the civilisation of eastern Europe and Islamic civilisation – it is impossible, given the current curriculum, for a single student to study both of them; in fact, would be very possible for a student to study ancient Egypt and bypass Greece and Rome altogether. Moreover, the curriculum in its current form does nothing to emphasise the importance of Greece and Rome and exactly why they are especially important for Australia; on the contrary, both are treated in exactly the same way as all the other ancient civilisations in the Year 7 depth studies.

The same is true in Year 8, where a large number of the depth studies about Asia and the Ottoman Empire and medieval Europe are found in the same category. Similarly, the curriculum in its current form makes it impossible for any student to study both Medieval Europe and the Renaissance, although it is not required to study either and it would be possible to go through Year 8 having studied the Ottomans and knowing very little about medieval Christendom.

It clearly would have been more difficult for the curriculum to use the same scattered approach for the modern period of history in Years 9 and 10, during which western European civilisation spread across the world – including to Asia. However, even here, the curriculum is somewhat inadequate; it does not adequately cover the period of European history between 1600 and 1750, which was critical for the development of Western Civilisation and for British history. Indeed, there was very little in the curriculum as a whole on British history, although it is the primary focus in the depth study on the industrial revolution. Finally, in Year 10, the curriculum lacks anything but a sketchy overview of the Cold War, which has shaped Western Civilisation in the present day.

Conclusion

A biased and confused curriculum

There are two points that can be drawn from this discussion. The first is that the curriculum appears to portray Western Civilisation – of which Australia is undeniably a part – and the elements and earlier civilisations that have shaped it in an either ambivalent or distinctly negative light, which is disappointing and greatly concerning in a National Curriculum.

The second point that can be drawn from it is that the history curriculum in its current form is missing a crucial element: a coherent theme. The current National Curriculum purports to be a history of everything, at the cost of providing a continuous and coherent account of anything – not least, of Australia and its institutions. ‘World history’ is not something that can realistically be achieved over four years in most school settings, and certainly not something that a National Curriculum should attempt to prescribe.

At the present, the scattered and eclectic selection of depth studies available lacks cohesion and a common thread. It is so excessively multicultural in that it consists of so many disconnected depth studies that it is impossible to determine what exactly students are supposed to draw from it, aside from so-called ‘historical skills’ and abstract themes. The curriculum would have made much more sense if it largely focused on a specific thread of history – ideally one which was most relevant to Australia. The thread of history most relevant to Australia – in terms of its institutions and its culture – is that of the development of Western Civilisation and its forebears. For the most part, this would be the history of Greece, Rome, western Christendom, and – in Australia’s case – the British Empire.

The National Curriculum should be abolished, not amended

The Institute of Public Affairs opposes the establishment of a National Curriculum.

It is essentially an ideological exercise, and it is inherently dangerous in a liberal democracy that a government should be given the power to determine the ideology of school curricula across the entire country.

Having a National Curriculum means that school curricula are politicised. Indeed, by definition, it is impossible to have a government-endorsed curriculum that is not politicised. As such, it is not only difficult to justify having an Australian National Curriculum in the first place, but any National Curriculum that we do have is likely to be both contentious and unstable for as long as it continues to exist.

Different sides of Parliament are highly unlikely to agree upon an ideologically neutral curriculum. On the contrary, it is highly likely that each side will accuse the other of

politicising various academic disciplines – especially history, the most political of all disciplines – and that a review of the curriculum will be announced every time a new government comes into power to correct any perceived imbalance.

We have already seen this occur twice since 2006: the first time, when the Rudd government scrapped the Howard government's *Guide to Teaching Australian History*; the second just two months ago, when Christopher Pyne announced a review of the Labor curriculum. A very similar pattern is currently occurring in the United Kingdom. The trend is likely to continue here, making the National Curriculum greatly destabilising for the teachers and students involved.

On the basis of the above, the ideal situation would be to abolish the National Curriculum altogether and to introduce a competing curriculum model to allow for greater school autonomy and prevent curricula from becoming politicised.

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