

New Zealand Historical Association Submission on the draft proposal document *Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories in the New Zealand Curriculum*

The NZHA

The New Zealand Historical Association (NZHA) was formed in 1981 to promote research and scholarship on history in New Zealand. The Association has a tradition of leadership by university history departments/programmes, but today's membership includes historians working within the public sector and professional history fields more broadly. The NZHA recognises the role of Te Pouhere Korero in being a voice for Māori history and Māori historians. PHANZA, the organisation representing professional historians, has a representative on the NZHA Council.

Since its inception in 1981, members of the NZHA have led critical reconsiderations of New Zealand's past through publishing books and articles, through teaching undergraduates, and through supervising postgraduate theses. The NZHA's biennial conference plays a leading role in promoting new interpretations of Aotearoa New Zealand's past. Members of the Association have enhanced our understandings of New Zealand as a settler society, of Māori and Pacific history, of the nature of community, and of the role of gender in New Zealand history. As public historians and academic citizens, members have contributed to the work of the Waitangi Tribunal and Office of Treaty Settlements, to the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, to Te Ara: The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, and to the centennial commemorations of the Great War. Research and teaching undertaken by members of the Association will provide a critical underpinning of Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories.

The NZHA Welcomes the Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories Curriculum

The NZHA welcomes the incorporation of New Zealand history into the school curriculum for Years 1-10. The Association is delighted that Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories will provide a more structured and disciplined approach to the teaching of history. It regards this as a valuable opportunity for New Zealanders to gain a better understanding of their past in order to better understand their present and their future. The Association has long argued that this is essential to providing all New Zealand children and young people with an understanding of their shared and distinct histories.

The unexpected announcement by the Prime Minister and Minister of Education on 12 September 2019 lay down some fundamental objectives. The new curriculum would need to recognise the 'value of every New Zealander', as under the existing social science curriculum 'too much is left to chance in the teaching and learning of New Zealand history'. The announcement also stipulated that 'all learners and ākonga [should be] aware of key aspects of New Zealand history and how they have influenced and shaped the nation'. Finally, an indicative list of seven topics was set out as fundamental knowledge that 'cannot be left to chance'.

The NZHA recognises that the implementation of Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories will mark a dramatic change in the teaching of social sciences in New Zealand schools, by introducing significant levels of prescription. However, schools will retain substantial autonomy to interpret this according to local circumstances. Given the impact of Covid-19 and the scale of these changes, the development of the new curriculum for the beginning of the 2022 school year remains a formidable challenge. All those involved in the process should be commended for the work that they have done so far. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft and are committed to the objectives outlined in September 2019: to produce an inclusive curriculum that gives teachers and students the opportunity to explore New Zealand's past in a way that is meaningful and that contributes to the broader objectives of the social sciences curriculum.

Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories Rightly Centralises Māori History and Local Perspectives

The NZHA particularly welcomes the centrality of Māori history within the three 'big ideas' at the heart of the curriculum. This is regarded as a long-overdue shift, and a core foundation upon which understandings of New Zealand history ought to be based. The emphasis on teaching local histories is also welcomed. This will give pupils a deeper knowledge of their own whānau and communities, thereby allowing them to see their own history within the broader sweep of the past. Moreover, a focus on local histories will better facilitate understanding of the diversity of New Zealanders' historical experiences.

The NZHA strongly supports how the draft Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories Curriculum treats history as a series of contested narratives, rather than as a search for a definitive interpretation. We also recognise the importance of Māori and Pasifika histories, not just because they are different interpretations, but because they are based on distinct ways of interpreting the past.

Changes Required

Nonetheless, the NZHA considers that more needs to be done to achieve the objectives outlined in the September announcement 2019. In its current form, the draft curriculum has significant gaps that will make it difficult for teachers to provide sufficient context for those topics which are included. The draft is also insufficiently inclusive, meaning that not all New Zealanders will be able to see their own history.

This Association shares the concerns expressed by the Royal Society's Expert Advisory Panel, and of other historians who have raised similar issues, that the curriculum insufficiently reflects both the complexity and diversity of New Zealand's past, and the foundational historical skills required for children and young people to engage in that past.

While NZHA is supportive of the incorporation of New Zealand history into the school curriculum and the approach outlined in the draft proposal, members have concerns over certain aspects. There is very little reference to the everyday processes by which communities evolved. Gender history is almost completely invisible, aside from female suffrage. There is very little mention of how New Zealanders earned their living, both domestically and via exports. Indeed, outside of warfare, there is very little mention of how New Zealand's history

was shaped by its engagement with the wider world. These elements of social history are central to explaining how, and the extent to which, particular peoples and sections of the community have been able to shape the society in which we now live. They also provide essential context for understanding the curriculum's 'big ideas'.

There is also no indication that pupils will be introduced to the techniques by which historians assess evidence and interpret the past. This is of particular concern given the stated expectation (page 7) that at years 9 and 10 that pupils will have the capacity to make 'an informed ethical judgement about people's actions in the past'. Historians prioritise understanding and explaining the past over making value judgements. History is a discipline that, first and foremost, tries to understand what happened and why. It explores the complex relationships between the past and the present, and in so doing draws on a series of specialist approaches and methods.

As the report of the Expert Advisory Panel makes clear, history is about the interpretation of real events occurring at specific points in time. For teachers, who over recent decades have become far less likely to study history as part of their degree, some understanding of historical methodology and approaches to the past is critical in instilling the confidence to deal with a multiplicity of interpretations, particularly in the teaching of difficult histories. At present, research has shown that teachers' lack of confidence and anxiety about teaching cross-cultural and difficult histories has led them to avoid bringing these topics into the classroom. As well as ensuring that appropriate historical knowledge and skills will be provided to teachers graduating in the future, opportunities for post-professional education will also be required, alongside the provision of classroom-ready resources.

While acknowledging the concerns noted above, the NZHA hopes they can be addressed through further engagement and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this process.

The Future

Recognising the challenges involved in providing the necessary teaching resources, the Association looks forward to using its members' expertise to work with teachers to develop quality materials in this area. The NZHA also hopes to ensure that existing and future teachers are well-grounded not only in the context of New Zealand history, but are also sufficiently informed of the basic building blocks of historical understanding and are capable of thinking historically.

Ngā mihi nui

The Executive of the New Zealand Historical Association