



Statement by the South African Society for History Teaching on the appointment of the History Ministerial Task Team to oversee the implementation of compulsory history in the Further Education and Training schools

November 2015

The Society congratulates the members of the Task Team on their appointment, appreciates their willingness to serve in this capacity and wishes them well with their highly significant assignment.

SASHT would be very happy to cooperate with and assist them in every way that it can, by providing any information, views and research on request.

1. As a preface to commenting on the Terms of Reference of the Task Team contained in the *Government Gazette* Notice of 9 October 2015, the Society should like to clarify its **understanding of the nature of “History” as a school subject**. This underpins all the subsequent references to History in this statement.

The Society espouses, inter alia, the following descriptions of the nature, function and purpose of History in schools and affirms that *anything that falls short of, or goes beyond, them is not “History”*.

“History is the study of change and development in society over time. The study of history enables us to understand how past human action affects the present and influences our future, and it allows us to evaluate these effects. So, history is about learning how to think about the past, which affects the present, in a disciplined way. History is a process of enquiry. Therefore, it is about asking questions of the past: What happened? When did it happen? Why did it happen then? What were the short-term and long-term results? It involves thinking critically about the stories people tell us about the past, as well as the stories that we tell ourselves.” Department of Basic Education (2011) *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement Grades 10-12 History*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education, p. 8.

“While history has had a variety of meanings and uses across human time, today it can be said that in an established general sense it means an organised knowledge of the past, a defining feature which it shares with archaeology. In this regard, while it has a different character as a discipline, archaeology is also recognisable as a form of history. History is a distinctive and well-established academic discipline with its own methods and discourses. Its field of study is potentially limitless, in that it encompasses the totality of past human experience. Among scholars who study history there can be differences and even controversy between some who regard it as an account of an actual past, and others who view it as an entirely imagined or constructed past.” Ministry of Education (2000) *Report of the History/Archaeology Panel to the Minister of Education*. Pretoria: Department of Education.

“The approach to the past should be inclusive and democratic: it should explore the experiences of ordinary men and women as well as leaders and heroes, and should deal with the political, social, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions of human experience. The manner in which history is taught should promote democratic values, and democracy should be introduced through the mode of classroom discourse and the experiences of students in the classroom.

The approach to historical knowledge should be analytical and explanatory, dealing with change, continuity and conflict, and complex historical processes and concepts should be dealt with at levels appropriate to the learning abilities of students.

Skills and content should be seen as inseparable. The history curriculum should be based on an awareness of how knowledge is produced. History is not a set of given facts. The process of history production should be made clear to students.” Statement of the colloquia on *School History Textbooks for a Democratic South Africa*, Sparkling Waters Hotel, Rustenburg, 1993, 1.2-1.4, in 'Reconceptualising South African School History Textbooks.' *South African Historical Journal* 30, May, pp.98-108.

2. The Society looks forward to a strengthening of History as an elective FET subject and a blossoming of it in the light of the present initiative of the Minister. But it seeks, in the first place, the assurance that whatever recommendations the Task Team should make, **the present place of History among the elective FET subjects for the NSC examination (DBE and IEB) will not be undermined or weakened.** History is growing in the number of candidates (+35% over four years) – the tenth most popular of the elective subjects in terms of the numbers who wrote the DBE examination but the second most successful in terms of achievement in 2014. In order to **strengthen** the place of History amongst the elective subjects, the reasons for some schools not offering History as an FET subject and for it sometimes being unfavourably timetabled against other elective subjects among the schools that do offer it, need to be probed.

NATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN 11 MOST POPULAR SUBJECTS : 2011-2014

Subjects	2011			2012			2013			2014		
	Wrote	Achieved at 30% & above	% achieved	Wrote	Achieved at 30% & above	% achieved	Wrote	Achieved at 30% & above	% achieved	Wrote	Achieved at 30% & above	% achieved
Accounting	137 903	84 972	61.6	134 978	88 508	65.6	145 427	95 520	65.7	125 987	85 681	68.0
Agricultural Sciences	77 719	55 404	71.3	78 148	57 571	73.7	83 437	67 308	80.7	78 063	64 486	82.6
Business Studies	187 677	147 559	78.6	195 507	151 237	77.4	218 914	179 329	81.9	207 659	161 723	77.9
Economics	133 358	85 411	64.0	134 369	97 842	72.8	150 114	110 869	73.9	137 478	94 779	68.9
English First Additional Language	414 480	398 740	96.2	420 039	410 999	97.8	454 666	449 420	98.8	432 933	423 134	97.7
Geography	199 248	139 405	70.0	213 735	162 046	75.8	239 657	191 834	80.0	236 051	191 966	81.3
History	85 928	65 239	75.9	94 489	81 265	86.0	109 046	94 982	87.1	115 686	99 823	86.3
Life Sciences	264 819	193 946	73.2	278 412	193 593	69.5	301 718	222 374	73.7	284 298	209 783	73.8
Mathematical Literacy	275 380	236 548	85.9	291 341	254 611	87.4	324 097	282 270	87.1	312 054	262 495	84.1
Mathematics	224 635	104 033	46.3	225 874	121 970	54.0	241 509	142 666	59.1	225 458	120 523	53.5
Physical Sciences	180 585	96 441	53.4	179 194	109 918	61.3	184 383	124 206	67.4	167 997	103 348	61.5

Department of Basic Education (2015) *National Senior Certificate Examination Schools Subject Reports*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education

3. The following are the Society’s observations on the Task Team’s Terms of Reference.

- 3.1 Term of Reference i: **To conduct a research study on how best to implement the introduction of compulsory History in FET schools as part of citizenship located within Life Orientation**

The intention of this term of reference is not completely clear, as 2 i of the *Government Gazette* Notice additionally states: “Conduct research on how other countries have dealt with the introduction of compulsory History as part of citizenship in their schooling system.” The Society urges that the Task Team act with circumspection and care in its response to it.

The most apparent reading of this term of reference is that a study be made of how the Life Orientation curriculum could be suitably amended to include elements of History and that this would form the only compulsory History component for FET learners.

At present, Physical Education occupies 50% of time allocated to Life Orientation (i.e. one hour a week). Citizenship (“Social and environmental responsibility” and “Democracy and Human Rights”) occupies 15%, Careers 15% and “Development of self” & “Study skills” the remaining 20%.

It is difficult to see how much time can be found in this mix for meaningful History, together with suitable assessment. At best it might amount to 20% of Life Orientation, i.e. 36 hours contact time over three years, which would probably better employed over two years. That would make it possible to do two History topics of 18 hours each, which could include aspects of South Africa’s democracy and citizenship within them. It would also allow for a small form of assessment to be incorporated.

An alternative would be to add more time to Life Orientation, by reducing the time for the three NSC elective subjects from 4 hours per week each to 3.75 hours (i.e. five 45-minute periods), which would allow 45 minutes per week extra for History, 70 hours of contact time over the three years.

Given the somewhat contentious position and status of Life Orientation in the FET curriculum, the Society draws the attention of the Task Team to the need to investigate what the inclusion of History in Life Orientation might do to the status and reputation of History as a whole and to the existing elective FET subject History. Issues to investigate regarding the addition of History to the Life Orientation curriculum include that it might be counter-productive if it causes resentment among students because of the extra burden of work involved (which does not normally count towards admission to higher education); that it might have the (likely?) result that the numbers of candidates for History as an elective subject drop, as learners might be reluctant to take both the compulsory and the elective History; and that, given a possible resultant shortage of History teachers, schools might take it upon themselves to stop offering History as an elective subject (please refer to 2. above).

The Society regards it as imperative that any History component of Life Orientation will always be taught by properly trained teachers.

3.2. Term of Reference ii: **Strengthen the content of History in the FET band**

This term of reference is also capable of being interpreted in more than one way. The Society trusts that it will be taken to refer to the CAPS FET curriculum of the elective subject History as it is at present and that it assumes that the current purposes, skills,

concepts and assessment aspects of the CAPS FET History will remain unchanged. It is important, however, that these be built into the content more thoroughly than they are in the CAPS at the moment and there are international examples of how this may be done (see the UMALUSI FET History evaluation study conducted in 2014.)

In consideration of any changes to the content of the CAPS FET History, the Society urges that the Task Team conducts research into the views of all affected – learners, teachers, officials and higher education.

The CAPS FET History content is premised on a number of principles, which should be thoroughly interrogated before any substantial changes to content are proposed.

They are:

- A key question to frame the content for the phase ('How do we understand our world today?'), which is divided into a sub-question for each grade (Grade 10: 'How had the world been transformed by the late 19th century?' Grade 11: 'How do the concepts imperialism, capitalism, communism, racism and nationalism define the century 1850–1950?' Grade 12: 'What was the nature of the post Second World War world?'), and further sub-questions for each topic.
- A single chronological sequence, though topics are separated by grade (Grade 10 topics: 1600 – 1913; Grade 11 topics: 1900-1960s; Grade 12 topics: 1948- present), with a concentration on history since 1930.
- A relationship between the history of South and southern Africa, Africa and the world, that allows the links between them to be simultaneously identified and explored.
- A balance between those topics that have their chief focus in South Africa and those that do not.
- South African-focused topics attempt to cover themes which relate to each of the provinces.
- Mindfulness of what has been studied in previous curricula and/or for previous examinations, so that there is not an imbalance of new vs. well-known historical knowledge for teachers.
- No direct repetition of content topics and themes from GET (though, inevitably major aspects such as World War II and Apartheid have to be re-visited).

Given the reported statement of Minister Angie Motshekga in Parliament, that, "[m]edia reports indicated that many of those who participated in the looting, violence and vandalism (during the xenophobic attacks) were youths ... we need to equip our youth with an accurate account of our history in order for them to make educated decisions regarding their own future", it is suggested that this aspect of strengthening the content (and teaching) of History, viz. to be able to use historical knowledge to better understand and appreciate the past and present circumstances of others, particularly those of different origins and backgrounds, enjoys special attention by the Task Team.

In many classrooms the strength of the content of History is dependent on the quality of the History textbooks used. The Task Team should consider drawing up suitable criteria for textbooks (including text-to-illustration ratio, length, pedagogy and activities, and assessment ideas). It should also investigate the impact that a single prescribed book for the country (or a province) would have on the depth of content knowledge of teachers and learners.

3.3. Term of Reference iii. **Review content in the GET band**

Content in the CAPS GET Social Sciences History follows many of the same principles as the CAPS FET History, with a special sensitivity to the amount of new knowledge introduced to the curriculum at any one time, to accommodate the extent of the existing historical knowledge of teachers (non-specialist teachers, teachers without a strong history background, or those who have specialised in particular content or Grades only).

Unlike FET, where there is a clear argument for a cohesive, carefully structured curriculum, GET can allow more scope for local/provincial variation within the broad content categories that are contained in the topics. Suggestions of these possibilities for extension and adaptation could be made available to teachers.

Strangely there is even less topic content assistance provided to teachers ('Background and focus') in the CAPS GET Social Sciences History than there is in the CAPS FET History, despite the fact that many of the teachers are non-specialists in History. This should be rectified.

Attention is drawn to the fact that a way to strengthen the teaching of historical content is to separate History and Geography in the Senior Phase and to create independent subjects again, so that teachers can specialise in the subject they are trained in without being expected by schools to teach both History and Geography.

Terms of Reference ii and iii cannot be considered apart from Term of Reference iv. It may well be that the best way to strengthen the content of History in the GET and FET is not to make any big changes to it, but to improve teachers' content knowledge through training and to improve the quality of their teaching.

3.4. Term of Reference iv. **Proposal regarding Teacher Development in the area of initial professional education and training (IPET) and continuous professional teacher development (CPTD)**

3.4.1 IPET

The Society suggests that the most effective way to train Life Orientation teachers to teach the new History topics, should a decision be made in favour of a form of compulsory History as part of Life Orientation, is to develop a comprehensive support package for them (along the lines done for HIV/Aids education a decade ago). It should include textbook units; activity and assessment materials; image, video and internet resources. This should also be used for in-service teachers.

If a decision is made to discontinue "Social Sciences" and to reinstate separate History and Geography subjects in Senior Phase, the implications for IPET need to be investigated.

As it is highly likely that more History teachers will be required than are presently produced, the Society draws attention to the need to include History among the qualifying subjects for the grant of Funza Lushaka bursaries.

The SASHT and the Department of Basic Education could jointly hold a national conference of higher education history and history education lecturers to promote an exchange of ideas and practices between institutions and between university departments. A working group to promote the cause of history and history education at IPET level in university departments of History and Faculties/Schools of Education could be established from among the participants.

3.4.2 CPTD

In-service training will need to be undertaken in all provinces for FET Life Orientation teachers, based on the support package suggested in 3.4.1. It will have to be generously funded, so as to prevent the “cascade syndrome,” and should be conducted with the full involvement of universities to ensure expert knowledge.

The Society draws attention to the fact that it was part of the SGB that created a unit standards-based Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) in History Education in 2003, which has been little used because Provincial Education Departments have not been prepared to provide bursaries to teachers to do it. The qualification could be resurrected in the form of an Advanced Certificate in Teaching (ACT).

The Department of Basic Education and the Provincial Education Departments (together possibly with SACE and teacher unions) should encourage and sponsor teachers to do accredited short courses in aspects of GET and FET history developed by universities.

4. *Yesterday & Today* is the (accredited) journal of the South African Society for History Teaching (<http://sashtw.org.za/?cat=5>). Recent articles with a bearing on aspects of the work of the Task Team include the following, which may be found helpful:

Peter Kallaway, ‘History in Senior Secondary School CAPS 2012 and beyond: A comment’, *Yesterday & Today*, 7, July 2012, pp.23-62.

Johannes Seroto, ‘Citizenship education for Africans in South Africa (1948-1994): A critical discourse’, *Yesterday & Today*, 7, July 2012, pp.63-84.

Barry Firth, ‘Not just to know history but to do history’, *Yesterday & Today*, 8, Dec. 2012, pp. 115-120.

Helen Ludlow, ‘Ghana, cocoa, colonialism and globalisation: Introducing Historiography’, *Yesterday & Today*, 8, Dec. 2012, pp. 1-22.

Elize S van Eeden, ‘The youth and school history - learning from some thinking of yesterday in South Africa’, *Yesterday & Today*, 8, Dec. 2012, pp. 23-46.

Morgan Ndlovu, ‘Mobilising History for nation-building in South Africa: A decolonial perspective’, *Yesterday & Today*, 9, July 2013, pp.1-12.

Morgan Ndlovu, ‘Why indigenous knowledges in the 21st Century? A decolonial turn’, *Yesterday & Today*, 11, July 2014, pp.84-98.

Jared McDonald and Jenni Underhill, ‘“Making history familiar”: The past in service of self-awareness and critical citizenship’, *Yesterday & Today*, 11, July 2014, pp.54-71.

Kirsten Kukard, ‘Content choice: A survey of history curriculum content in England since 1944. A relevant backdrop for South Africa’, *Yesterday & Today*, 13, July 2015, pp.17-39.

5. The Society looks forward with anticipation to the report of the Task Team and the interest that it will generate in History and History teaching. Our best wishes accompany you.



The South African Society for History Teaching was founded in 1986. It is the only national body concerned with the teaching of history and represents the interests of history teachers and history education lecturers throughout the country (website: www.sashtw.org.za). The objectives of the Society include, amongst others:

- To make history educators and student teachers aware of the relationship between History as an academic discipline and the didactics and teaching of History at school level in order to keep abreast with development and academic debates.
- To encourage educators of History to strive towards achieving and sustaining high academic standards in the teaching methodology and in the general knowledge of History as a discipline, and
- To continuously debate the content of basic and advanced educational programmes in the training of history educators with the intention to continue to improve quality.

Statement issued by the Executive of the *South African Society for History Teaching* following wide consultation among members and discussion at the Society's annual conference, held at the University of Limpopo, 9 to 10 October 2015. Correspondence to the Secretary, Dr Susan Bester: sjbdok@telkomsa.net.