

## History Teachers' Association of Ireland

### Summary of Submission and Presentation to Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection

For meeting 12 June 2013

- Entitlement:-** We argue that Irish students are entitled to an historical education. Believing the study of history is the entitlement of every student our concern is that some students do not have that entitlement and that under the proposed 'Framework' many more may lose that entitlement.

This entitlement is essential in a functioning democracy and as part of our cultural identity, particularly for a country where the majority no longer speak our native language. The European Assembly in 1996 declared "People have a right to their past" and "Historical awareness is an important civic skill, without it, the individual is more vulnerable to political and other manipulation....."

In Ireland we have largely lost our linguistic identity and heritage, making us unique amongst the nations in Europe. This has placed history into high relief as the conduit of memory and the apparatus for the construction of identity. [Ref. doc. 4b. Extracts from Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, "Why History Matters"]
- History needs to be a full taught subject**

The nature of History demands that it be taught as a full subject over a substantial period of time. We are asking therefore that History as a discrete subject be taught to all students for say 3 class periods (approx. 2 hours) per week for the 3 years of the Junior cycle. It is at this stage that students can engage in abstract reasoning and the subject can be understood as a coherent discipline with a chronological framework. Thus post-primary History will build on the interest awakened and knowledge and skills learned from the patch and strands approach adopted in Primary school.

[Ref. Doc. 2a. "Why Should History be a part of a compulsory core ...."]  
[Ref. Doc. 3d. Fintan O'Toole, In this golden age , let's not throw away our history ]
- Practical implication of the Framework document:**

We understand and appreciate what the Minister is doing in trying to reform the Junior Cert., but we believe that the proposal, whereby the 24 Statements of learning are not followed through with a core curriculum which can deliver them, will not achieve the aims for his proposed reform.

The way the framework is described allows for the possibility that in some schools more teaching time could be given to history than at present. It also allows that in many schools the teaching time given to History will be considerably less. Lack of specificity in the framework allows for some schools to give 200 hours (more time) to history or none. In fact as the Framework Document currently stands no Junior Cycle student need ever study history as a full subject, since for all the Statements of Learning there are multiple options given to demonstrate how they may be achieved. A recent report of a consultation with young people by the Dept of Children and Youth Affairs emphasised how much they enjoyed learning History in Junior Cycle, but the implications of the Framework could mean that they don't have the chance to realize this because it may not be part of every students experience.

We appreciate what the Minister is trying to achieve through the Statements of Learning approach but in practice it will only be realisable if they are worked through a core curriculum that can deliver them.

We understand the aims and philosophy behind the Framework Document. We support the Literacy and Numeracy initiative of the Minister and we believe that History is uniquely placed to address the literacy and numeracy strategies in other jurisdictions.

[Ref. doc. 2c History in the development and promotion of literacy ....]

#### 4. The negative Consequences of choice for History

There is ample evidence of what happens when the study of history is left to the discretion of schools from the experience of what has happened in the U.K. The framework document leaves the door open for History to be reduced to a short course or a learning experience, which could tragically mirror what has happened there. [ref. Doc. 4a – Findings of the Historical Association..]

The flexibility in the document militates against history and it might never be selected as a subject to meet a Statement of Learning. This could be seen as an implicit admission that history, amongst other subjects, is not a requirement and thus history may disappear as an educational experience for many students. [Ref. doc. 2b. “The Impact of the Framework Document ....”]

Given the constraints in resourcing, staffing and timetabling being experienced by schools in the current economic circumstances some measure of curricular prescription is required to safeguard essential subjects / aspects of learning. No cohort of students or category of schools should be denied their entitlement because of staffing/timetabling/resource constraints.

#### 5. Will History survive the decade of Commemorations?

We are in a unique situation in Ireland at present entering the decade of Commemorations and emerging after several decades of conflict in the North of Ireland. The study of history by our young people will play an indispensable role in enabling those young people to interrogate and analyse the events of the last 100 years on the island of Ireland. It would be a very unfortunate legacy of the decade of commemorations if at the end of the decade a coherent study of the discipline of History in school was not the entitlement of every one of our young people.

[ref. Doc. 3b Diarmaid Ferriter, newspaper article and reference to podcast on HTA website]

[Ref. doc. 4b. Extracts from Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, “Why History Matters”]