

Quinn takes aim at historians over Junior Cert criticism

Fiach Kelly – 02 August 2013

EDUCATION Minister Ruairi Quinn has taken a sideswipe at high-profile historians who are opposing his move to remove history as a compulsory Junior Cert subject.

The move is part of Mr Quinn's [Junior Cert](#) reforms, but it has attracted the ire of historians like Diarmaid Ferriter, Professor of Modern Irish History at UCD.

Although Mr Quinn did not name Prof Ferriter, he and others were the likely targets for the claim that historians should try to influence rather than "coerce" people into appreciating the subject. And he said it was up to them to prove why their subject matters.

Prof Ferriter has in the past accused Mr Quinn of having a "preoccupation with the idea of 'key skills' and focusing too much on literacy and numeracy.

He also claimed that Mr Quinn was downgrading subjects such as history and geography, adding: "Enhancing students' scientific and numeracy skills should not be done by throwing history overboard."

But speaking at the MacGill Summer School in Glenties, Co Donegal, Mr Quinn said that each school subject "has advocates who call for their subject to be made compulsory ahead of all others".

He insisted: "Choices need to be made," adding that "all of human knowledge cannot be distilled into a handful of compulsory subjects."

The minister said he wanted to put a "challenge" to historians.

"Historians owe a duty to the country to show why their domain of knowledge matters (and it does) and why 12-year-olds and their parents should take heed.

"Historians must advocate, argue and defend. But the target of their discourse should not be the State. Their conversations should be with the students, who matter, and their parents.

"They should seek to influence, not to coerce. They should rely on the lure of their subject, rather than compulsion. They should remember that compulsion doesn't always work. And they should remember that even though history is not compulsory in half our schools, nine out of 10 students take it anyway."

Mr Quinn added: "Perhaps our students actually like it. History persists as a subject of choice for the vast majority of students. I am convinced it will into the future."

<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/quinn-takes-aim-at-historians-over-junior-cert-criticism-29466898.html>