

## **Senior Certificate History**

By Des Cowman

As the Junior Certificate Syllabus was being developed there was an assumption that there would be an orderly progression to a new Senior Certificate History Syllabus and that teachers need not worry about how relevant the junior cycle history was likely to be towards attracting pupils to and preparing them for the present Leaving course. While no time scale was set out, HTAI took the first steps towards evolving a Senior Certificate History course as a continuation of the junior cycle at its Annual Conference, held in Drumcondra in August 1990.

A discussion document was presented (published in *Stair* 1990), workshops were set up and a report subsequently prepared which was sent to branches. Ten of the participants indicated a willingness to serve on an action committee to continue the process. Since a Department inservice course was to be organised by HTAI over the following term, the CEC decided to bring together those interested in the Senior Certificate syllabus for a residential weekend.

The "weekend" turned out to be a Friday evening and a Saturday (31 Nov.- 1 Dec. 1990) It was held at Bellinter near Navan. The people invited were not those we had selected and the programme we had devised was changed by the Inspectorate. Therefore the intended objectives were not achieved. However, workshops were established and points made. The following collate the issues raised at the Drumcondra and Bellinter conferences.

### **1. Promoting history**

It was suggested that history could no longer stand on its own intrinsic worth but would have to be marketed. This implied having an attractive and relevant syllabus and an assessment system which tests only defined objectives. It also means that history would have to be actively promoted in schools. The success of the brochure emanating from the Cork Branch was quoted in Drumcondra as a possible way forward.)

### **2. Syllabus**

(a) A strong consensus was reached that a "relevant" syllabus would have an emphasis on 20th century history, though other options should be available, possibly thematic ones, (e.g. propaganda, local studies, technology or even a theme, re-examining parts of the Junior course for Medieval times, etc.)

(b) Encouragement should be given to citing contemporary situations in discussing Modern History topics. (c) Topics in the 20th century should be defined beforehand (i.e. unlike the Leaving Course which includes all aspects of the periods specified). These could include modules relevant to everyday life of pupils - (and this would need to be researched) such as technology, the role of women, the development of the EC, etc.

(d) An overall view emerges therefore that there should be a fully defined 20th century core syllabus common to all pupils with a choice of subsidiary themes available.

### **3. Examination format**

Time at both conferences precluded fuller discussion of the format of a possible Senior Certificate examination though there seemed to be a general agreement on the need for a flexible, multi-dimensional approach (including other modes of assessment, like open-book exams, documentary analysis, etc.) with an enhanced role for the Special Study. An oral dimension to this was advocated as being particularly relevant for the lower level candidates.

### **4. Relationship to the Junior Cycle**

It was generally agreed that the Senior Certificate syllabus and examination should build on the skills developed in the Junior syllabus. It was further suggested that the objectives of the Junior syllabus could also become the objectives of the Senior syllabus.

### **5. Ordinary and Higher Level**

(a) That Ordinary History at Leaving poses a problem was accepted, especially as both Levels normally have to be taught in the same class.

(b) The possibility of using a strategy such as that in Junior Certificate was considered. Thus the Higher Level could be an extension of the Ordinary Level both in syllabus and examination. It was considered desirable, for instance, that both should do a Special Study.

This then represents the current (Summer 1991) thinking of HTAI on Senior Certificate History. However the context in which we began this process in August 1990 has changed. We can no longer expect an orderly progress from Junior Certificate to Senior Certificate - the best we can do is hope for it - and of course, push for it.