

Secretariat of ACC  
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Dear Minister

The Australian Curriculum Coalition represents a forum of Presidents, Executive Officers and Executive Directors of National Education Organisations. The Organisations represent members who are teachers, principals, school leaders, academics and education researchers. Collectively the Organisations have cooperated for a number of years in supporting the development of a high quality, 21<sup>st</sup> century national curriculum agenda. The Organisations individually believe that Australian schools, their teachers and students, deserve the highest quality national curriculum.

It is in this context that the organizations have cooperated as the Australian Curriculum Coalition (formerly CSCNEPA) to contribute positively and dynamically to the development phases of the Australian Government's National Curriculum.

The Coalition shares a number of similar concerns about the process of development, work to date, conceptual framework and structural issues of the first drafts, assessment and reporting issues and finally, implementation issues.

These concerns were evident in the individual responses of members of the Coalition and the attached paper represents a summary of their views.

The paper sets out matters of concern, recommendations for further activity and engagement by ACARA, and underpinning principles for a way forward.

The Coalition has had the opportunity to meet with senior ACARA personnel and we are pleased that this opportunity is scheduled to continue.

We believe that it is important that the considered and common views of peak national education associations are made explicit to Ministers to ensure that the National Curriculum is delivered in the highest quality form as possible.

Signed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2010



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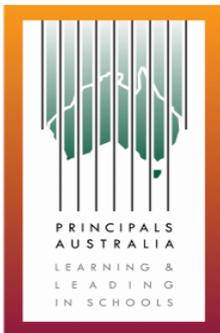
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**PROCESS ISSUES**

**Support for a national curriculum**

1. We express support for the development of the Australian curriculum. We believe this ambitious initiative can lead to a curriculum that reflects who we are, our visions for the future and our best attempts to predict and plan for what young people will need to be active and successful participants in Australian and global political, economic, social and cultural life. We regard the development of the Australian curriculum as a significant step forward, and respect the work done by ACARA and its officials to make substantial progress in the limited time that has been available.

**Extend the timeline**

2. We believe that the timeline for the project must be extended to ensure that the Australian curriculum is as good as it can be. The timelines for all stages of the project at present are unreasonably short, and in the end this will be self-defeating. The consultation timelines do not allow enough time to provide considered, detailed feedback, and do not allow the voices of teachers and other stakeholders to be heard. The speed of the development process is contrary to what is known about the conditions for effective professional development practices and educational change. It was noted that schools require time for both evaluation of the curriculum documents after they are provided and planning for their effective implementation. This will also require an extension of the timeline.

**Involve teachers and professional associations**

3. ACARA should invest effort in building stakeholder ownership and buy-in from the professional associations, which are a potentially valuable resource and source of expertise. There has been too little involvement of professional associations in the process. The quality of the final curriculum would benefit from the greater involvement and engagement of teachers in development. Teachers must have ownership of a National Curriculum if it is to be meaningful or effective, and for this to occur teachers themselves and their key professional organisations must be central to its production and engaged in providing support for implementation.

**Make the consultation submissions and outcomes public**

4. Submissions received by ACARA and ACARA's response to those submissions (including changes to the drafts) should be made public to support an informed debate and provide further opportunity for review and feedback before the implementation phase begins. Such a process is necessary to give teachers time to consider and understand the provisions of the curriculum, prior to having to turn their full attention to working out how they will deliver it.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND STRUCTURAL ISSUES

### Need for a stronger rationale and curriculum theory

5. The process would be strengthened by a strong and clearly stated rationale and curriculum theory. The fact that this is not yet in place is evident at a number of levels:
  - There is no clear statement about the issues that a national curriculum is designed to address, apart from the problem of mobile students;
  - There is no clear statement about how the initiative will further the education purposes outlined in the Melbourne Declaration;
  - There is a need for an overarching framework for the curriculum to provide clarity about the conceptual model underpinning it;
  - A stronger definition of curriculum is needed to bring together content coverage, general capabilities and cross curriculum dimensions;
  - A rationale should also address how the different curriculum areas are related, and the basis for their separation; and
  - The lack of a theory of learning contributes to the perception that this is not a 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum (see next item).

Part of the conceptual difficulty arises from the development and release of only four curriculum areas initially. This seems to give greater attention to the first four areas, and raises questions about how Stage 2 and 3 subjects relate to Stage 1. The development of the first four subjects in isolation from other subjects does not allow for an understanding of how all discipline areas relate to each other and a clear understanding by practitioners of the whole curriculum.

We are concerned about the coherence of the approach adopted within and between subjects, arising in part from what is seen as a lack of conceptual coherence. There are inconsistencies of approach and terminology across subjects. Content descriptions vary widely between descriptions of knowledge and descriptions of what students should do. Some variations in terminology and structural issues make it difficult to follow a strand of content through some subjects (e.g. related content appearing under different strand headings in English).

### Is this a 21<sup>st</sup> century, world-class curriculum?

6. The drafts viewed to date do not represent a world-class, 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum. The curriculum does not adequately reflect the intention of the Melbourne Declaration that young people should become successful, creative, innovative and resourceful learners able to think logically and evaluate evidence, able to solve problems in ways that draw upon a range of learning areas and disciplines and able to work independently as well as collaborate with others. The segmentation of the curriculum works against effective integration across learning areas. The documents do not focus sufficiently on thinking skills, imagination, links to the real world and student engagement.

### Curriculum overcrowding

7. There is a need to reduce the volume of material evident in the current drafts. As they stand, the documents will lead to serious overcrowding of the curriculum. This difficulty has a number of particular forms:

- There is an excessive quantity of content evident in the four drafts so far released;
- There are specific volume problems in the history and science documents for the primary years, and the history document in the secondary years;
- We are concerned about the effect on primary teachers of the dramatically increased content in these four subjects taken as a whole;
- The English document includes a myriad of content descriptors that will encourage a superficial approach rather than in-depth and sustained learning. The apparent privileging of breadth over depth was widely noted;
- The documents include too much lower order content to be learnt at the expense of higher order skills and conceptual understanding, leading to a degree of risk to teaching quality and the chances of effective student learning; and
- There is no mechanism for monitoring time required to deliver the content identified in learning area drafts across the curriculum.

These issues raise questions about the feasibility of implementing the learning area drafts in their current form, and the further difficulties likely to occur when all learning areas are developed. Curriculum content in all areas should be realistic and appropriate to the implementation of a full and balanced curriculum taking into account all planned learning areas.

#### **Core or the whole curriculum?**

8. We are not clear whether the draft documents reflect everything expected to be taught, or a core around which jurisdictions and schools might add further content of local relevance. The Australian curriculum should consist of core, mandated elements rather than a complete curriculum. This would allow more innovation and flexibility in offerings at the school level. There must be clarity about what is essential and what is optional within the drafts. The volume of content in the current drafts (see above) means that the four drafts released in Stage 1 would constitute the whole of the time available in the primary curriculum and a high proportion of the secondary curriculum. This means that there would be no flexibility: the documents are not only a complete curriculum, but one which is too large to be realistically implemented.

#### **General capabilities and cross curriculum dimensions**

9. We support the concept of general capabilities and the inclusion of cross curriculum dimensions. These elements signal that while a framework should include explicit content it is about more than content coverage alone. It is disappointing that they have been given limited and uneven emphasis in the draft documents. It is important to assist the writers to develop a clear statement about each of the capabilities and dimensions including those that are across curriculum. At the moment there is no clear framework for the inclusion of these elements of the curriculum, and as a result some of them are absent from some subjects and in general are poorly represented in the drafts.

A related issue concerns the lack of support for teachers in developing cross-curricular and integrated delivery of the Australian curriculum. The presentation of subject areas in silos and the volume of material in the drafts (see above re overcrowding) are likely to limit more innovative approaches to delivery.

## Equity

10. We believe that ACARA should identify and strengthen the understandings of equity that inform the development. The principle that all students have an entitlement to the same challenging curriculum content is an important one. It is essential, however, that curriculum development is informed by an understanding of how this principle can work in practice, and in different contexts. The curriculum should aim to support 'high quality, high equity' for all young Australians. Work should be undertaken to identify how the Australian Curriculum is to take account of the needs of diverse student cohorts including students with special needs, students (especially indigenous students) in remote settings, students with disabilities, students for whom English is not their first language and gifted and talented students.

## ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING ISSUES

### Greater clarity about assessment and achievement standards

11. The learning area drafts and ACARA's explanatory documents do not yet provide clarity about expectations regarding assessment and reporting. There is a need for a clear and detailed statement about these issues. The achievement standards appear to be more a summary of the content in each year level for each subject (and therefore useful for programming purposes), rather than an attempt to define the quality of learning. They do not yet provide sufficient guidance to ensure consistency in their use for assessment and reporting. They do not yet outline reasonable expectations for some year levels in some subjects.

It is not yet clear what relationship is intended between the achievement standards and assessment and reporting. Are the standards descriptions of typical achievement, or expectations for all students? What is their status and purpose? It is important that the assessment and reporting framework reflects the full range of achievement of all students. It is not clear how the year level A to E grading system will work in practice (eg in classrooms with students whose learning progress is significantly below their relevant age-grade level).

ACARA should prepare a detailed paper on options for the approach to assessment and reporting in relation to the Australian curriculum, and include a clear statement on assessment in the introduction to the learning area documents.

## IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

### Implementation management

12. It is essential that implementation is undertaken and resourced consistently across the nation and reflects local circumstances and needs. This will require attention to how implementation arrangements will be managed and supported. Current constitutional arrangements might not be a useful guide to the relative responsibilities of Commonwealth and State and Territory governments in implementation. There is a need for clarity about ACARA's role and the role of states and territories in the rollout process. At the very least, ACARA should give some thought as to how the quality, coherence and comprehensiveness of implementation can be reviewed and tracked. There will need to be a very thorough and well-resourced implementation process, and additional time for implementation.

## Funding and support for professional learning and resources

13. A key element of the implementation process concerns the kinds of support to be provided to teachers and schools. We believe the implementation challenge has been seriously underestimated. The rollout of the Australian curriculum must be supported by resourced and structured programs of professional development and teacher capacity building, particularly during its implementation, but also on an ongoing basis. These programs should address curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Resources and support materials will also be required to support teachers. Professional support should be provided nationally, but adapted to meet local circumstances by jurisdictions and schools.

While all teachers in all learning areas will require support in implementation, there are some especially critical support requirements. History will require substantial support at both primary and secondary levels. Primary teachers will require assistance in managing a substantially broader content load. There was a widely expressed view that professional learning support and resources should also cover the indigenous aspects of the curriculum, incorporation of ICTs, Asia literacy and environmental sustainability.

These varied requirements will have significant resourcing implications. There is a need for significant new funding to support implementation. Some schools may need additional teachers, and all teachers will need time to participate in professional learning activities. This will require a national plan for resourcing and support for rollout.