

**Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace
Relations**

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates 2012-2013**

Agency - Australian Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting Authority

DEEWR Question No. EW0699_13

Senator Mason asked on 18 October 2012 , Hansard page 14

Question

ACARA - Lowering of the discussion of issues like puberty to 7-year-old children.

Senator MASON: So who recommended that it be lowered and that seven-year-old kids should learn about physical change? Mr Randall: Who proposed that we do it? We had a small writing team of people. I am happy to provide the list of those people and their backgrounds. Senator MASON: Yes, thank you.

Answer

ACARA has provided the following response.

The proposal for the inclusion of learning about the physical, social and emotional changes associated with puberty in Years 3 and 4 was made by the Lead Writer, Professor Doune Macdonald, and ACARA's Advisory Group for Health and Physical Education.

Following national consultation on the draft *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education*, the final shape paper has this content to be taught in Years 5 and 6.

Professor Doune Macdonald is the Head of School of Human Movement Studies, Faculty of Health Sciences, at The University of Queensland. Her professional biography can be found at http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/_resources/Professor_Doune_Macdonald-CV.pdf

The ACARA Health and Physical Education Advisory Group members and their backgrounds can be found in the below table:

Name	Current Position	Organisation
Mr Glenn Amezdroz	Head of Department: Health and Physical Education	All Hallows' School, QLD
Professor Donna Cross	Professor, Child and Adolescent Health School of Exercise, Biomedical and Health Science	Edith Cowan University
Dr Trish Glasby	Curriculum Manager	Department of Education and Training QLD
Ms Toni Gray	State Development Officer	MindMatters, Tasmania
Mr Doug Hearne	Deputy Principal	Wollongong School of the Performing Arts
Ms Nerida Matthews	Curriculum Manager, Health and Physical Education	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
Professor Phil Morgan	Co-Director of the University of Newcastle Priority Research Centre in Physical Activity and Nutrition and lecturer in the School of Education	University of Newcastle
Mr Gareth Richards	Executive Teacher	Kingsford Smith School, ACT
Ms Kris Stafford	Curriculum and Assessment Officer, Health and Physical Education	Curriculum Council WA
Professor Jan Wright	Professorial Research Fellow, Faculty of Education	University of Wollongong
Mr Nick Perkins	Manager, Curriculum	ACARA
Ms Rosemary Davis	Manager, Curriculum	ACARA (departed in Jan 2012)

The original proposal was based on the growing evidence that puberty is gradually occurring earlier.

The Falling Age Of Puberty In US Girls¹, published in 2007 and summarising the available literature, found that girls in the United States were starting to develop breasts one to two years earlier and were getting their periods on average a few months earlier than they did 40 years ago. The study found that about half of US girls have breast buds by the time they turn 10, and 14 per cent have them between ages eight and nine.

An Australian study² published in 2007 in the Journal Of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism found that the median age of menarche (onset of menstruation) was 12.6 years (therefore typically in Year 7) with a range of 9.4 to 14.6 years which typically spans Years 4 to 9, with ages and year levels varying across states and territories. No studies have been conducted in Australia specifically in relation to the timing of breast development. However, anecdotal evidence and reports from specialists in paediatrics and child and adolescent health in Australia suggest that breast development in 10 year old girls is not uncommon.

An important question considered by the Advisory Group was when students should start learning about puberty. The recommendation from the advisory group was that students should learn about puberty before its onset. It was felt that teaching students about the changes that occur at puberty before they begin to experience them can significantly reduce the anxiety associated with the start of puberty and can also reduce the stigma and potential bullying of students who do begin to develop earlier than their peers.