



**Submission to the
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education Committee**

Inquiry into Academic Standards of School Education

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The Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) is pleased to respond to the invitation to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry into Academic Standards of School Education.

We note the scope of the terms of reference and would be happy to appear before the committee to expand on the following statement and to comment on aspects of the Inquiry. In this submission we have determined we should focus on the current debate on a twenty-first century curriculum, one which is adequate to equip students with the required knowledge and skills to progress successfully through the stages of schooling and then to participate in further education and training, and lifelong learning.

It is widely known that ACSA has been at the forefront of curriculum work in this country for twenty years. The Association has an enviable publications list that documents dialogue, debate, controversy, outcomes of inquiries, and curriculum best practice across the nation and internationally - bringing together the necessary evidence from research and practice to inform curriculum policy. ACSA projects and reports have influenced the work of the profession and policy makers in each phase of schooling and in particular the middle years of schooling – a phase of learning where debate around the essential or core curriculum continues with intensity.

In February and August 2006 ACSA hosted two invitational forums on *National Approaches to Curriculum* and *Approaches to National Curriculum Work*. The forums were attended by senior level leaders from curriculum and assessment authorities, system and sector authorities, peak professional bodies and key agencies across Australia. It was agreed that the forums would:

- Explore and sharpen participants understanding of what is meant by approaches to national curriculum work
- Update participants on developments in recent initiatives relating to national curriculum work,
- Identify key issues for states, territories and national agencies, and
- Suggest strategies for promoting productive discussion and action in relation to approaches to national curriculum work between all stakeholders.

The forums took place in an environment where doubts were being expressed by both the public and politicians regarding the adequacy of the current curriculum to deliver the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for the successful twenty-first century learner. This environment, of course, relates to the purpose of the Senate Inquiry. Outcomes of the forums included the production of *A Guide to Productive National Curriculum Work for the Twenty First Century* (Appendix 1).

This work has proved timely in the current environment where policy statements on a national curriculum have been issued by both the Federal Government and the Opposition. The Guide makes clear that national collaboration to produce a common approach to curriculum - which is most likely to emerge as an articulation of a core or essential curriculum in the compulsory years, and a common curriculum in certain discipline areas in the post compulsory years - could serve both national consistency and mobility requirements. However, the motivation for the current focus on national curriculum is increasingly focused on the need for a curriculum to meet the demands of a globalising world – and such a curriculum needs to encompass and go beyond the basics of literacy, numeracy and ICT to develop capabilities needed for individuals and communities to thrive in the twenty-first century.

To advance this work ACSA, building on its 2006 commitment, has facilitated the establishment of a *Curriculum Standing Committee of National Education Professional Associations* (CSCNEPA) made up of fourteen of the nation's peak educational professional associations (Appendix 2). In undertaking this work ACSA and our colleague organisations have a set of purposes which are expressed in the following terms:

1. To identify and articulate the curriculum challenges for educating young people for the twenty-first century.
2. To contribute to the development of national approaches to curriculum.
3. To provide considered and timely responses to policy proposals and directions in curriculum that are of significance to Australia, and
4. To contribute to and promote constructive and informed curriculum debate in Australia.

One of our priority activities has been to identify common ground around describing what a curriculum for the 21st Century should achieve.

This work is currently underway and our second meeting, which took place in Canberra in May 2007, was further informed by the April release of a report by the States and Territories - produced by a steering committee of the Council for the Australian Federation (CAF), *Federalist Paper 2: The Future of Schooling in Australia*. This report includes statements on curriculum using as a starting point the *Adelaide Declaration of National Goals for Schooling for the Twenty- First Century*. The report goes beyond this to clearly articulate new curriculum challenges given acceleration in the pace of change. The report goes on to identify what a curriculum must achieve for students and how a national approach can best meet these objectives.

There are also in place a number of National Statements in the areas of *Engaging Young Australians with Asia*, *Values Education* and *Languages Education*, and there are the recently developed and agreed Statements of Learning for English, Maths, Science, Civics and Citizenship and ICT which articulate the essential skills, knowledge, understandings and capacities that all young Australians should have the opportunity to learn by the end of years 3,5,7 and 9.

Given that each of the above developments are explicitly intended to underpin future curriculum, we have travelled a considerable distance in achieving a common and rigorous approach to a twenty first century curriculum – which can be confidently compared with curriculum statements in other OECD countries.

To add further value to this work a draft CSCNEPA statement on “What a 21st Century Curriculum must achieve for all Australian students and how we should achieve it” is currently being prepared. The statement will contain a preamble which identifies the overarching purpose of a twenty first century curriculum to be one which serves to strengthen civil society, participative democracy, and active citizenship (local and global) – addressing economic, social, and human dimensions.

The statement will make clear that the contribution of schooling to achieve this purpose requires attention to the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes identified in the CAF paper.

The statement will argue that the school curriculum (K-12) must address the areas of Literacy and Numeracy, Science and the Environment, History and Culture - providing a solid foundation, through the disciplines. It will go on to emphasise the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in order to move to deeper and connected knowledge and understanding. Beyond “content,” key capabilities will be identified and emphasis will be placed on the importance of student motivation and engagement – thereby ensuring responsiveness to context, stage, phase, and interest.

The statement will argue for a 21st Century Curriculum for all Australian students which encompasses international, national, regional, local and personal.

Of course, the success of a 21st Century Curriculum will be dependent on what is experienced by young people in and out of classrooms – the result of an engaging, high quality teaching-learning process.

The successful translation of a CSCNEPA statement (and other national documents and statements, referred to above), into curriculum frameworks/statements of essential learning or core curricula at the state and territory level, would provide for flexibility whilst reflecting a productive consensus around a curriculum for the 21st Century for Australian schools.

The curriculum is properly a matter of concern to the profession, the public and politicians. However, competing claims on the curriculum need to be carefully assessed and held in balance – particularly if we are to produce both equity and excellence in school education.

A way forward to achieve this “balance” will be reflected in the CSCNEPA statement and is reflected in the (CAF) *Federalist Paper 2: The Future of Schooling in Australia*. A national agreement on core content, benchmarked against the rest of the world, should not be beyond our capabilities.

The skill set that is required by students for twenty-first century capability remains the focus of debate involving all stakeholders and is of a particular interest to the world of work. Whilst these skills have been the subject of considerable and ongoing debate more thinking is required and more action is urgently needed.

Beyond content and skills we have emphasised that what should not be forgotten is that student learning is dependent upon motivation and engagement. Without a curriculum that is flexible and responsive to diversity and one which is tailored to the interests and needs of students – i.e. “personalised” - our work will fall well short of success.

Given the need for universal secondary education we must understand what engages all young people in learning. We must have teachers and a wider educator workforce with the capacity and professional skills to use curriculum flexibly, so that all young Australians acquire 21st Century knowledge, skills and dispositions.

ACSA is progressing its work both through its own channels, through the Curriculum Standing Committee of National Education Professional Associations and at our Biennial National Conference, *Curriculum Centre Stage: Inclusivity, Creativity and Diversity* in July 2007. We will therefore be well equipped in “real time” to appear before the committee to provide an informed and authoritative view on what we

believe is at the heart of the Senate Inquiry: an adequate curriculum for the twenty-first century for Australian schools in a national, regional and global context.

Appendix 1 :

A GUIDE to productive national curriculum work for the twenty first century

BACKGROUND

This Guide was produced as a result of two National Forums, held in February and August 2006, convened by the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) and attended by leaders from curriculum and assessment authorities, system and sector authorities, peak professional bodies and key agencies across Australia.

PURPOSE

- The Guide describes principles to engage sensibly, intelligently and ethically with government, the public and the profession in productive national curriculum work.
- Its purpose is to provide a basis on which the worth of national approaches can be judged by governments, the public and the profession.
- The Guide is forward looking, enabling the identification of the necessary conditions to meet the curriculum demands and challenges of the twenty first century. It provides a productive alternative to partial and often misleading statements, and at times misrepresentations, that currently appear in much of the public debate around curriculum.
- The Guide assumes that national curriculum collaboration will produce resource efficiencies and curriculum consistencies that meet the demands of an increasingly mobile population.
- It goes further and assumes that a curriculum to meet the demands of a globalising world is a national challenge and so requires the states and territories and the Australian Government to collaborate.
- Such a curriculum will encompass and go beyond the basics of Literacy, Numeracy and ICT to develop capabilities needed for individuals and communities to thrive in the twenty first century.

APPLICATION

Given the preceding argument national curriculum work must:

1. Establish clear moral purpose and rationale.

Any collaborative national project should have a rationale that:

- is consistent with the overarching rationale for national work outlined above,
- addresses emerging challenges for learning in the twenty first century,
- equips all young Australians with the capacity to thrive in twenty first century Australia, our region, and globally; and
- addresses efficiency and effectiveness demands and requirements.

2. Promote a view of the curriculum consistent with the rationale.

An adequate view of the curriculum must reveal coherence between its various parts and across the stages and phases of learning, promoting:

- a depth of understanding and breadth of application; and
- high expectations and standards in learning outcomes for all young people.

3. Follow a principled process.

A principled process for undertaking national approaches to curriculum work must:

- deeply engage teachers from conceptualisation to implementation,
- be rigorously research/evidenced based,
- encompass multiple models of curriculum design and development,
- reflect legitimate democratic authority at multiple levels,
- reflect community expectations; and
- allow adequate time for engagement and the production of quality outcomes.

4. Ensure adequate resources and funding.

The level of resources and funding for national approaches to curriculum work must:

- be sufficiently serious and adequate to match the ambition of the rationale and the process,
- be adequate to the needs of successful implementation; and
- encompass the direct link to building professional learning and capacity.

5. Demonstrate impact and outcomes.

The level of impact and the outcomes of productive national approaches to curriculum work must:

- lead to proven and sustained levels of professional practice and professional accountability,
- integrate curriculum with assessment and reporting to enhance learning outcomes,
- produce improved learning outcomes that directly fulfil the moral purpose/rationale of excellence and equity,
- produce compelling evidence to meet the legitimate expectations of the profession, students, parents, the wider public and governments; and
- be accountable to the community.

PROMOTION

— In this Guide approaches to national curriculum collaboration range from sharing curriculum work across jurisdictions, to joint exploration of ways to ensure the most effective approaches to curriculum, to a sharp focus on curriculum consistency and combinations of these three approaches.

— This Guide has been produced by the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) emerging from two National Forums held in February and August 2006. Full reports of the Forums are available from ACSA at: www.acsa.edu.au or by telephone: 02 6260 5660.

— ACSA is committed to promoting this Guide to the Directors General of Education through the Australian Education Systems Officials Committee (AESOC) and to all Education Ministers, federal, state and territory through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). ACSA is also committed to promoting “A guide to productive national curriculum work for the twenty first century”, to the profession, students, parents and the wider public including the business community.

Appendix 2:

Curriculum Standing Committee of National Education Professional Associations (CSCNEPA)

Membership

Chairs and Directors of the following organizations:

Australian Curriculum Studies Association
Australian Primary Principals Association
Australian Secondary Principals Association
Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia
Association of Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools of Australia
Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council
Australian Council for Educational Leaders
Australian College of Educators
Australian Education Union
Australian Independent Education Union
Australian Council of Deans of Education
Australian Joint Council of Professional Teaching Associations
Australian Association for Research in Education
National Education Forum