



## **Australian Education Union**

### **Submission to the**

## **National Curriculum Board on the Shape of a National Curriculum**

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## General

The Australian Education Union represents 175,000 teachers and educators in the primary, secondary, early childhood and TAFE sectors throughout Australia. As such it is uniquely placed to represent the views of teachers and educators on the shape of a new National Curriculum.

The AEU is in support of much of the approach to a National Curriculum taken in *The Shape of a National Curriculum: A Proposal for Discussion*. The AEU is in agreement with a flexible approach, with states and territories able to innovate respond and adapt curriculum to their particular needs, for individual schools and teachers to be able to make professional decisions about curriculum, and for flexibility of schools catering to different cohorts to be able to achieve educational standards in different ways.

The school curriculum is one of the most powerful forces in a democracy. It encapsulates what a society believes its future citizens should know and be able to do. The school curriculum is also the means by which all students, irrespective of their background, are provided with access to the worlds of work and further study. A curriculum must articulate with and progress social and economic objectives. It is a tool of social justice because it both describes and unlocks social and economic power.

The school curriculum cannot be owned by any individual interest group or political party. Its success is predicated on consensus. It must be owned by society and the community in general.

As teachers we support a rigorous, rich and rewarding curriculum aimed at equipping students with all the knowledge and skills required to be successful in the 21st century.

Governments must provide a curriculum guarantee which will ensure all students, no matter where they live or what their socio economic background is, with the chance to pursue the widest range of opportunities in life.

The development of a National Curriculum must be evolutionary, preceded by achieving greater national consistency around curriculum. As acknowledged by Barry McGaw, the Chair of the National curriculum Board, it cannot be overly prescriptive. A national curriculum must:

1. ensure a shared understanding of essential knowledge and contribute to a shared understanding of what Australia is;
2. be a shared national enterprise and ensure that all education stakeholders have a place at the table. This must include, practicing teachers, academics, teacher employers, community and industry representatives, parents and representatives of teacher unions;
3. provide flexibility for state, regional and local content as appropriate;
4. allow students to move successfully across state borders with less dislocation.

The pursuit of individual excellence for all students and striving to achieve the highest possible standards in our classrooms for every student is what defines teachers. However, teachers do not work in a vacuum. The development of a National Curriculum cannot and will not in itself improve the educational outcomes of students. Educational outcomes can only be improved if the implementation of a curriculum is properly resourced.

Our schools must be resourced to achieve equity and excellence in education, ameliorating rather than exacerbating the effect of social background on educational achievement.

## **Values - Goals of education for young Australians**

A National Curriculum must be more than a technical entity. Of necessity it will be linked to the values, knowledge and skills to which the community assents, and be linked to substance to achieve outcomes for young people.

Ultimately, the vision for a National Curriculum must be about the needs and requirements of young people and delivering to them all, regardless of their backgrounds, the best education the nation has to offer. The curriculum should develop each and every student to his or her maximum potential. It should seek success not failure and have high expectations of every student. It should be provided on a basis that is accessible and meets the needs and interests of all students. It must be based on the concept of a common curriculum, one which gives all students access throughout their schooling to all the major fields of human knowledge. It should offer increasing choice with age in a way that opens up options and maintains a breadth of study rather than narrows opportunities and options, and it should meet the cultural, social, civic and vocational needs of each student.

A curriculum should contribute to the role of schools and education in providing students with the necessary knowledge and skills to empower them in their goals of work, further education and life, including high levels of literacy, numeracy and other important skills. It should develop in students a capacity for critical thought, informed opinion and the skills and knowledge to be socially responsible contributors to Australian society interested in the creation of a better global future. It should assist in overcoming inequalities between social groups, seeking to produce equal and high educational outcomes for all social groups. In the national interest it should ensure there are highly educated and qualified people across all areas of the economy and society.

In that context, while a necessary condition, an effective curriculum will not in itself deliver a quality education. Issues of resourcing and equity are also essential, and the implementation of an effective curriculum cannot be a substitute to dealing with the structural inequalities that exist within the Australian education system.

In that regard the AEU is in agreement with *The Shape of the National Curriculum: A Proposal for Discussion* where it says:

“In pursuing the goal of a more equitable education system, curriculum can make some contribution but success will depend on substantial action by education authorities funding and running schools.” (p.2)

The AEU accordingly believes that any National Curriculum document should contain a statement or preamble recognising the vital role of education as a vehicle of social equity and fairness, and of the importance for it to be properly resourced.

The AEU regrets that the goals of equality of outcomes that were fundamental to *The Adelaide Declaration* in 1999 have been watered down in *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* and in the more recent educational debates in favour of a lesser commitment to equality of opportunity to participate, and for governments to provide educational “choices” rather than ensure equality of outcomes for all. The AEU strongly believes a National Curriculum document would be greatly strengthened by a statement supporting the importance of equality of outcomes for all, regardless of background.

Ultimately a vision for a National Curriculum must be about far more than correcting real or perceived deficits, and in this regard it is worthwhile briefly examining the nature of the educational debate in Australia at the present time.

## **Nature of the Education Debate**

Much debate around education in recent years has revolved around perceptions of a supposed crisis in standards, claims that educational standards are falling and calls by some for a greater emphasis on a “back to basics” approach to literacy and numeracy and a narrowing of the curriculum to allow it.

In that regard, the insights of outside observers of the Australian education system can often put educational debates taking place within the country into some perspective. In an address in 2007 to the European Reading Conference in Berlin, Andreas Schleicher of the OECD noted that Australia’s Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) literacy results placed it amongst the top tier of countries. He went on to attribute this high level of literacy achievement by Australian students to a high level of Australian teacher professionalism.<sup>1</sup>

The “back to basics” movement is accompanied by a distorted sense of educational crisis and claims modern teaching methods have led to a decline in literacy and numeracy levels in schools. It is not a claim supported by the evidence. The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) 1975-1998 shows literacy and numeracy levels have remained constant over the last thirty years and improved for some groups, despite challenges of changing demographics.<sup>2</sup> The international PISA data show Australian students doing well by international standards. Nevertheless, claims of a crisis in literacy and numeracy have gained currency in the media and apparent acceptance by some decision makers. It is in this context that there appears to be a growing tendency to ignore past evolution and current educational expertise and re-invent curriculum based on the views of a narrow range of discipline “experts”, often from non-educational backgrounds.

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<sup>1</sup> Schleicher, A. (2007) *Literacy Skills in the Information Age*. Paper presented to the 15<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Reading, Humboldt University, Berlin. Quoted in Luke, A. and Woods, A. (2007) *Learning Lessons” What No Child Left Behind can teach us about literacy, testing and accountability*. Australian Curriculum Studies Association. [http://www.acsainc.com.au/content/lessons\\_from\\_no\\_child\\_left\\_behind.doc](http://www.acsainc.com.au/content/lessons_from_no_child_left_behind.doc)

<sup>2</sup> Rotham, S. 2003. *Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy by Australian 14-year-olds, 1975-1998*. Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) [http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/LSAY\\_lsay29.pdf](http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/LSAY_lsay29.pdf)

Much of the public debate is increasingly framed by the advice of isolated self-styled “experts” who reflect ideological prejudices but lack the confidence and respect of the education community in general. The dominant voices in the debate are often more influenced by trends in countries such as the USA and UK, rather than reflecting and building on the Australian circumstance. They advocate paths which most in education believe are educationally unsound and which have little regard for the professionalism of teachers. It is hoped that the voices of these elements will not influence the outcomes of the debates concerning the content and purpose of a National Curriculum.

There is nothing new about laments about literacy and numeracy standards; Brock demonstrates they have been a part of educational debate since time immemorial.<sup>3</sup> This does not mean that such a tendency is harmless. A false sense of crisis that is not based on evidence can be enormously damaging if it leads to the abandonment of effective curriculum or teaching strategies based on the unsupported assumption that they are not working and that systemic change is necessary. While all educational systems should clearly strive for continual improvement, an entirely different approach should be taken in the face of a system that is demonstrably failing to one for which the evidence suggests is fundamentally succeeding. The former situation would call for systemic changes, while the latter would call for assessing strengths as well as weakness and building upon them. Accordingly, the AEU strongly rejects the notion that a National Curriculum should involve a return to a more narrow, limited or rote learning approach to education.

Education in the modern world must be broadly based and give students the skills and flexibility to acquire new knowledge in a changing society. Subject and teaching methodologies that create flair and encourage thinking processes are essential. As well as creating aware, creative and involved citizens, they produce the flexible and creative skills that equip students best for the future, and are often what employers explicitly say they want.

It is essential that a National Curriculum be based upon provision of a rich, rigorous and rewarding curriculum for all regardless of their background, providing them with excellence in education and the creative and critical thinking skills needed to achieve successful careers and lives in a changing society.

## **Nature of the Curriculum**

The task of any curriculum, and the whole schools system for that matter, is to ensure that when a teacher enters a classroom they have the support, materials, knowledge and capacity to deliver effective lessons to their students, regardless of their backgrounds or particular circumstances, and to make sure that all students have pathways to success.

A National Curriculum will not in itself raise standards. Nor can it realistically be assumed that mandating that something be learned through a National Curriculum will be sufficient to ensure that it is. Raising standards and providing effective educational outcomes for all requires system support, resourcing, and providing teachers with what they need to do their

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<sup>3</sup> Brock, P. “*Breaking Some of the Myths – Again*” Australian Journal of Language and Literacy, Vol. 21, 1998.

jobs properly. An effective National Curriculum may, in conjunction with other factors, contribute to providing students with equitable access to knowledge.

It is important to acknowledge the contested nature of the curriculum. Because of its extreme importance in shaping the future of individuals and society the content of the curriculum will always be a contested area. It is important that the National Curriculum acknowledge this, and make it clear that curriculum should not be static, but should be free to change and develop in a changing society. Enactment of curriculum at a school based level should accordingly occur in a flexible and adaptive manner within the overarching framework of the National Curriculum.

The AEU also believes that is important that a National Curriculum should include an understanding of the qualitative and complex nature of learning in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Kalantzis and Cope, talking about learners in the knowledge economy describe the requisites of learning as follows:

“Excellent learners in the knowledge economy will be autonomous and self-directed – designers of their own learning experiences, in collaboration with others as well as by themselves. They will need to be flexible, possessing problem-solving skills, multiple strategies for tackling a task and flexible solutions-orientation to knowledge. Importantly, good learners will also be collaborative, recognising that knowledge is increasingly created collaboratively, whether in work teams, in scientific research laboratories or through community development. They will themselves be good teachers and communicators, and of open sensibility, able to work productively with linguistic and cultural diversity. Effective learners will be intelligent in more than one way – that is their intelligence may in turn be communicative, numerate, technical or process-oriented, or it may be emotional, analytical, creative or critical. Finally, good learners will be broadly knowledgeable, and in particular able to engage with the different interpretative frameworks and contexts of specific information.”<sup>4</sup>

This requires a broad curriculum with multiple objectives, concerned not just with a few “basics”, but with the development of interrelated skills, knowledge and concepts and the ability to apply them in real life situations.

This is not to argue that literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills and understandings are not foundational to participation in modern society and essential for life-long learning. Every effort must be made to ensure that all students develop capabilities in these areas. This includes appropriate concentration on these areas at the relevant developmental stage, and access to additional resources and help for those who experience difficulty acquiring these skills. All teachers throughout schooling should accept responsibility for and receive appropriate pre-service education and professional development in incorporating the teaching of these skills.

The teaching of literacy and numeracy beyond the early childhood years need a clear focus in the National Curriculum statements. Teachers need targeted professional development to

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<sup>4</sup> Kalantzis, Mary and Cope, Bill (2001) *New Learning: A Charter for education in Australia*, Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE), Canberra. p. 38)

teach literacy and numeracy in the context of specific subject areas. The literacy and numeracy demands of subject areas should be specified in the National Curriculum.

However, it must be recognised that basic literacy and numeracy are not of themselves a sufficient education for anyone. All students, including those experiencing difficulty should have access to other forms of learning, including critical thinking and higher order skills, as well as an understanding of the major fields of human knowledge. Writing in the context of the situation in England, Hargreaves describes how a concentration on basic standards to the detriment of a wider curriculum is leading to a situation in which schools which meet the standards are perceived to have “earned autonomy” and are therefore less subject to standardisation.<sup>5</sup> He describes how this is creating a two level schooling system, with schools catering for lower achieving students being forced to concentrate narrowly on basic skills and standards, while schools catering for higher achieving students are free to deliver a much richer and broader education.

The AEU strongly believes there is no point in increasing national consistency if it is going to lead to a downgrading in the quality of the curriculum, a narrowing of student learning options, lowest common denominator expectations and another overlay of bureaucratic accountability on top of that which presently exists.

## **Role of the Teacher in the Curriculum**

Any new curriculum will only be as effective as it is implemented by teachers in classrooms. Teacher education must accordingly be at the centre of the implementation of a National Curriculum and will only work if support is made available to teachers to work with, adapt and implement the curriculum in a manner suitable to their students and cohorts. In this context, valuing teacher professional judgement is central to the effective implementation of any curriculum, and in producing high quality educational outcomes for students. The AEU believes this should be explicitly acknowledged in any overarching National Curriculum document.

Models which suggest that the teacher’s role is to implement a curriculum which has been decided at some distance from its implementation create disconnections between elements that need to be integrated, and ignore the complex and interrelated judgements which lead to improved student learning.

The connection between student engagement and alienation and the content of the curriculum is particularly important. An overly standardised curriculum is likely to lead to further difficulty in engaging the very groups which have the low achievement standards which need to be addressed. This is not to argue that teachers should make decisions on curriculum enactment on an individual and potentially idiosyncratic basis, or to suggest that teachers collectively should do so in isolation from the broader society and its demands. Rather it is to point out the complex nature of curriculum development and to assert the importance of the teacher role in it.

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<sup>5</sup> Hargreaves, Andy (2003) *Teaching in the Knowledge Society; Education in the Age of Insecurity*, New York, Teachers College Press. p. 191

If teacher professional knowledge is not valued, and teachers not seen as the primary agents in the development as well as enactment of curriculum, implementation will occur more as a matter of compliance through performance management rather than the outcome of any ownership or commitment.

It is also important that teacher education be in the form of proactive support that values teacher judgement and professionalism, rather than deficit models of performance and development based on intrusive oversight, micromanagement and blame. Such support should involve adequate and effective professional development, time releases for teachers undertaking it, and provision of sufficient time release for teachers to properly plan, adapt and implement curriculum in an effective manner for their students and cohorts.

Feedback from members in all states and territories indicates that professional development is often perceived as delivered in a piecemeal and inadequate manner, and without sufficient time allowances for teachers to take effective advantage of it. There is also evidence that planning time and preparation time to implement curriculum initiatives is inadequate. While such matters have traditionally in the public education sector been considered state and territory matters and should remain so, the AEU nevertheless believes that any overarching curriculum document should contain a statement in support of the need for such arrangements.

## **Context and Australia's future**

The AEU notes that education is more than a tool for improving human capital in the interests of national prosperity and economic wellbeing. While this goal is clearly very important, education is also important in its own right in producing informed, well balanced individuals with the knowledge and skills to make their own decisions about their educations and future, with a basis for full participation in the social, cultural, political and economic life of the community, and capable of being active citizens in a democratic global society. Education is also vital in working towards a cohesive society and a common good, and the AEU believes that these factors should be emphasised in an overarching curriculum document.

That said, the AEU recognises that preparing young people for a changing society and workplace is a very important goal of education. Confident individuals need specific understanding of the economy, the structure of the workforce and opportunities within the Australian economy, as well as financial literacy.

Specifically, the AEU believes there should be a segment on work education and career guidance in all subject areas, with a particularly strong focus on this area around Year 10. Young people have a need and a right to know about the world of work and career opportunities available to them. It is in the interests of the productivity of the nation that they do so.

The evidence demonstrates that preparing young people for a knowledge economy requires the development not only of sound literacy and numeracy skills and subject specific knowledge, but also of flexible learning skills and an ability to innovate. Many jobs that exist today did not exist thirty years ago, and it is likely that there will be many jobs in existence in twenty or thirty years that do not exist today. Well educated individuals will accordingly

require to change and to innovate, to think for themselves and to adapt to changing circumstances. Teaching these abilities requires a rich, rigorous and rewarding curriculum for all regardless of their background, providing them with excellence in education and the creative and critical thinking skills needed to achieve successful careers and lives in a changing society.

The AEU is accordingly in broad agreement with the three goals identified by the The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians of supporting young Australians to become successful learners, confident individuals, and active and informed citizens. To become successful learners, young people must not only acquire high level literacy and numeracy skills, but the abilities to think critically, to be innovate learners and to research, find information and acquire new skills and knowledge. The AEU agrees that becoming confident individuals involves respecting others, valuing a culture and identity and embracing opportunities. The AEU agrees that involvement as active citizens includes acting with ethics and integrity, understanding Australian society and civic life, and having the capacity to work for the common good. It should also, however, specifically include having the knowledge and capacity to engage in Australian society and its political and civil system, and this should be explicitly stated.

The AEU considers that increasing retention rates to Year 12 or equivalent to be vital in maximising young people's chances of achieving successful careers and lives, a contention supported by a range of national and international evidence, and believes this important goal should be recognised in a National Curriculum document. Once again, a flexible overarching curriculum that schools and teachers can adapt to the needs of particular communities, cohorts and individuals, catering to individual needs and providing multiple pathways to success is the most effective way of achieving this.

## **Principles and specifications for development**

The AEU believes that curriculum documents should be clear, readable by all teachers, but inspirational as well, providing broad outlines over which effective teaching strategies may be built. Curriculum should also be based on a strong evidence base of what works.

The AEU agrees with much of the specifications for development in the proposal, particularly:

- that the curriculum should be based on the assumption that all students can learn, that every child matters, and that students develop at different rates;
- that it should build firm foundational skills for the development of advanced studies in academic disciplines;
- that it should be feasible and realistic, taking into account the time required to learn complex concepts and ideas;
- that time demands on students should leave room for important learning areas not part of the National Curriculum;
- that it should allow jurisdictions, systems and schools to implement it in a way that values teachers' professional knowledge and reflects local contexts;

- that it should be based on a strong evidence base of learning and pedagogy and should encourage teachers to experiment with and evaluate their practices.

In accordance with the AEU's previously stated commitment to a flexible curriculum and the valuing of teacher judgement, the AEU believes the last two points are particularly important, and should be given a place near the top in the hierarchy of points to emphasise their importance.

The AEU believes that the curriculum should encompass broad frameworks outlining what teachers should teach and students learn. It cannot be overly prescriptive.

## **Curriculum Content – knowledge, understanding and skills**

The AEU is in broad agreement with the three intended educational outcomes for young Australians specified in page five of the proposal, specifically:

- a solid foundation of skills and knowledge on which further learning in adult life can take place;
- a deep knowledge and skills that will enable advanced learning and an ability to create new ideas and translate them into practical solutions;
- general capabilities that underpin flexible and critical thinking, a capacity to work with others and an ability to move across subject disciplines to develop new expertise.

The AEU also welcomes the recognition in the proposal that "...students develop at markedly different rates and that year-by-year specification of the curriculum can risk imposing lock-step progression on all students." (p. 5)

The AEU believes the document's proposal that significant review of students at key transition points take place, and that those who are struggling be identified and helped to catch up is a fundamentally a good one. (p. 6) Such individualised attention has been demonstrated to be an effective tool in enhancing the learning abilities of students with additional needs or suffering from low educational achievement, and as such is a potential tool in overcoming educational disadvantage. However, the AEU points out that such individualised learning strategies require resources. If the National Curriculum document is to support such a position it should accompany it with support for lower class sizes and additional resources to support more individualized attention and for schools with a high number of special needs students.

The AEU welcomes the proposal's commitment to high standards in literacy and numeracy, (p. 6) a position in accordance with the commitment to a rigorous curriculum made by the AEU. While an emphasis on literacy and numeracy is very important, there is no dichotomy between a commitment to high standards in literacy and numeracy and a commitment to a rich curriculum capable of giving students the skills and flexibility to acquire new knowledge in a changing society.

The AEU is in agreement with the statement that literacy and numeracy "must be strengthened in the sciences and history as well." (p.6) Sciences and the humanities provide the opportunity to strengthen literacy and numeracy while providing students with the skills

to put them into practice in creative and innovative ways, to strengthen their inquiry skills and their abilities to use literacy and numeracy skills to communicate ideas.

## **Achievement standards**

Assessing students is at the heart of successful teaching. The best form of student assessment is closely linked to the purposes of the curriculum and integrated with curriculum and classroom experience. Apart from providing evidence of student progress and achievement, it also provides important diagnostic evidence that assists teachers in planning for ongoing improvement in student outcomes.

The AEU believes that achievement standards should be realistic, based on actual knowledge and skills students actually achieve. They should be assessed by a variety of methods, both formal and informal that value teacher professional judgement and acknowledge complexity, rather than simply being based on limited test or metrics based measures.

The AEU supports the project of gathering and comparing student work from around the country to determine achievement standards. Moderation of student work is a very powerful form of professional development for teachers. However, the AEU is concerned by the statement in the proposal that, “the national results in the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) will define continua on which the annotated student work samples will be located.” (p.10)

Mass tests are a snapshot of limited learning at one point in time and are best used as a random sample over a large population to determine program effectiveness. Mass census testing is unnecessary, expensive and often counter-productive. International research shows that high stakes mass testing has encouraged developmentally inappropriate teaching and learning practices, narrowing expectations and student outcomes. The AEU believes the NAPLAN tests, which are not based on coursework and do not reflect sophisticated measures, are instruments of limited validity and are not of sufficient quality or breadth to be used in the determination of achievement standards.

The growing trend to use test and metrics based data rather than more qualitative, complex, but ultimately more pedagogically valid measures is indicative of a growing trend for administrative convenience to be favoured over validity. Validity is more difficult and complex, but ultimately more effective as a pedagogical tool. One again, this requires recognising the importance of professional teacher judgement based on a range of sometimes diffuse and complicated factors, rather than a more simplistic, although administratively more convenient assessments based on testing and metrics based determinations.

The AEU supports achievement standards related to coursework and coursework assessment, and believes a National Curriculum document would be enhanced by such a position.

## **Testing and the National Curriculum**

With the establishment of the national NAPLAN tests preceding rather than following the development of a National Curriculum there is a risk that this will lead to the development of

a narrow test driven curriculum rather than a rich, engaging and rigorous one oriented to student needs. While course based testing is a valid, appropriate and necessary part of assessment, testing in itself does not improve student learning outcomes, and there is much evidence that an over emphasis on cohort testing does much to narrow curriculum, and damage the quality of education and student outcomes.

Governments' obsession with mass standardised testing and making judgments about teacher and school performance/quality on the basis of it will not enhance student learning or result in genuine educational accountability.

There is emerging a growing body of evidence that the high stakes testing regimes introduced in both the UK and the USA are having a severely deleterious impact on the education of students in those countries. At the same time, analysis of the results of the OECD PISA tests is showing that the higher achieving countries such as Finland and Canada do not use high stakes testing and place a high degree of confidence in teacher professional judgment in the enactment of curriculum.

It would be foolish for Australia to ignore the experiences of other countries and go down a failed path at the very time those countries which have tried it are realising how flawed it is. The AEU is also concerned that National census testing imposed on the various curricula will encourage curricula and teaching to be built around tests, and the higher the reporting accountability mechanisms the stronger this trend is likely to be. This will lead to a narrowed curriculum and a lowering of the quality of teaching. There is also strong evidence that high stakes census testing can increase educational inequity, and this is especially so when accompanied by disaggregated reporting of school results and league tables. A recent OECD report described the effect ranking schools had on the quality of education in England:

“Many educationalists claim that these ranking lists have had an unfortunate influence on public perceptions. Certainly, the consequences for the individual school, as well as for the individual pupil, are often negative, and it is clear that the construction of the tables favours schools that are already advantaged. Less successful schools have to fight against the following vicious circle: bad reputation, worsening school atmosphere, decreasing identification of the pupils with their school, decreasing number of pupils, reduction of resources, decreasing job satisfaction and motivation among staff, lack of applications of well-qualified teachers for this school, worse quality of lessons, decreasing pupil achievement, worse results in the league tables.”<sup>6</sup>

Governments of all political persuasions use the term ‘accountability’ attached to tests to shift focus away from the responsibility of Government to ensure all children have access to a quality education. They also use references to testing to make simplistic and mostly spurious judgments about teachers.

There is no evidence that the introduction of mass standardised testing has ever led governments to dramatically increase resources to public schools. Rather, testing regimes are, more often than not, a political construct used by governments to create fake crises, to undermine confidence in public schools and to divert attention away from funding policies.

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<sup>6</sup> Pont, B, Nusche, D, Moorman, H. 2008. *Improving School Leadership*. OECD. Vol. II p. 115

According to neo-conservative politicians and commentators ‘accountability’ ends at the classroom door. That is, that the teacher is solely responsible for the performance of students, irrespective of the ability and diversity of the student population, the resourcing available, the support provided and a myriad other variables beyond the control of the classroom teacher.

The AEU believes that teacher and school quality cannot be measured by a “snapshot”, especially based on testing divorced from course content. Where further information is required on the particular needs of cohorts or schools, it can be obtained through the use of sample testing.

## **Early Childhood**

Effective and quality transitions are vital to ensure that children maximise their educational potentials and outcomes. Accordingly there should be an alignment between The National Curriculum and the Early Years Learning Framework, under development at the time of writing, to facilitate a smooth transition from early childhood education and the early years of primary school. The AEU is pleased that the importance of doing so is noted in the proposal. (p.4)

## **Arts, Music, Physical Education and other learning areas outside the framing documents**

The AEU is concerned that with the identification of four major areas as core curriculum with the creation of the framing papers. While Geography and LOTE will be addressed in the next stage of curriculum development, other very important areas risk being relegated to secondary significance in terms of allocation of time and resources. In particular art, music and physical education fit into this category, despite their vital significance in providing young people with important knowledge and skills necessary in modern society. The AEU accordingly believes that a curriculum document should specifically acknowledge the importance of these and other learning areas and advocate for the proper allocation of time and resources to them.

## **Ongoing curriculum development and the 2009-2012 Strategic Plan**

With the establishment of a National Curriculum, mechanisms for ongoing curriculum development should also be established to allow for the revision and renewal of the National Curriculum as knowledge, education and society change. The curriculum is at the heart of what teachers do as a profession. It is therefore imperative that they be involved in all decisions related to its development and implementation. For this reason, the processes for deciding curriculum change and development must involve teachers, be transparent, be protected from direct political intervention, include the broad community and seek to find consensus.

The AEU is deeply concerned that the needs of the public education sector have so far largely been marginalised in the production of the National Curriculum, as evidenced by the non-existent direct public school representation on the National Curriculum Board.

The AEU is concerned about the time frame presently envisaged in the 2009-2013 Strategic Plan for the development and implementation of the National Curriculum, along with associated issues of resourcing and professional development. Adequate consultation with teachers, parents, educational academics and the wider community will require both time and resources, and it is not at all clear that the present Strategic Plan provides for sufficient of either to ensure a proper and participatory consultation process. Issues concerning the allocation of resources for the very necessary professional development the effective implementation of the National Curriculum will require have also not been addressed.

The AEU strongly believes these issues should be addressed by the National Curriculum Board as a matter of priority.