



Australian Education Union

Submission

to the

ACARA Consultation on the
Senior Secondary Years Position Paper

October 2009

Angelo Gavrielatos
Federal President

Susan Hopgood
Federal Secretary

Australian Education Union
Ground Floor
120 Clarendon Street
Southbank VIC 3006

Telephone: 61 3 9693 1800
Facsimile: 61 3 9693 1805
E-mail: aeu@aeufederal.org.au

Australian Education Union

Submission

to the

ACARA Consultation on the Senior Secondary Years Position Paper

Introduction

The Australian Education Union (AEU) is pleased to respond to the *Position Paper on the National Curriculum in the Senior Secondary Years*. This submission will address general issues relating to the position paper, under the headings provided in the paper (in the order they are outlined), with the exception of the first section, consultation.

The AEU believes it is imperative that ACARA give greater priority to maximising opportunities for teachers to have input in to all parts of the process of development of the National Curriculum. We have outlined our concerns in the first section of this submission.

Consultation

Whilst recognising the consultation processes conducted by ACARA to date, the AEU is concerned that the vast majority of this consultation has occurred at peak body level, resulting in a lack of engagement with teachers – the classroom practitioners who will eventually implement the curriculum. The construction of web-based processes as the basis of the consultation reduces the scope to engage classroom teachers in genuine dialogue. This limits the qualitative interaction required to enable professional participation and the subsequent benefits of professional development which teachers derive from such processes.

The possible implications of the limited scope of consultation with classroom teachers are the development of a curriculum which does not draw on the cumulative wealth of experience from teachers across the country, and the reduction of the broad levels of ‘corporate’ and professional knowledge which ACARA could draw on from teachers’ experiences in the implementation of new curricula. Further, there is potential to limit teacher capacity to implement the curriculum if it is seen as an imposition from a remote authority, rather than a part of professional practice and genuine engagement in the education reform process.

The AEU urges ACARA to maximise teacher input through conducting structured opportunities for teachers to participate collectively in discussions and debates about the nature, structure and shape of the new National Curriculum. Further, greater structured opportunities to engage with groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and educators and groups of teachers and educators from multi-cultural and other diverse backgrounds must be implemented at all stages of the process. This should be facilitated through Departments and should be run in partnership with teacher unions and other professional associations.

Design of the Curriculum and Structure of Courses

The AEU is concerned that there are only two references to Indigenous peoples in the outline provided in the structure of the curriculum sections – *English – ... a course for students from diverse backgrounds with English as an Additional Language or Dialect*; and *History – Ancient History*. One would expect that given the policy context and framework outlined by the Rudd Labour Government, consideration on the engagement of Indigenous peoples would be a central policy focus of all agencies. The Prime Minister in his historic Sorry Day speech said:

*“We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.”*¹

Whilst acknowledging ACARA’s stated intention to establish an Indigenous reference group to guide the development of all curriculum and the appointment of an Indigenous person to the History writing panel, the AEU believes that any framework for the development of a new National Curriculum must be inclusive of Indigenous Australian content, knowledges and expertise, beginning with explicit reference across all areas of the curriculum framework.

In this regard the AEU believes ACARA should look to best practice in States and Territories to facilitate the involvement of Indigenous teachers, educators and communities in curriculum development and implementation. Some States and Territories have employed Indigenous teachers and educators to drive the process of curriculum development. In Queensland there is an Indigenous secondary curriculum and an *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Committee* to provide advice to the Queensland Studies Authority on issues affecting Indigenous education.² The committee provides strategic directions on embedding Indigenous perspectives in Queensland curriculum and educational priorities.

Further, the AEU is concerned that the key foundational documents intended to shape the National Curriculum contain no reference to the importance of multicultural perspectives. Australia is a multicultural society. It is vital that this be acknowledged across the curriculum at all levels. The National Curriculum must provide appropriate and accurate recognition of the diverse range of cultural backgrounds in Australian society. The AEU believes that multicultural perspectives should be explicitly included across all areas of the curriculum framework.

¹ From <http://news.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=379056> (accessed 2nd October, 2009)

² Queensland Studies Authority. *Indigenous Perspectives*. from <http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/learning/577.html> (accessed 2nd October 2009)

The AEU sees these limitations in the Position Paper as a direct consequence of limited engagement with a broad range of teachers, and a diverse range of groups who have the experience, capacity and expertise to provide input and content knowledge. Again, structured opportunities for engagement must be created to address these issues.

Implementation

The Position Paper outlines that States and Territories will be required to develop an implementation plan for the National Curriculum from 2011. We draw to ACARA's attention to the fact that there is a large degree of uncertainty within the profession about the process for implementation of the National Curriculum in general and in particular, the implementation of subjects at a school level. This is especially the case in those states where large scale curriculum reform has recently been undertaken. Many teachers and school leaders have expressed their concern about 'reform fatigue', which is exacerbated if reforms have been implemented with limited engagement and resources to support appropriate professional development.

The AEU urges ACARA to work with State and Territory curriculum authorities to bring forward the process for developing the timetable for implementation and provide detailed budgets for the roll-out of the National Curriculum in schools. Professional concern on the impacts of implementation of the Curriculum on the work of teachers and school leaders would be substantially reduced through the provision of certainty.

Point 54 of the Position Paper states:

“Depending on the extent to which a new course is different, systems may conduct professional development sessions for teachers. Teachers will need to develop teaching/learning and assessment programs.” (p.12)

Given that there is a stated requirement in the document that teachers *will* need to develop teaching/learning and assessment programs, the AEU believes that there must be an equal requirement of systems to conduct professional development programs for teachers. Teachers have a professional right to receive professional development when implementing new curricula and a lack of quality professional development could potentially impact on the quality of delivery of the National Curriculum. The Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments must provide resources to enable teacher release for professional development.

The Position Paper is silent on the extent to which there has been engagement with Education Faculties in the Higher Education sector regarding arrangements for introducing the concept of the National Curriculum in to pre-service teacher education courses. The AEU believes that ACARA must be explicit regarding preparations to build the capacity of the future teacher workforce in implementing the National Curriculum.

Governance Arrangements

Point 29 of the Position Paper states that “ACARA will not seek to embed or cross-reference units of competence in its curriculum”. However, point 57 (dot point three) outlines the inclusion of training packages as an issue that requires attention:

“the inclusion in the learning programs of senior secondary students of courses/subjects accredited by senior secondary curriculum authorities and of training packages approved by industry bodies and the different contributions each can make to certificate requirements.” (p 13)

Any integration of National Training Packages with the National Curriculum has the potential to impact on the professional qualifications of teachers. The minimum qualification requirement for the delivery of Training Packages is a Certificate IV Training and Assessment qualification, and the minimum qualification requirement for a teacher is a 4 year university degree. Whilst the AEU strongly supports the creation of pathways in to Vocational Education and Training for senior secondary students, we strongly oppose the delivery of any senior secondary qualification, be it under the framework of the National Curriculum or National Training Packages, by anyone who does not have a 4 year trained teaching qualification, which is the requirement for teacher registration under state and territory legislation.

Conclusion

The curriculum provides the basis from which teachers work to develop and structure learning opportunities which engage students and enrich their experiences. It is therefore imperative that opportunities are created to maximise teacher engagement in all processes related to the development and implementation of the National Curriculum. Models which suggest that the teacher’s role is to enact a curriculum which has been decided at some distance without their involvement create disconnections between elements that need to be integrated, and ignore the complex and interrelated judgements that teachers make on a daily basis.

Adequate consultation with teachers, parents, educational academics and the wider community (including specific groups such as Indigenous and multi-cultural educators and communities) will require both time and resources. In order to ensure effective implementation of the new National Curriculum, issues such as the allocation of resources for comprehensive professional development must be addressed. State and Territory implementation plans must maximise opportunities to consult broadly with the profession and recognise and value the importance of teachers’ professional judgement.

Many State and Territories have established best practice models of curriculum development and implementation including through the establishment of collegial networks headed by successful teachers to facilitate implementation whilst ensuring consistency and quality. Such networks could operate at a school or regional level with agreed processes to moderate implementation.