



**Australian Education Union**  
**Submission to the**  
**K-10 National Curriculum Consultation**

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## 1. Introduction

The Australian Education Union represents 180,000 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 all aspects of the development of a National Curriculum.

The AEU is deeply concerned about the scope and timeframe of the present consultation process. It is imperative that ACARA give greater priority to maximising the opportunities for teachers to have input into all stages of the development of the National Curriculum.

The AEU is also concerned that much of the debate in the formulation of the National Curriculum has taken place under the assumption of a deficit model of educational standards. This is not a position supported by the evidence. The evidence in fact indicates that Australian teachers overall produce a very high standard of educational achievement, as demonstrated by the performance of Australian students in international measures.<sup>1</sup> It is notable in fact that Australia performs substantially better than both the United Kingdom and the United States, whose educational agendas on the public reporting of school test results have recently served as models for policies adopted here.

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 Directorate of Education of the OECD noted that Australia's achievement in the 2003 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>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thompson, S., De Bortoli, L. (2008). *Exploring Scientific Literacy: How Australia measures up*. ACER Press, Melbourne.

<sup>2</sup> Schleicher, A. (2007). *Literacy Skills in the Information Age*. Paper presented to the 15th European Conference on Reading, Humboldt University, Berlin.

Whilst all teachers, schools and educational systems should 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. This should include adequate consultation with the profession that has been responsible for these educational achievements. The evidence suggests that Australian teachers have been very effective in achieving successful outcomes for their students, demonstrating a high level of professionalism and knowledge of pedagogical practices. More engagement with teachers in the development of the National Curriculum and utilisation of their expertise would not only be inclusive, but clearly of benefit to the development of an effective curriculum and the educational well being of students.

## **2. The timeframe and level of genuine broad consultation**

No reform can succeed without the active participation and involvement of teachers. The possible implications of the limited scope of consultation with classroom teachers concerning the National Curriculum will be a reduction in the broad levels of professional knowledge which could be drawn upon in its production and implementation. Indeed, a failure to engage adequately with teachers and utilise their expertise would be a major waste of the most comprehensive resource of educational knowledge in the country. There is potential to limit teacher capacity to implement curriculum initiatives which are seen as an imposition from a remote authority, rather than as a part of professional practice and genuine engagement in the educational reform process. 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.

The AEU strongly believes that the present consultation process is insufficient and does not allow the voices of teachers and other stakeholders to be effectively heard. The number and length of state and territory consultation sessions severely limit scope for teacher participation and involvement.

The web based consultation mechanisms that make up much of the process are limited and atomistic, do not allow for the collective engagement of professional teachers in the development of concepts and materials and reduce the scope for them to engage in genuine dialogue. Targeted resources must be provided to allow teachers the time space and respect to engage in a collegial and collaborative dialogue and assessment of proposed curriculum.

Further, greater structured opportunities to engage with groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and educators must be implemented at all stages of the process.

ACARA should work with state and territory departments to establish consultation processes which encompass the elements described above.

Such processes will clearly require considerably more time than that which is presently allocated for the consultation process. It is unclear why this process should be rushed, and the AEU believes it is far more important that a quality curriculum be enacted that is owned by teachers and produced with their participation than it is to keep to the present timetable.

The AEU requests that ACARA work with all stakeholders, including federal, state and territory governments, teacher professional organisations and the academic community to establish a more realistic timeframe for consultation.

### **3. Implementation**

The quality of educational outcomes produced by the National Curriculum will not be maximised if schools are forced to implement it in a rushed manner that does not allow them time to consider all issues they may be facing in their particular circumstances and tailor it to the needs of their students and community. This will require time for both evaluation of curriculum documents after they are provided and planning for their effective implementation.

Schools should be allocated at least six months to analyse curriculum documents once they have been provided, and a further six months to implement them. At least a full year should be provided from the time curriculum documents are provided to schools and when they are expected to use them in classes. Each curriculum area should be introduced in a staged manner taking into account implementation in other curriculum areas, the particular needs of the subject area and other school commitments. These processes should include opportunities for teachers to meet to work together on the implementation of the National Curriculum. Such meetings must be funded.

The implementation of the History curriculum in particular will require substantial in-service professional development for teachers. Given this requirement and the changes the introduction of the proposed History curriculum will entail, 2011 is too soon for this process to take place. A longer timeframe is required, and implementation should be integrated with a systematic program of teacher professional development in this area.

A number of schools are presently undergoing trials of aspects of the proposed National Curriculum. The AEU believes the period of time presently allocated for these trials is insufficient to allow for meaningful feedback.

#### **4. Teaching in the 21st Century**

The National Curriculum must be built on an acknowledgement of the overall high standards of Australian teaching and seek to harness and build on the high level of teacher professionalism that currently exists in Australia. This must be based on an understanding of the complex role of teaching and learning in modern Australian society and the importance of equipping students with the knowledge and skills required to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Kalantzis, et al, when discussing 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>3</sup>

The Melbourne Declaration also recognises the importance of young people becoming 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.<sup>4</sup>

In order to achieve these goals it is necessary to ensure that students are not only provided with an education that is rich, rigorous and rewarding, but also one that provides for the needs of a diverse student cohort and places the importance of the equity on a par with its quality. In other words, the goal should be the achievement of what a number of academics and researchers call “high quality, high equity” outcomes. Luke et al point out that there is no contradiction between these goals:

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<sup>3</sup> Kalantzis, M., Cope, B., & Harvey, A. (2003). Assessing Multiliteracies and the New Basics. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*. Vol. 10. No. 1 p. 17.

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a713613242&db=all>

<sup>4</sup> MCEETYA. (2008) *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. p. 8.

The OECD data shows that quality and equity do not necessarily have to be traded off against each other. The achievement of “redistributive justice” is not incompatible with the system producing high quality, relevant and powerful resources for the new economy<sup>5</sup>

Based on an analysis of the countries which score highest on the PISA rankings for both these factors, Luke et al identify the characteristics of high quality/high equity systems as:

- The technical form of the syllabus is relatively low definition: that is, it outlines ‘expected’ coverage and standards without attempting to ‘script’ or ‘control’ pedagogy;
- The ‘prescription’ is enforced not through high stakes testing, but rather through parsimonious testing that enables schools to diagnostically assess their performance relative to comparable schools, through strong systems messages about standards and equity, and through the official provision of a range of professional development resources from various sources and at multiple levels of the system;
- The expectation is that teachers will exercise informed and autonomous professionalism, which is supported at multiple levels through aligned preservice training, professional resources, inservice training, and annual regional/district/municipal or school curriculum planning.<sup>6</sup>

## 5. Quality teaching and teacher professional judgement

It is essential that National Curriculum learning area documents aim to provide for rich, rigorous and rewarding educational outcomes for all students regardless of their background, providing them with excellence in learning outcomes and the creative and critical thinking skills needed to achieve successful careers and lives in a changing society. Attaining these objectives requires high quality teaching based upon a high level of teacher professionalism.

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<sup>5</sup> Luke, A, Weir, K & Woods, A. (2008). *Development of a set of principles to guide a P-12 Syllabus framework. A Report to the Queensland Study Authority.* p. 42.

[http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/publications/qa\\_p-12\\_principles\\_dev\\_ppr.pdf](http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/publications/qa_p-12_principles_dev_ppr.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.44.

To accomplish this schools and teachers must be given trust and support to innovate and tailor teaching to meet individual learning needs.

National Curriculum learning area documents should not be over prescriptive or lead to micro-management of professional teachers, or a lack of recognition of teacher professional judgement. An overly prescriptive curriculum that does not value teacher professional judgement or allow teachers and schools the flexibility to teach to the requirements of their individual students and cohorts will not support improved practice. Such a curriculum will rather discourage effective and innovative teaching, encouraging teachers to take a conservative approach and teach to narrow or defined criteria.

As Luke et al point out, US studies have demonstrated that effective teachers of lower socio-economic and disadvantaged students have high levels of professionalism and are afforded the opportunities to use their professional judgment and adapt curriculum to the needs of their cohorts' cultural backgrounds and cognitive strategies.<sup>7</sup> This is not to imply that teachers should work without guidelines or make judgements in a vacuum. Rather, as Luke et al put it:

Teacher professional judgement in the shaping of curriculum work programs, pedagogical approaches and classroom assessment allows and enables individuals and cohorts to take different routes through the terrain.<sup>8</sup>

It is vital that teacher professionalism and professional judgement be supported by resourced system support. Hayes et al talk of the importance of integrating the three message systems of schools – curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and the importance of creating “professional learning communities” which integrate these to maximise student learning.<sup>9</sup> A key element of such support is teacher professional learning itself.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Hayes, D., Mills, M., Christie, P. & Lingard, B., (2006). *Teachers & Schooling Making a Difference: Productive Pedagogies, Assessment and Performance*. Allen & Unwin, pp. 184-194.

## 6. Professional development, support and building teacher capacity

The AEU is very concerned that with implementation due to commence in 2011, there is still no plan with associated budget to support the implementation of the proposed National Curriculum. A curriculum in itself does not improve educational outcomes. Educational outcomes may be improved if a quality curriculum is properly supported and resourced. This includes resources for teaching materials, but most importantly for teacher professional development and capacity building. The importance of ongoing teacher capacity building is supported by a range of academic evidence. Andreas Schleicher of the Directorate of Education at the OECD, for example, notes that the best performing countries in PISA “build their success on combining clear and ambitious standards for educational performance with access to best practice and professional development and support for schools.”<sup>10</sup>

Teacher professional judgement is essential to delivering effective educational outcomes and teaching to the needs of individual students and cohorts. But teacher professional judgement is proven to be most effectively delivered in a context of support, collegiality, and educational teaching capacity building, including effective professional development and opportunities for collaborative decision making.

A curriculum cannot, if it is to be effective, be divorced from professional development and capacity building in teachers. Equally, a curriculum that is not supported by adequate and effective professional development is unlikely to meet its full potential in improving the quality and equity of educational outcomes of students. The rollout of the National 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. Such professional development should be collaborative in nature and draw upon the professional expertise of teachers rather than impose template “standards” that have been determined elsewhere.

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<sup>10</sup> Schleicher, A (2008) *Seeing School Systems Through the Prism of PISA*. Commissioned paper in Appendix A, Luke, et al, Op Cit. p.75

History in particular will require particular attention at both primary and secondary levels if the extensive requirements of the History part of the National Curriculum are to be effectively met. Specific programs in this area must be developed and dedicated resources provided for teacher capacity building in the area.

Professional development in the Indigenous aspects of the National Curriculum will also require particular attention, and specific properly resourced programs must be provided.

Areas of ICT, environmental sustainability and Asia literacy will also require professional development programs.

A single session or small number of sessions will not be sufficient to achieve these aims. Effective professional development must be ongoing, consultative, collaborative and integrated with other professional responsibilities. It is essential that the professional knowledge of classroom teachers across the country be harnessed in this process and the learning and capacity building teachers undergo be interactive and collaborative in nature. To do otherwise would be to limit the effective implementation of the National Curriculum and make it less likely to improve learning outcomes for students.

In this regard it is pleasing to note that the *COAG National Partnership Agreement on Improving Teacher Quality* contains the key outcome of, “developing teachers and school leaders to enhance their skills and knowledge throughout their careers”.<sup>11</sup> The reward reforms for its indicative achievements include improved induction programs for new and beginning teachers and principals, continual improvement programs and professional development supported by resources and materials that are shared nationally.<sup>12</sup> The National Partnership’s reward reforms also include, “Improved in-school support for teachers and leaders, particularly in disadvantaged Indigenous, rural/remote and hard-to-staff schools”.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> COAG, (2009). *National Partnership on Improving Teacher Quality*. Clause 24.d.  
[http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov\\_agreements/federal\\_financial\\_relations/docs/national\\_partnership/national\\_partnership\\_on\\_improving\\_teacher\\_quality.pdf](http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/docs/national_partnership/national_partnership_on_improving_teacher_quality.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, Schedule B, Table B1.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

The implementation of the National Curriculum should not impose additional workloads on teachers that damage their core responsibilities to their students. Appropriate funding must be provided to allow teachers to integrate the professional development requirements for the National Curriculum into their other responsibilities.

## **7. Funding and Resources for professional development and implementation**

It is essential that such resources for both development and implementation of the National Curriculum be provided in a consistent manner throughout the country to ensure that all schools and teachers are able to avail themselves of them. It is also important that jurisdictions and schools be provided with the flexibility to implement the National Curriculum and provide the professional development that must accompany it in a manner that suits their local conditions and circumstances.

Professional development and funding for implementation should be resourced nationally, but implemented by state and territory education departments, with schools afforded sufficient flexibility to implement programs in accordance with the particular requirements of their professional teaching staff, students and community. ACARA should work with state and territory departments to ensure that programs of professional development that support the National Curriculum are provided. Given the extensive commitments such professional development and teacher capacity building will require, the federal resourcing for such programs should be substantial, budgeted and transparent. Funding provided for such programs should be audited to ensure it is in fact used for such purposes.

Programs in all jurisdictions should include the provision of an adequate time to allow teachers to undertake professional development and planning for the National Curriculum. Such programs should include times for teachers to meet and collectively discuss issues regarding implementation.

The implementation of appropriate and effective Indigenous perspectives, ICT, environmental sustainability and Asian literacy will require substantial professional development and teacher capacity building, and should be resourced accordingly.

## **8. Effective pedagogy**

This submission has previously noted the importance of education being based on an understanding of the complex role of teaching and learning in modern Australian society. Education must be broadly based and provide students with 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 developing aware, innovative and involved citizens, they generate 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. These aims are supported by a range of academic evidence and the goals of the Melbourne Declaration. Such an approach must seek to harness and build on the high level of teacher professionalism that currently exists in Australia.

An approach which moves away from a focus on a student-centred, flexible curriculum emphasising rich learning and higher order thinking is not likely to produce motivated and engaged students or equip them with the knowledge and skills required to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Such an approach is also not likely to best facilitate improved literacy and numeracy. Research shows that literacy and numeracy are best learned in a wider pedagogical context and that a broad curriculum does not in any way conflict with high standards in these areas. Professor Robin Alexander, director of the prestigious *Cambridge Primary Review* in the United Kingdom said in a recent seminar:

Our evidence also shows that a broad curriculum enhances rather than undermines standards in the ‘basics’, yet many political leaders continue to believe that standards and breadth are incompatible.<sup>14</sup>

The rollout of the National Curriculum must be seen in context to the educational debates in the Australian community at the present time. As previously noted, the international PISA data and other evidence indicate that Australian students do 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.

Improvements to teaching and learning in Australian schools must be built upon a recognition that Australia already possess a quality education system that achieves well by world standards and provides effective outcomes for students. A deficit model of reform should be rejected. This is not to say that issues of underachievement do not exist, or that improvement is not possible, or that systems, schools and teachers should not continually work for improved and equitable outcomes. It does mean that change should be built on prior achievements and that it is important not to abandon effective and proven educational practices.

It is important that a National Curriculum not seek to narrow, over-prescribe or micro-manage what is taught or impede the ability of schools and teachers to use their professional judgement when teaching to their cohorts. Luke et al note that:

The danger is that “uninformed prescription” ...or “hard prescription”...characterised by over specification of the curriculum, continuous monitoring and enforcement through high stakes testing, and punitive approaches to accountability – can deskill teachers and deter quality and equity... That is, *strong curriculum policy bids to control what goes on in classrooms through curriculum prescription, and enforcement through testing and accountability can generate inverse and unintended effects*, deterring the informed professional judgement that is necessary for schools and teachers to engage in local curriculum development, implementation and assessment practice.<sup>15</sup> (Emphasis in original)

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<sup>14</sup> The University of Melbourne Newsroom. *Good teaching, not testing, raises standards, says British expert*. 11 March 2010. <http://newsroom.melbourne.edu/news/n-258>

<sup>15</sup> Luke, et al, op cit, p. 10.

In this context the AEU is concerned that parts of the draft National Curriculum are over prescriptive, and contain an unrealistic amount of requirements that are unlikely to lead to improved pedagogy or maximise the chances of effective student learning. The National Curriculum as it stands in the draft documents of the four learning areas in parts represents a move away from the focus within various jurisdictions of a student-centred curriculum with appropriate flexibility for delivery.

## 9. Coherence and overview

The AEU is concerned about the staged implementation of the National Curriculum, and the impact the early rollout of the four priority learning areas will have on time allocations to other areas of the curriculum. The present learning area documents have content over-allocations. Adhering to them will require the dedication of considerable time, diminishing that available for other areas and narrowing breadth and depth of the whole curriculum. There is a danger that such an approach will lead to a curriculum too narrowly focused on a limited number of areas. There is a further danger that cross curriculum perspectives will be ignored. Libby Tudball of the Education Department of Monash University recently wrote:

Yes, we want students who are knowledgeable in maths, science, history and English, but we must recognise that some of the most important knowledge will not fall neatly into these disciplines - politics, multiculturalism, water shortages, increasing violence and under-age drinking are vital concerns in their lives.

Students need to develop the knowledge and skills to be active and informed citizens who know how to think critically, and how to respond to contemporary issues; a narrowly focused curriculum will not do this.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, over-allocations occasion 'chronological dashes' through material that do not facilitate quality and higher order learning, produce quality pedagogy or maximise student engagement. The Melbourne Declaration states:

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<sup>16</sup> Tudball, L. *Curriculum's narrow focus leaves students bereft of big ideas*. The Age, 2 March 2010. <http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/politics/curriculums-narrow-focus-leaves-students-bereft-of-big-ideas-20100301-pdi2.html>

Australia values the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society - a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse, and that values Australia's Indigenous cultures as a key part of the nation's history, present and future...

Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation's ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion.<sup>17</sup>

To achieve this teachers and students require a broad curriculum which gives appropriate weight to each area, contains provision for cross curriculum perspectives and encourages high quality rich learning, engaging higher order thinking skills.

Curriculum content in all areas should be realistic and appropriate to the implementation of a full and balanced curriculum taking into account how all areas fit together. In light of these issues there is a need for ACARA to reassess the allocations in all four curriculum documents.

At present the four learning areas exist as standalone curricula with insufficient coherence between them. The AEU is aware of the three designed areas of cross curriculum perspectives, (Indigenous perspectives, sustainable living and of knowledge of Asia), and of the ten general capabilities. However, these are not sufficient to establish effective pedagogical links between the learning areas and maximise the opportunities of cross curriculum learning. Considerably more attention must be given to identifying cross curriculum perspectives, how the different learning areas reinforce and complement each other, and how this can be utilised in teaching. The AEU recommends that ACARA work with state and territory departments, curriculum authorities and other relevant organisations to produce scoping papers on cross curriculum perspectives and capabilities.

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<sup>17</sup> Melbourne Declaration, Op Cit, p. 4.

## **10. Assessment and Achievement Standards**

Clarification must be obtained regarding the status and purpose of the Achievement Standards. In the present drafts it is not clear whether they are simply referential to the expected skills of typical learners at a particular year level, or are requirements to be met by individual students. Most importantly, the consequences that would entail if a student failed to meet the Achievement Standards should be made clear.

The purpose of achievement standards should be to make explicit expected student achievement at different year levels in order to aid teachers in teaching to their needs, and to provide a basis for accurate and effective assessment and reporting to parents.

The AEU believes that achievement standards should be realistic, based on actual knowledge and skills students are expected to achieve. They should be assessed using 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. Their purpose should also be explicitly stated in all four learning area documents.

Assessment processes must also be appropriate to year level.

The AEU is concerned that the assessment and reporting processes at all year levels that will accompany the National Curriculum are not yet clear. These have the potential to considerably impact upon the content and processes of teaching and learning in schools. The AEU believes these matters should be addressed in a consultative manner.

## **11. Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum**

The AEU strongly supports Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum. Whilst noting that the present draft curriculum for the four learning areas contain references to Indigenous perspectives in a variety of contexts, the AEU believes

that Indigenous content remains insufficient. Time should be taken to consult with Indigenous educators and community members to ensure that this content is respectful, thorough and properly embedded in the curriculum.

The AEU notes criticism in the media and from some politicians concerning the inclusion and nature of Indigenous perspectives, in particular concerning the History curriculum. Despite these claims, Indigenous perspectives only comprise, in whole or in part, 39 of the 237 content areas in History. Claims that Indigenous perspectives are over-emphasised are not supported. The aim of the History curriculum must be to give a historically accurate account of Indigenous history.

Based on advice from the AEU's federal, state and territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander committees, the AEU also recommends the following specific changes to the draft wording of the History and English curriculum documents. The new recommended wording is in italics:

- History, page 3. “Through this history curriculum, children in Years K-2 learn about their own social context of family, friends and school, and the significance of the past. They engage with the remains of the past; develop a concept of time as present, past and future; and use their imagination to speculate about the lives of others in the past through role play. *Developing a foundation for the understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies through discussion, experience and play.*”
- History, page 7. Kindergarten. Personal and family stories. “They will consider board inquiry questions, including:
  - what is my story?
  - what stories do other people tell about their past *including stories as told by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?*
  - how are stories told?”
- History, page 8. Year 1. Content descriptions. “They will consider broad inquiry questions, including:
  - what happened and when?
  - *what has changed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the years?*
  - how do we measure and describe time?

- how can we show the past is different from the present?
- has family life changed over time?”
- History, page 9. Year 2. Content descriptions. Heritage. “The Year 2 curriculum details with the concept of heritage. Students learn about the heritage of their locality.

“They will consider broad inquiry questions, including:

- Why do you think the past is important?
- Why do you think the past is important?
- How can we preserve these signs of the past?
- *How can we preserve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage?”*
- History, page 9. The word “Indigenous” is not specifically included in the Year 2 content description. When referring to concepts of Australian heritage, as this section does, it is important that Indigenous perspectives be specifically acknowledged. It is also important that they be included in this year level.
- English, page 6. “Students will be taught *to value and understand* that there are many languages and dialects spoken in Australia including Aboriginal English and Standard Australian English and that these languages may have different writing systems and oral traditions. Students will be taught to develop critical understandings about social, historical and cultural contexts, aesthetic qualities, and the perspectives associated with different uses of language and textual features.”

The present draft documents for the four learning areas contain no reference to the importance and application of bi-lingual Indigenous education. There is strong evidence that effective programs of bi-lingual education accompanied by culturally sensitive pedagogy considerably increase educational achievement in both a student’s first language and in English.<sup>18 19 20</sup> Bi-lingual education should be explicitly supported in all four curriculum learning areas.

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<sup>18</sup> Cummins, J. (1986). Empowering Minority Students: A Framework for Intervention. *Harvard Educational Review*, Vol. 56, No. , pp. 18-36.  
[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=EJ330827&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=EJ330827](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ330827&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ330827)

## 12. Multicultural perspectives

The AEU is concerned that the key foundational documents intended to shape the National Curriculum contain no reference to the importance of multicultural perspectives. In July 2009 Professor Andrew Jakubowicz of the University of Technology Sydney published *Cultural Diversity, Cosmopolitan Citizenship and Education: Issues, Options and Implications for Australia*.<sup>21</sup> He examined the importance of multicultural perspectives in education as vehicles for social and educational inclusion and coherence, recommending that education in Australian schools should incorporate multicultural perspective across all learning domains and aim to enhance student and teacher intercultural understanding and cross-cultural communication skills. He criticised the framing papers then published that preceded the present draft of the four learning areas, stating:

The Curriculum Corporation materials for example have been suffused with the ideological sanitisation of the Howard years, and while there are useful elements already produced for schools, the depth and range of material has not been created in relation to cultural diversity teaching and student-centred research.<sup>22</sup>

The current drafts of the four learning areas have not substantially addressed these concerns, and the AEU shares these concerns. 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.

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<sup>19</sup> Akkari, A. (1998). Bilingual Education: Beyond Linguistic Instrumentalization. *Bilingual Research Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 2-4. pp. 103-125, 117.

[http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=EJ607037&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=EJ607037](http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ607037&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ607037)

<sup>20</sup> Wu, J, & Bilash, O. (1999). Empowering Minority Students Through Bilingual Education, A Multifunctional English-Chinese Bilingual Program in Western Canada. *TESOL Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 29-34.

[http://www.hiceducation.org/Edu\\_Proceedings/Joe%20Wu.pdf](http://www.hiceducation.org/Edu_Proceedings/Joe%20Wu.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Jakubowicz, J. (2009). *Cultural Diversity, Cosmopolitan Citizenship and Education: Issues, Options and Implications for Australia*. AEU.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pp. 15-16.

### **13. Students with special needs**

The AEU has previously noted the importance that curricula be sufficiently flexible to provide for diverse student cohorts. This must include provision for students with special needs. Curricula at all levels must have sufficient scope and flexibility to cater for students with special educational needs, including those who have an intellectual disability and are not able to access regular course content. Teachers should also be provided with support in delivering curricula to students with special needs. This should include quality professional development in this area, but also assistance from specialist help and teaching aids where appropriate.

Assessment and achievement standards for special needs students must also be appropriate to their needs and based on what is actually taught to them rather than against general assessment standards or criteria. The AEU sees the need for a scoping paper on this issue, identifying how the implementation of the National Curriculum should take these factors into account and addressing how teachers should be supported in classrooms in teaching students with special needs.

### **14. Engagement with higher education authorities**

The draft curriculum and support documents are 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 into 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.

Engagement between ACARA and higher education authorities is clearly important to this process.

## 15. Conclusion

The AEU expresses deep concern and reservations with respect to the present timeline and processes for their implementation.

The AEU believes that considerably more time is needed for a more extensive collaboration with the profession to produce and implement a national curriculum for the future.