



AUSTRALIAN
ASSOCIATION
OF CHRISTIAN
SCHOOLS

Australian Curriculum Review Consultation

Mr David de Carvalho

Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Level 13, Tower B,
280 Elizabeth Street
Sydney NSW 200

via email: engagement@acara.edu.au

30 June 2021

Dear Mr de Carvalho,

The Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to ACARA's review into the Foundation – Year 10 Australian Curriculum. AACS represents over a hundred schools and thousands of Australian families from a wide variety of backgrounds, cultures and church denominations. Christian schools were established by parents who had the common goal and desire to see their children grow up in a teaching and learning environment where they could be nurtured in their faith. Characterised as low-fee, our schools are located in every state and territory across Australia, ranging from very small to large, urban to regional, rural and remote.

AACS has consulted with its member schools on the proposed changes to the Australian Curriculum and has provided detailed feedback via the Survey function for specific learning areas and year levels. The comments provided below are a summary of feedback and overall comments provided by our leadership staff and teachers.

Firstly, AACS would like to congratulate ACARA on its goal of decluttering the curriculum. A streamlined curriculum will allow teachers to prioritise what is essential for students to learn in each subject by delivering a quality teaching program that has depth and rigour. We would like to see more open-ended content descriptors and elaborations which allow teachers the opportunity to use their professional judgement of the local context and subject matter expertise to be



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‘curriculum developers’ rather than simply ‘curriculum deliverers’. AACCS encourages ACARA to continue pursuing the goal of removing unnecessary duplication, both within and across learning areas, and our specific feedback in the online surveys provides further suggestions to achieve this goal.

We note that there has been much commentary in the media about the reduced focus on Australia’s Christian heritage in the curriculum. We believe that all Australian students deserve to learn about our rich cultural and spiritual heritage that has come through the mission and work of Christian church leaders, and people of faith, who were key players in the British settlement of our country. Many social justice and community services were developed by Christians, such as the Reverend John Flynn who founded the Royal Flying Doctor Service and countless other charities, schools and hospitals which were established by people of faith.

In the proposed iteration of the Australian Curriculum, there are fundamental questions about life and identity that are not explored with any sense of overarching narrative. Will students graduate school with confidence in their identity as Australian citizens and their place in the world? Where does the curriculum address the big questions of life such as: “what does it mean to be human?” and “what are the key characteristics as Australian citizens that unite and inspire us?” and “how can we create a society where all people flourish?” Young people today are searching for meaning and purpose in life. Education provides a unique opportunity to influence the next generation of citizens with a deep appreciation and love of their country throughout their school journey.

AACCS supports more attention being given to the history of First Nation Australians. We acknowledge that the past deep loss of culture, identity, opportunity, and loss of family has ongoing present and future concern for First Nations people, and therefore all Australian citizens. We support curriculum content that helps to bring greater understanding to present cultural tensions and works to resolve issues of racism and injustice in our society. At the same time, while regretting short-comings and ignorance, we should also recognise the positive impact our Christian heritage and British traditions have had on the development of our nation, both socially and politically.



In that context we are concerned that in the proposed curriculum there is an unbalanced focus on contentious issues around the formation of our nation and unresolved historical debates that is not helpful or, arguably, objective. We would urge more attention be given to the qualities that have created a free, democratic, and egalitarian society, albeit an imperfect one. AACS suggests that these themes do not come through strongly enough in the current version of the curriculum, in particular through the Cross-curriculum priorities and the study of Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS).

We have provided some suggestions and examples of our concerns below:

Cross-curriculum Priorities:

AACS recommends ACARA consider reworking the Cross-curriculum priorities:

- from “Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia” to “World and Australia’s engagement with the World”; and
- add a new cross-curriculum priority called “Histories of Cultures and Faith in Australia” or reword “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Histories and Cultures” to “Histories of Cultures and Faith in Australia” to be more inclusive of all Australians journeys, stories and identities.

Incorporating new cross-curriculum priorities into the curriculum could provide a circuit breaker in the ‘culture wars’ and assist in achieving consensus among all parties and interests across States and Territories. These suggested priorities would also enable schools to cater for their local context when engaging with the Australian Curriculum.

HASS: Foundation-6

- AACS commends the Core Concept of: *Identity and Diversity – The factors, including values and traditions, that shape personal and shared identity and the diversity of Australia as a multicultural and multi-faith society.* However, we do not believe there are sufficient examples of the diverse range of faith and multicultural communities that represent modern Australian society.



- We appreciate the improved perspectives of First Nations People of Australia, especially those exploring the contribution and motivation of people like Uncle William Cooper, Faith Bandler and Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls. There are other minority groups who need to be known for their own sake, including people of Christian faith who have made a positive contribution to society.

HASS: 7-10

- In Year 7 History, we commend the study of two societies of the Ancient World, with one being First Nations People of Australia. AACCS recommends a more balanced approach to the Content Descriptors so that there is equal time allowed for studying both ancient societies, particularly as ancient Greece and Rome provide keys to understanding the development of our modern western civilisation.
- In Year 9 History, there is an overly negative, one-sided portrayal of Australia's British settlement without providing the opportunity for balancing perspectives. There is also a very narrow portrayal of Australia's agricultural and mining sectors that does not sufficiently acknowledge the positive contribution these industries have made to Australia's economic prosperity.
- In Year 9 Civics and Citizenship, the increased emphasis on global citizenship is problematic. While we agree it is a concept worth exploring, it should not overshadow Australian citizenship which has identifiable markers such as holding a passport, paying taxes and voting. AACCS is concerned that the examples provided of global citizenship in action are biased towards encouraging students to accept certain positions on political issues rather than enabling them to explore different points of view.
- In Year 10 History there is an over-emphasis on the Australian civil rights movement with very limited international comparisons of similar movements e.g. in the United States. AACCS recommends condensing some of the Content Descriptors to allow space for students to study key events and leaders of international civil rights movements. There is also very little coverage of the causes and effects of the Cold War which was a major influence on Australia's foreign policy post World War Two.



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- In Year 10 Civics and Citizenship, the opportunity to compare Australia's system of Government with an Asian country and examine our international obligations are very beneficial. When considering Australia's obligations under international treaties, AACCS recommends the curriculum consider how Australia protects the human right of freedom of religion under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

There is much in the proposed new curriculum to be applauded. The points provided above are a summary of the main areas where AACCS would request ACARA consider further refinement and improvement.

We would be pleased to provide additional feedback through any future consultations and are happy to meet with you in person to discuss these matters further.

Kind regards,

Vanessa Cheng

Executive Officer

Australian Association of Christian Schools

CC: The Hon. Alan Tudge MP
Minister for Education and Youth