

Emeritus Professor John Halsey  
Secretariat for the Independent Review into Regional Rural and Remote Education  
Student Participation Branch | Schools and Youth  
Australian Government Department of Education and Training  
GPO Box 9880  
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Emeritus Professor Halsey,

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) appreciates the opportunity to make a submission in the important area of supporting quality and equity of educational outcomes for students from regional, rural and remote areas.

ACARA's mission is to improve learning outcomes for all Australian students.

ACARA's assessment and reporting work continues to play a valuable role in identifying sources of educational disadvantage in Australia. ACARA delivers and reports on the National Assessment Program, which covers literacy and numeracy, science literacy, civics and citizenship and information and communication technology literacy. Where possible and appropriate, ACARA reports educational outcomes by geographic location. This allows for identification and comparison of outcomes across different student populations, including between metropolitan, rural and remote schools.

The Australian Curriculum sets expectations for learning for all Australian students wherever they attend school, while also providing flexibility in how the curriculum is delivered to reflect local school context and student learning needs. The development of a national curriculum has also facilitated the development of high quality resources that can be used by schools across Australia.

ACARA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to policy dialogue to address the challenge Australia faces with respect to regional, rural and remote education and I would be pleased to meet with you if I can provide further assistance.

Yours sincerely,  
Robert Randall  
Chief Executive Officer

## **About ACARA**

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is an independent statutory authority whose functions include development of national curriculum, administration of national assessments and associated reporting on schooling in Australia. ACARA's strategic directions are set by its Charter and any other written instructions from the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Education Council.

## **The Australian Curriculum**

In its first iteration as the national curriculum, the Australian Curriculum has been designed to set the expectations for the learning of all young Australians as they progress through school, regardless of where they live or the background from which they come. By establishing consistent standards in terms of content – “what” is taught – the Australian Curriculum aims to improve the quality, equity and transparency of Australia's education system.

The Australian Curriculum, however, has been designed to provide flexibility to enable states and territories to manage change and to meet their own statutory and other requirements. State and territory school and curriculum authorities determine “how” the curriculum is taught: the approach to implementation of Australian Curriculum to be taken by their schools including implementation timelines, advice and professional support.

It is recognised that quality teaching makes the most significant contribution to student learning. A national curriculum sets common, shared expectations and facilitates national collaboration and sharing of high-quality practice and resources. One significant consequence of the publication of the Australian Curriculum is the development of quality resources for teaching and learning by educational, cultural and community organisations, and commercial publishers, as well as by ACARA in collaboration with school authorities, for use in classrooms across Australia.

The development of the Australian Curriculum involved extensive consultation with teachers, principals, state and territory education authorities, professional education associations, business, industry, community groups, the general public and all governments. The Australian Curriculum has drawn on national expertise and built on the diverse curriculum development and implementation experiences of the states and territories.

## **Monitoring and evaluation of the Australian Curriculum**

ACARA has completed development of curriculum for agreed learning areas from Foundation to Year 12. The ongoing monitoring and evaluation framework for F-10 Australian Curriculum is designed to balance the desire for curriculum stability against the need for ongoing enhancements to reflect the rapidly changing world, and facilitate depth and breadth of consultation.

ACARA is also reviewing the strategy and processes for the further development of the senior secondary Australian Curriculum and will scope options for further development of senior

secondary curriculum in partnership with interested jurisdictions. As a part of agreed monitoring and evaluation processes, ACARA is gathering information about the effectiveness of the Australian Curriculum and identifying ways in which the curriculum could be improved over time. ACARA uses this information to prepare a future work plan for consideration by all education ministers.

## **2015 review of the Australian Curriculum**

In January 2014 the Australian Government announced an independent Review of the Australian Curriculum to evaluate the robustness, independence and balance of the Australian Curriculum, examining the content and development process. It also sought to understand whether the Australian Curriculum is delivering what students need, parents expect and the nation requires in a rapidly changing world.

The Review of the Australian Curriculum was informed by consultation and research to ensure that a broad range of views on the curriculum were heard. These included stakeholder consultations, international and national research evidence and evaluation of Australian Curriculum learning area documentation by subject matter specialists. Members of the public could also provide feedback through an online submission process.

On 18 September 2015 all Education Ministers endorsed the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum, including all learning areas and changes to the curriculum made following the Review of the Australian Curriculum.

As a result of the Review of the Australian Curriculum, enhancements were implemented to uncrowd and rebalance the curriculum, especially in primary school years, to improve access for students with a disability, and to improve parental engagement. As the Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education (Review) Discussion Paper notes, the streamlining of the Australian Curriculum ensured a focus on the basics without compromising the breadth of coverage.

## **Student diversity**

Materials have been developed to assist teachers to use the Australian Curriculum to develop teaching and learning programs that build on students' interests, strengths, goals and learning needs. These address the cognitive, affective, physical, social and aesthetic needs of all students, inclusive of students with disability gifted and talented students, and students for whom English is an additional language or dialect.

The Australian Curriculum website, available as a resource for principals, schools and teachers, is intended to:

- help ensure that all students are able to access and participate in the Australian Curriculum
- provide advice as to how the three-dimensional design of the Australian Curriculum may be used to address the learning needs of all students

- provide specific advice with regard to meeting the learning needs of students with disability, gifted and talented students, and students for whom English is an additional language or dialect
- provide examples illustrating how students with diverse needs can access and participate in the Australian Curriculum.

The ways in which the Australian Curriculum has been designed to address the goals of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) (Melbourne Declaration) are detailed in *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum Version 4* (ACARA, 2012). The propositions that shape the development of the Australian Curriculum establish expectations that the Australian Curriculum is appropriate for all students. These propositions include:

- that each student can learn and that the needs of every student are important
- that each student is entitled to knowledge, understanding and skills that provide a foundation for successful and lifelong learning and participation in the Australian community
- that high expectations should be set for each student as teachers account for the current level of learning of individual students and the different rates at which students develop
- that the needs and interests of students will vary, and that schools and teachers will plan from the curriculum in ways that respond to those needs and interests.

The Australian Curriculum provides a framework for supporting the development of skills and interests relevant to specific schools and communities through the general capabilities including personal and social capability. One of the themes highlighted in the Review Discussion Paper is entrepreneurship in schools. The paper suggests that entrepreneurial education has the potential to improve opportunities for students and youth in regional, rural and remote communities by shifting the focus of education from primarily preparation for employment to creation of employment. Such education potentially enables young people to stay in their communities and create opportunities there, rather than relocate to metropolitan areas for employment. Entrepreneurship is taught within the elective Work Studies subject area.

The Australian Curriculum also supports opportunities for students to learn about their connection to place and local context. The F-10 Australian Curriculum: History, for example, provides opportunities to investigate Australian and world history. While Australian history is to be taught within a world history context, students develop knowledge, understanding and skills through their study of specific societies, events, movements and developments and there are opportunities to study the role of individuals and groups and their significance. The historical knowledge and understanding strand includes personal, family, local, state or territory, national, regional and world history. The 7-10 curriculum enables students to develop an understanding of the past and present experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, their identities and the continuing value of their cultures.

## **Roles and responsibilities of ACARA**

ACARA's support for the curriculum includes:

- digital publication of the Australian Curriculum, which means everyone can view what is being taught in schools

- collaborating with Education Services Australia (ESA) and the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) to support teachers in implementing the curriculum
- publication of portfolios of student work samples (annotated) that illustrate the Australian Curriculum achievement standards. The portfolios comprise authentic and diverse samples of students work. They have been selected, annotated and reviewed by classroom teachers and other curriculum experts
- Provision of a range of other support to schools and school authorities.

## **States and territories**

State and territory curriculum and school authorities are responsible for the implementation of the Australian Curriculum in their schools, in line with system and jurisdictional policies and requirements. They make decisions about the extent and timing of take-up and translation of the intended Australian Curriculum into the curriculum that is experienced by students.

Progress with implementation of the full scope of the Australian Curriculum in each state and territory level is informed by, amongst other things:

- the readiness of their systems, schools and teachers
- the extent of change from current curriculum provision
- available resources
- existing curriculum development cycles and processes.

ACARA works with State and Territory Curriculum authorities to manage and support the implementation of the Australian Curriculum.

## **Schools**

Schools develop tailored local curricula that meet the needs of their students either directly from the Australian Curriculum, in some states and territories, or from curriculum documents incorporating the Australian Curriculum, in others.

State and Territory Curriculum authorities support the implementation of the Australian Curriculum in schools. State and territory curriculum and school authorities present the curriculum to teachers in ways appropriate to their context, and are responsible for providing teaching and learning and assessment advice.

ACARA has also led or contributed to a number of collaborative projects designed to support teacher's understanding of new content within learning areas and use of teaching resources. Examples of these projects include:

- the Australian Government funded digital technologies project aimed at supporting the professional learning for teachers in the Digital Technologies curriculum. As part of the Australian Government's National Innovation and Science Agenda, ACARA is supporting the implementation of this project in some of Australia's most disadvantaged schools, including those in remote and very remote locations. One hundred and sixty schools with

a low ICSEA (index of community socio-educational advantage) rating have been invited to participate in the project. From July 2017, leaders and teachers from these schools will participate in workshops to support the implementation of Digital Technologies subject within their schools.

- national projects such as the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership's science and mathematics illustrations which support effective teaching and showcase best teaching practice across Australia aligned to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers.

### **National Assessment Program**

The terms of reference of this review include consideration of whether current assessment processes help to improve the achievements of regional, rural and remote schools.

ACARA delivers the National Assessment Program (NAP) at the direction of the Education Council. It includes the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), the three-yearly sample assessments in science literacy, civics and citizenship, and information and communication technology (ICT) literacy, and participation in international sample assessments.

NAPLAN is the measure through which governments, education authorities, schools, teachers and parents can determine whether, or not, young Australians are meeting important educational outcomes in literacy and numeracy. The tests provide parents and schools with an understanding of how individual students are performing at the time of the tests. They also provide schools, states and territories with information about how education programs are working and what areas need to be improved. A significant dimension of the usefulness of NAPLAN is that it enables consistent, objective national judgments about student learning to be made. It also enables reporting that can distinguish between different populations of students, broken down by geolocation classification for example.

ACARA reports on the outcomes of the NAP at a national, school and student level. Reporting information about educational outcomes allows for nationally consistent, accurate, and information about schooling to be provided to schools, parents and the community. This information and reporting can provide diagnostic information about and insights into regional or remote areas compared to the rest of Australia.

### National Reporting

The Measurement Framework for Schooling in Australia 2015 provides the basis for national reporting on the key performance measures (KPMs) of schooling in Australia, as agreed by education ministers.

This includes the relevant KPMs that are part of the National Assessment Programs. When reporting all measures are disaggregated, where possible and appropriate, by a range of factors including geographic location.

The most recent data is available on the National Report on Schooling Data Portal which provides interactive access to several national data sets for schooling relevant to the annual national report on schooling in Australia.

### My School – school level reporting

*My School* provides parents and the community with information about NAPLAN performance as well as information about school finances and school communities.

*My School* contains quality data that allow for comparison of results between schools with students from similar socio-educational backgrounds, using the index of community socio-educational advantage (ICSEA) developed by ACARA. The current version of *My School* was released in March 2017.

### Individual Student Reports (ISR) – student level reporting

Students who sit NAPLAN are provided with an ISR. Individual student performance is shown on a national achievement scale for each test. The performance of individual students can be compared to the average performance of all students in Australia.

These reports provide parents and educators with a snapshot of how students are progressing in the key areas of literacy and numeracy — individually, as part of their school community and as a nation. NAPLAN results enable parents and teachers to see how students are progressing, not just within their class but also against national standards that have been agreed upon by all state and territory governments.

ACARA is working with states and territories towards implementing NAPLAN Online which will provide more precise and faster turnaround of NAPLAN results. This will benefit teachers and parents in having diagnostic information earlier to assist students learning outcomes.

While school assessment processes include formative assessments as well as the summative assessments administered by ACARA as part of the NAP (noting that the day to day assessments conducted by teachers are more powerful in assisting student learning than summative assessments) some comments are provided with respect to the national assessment program below.

Indeed, it is in part due to NAPLAN that we know that the learning outcomes of students in remote and regional areas tend to lag behind those of students in metropolitan zones. As the discussion paper notes, the trend for 2016 was “decreasing attainment with increasing remoteness”, a trend confirmed by NAPLAN geolocation statistics within the *2016 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy Achievements in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy: National Report*. Educational disadvantage in remote and rural areas is an issue of long standing – similar commentary can be found in virtually any national or international report that disaggregates performance by geolocation classifications - and the focus of a range of government policy interventions.

As noted in the discussion paper, there are some notable exceptions to the pattern that are “against trend” and I broadly agree that further research to discover what these schools are doing “right” and how they are going about delivering and adapting the Australian Curriculum to their local environment is a worthwhile endeavor. ACARA has, for the last few years, identified schools achieving year to year gains in literacy and numeracy through analysis of NAPLAN

results. ACARA would be happy to share, in-confidence, the names of schools identified in regional, rural and remote contexts to support such research.