



15 October 2014

National Advocates for Arts Education
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**The future of *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts*:
A response to the Review of the Australian Curriculum, October 2014**

The National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) acknowledge the *Review of the Australian Curriculum – Final Report* (pp.213–220), and welcome its general statements about the value of the arts in formal school education. The NAAE also welcomes the report's emphasis on the need for greater teacher professional development in the arts.

However, we consider this review to be premature. There has been little opportunity to test the five arts subjects in the classroom, and, as we noted in our submission to the review, we 'strongly urge the review panel to enable the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* to be implemented in its present form, allowing processes of refinement to be managed by classroom teachers. It is a living document that can be refined by expert arts educators as it unfolds across the country'. Teachers need to implement, test and reflect on the current well-developed arts curricula and NAAE rejects the recommendation that 'the content of each of the arts forms needs to be restructured and re-sequenced along the lines suggested by the (two) subject matter specialists' employed by this review'.

NAAE will spend some time over the coming weeks developing a more detailed response for State and Territory Education Ministers to consider at their December meeting with Federal Education Minister Christopher Pyne. In the meantime we have major concerns about the number of contradictions, assertions and factual errors in the report, some of which are summarised below.

- '... there appear to be no other countries that have combined these five art forms into one curriculum' (para 4, p.213).
 - Even a cursory inspection reveals that *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts* does **not** combine five art forms into one curriculum: There are five stand-alone subjects, each with its own comprehensive, sequential and developmental curriculum for years F–10 in Dance, Drama, Music, Media Arts and the Visual Arts. There was early consensus and support from teachers, professional artists and academics for the five arts to be included equally as a foundational entitlement for all young Australians.
- The review panel states that '.... in most of the PISA top performing countries music and the arts have separate learning areas' (para 3, p.214).

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- In Australia as in the PISA countries, each art form is to be a separate subject. The fact that in Australia the five art forms are part of a curriculum 'learning area', just as are the sciences, should not have confused the issue.
- The authors' assertions that 'the English (arts) models are clearly the result of careful work by area experts' and that 'these [Australian] curriculum documents appear to have been drafted by experts in "education" rather than by experienced leaders in the disciplines' are inaccurate.
 - It is well documented that Australia's five arts subject curricula were in fact written by some of the most 'experienced leaders in the disciplines'. These are arts education specialists with experience in teaching their arts subjects in schools. Arts teachers' associations represented by NAAE, the Australian Major Performing Arts Group (AMPAG), generalist teachers from across the country and the Australia Council were among those consulted and invited to comment.
- Where is the 'considerable evidence that this curriculum has been cobbled together to reach a compromise among the advocates of all the five art forms'?
 - There has been a rigorous development process, detailed stakeholder consultation with State and Territory curriculum representatives, organisations such as the Australian Primary Principals' Association, and expert consideration based on the value and recognition of each art form.
 - The assertion by one subject matter adviser that the arts curriculum does not achieve the aim of providing 'a solid and sequenced foundation in the practical and intellectual skills needed for effective artistic expression' is not substantiated. ACARA conducted a transparent consultation process lasting over four years involving negotiation and settlement with hundreds of generalist primary teachers and secondary specialists across Australia, as well as professional artists. A key consideration from the Shape paper to the current arts curriculum was the development of a sequenced practical and intellectual curriculum in each of the five arts content areas which will now be further refined through the testing processes being undertaken by the state education systems.
- We do not understand references to the Media Arts 'becoming a separate standalone subject' when it is already a separate stand alone subject in *The Australian curriculum: The Arts*. We reject the statement that Media Arts does not appear to have been satisfactorily defined in educational terms. We will provide the review panel with more information.
- We are concerned about the views of the two reviewers regarding the arts within the F–2 years (recommendation 1). Research shows that frequent planned art-making activities in the early years stimulate brain development that supports accelerated learning in other learning areas. The proposal that the arts are only rich resource materials for teaching literacy and numeracy in F–2 is counter-productive. The Arts curriculum should be taught in F–2 and teachers must be trained to teach it.

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- We strongly reject the recommendation that the five arts curricula be reduced and that only two be mandated, with the other three subsumed by other subject areas. *The Australian curriculum: The Arts* already has minimal time allocations over each two-year band, a target which can be met if teacher professional learning is properly resourced and schools are allowed to adopt their own timetabling for meeting this target (e.g. sequential teaching for each arts subject over a whole term, etc.).
- The statement (p.219) that ‘most schools would be very active already, in at least four out of five of these arts areas’ is not true, a fact substantiated by at least two Federal government reviews of Music and Visual Arts education. Most state and Catholic primary schools lack effective arts education programs, mainly because the teachers have not received an education that would equip them to deliver any arts curriculum. This is why the recommendations for teacher education are so important.
- We therefore support the recommendation that ‘The considerable resourcing costs associated with delivering the arts curriculum need greater consideration, and professional development for teachers is needed as the years progress. It needs to be acknowledged that arts specialists will be needed at the advanced levels.’ In our view, the advanced level begins at Year 3.
- Discussion in the review of the cross-curriculum priorities seems to have overlooked Dr Barry McGaw’s article entitled [Cross-curriculum priorities are options, not orders](#).
- Finally, we note that the National Advocates for Arts Education – or any other arts education organisations – were not consulted in the process of writing this review. Why were arts representatives excluded when subject area associations such as mathematics, geography, science, history and social & citizenship education were represented?

Recognition for Australian innovation and leadership in Arts curriculum

Many other countries including the United States of America, Norway, China and Japan keenly watched the development of *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts*. As noted in the review (and in the NAAE submission), *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts* has received international recognition in the [International Arts Education Standards and Practices of Fifteen Countries and Regions](#), a report prepared in August 2011 by the New York-based College Board for the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards. It states:

The Australian arts curriculum could be considered as exemplary in the international context in terms of the breadth of its scope, the considerable attention to defining its own language, and the lengths it goes to in recognising the differences in abilities and learning opportunities at the different age/grade levels. It considers the importance of the arts in the roles they may play in other parts of the general curriculum: literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, cross-cultural and environmental awareness, social and ethical development.

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