

**Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications:
Inquiry into Recent ABC Programming Decisions**

Dear Senators

On 26 August 2011 the Hon Peter Garrett MP and the Hon Simon Crean MP issued a joint media release headed "Arts at the heart of new Australian Curriculum". (The release is attached at **TAB A.**)

The purpose of the release was to announce the publication of the shape paper for the arts in the new national curriculum. In it, Mr Garrett said:

"It is really important that every kid in Australia, no matter where they live or what school they attend, has the opportunity to engage with the arts, to broaden their understanding of the world through experiencing various art forms, and to have the confidence to show their creativity."

And Mr Crean said:

"The arts are fundamental to our way of life and not just for their entertainment value."

It is ironic and disturbing that the Ministers should make these statements at the same time that the ABC is making cutbacks to its arts programming.

As the Executive Director of the National Association for the Visual Arts noted in a recent letter to the Managing Director of the ABC, "the Art Nation program is one of very few offered by the ABC that reports on current national arts news and events". To reduce this offering even further can only be to the detriment of all Australians, especially students.

It is also disturbing that the head of television has said that from now on most arts programs will be sourced from overseas because they are cheaper (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 September 2011).

These actions do not help to advance the goals of the ABC Charter, to provide "innovative and comprehensive" programs "that contribute to a sense of national identity" and to "encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia".

The ABC should be funded adequately so that it has strong specialist units to produce high levels of high quality and genuinely local in-house programming in all program genres on all platforms. The ABC's focus should be quality and diversity, not ratings.

The Hon Peter Garrett MP

Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth

The Hon Simon Crean MP

Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development, Local Government

Minister for the Arts

26 August, 2011

Joint Media Release

Arts at the heart of new Australian Curriculum

The Arts will be given a central place in the new Australian Curriculum with the release today of shaping paper setting out how drama, dance, music, visual arts and media arts will be studied in all schools.

Minister for School Education, Peter Garrett, announced the release of the final Shape of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts paper at an event at the National Institute of Dramatic Arts in Sydney today.

The final shaping paper was developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) following a consultation period earlier this year.

“During that extensive consultation ACARA received a lot of feedback and suggestions about the best way to teach the Arts in our schools, including the need to maintain specialist teaching,” Mr Garrett said.

“We’ve listened to those suggestions and the final shaping paper released today reflects the views of our arts and education leaders, schools and parents.

“It is really important that every kid in Australia, no matter where they live or what school they attend, has the opportunity to engage with the arts, to broaden their understanding of the world through experiencing various art forms, and to have the confidence to show their creativity.

“The fact that the Arts curriculum is the second to be developed, after the foundation subjects of maths, science, English and history, demonstrates the Gillard Government’s commitment to fostering creativity and recognising that the Arts are at the centre of our way of life.”

Under the new curriculum, students will study all five arts subjects – dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts – from their first year of school to the end of primary school. Once in high school, students will be able to start specialising in one or more of their favourite Arts subjects. Schools will have a high degree of flexibility over implementation.

Arts Minister Simon Crean said the Arts curriculum will ensure young Australians have access to learning in the creative arts.

“That’s why the development of a renewed National Cultural Policy is vital, because the creative arts empower the individual and underpins expression, tolerance and inclusion,” he said.

“The arts are fundamental to our way of life and not just for their entertainment value.”

Mr Garrett said that ACARA will use the shaping paper to guide the writing of the Australian Arts Curriculum, which will be released for public consultation next year. Once the curriculum is completed it will be endorsed by states and territories and implemented in classrooms from 2013.