

### 3. ARTS IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM -

#### HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

##### Slicing the cake - a fifth of an eighth?

*More time for the arts?*

3.2 Good learning needs good teaching; it also needs time in the school timetable.

‘Music should be given enough time in the curriculum to learn it well enough to play or understand. Thirty minutes a week is not enough to learn mathematics, *or music.*’ (Australian Society for Music Education, ACT Chapter, submission 99 p1231)

3.3 Many submissions wanted more time for arts. None suggested where the time should be taken from. Most acknowledged the phenomenon of the ‘crowded curriculum’, but complained that arts, because of its ‘frill’ status, were the first subjects to be cut or compromised to accommodate other demands in the timetable -

‘The curriculum and timetabling decision-makers in secondary schools most often have little experience of the arts, coming from maths and science backgrounds, and carry negative attitudes which result in disadvantages to the students who wish to take arts subjects by manipulation of the timetable, such as limiting the number of lines on which a subject is offered, in order to reduce numbers of students in the department. Teachers in traditional/older subject areas believe their subjects to be more important than the arts and demonstrate this by expecting more time on the timetable...’ (Visual Arts Department, Alexandra Hills State High School, submission 71 p760)

‘Recognition of the arts as one of the key learning areas in the National Curriculum Framework for Australian Schools has been a significant development for arts education at the school level. It is the *delivery* of these policies to which we must now turn our attention. The principle of equity implicit in the National Curriculum Framework does not always translate to equity at the school practice level. The National Affiliation of Arts Educators’ National Arts Education Survey [1993] revealed that timetabling practices and elective groupings, as well as inadequate resourcing in terms of materials, spaces and personnel, produce inequitable outcomes for arts education. This was particularly evident in more isolated country regions.’ (National Affiliation of Arts Educators, submission 22 p284)

‘National curriculum policy promotes eight key learning areas in an equitable manner but definitions of equity are lacking.... On the surface, declaring the arts as one of the eight Key Learning Areas for the compulsory years of education K-10 may appear to be assigning curriculum equity and value for arts education.... [but] If a school does not actively encourage and

value the arts in real terms the timetable and school organisational structure can serve to diminish the role of the arts.... Reports and reviews into the state of arts education do not account for time as a controlling resource.’ (Dr Diana Kendall and Ms Rasa Mauragis, submission 30 p361)

### 3.4 New subjects in the ‘crowded curriculum’ take their toll -

‘The current trend in Victorian [Catholic] secondary schools is for Arts to become an elective at year 7 or 8, and broken into semester-based units. This is a concern as it creates difficulty with sequencing and coherence. The arts can be a victim of the introduction of new elements to the curriculum, of which there is an increasing number.’ (Catholic Education Office of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, submission 13 p146)

### *Time spent versus educational outcomes*

3.5 The Committee did not have the resources to survey the amount of time spent on the arts in schools. Figures on how much time subjects get seem to be much more elusive than figures on what subjects students take; yet neither is meaningful without the other.

3.6 The main secondary sources such as Education Department annual reports and the *National Report on Schooling in Australia* give no information. Submissions to the inquiry provided a few inconclusive samples. In South Australia 17 per cent of total secondary school teachers (by Full Time Equivalents) are arts teachers, suggesting, presumably, that arts lessons get about 17 per cent of the total time.<sup>1</sup> In Queensland government school arts teachers are said to be 5 per cent of total government school teachers - a figure so different from the South Australian figure as to suggest an anomaly in the data or definitions.<sup>2</sup> As for time -

‘[In Queensland] The involvement of students in arts activities in primary schools is not documented because statistics are not maintained for student involvement and teacher involvement in all of the arts subject areas....’ (Queensland Department of Education, submission 115 p1368)

3.7 A 1994 survey by Cross Arts Victoria found that most Victorian government primary schools give between 1 and 3 hours per week to arts - about 4-12 per cent of teaching time. It found that in Catholic systemic secondary schools arts had about 15 per cent of teaching time on average, compared with English 14.5 per cent and Maths 13.5 per cent. It concluded that arts education appears to have an appropriate share of teaching time (though arts programs have been high on the list of recent cutbacks); but the figures must be used with caution because the sample was small (see paragraph 1.102 and following).<sup>3</sup> According to the Victorian Ministry of Education -

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1 Government of South Australia, submission 109 p1301.

2 See APPENDIX 6 for Queensland, South Australian and Western Australian figures.

3 Cross Arts Victoria and others, submission 96 pp1116,1131. The similar profile of arts in government schools and Catholic schools, in the Cross Arts survey, seems inconsistent with the

‘[In terms of the average percentage of teaching time given to teaching within the different curriculum framework areas in Years 7-10] in general there is little change from one year to the next. At each year level English comprises 17 per cent of the total time, mathematics between 15-17 per cent, science between 10-11 per cent, the arts between 14-16 per cent, languages other than English between 1-5 per cent, and technology studies between 4-7 per cent.’ (Ministry of Education and Training [Victoria], *Curriculum Provision: Research in Victorian Education*, Carlton South, 1991, p27)<sup>4</sup>

3.8 On the other hand, a 1993 study of 15 government high schools in the Australian Capital Territory found that of the eight Key Learning Areas arts, on average, were given about 4 per cent or less of total teaching time - less than the time mandated in school policy and less than all other Key Learning Areas except Technology and Languages Other Than English.<sup>5</sup> Again, the difference from the Victorian examples is so great as to suggest an anomaly.

3.9 Commonsense suggests that the way children spend their time during the school week is a fairly basic piece of accountability information about education systems - one that is practically absent from present annual reports.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**The *National Report on Schooling in Australia* should report on the inputs to school education (such as enrolments, lesson time, teachers employed) broken down by the various subjects and Key Learning Areas and level of schooling, to allow a measure of the place of the arts (or other subject areas) in the school curriculum.**

3.10 ‘Time spent’, of course, is an input. The modern trend is to focus on measuring outcomes rather than listing inputs. An important question is what the content and outcomes of an arts education should be. The Committee has not tried to go into this question in an orderly way - for the most part this report implicitly treats ‘doing arts in school’ as a given package, and does not consider exactly what the package does or should contain. We take this approach partly because the focus of the report is on Commonwealth administrative actions, which do not extend to the details of school curriculum; partly because other more expert seems to have great difficulty with this subject. A common theme in submissions was the need for more research into the characteristics and outcomes of a good arts education. The National Board of

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finding of Ainley and others (*Subject Choice in Years 11 and 12*) that participation in Year 12 arts is about twice as high in government schools. See paragraph 1.109 and Figure 10.

4 Such averages may conceal important information, such as the balance between core subjects and elective offerings over Years 7-10 (a sample by Cross Arts Victoria on this aspect is mentioned at paragraph 1.115 above). The small *average* time given to languages other than English presumably reflects a small elective enrolment rather than an attempt to teach a language in 15 minutes per week.

5 Dr Diana Kendall & Ms Rasa Mauragis, submission 30 p361.

Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) has commented generally on the lack of systematically collected nationally consistent data on educational outcomes generally.<sup>6</sup> The *National Report on Schooling in Australia* tends to concentrate on listing inputs, no doubt partly because of the difficulty of defining outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

3.11 Issues in measuring educational outcomes include both the practical problems of co-ordinated information-gathering and the in-principle problems of deciding *what* is to be valued and measured.<sup>8</sup> Current efforts tend to concentrate on measuring literacy and numeracy: these dominate the ‘curriculum comment’ sections of education authorities’ annual reports, and (for example) are the measures of ‘overall early school achievement’ in the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) *Youth in Transition* longitudinal research project. But there is a need to ensure that a focus on literacy and numeracy does not lead to unconscious biases against the learning of other subjects, or against outcomes that are less easily measured. The Committee agrees with the submission that recommended -

‘The Annual National Report on Schooling for each State and Territory needs to... • extend the requirement that outcomes be recorded for literacy and numeracy, to a requirement they be recorded for all eight Key Learning Areas.’ (Dr Diana Kendall & Ms Rasa Mauragis, submission 30 p362)

3.12 - although, depending on the cost of information-gathering and the speed of change, it might be reasonable to design the National Report on Schooling so that the most detailed information is provided every few years rather than every year.

### **Recommendation 8**

**The *National Report on Schooling in Australia* should record educational outcomes for all Key Learning Areas, not only literacy and numeracy.**

3.13 A few relevant comments elsewhere in this report on the outcomes of arts education are -

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6 For example, Schools Council [of National Board of Employment, Education and Training], *The Role of Schools in the Vocational Preparation of Australia’s Senior Secondary Students: Final Report*, December 1994, p33.

7 Further comment on this is in the report of the Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee, *Accountability in Commonwealth-State Funding Arrangements in Education*, June 1995, p37ff. A Commonwealth/State working party co-ordinated by the Industry Commission is now engaged in a *Review of Commonwealth and State Service Provision*, which involves setting performance indicators for various government services including school education. Its first report is expected in December 1995.

8 ‘Effective pedagogy is notoriously hard to define and measure.’ Schools Council [of National Board of Employment, Education and Training], *The Middle Years of Schooling (Years 6-10) - A Discussion Paper*, Canberra, 1992, p11.

- The prime purpose of arts education for most students is to enrich their educational experience generally - to foster confident self-expression and to encourage the habits of creative and innovative thinking that may have the benefit of carrying through into other school disciplines and other areas of life. Since few will make careers in the arts, arts as vocational training, though important for these few, must be secondary on the whole (paragraph 1.63).
- A good arts education should have both process and product outcomes (relevant quotations from the submissions are at paragraphs 1.76, 2.34, 2.48, 4.48).

3.14 An extra point the Committee would like to stress here is the need for arts education to incorporate the information technology of the future. The arts will be a major part of the content of the multi-media of the future; artists must not be left behind by new technology. How to ensure this raises several challenges. New technology is already causing problems in the education system, mentioned in several submissions, of the rising cost of staying at the leading edge. Conservative attitudes in schools need to be broken down (a major reason for the need for more cross-over between teaching and professional practice, to keep teachers in touch with their profession, as discussed at paragraphs 2.75 and 2.85).<sup>9</sup>

‘Most existing arts curricula do not address the rapid technological advances within the arts, nor do they address the increasing need for training in business management, marketing, promotions and all the other skills required by visual art and craft practitioners.’ (Crafts Council of Queensland, submission 103 p1256)

3.15 The widespread community attitude that ‘the arts’ does *not* include the contents of television and radio is significant and ominous.<sup>10</sup>

3.16 It is crucial that artists, educators and policy-makers are widely aware and involved, so that the ‘information highway’ of the future expresses and strengthens our own Australian culture, rather than being driven entirely by the private market and becoming a prey to cheap imports.

‘The new services to date are being driven by the technology and not by the market.... Hundreds of unregulated video channels would be more likely to create demand for overseas services than to stimulate the market for Australian product of high production value. Without a viable and healthy domestic production industry meeting the demand for programming on broadband services, the representation of Australian cultural images and themes is at risk.’ (Australian Film, Television and Radio School, submission 57 p642)

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9 The Australian Children’s Television Foundation described the difficulty of getting its videos and kits into schools - ‘the existing distribution mechanisms in the school systems are set up for books... there is still resistance to embracing audio-visual materials.’ Submission 37 p432.

10 See paragraph 1.14. McDonnell, J.S., *Public Attitudes to the Arts 1994*, Australia Council, February 1995, p23.

3.17 In short -

‘It is content which is absolutely crucial: it is what we put onto the highway that really matters.’ (*Creative Nation - Commonwealth Cultural Policy*, October 1994, p55)

*Tendency to rely on extra-curricular activities*

3.18 More than most subjects, teaching the arts relies on extra-curricular activities and special events -

‘The hidden component of student involvement in the Arts stems from extra-curricular activities, particularly in Music, Drama and Dance... Such activities, depending on the school, its tradition and resources, can also involve a much broader group of students whose subsequent benefit from an Arts education experience is considerably heightened.’ (National Catholic Education Commission, submission 5 p87)

3.19 This reliance arises partly from ambivalent attitudes to the arts, alluded to above (from paragraph 1.75) - the arts are accepted as improving the ‘tone’ of the school, but marginalised as part of the regular curriculum. Partly, no doubt, it is the nature of the beast - a performance or exhibition, or a visit to or from a professional group, is likely to be a special event.<sup>11</sup>

3.20 Extra-curricular activities are of course important, and have their special merits in encouraging initiative and volunteerism outside the set curriculum.

‘All except four schools [surveyed] provided performances, public displays or exhibitions for parents and others using skills or products developed through arts educations... There was near universal confirmation that such activities: promote social cohesion within the group involved and in the school generally, provide personally important experiences, improve individual self esteem and that of the institution, and give the institution ‘a lift’ affecting other activities. Other comments included that they give a focus and purpose to students’ work, that they are very popular with students and parents and that they help to promote the school.’ (Cross Arts Victoria and others, submission 96 p1118)

3.21 But it is a two-edged sword: *relying* on extra-curricular activities for something which should be part of the everyday program tends to confirm the ‘outsider’ status of the arts, and leaves arts teachers exhausted and resentful -

‘Problems occur when arts educators are required to deliver learning in the same model or framework as a mathematics classroom. For example, school musical and theatrical productions; band, choral or orchestral; accompanying soloists preparing for recitals or examples are educational but

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11 This factor will be accentuated if performance is seen - incorrectly - as the main aim of the arts education program. Several submissions regretted this tendency, emphasising that a balanced program has both process and product outcomes.

not usually regarded as teaching. Arts educators recognise the value of these activities and take great efforts to make sure that students have access to them. Principals recognise the value of such activities and encourage their promotion within the extra-curricular program. A combination of timetabled arts teaching and extra-curricular expectation often results in overworked and highly-stressed teachers.’ (Victorian Schools Music Association, submission 129 p1586)

3.22 A similar issue arises in the case of the education programs run by arts institutions and performing companies.<sup>12</sup> These may include touring performances, excursion packages, and weekend or holiday workshops (either for students or as professional development for teachers). They are sometimes funded partly by government grant, often by fees and/or by cross-subsidy within the company as an investment in nurturing future audiences.<sup>13</sup> All report that their education and outreach programs are immensely popular and (where they are cross-subsidised) are limited only by their own limited resources.<sup>14</sup>

3.23 These programs are admirable, of course - but they are vulnerable -

‘Many arts institutions such as performing arts centres, museums and theatre companies provide the opportunity for children to see and experience the arts at first hand. These programs enrich arts education, and yet in times of reducing funds they are the programs that can be abandoned with little public outcry, whilst the main activity of an organisation continues....’ (Arts Action Australia Inc., submission 102 p1248)

3.24 The need for cost recovery in privately provided outreach activities raises equity issues -

‘The alternative [to a subsidised ‘schools program’, in times of reduced funding] is that children must pay, or pay more for these services, and consequently the range of children gaining access to professional arts is much reduced.... Children do not have to pay for their maths or science education in the same way.’ (Arts Action Australia Inc., submission 102 p1248)

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12 Artistic bodies with ‘schools programs’ who made submissions to the inquiry were the Australian Opera, Musica Viva, the National Gallery of Victoria, the National Institute of Dramatic Art, the Sydney Theatre Company and the Shakespeare Globe Centre Australia Inc.

13 For example, Musica Viva Australia devotes a quarter of its resources, and about half of its annual Australian Council grant (total grant \$528,944 in 1993-94) to a schools program of touring performances and support materials. The program also gets State government support and private sponsorship. The Commonwealth’s 1994 *Creative Nation* cultural policy provides \$1.2 million over 4 years to extend the program to Queensland, South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. Musica Viva, submission 85 p998. *Creative Nation - Commonwealth Cultural Policy*, 1994, p24

14 The fact that these activities are so popular seems to corroborate the burden of the submissions on the deficiencies of the regular curriculum and the deficiencies of regular inservice professional development opportunities for teachers - see paragraph 2.96 and following.

3.25 Not only the country, but also the outer suburbs of the big cities, can be relatively disadvantaged -

‘Geography is an important factor in disadvantaging young people’s access to arts and cultural experiences. This disadvantage is not only concerned with rural regions. Students in metropolitan areas may be disadvantaged in that cost of transport or hire of buses may be prohibitive, yet they are not necessarily given access to outreach programs because of their Sydney location.’ (Counterparts, submission 49 p596)

3.26 As well, here too there is a two-edged sword. Several submissions expressed the concern that privately provided ‘schools programs’ should not be the excuse for schools or education authorities to opt out of their own fundamental responsibility to provide a balanced curriculum.

‘Common cultural experiences are, of course, extremely valuable but should be seen as complementing developmental Arts programs already existing in the classroom.’ (National Catholic Education Commission, submission 5 p87)

‘Such agencies and programs may complement good arts teaching, but they should not be seen as a substitute for it...The very fact that there appears to be a growing expectation in terms of what such programs might achieve is simply another indication of our failure to address the root causes of the problem. In my view, the major responsibility for promoting the arts in schools rests with the people who work in schools...’ (Mr John Deverall, submission 6 p98)

3.27 The Committee agrees that while the one-off activities provided by such programs are invaluable in *adding* to children’s experiences in a pluralistic system, they cannot replace an ongoing arts education program *in the schools, in school time* - particularly since the budgets of such programs are minute compared with education department budgets.

*How to define fair shares?*

3.28 The Committee cannot say whether the arts, *considered as a unit*, have a fair share of school time. Quite apart from the scanty information on this matter provided to the inquiry, what a ‘fair share’ is in principle is a difficult question, depending on what level of schooling one is looking at (primary, secondary core subjects, secondary elective subjects...) and what the competition is. Does ‘fair’ mean cutting the cake into arbitrary equal slices - one eighth time for each of the eight Key Learning Areas of the National Curriculum profiles? Or should it mean ‘to each subject according to its needs’? Perhaps all Key Learning Areas ought to be taught; but perhaps some need more time than others. This requires thinking about what educational outcomes are desired from teaching a subject, and how much time they need. It requires thinking about what educational outcomes are desired from teaching *all* subjects, and how *each* subject contributes to them. There are no simple answers to these questions.



3.29 The position is complicated by the relationships between earlier and later experiences, and by different policies on the balance of core subjects and elective subjects at the different levels of schooling -

‘Arts subjects, partly because of their potential number in a crowded curriculum are among those which most commonly become elective in the middle school.’ (Cross Arts Victoria and others, submission 96 p1120)

‘Secondary school is the first opportunity for students to access specialists in the arts. They should be part of the core curriculum to the end of year 10 to compensate for this inequity.’ (Visual Arts Department, Alexandra Hills State High School, submission 71 p760)

3.30 Does fair shares with limited resources mean a good core experience for most, but fewer elective choices later? A good core experience for most, but finishing earlier? Top quality electives in later years? More time with less equipment, or vice versa - here the cost of computerisation will be a particular issue. There are many possible permutations - a simple statistic on hours spent per student per subject, averaged over the whole school, may not be very informative. Such choices must interact with views about what the real purpose of arts education at each level of education is - how much directed to vocational training, and how much directed to life experience.

3.31 A 1977 report on arts education recommended that the arts should get 20 per cent of school time in primary school and the first two years of secondary school.<sup>15</sup> The only submission to this inquiry to venture a concrete suggestion recommended 15 per cent (this is also the national goal in the United States).<sup>16</sup> Neither put forward any particular justification for the suggested figures. Others made recommendations like ‘mandate arts education as a priority curriculum area.’<sup>17</sup>

3.32 Many who made submissions looked to the recent National Curriculum, where ‘the arts’ is one of eight Key Learning Areas,<sup>18</sup> to buttress their claim for more time. The clear implication, though few stated it explicitly, is that as one of eight Key Learning Areas, the arts ought to get one eighth time - 12.5 per cent - and that this is more than they get now. Implicitly, these witnesses want to cut the cake into arbitrarily equal slices; but none put forward an argument as to why this should be regarded as most ‘fair’. The National Curriculum itself is silent on the question of how school time should be divided between the various Key Learning Areas. Obviously *some* concept of the time available must have been in the minds of the authors of the various Key Learning Area profiles, since this is a key constraint on the amount of material included - in any subject it would

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15 Education and the Arts - A joint study of the Schools Commission and the Australia Council - national report, 1977, p15.

16 Dr Gary McPherson, submission 107 p1277.

17 Australian Dance Council - Ausdance Inc., submission 79 p853.

18 The Key Learning Areas of the National Curriculum are English, mathematics, science, technology, languages other than English, health and physical education, studies of society and environment, and the arts.

be possible to write a syllabus twice as demanding, if it was the only subject to be taught in school. But the assumptions are not made explicit.

3.33 The Committee does not believe it should recommend a particular figure as a goal for arts time, for several reasons. Firstly, to mandate one eighth time would, by the same logic, mean mandating one eighth time for *every* Key Learning Area. If a school in a high immigrant neighbourhood sees a need to put above average time into English or languages, is it to be told not to? If a school is already above average in the arts is it to be told to cut back? How meaningful is an average anyway in the light of the different needs of children of different ages, and the many possible permutations of core time and elective time through the school years? One eighth time for primary classes taught by classroom generalists *and* for Year 10 classes who may have already chosen to put more of their time into other elective subjects? The first may deserve more; some of the Year 10 students may choose less. There are too many variables.

3.34 Secondly, mandating a certain time for ‘the arts’ may encourage the simplistic view of the arts as a single unit - a perception which arts educators vigorously opposed. If a school happens to have an enthusiastic art department *and* an enthusiastic music department, are they both to be pruned a little to fit in the same pot? A flexible approach is needed in recognition of the very different learning involved in the various arts subjects.

3.35 Thirdly, mandating percentages is likely to encourage a suspicious and scrupulous approach to slicing the cake which would be detrimental to cross-curriculum perspectives generally. We have argued that creative and innovative thinking should not be kept in a special box marked ‘the arts’; the same applies to the distinctive learning of *every* discipline. Cross-curriculum perspectives need all the help they can get -

‘We seem also unable to ‘break the discipline habit’. The content of the curriculum is still largely presented to students in the compartmentalised format which reflects the organisation of knowledge for university study. Attempts to break down or amalgamate these compartments are stoutly resisted, an occurrence to which any teacher of Social Studies, Environmental Studies or other cross-curricular units will testify... Young people need also to be given opportunities to discover the interconnectedness of different fields of knowledge, to range across formal subject boundaries, and to extract the elements they need to construct their own knowledge.’ (National Board of Employment, Education and Training, *The Role of Schools in the Vocational Preparation of Australia’s Senior Secondary Students: Final Report*, December 1994, pp29-30)

3.36 For many activities, particularly in the more integrated curriculum of the primary school, a rigid separation of Key Learning Areas may be meaningless. How does one classify a role play in English, or a drawing exercise in science?

*‘To each according to their needs’*

3.37 The Committee thinks that the better policy is ‘to each subject according to its needs’, and according to its distinctive contribution to the total educational experience of

the child. What this means will naturally be a matter of not only local circumstances but also never-ending debate over principles, in which arts educators must make their voices heard with other educators. It may well imply more than one eighth time for the arts, in view of their special place in learning about the important general skills of creative and innovative thinking.

3.38 In answer to this arts educators will quickly point out the problems they have in making their voices heard. The Committee acknowledges this; it is the underlying problem of attitudes which is so crucial. Changing attitudes requires a mixture of leadership and encouragement from education authorities, and generational change both among teachers (such as would flow from improved teacher training) and in the community (such as would flow from better arts teaching and better arts experiences in the memory of students now grown up). It is a long-term project and (particularly in a devolved system) it cannot be mandated.

3.39 The Committee does agree with the concerns of arts educators in two respects. Firstly, the position of arts near the bottom of the pecking order creates a detrimental instability -

‘This is one of the principal concerns of arts education: how to maintain consistency of resourcing and offering over longer term periods. Perhaps more than any other area of the curriculum it is subject to significant fluctuations in public, systemic and institutional support.’ (Cross Arts Victoria and others, submission 96 p1131)

*One subject or five?*

3.40 More importantly, the situation changes radically when each artform is considered *individually*.

3.41 The National Curriculum (considered fully from paragraph 3.59 below) treats five main artforms: dance, drama, media, music and visual arts. The documentation says, ‘...all students should experience all of the arts forms during their time at school.’<sup>19</sup> Many arts educators were agitated by the practical problems of squeezing all the artforms into the school timetable: they fear that an unthinking application of the National Curriculum framework will mean that every artform form will end up with a fifth of an eighth - 2.5 per cent, or about 40 minutes per week.

3.42 Predictably, these fears were most loudly expressed by music and visual arts groups, whose subjects have traditionally been pre-eminent in school arts. Advocates for the ‘new’ artforms (drama, dance, media) were as likely to be happy that at least they have a foot in the door. Statements like -

‘There is an increasing demand for all arts subjects to be taught in primary schools.’ (Australian Dance Council - Ausdance Inc., submission 79 p850)

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19 Curriculum Corporation, A Statement on the Arts for Australian Schools, 1994, p26.

3.43 - were made with anxiety by the first group and with hope by the second. The following comment came from a visual arts group -

‘The attempted integration of essentially dissimilar arts disciplines has led to a lowest common denominator standard of teaching and learning in many cases... Teachers are expected to teach all the areas without, in many cases, having had the opportunity to develop competence in any. Students (and teachers) either resort to their own strength area - if they have been enabled to discover it through a reasonable range of offerings - or give an overall poor to mediocre performance in all areas.’ (Australian Institute of Art Education, submission 17 p227)

*Do everything a little or a few things well?*

3.44 The Committee agrees that it is impossible to teach a skills-based arts subject with any quality in 40 minutes per week. The alternative is a ‘turn and turn about’ approach (a semester of this, then a semester of this), which was equally unpopular with all who mentioned it.

‘The current trend in Victorian [Catholic] secondary schools is for Arts to become an elective at year 7 or 8, and broken into semester-based units. This is a concern as it creates difficulty with sequencing and coherence. The arts can be a victim of the introduction of new elements to the curriculum, of which there is an increasing number.’ (Catholic Education Office of the Archdiocese of Melbourne, submission 13 p146)

3.45 Yet it is unrealistic to expect all arts subjects to be offered as core subjects in the earlier years with as much time as any one of them might take as an elective in later years - it would take half the school week. This raises serious questions about priorities. In short: is it better to do everything a little bit or a few things well?

3.46 Few submissions came to grips with this question. Most were either uncompromising advocates of ‘their’ artform (‘Crafts should be included at all levels of education’<sup>20</sup>), or agreed that students should ‘experience’ all the artforms. Statements of the second type were conspicuously vague as to what exactly they meant by ‘experience’, and how much of the school week ought to be available for the purpose.<sup>21</sup>

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20 Crafts Council of South Australia, submission 11 p132.

21 The question is also relevant to the perceived problem of the ‘fragmented curriculum’ generally: ‘While most students leaving primary school have been accustomed to a more unified curriculum taught by one or a small number of teachers, it is not unusual for them to be confronted, in secondary school, by a much larger number of teachers in the course of each week, as well as by a much larger number of curriculum subjects or units, each with its particular ‘discourse’ or ‘language’. The Schools Council was told that this situation greatly contributed to the ‘transition problems’ of students leaving primary school, including problems of regressions in learning.’ Schools Council [of National Board of Employment, Education and Training], *Five to Fifteen - Reviewing the Compulsory Years of Schooling*, Canberra, 1993, p15.

3.47 A few submissions sounded a more cautious note -

‘The extent to which primary schools in particular can provide peak experience in each of [the five National Curriculum] strands of the arts for every child in each year of schooling is questionable. Such issues as location, school size, resources and staff expertise make this extremely problematic. Current policy directions suggest that in Tasmania schools, at best, can provide peak experience in some and basic experience in all of the arts strands...’ (Government of Tasmania, submission 121 p1463)

‘It seems unlikely that schools will be able to attend to the delivery of such a complex and resource intensive curriculum component without recourse to additional funding or to the deletion of some strands of the arts curriculum. The opportunity for schools to be able to implement the curriculum at significant levels of depth and breadth is considered unlikely especially in rural areas.’ (Faculty of Education, Curtin University, submission 113 p1357)

3.48 A typical view from visual arts and music groups - speaking from their traditional position of dominance - was -

‘Some educators believe that if we are really serious about a degree of integration then the traditional model of the arts being represented in educational settings through visual art and music would be a happier compromise. This would allow for the development of reasonable competence for both teachers and students...’ (Australian Institute of Art Education, submission 17 p227)

*There are factions among arts educators*

3.49 The categorisation of five artforms in one Key Learning Area in the National Curriculum has given focus to these tensions -

‘Whereas visual art (art, craft and design) ... formerly shared equal status with the performing arts, it now competes for resources with music, drama, media and dance; that is, potentially a one-fifth share rather than one half - or more equitably one seventh share if craft and design are similarly resourced.’ (Australian Institute of Art Education, submission 17 p236)

3.50 Clearly there are factions amongst arts educators - in our evidence, mainly drama and dance groups complaining at the privileged status of music and visual arts, while music and visual arts groups point out that they still enrol the lion’s share of elective arts students; varied by some jealousy between the big two. The tone of the following is a fair example -

‘In 1993 less than 1 per cent of candidates studied classical ballet, less than 1 per cent of candidates studied dance, and 4 per cent the two unit music course. On the other hand, in the visual arts 8 per cent of candidates entered the visual arts at two unit level and an additional 7 per cent studied the visual arts at the three unit level. The visual arts should be placed as a discrete subject within the whole curriculum, not reduced to a ‘strand’ or

some other element of the 'arts' in the whole curriculum.' (Art Education Society of New South Wales, submission 84 p992)

3.51 A number of submissions, mentioning the disabilities of arts teachers in lacking collegiate support and networking opportunities, commented that in secondary schools the various arts specialists tend to be sole operators rather than a united 'arts' department

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'[Secondary] Teachers in the arts forms are often sole practitioners in their school. The recent development of secondary Arts faculties in some schools has at least brought Arts teachers together, but to achieve true faculty co-operation and functioning depends very heavily on the personalities and willingness of individuals to co-operate. There is not yet a tradition of thinking and working in Arts faculties.' (Arts Action Coalition of Western Australia, submission 35 p413)

3.52 As well, timetabling of elective subjects tends to place the different artform teachers in competition with each other -

'A problem is that many schools currently using 'line systems' [to organise offerings of elective subjects] tend to group all Arts subjects together on one line. This forces Arts subjects to compete against each other for time and space....current practices make it very difficult for Arts subjects to be supportive, co-operative and integrate in a positive way.' (Ms Maxine Conroy, submission 45 p518)

'Several schools also commented that the arts often suffers in timetable blocking for elective programs and at Victorian Certificate of Education level.' (Cross Arts Victoria and others, submission 96 p1125)

3.53 On this the anecdotes are supported by nation-wide research showing that arts subjects are the most prominent among those which students report that they would like to study but cannot, mostly because of timetable clashes or because they are not offered.<sup>22</sup>

3.54 A further source of tension is the fear that the National Curriculum will encourage school administrations to consider 'the arts' (sometimes called 'generic arts') as, somehow, a single subject - a bastard mixture (this is considered further in the following section on the National Curriculum - see p103). Arts educators cling fiercely to the special virtues of their chosen artform, and many, it seems, are eyeing others suspiciously as they try to foresee who will be the winners from curriculum reform.

3.55 It seems that the National Affiliation of Arts Educators has a hard time trying to speak for all arts educators. One visual arts group said -

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22 J Ainley and others, *Subject Choice in Years 11 and 12*, Department of Employment, Education and Training and Australian Council for Educational Research, 1994, pp xxi, 153.

‘There is growing concern among a significant number of art educators over the consequences of the Australian Institute of Arts Education’s continued participation in the National Affiliation of Arts Educators. Their concerns are wide-ranging and include:

- Grouping the arts has obvious economic convenience. However the assumption that national alliances such as NAAE speak with one voice for all the arts areas and their concerns and that equitable outcomes are possible may not be justified.
- Government has a fundamentally confused perception of the role of the NAAE. It sees NAAE as the peak body representing the various arts education associations.
- The NAAE began as a strategic alliance of arts educators combining for mutual support. It became a joint lobby group but at the same time it became a convenient focus for government policy and decision makers who appeared to perceive it as the peak funding distribution agency - and by implication policy, powerbrokers and single point of reference that unerringly represents the mind and opinion of its constituent parts - this is not so! This promotes the homogenous, reductionist and rationalist view that the arts and their complex sectors, issues and unique discursive forms are a single entity; and one that can be addressed through a single point of reference.
- This view does not address the issue that *the chief policy group for each professional association is the main voice for each area.*
- A number of AIAE members are already questioning the ‘brokerage’ or ‘middle-man’ role of the NAAE especially in a time of limited resources.... There are other AIAE members and affiliate art teachers’ associations who see the usefulness of AIAE’s continued operation through the alliance with NAAE....’ (Australian Institute of Art Education, submission 17 pp234-5)

3.56 Arts educators must face these problems squarely. It would be disastrous for arts education if the energy of arts advocates is dissipated in jockeying for position in the National Curriculum timetable stakes, when an articulate united front is necessary to argue for improved status for arts generally.

### *Conclusions*

3.57 The Committee agrees that ideally all students should ‘experience’ all artforms, especially in the earlier years of school, as the basis for making elective choices later; but we also think it is better to do a few things well than to do everything slightly. When limited resources bring the two goals into the conflict, the second should prevail. Local circumstances will be important - if a primary generalist in a small country school is good at one artform, for example, it might be better to concentrate on that rather than to demand that the teacher also teach the other artforms badly. Approaches must be flexible - it is important not to design inflexible policies with big city schools in mind, if this means that small country schools where the big designs are impractical are left worse off than before.

3.58 The Committee is mindful of the fact that arts educators, in advocating a quality education in *all* the artforms, will stress the very different nature of each artform, and the

different learning that each involves. The difference between art and music is not as simple as the difference between French and German. But in the submissions of many particular artform advocates the Committee detected a note of evangelism about the special merits of 'their' artform, which we regard as regrettable. The separate artforms should not be put into boxes, just as the arts as a whole should not be put in a box. There is higher level learning - the habit of creative and innovative thinking - which is not the sole property of any one artform, nor indeed is it the sole property of the arts generally. All arts advocates need to recognise this. They need to recognise that their colleagues in other artforms (and, ideally, other disciplines) are travelling to the same place by slightly different paths. They need to help each other.

### **The National Curriculum for schools<sup>23</sup>**

#### *The National Curriculum described*

3.59 The National Curriculum is a co-operative curriculum development project by Commonwealth and State governments. It had its genesis in the *Hobart Declaration on Schooling* (April 1989), a communiqué in which Australia's Education Ministers agreed on ten goals for the school education of Australia's children (the Hobart Declaration is reproduced as APPENDIX 4). The project has produced 16 framework documents: a 'statement' and a 'profile' in each of eight 'key learning areas'.

3.60 The eight key learning areas of the National Curriculum are:

- English
- mathematics
- science
- technology
- languages other than English
- health and physical education
- studies of society and environment
- the arts.

3.61 The Statement and Profile for the arts are subdivided by 'the five key strands of the arts' - dance, drama, media, music and visual arts - the last 'incorporating art, craft and design'.<sup>24</sup>

3.62 The Statements, it is said -

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23 The 'National Curriculum' refers to a Commonwealth-State project the main outcome of which, to date, has been a 'statement' and a 'profile' for each 'key learning area'. The phrase 'national curriculum' does not occur in these documents. In deference to State sensitivities about anything 'national', and to reflect the fact that more detailed syllabus development remains in the hands of the individual States and Territories, the Committee was urged to call this a 'national curriculum [with small letters] *framework*'. For the sake of brevity and clarity we defer to the usage of the majority.

24 Curriculum Corporation, *A Statement on the Arts for Australian Schools*, 1994, p3.



‘...provide a framework for curriculum development in each area of learning. They define the area, outline its essential elements, show what is distinctive about it and describe a sequence for developing knowledge and skills.... [they] do not provide a syllabus.’ (Curriculum Corporation, *A Statement on the Arts for Australian Schools*, Melbourne, 1994, pp iii, 1)

### 3.63 The Profiles -

‘...describe the progression of learning typically achieved by students during the compulsory years of schooling (years 1-10) in each of the areas of learning. Their purpose is two-fold: to help teaching and learning and to provide a framework for reporting student achievement.’ (Curriculum Corporation, *A Statement on the Arts for Australian Schools*, Melbourne, 1994, p1)

3.64 The content of the Profiles is a rather complicated matrix the core of which is a set of graded ‘outcomes’ with attached ‘pointers.’ The outcomes supposedly describe the ‘various skills and knowledge that students typically acquire’ at each level of schooling, while the pointers are examples of particular behaviours that are evidence that the student has achieved the outcome.<sup>25</sup>

3.65 For example: in Dance, ‘at level 6 a student: [outcome 1 -] 6.1 explores the dance of different cultures to generate and develop ideas for dance. Evident when students, for example: [pointers -] • research and reconstruct the dances of different groups; • create dances based on variations in the rhythmic structure of dances from different cultures • reproduce a dance using a different style from the original...[etc]. [outcome 2 -] 6.2 uses dance elements, skills, techniques and processes to structure dance works appropriate to chosen styles and forms....’<sup>26</sup>

3.66 As a further level of detail, work samples are given with commentary showing how they are relevant to *a few* of the outcomes.

3.67 Some sample pages from the profile for the arts are at APPENDIX 5.

3.68 The Profiles and Statements are said to be linked in this way: ‘The profiles show the typical progression in achieving learning outcomes, while statements are a framework of what might be taught to achieve these outcomes.’<sup>27</sup>

3.69 The National Curriculum documents are now in the hands of the States and Territories to be used as a resource, subject to their own policies and priorities, in making more detailed curriculum documents.<sup>28</sup>

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25 Curriculum Corporation, *The Arts - a Curriculum Profile for Australian Schools*, 1994, p7.

26 *ibid*, p108.

27 Curriculum Corporation, *A Statement on the Arts for Australian Schools*, 1994, p1.

28 A useful brief commentary on national curriculum initiatives (among other things) to 1992 is in Dr G Speedy/National Board of Employment, Education and Training, *Curriculum Initiatives*, Canberra, 1992.

*Some doubts*<sup>29</sup>

3.70 The Committee has some doubt about whether all this is quite as logical as is made out. For example, the ‘outcomes’ and ‘pointers’ (supposedly understandings and behaviours respectively) seem to be mostly similar types of statement (starting with words like ‘explore...create...identify....use....’) only at different levels of detail: as well as being thought of as understandings and behaviours respectively, they could probably both be thought of as understandings or both as behaviours, only at different levels of detail. The pointers seem to omit any consideration of the crucial matter of whether the action that evidences the outcome is being done *well* or *badly* (this was a key objection in several submissions, considered below). The pointers, it is stressed, are only examples; but whether the higher level ‘outcomes’ are *also* only examples, or are intended to exhaust a student’s *possible* knowledge and understanding of the subject, is unclear. And we do not quite understand how the arts Statement is a ‘framework of *what might be taught to achieve the outcomes*’, since most of the Statement consists of dotpoints (‘use...explore....reflect....express...’) of a similar type, and a similar level of generality, to the pointers in the Profile.

3.71 We note also that the key National Curriculum documents - the Statements and Profiles - nowhere state clearly what the *purpose* of the whole exercise is - that is, the particular purpose of *national* documents overlaying the constant evolution of educational theory and curriculum development which has previously occurred at State level. National consistency considered narrowly and pragmatically, so that students can transfer interstate without inconvenience? A new and better curriculum, co-ordinated nationally to economise the development costs? Or a desire to shape a different *type* of curriculum, one more focused on measurable outcomes? A brief comment in each Statement mentions only the first two (‘a national collaborative effort... to make the best use of scarce curriculum resources and to minimise unnecessary differences in curriculum between States’<sup>30</sup>); many arts educators seem to fear the third.<sup>31</sup>

#### *The concerns of arts educators*

3.72 But let the arts educators speak for themselves. A few were cautiously optimistic about aspects of the National Curriculum. Among these the main motive seems to be a pragmatic desire to take advantage of the arts’ status as a Key Learning Area to press for improved standards -

‘Recognition of the arts as one of the key learning areas in the National Curriculum Framework for Australian Schools has been a significant development for arts education at the school level. It is the *delivery* of these

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29 The following discussion, apart from the second paragraph of this section, is with reference to the Statement and Profile *for the arts*. The Committee has not tried to compare these with the documents for other Key Learning Areas.

30 Curriculum Corporation, A Statement on the Arts for Australian Schools, 1994, p58.

31 ‘The profiles are designed to assist in the improvement of teaching and learning *and to provide a common language for reporting student achievement.*’ [emphasis added] Curriculum Corporation, *The Arts - a Curriculum Profile for Australian Schools*, 1994, p iii.

policies to which we must now turn our attention.’ (National Affiliation of Arts Educators, submission 22 p284)

‘The National Statement and Profile have provided a tool for consistency, but more work needs to be done to refine the documents and develop support material.’ (Australian Society for Music Education Inc., submission 118 p1401)

‘The recent publication and trialling of Student Outcome Statements for the arts has the potential to change this situation [teachers’ lack of confidence]. On their own, however, Student Outcome Statements will achieve little without a program to meet the needs of primary teachers for professional development.’ (Western Australian Association for Drama in Education Inc., submission 83 p983)

3.73 Some were optimistic about the fact that the National Curriculum explicitly recognises five main artforms. This tended to be the view of those who regret the historic dominance of visual arts and music over drama and dance -

‘The working party [convened to make this submission] applauds the fact that the National Curriculum has recognised five arts as being worthy of study as distinct disciplines and feel that the implementation of this in both primary and secondary areas of education will lead to a greatly enriched education experience for all students.... The working party believes that these curriculum documents are good examples of their type, and that if they were placed in the hands of teachers who had received an appropriate pre-service education the resulting arts education experiences would benefit students.’ (Queensland University of Technology, submission 23 p292)

3.74 Some noted the positive potential for breaking down barriers between the different levels of schooling -

‘There is a need to ensure that the bands of schooling have articulated and effective links. The introduction of frameworks such as Student Outcome Statements is a positive move. In support of this consistency, there should be research and active support for projects that assist teachers in primary schools and secondary schools to work collaboratively.’ (Western Australian Association for Drama in Education Inc., submission 83 p987)

‘One of the positive aspects may be the pressure to break the barriers set up during the transition between primary and secondary levels of education. However, the development of specific levels of achievement in Visual Arts education is fraught with major pitfalls, especially as they are not based on any acceptable standards or levels determined by necessary research.’ (Mr Robert Waters, submission 26 p315)

3.75 But most arts educators, while approving the inclusion of the arts as a Key Learning Area, had other concerns about the National Curriculum. Their concerns may be divided broadly into principled criticisms of the concept and methodology, and fears, from those who already see themselves as being near the bottom of the pecking order,

that *in practice* the National Curriculum will give school administrators further excuses to keep them there.

*‘...one piece in a giant industrial chess game’?*

3.76 Submissions made a number of criticisms of principle. They start with the uncompromisingly political, for whom the National Curriculum, with its mechanistic emphasis on standards, is designed to make school education simply ‘one piece in a giant industrial chess game’ -

‘Curriculum change in the arts currently being implemented appears to be a politically motivated rather than an educational issue.... The discourse is economics, not human personal values. The power of the Federal purse has reinstated the national curriculum and the language is in terms of national competencies, that is, industry standards.’ (Crafts Council of Queensland Ltd, submission 103 p1251)

‘The motivation for curriculum reform has arisen from a political agenda... driven by the overarching aim of improving the competitiveness of industry and defining more clearly the pathways between education and the workforce.... The language used in the reports of these committees [Carmichael, Finn, Mayer] is that of competencies, and their aims are clearly directed towards establishment of national competency standards for education in industry defined terms.... School education is only one piece in a giant industrial chess game.’ (Prof. Doug Boughton, submission 14 p159-60)

‘The educational climate in recent years has promoted strategies of control and accountability through competencies and outcomes. This approach weakens the intrinsic values, the fluidity and complexity of subject fields. Complementing this shift from understanding to generic competencies has been the removal of subject based consultancy support in both the [New South Wales] Department of School Education and the Board of Studies. Instead, consultancy has mutated to become the marketeering of the competencies approach through the implementation of the Profiles - despite the robust critique of their values and appropriateness.’ (Art Education Society of New South Wales, submission 84 p993)

### *Standards and outcomes*

3.77 Seen in this light, the essential feature of the National Curriculum is the establishment of clearly defined standards and outcomes. Many submissions saw this as totally inappropriate in the case of arts, because of their creative and unpredictable element -

‘First we need to examine the question, ‘What is a standard?’....For complex performances or objects, the judgement of standards has to do with matching an observed phenomenon against an ideal or exemplar... Consider a dog show in which dogs of a particular breed have to be rated by the judge against the ideal for that class. The judge’s task is to determine the degree to which the observed animals match the image of the ideal, held in the judge’s

head.... In visual arts education, and I refer particularly to studio work, the judgement task is far more complex since the work being judged is expected to reflect a degree of original thought... It is not possible, nor would it be appropriate to pre-define an ideal performance or icon against which student's work is matched to determine level of achievement.... the art teacher's problem is compounded by the fact that, when looking at student artworks, they are not looking only at one breed of dog. They may be confronted with all manner of dogs, cats, birds, cows, giraffes, and hopefully many new animals that have never been seen before - about which they have to make judgements.... We should, as arts educators, be much less concerned with what is typical student performance, and much more concerned with the idiosyncratic.' (Prof. Doug Boughton, submission 14 pp164,171)

'Each level is a standard that the *average* student may attain. As the judgement of artwork is original thought and the idiosyncratic elements of the maker, the profiles do *not* provide an appropriate criterion for assessment.' (Crafts Council of Queensland, submission 103 p1252)

3.78 This raises the next, closely related concerns: firstly, that standards demean the professional judgment of teachers -

'Teachers whose recognition as good teachers was once based on their 'mastery' of a subject are converted into ones who gain approval by being good at profiling average students at various levels in their subject.... The mapping of a student's profile in a subject depends upon the making of judgements similar in complexity to those made in a medical diagnosis. Pointers introduced into this complex process disempower teachers and pigeonhole students in the arts into rigid stereotypes. 'She's got to fit somewhere!' I can imagine principals insisting.' (Dr Neil Brown, submission 15 p180)

'Standards frameworks are predicated upon a mistrust of art teachers and will contribute to a deskilling of the profession.' (Prof. Doug Boughton, submission 14 p167)

3.79 - and secondly, that standards will be used inappropriately to assess the *performance* of teachers -

'It would be naive indeed to believe the profiles will not in the future be used as an instrument for reporting student progress, for comparisons between schools and states, and later for the assessment of teacher competence. To provide bureaucrats with an instrument such as this set of profile statements, expecting them not to be used to technocratic ends, is akin to providing an alcoholic with a bottle of whisky then being surprised by the drunken outcome.' (Prof. Doug Boughton, submission 14 p162)

3.80 Standardised 'generic' pointers, it was feared, will encourage standardised behaviour -

‘There is a real concern that national profile outcomes and pointers used on their own, without other outcomes involving reference to subject specific content or process, may increasingly act as a closed system on student achievement... In adopting this approach little reference will be maintained with respective fields. ‘Standards’ set by outcomes, pointers and work samples will become readily anachronistic and encourage student performances to be of a particular type in a subject where students can be ‘coached’ to perform in a certain way. From this position the diversity of individual response may be suppressed, discouraged, or left unexplored...’ (a confidential submission, quoted with permission)

3.81 The emphasis on measurable behaviour as outcome was a concern to those who pointed out that in the arts the process of coming to understanding is as important as the product (similar concerns were expressed in relation to the Mayer Key Competencies, considered in chapter 4) -

‘My quarrel with the profiles as a framework of standards is that it represents instrumental outcomes instead of educational outcomes... take for example two of the outcomes expressed in the visual arts strand... “Level 4: *selects, combines and manipulates images, shapes and forms using a range of skills, techniques and processes*” [see Appendix 5].... These are instrumental outcomes which are easily identified and reflect conventionally understood elements of art works. They do not necessarily have anything to do with the quality of the student’s artistic expression, and need not necessarily be present to determine good student artwork at a given stage of development. If we return to the dog-show [see quote at paragraph 3.77], these kinds of outcomes equate with the requirement that a dog should possess four legs, a tail and an appropriate head...’ (Prof. Doug Boughton, submission 14 p165)

‘An artwork’s resemblance to an average pointer tells nothing about the quality of choice and treatment in a student’s performance since in the arts the same pointer could serve under different values at every level.’ (Dr Neil Brown, submission 15 p178)

3.82 In this environment the fair assessment of creative work becomes problematic, and there is a fear that this will bias assessors to value what is easily measurable (or easily comparable with other disciplines) above what is not. The following tale was *not* put forward as a parable for the future of the National Curriculum, but it may well be seen as that -

‘As Queensland does not use a system of public examinations a review system has been developed which is administered by the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies. Unfortunately in its search for levels of comparability and accountability similar to those achieved in public examinations the review system has developed a culture of mistrust in teachers, particularly in teachers’ ability to make objective judgements of student’s work. Arts education, because of its traditional association with subjectivity, personal expression and creativity, has been a special target of the review system with the unfortunate result that, in some disciplines,

students are required to submit written evidence of the quality of their creative work. There are many problems in this model, most of which result in the student being given less credit than he/she deserves, because it is usual that the creative work is of a higher standard than the writing.’ (Queensland University of Technology, submission 23 p293)

### *Five subjects = one Key Learning Area?*

3.83 Though most submissions generally approved including the arts as a Key Learning Area of the National Curriculum, the way the artforms are grouped together aroused not only pragmatic fears (considered further below) but also principled criticisms. The first criticism arises from the way in which the same set of outcomes, with a little cutting and pasting, has been used for all the artforms (outcome 3.1: ‘explores ideas and feelings through *dance works*’; outcome 3.6: ‘explores ideas and feelings through *drama*...’ - see APPENDIX 5). Some thought that this tends to falsify the different learning involved in the different artforms -

‘This approach can discredit practices and content which are particular to artforms. The profile acts to ‘smooth out’ differences and in so doing undermines the knowledge base of subjects.... The generic approach in the profile also implies that experiences in any of the arts subjects are interchangeable and may be transferable from one subject to another. For example, to explore ideas and feeling in Drama (level 4) is meant to be like exploring ideas and feelings in Music. This is certainly not the case... This approach, in time, may lead to a deskilling of teachers in terms of their understanding of subjects...’ (a confidential submission, quoted with permission)

3.84 A consequential fear is that this ‘generic’ approach, by de-emphasising the particular skills of each artform, will leave school leavers insufficiently skilled to go on to tertiary arts courses -

‘The National Curriculum for the Arts has a quasi-theoretical content which will eventually see students admitted to tertiary institutions lacking the basic skills upon which they may build a conceptual and theoretical understanding of the discipline.’ (Faculty of Art and Design, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, submission 31a p378)

‘Secondary schools also seem to be developing a system of very generalised visual art and craft education. In turn this means that students are losing the ability to discriminate between art forms, and do not have the opportunity to define and aim for a preferred area of practice. The end result is one where students lack the knowledge and experience to select electives in the visual arts and crafts and therefore do not continue with specialised art education in their later secondary and tertiary years. This, coupled with the lack of professional guidance for students interested in pursuing a career in the visual arts and crafts, will eventually mean a decrease in tertiary demand from students which in turn will lead to a cut in resources allocated to the arts departments.’ (Craft Australia, submission 66 p721-2)

3.85 At this point the Committee notes the comment of the Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools (formerly National Council of Heads of Art and Design Schools) -

‘At present little co-operation exists between arts teacher educators and those responsible for professional Art and Design education at University level. The recently completed National Curriculum Statement and Profiles have been developed without the participation of the major sector interests represented by NCHADS and National Council of Heads of Music Schools. There is a need to develop strategies to improve this situation as obviously secondary school curriculum is significant in young people gaining the pre-requisite experience for entry to University Art and Design education.’  
(Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools (formerly National Council of Heads of Art and Design Schools), submission 53 p627)

3.86 The second criticism of principle about the grouping of the arts as a Key Learning Area concerns the way this structure puts the arts in their box - the box with frills - to the detriment of cross-curriculum perspectives -

‘Engagement with an arbitrary collection of other art practices has served to perpetuate the tired cliché of the creative-expressive individual [who is contrasted with ‘ordinary’ people]...’ (Dr Neil Brown and Ms Penny McKeon, submission 15a p193)

‘The rationalisation of the arts into a key learning area... marginalises the arts into separate territory - one that is perceived to be essentially concerned with ‘creative’, ‘expressive’ and ‘aesthetic’ interests. A more rigorous consideration of the arts would reveal, for example, stronger links with the humanities and social sciences, which are difficult to sustain under this framework of difference. The structurally determining nature of the key learning area framework may act to reduce innovations within subject fields by suggesting that the arts are essentially the same [as each other] but different [from other subjects], and must develop accordingly.’ (a confidential submission, quoted with permission)

3.87 The National Curriculum Statement on the arts does make reference to the need for cross-curriculum perspectives;<sup>32</sup> the point of the complaint is that the *structure* of the documents as a whole works the other way.

3.88 We turn to the more pragmatic fears about the arts as a Key Learning Area in the National Curriculum. The first may be characterised as the ‘jockeying for position’ stance. This came mostly from visual arts groups fearing the loss of their traditional hegemony, and craft/design advocates concerned at being left out of the list of five ‘key’ artforms (dance, drama, media, music, visual arts).

‘The National Curriculum initiatives and the articulation of the eight Key Learning areas has meant that the position of (visual) ART education has

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32 Curriculum Corporation, *A Statement on the Arts for Australian Schools*, Melbourne, 1994, p8.



been challenged in the Queensland school curriculum.’ (Queensland Art Teachers Association, submission 120 p1457)

‘The concerns here include that the performing arts have been allocated three separate strands (dance, drama and music) and the visual arts represents only one strand with three fields (visual arts, craft and design).’ (Crafts Council of Queensland Ltd, submission 103 p1254)

‘Why have the sub sectors of design and the crafts in the visual arts not been given individual status as have the sub sectors of music and dance in the performing arts? Since the Government in its Building a Competitive Australia statement of 1990 specifically identified the critical importance of design in enhancing international competitiveness, it would be a folly to ignore this discrete strand in a national curriculum.’ (Dr Neil Brown, submission 15 p182)

3.89 The National Curriculum Statement on the arts makes no very clear statement as to why the division into five ‘key’ artforms was so chosen, saying only -

‘This document identifies dance, drama, media, music and the visual arts (incorporating art, craft and design) as the five key strands of the arts. Although this is not a complete listing of arts forms, or strands, the five are widely accepted as major forms of arts activity and are representative of the arts both in the schools and in the wider community.’ (Curriculum Corporation, *A Statement on the Arts for Australian Schools*, Melbourne, 1994, p3)

3.90 The documents do make the obvious point that the division into five key artforms is to some extent arbitrary, and should not be seen as a constraining device -

‘The arts Statement outlines the five arts forms of dance, drama, media, music and visual arts as the arts form strands. This profile does not group the arts forms together as visual and performing arts, nor does it specifically outline arts experiences that may draw on several arts forms. These are options open to systems, schools and teachers. The statement and profile set out to accommodate a wide range of approaches to arts program planning, making it possible to focus if desired on particular aspects of the strands or their organisers. For example, systems may choose to concentrate upon design as an aspect of the visual arts. If so, schools may adjust the pointers to accommodate the focus on the design aspects of the visual arts strand.’ (Curriculum Corporation, *The Arts - a Curriculum Profile for Australian Schools*, Melbourne, 1994, p2)

3.91 But again, the complaint is that the large print sends out the wrong messages, and the small print caveats will be easily forgotten. This is a theme repeated in discussion of the Mayer Key Competencies in chapter 4.

3.92 The second pragmatic concern was that the easy concept of ‘the arts’ as a unit will encourage administrators to rationalise offerings. We do not think anyone is suggesting that school principals will come to believe that art and music are somehow

the same subject; rather, the concern is that they will have to compete for a rationalised 'arts' slot in the timetable in a way that will make it impossible to teach a quality program in either -

'The National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) and academics in the visual arts share the belief that the National Curriculum in the Arts represents a significant attack on the breadth and depth of the visual arts as a field of cultural activity... there is strong evidence to show that the umbrella term of the 'arts' in the National Curriculum has been used by education authorities already as a way of rationalising and thus diluting the depth of arts subjects offered in educational programs. This is despite an insistence in the document that the individual arts retain their separate status.' (Dr Neil Brown, submission 15 p180)

3.93 This is discussed further from paragraph 3.40.

#### *The top-down nature of the National Curriculum*

3.94 A grievance underlying many submissions was concern about the 'top-down' nature of the National Curriculum -

'A short time-frame is also a wonderfully effective bureaucratic tool that can be used to ensure large-scale change is implemented with a minimum of opposition. Before busy professionals have become aware of what is afoot, the deed is done! I quote in support of this the proceedings from the forum of angry and frustrated arts educators held at the University of NSW in May last year [Art Education Forum Debate: The Case Against the National Curriculum Profile Statement for the Arts: A Debate with Sam Weller. University of NSW, May 1993]. A motion was passed at that meeting to halt the development of the National Curriculum subject to more widespread and appropriate consultation. The mood of that meeting was that teachers felt themselves to be largely disconnected with the process.' (Prof. Doug Boughton, submission 14 p161)

'The National Curriculum movement has not occurred as a spontaneous response by educationalists to some educational imperative of the field. Rather it is the dutiful response by an educational community to economic demands for control and predictability in the skills of the labour force. In the case of visual arts education, the dutiful response has turned into a struggle for survival.' (Dr Neil Brown, submission 15 p185)

3.95 One of our submissions described the collapse of the 1985 New South Wales music syllabus over a period of six years as it was gradually undermined by diminishing resources, support staff, confidence and interest at the local level.<sup>33</sup> Could this be a parable for the future of the National Curriculum if it is not seen to belong to classroom teachers?

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33 Australian Society for Music Education Inc., submission 118 p1408-9.

‘AUSMUSIC’s experience is that it is very difficult to implement core curriculum at a national level. It is better for music frameworks to be developed and implemented from the grassroots, rather than imposed from a national body.’ (AUSMUSIC, submission 75 p786)

‘There is a long history of the failure of curriculum reform because it has not been intimately connected with teacher development.’ (Dr G Speedy/ National Board of Employment, Education and Training, *Curriculum Initiatives*, Canberra, 1992, p46)

3.96 A recent study by the Centre for Applied Educational Research at the University of Melbourne commented -

‘If policy makers and principals want to improve education, they have to aim their reforms at the classroom rather than at the whole school or system, Professor Hill said. Most fashionable reforms which dominate the current education debate - such as giving principals the power to appoint their own staff, or changing curriculum - “stop short at changing what happens beyond the classroom door.”’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 May 1995, p3)

### **Conclusions on the National Curriculum**

*It’s too soon to tell*

3.97 The effects of the National Curriculum project are only just beginning to flow through to schools, as the States and Territories further develop the ‘framework’ provided by the national Statements and Profiles. It is inappropriate to be too critical until results can be seen. The inclusion of the arts as one of the eight Key Learning Areas is undoubtedly a positive step.

3.98 In response to the pragmatic fears - that the National Curriculum will encourage school principals to dilute arts offerings - the Committee suspects that the National Curriculum will be good or bad for the arts more according to pre-existing attitudes within individual schools than because of its own details. The National Curriculum itself does not try to mandate any particular amount of time for particular subjects - that is left for local decision. Where schools don’t value the arts, no doubt they will continue not to. Where they do value the arts, nothing in the National Curriculum forces them not to. The recognition of the arts as a Key Learning Area has the potential to influence attitudes positively although, as many submissions stressed, this by itself changes nothing until it is made concrete in the form of better trained teachers, better professional development and adequate time in the school week.

*But there are serious concerns*

3.99 However the Committee does share many of the concerns over matters of principle about the way the National Curriculum may affect arts education. In particular, we agree that an over-emphasis on measurable outcomes and *typical* achievements may be detrimental to a fair recognition of the immeasurable and unpredictable element - the

creative and expressive element - in arts learning.<sup>34</sup> The comparison with the dogshow quoted above (paragraph 3.77) is apt and telling. We agree that the arts should be concerned with the original more than with the typical.

3.100 The Committee shares the concern that the structure of the National Curriculum documents may encourage teachers to coach observable actions rather than look to deeper understanding. It may be that in some subjects action *does* prove understanding - for example, if a student produces the correct answer to a mathematical problem, it might be reasonable to take this as proof that the student has understood and traversed a particular logical path. The tip of the iceberg - the solution - is clear enough evidence that the rest of the iceberg lies underneath.<sup>35</sup> With arts nothing is so clear - firstly, because differing personal judgments intervene, and secondly because there is no single correct answer. In the arts, providing the student has basic skills necessary for the artistic goal in view, success in using those skills creatively, expressively and communicatively is not right or wrong like a mathematical solution, but lies on a continuum from 'more successful' to 'less successful'. The 'pointers' in the National Curriculum arts profile - examples of a student's artistic actions that supposedly prove that an 'outcome' has been achieved - omit any reference to whether the artistic action is more or less successful. As put, they are only half the story.

#### *How to 'teach' creative thinking?*

3.101 The problem with the arts in the National Curriculum may be generalised as this fundamental and paradoxical question, which is relevant to all disciplines, not just the arts: how does one *teach* creative and innovative thinking?

3.102 A similar problem arises over teaching initiative and enterprise - teaching people to be 'self-starters' - likely to become more important in the future economy as people change jobs or careers more often, and are more likely to mix full-time work, part-time work, paid employment and self-employment during their lives. The following comment on teaching 'enterprise' is probably equally relevant to the creative and innovative thinking which is necessary to turn enterprising aims into successful actions -

'Unlike knowledge and skills, I would say enterprise cannot be taught, but only learned, and thus requires not new curricula but new thinking about the methods of teaching and training we use.' (Kearney, Paul, *Training Through Enterprise: A Practical Introduction Using Enterprise Briefs*, Artemis, Tasmania 1991; quoted in National Board of Employment, Education and Training, *The Role of Schools in the Vocational Preparation of Australia's Senior Secondary students: Final Report*, December 1994)

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34 An outcomes-based framework is *not* necessarily inappropriate for the part of arts learning that consists of acquiring physical skills and techniques. But the two interact closely: an important part of learning in the arts is learning about the relationship between technique and creativity.

35 The comparison should not be pressed far. The Committee certainly does not want to characterise mathematics as mechanical. There may be several paths to the solution, some showing a deeper understanding than others. But probably, as a generalisation, the links are closer, and more *observable*, in mathematics than in arts.

3.103 The Committee has a concern that the National Curriculum, with its simplistic focus on ‘behaviour as evidence of learning’, and *its own* fairly rigid structure carrying the temptation to use it as a blueprint, will not be conducive to the type of creative thinking in teachers and administrators that is necessary to elicit creative thinking from students. This comment applies to all disciplines; but it is likely to be most relevant to the arts because of the explicit emphasis on creative and innovative thinking which is traditional in the arts. It was put to us that some State education systems *are* tending to use the National Curriculum documents as a blueprint, and that the originating concept of the ‘framework’ is being lost.<sup>36</sup>

3.104 The Committee considers that further development of national curriculum initiatives at State level should adapt to the particular needs of each discipline and should pay particular regard to the creative and unpredictable element of arts learning which cannot easily be accommodated in a framework of pointers and outcomes. The Commonwealth and the States should monitor the implementation of the curriculum reform to assess the extent to which the fears raised above are being realised in practice, and should devise appropriate pre-emptive and remedial strategies. Such strategies must include appropriate professional development for teachers which addresses the particular needs of the various disciplines. Inservice professional development courses which are addressed at all teachers and focused on the National Curriculum as a generality (‘how to assess students’ outcomes’, perhaps) are unlikely to answer the concerns of arts teachers, and unlikely to assuage teachers’ sense of being disconnected from curriculum reform.

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36 at a private briefing for the Committee, 29 May 1995.

**Recommendation 9**

**In any further consideration or development of the National Curriculum documents the purpose of education must be clearly and strongly asserted, with a well-rounded and liberal education being the benchmark, so that education will be an effective instrument by which children become socialised, participating, informed and creative adults.**

**Recommendation 10**

**Further development of national curriculum initiatives at State level should adapt the National Curriculum framework to take account of the particular needs of each discipline, paying particular regard to the creative and unpredictable element of arts learning which cannot easily be accommodated in a framework of pointers and outcomes.**

**Recommendation 11**

**In light of this the Commonwealth and the States should monitor the implementation of national curriculum initiatives to assess whether changes are relatively disadvantaging the arts, and should devise pre-emptive or remedial strategies.**

**Recommendation 12**

**Professional development programs for teachers relating to national curriculum initiatives, including those funded by the Commonwealth's National Professional Development Program, should pay due attention to the particular problems and needs of each discipline in implementing national curriculum initiatives.**