

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment - Education

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Budget Estimates 2014-2015**

Agency - Australian Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting Authority (ACARA)

Department of Education Question No. ED0302_15

Senator Wright asked on 4 June 2014 , Hansard page 56

Question

Draft report of curriculum review

Senator WRIGHT: So how many times have you met with the reviewers, Dr Donnelly and Professor Wiltshire? Mr Randall: Once. Senator WRIGHT: That was in May? Mr Randall: Yes. We have provided some advice to them. I think they have written to us in the lead-up. There are two occasions—I can check—we have written to them providing information. Senator WRIGHT: Was one of those occasions after you met with them in May? Mr Randall: One of them was a follow-up, yes. Senator WRIGHT: Can you confirm, when you can, how many times you have written to them? Mr Randall: I think that last time, in the follow-up to last Senate estimates—I would need to check—one of the senators asked us for a copy of the correspondence. That was provided. I could check now who it was. But we did provide, I think after we last met, the copies of the correspondence. Senator WRIGHT: Thank you for that.

Answer

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority has provided the following response:

Professor Barry McGaw AO, Chair, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority received a letter dated 22 January 2014 from the reviewers, Professor Wiltshire and Dr Donnelly. The letter requested information on the approach used by ACARA in developing the Australian Curriculum. Professor McGaw responded on 4 February 2014. Copies of both letters were previously supplied in response to ED0411_14.

On 21 March, Professor McGaw wrote to the reviewers enclosing ACARA's submission to the Australian Curriculum Review. The letter is attached (Attachment 1), while the submission is available here - http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/resources/STATEMENT_Review_of_the_Australian_Curriculum_20140324.pdf

Professor McGaw wrote to the reviewers on 24 April in advance of a proposed meeting to raise possible topics for discussion. The reviewers responded on 29 April. Copies of both letters are attached (Attachment 2).

On 28 April, following extensive media coverage of the Daniel Morcombe Child Safety Curriculum, Professor McGaw provided the reviewers with some information about analysis undertaken by ACARA of coverage of child safety in the Australian Curriculum (Attachment 3).

Professor McGaw, the CEO of ACARA and the GM, Curriculum, met with the Australian Curriculum Review Panel on 1 May 2014. Following that meeting, Professor McGaw wrote to the reviewers on 21 May 2014. A copy of this letter is attached ([Attachment 4](#)).

The reviewers responded on 23 June seeking some further information. A copy of this letter is attached ([Attachment 5](#)).

Attachment 1 - 21 March, Professor McGaw to the reviewers. ACARA's submission to the Australian Curriculum Review is provided as a separate document.

Professor Ken Wiltshire AO,
Dr Kevin Donnelly
Australian Curriculum Review Panel
C/O Department of Education
GPO Box 9880 Canberra ACT 2601

21 March 2014

Our ref: D14/5696

Dear Professor Wiltshire and Dr Donnelly,

LETTER FROM THE ACARA BOARD CHAIR – REVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

The school curriculum expresses a nation's aspirations for its next generations. The curriculum must strike a balance between developing young people's understanding of their national history and culture and preparing them for a future that is increasingly global and largely unpredictable.

What constitutes essential school learning will always be contested because behind it is a debate about what knowledge is of most worth. Curriculum stirs the passions – and that is a good thing. Curriculum is never completed. It is never perfect and should always be a work in progress. As responsible citizens, we are obliged to provide our future generations with the best possible learning opportunities and outcomes.

ACARA is mandated to set high expectations for what is taught to students in schools throughout the country. I am convinced the vigorous processes we have adopted, drawing on our country's best expertise and talent, have allowed us to establish a curriculum that is high-quality.

In developing the Australian Curriculum, ACARA consulted widely, including with organisations and individuals beyond the field of education. The advice ACARA received was extensive and varied greatly. To make our decisions clear, we commissioned independent analysis and published reports on the consultation together with accounts of what we would do with the advice we received.

We started with a blank page for each learning area. We did not seek to put together a national curriculum from existing state and territory curricula. For each area we began with a broad outline of what should be provided and how it should be sequenced from Foundation to Year 12. Those outlines enabled us to have real discussions about the big picture before getting down to the detail.

The curriculum detail is expressed in content descriptions and achievement standards, and in them we set high expectations for all students, among other things, by comparing our drafts with the curricula in high-performing countries. At the same time, we were mindful of leaving space and flexibility for jurisdictions, schools and teachers to tailor the curriculum to meet the needs of their students.

The overall structure of the curriculum was determined by the council of Commonwealth, state and territory ministers of education and the successive remits they gave us. We began with a request to develop English, mathematics, science and history, but the ministers soon added geography, the arts and languages other than English. Ministers then asked us to propose how the whole curriculum could be developed. We took the shape of

the whole from the Ministerial Council's 2008 *Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians*, which provides clear directions about the priorities that need to be addressed in a national curriculum.

In their *Melbourne Declaration*, ministers also proposed that a national curriculum provide for students' development of general capabilities of the kind that business and industry leaders have called on the education system to deliver. Ministers also wanted more attention to be given to three issues that have become the cross-curriculum priorities in the Australian curriculum.

We did not want to create new subjects to deal with the general capabilities and the cross-curriculum priorities. We judged that all could be dealt with, where relevant, through the discipline-based subjects. There have been some suggestions that we have proposed it be done the other way around, with the subjects being taught through the capabilities and the priorities. We certainly have not.

Currently, F–10 English, mathematics, science and history are being implemented by schools in Australia. As more learning areas and subjects are introduced, ACARA and state and territory authorities will monitor issues around teacher and student workload.

Curriculum is only one part of the story of school learning. The curriculum comes alive in the hands of teachers who make expert decisions about the learning experiences each student needs to succeed. In Australia, the curriculum is also facilitated by state and territory curriculum and school authorities.

An Australian Curriculum means that no matter where students live they now have access to the same content and their achievements will be judged against the same standards. It gives teachers stability to focus on the quality of their teaching, while being a living document that can evolve and change.

ACARA has made the Australian Curriculum a web-based document so it is accessible to teachers and the public, and provides multiple ways of viewing the curriculum and the flexibility to adjust it in ways that are not so readily available in printed documents.

We have been invited to present our work on the Australian Curriculum to colleagues around the world and we know that it is generating much interest. Australia is recognised as one of the leaders in education and a worthy partner in international collaborations. We also know that we have not accomplished this alone. We recognise the generous and often passionate contributions of countless stakeholders in shaping the curriculum, reaching settlements that do not compromise on quality and now supporting each other to implement new curriculum for our young people.

We have not yet seen the true benefits of a national curriculum but we are confident that young people and the nation will be better off as a result of the work done by tens of thousands during the last few years. We can be rest assured that quality education is not a distant dream for our children.



Professor Barry McGaw AO
Chair

Attachment 2 - Professor McGaw to the reviewers on 24 April; reviewer' response 29 April

Professor Ken Wiltshire AO,
Dr Kevin Donnelly
Australian Curriculum Review Panel
C/O Department of Education
GPO Box 9880 Canberra ACT 2601

24 April 2014

Our ref: D14/7517

Dear Professor Wiltshire and Dr Donnelly

**LETTER FROM THE ACARA BOARD CHAIR – MEETING WITH REVIEWERS OF THE
AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM**

Thank you for providing the opportunity to meet to discuss the review of the Australian Curriculum on 1 May and also with the ACARA Board on 22 May 2014.

The CEO of ACARA Mr Robert Randall, the General Manager, Curriculum Dr Phil Lambert and I will meet with you on 1 May. I will provide names of ACARA Board members who will participate on 22 May closer to that date.

The ACARA Board and Executive have welcomed the review of the Australian Curriculum and have followed with keen interest the discussions in the media and the many submissions that have been made public. In fact the submissions have provided a valuable source of feedback for ACARA's process for monitoring the effectiveness of the Australian Curriculum, which is part of ACARA's work plan. The first monitoring report is scheduled to be presented to the ACARA Board in October 2014.

To ensure that we can be of most assistance to you in your deliberations I am writing to clarify the content for the 1 May meeting and invite you to share with us in advance of the meeting matters you may wish to discuss on the day.

I understand from the email advice provided by Mr Tim Kinder on 6 March that the meeting on 1 May will provide the opportunity to discuss the "more technical aspects of the development of the Australian Curriculum, including procedures used for the development of the curriculum and how important curriculum aspects were identified, initiated and decided upon". I imagine that this will be the major item for discussion.

I think that it would also be useful to outline the nature of ACARA's work as agreed with all Ministers of Education, under the letter of expectation and work plan.

I also propose that we discuss some of the areas for further development raised in ACARA's statement to the review, for example:

- strengthening achievement standards
- manageability of the Australian Curriculum, especially for primary schools
- strengthening alignment across the whole curriculum
- increasing the functionality and usability of the Australian Curriculum website, and
- improving the content elaborations.

Matters raised through other submissions to the review may also guide valuable discussion such as:

- the role and status of cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities in the three-dimensional curriculum, and
- senior secondary issues.

I look forward to receiving any further advice regarding the content of the 1 May meeting.

Yours sincerely

Professor Barry McGaw AO
Chair

Attachment 3 - Professor McGaw to reviewers about child safety on 28 April



AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM,
ASSESSMENT AND
REPORTING AUTHORITY

Level 10, 255 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000
Phone 1300 895 563 **Fax** 1800 982 118
Email info@acara.edu.au www.acara.edu.au

28 April 2014

Our ref: D14/7543

Professor Wiltshire and Dr Donnelly National
Curriculum Review Panel Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Professor Wiltshire and Dr Donnelly

Following recent extensive coverage in the media regarding the Daniel Morcombe Child Safety Curriculum, I am writing to provide information on how the Australian Curriculum explicitly addresses teaching and learning about child safety. I have also written to Minister Pyne on this matter.

The Australian Curriculum, in particular health and physical education and digital technologies, provides extensive coverage of 'child safety'. The coverage includes naming parts of the body, identifying people who help them to be safe, recognising safe and unsafe situations, knowing how and when to seek help, and online and phone safety.

I have attached a comparison between the Australian Curriculum and the Daniel Morcombe Child Safety Curriculum that was undertaken by ACARA officers. For the Australian Curriculum, content descriptions are shown in italics and the further suggestions provided as content elaborations are shown as bullet points in plain text.

The content covered in the Daniel Morcombe Child Safety Curriculum is explicitly covered in the Australian Curriculum, although the Daniel Morcombe material also includes teaching ideas and lesson plans that teachers may use to teach the content. These teaching materials are available on the ESA Scootle website and will be linked to the *Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education* and *Digital Technologies* in due course to make them readily available for teachers searching for teaching materials.

We would be happy to discuss this at our meeting on 1 May, if you wish.

Yours sincerely

[signed by Chair]

Professor Barry McGaw
Chair

Encl: Comparison of the Australian Curriculum to the Daniel Morcombe Child Safety Curriculum

Attachment 4 - Professor McGaw to the reviewers on 21 May 2014

Professor Ken Wiltshire AO,
Dr Kevin Donnelly
Australian Curriculum Review Panel
C/O Department of Education
GPO Box 9880 Canberra ACT 2601

21 May 2014

Our ref: D14/8223

Dear Professor Wiltshire and Dr Donnelly

LETTER FROM THE ACARA BOARD CHAIR – MEETING WITH REVIEWERS OF THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

Thank you for meeting Rob Randall, Phil Lambert and me on 1 May 2014. We found the discussion to be constructive, and hope that you found it informative and useful.

As promised, I forward with this letter the draft document, *Learning about religions, spiritualities and ethical beliefs in the Australian Curriculum*. The document will be considered by the ACARA Board in the near future.

In our meeting, we discussed ACARA's remit and governance arrangements and you may be interested in reading ACARA's Charter (which includes reference to ACARA's legislated functions) and Letter of Expectation, both of which are set by the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC) and are available [here](#) while information about governance arrangements set by SCSEEC for ACARA is available [here](#) (see attachment 1). During the meeting you sought our perspective on whether there might be a broader role for ACARA in relation to the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. We are interested in discussing this matter with you further.

Finally, in relation to the underpinning values for the curriculum, which we discussed in relation to other models such as the UK curriculum, I thought it might be useful to outline the approach taken by ACARA. We have said in our statement sent to you earlier and in the discussion in our meeting that the Melbourne Declaration, through its preamble, goals and specified actions, provided a strong basis for the approach we took and expressed in the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum*. There was a further important reason for which we chose not to go beyond the *Declaration*. The initial task of the Interim National Curriculum Board was to develop curricula for English, mathematics, science and history with the new Australian Curriculum for these subjects to replace those in the existing state and territory curricula. That is, they had to fit within eight separately defined curriculum frameworks with their statements of values, aims and rationales which we had no remit to alter.

With subsequent remits from the SCSEEC extending our work to the whole curriculum and with the development for all subjects Foundation to Year 10 now completed, it would be good for ACARA to articulate the values that have underpinned the work and that are evident in and across the parts of the Australian Curriculum. We understood you to encourage us to do so and would welcome a recommendation to this effect in your report as well.

I understand that the Departmental secretariat has advised you that the scheduled meeting with the ACARA Board on 22 May 2014 has had to be postponed because the appointment of new ACARA Board members to replace those who retired in early May has not yet been completed. It is anticipated that the appointment process will be finalised in June. Given the next Board meeting is scheduled for 3 July, we would be pleased if you were able to attend that meeting. We would invite the recently retired members to attend for the session with you since they are the ones who served on the Board during the creation of the work that you are reviewing.

If you are able to attend, we would welcome your advice on what might be the most productive format for the discussion. You might, for example, want to talk through or test your findings or recommendations with the Board.

I look forward to receiving your advice as to your availability for the 3 July 2014 ACARA Board meeting, and, if you are available, your preference for how that meeting is handled.

Yours sincerely

Professor Barry McGaw AO
Chair

Learning about religions, spiritualities and ethical beliefs in the Australian Curriculum

This statement describes ACARA's approach to learning about religions, spiritualities and ethical beliefs in the Australian Curriculum.

1. The development of the Australian Curriculum has been guided by the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008). The Melbourne Declaration commits to ensuring 'that schooling contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural, social and religious diversity' and that all young Australians 'are able to make sense of their world and think about how things have become the way they are'.¹
2. Educating the whole person pays attention to the 'intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing' of young people. Schools play a vital role in realising the opportunities provided by the Australian Curriculum to develop 'successful, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens'.²
3. Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have unique traditions extending back over tens of thousands of years, connecting them spiritually to land, sea, sky and waterways. Since the late 1700s, Judeo-Christian traditions became the predominant religious forces shaping Australian society. With the arrival of many immigrants of diverse faith and no-faith traditions from Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa, Australia has become a secular, multicultural and multifaith nation, with an increasing number of no religious affiliation.
4. The Australian Curriculum provides opportunities for and encourages students to learn about different religions, spiritualities and ethical beliefs, increasing their knowledge and understanding of self and others, and preparing young Australians for life in a dynamic, plural society and globalised world.
5. The Australian Curriculum provides a specification of what all young people should learn but assumes that the fundamentally important decisions about how to organise learning for individual students or groups of students are made by schools and teachers.
6. The three-dimensions of the Australian Curriculum — learning areas, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities — allow for flexibility and innovation in the organisation of teaching and learning experiences related to religions, spiritualities and ethical beliefs.
7. The Australian Curriculum provides a platform for teaching about religions, spiritualities and ethical beliefs in a balanced, informed and impartial manner where both commonalities and differences are recognised and mutual respect is cultivated. The study of this content is incorporated within the learning areas and subject content of the Australian Curriculum, in particular across the years of

¹ Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, December 2008.

² Ibid

schooling in the history and civics and citizenship learning areas. The general capabilities, ethical understanding and intercultural understanding, and the cross-curriculum priorities, also provide many opportunities to broaden knowledge, reinforce learning, connect issues and deepen student understanding of religions, spiritualities and ethical beliefs.

Attachment 5 - *The reviewers responded on 23 June seeking some further information. A copy of this letter is attached.*



Australian Government
Department of Education

**REVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN
CURRICULUM**

Professor Barry
McGaw AO
Chair
Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
Level 10
255 Pitt Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Professor McGaw

Thank you for your ongoing co-operation with the Review of the Australian Curriculum which we are conducting. We have appreciated the Authority's openness and responsiveness in providing us with information we have previously requested.

Now that we have finished our consultations and are drawing together the input we have received, we have a further request for information from ACARA.

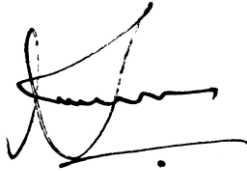
The ACARA paper titled *Review of the Australian Curriculum: A statement by ACARA* states that ACARA has undertaken international benchmarking and that the Australian Curriculum represents 'best practice nationally and internationally'. It also states there have been 'national and international benchmarking reports'. While we are aware of the papers written by Wilson, Zbar and Cole which are available from the 'National and international mapping' section of the 'consultation' page of the ACARA website, we request that if there is more evidence related to international benchmarking of the Australian Curriculum that you provide it to our Secretariat.

We are also seeking two ACARA papers relating to students with disability or who are disadvantaged and which we believe are unpublished. One is by John Enchelmaier on secondary education, other by Tracey Chapel which is a more general approach to curriculum.

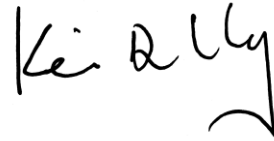
Given our final report is due to the Minister by 31 July 2014, we would appreciate your response to this request as soon as possible. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us through the Review

Secretariat at the Department of Education at
AustralianCurriculumReview@education.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Professor Ken Wiltshire AO



Dr Kevin Donnelly