



6 November 2014

National Advocates for Arts Education
[Julie Dyson](#) AM, Chair
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The Hon. Christopher Pyne MP
Minister for Education
PO Box 6022, House of Representatives
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Pyne,

Response to the Review of the Australian Curriculum

The Australian Curriculum: The Arts

The National Advocates for Arts Education believe that, after an extremely rigorous development and writing process by ACARA, in consultation with teachers and the arts industry, we have achieved a well-written and well-researched national arts curriculum that has been endorsed across the teaching and practice professions. *The Australian Curriculum: the Arts* was endorsed by state and territory Education Ministers in July 2013 (subject to resolution of some matters raised by one state). We are concerned the Review's recommended changes would severely compromise a curriculum that has taken four years of careful work to produce.

The Arts curriculum must be allowed to follow ACARA's evaluation process after being properly implemented by classroom teachers. All curriculum is reviewed and refined over time; however it is only after implementation and with consultation that this process should occur. Notably, most state and territory jurisdictions have already begun to seriously invest in the implementation of the Arts curriculum, and we do not believe that the recommendation to rewrite it has been justified.

The Australian Curriculum: The Arts has already received international recognition as a leader in 21st Century curriculum. We know that China is taking an interest in Australia's approach to building the creative capacities of young people who are flexible, can adapt to change and are innovative and entrepreneurial. We also know Norway, Singapore, the United States of America and the United Kingdom are interested in the collaborative achievement of *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts*, as several NAAE members have been invited to speak to those governments about its developmental processes and content.

We note that arts organisations and arts professional teaching associations, including the National Advocates for Arts Education, were not consulted by the review panel. The NAAE has therefore provided detailed responses to each of the Review's recommendations as an appendix.

**NAAE members: Australian Dance Council – Ausdance, Art Education Australia
Australian Society for Music Education, Australian Teachers of Media, Drama Australia,
Music Council of Australia, National Association for the Visual Arts**

The crowded curriculum

As will be articulated below, we believe that any pressure on the curriculum is coming from some other subject areas, not from the Arts. There is a fundamental misreading of *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts* and its purported contribution to the 'crowded curriculum', encapsulated by the following two statements on page 241 of the Review:

[There is] significant overcrowding as a result of compromise, cobbling together various disciplines to create one subject area – such as in the arts, economics and business, and health and physical education

and

The homogenous monolithic and template-driven design adopted for all learning areas has come in for criticism especially in the arts, and to a lesser extent in economics and business, civics and citizenship, and health and physical education.

The 1994 *Arts Statements and Profiles* led to disparate arts curricula (and language) being developed by each of the states and territories. Now, however, after extensive consultation, Australia is in the unique position of having an Arts curriculum that provides sequential development for each art form, achieving language cohesion without homogenisation, and using appropriately more specialised language in the secondary years. The curriculum provides teachers with information for implementation support across the five art forms.

The coherent framework and language consistency used across content and achievement standards in the Arts provides a model for the humanities and social sciences, where the subjects of history, geography, civics and citizenship, business and economics were once housed in one curriculum (SOSE or Studies of Society and Environment). SOSE had one time allocation (similar to what the Arts have now), making the teaching of these subjects more achievable.

The cohesion around the humanities and social sciences has now changed significantly; separate curriculum documents have been developed and introduced at different times in the primary years and each has its own separate language, making the curriculum much more difficult for primary teachers and parents to interpret and apply. The metastasising of the humanities and social sciences has become a major problem, particularly for primary school teachers, and this has contributed significantly to the 'crowded curriculum' referred to in the Review. The concerns of the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) and others about the 'crowded curriculum' were noted by ACARA, and arts writers were guided with an indicative 4%-5% weekly time allocation in the primary years, according to the [Curriculum Design Paper](#) (the table below shows time allocation comparisons for Humanities & Social Sciences, Health & Physical Education and the Arts):

	F	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6	Yr 7	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10
All Humanities & Social Sciences	4%	4%	4%	10%	10%	12%	12%	14%	14%	17%	17%
The Arts	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	5%	5%	8%	8%	8%	8%
Health & Physical Education	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%

This time allocation is, in fact, a *reduction* of weekly time identified by APPA from ‘the little less than 120 minutes’ allocation of time to the Arts. Primary school teachers ‘reported they had insufficient time available for the Arts’. Its report *In the Balance* went on to state: ‘Clearly, teachers feel they should be doing more in this very broad area’ (pp. 17-20). The ACARA indicative time allocation is hardly causing a crowding of the curriculum, especially when compared with other learning areas.

There is also a misconception that all five arts should be taught each week through the primary years. However, the Arts curriculum only provides a *minimum basic entitlement for every child*, while allowing for schools that have the expertise and resources to provide additional hours if they wish to do so. The 4%-5% per week allocation means the Arts may be approached by primary schools in many different ways, e.g. term 1 might be drama, term 2 media arts, term 3 visual arts, term 4 dance, and music might be taught throughout each term. This time allocation has been misunderstood in the review of the curriculum.

The NAAE remains willing and able to discuss strategies to support implementation of the Arts curriculum, with particular focus on supporting teachers and providing pathways for professional artists to engage with schools. We hope Recommendation 6 is taken up by the [Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group](#) and that it engages with the particular concerns of arts teaching. Time in pre-service teacher education focusing on the arts has continued to be cut over recent years, resulting in more and more teachers having reduced skill and confidence in teaching the arts, as noted in the APPA report.

The recent Federal Government announcement of a \$594,000 pilot program in music for mentoring classroom teachers is promising in principle, but is in no way proportionate to the task. Mentoring programs in other countries are very successful and NAAE looks forward to this program being extended to other art forms.

We strongly urge you to reject the Review’s recommendation to rewrite *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts*, and to support it in its present form when state and territory Education Ministers meet in Canberra in December.

Yours sincerely,



Julie Dyson AM (Chair)
 Roslyn Dundas & Jeff Meiners (Ausdance)
 Derek Weeks & Roger Dunscombe (Australian Teachers of Media)
 Tamara Winikoff OAM (National Association for the Visual Arts)
 Linda Knight (Art Education Australia)
 Sandra Gattenhof & John Saunders (Drama Australia)
 Chris Bowen & Kim Waldock (Music Australia)
 Kay Hartwig (Australian Society for Music Education)
 Richard Letts AM (Australian Music Trust – NAAE observer)

NAAE member associations represent the five art forms of dance, drama, media arts, music and the visual arts. Our members include school principals, classroom teachers, education academics, artists, companies and arts organisations.

Appendix

NAAE members: Australian Dance Council – Ausdance, Art Education Australia
 Australian Society for Music Education, Australian Teachers of Media, Drama Australia,
 Music Council of Australia, National Association for the Visual Arts

Response to individual Arts recommendations (p. 219)

Recommendation 1

The arts curriculum should be available to all students throughout all the years of schooling. The learning area should be formally introduced at Year 3 but provide a rich source of resource material for Foundation to Year 2, the Foundation years.

Cognitive science research demonstrates that frequent planned art-making activities in the early years stimulate brain development that supports accelerated learning in a range of non-arts learning areas, including literacy and numeracy. Some of this development occurs only in the early years. It directly links to and deeply enhances children's literacy and language development (Baldwin, 2012). To remove any of the arts from the early childhood years curriculum would severely and irrationally damage the Review's stated primary intention of improving literacy and numeracy. The proposal that the arts are only rich 'resource materials' for teaching literacy and numeracy in F-2 is therefore counter-productive.

Recommendation 2

The core content of all five strands should be reduced and a considerable portion of the current core be included in school-based curriculum and activities, thus augmenting the rich arts programs which most schools are already conducting.

- This recommendation contradicts recommendation 1.
- A reading of the Arts curriculum shows most of the 140 pages are for 'guidance only'. The key information with sequential content descriptions and achievement standards is in the Scope and Sequence section (eight pages), containing the curricula for five subjects for K-10, i.e. 11 years. $5 \times 11 = 55$ subject years and $8/55 = 0.145$ pages per subject per year: $1/7^{\text{th}}$ of a page. Can it justifiably be claimed that $1/7^{\text{th}}$ of a page is too much if the curriculum is to be robust and rigorous? To what would it be reduced?
- The total document for the five Arts subjects is 140 pages: eight pages of Scope and Sequence, and 132 pages of information to support implementation: $140/55 = 2.55$ pages per subject each year. The online curriculum has been designed so that a Year 3 teacher can look at the curriculum for Year 3 only and does not need to read the other years.
- A primary school teacher of one art form would therefore find the entire primary school content for that subject in **one page** of the Scope and Sequence section and supporting material in a total of 18 pages over seven years. NAAE considers any further reduction of supporting information will adversely impact on those teachers who need it most.
- Early feedback from our primary school members indicates that generalist teachers are finding curriculum detail such as elaborations and examples of knowledge and skills for each arts subject helpful for the implementation of sequential arts learning of concepts, e.g. in Music, duration-pulse-beat-rhythm-metre.

Recommendation 2 also states that 'the core content of all five strands (sic) should be reduced' to 'be included in school-based curriculum and activities, *thus augmenting the rich arts programs which most schools are already conducting*'. According to the 2005 *National Review of School Music Education*, only 23% of students are receiving a school music education, and it was similar with the 2008 *National Review of Visual Education*, indicating that 'most schools' are *not* providing 'rich arts programs'.

A 'program' is not a curriculum; *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts* provides the basic entitlement of education in the Arts within the classroom for *every* child. Both the *National*

Review of School Music Education and National Review of Visual Education illustrate that arts-based instruction in the primary years is strongly linked to socio-economic advantage, meaning that those students from less privileged backgrounds are deprived of arts learning. The Arts are fundamental to learning, particularly in the primary school years, and extra-curricula arts activities or programs do not offer a foundation in consistent, sequential learning to students.

While some privileged elite private schools offer rich arts programs outside school hours, this certainly does not include the majority, and usually involves a student fee. If this recommendation is accepted, it will not allow equitable access to learning in the Arts. To provide a full, rich and equitable education, an arts curriculum needs to be delivered as part of core hours.

Recommendation 3

Two of the arts strands should be mandatory and we recommend music and visual arts. The other three strands would be elective subjects and schools would choose which to offer according to their resources and wishes of the parents and nature of the school context. Media arts should become a separate standalone subject and substantially reduced in content.

- Strands are making and responding – they are not the subjects of music and visual arts. This misreading of the curriculum illustrates that the reviewers have not adequately engaged with the curriculum itself.
- The suggestion that drama and dance be subsumed into English and Physical Education would exclude the making and responding strands and thus remove essential learning in these two arts subjects. Making is essential and would not occur if the subjects were subsumed. Children need to ‘practise’, not just respond to art.
- Media Arts is already a standalone subject in the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts*. This recommendation offers far less than what is currently being offered in the states and territories. Only NSW students are currently deprived of a media arts education, hard to credit in the 21st Century. Most other states offer the five arts subjects in the primary years and these five arts are treated equally.
- NAAE believes that every primary school student in Australia should study Media Arts within The Arts Learning Area as part of their core entitlement. Media Arts teaches children how to participate effectively, safely and ethically in digital media culture through the developed curriculum’s conceptual framework, and a focus on art making and responding. Students must make and respond to film, television, print, interactive and social media to develop the appropriate literacy skills and creative capacities for their present lives and for their future within 21st Century Australian society and its digital economy. We note the USA has followed Australia’s lead and included Media Arts in their arts curriculum framework.

Recommendation 4

Elements of the current arts curriculum should also be integrated into other learning areas such as English, health and physical education, history and technologies.

If dance, drama and media studies are subsumed into other learning areas, students will not experience the ‘making’ strand. If they learn anything about those art forms, it will be as passive learners, not as creative artists (see comments under Recommendation 5, below).

Teachers employ many strategies in the classroom, and the Arts curriculum includes suggestions for connectivity between subject areas and provides information to support

teachers in making links between the Arts and other learning areas, thus complementing learning outcomes for those subjects. However, we do not support integration at the expense of art form learning – we support connectivity, not integration. The discrete integrity of each art form must be maintained. Acquisition of knowledge and skills in this area is to prepare children to be creatively capable, professionally and personally.

Recommendation 5

The content of each of the arts forms needs to be restructured and re-sequenced along the lines suggested by the subject matter specialists. The documents need to be expressed in clearer language. The balance between ‘making’ and ‘responding’ in each of the strands needs to be revisited involving consultation with arts teachers.

- The learning relationship between the two strands – making and responding – is the result of long consultation with primary generalists and arts specialists. Making and responding cannot be separated; they represent a connected, high level thinking process and both are well described and explained in the curriculum. Australia is one of only a few countries to have positioned children as art makers in their own right. That is not the case internationally where apprentice training models are more common and not appropriate for primary school learning.
- The arts curricula of the UK and Korea are cited by Dr Vallance, but the UK is not a high performing PISA country and arts curriculum offerings there have received considerable criticism for lack of depth and an incoherent approach that does not facilitate implementation at the primary school level. The second specialist reviewer, Michele Chigwidden, however, notes that ‘the arts offers ... opportunities to become an “artist”, not simply a passive spectator’ (p.217). The NAAE agrees, and is clear that Australia must maintain the integrity of children as art makers in order to equip them with problem solving abilities and creative capacity in their professional and personal lives.
- Feedback from our members indicates the new Arts curriculum is easily readable and already accessible by trained primary school teachers, contrary to the Review panel’s observations. ACARA employed arts education specialists in the writing process with ongoing input from teachers and professional teaching associations. *It was written by teachers for teachers.*

Recommendation 6

The considerable resourcing costs associated with delivering the arts curriculum need greater consideration, and professional development for teachers is needed as the years progress. It needs to be acknowledged that arts specialists will be needed at the advanced levels.

NAAE supports this recommendation, although we note that arts specialists are already employed in secondary schools. We hope this recommendation is accepted by the [Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group](#) and that they make a similar recommendation for training teachers of the arts across the spectrum. Time in pre-service teacher education focusing on the arts has continued to be cut over recent years, resulting in more and more teachers having reduced skill and confidence in teaching the arts. The recent Federal Government announcement of a \$594,000 pilot program for mentoring classroom teachers is promising in principle but is in no way proportionate to the task. Mentoring programs in other countries are very successful and NAAE looks forward to this program being extended to other art forms.

Recommendation 7

An analysis needs to be undertaken to identify the extent to which the cross-curriculum

priorities have produced repetition of content in these strands, and the extent to which they have skewed the content of all the strands, particularly away from Western and other cultures. The cross-curriculum priorities should be integrated, but only where appropriate, and their presence more clearly indicated.

The cross curriculum priorities are embedded, they are not enforced (see Dr Barry McGaw's article [Cross-curriculum priorities are options, not orders](#)). However, NAAE supports the recommendation to analyse the impact of the cross-curriculum priorities, while noting that, in terms of the primary curriculum and its implementation, general capabilities are excellent devices for primary teachers to plan for a connected learning model, whether that is a lesson or a unit of work.

Review Recommendation 10 (p. 245)

ACARA, guided by special education experts, improve the inclusivity of the Australian Curriculum by more appropriately addressing the needs of students with disability, particularly those working towards the Foundation level.

The Arts curriculum has already taken account of the needs of diverse students with disability through wide consultation with the sector, and this is clearly reflected in the completed curriculum. The literature suggests that arts engagement may be able to assist students in literacy acquisition by providing alternative structures and pathways to the development of literacy competency, particularly for students from low socio-economic status backgrounds.

Review Recommendation 23 (p. 252)

That in the preparation for future curriculum design, planning should take better account of teaching contexts, the learning environment and engaging teachers in the design process. Curriculum development should not proceed in haste and any compromises should be transparent and be made on educational grounds.

While we do not think this recommendation directly applies to the development of *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts*, we state again that the Arts curriculum was developed by ACARA over four years in an ongoing consultative, transparent and inclusive design process with teachers from across all jurisdictions. The well-documented consultation process included school leaders, primary and secondary teachers from urban, rural and remote locations, teachers of students with disability, and those working with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.