

The Final Report on the Australian National Curriculum Review released 12 October 2014  
 "expressing a national identity and unity" P 115 Website: [Final report \(pdf\)](#)

Some interesting extracts:

#### Recommendation 15

ACARA revise the Australian Curriculum to place more emphasis on morals, values and spirituality as outlined in the Melbourne Declaration, and to better recognise the contribution of Western civilisation, our Judeo-Christian heritage, the role of economic development and industry and the democratic underpinning of the British system of government to Australia's development.

p 246

#### History

A number of submissions to this Review, some of which are referred to in Chapter Six, are critical of the Australian Curriculum for failing to properly acknowledge and include reference to Australia's Judeo-Christian heritage and the debt owed to Western civilisation. In part, the concern is that an undue emphasis on the cross-curriculum priorities – especially the way they are dealt with in the design of the curriculum – leads to an unbalanced approach. A second concern is the lack of a Review of the Australian Curriculum - Final Report P 177

balanced and comprehensive treatment of the significance of Western civilisation and Christianity in the content descriptions and elaborations.

The Catholic Education Commission New South Wales, for example, argues that the Melbourne Declaration and the Australian Curriculum need to be amended in order to:

More fully reflect the role, both past and present, of faith traditions generally and Christianity specifically in the development of Australia.<sup>360</sup>

Mr Peter Abetz, MLA, when referring to the history curriculum, raises a similar concern when he writes:

This approach suffers from a great lack of balance.

The important contribution made by European Christians needs to be highlighted, just as much as the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders contribution.

This is not a religious remark, prompted by a desire to promote a Christian agenda in our schools. It is simply a reflection of the fact that the large majority of Australian society is from European stock and has adopted European lifestyles, beliefs and practices.

It is also an acknowledgment that whilst our society is largely secular today, history looks at the past, not the present and, undeniably, our society has a European heritage. 361

#### Conclusion

Notwithstanding that some submissions argue there is no bias in the Australian Curriculum:

History document, others suggest there is a lack of balance as the curriculum, especially as a result of the cross-curriculum priorities, fails to adequately deal with the historical impact and significance of Western civilisation and Australia's Judeo-Christian heritage and values and beliefs. Another criticism is that whereas the history associated with Western civilisation and Australia's development as a nation is often presented in a negative light, ignoring the positives, the opposite is the case when dealing with Indigenous history and culture.

In opposition to the positive comments expressed by many of the subject associations and professional bodies and one of the subject matter specialists, a number of concerns are also raised about the academic rigour of the history curriculum and the way it is structured.

One criticism relates to the fact that there is too much choice in terms of students being able to choose between various electives that results in missing out on significant and foundation

historical knowledge, understanding and skills. Another concern is that the way the cross-curriculum priorities are signposted in the digital version; in addition to promoting a superficial checklist mentality, it appears tokenistic. It would be better if priorities like Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are taught as essential content related to particular units of work rather than as a cross-curriculum priority scattered across the history curriculum and other various subjects.

One of the subject matter specialists, Professor Melleuish, criticises the history curriculum for failing to provide a more structured historical narrative to underpin what, at times, appears to be disconnected 'things to know about the past'. After evaluating the English and Singapore curriculums, Professor Melleuish also suggests that the Australian Curriculum be revised to make it less bureaucratic and prescriptive in some areas by giving schools greater flexibility and choice. The criticisms are also made that the Australian history curriculum is ideologically motivated; that it fails to adequately deal with world history and that the primary curriculum is too Australia-centric.

#### Recommendations

- The Australian Curriculum: History should be revised in order to properly recognise the impact and significance of Western civilisation and Australia's Judeo-Christian heritage, values and beliefs.
- Attention should also be given to developing an overall conceptual narrative that underpins what otherwise are disconnected, episodic historical developments, movements, epochs and events.
- A revision of the choice available throughout this curriculum should be conducted to ensure that students are covering all the key periods of Australian history, especially that of the 19th century.
- The curriculum needs to better acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses and the positives and negatives of both Western and Indigenous cultures and histories. Especially during the primary years of schooling, the emphasis should be on imparting historical knowledge and understanding central to the discipline instead of expecting children to be historiographers.

Views of the current curriculum expressed to this Review are reported in Chapter Six. In summary they are:

(The first being) - The aims and values underpinning the curriculum are not clear. They are not a true reflection of the Melbourne Declaration, especially as to moral and spiritual values. Many also argue that the place of religion, belief systems, and values is not being addressed, and there is a sizeable degree of support for the greater inclusion and emphasis of this content in the Australian Curriculum. There is also some support for an updating of the Melbourne Declaration.

p237

## 2. The Place of Religion, Belief Systems and Values in the Australian Curriculum

Pages 155 to 162

One of the more contentious issues related to the Australian Curriculum is the place of values and beliefs, especially moral and spiritual values and how religion is dealt with.

As noted in Chapter One, no curriculum is ever value free as it either implicitly or explicitly embodies or gives voice to a particular set of values and beliefs. It is also true, when defining the purpose of education that along with more practical and utilitarian ends education, by its very nature, deals with the transcendent, including morality and spirituality.

It also needs to be understood, while the major religions of the world deal with the transcendent and emphasise moral and spiritual aspects of existence, many secular beliefs systems also explore and deal with similar matters.

[The Melbourne Declaration, the blueprint for Australian schools](#), recognises this when it refers to 'moral and spiritual' when detailing the role schools play in promoting students' wellbeing. The Declaration also defines active and informed citizens as exhibiting 'moral and ethical integrity' and commits itself to a curriculum that will enable students 'to understand the spiritual, moral and aesthetic dimensions of life'.

Many overseas curriculum documents also refer to ethical and moral values and beliefs when detailing aims and objectives. The Singapore curriculum, under the heading The Desired Outcomes Review of the Australian Curriculum - Final Report

of Education, states that students should develop a 'sound moral compass' and 'a strong sense of right and wrong'.<sup>289</sup> Ministry of Education, Singapore, The Desired Outcomes of Education, Ministry of Education, viewed 30 July 2014, can be accessed at

<http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/desired-outcomes/> <sup>290</sup> Finnish National Board of Education 2004, National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2004, Finnish National Board of Education. <sup>291</sup> While mandatory for maintained schools, parents are able to withdraw their children from all or part of such lessons. <sup>292</sup> Department for Children, Schools and Families 2010, Religious education in English schools: Non-statutory guidance 2010, Department for Children, Schools and Families, p. 4. <sup>293</sup> Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Victoria), s. 2.2.10. <sup>294</sup> Australian Education Union 2014, Submission to the Review of the Australian Curriculum, p. 9.

The Finnish curriculum, when detailing learning objectives and core content of education, argues that students must 'learn to evaluate the ethics of their actions and to recognize right from wrong' as well as being taught 'their respective cultural heritages, spiritual and material'.<sup>290</sup>

The English National Curriculum, similar to the Australian Curriculum, also stipulates that the curriculum must deal with students' spiritual and moral development and goes as far mandating religious education (RE)<sup>291</sup> for maintained schools on the basis that:

RE is an important curriculum subject. It is important in its own right and also makes a unique contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and supports wider community cohesion. The Government is keen to ensure all pupils receive high-quality RE.<sup>292</sup> Based on the argument that state schools are 'free, compulsory and secular', the argument is often put that there is no place for teaching about religion in state schools. Such an argument is bolstered by the fact that the legislation in states like Victoria stipulates, 'education in government schools must be secular and not promote any particular religious practice, denomination or sect'.<sup>293</sup>

The Western Australian legislation is similar when it states in the School Education Act, section 68(1a) that the 'curriculum and teaching in government schools is not to promote any particular religious practice, denomination or sect'.

As a result, organisations like the Australian Education Union, argue that:

As part of the great education settlement in the colonies of the latter part of the nineteenth century it was agreed that public systems of education would eschew instruction of a dogmatic and specific kind. Part of the guarantee of freedom of religion in this country was to be based on freedom from religion in teaching programs. And part of respect for all citizens' belief systems was the guarantee that one religious tradition was not to be privileged by the state over another. This

is simply basic to the finely-honed and successful western, liberal tradition of Australia and in particular, its public school system.<sup>294</sup>

Ignored is that the existing legislation in many states – contrary to the belief that there is no place for religion in state schools – allows religion to be included. The Western Australian legislation in section 68 qualifies the statement that religion should not be taught, when it states:

(2) Subsection (1) (a) is not to be read as preventing – (a) the inclusion of general religious education in the curriculum of a schools; or (b) prayers, songs and other material based on Review of the Australian Curriculum - Final Report religious, spiritual or moral values being used in a school activity as part of general religious education.

The New South Wales legislation requires that state schools provide religious education classes when it states, ‘in every school, time is to be allowed for the religious education of children of any religious persuasion’.<sup>295</sup> The Victorian legislation, in addition to allowing states schools to provide religious instruction, if desired, also allows for the inclusion of what is described as general religious education in the curriculum. The Victorian Act allows students to be taught ‘about the major forms of religious thought and expression characteristic of Australian society and other societies in the world’.<sup>296</sup>

<sup>295</sup> Education Act 1990 (NSW), s. 32. <sup>296</sup> Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Victoria), s. 2.2.10. <sup>297</sup> ACARA 2014, Learning about religions, spiritualities and ethical beliefs in the Australian Curriculum (draft). <sup>298</sup> Julatten Family Fellowship 2014, Submission to the Review of the Australian Curriculum, p. 1.

Clearly, the statement that education in government schools, as opposed to faith-based, non-government schools, must be secular does not exclude special religious education classes or including teaching about religion in the curriculum in subjects like history, art, civics and citizenship, music and English (especially literature).

That religion can, and should, be included in the curriculum is acknowledged by ACARA in its draft statement titled ‘Learning about religions, spiritualities and ethical beliefs in the Australian Curriculum’ which was provided to this Review.<sup>297</sup> Based on the Melbourne Declaration’s belief that education must deal with moral and spiritual beliefs and issues the ACARA statement argues the Australian Curriculum ‘provides opportunities and encourages students to learn about different religions, spiritualities and ethical beliefs ...’.

ACARA’s argument that ‘religions, spiritualities and ethical beliefs’ should be included in the Australian Curriculum is not an argument for proselytising; rather it is an argument that any balanced curriculum should teach what the Victorian legislation refers to as ‘the major forms of religious thought and expression characteristic of Australian society and other societies in the world’.

As noted by one submission, important when listing ‘the major forms of religious thought and expression characteristic of Australian society’ is the reality that Christianity plays a major role, on the basis that ‘Historically, Christianity has had a far greater positive influence on Western Society, than any other religion’.<sup>298</sup>

The ACARA statement goes on to argue that the Australian Curriculum ‘provides a platform for teaching about religions, spiritualities and ethical beliefs in a balanced, informed and impartial manner’ and that this content is especially evident in the history and civics and citizenship learning areas.

Not all the submissions agree. In opposition to ACARA's argument that the Australian Curriculum adequately and properly deals with religion and ethical and moral values a number of submissions suggest that there is an imbalance, especially related to how Christianity and Western civilisation are presented in the curriculum.

#### **Review of the Australian Curriculum - Final Report**

In addition to the submissions received by this Review, further evidence that religion is not adequately dealt with in the Australian Curriculum is found in an analysis of the place of religion in secular education where the statement is made 'since 2008 the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has been developing a new national curriculum. However, religion is not a focus area'.<sup>299</sup>

299 Byrne, C 2014, *Religion in Secular Education*, Koninklijke Brill NV, p. 168. 300 Catholic Education Commission of Victoria 2014, *Submission to the Review of the Australian Curriculum*, p. 7. 301 Catholic Education Commission of New South Wales 2014, *Submission to the Review of the Australian Curriculum*. 302 Presbyterian Church of Victoria's Church and Nation Committee 2014, *Submission to the Review of the Australian Curriculum*. 303 Christian Schools Australia Limited 2014, *Submission to the Review of the Australian Curriculum*. 304 The Anglican Education Commission 2014, *Submission to the Review of the Australian Curriculum*.

In terms of the number of submissions received on this topic, it should be noted that the Review received 413 that appeared part of a campaign arguing that the Australian Curriculum needed to be revised to ensure a more balanced and objective treatment of Christianity and the debt owed to Western civilisation.

A further submission arguing that the 'National Curriculum should address Christianity in a way that is fair and balanced' contained 1,647 signatures.

A number of individual submissions have also been received in relation to what is perceived as an imbalance in the Australian Curriculum related to the nation's Judeo-Christian heritage and values and beliefs.

When questioning the rationale and justification for the three cross-curriculum priorities the submission by the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria (CECV) states:

The CECV is unclear as to why these particular areas of have been privileged at the expense of others. Forgotten, for example, are the foundations of our liberal democracy, shaped by our Judeo-Christian heritage.<sup>300</sup>

The Catholic Education Commission of New South Wales also expresses the concern that the Melbourne Declaration and the Australian Curriculum undervalue the 'the role, both past and present, of faith traditions generally and Christianity specifically in the development of Australia'.<sup>301</sup>

The Presbyterian Church of Victoria's Church and Nation Committee's submission also argues, 'One glaring omission of the curriculum is that it fails to give an understanding of our Judeo-Christian heritage which had, and continues to have, such a great impact on our country'.<sup>302</sup>

While acknowledging the importance of the three cross-curriculum priorities the Christian Schools Australia Limited submission raises the concern that the priorities are seen as 'dominant, almost exclusive' and suggests that an additional priority be added. This new priority would ensure 'the continued recognition of the Western/Judeo-Christian influences on our society'.<sup>303</sup>

The submission by The Anglican Education Commission in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney also emphasises the importance of religious beliefs and values when it states, in relation to Australia, that, 'Our justice, government, education, health and general welfare systems are all established

on the Judeo-Christian foundation of this civilization'.<sup>304</sup> Review of the Australian Curriculum - Final Report

Not unexpectedly, the Australian Christian Lobby also repeats the criticism that the Australian Curriculum underplays the 'significance of Christianity in both Australia's history and its modern institutions and culture'. While accepting that contemporary Australia includes a 'rich variety of cultures and religions' the submission regrets the fact that the curriculum fails to properly acknowledge 'the very strong Christian influence of Australia's European settlers, particularly those from the United Kingdom and Ireland'.<sup>305</sup>

<sup>305</sup> Australian Christian Lobby 2014, Submission to the Review of the Australian Curriculum. <sup>306</sup> Professor Dawkins advocacy for including the Bible in the curriculum, can be found [here](#). <sup>307</sup> See [here](#). <sup>308</sup> Spurr, B 2014, Subject matter specialist report on the Australian Curriculum: English, with particular attention to Literature, prepared for the Review of the Australian Curriculum. <sup>309</sup> Ibid. <sup>310</sup> Langmaid, A 2009, 'All kids must read the Bible, federal Opposition Leader Tony Abbott says', Herald Sun, 18 December 2009, viewed 30 July 2014, can be accessed [here](#).

The Australian Christian Lobby submission also argues that the Bible's cultural and literary significance should not be ignored in what many submissions consider to be an overly secular curriculum. The Christian Lobby's submission cites the well-known atheist Professor Richard Dawkins' support for the decision in England to provide every school with a copy of the St James version of the Bible in support of its case.<sup>306</sup>

Professor Dawkins is not alone in arguing that the Bible should be included in the school curriculum. As Prime Minister, Julia Gillard made the same case when she argued in 2011 'It's impossible to understand Western literature without having that key of understanding the Bible stories and how Western literature builds on them and reflects them and deconstructs them and brings them back together'.<sup>307</sup>

The argument that knowledge of the Bible is vitally important for an appreciation of Western literature is also made by Professor Spurr in his analysis of the national English curriculum for this Review. After citing Northrop Frye's belief that the Bible represents 'the single most important influence in the imaginative tradition of Western literature', Professor Spurr argues the Bible also cultivates an awareness of the literal, metaphorical and allegorical uses of language.<sup>308</sup>

Professor Spurr also makes the point that if students are expected to 'learn to question stated and unstated cultural beliefs and assumptions', when studying literature, then they need to have a 'mastery of different belief systems'.<sup>309</sup>

The Hon Tony Abbott MP, when Leader of the Opposition, also argued two years earlier than Ms Gillard that all students should have knowledge of the Bible when he said, 'I think it would be impossible to have a good general education without at least some serious familiarity with the Bible and with the teachings of Christianity'.<sup>310</sup>

It should be noted that not all the submissions received argue that the Australian Curriculum fails to adequately deal with Judeo-Christian values. The Rationalist Society of Australia, for example, 'rejects the notion that Australia owes its foundations to some putative "Judeo-Christian" heritage' Review of the Australian Curriculum - Final Report

arguing instead for the importance of ancient Greek and Roman influences and the impact of the Enlightenment.<sup>311</sup>

<sup>311</sup> Rationalist Society of Australia 2014, Submission to the Review of the Australian Curriculum, p. 2. <sup>312</sup> Institute for Judaism and Civilization 2014, Theology and the provision of the spiritual development of students, Submission to the Review of the Australian Curriculum. <sup>313</sup> Religions,

Ethics and Education Network Australia 2014, Submission to the Review of the Australian Curriculum. 314 For a copy of the Toledo principles see [here](#).

In addition to many submissions putting the case that the Australian Curriculum should deal with Christianity in a more balanced and objective way, a number of submissions argue that students should study a range of religions and beliefs systems.

Rabbi Dr Shimon Cowen in his submission<sup>312</sup>, based on the Melbourne Declaration's belief that the curriculum should address students' moral and spiritual development, argues that case for including a subject titled theology. Rabbi Cowen, while acknowledging the special place of the Judeo-Christian ethic in Australian society, argues that students need to also learn about other religions and belief systems such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.

Instead of being taught through the lenses of subjects like sociology or history, often with a secular focus, Rabbi Cowen argues that spirituality needs to be taught as a separate subject over the years of schooling. An argument is also put, that instead of focusing exclusively on what makes each particular religion or faith distinctive, the emphasis should be on what constitutes 'common theological categories and ethical principles'.

A second submission by the Religions, Ethics and Education Network Australia (REENA) also cites the Melbourne Declaration when arguing 'for the inclusion of Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) in the National Curriculum'.<sup>313</sup> The submission cites overseas examples involving the UK, Quebec and Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights where teaching about various religions, ethics and beliefs is supported.

In particular, the submission refers to the Toledo Guiding Principles About Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools<sup>314</sup> as a useful guide to inform any decision to include teaching ERB in the Australian Curriculum. Various possibilities include developing a distinct subject 'on diverse religions, spirituality and belief systems taught by qualified teachers' or as part of the cross-curriculum priorities. An ERB subject would be in addition to existing Years 11 and 12 subjects dealing with religion and belief systems that are often only taught in a few schools as an elective. The REENA submission refers to the example of Quebec, where an Ethics and Religious Culture Program was developed to help promote social inclusion and counter terrorism, as one worth considering in any attempt to develop an ERB subject in the Australia Curriculum.

A third submission relating to moral and spiritual education by the Australian Association for Religious Education (AARE) also argues for the place of different beliefs systems and religions in the Australian Curriculum. Whereas a number of submissions to the Review emphasise Christianity, this submission takes a broader view when it:

highlights the importance of a study of religious, spiritual and secular beliefs and worldviews which compose the human world and argues that the Australian Curriculum should recognize the important role these different belief systems and worldviews have in the lives of many Australians.<sup>315</sup>

<sup>315</sup> Australian Association for Religious Education 2014, Submission to the Review of the Australian Curriculum, p. 3. <sup>316</sup> Ibid., p. 5. <sup>317</sup> Ibid., p. 5. <sup>318</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

Drawing on the work of the English educationalist Paul Hirst, and his argument that there are distinct and unique forms or domains of human knowledge, the submission argues that a well-rounded education dealing with the whole person should include the rational, logical, social, ethical, moral, aesthetic, emotional and spiritual (as does the Melbourne Declaration).

In opposition to ACARA's argument that the Australian Curriculum deals with moral and spiritual values and beliefs in a balanced and proper way the AARE submission argues, 'The glaring omission in the selection of subjects for the Australian Curriculum is one that relates to learning about the role and contribution of religions, spiritual and secular belief systems and world views to human society'.<sup>316</sup>

The argument that a study of religions and beliefs systems can be accommodated by general capabilities like intercultural and ethical understanding or various elements of the history or civics and citizenship curriculums is also rejected. The submission states:

It is argued, here, that such an approach is reductionist and fragmentary, reducing the knowledge of religions to knowledge about some elements of religious history and tradition, religious socialization, religious culture, religious leaders and so on. Such an approach does not recognize that religious and spiritual knowledge, in particular, provide a particular way of knowing which balances and complements other ways of knowing.<sup>317</sup>

The submission notes the contribution to the theory of knowledge by Jurgen Habermas that differentiates between three different ways of knowing related to each discipline when arguing the vital importance of 'knowing oneself'. While it is important 'to have knowledge and understanding of others, equally as important is knowledge and understanding of self' on the basis that 'If one has a sense of self and a level of security in what one believes and stands for, it is easier to accept and include others'.<sup>318</sup>

When justifying its argument that the curriculum should better include teaching 'religious and spiritual beliefs and practices' the AARE submission notes the impact of increasing globalisation caused by changing technology and media and the increasing multicultural and multi-faith nature of Australian society. Students need to be given a 'firm foundation that will enable them to understand, appreciate and engage with differences in society that relate to religious, spiritual and secular beliefs systems and world views'.

The submission also justifies the need for teaching religious and spiritual beliefs by referring to the dangers of racism and prejudice associated with what is becoming an increasing pluralist society and a post 9/11 world where sectarianism is on the rise.

As to how teaching about religious and spiritual beliefs might be better dealt with in the curriculum the AARE submission suggests either incorporating the study as a part of the civics and citizenship Review of the Australian Curriculum - Final Report

learning area or introducing it as a distinct subject. The submission by the Anglican Education Commission in Sydney puts a similar case when it argues that there be a 'central, integrating mandatory subject called Worldview and Ethics'.

The submission from the Pathways Coalition for Diversity Education also argues strongly that all students deserve to be taught about 'a wide range of religions and philosophies and ethical issues within a secular (neutral) pedagogy'.

In relation to how the Australian Curriculum deals with religion, especially Australia's Judeo-Christian heritage, it is interesting to note that ACARA publicly released a revised version of the civics and citizenship Foundation to Year 10 document, dated 18 February 2014, that refers to Judeo-Christian traditions a number of times.<sup>319</sup>

<sup>319</sup> It should be noted that there was no reference to Judeo-Christian values and beliefs in the earlier drafts of the civics and citizenship curriculum. Review of the Australian Curriculum - Final Report

### 3. Civics and Citizenship

### **Conclusion P198**

It is commonly agreed that this learning area is vital for the education of Australian students and there is strong support for its retention as a separating learning area. However, some significant recasting is needed.

The history of democracy, the origins of the Australian system of government, and the role of the founders in creating a democratic nation and a constitution, all need much greater emphasis. There is also a lesson to be learnt from many other countries in having a much more explicit discussion of the values underpinning the Australian political system, including national values which pervade our society and have shaped our history – values like enterprise and equity, as found in the typical Australian expressions of ‘have a go’ and ‘a fair go’. Personal values need a greater focus as well including rights and responsibilities, mutual obligation, respect, tolerance, and the virtue of community participation. A well-balanced emphasis on the virtue of patriotism – pride in being Australian – along with being a citizen of the world is needed. Indeed, this curriculum is a key area to demonstrate and develop the values espoused in the Melbourne Declaration.

Clearly there are serious gaps in the content. The role of all elements of the Executive is a glaring example – it seems inconceivable that a civics curriculum could contain scant reference to the role of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The same can be said regarding the whole public policymaking process and the actors involved along with the potential to influence policy. The role of the media is also non-existent, a fault also found in most textbooks on politics. The importance of the rule of law and the functioning of the hierarchy of laws needs more material. Review of the Australian Curriculum - Final Report

There are concerns about the structure of this learning area particularly the age levels at which particular content is introduced, as well as the sequencing, and potential for ideological bias. The introduction of the cross-curriculum priorities is very strained and appears to have inadvertently skewed the content; they should be included only where relevant and educationally justifiable. The serious inaccuracies in definitions and explanation of concepts need to be rectified urgently. There is clearly a great deal of concern about the notional time allocation given to this learning area, the argument being that it is too important and with too much content for teachers to handle in the time available. A strong case has been put for this learning area to be compulsory to Year 10 and there is also a very strong case for it to be mandatory in some form to Year 12 which is, after all, just prior to the age at which students will be voting. It seems rather remiss to cease learning civics and citizenship two years before the vote. There is not much point in having compulsory voting if we do not make every effort to educate future citizens about our system of government.

Australia has a very proud record in this domain, being one of the longest continuing democracies in the world, with no experience of civil war, a pioneer in universal suffrage, and a nation created with the consultation and approval of the people through referendums. A vibrant civics and citizenship curriculum can preserve and maintain this heritage.

### **Recommendations**

Civics and citizenship should be introduced at Year 3 and in Years 3–6 as part of a combined humanities and social science subject, then should be a separate learning area from Years 7–10. This curriculum should be rewritten and considerably re-sequenced along the lines advocated by the subject matter specialist.

Serious gaps which have been identified should be filled, including the foundation values of the Australian system of government and the importance of personal values and ethics, the balance between rights and responsibilities, the importance of British and Western influences in the formation of Australia's system of government, the role of the founders and the key features of constitutional development, the historical functioning of the federation, the role of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the executive arm of government, the hierarchy of laws and the policymaking process, the key elements of public finance, and the importance of community service as a key component of citizenship.

The civics and citizenship curriculum should better recognise the importance and contribution of the many community, charitable and philanthropic bodies and organisations – especially religious – in areas such as health, education and social welfare.

Cross curriculum priorities should be reduced in the content of this learning area and properly integrated only where relevant.

The notional time allocated to this learning area needs to be reviewed and increase as the years progress.

Civics and citizenship should be mandatory to Year 10.

#### 4. Some Further Extracts

The cross-curriculum priorities, while generally supported by many of the submissions and those involved in consultations, are also identified as a concern by a number of submissions responding to the English curriculum. In particular, the emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature when discussing Australia's literary heritage is criticised for undervaluing Australian literature and the place of Western literature, especially poetry.

Four individual submissions suggest there should be a greater emphasis on Australian literature while Professor Spurr argues, 'the impact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on literature in English in Australia has been minimal and is vastly outweighed by the impact of global literature in English, and especially that from Britain, on our literary culture'.<sup>330</sup> p165

However, the most controversial area by far was sexuality education. Sex(uality) education is taught in England's basic curriculum in Years 7–11 and in New Zealand (ages 5/6–16.)

Some submissions to this Review sought guidelines for sexuality education which, as Family Planning Victoria point out, is a very challenging area for teachers, with many teachers having little or no undergraduate training in sexuality and being unsure of pedagogical approaches. Family Planning Victoria wants more exploration of topics in relation to sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing. Other submissions supported more emphasis on inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex content (LGBTI); but others, including 24 individual submissions, were opposed to any content of this kind. Some submissions were completely opposed to the inclusion of any sexuality education at all in the curriculum, and one jurisdiction said it would refuse to implement the content in sexual education. They were joined by a significant number of individual submissions from people who said that they supported parental rights to withdraw their children from instruction they deemed inappropriate.

A number of submissions suggested that the health and physical education curriculum was politically biased.<sup>p204</sup>

It should also be noted that the submission by the NCEC signals that Catholic schools reserve the right to implement the Australian Curriculum according to the uniquely faith-based and religious nature of such schools:

**For example, as usual in all Catholic schools, the new Health and Physical Education Curriculum will need to be taught in the context of a Personal Development program informed by Catholic values on the life and personal issues involved.411 p207**

**(Note. There is nothing about Intelligent Design in Science beginning p 182)**