



National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE)

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This submission is focused on the Arts (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts) in consideration of the Review of the existing NSW curriculum. The following commentary has been developed by representative members of the National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) council, including the former Senior Project Officer and lead writers of the Shape Paper for the Australian Curriculum: The Arts.

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## Reforming the content of Curriculum

### Objective:

*To promote deep learning through a less crowded curriculum, that prioritizes the development of core disciplinary knowledge, conceptual understandings and ways of thinking and working, together with skills in applying these in real world contexts.*

### Reform direction 1 Creating a less crowded curriculum

The existing NSW curricula for the Arts are provided as K-6 Creative arts: dance, drama, music and visual arts; Stage 4, Stage 5 and Stage 6 syllabus in each artform with additional syllabi in music and visual arts in Stage 6. NAAE recommends the following:

The adoption of the Australian curriculum: the Arts for K to 6. This curriculum provides a framework of knowledge and skills for each artform allowing for depth of study according to students' learning needs and teacher capacity. The curriculum does not dictate content, rather it enables the learning of skills and techniques in order to develop knowledge, understanding and application of skills in each artform. The four content descriptions in each artform have been carefully constructed to provide a sequential development of skills in the artform. Four organising ideas run across the five artforms to give primary teachers a framework from which to plan. The first three organising ideas pertain to 'making' and the fourth pertains to 'responding' as outlined below:

#### Making

- Exploring ideas and improvising with ways to represent ideas
- Developing understanding of practices
- Sharing artworks through performance, presentation or display

#### Responding

- Responding to and interpreting artworks (ACARA, 2015)

Additionally, primary teachers identified the enquiry model provided in these four organising ideas as providing invaluable assistance for them in planning integrated learning opportunities for their students both within the artforms and with other learning areas in the curriculum.

For Years 7 – 10 prior learning must be acknowledged and built upon. *The Australian curriculum: The Arts* through the F(K) to 6 curriculum promotes a deeper learning through extension of skills expressed through the seven content descriptions. The organising ideas for the content descriptions were expanded from four in Primary to seven organising ideas for the content descriptions in the secondary years (Years 7 to 10) as outlined below:

### Making

- Exploring ideas and improvising with ways to represent ideas
- Manipulating and applying the elements/concepts with intent
- Developing and refining understanding of skills and techniques
- Structuring and organising ideas into form

### Responding

- Sharing artworks through performance, presentation or display
- Analysing and reflecting upon intentions
- Responding to and interpreting artworks. (ACARA, 2015)

NAAE asserts that the structure of the Australian curriculum: The Arts provides a clear scope and sequence for teachers to follow and thereby reduces the crowding and potential confusion currently evident in the NSW Creative Arts K – 6 and Stages 4 and 5 syllabi for the arts.

A recent review of these documents conducted by NESA found overwhelming support for the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* from predominately NSW teachers and relevant arts education organisations with particular emphasis placed on the clear and scaffolded sequential learning that occurs, the adoption of a common language and vocabulary for teachers to engage with and the focus on student-centered learning

## Reform direction 2 Promoting deep understanding

Intentionally developed to enable deep understanding in each artform, the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts*, provides the framework for skill development in each artforms. The current NSW syllabus model in the arts is a teacher-centred model that leads to 'rote' learning (O'Toole, 2015). *The Australian curriculum: The Arts* is a student-centred model, based on best practice in developing critical and creative thinking, that changes the focus from memorisation to the application of skills. Extensive consultation was undertaken in the development of the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts*.

## Reform direction 3 Building skills in applying knowledge

The importance of knowing how to apply skills in a range of contexts is an integral aspect of higher order thinking. The Australian curriculum: The Arts models acquisition of understanding and skills through content descriptions which lead to achievement standards. It is through consistent opportunities in both Making and Responding that students develop creative and lateral thinking. The Arts make learning visible and as such the opportunities to apply knowledge throughout the curriculum have been carefully designed based on the developmental understanding of children and

young people with scope for teachers to extend on and provide appropriate challenge with the scope provided in the content descriptions and achievement standards.

#### Reform direction 4 A common entitlement

The Australian curriculum states that all students are entitled to learning in all five artforms in K to 8. In the current NSW arts curricula Media Arts has not been included as a distinct artform. Given the ubiquitous nature of technology in our lives the exclusion of this significant artform does not provide a common entitlement for NSW students. It is also detrimental to any student who moves from interstate to study in NSW or for students moving out of NSW to study in another state or territory. Children and young people are increasingly becoming producers of digital technology. Understanding the impact of such technology, critically understanding how they are used, and having the aesthetic knowledge to creating powerful messages on a range of platforms is an increasingly essential and critical skill.

The allocation for the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* provides a minimum entitlement for all students. This is an equity issue as many students may not have the opportunity to engage with the Arts outside of the school context due to financial and time considerations. Countries that include the Arts as an integral part of their curricula consistently demonstrate higher student outcomes than those that do not. The significance for Australia in having the Arts as an integral part of the national curriculum cannot be underestimated. The exclusion of one of the five mandated artforms, however, is detrimental both in terms of a national curriculum and the impact this is having on NSW students. It also subverts the intention of Australian students moving interstate and not being disadvantaged by encountering a different curriculum than that which has been endorsed by all Australian Education Ministers.

## Reforming the structure of Curriculum

### **Objective:**

*To facilitate targeted teaching by reorganizing syllabuses into a sequence of attainment levels to support teachers in establishing where individuals are in their learning, meeting individual learning needs, and monitoring whether students are on-track with year-level expectations and to meet the standards expected of every student by the end of school.*

### Reform direction 5 Creating a more flexible curriculum

An intentional framework enabling flexibility in terms of specific artform content is provided in the *Australian curriculum: The Arts*. NSW primary teachers have tended to adopt set arts content as provided in the prescribed *Creative arts K-6 units of work* (Board of Studies NSW, 2000) resulting in a standardisation of visual arts activities across the primary years in NSW schools without a visual arts specialist (Lorenza, 2018). Similar practice has occurred in the other artforms (Dance, Drama and Music) in NSW where teachers do not have expertise or the confidence to design their own arts programs for primary students. This has resulted in the disempowerment of teachers who have had limited or no previous experience with the Arts. However, a generalist teacher is expected to be able to provide expertise and experience in all learning areas.

Teachers need to know that they do not have to fulfil outcomes in order to unlock and enable students' to learn at their own pace/rate and development. The Arts value process as an integral part of learning in and through the Arts. NSW has adhered to an outcomes focused model of curriculum for many decades to the detriment of teachers and students alike.

### Reform direction 6 Restructuring the curriculum

In restructuring the curriculum to move away from prescribed dot-point curriculum outcomes, the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* is an ideal model for use by NSW. The framework enables open-ended learning whereby the student is not directed towards a predetermined outcome. The curriculum enables teacher-student collaborative learning rather than traditional teacher-directed learning which put the onus upon the teacher to be the expert and provide of knowledge. "The teacher's expertise in curriculum interpretation and pedagogy is imperative to a student's success and requires more than fulfilling standards or outcomes" (Lorenza, 2018, p. 158).

## Reform direction 7 Setting high expectations

By not providing a pre-determined outcome, expectations and opportunities are raised. In the Arts in NSW to date students have anticipated requirements based entirely on the artworks<sup>1</sup> (including performance, visual artwork, portfolios, musical composition etc) submitted by the students in the years ahead of them. This practice has formed an artificial ceiling of attainment. NSW Year 12 students and their teachers are caught in an outcomes focus on the attainment of 'Band 6' and winning a place in the showcases of HSC works<sup>2</sup>. Removing this ceiling enables students and teachers to collaboratively explore and develop knowledge skills and understandings through arts learning. Catterall (2009) found that arts-rich high schools do much more collaborative learning and much less teacher-directed learning than arts-poor high schools, finding that "indicators of educational attainment and achievement were significantly higher for the arts-rich school participants" (Ewing, 2012, p. 16). In terms of pedagogical practice Graham and Goetz Zwirn (2010) argue that utilising art in the classroom has the ability to "shape pedagogy in significant ways"(p. 313).

## Reform direction 8 Monitoring whether learning is on-track

Removal of the artificial ceiling will mean a change in monitoring learning in the arts. The arts by their very nature are not a consistent steady development, rather development is in fits and starts and times for contemplation and thought need to be incorporated. Artists and performers continually reflect on their practice balancing paradoxical qualities "such as the commitment to work on a problem for an extended and intense period of time, followed by what appears to be long periods of idleness which are in reality important periods of reflection" (Carrillo & Baguley, 2011, p. 63).

## Reform direction 9 Ensuring continuity of learning

Learning in the arts is sequential and required a continual reflection and revisiting of previous learning knowledge and skills. NSW teachers recognised "the limitations of beginning to study drama in later years of secondary school, when commencing in the early years could 'empower teacher capacity to build student engagement in the Arts' (Snyder et al., 2014, p. 5)" (Lorenza, 2018, p. 166). Quality arts experiences can contribute to and enhance appreciation for the Arts with important foundation knowledge being attained at school. *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts* provides this sequential framework to ensure continuity of learning. There is also scope for genuine integration of arts

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<sup>1</sup> This paper refers to artworks meaning all possible artefacts produced in any of the five artforms (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, Visual Arts)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.school-news.com.au/news/student-theatre-music-and-dance-hsc-showcase-kicks-off/>

experiences with other learning areas which enhances learning in both areas. When students study the Arts they use multiple intelligences, deepen their thinking, attain knowledge and build 21<sup>st</sup> century skills in creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving, collaboration, and communication (National Urban Alliance, n.d., p. para 3).

## Reform direction 10 Assessing and communicating learning

Assessment in the arts needs to move away from the current prescriptive model in use in NSW. In NSW students have a tendency to “copy” what they perceive will fulfil the outcome. For example, in Drama students “mimic the vocal presentation style they perceive to be required” or “produce identical artwork in visual arts”. Students have “preconceptions of what would fulfill the requirements of pre-specified outcomes” (Lorenza, 2018, p. 153). This occurs across all learning areas. The current NSW curriculum model for secondary schooling encourages students to rote learn and recall without demonstrating ability to apply learned knowledge and skills. Furthermore, the assessment focus is solely on the final outcome. The process of learning requires formative assessment. It is the development of skills and learning how to apply these in different situations that sets students up for new non-school-based experiences later in life. Their development of such aptitude will also students in applying their knowledge and skills in unfamiliar situations such as the PISA and other international benchmarking assessments. When observing students engaged in the Arts, teachers gain a fuller picture of the whole child or young person. It is important to note that in all assessment a range of measures should be used to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their development. Including both formative and summative assessment will enable the teacher to build up, particularly over a period of time, an informative and documented record of the student’s progress.

In addition, Goldberg (2017) contends that the arts contribute to an equitable education and nominates a range of principles that underpin their importance for a diverse range of learners including how the arts assist in building self-esteem, open avenues for inclusive education and exceptional learners, and enable freedom of expression for second language learners.



## Reforming the Senior school curriculum

### **Objective:**

*To ensure every student is well-prepared for further learning, life and work through rigorous senior secondary courses that integrate knowledge, skills and attributes and prioritises both theory and application in learning.*

### Reform direction 11 Creating a more integrated curriculum

The Australian curriculum: The Arts is structured by organising ideas across the five artforms. Four organising ideas run across the five artforms to give primary teachers a framework from which to plan. Primary teachers identified the enquiry model provided in these four organising ideas which would assist them in planning integrated learning opportunities for their students.

- Exploring ideas and improvising with ways to represent ideas
- Developing understanding of practices
- Sharing artworks through performance, presentation or display
- Responding to and interpreting artworks (ACARA, 2015)

The Australian curriculum: The Arts for Years 7 – 10 expands to seven content descriptions in:

- Exploring ideas and improvising with ways to represent ideas
- Manipulating and applying the elements/concepts with intent
- Developing and refining understanding of skills and techniques
- Structuring and organising ideas into form
- Sharing artworks through performance, presentation or display
- Analysing and reflecting upon intentions
- Responding to and interpreting artworks. (ACARA, 2015)

### Reform direction 12 Recognising progress and attainment

A consistent flaw in the current NSW syllabus is the focus on 'outcomes'. Even the term 'outcome' used throughout syllabus document points to summative assessment. In all learning and particularly in the Arts assessment of the process of learning, the formative, is imperative. Too often students invest considerable time and effort in the process of making an artwork, be this a painting, a performance, an animation, a musical composition, and only the final outcome is assessed.

A restructure and reconsideration of how curriculum is described in NSW necessitates a move from this outcome-focused practice. The Australian Curriculum uses 'content descriptions' these describe

the learning and teaching to be undertaken. The achievement standards are descriptions of the understandings and skills a student should develop during the course of the band (or stage) of learning by contrast the current dot-point list of outcomes in NSW curricula.

### Reform direction 13 Introducing a major project

Instigating a major project cuts across the current practice in arts subjects for the NSW HSC. In Visual Arts students prepare a portfolio of artwork created across the year. In Music, students may opt to prepare compositions or performances. In Drama and Dance students devise and rehearse collaborative and individual performances or develop other large project-based submissions. Should NSW students have the option to study digital media/media arts, they would also develop major projects in this artform. Major projects that intentionally incorporate several disciplines beyond the Arts would be beneficial to students as they develop their skills and ideas and consider 'real-world' situations. A consideration with such a development is how to include formative assessment rather than solely an outcome-based assessment. This gradual assessment should alleviate anxiety already felt by students in the senior secondary years. A curriculum should enable students to learn about how they learn and help them to acknowledge and understand how to apply their developing knowledge and skills.

### Reform direction 14 Redefining learning areas

Reconsideration of learning areas to reflect more 'real-world' connections between disciplines may assist students. The challenge is how will teachers trained as specialists in specific disciplines will be able to work within such a structure. This has been attempted in Victoria through VELS and Aus-VELS to varying levels of success and frustration. Consideration should also be given to teachers and students who may move across states and territories and thus have to contend with entirely different approaches to describing learning and teaching in schools.

### Reform direction 15 Reviewing ATAR

NAAE supports a review of ATAR. The tertiary entrance rank has become an over-inflated measure that is frequently used to guide students' subject selection choices. Subjects perceived to 'rank' better for ATAR such as maths and sciences are prioritised. In fact, this misrepresentation of ATAR results in students not studying arts subjects to Year 12. Keddie (2017) claimed that "these external forms of accountability have become increasingly 'high stakes' given that a school's reputation and effectiveness are based on its performance on these measures"(p. 3).

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## APPENDIX 1 Analysis the NSW K-6 Creative Arts Syllabus

### Monitoring the Australian Curriculum

#### Attachment

##### *THE NSW K-6 CREATIVE ARTS SYLLABUS*

##### **Alignment with the *Australian Curriculum: Arts***

**An informal analysis, April 2019**

##### **John O’Toole, Lead Writer and Writer for Drama, *Australian Curriculum: Arts***

This analysis was prepared with the assistance of five senior arts educators involved in the generation and creation of the *Australian Curriculum: Arts*, and the National Advocates for Arts Education.

#### **PRELIMINARY COMMENTS**

It is clear that there has been a considerable, and in some ways impressive effort, to achieve alignment with the Australia Curriculum (AC), most strongly evident in the **content structures** and **descriptors**, which are mainly very well aligned now.

There is equally a clear intention to make the Syllabus at least partially **congruent conceptually** with the AC.

There are also some features of the NSW Syllabus which **go beyond** the AC, and which are congruent with its original intentions as drafted in the Shape Paper (2010).

#### **NON-ALIGNMENTS**

However, there are still **four categories of non-alignment**

- a.) **conscious departures**
- b.) **lack of full understanding of some basic concepts** underpinning the Australian Curriculum, many of which are only implicit or partially explicated, and ill-articulated in the AC itself.
  - (NB This was owing to ACARA’s unyielding commitment to a standard minimalism for all documents, of comprehensibility to ‘any generalist Year 3 teacher’. It seems that this lack of explicitness in the AC has hampered NSW in particular, owing to the State’s uncompromising and combative resistance to the AC planning process, rather than being ‘in on’ the planning and contributing throughout to the construction of the model).
- c.) **Deviant points of detail, omission or addition, and terminology** – most of which are slight.
- d.) **Congruent deviations**, where the NSW Syllabus independently interprets the principles and spirit of the AC, and helpfully expands on concepts which are not in fact made explicit in that curriculum.

**a.) Conscious departures**

1. The Syllabus's continued recognition of only four art subjects and non-acknowledgment of Media Arts is in clear contravention of the AC. I note that there are mentions of aspects of Media mentioned in token fashion in Visual Arts and Drama. However, those references neither express nor encompass the particularity of Media Arts as a specific and distinct organization and manifestation of Media technologies *to provide aesthetic knowledge outcomes* (see below) – a rationale which also provides Media Arts with its commonality with the other four art forms.
  2. It is disappointing to see NSW still clinging to the hierarchical arrangement and prioritization of the two 'traditionally established' art forms over the 'newer' ones. This is first explicit in NSW's refusal to use the AC's alphabetical ordering of the arts, in favour of its own traditional 2 + 2 grouping (Music/Visual Arts + Dance/Drama). It is even more explicit in the spectacularly privileged treatment of Music and Visual Arts in Stages 5 and 6, where Dance and Drama are both relegated to also-ran status, lumped in with a number of sub-sets of Visual Arts. And of course, Media Arts remains excluded.
- Admittedly, this draft syllabus does not to any great extent distinguish and prioritise Music and Visual Arts at Stages Early 1 to 3; however, it is inevitable that primary teachers and schools will take into account the far greater opportunities for Music and Visual Arts at secondary level. This is entirely non-compliant with the AC which clearly requires parity and an equal introduction to all the arts from F-6 (Early Stage 1-3). That is also the unanimous policy of the NAAE (which represents the national associations for Music and for Visual Arts, as well as Dance, Drama and Media Arts).
3. The continued use of the title 'Creative Arts' is not aligned with the AC, where the decision was made at the outset to acknowledge the field by its proper name.
- [NB In the past, some non-artistic subjects (i.e. subjects whose primary purpose was practical rather than aesthetic knowledge) may have been given the 'arts' nomenclature (e.g. Manual/ Language Arts); however, it is no more necessary to make this distinction than to distinguish the Sciences from Domestic Science by adding a prefix such as 'logical'. ]

**b.) Incomplete understanding**

4. A central building block of the AC from its inception (but very poorly explicated in the AC's final form) has been the concept of *aesthetic knowledge* as the defining feature that binds the five subjects together and distinguishes this Learning Area from other kinds of knowledge/learning in the curriculum. All the objectives, content, learning experiences and achievement standards are written in terms of the distinct forms of aesthetic knowledge inherent in the five art forms.
- This is embedded (but again, not very explicitly) in the AC's common content terminology (e.g. *elements, techniques, skills, processes, materials, viewpoints*) that sits above the art-form-specific terminology in all five arts. This is not yet fully evident in the NSW syllabus, particularly in the preliminary rationale and generic sections.

There are three more connected fundamental principles of the AC (again, all embedded rather than explicated in the AC) which are not fully evident in the NSW Syllabus yet:

5. In the AC the emphasis is on the student rather than on the subject particularly in the primary years (NSW Stages 1-3), and therefore on **process** rather than **product** and even more definitely in the early years (NSW Early Stage 1). This has led to the conscious use of verbal rather than nominal grammar: i.e. *art-making* rather than *producing artworks*. The result of this divergence is that the NSW syllabus appears still to be more secondary-centric (or secondary-driven) than primary education should be.
6. A central tenet of the AC is the principle of **recursivity** – where the dimensions ('strands' or 'domains') can and do interact, integrate and interweave. To use the NSW terminology, making and performing involve both investigating and responding, which can themselves take the form of further making and performing.
7. Linked to this is the AC's conscious reluctance to draw too clear a distinction between 'artist' and 'audience' functions, which are still quite discrete in the NSW Syllabus, as they also were in its predecessor. The first audience for any artist or artists is themselves, and the investigating and responding function is very present in the making and producing of any art. Some established art forms and genres may have no external audience – jazz, rock music jamming, process drama and other role-play forms, dance improvisation, Aboriginal corroboree etc. The NSW Syllabus terminology as yet takes little account of these three principles.
8. It is not clear whether NSW has grasped the significance of the **Viewpoints** in the AC which provide a comprehensive set of perspectival lenses for responding to art-making and artworks. In the NSW syllabus, the references to the various perspectives for study seem rather more diffused, in vague phrases like 'about the World'.

**c.) Deviant details**

9. A significant deviation affecting several art forms is that the AC recognizes the key components of the art forms as operating right from the earliest stages – e.g. from early childhood, children compose music, develop expressive, technical and choreographic skills for dance and a movement vocabulary, and experiment with visual codes and conventions.
10. For this reason, the AC uses art-form-specific terminology throughout the Stages and encourages its use, whereas e.g. in the NSW syllabus, 'choreography', 'composing' and 'visual codes and conventions' only appear at Stage 3.
11. The token references to Media Arts in the NSW syllabus mainly just use the vague phrase 'media technologies', which does not take account of the diversity of new media nor of the aesthetic requirements for their inclusion in this Learning Area.
12. The otherwise admirable 'safe practices' sections make no mention of intellectual property and copyright issues.

13. I am puzzled as to why some of the icons used in the syllabus appear to be the same as the AC and some not.
14. In the Drama section, I am pleased that the elements of drama are so strongly foregrounded, but puzzled as to why two of the most primary of those elements have been relegated to last: **time** (as a key dimension of causality, narrative and dramatic development) and **language** (as along with the body and movement one of the two essential instruments through which drama is manifested and expressed).

#### d.) Helpful congruence

By contrast, two major features of the NSW syllabus not specifically aligned to the letter of the AC are not only congruent with its spirit, but actually go beyond and improve on it.

##### 15. **Design thinking**

In the AC it was decided that since **design** – often seen as a sub-set of Visual Arts - can be claimed as a key component of all five art forms, it should not form a separate feature, but be embedded and emphasized in all of them. The NSW decision to feature ‘design thinking’ as a general capability is imaginative and welcome.

16. On balance I support the NSW move to replace or flesh out the AC’s **Making** and **Responding** strands (domains) with **making, performing, investigating and responding**. However, there are still elements of uneasy compromise that need further consideration – in NSW as well as in the AC. It may be helpful to look at the historical context of the AC to see how this change is actually in synch with the principles of the AC - though not the letter. The AC writers of the Shape paper were unanimous in deciding on a model of **three common strands** for all art forms, which is also probably the most widely accepted and used world-wide:

- a.) Making/ creating/ forming/ generating;
- b.) performing/ presenting/ interpreting/ producing;
- c.) responding.

(The final nomenclature had not been decided on).

At the last minute, after influential pressure (ironically mainly from NSW) ACARA unilaterally imposed the bilateral **Making** and **Responding** as the common strands, which the Writers had rejected as being too easily diminished into ‘practice & theory’. The Curriculum writers managed to embed within the content descriptors of the four most performative art forms those essential aspects of b. (performance, presentation and production) that are in fact quite distinct from ‘making as creating’. So to have the **strand b.** dimension of **performing** recognized explicitly is indeed aligned to the spirit of the AC, if not to its letter.

This does however leave unresolved several issues;

- a.) The interesting inclusion of the word ‘investigating’ is problematic rather than helpful, as it applies equally to ‘making’ and ‘responding’ experiences and practices.

- b.) the fact that in the NSW syllabus Visual Arts alone still does not acknowledge any elements of [the original] **strand b**. Such elements do in fact exist in the Visual Arts, such as art production, curating, exhibiting, communication, transformation, and aspects of the genres of two-, three- and four-dimensional performance art.
- c.) the question of recursivity and interdependence of the domains in order to avoid the possibility of a simplistic 'practice' v. 'theory' dichotomy;

To sum up, it is clear that NSW has adopted the majority of the AC in its forthcoming K-6 Creative Arts Syllabus, and almost completely in its content descriptors and learning experiences. However, there are still some misalignments that could cause unnecessary divergence in the Syllabus's implementation in schools, and areas of continuing confusion for education officers, head teachers and classroom teachers, particularly non-specialists and primary school teachers in general.