

INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Organisation: Parliamentary Education and Engagement Unit - NSW
Parliament

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Submission to *Inquiry into the New South Wales School Curriculum*

From:

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The Parliamentary Education and Engagement Unit of the NSW Parliament provides programs and resources for teachers and students to learn about our parliamentary democracy, and aims to inspire informed and active citizen engagement. Civics and citizenship education (CCE) is an important aspect of, and currently embedded in, the NSW school curriculum. Parliamentary education is an essential element of CCE and should continue to be incorporated in any future syllabus areas of the NSW curriculum.

In this submission we are addressing the following terms of reference of this Inquiry:

- 3 a) To what extent, if any, 'cross-curriculum' priorities, are needed to guide classroom content and teaching;
- 3 d) Adequacy of the content and depth of teaching of Australian History, pre and post 1788
- 1d) Relationship with national school's curriculum

Background: The NSW Curriculum, civics and citizenship education and parliamentary education

Over the past three decades in Australia, Civics and Citizenship Education has been a strong component of school curriculums and as such has had an important role in preparing citizens to understand how decisions are made in Australia's system of government and successfully participate as informed and active citizens in our democracy.

Civics and Citizenship Education is a broad concept. Civics has been defined in Australian curriculums as a body of knowledge, skills and understandings, relating to the organisation of a democratic society. This includes an understanding of decision making processes in the Westminster parliamentary system, in particular the bi-cameral system, and the role of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly. Citizenship is the set of rights and responsibilities granted to people of a particular state and also refers to the participation of people in the democratic system: everything from voting, to making a submission to a committee enquiry, or communicating with their local member of parliament.

As it is currently adopted in New South Wales, this area of the curriculum has evolved from the *Whereas the people...Civics and Citizenship Education* Report (Civics Expert Group, Commonwealth of Australia 1994); the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA 2008), which states that all young Australians should become active and informed citizens; the *Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship* (Curriculum Corporation 2006); and *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship* (ACARA 2012) In order to ensure continued civic

engagement in NSW, it is essential that civics and citizenship education remains a fundamental aspect of the NSW curriculum into the future.

Other matters of public concern and interest in the development of the NSW curriculum:

3 a) To what extent, if any, 'cross-curriculum' priorities, are needed to guide classroom content and teaching

In the NSW curriculum Civics and Citizenship Education (CCE) is a 'learning across the curriculum' priority that accompanies the 'cross-curriculum' priorities for NSW. Given that CCE does not stand alone as a subject in NSW, it is an important guide to inform classroom content and teaching for teachers, providing objectives that guide the focus of content learning in individual subjects and allow for opportunity to include important civic knowledge into content areas. This is of particular importance in the subject areas of History, Geography, Commerce and Legal Studies where the 'learning across the curriculum' is accompanied by CCE content embedded into learning topics.

Civics and citizenship education should remain as 'learning across the curriculum' content in future syllabuses as it provides opportunities to learn democratic skills, knowledge and values, in the context of a subject area that are essential for future citizens navigating their society in the 21st century. Incorporating CCE in this way emphasises that these are learnings essential for the real world and not just confined to subject area knowledge.

For example, the Geography K-10 syllabus states that: "As students engage in learning in Geography, they will develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes for responsible, informed and active participation in Australian society and as global citizens. ... Students examine the role of citizens in the context of government systems and institutions as well as political and social life in Australia and other countries." (p33)

The History K-10 syllabus states that: "In History students investigate and explore how their own and other societies have organised themselves, and how the ideals and practices of their own democratic society have evolved over time. Students engage with the fundamentals of the nature of community and citizenship and the development of democracy in Australia. A comparison with other civic societies enriches this knowledge and understanding of civic life. Students examine the changing role of citizens in the context of government systems and institutions as well as political and social life in the past and the present. The long struggle for rights, responsibilities and freedoms forms the focus of studying past people." (p31)

This 'learning across the curriculum' content should not only be maintained but strengthened by ensuring that students study the role and structures of parliament and government at both State and Federal levels, and how the Australian Constitution and the State constitutions outline the powers and decision making processes in our Federal system. This will strengthen student's understanding of the topics that they study in these syllabuses and model the decision making processes they will engage in in their future lives. Currently the programs provided by Parliamentary Education and Engagement are designed to address these topics for teachers who elect to participate.

3 d) Adequacy of the content and depth of teaching of Australian History, pre and post 1788

From a Parliamentary Education perspective we believe that the NSW Curriculum allows for an adequacy of content and depth in the teaching of Australian History in regards to civics and

citizenship education. However it is more adequate in the primary syllabus area of History but could be strengthened in the secondary syllabus areas of History and Geography.

In the NSW K-6 Primary History syllabus civics and citizenship education is embedded in appropriate content, and moves incrementally from the person to the broader community as the students' age increases. Stage 1 students learn about roles, rights, responsibilities, rules at school and in the family and may look at decision-making processes. In Stage 2, local government and its processes are addressed. In Stage 3, CCE content becomes linked to historical events such as how Australia became a nation, the influences of Britain and the USA on Australian democracy and the structures and responsibilities of local, state and federal governments state government as well as the significance of key figures such as Sir Henry Parkes in Australian democracy.

However, in the NSW 7-10 History syllabus, although the teaching and learning about civic history is adequate, the role of civic institutions is not given the core emphasis that we believe it requires. For example, the topic *Making a Nation* is not mandatory yet it discusses European settlement in Australia; how and why Federation was achieved; state and federal responsibilities under the Australian Constitution; and key events and ideas in the development of Australian self-government and democracy. This topic should be a mandatory in Years 9-10 History, allowing students to revisit, and teachers to build upon, the foundational knowledge and values about parliamentary democracy that were learnt in primary school and therefore preparing students for their future lives as voting citizens. The topic of *Rights and Freedoms 1945 – present* is a mandatory core study and provides opportunities to learn about civics and citizenship in the context of the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders for rights and freedoms. This should remain mandatory, however it should not be prioritised over the *Making a Nation* topic which is the mechanism which guarantees an understanding and valuing of Australia's democracy.

In the current NSW Geography 7-10 syllabus CCE is mainly found as a 'learning across the curriculum' element but is also embedded in content areas where appropriate. For example the topic: 'Human Wellbeing' in Stage 5 has a Key Inquiry Question: How do governments, groups and individuals respond to inequalities in development and human wellbeing for a sustainable future? (p78) This analysis of the roles of individuals, groups and governments in democratic decision making is an essential aspect of civic knowledge and motivation for informed citizen action. There should be more examples of this type of link to CCE in any future Geography syllabus, perhaps returning to the model of the previous Geography Years 7–10 Syllabus (2003) in which CCE content was more obvious.

The Year 10 Commerce Elective syllabus also provides an opportunity for a deeper understanding of the skills and knowledge needed by informed and active citizens through the Core study topic: Law, Society and Political Involvement. This topic allows for a contemporary and dynamic view of the workings of decision-making processes of the parliament and demonstrates how laws and policies affect the everyday lives of students. However as this is an elective subject not all students gain the opportunity provided by this topic for in depth learning about parliament, politics and the law. Consideration should be given to mandating this, along with the *Making a Nation* topic in History, as a module in Year 10 and/or using these topics as a model for a mandatory CCE module in Years 11 and 12.

In Years 11 and 12 in NSW, civics and citizenship education is not mandated in any form despite these being the years that students begin their lives as active citizens, in particular when they reach voting age at 18. Civics and citizenship content is found in the non-mandatory subject of Legal Studies in the Preliminary Course; mainly in Part 1: The legal system. Currently Parliamentary Education and Engagement offer *Legal Studies and the Legislature* workshops to Year 11 students

addressing the outcomes in this elective subject. This is a topic that we believe could be used to create content for a mandatory new senior syllabus dedicated to civics and citizenship education as this is the age at which students are becoming active citizens through their education, work, community and social engagement opportunities.

The extent to which the Masters Curriculum Review addresses its terms of reference, including: 1d) Relationship with national school's curriculum

Currently the NSW curriculum is written to reflect the Australian Curriculum with civics and citizenship as a 'learning across the curriculum' priority and also embedded in appropriate syllabuses. However, at the national level, CCE is given the status of a separate subject. An opportunity exists for more in depth and mandatory inclusion of CCE, particularly in the senior years, with the recommendations of the Master's Review, as suggested in the Executive Summary: "In the senior years of school, a smaller number of rigorous, high quality HSC subjects is envisaged, achieved by combining and consolidating existing subjects. It is recommended that the core content of these new syllabuses be developed with reference to the Australian Curriculum and that, as they are developed, new syllabuses replace the existing syllabuses of the NSW curriculum." Education about parliamentary democracy, should be included as a mandatory topic in any appropriate new or revised syllabuses in NSW.

Conclusion

Knowledge about our Westminster parliamentary democracy, how it works in a Federal system and how students can engage as active and informed citizens is currently an essential aspect of the NSW School Curriculum. An understanding of how decisions are made in a democratic system underpins the learning that will help students become informed and responsible individuals who see participation in their democratic society as part of their lifelong learning.

We strongly believe that civics and citizenship knowledge and skills should remain embedded in all appropriate K-10 NSW syllabuses and should be enhanced by making the *Making a Nation* History topic mandatory in Years 9-10.

Alternatively, civics and citizenship could be mandated as its own module of learning in K-10 and also in Years 11 and 12.

Currently Parliamentary Education and Engagement provides student programs that address the civics and citizenship outcomes in Stage 3, Stage 5 and Stage 6 in the NSW Curriculum. Examples of these are the State Schools Student *Constitutional Convention* for Year 11 students; *Make a Difference Day* for year 10 students; and *Visit Us At Our House* video conferencing program for Year 5 & 6 students. To ensure that high quality teaching occurs in this area, it is also proposed that funded teacher professional development be made available, to allow for a depth of conceptual learning, knowledge and understanding, in the important area of civics and citizenship, and in particular education about parliamentary democracy.