

## **INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

**Organisation:** Australian Catholic University

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To: NSW Legislative Council's Portfolio Committee No. 3 - Education

By email: [PortfolioCommittee3@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:PortfolioCommittee3@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Committee members

**Re: ACU response to the Committee's inquiry into the New South Wales School Curriculum**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the NSW Legislative Council's Education Committee Inquiry into the NSW Curriculum (the Inquiry).

ACU's Faculty of Education and Arts wishes to make only a few specific comments on:

- a) the importance of English literacy across the curriculum, and the need to adopt the most effective evidence-based approaches to language acquisition, especially for reading and writing (TOR 3e); and
- b) general comments about the overcrowding of the curriculum.

**The importance of English literacy across the curriculum**

In the last decade, large-scale testing at national and international levels has made it possible to track performance trends in ways not possible in earlier eras. National testing in literacy education, for example, has shown declines in writing performance in every Australian State and Territory. It was in this context, amid growing concerns about declining performance in writing in particular, that ACU's Institute for Learning Sciences and Teacher Education (ILSTE) conducted an Australian Writing Survey that was completed online by 4,306 teachers and submitted to the New South Wales Education Standards Authority in 2018. This study showed there was a need to:

- i) embed literacy and numeracy as an essential aspect of learning in all curriculum areas; and
- ii) clarify the quality standards teachers are meant to be using to assess literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.

The ILSTE study revealed students do not routinely have time to develop writing skills in class and that time needs to be devoted to developing such foundational skills within specific contexts.

The study also revealed there are multiple standards competing for teachers' attention. A policy that establishes the standards to use would go some way to achieving consistency in both language and application across schools and sectors, and some consistency in expectations of quality within and across schools. Teachers would benefit from a rationalisation process that clearly establishes the standards or stated levels of quality they are to use. Presently, teachers are confused as to what standards they should use to judge literacy and numeracy.

**Professor Elizabeth Labone**  
Executive Dean

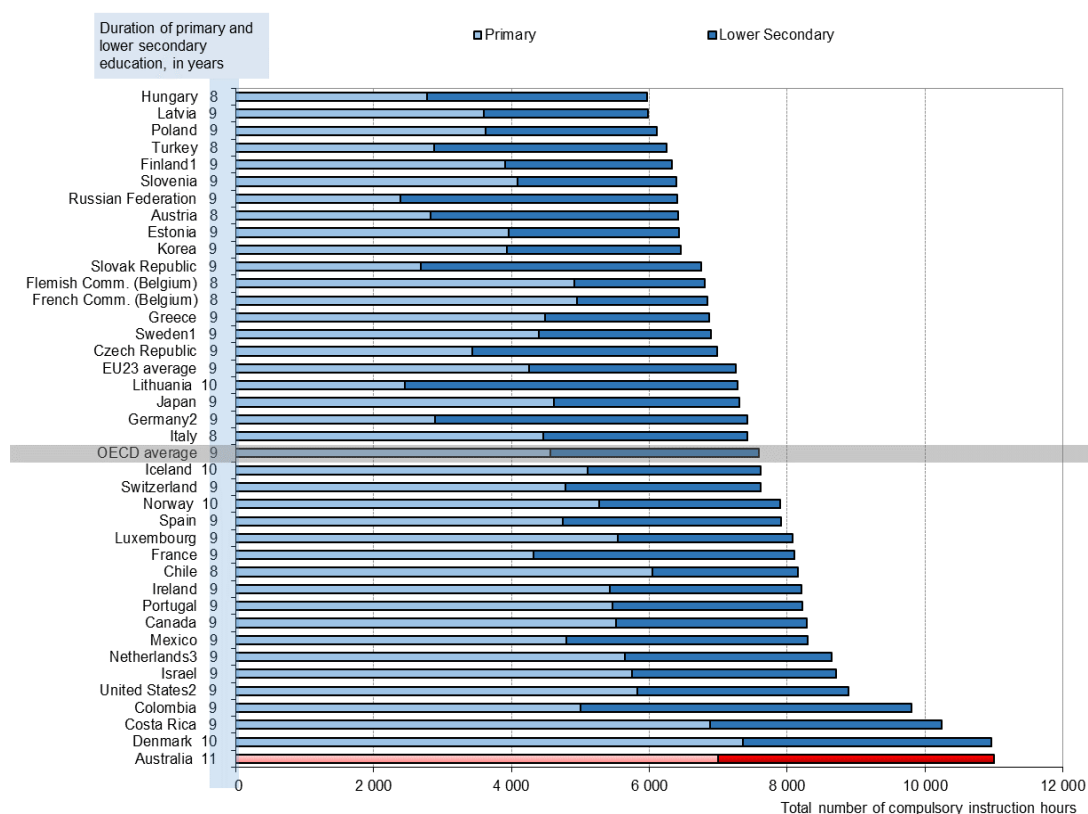
ACU recommends that explicit provision of time be provided for literacy and numeracy in all curriculum areas and a rationalisation occur of the assessment standards teachers use to judge literacy and numeracy.

## The overcrowding of the curriculum

ACU points to evidence that the Australian curriculum is overcrowded.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) *Education at a Glance* reports have indicated that Australian students have the heaviest workload, in terms of statutory requirements for instruction, than any other country in the OECD. For example, in 2019, Australian students undertook 11,000 hours of compulsory instruction time over the course of their primary and lower secondary schooling, which is nearly double some other countries and significantly higher than the OECD average of 7,590 hours (see Figure 1 below, where Australia is highlighted in red).

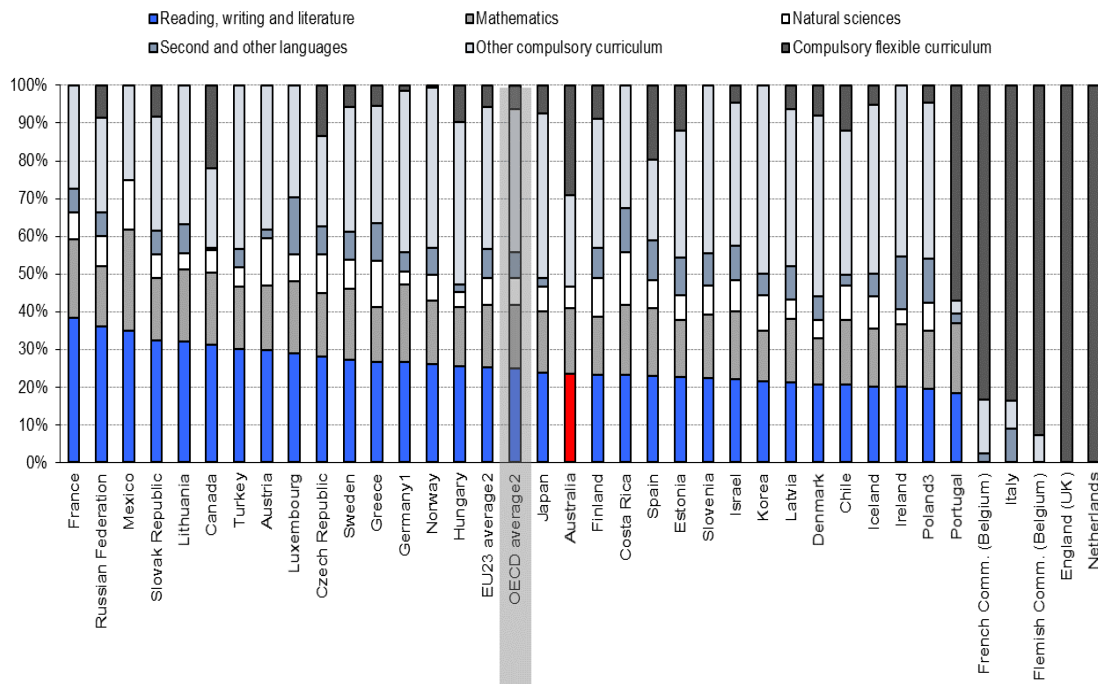
**Figure 1: Compulsory instruction time in general education (2019)**



Source: OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2019, Figure D1.1.

In contrast, the amount of time Australian primary students spend on reading, writing, literature and mathematics is about the same as the OECD average; 41 per cent of total instruction time in Australia, compared to 42 per cent for the OECD on average (see Figure 2, where Australia's "reading, writing and literature" column is highlighted in red).

**Figure 2: Instruction time per subject in primary education (2019)**



Source: OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2019, Figure D1.2a

If Australia's total hours of compulsory instruction time is far in excess of the OECD average, while its hours on reading, writing, literature and mathematics is just below the OECD average, it suggests that Australia's curriculum has been significantly expanded by other content, making it "overcrowded."

ACU notes there is evidence to suggest the Australian, and by implication, NSW curriculum, is overcrowded.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the inquiry.

Yours sincerely

**Professor Elizabeth Labone**  
 Executive Dean  
 Faculty of Education & Arts