Submission from the Australian Curriculum Studies Association to the Australian Government Department of Education on the Review of the Australian Curriculum

Overview
The Australian Government announced a review to evaluate the content and development process of the Australian Curriculum on 10 January 2014. Whilst the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to public consultations about fine-tuning the quality of the first national curriculum to be implemented in Australia, it expresses concerns about the nature and timing of this review.

ACSA was established in 1983 as a broadly based educational association supporting the professional interests of educators in curriculum work from all levels and sectors within and beyond Australia. ACSA works to support educators so that all students have access to a meaningful, relevant and engaging curriculum. ACSA is committed to curriculum reform informed by the principles of social justice and equity and respect for the democratic rights of all. In recognition of the importance of each element of the Australian Curriculum, ACSA has engaged with curriculum leaders from across the nation to provide an in-depth critique of the general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities of the Australian Curriculum (see Appendix One for details of this engagement).

ACSA has a commitment to maintain the architecture of the Australian Curriculum, namely: the learning areas, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities. This commitment has been reinforced and informed by the many educators who have participated in the ongoing professional development provided by ACSA. In light of ACSA’s commitment to the structure of the Australian Curriculum the ACSA Executive has identified the following four (4) key issues of concern in relation to the 2014 Review of the Australian Curriculum.

1. ACSA supports the tripartite design of the Australian Curriculum and argues for its preservation
ACSA endorses the innovative and effective way in which the Australian Curriculum is designed in three components including: learning areas, general capabilities (knowledge, skills and dispositions that apply across subject areas and equip students to be lifelong learners) and cross curriculum priorities (three contemporary priorities). The inclusion of these three components is in recognition of the fact that learning cannot always be defined by subjects alone.

ACSA commends this structure as it affords teachers around Australia professional opportunities to select the most relevant general capabilities and cross curriculum priorities to embed and enrich their subjects as they deem appropriate to the needs of their students each year. In this way, the knowledge, skills and dispositions to be developed through the general capabilities and cross curriculum priorities are given empirical grounding in the subject or discipline being taught. This captures the visionary goals of the Melbourne Declaration in devising a 21st curriculum for all young Australians. The objective of equipping young Australians, and the nation, to prosper in the future must underpin the design of this curriculum. There is strong support from the education community for a national curriculum approach to providing the opportunity for all young Australians to become active and informed citizens who:

- gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, deep knowledge, traditions and holistic world views;
- develop knowledge and understanding of Asian societies, cultures, beliefs and environments, and the connections between the peoples of Asia, Australia, and the rest of the world;
• appreciate the necessity of acting for a more sustainable future and so address the ongoing capacity of Earth to maintain all life and meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations.

2. Design and development process
The development of the Australian Curriculum involved a lengthy consultative process. This consultation included contributions from thousands of stakeholders, including teachers and other educators, students, and parents and community members. As an association representing the curriculum interests of educators across Australia, ASCA stresses that this acknowledgement of the professional expertise of teachers and other members of the education community must be recognised in any review of the current curriculum.

The Australian Curriculum has been negotiated with state and territory governments of various political persuasions. Further refinements - informed by research evidence – are planned to take place during the implementation process, in order to improve the effectiveness of the curriculum.

3. Timing
ACSA is concerned that a review of the Australian Curriculum will take place while the curriculum has not yet been fully developed and implemented. Educators, in particular our classroom teachers, have not been provided with the full opportunity to review or evaluate the curriculum. ASCA is always willing to contribute to discussion aimed at improving curriculum, yet we feel strongly that the timing of the review is premature. Review of the Australian Curriculum at this time, during its development and implementation, will have disruptive consequences for both teachers and students.

ACSA is especially concerned for those teachers in different jurisdictions who have already invested considerable time and expertise in implementing the Phase One disciplines. Those teachers require support and certainty to ensure they can focus on delivering the programs they have planned and commenced teaching.

4. Claims made about Australian Curriculum outcomes
It is extremely premature to make any claims about outcomes of the Australian Curriculum when Phase One has not yet been enacted in all jurisdictions; and in those where all Phase One learning areas are being taught, this situation has been the case for one or two years only, hardly enough time to have any significant effect on student outcomes.

ACSA expresses concern that generalised links have been made between the Australian Curriculum and falling PISA results by the Minister for Education. The Australian Curriculum includes disciplines not included in PISA testing, and as the most recent PISA testing was conducted in 2012, most students who were sampled in the PISA testing would have been from jurisdictions which had not begun to enact the Australian Curriculum at that time.

Appendix One
In recognition of the importance of each element of the Australian Curriculum, ACSA has engaged with curriculum leaders from across the nation to provide an in-depth critique of the general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities of the Australian Curriculum.

Biennial Conference and Symposium
ACSA’s 2012 Symposium was developed around the theme Quality learning through general capabilities: Opportunities and challenges. Workshops explored issues such as embedding general capabilities, implementing general capabilities and relating general capabilities to the learning areas;
and keynote addresses included: General Capabilities and the Australian Curriculum: Possibilities and challenges (Prof Alan Reid); What is quality learning? How does it relate to General Capabilities? (Paul Kilvert, SACE Board, SA).

The 2013 ACSA conference explored the theme Uncharted territory? Navigating the new Australian Curriculum by investigating each of the cross curriculum priorities in the Australian Curriculum. Leading educators presented papers on topics such as: My knowledge. Your knowledge. Towards an intercultural understanding. (Ass Prof John Bradley); Cross-curriculum priorities: Policy and practice (Dr Phil Lambert, ACARA); Understanding sustainability (Prof Eelco Rohling); Australia’s engagement with Asia in the 21st century: Which Asia? (Prof Kerry Kennedy, Hong Kong Institute of Education).

Feedback from educators who attended the conference indicated that they saw the general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities as a lynchpin of the Australian Curriculum, and confirmed that there is great support and interest in developing professional knowledge about these elements of the curriculum.

Comments included statements such as:

Putting the cross-curriculum priorities at the front of my thinking - the schools I work with have been busy just getting use to their learning area content and now it’s time to dig deeper in incorporating the cross-curriculum priorities and the general capabilities. Took lots of inspiration and ideas and ready to get into it! I’m really keen to get these priorities embedded and to network and collaborate to develop quality resources which can be shared & used. Particularly Sustainability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

Publications
ACSA also contributes to the professional development of Australian educators through its professional journal, Curriculum Perspectives. Recent articles in the journal include:

- Sustainability in the Australian science national curriculum (Vol 30, Number 1, 2010)
- Role and purpose of standards in the context of national curriculum and assessment reform for accountability, improvement and equity in student learning (Vol 30, Number 3, 2010)
- Messages about progress to date on the Australian Curriculum: Mathematics (Vol 31, Number 1, 2011)
- History in the Australian Curriculum F-10: Providing answers without asking questions (Vol 31, Number 3, 2011)
- Capabilities and the Australian Curriculum (Vol 32, Number 1, 2012)
- Effectively harnessing ICTs in support of skills development for employability (Vol 32, Number 3, 2012)
- The inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in the Australian National Curriculum: A cultural, cognitive and socio-political evaluation (Vol 33, Number 1, 2013)
- Asia literacy and schooling (Vol 33, Number 3, 2013)

In 2012, ACSA also published a book on the first phase of the Australian Curriculum, edited by the late pre-eminent curriculum expert Professor Colin Marsh, viz: