



# Submission by the Foundation for Young Australians to the Review of the Australian Curriculum

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Centre for New Public Education

## Introduction

The Centre for New Public Education (CNPE) would like to thank the Australian Government Department of Education for providing us with the opportunity to submit to their review of the Australian Curriculum (the review). CNPE is responding to the review on behalf of the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA).

FYA is a national, independent, non-profit organisation dedicated solely to young people. FYA believes that young people have the courage, imagination and will to shape their education and create social change. Our vision is that, no matter who they are or where they are, young Australians are connected, confident and optimistic about the future, with a deep sense of purpose and belonging. The FYA mission is creating change with generations of young Australians. CNPE, an initiative of FYA, is working to connect and empower people to influence education so all young people are ready for their future.

Section A argues for the central role of students in the curriculum review process, drawing on evidence demonstrating that successful curriculum implementation relies on the meaningful engagement of students. Section A responds to review parameter *ii*, ‘the process of curriculum development to be followed by ACARA for the development and revision of all future curriculum content’.

Section B argues that a key function of education is to prepare students to be confident and enterprising individuals, well-prepared for their future life and work. It recommends that enterprise skills be embedded into the curriculum to facilitate successful transitions between education and employment in an increasingly globalised economy. Section B responds to review parameter *iii*, ‘the content learning areas, cross curriculum priorities and general capabilities of the Australian curriculum’.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** FYA encourages the Australian Government to engage with students as part of the curriculum review process.

**Recommendation 2:** FYA encourages the Australian Government to embed enterprise skills and their assessment into the curriculum.

## Section A: Why students should be part of the curriculum review

As the primary beneficiary and stakeholder in the education system, young people should be an integral part of the curriculum review process. For curriculum to be successful, it must be meaningful to students and encourage their active participation. The only way to ensure this is to consider the views and needs of students as part of the review. Available evidence suggests that the engagement of students with their

schooling is associated with the transition to participation in post-compulsory education and training (Hillman 2010). Inviting young people to meaningfully engage with the curriculum review will help support these outcomes.

Spending 195 days a year in the classroom, students have more first-hand experience of the teaching and learning provided than any other stakeholder. Despite this, students 'remain the group least frequently invited to share' (Black 2011, p. 74). More importantly, the evidence demonstrates that student perspectives are reliable and robust indicators of the efficacy of teaching and learning processes. For example, the Measures of Effective Teaching study (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2012) found that student perspectives on the quality of teacher practice are more accurate than those of teacher observers. Student perspective is a highly valuable data source that remains largely untapped in processes of educational reform.

Successful reform of the education system relies on student buy-in, both to engage students and to persuade other key stakeholders of the need for change. Engaging young people in the design of curriculum will help prevent barriers to reform, including resistance at the classroom level. The evidence suggests that processes of educational reform would be far more effective if they included the young people they were designed to benefit (Cook-Sather 2002; Fullan 1991; Kohn 1993). The inclusion of students also facilitates teacher support of systemic change, as student attitudes to teaching and learning processes comprise a powerful contextual incentive for teachers (Earl & Lee 1999). The most serious and difficult barriers to curriculum reform occur at the classroom level. Student input is a vital part of successfully navigating these barriers.

FYA has demonstrated the power of young people's ideas in its Student ShoutOut (SSO) consultations in 2012 and 2013, where over 4500 young people spoke about educational issues that mattered to them. SSO has consistently found young people's greatest concern is the failure of the education system to meet their learning needs and adequately prepare them for their future life and work. In 2012, the key ideas were delivered in a report to the Senate Inquiry into Teaching and Learning.

The report generated significant interest and SSO participants appeared as expert witnesses at the Senate hearing.

The evidence is clear that students will add significant value to the review process, helping to boost the engagement of young people with the curriculum and navigate the obstacles to successful curriculum implementation.

**Recommendation 1:** FYA encourages the Australian Government to engage with students as part of the curriculum review process.

## Section B: the role of the curriculum in facilitating school-to-work transitions

One of the primary functions of an education system is to prepare students to have successful and fulfilling lives. Data from SSO 2012 shows that students believe their schooling fails to prepare them adequately for their future. This concern is also shared with their future employers. The evidence demonstrates that employers are concerned about young people's lack of enterprise skills (Casner-Lotto & Barrington 2006; Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland 2011). FYA defines enterprise skills as the 'broader, more general skills such as interpersonal and communication skills, critical reasoning and analytical skills,' as well as digital capabilities and the 'personal drive and commitment' demanded by the contemporary workplace (Stanwick et al 2013, p. 7). It is essential that enterprise skills be embedded into the Australian Curriculum to support student engagement and facilitate successful transitions between education and employment.

The reality of the work young people must be prepared for is very different from the reality their parents and grandparents faced. The emergence of knowledge economies and the increasing ubiquity of technology have underpinned an increasingly globalised labour market. The jobs of the future are dependent on workers who possess flexible, transferable enterprise skills that promote 'long-term job success and performance' (Pope et al 2014). The curriculum-level response to this rapidly shifting economic context has included the development of the General Capabilities the Australian Curriculum and programs including Work Studies and the National Trade Cadetship<sup>1</sup>. The development of these programs is indicative of the steps we need to take, as it has been shaped by the recognition that enterprise skills are essential for young people to successfully navigate their future career paths

The inclusion of enterprise skills in the curriculum is a positive step, but these, now critical capabilities, need to be effectively embedded into the curriculum to ensure they are explicitly taught in the classroom. While it is not desirable to explicitly teach these skills in every subject, it is important that these are not simply an optional add-on to the curriculum. Enterprise skills must be appropriately integrated into the curriculum to ensure young Australians are adequately prepared to obtain meaningful employment in an increasingly competitive globalised marketplace.

Effectively embedding enterprise skills requires the assessment of students on this basis. Teachers will prioritise the teaching of content that is assessed, so the assessment of enterprise skills will provide an incentive to the teacher workforce. More broadly, the assessment is vital to increasing the perceived importance of enterprise skills. The measurement of what is valued transforms the education systems by influencing what is taught. This has been most clearly demonstrated by the global impact on teaching and learning of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). The

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<sup>1</sup> ACARA intends to begin implementing the Work Studies Years 9–10 curriculum by mid-2014 and the National Trade Cadetship Years 11–12 from February 2015

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), through PISA, has shifted the priorities of education systems globally by measuring work readiness instead of curriculum mastery. FYA encourages the Australian Government to embed enterprise skills and their assessment into the curriculum in order to prepare young people to thrive in their future life and work.

**Recommendation 2:** FYA encourages the Australian Government to embed enterprise skills and their assessment into the curriculum.

## Conclusion

Successful curriculum features students at its core. FYA recommends that students be actively included in the review process. This will support the meaningful engagement of young people in the classroom and facilitate effective curriculum implementation. Young people look to their schooling to equip them with the mindset and capabilities necessary to navigate an increasingly flexible and competitive economic future. The engagement of young people in their schooling, together with the inclusion of enterprise skills in the curriculum, will prepare them to succeed in their future life and work.

## Acknowledgements

### FYA's Centre for New Public Education

This submission was prepared by FYA's Centre for New Public Education (CNPE), a national initiative dedicated to building a fairer and future focused education system for all young Australians. CNPE connects and empowers people to influence education so all young people, regardless of their background, will have access to an education which gives them the skills, knowledge and capabilities to thrive in their future life and work.

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