Monitoring the effectiveness of the F-10 Australian Curriculum

Submission, July 2014

Introduction
The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) submits this response to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) on monitoring the effectiveness of the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum on behalf of 22 Catholic school authorities and 296 Catholic schools in Queensland. The 2014 monitoring report covers the period from July 2013 to June 2014 in which most Catholic schools in Queensland were in their third year of implementing the learning areas: English, mathematics, science, and history. Many schools commenced implementing Geography in 2013 and in early 2014 started implementing the curriculum for other learning areas even though these remain to be endorsed by SCSEEC. The comments in the submission are based on comments provided by three diocesan Catholic Education Offices – Cairns, Rockhampton and Townsville.

Although the report was asked to focus on ‘the effectiveness of the Australian Curriculum as written, not curriculum as implemented’ it is evident that once teachers are in the implementation phase this differentiation is difficult to make and comments made in this submission relate to the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. While QCEC understands that the implementation, assessment and reporting of the curriculum is a State responsibility it is difficult to separate these from the ‘curriculum as written’ as each aspect impacts on all other areas of curriculum implementation.
1. **Name of Authority:** Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC)

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2. **Summary/Key recommendations:**

   - Teachers are generally positive about the Australian Curriculum. It essentially provides the content to be taught by teachers and the standard to be achieved by students. There is concern about an overcrowded curriculum – this relates to classroom teachers who teach across all subject areas, particularly, Years 5 and 6 teachers who will be expected to teach, assess and report on 16 different subjects.
   - As the Australian curriculum is written in disciplines and in a year by year framework (except for Phase 2 & 3 subjects) it is essential that key concepts or ‘big picture’ ideas are developed that transfer across subjects to enable meaningful integration of the whole curriculum, particularly in the primary years. The integration of learning areas ensures the development of ‘wholeness,’ where content is not seen to be held tightly within one specific subject area but is viewed more broadly in its relationship to all other knowledge and understanding.
     
     “Each discipline is not an island inhabited by a form of knowledge that is distinct and ring-fenced; rather, it is a dynamic relationship with all other forms of knowledge. Each of which expresses something about the human person and touches upon some truth.”
     
     Congregation for Catholic Education. (Dec, 2013) Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools, Living in Harmony for Civilization of Love

   Key recommendations:
   - Align inquiry learning models within grouped Learning Areas, e.g. Business & Economics within Humanities and Social Sciences
   - Improve the rationale, use and embedding of General Capabilities (GCs) and Cross Curriculum Priorities (CCPs)
   - Provide advice and guidance on integration of learning areas and support for multi-age settings.

3. **Feedback about the whole Australian Curriculum**

   **i. Relationship between the parts of the 3 dimensional curriculum**
   - Teachers are not always certain of the relationship between the three dimensions of the Australian Curriculum. This uncertainty or confusion can result in disconnected or unauthentic interaction between the dimensions.
   - Consistent formatting and use of language makes the curriculum user friendly.
   - The display of icons for General Capabilities (GCs) and Cross Curriculum Priorities (CCPs) is useful for identifying connections however at times the CCPs seem forced or contrived.

   Suggested improvements:
   - Provide visual resources to show the link between dimensions.
   - Provide a framework for the implementation and assessment of GPs.
ii. Primary curriculum

- Many primary teachers report they are experiencing content overload. The roll out of Phase 2 & 3 subjects will add additional workload for the generalist primary teacher, particularly in those areas that address content previously not covered in the primary curriculum e.g. Digital Technologies.
- Some teachers have the perception that because the learning areas are written as discreet subjects, they are not meant to be integrated.

Suggested improvements:
- Primary teachers express the need for support with planning, teaching and assessment for multi-age classes.

iii. Catering for diversity

- The information ACARA provides about catering for diversity is a good source of reference for policy and clarification. Teachers do not see the Australian Curriculum itself as catering for diversity, but rather each teacher’s pedagogical practice enables students’ learning needs to be met.
- Feedback suggests that the year level structure of the Australian curriculum is not conducive to catering for diversity. The use of a learning continua approach or similar would be more appropriate.
- Teachers are developing capacity in differentiating the curriculum to meet the needs of all students as the broad nature of achievement standards enables differentiation.
- The challenge for teachers is to assess student achievement by using a variety of assessment practices and not rely solely on a written based response.

Suggested improvements:
- Development of resources to differentiate using the achievement standards, content descriptors, CCPs and GCs.
- Increased support for the effective implementation of the General Capabilities would assist with catering for diverse learning styles.

iv. General comments

- The Australian Curriculum is viewed positively by teachers as they become more familiar with it and develop a better understanding of how its components work together to make up the whole.
- The year level descriptions provide a clear summary of the content descriptions and provide teachers with a concise picture of the learning direction for their year level.
- In the implementation stage, teachers are planning effectively using the content descriptions. The significance and capacity of the achievement standards for assessment and the strengths identified when embedding the General Capabilities and Cross Curriculum Priorities remain a challenge.

4. Feedback about the parts of the Australian Curriculum

i. F-10 learning areas/subjects

- The Australian Curriculum is viewed positively as it is an important and effective nationwide development.
- The curriculum challenges teachers to engage with content and issues, review their pedagogy and engage in professional conversations.
- Teachers acknowledge the comprehensive nature of the curriculum.
- The inclusion of assessment work samples is valued and utilised.
- There is continued concern for building teacher knowledge capacity for a high volume curriculum and all of its components.
- The curriculum for Foundation is not considered appropriate for learning in the early years. There are concerns that teachers are taking a formal structured implementation of the content descriptions as they do not allow for flexibility.

**Suggested improvements:**
- Improved alignment of inquiry skills across subject areas. Although recognised that inquiry models are discipline specific, this approach is not appropriate in the early years.

**English**
- The English curriculum is considered the most complex of learning areas to teach with teachers finding it a challenge to break the content descriptions into a usable form for planning.
- While some teachers are happy with the strands others do not like the literacy, language and literature strands as they add another layer of difficulty as teachers plan using the modes of reading and viewing, writing and speaking and listening.
- The focus on literature is valued for engaging learners.
- It is important there is an appropriate balance between the conventions of the language (spelling, punctuation, grammar, syntax) with the visual literacy, media texts and presentation aspects of the English curriculum in teaching strategies and assessment tasks.

**Mathematics**
- The Mathematics curriculum provides clear conceptual development and scaffolding of the content and skills required in the three content strands of Number and Algebra, Measurement and Geometry, and Statistics and Probability.
- The skills for each year level require even more explicit direction as they are still quite broad, with the elaborations being only a guide for teachers.
- The Scope and Sequence requires some adjustments.

**Science**
- The strength of the Science curriculum is the clear use of scientific inquiry.
- The Knowledge and Understandings are appropriate for age levels and engage students in the discipline however it is too content heavy in the secondary years.
- Primary Connections is a great resource.

**History**
- The structure of the History curriculum to include Historical and Knowledge and Understanding, and Historical Skills has been received very positively.
- The teaching of History is more effective when aligned with Geography and Science knowledge and understandings and inquiry skills. Teachers are able to integrate an inquiry question across a broader perspective that assists with time allocations of the curriculum.
### Suggested improvements:
- Broaden Asian Studies into the Humanities and Social Sciences.

### Geography
- The Geography curriculum has been well developed and teachers appreciate the links between Geography, History and Science, especially in Year 7.
- Despite limited implementation, the knowledge and understandings and inquiry skills have been organised in a way which allows for knowledge and skill development as students mature.
- Some primary school teachers are struggling with the content.

### Business & Economics
- This learning area will need support for its integration with other subjects so it can be taught in meaningful contexts.
- Alignment with the inquiry model of other Humanities subjects is an issue.
- 20 hours per year not a huge quantum of time in Years 5 – 8.

### Civics & Citizenship
- Civics and Citizenship is an essential subject but teachers will need to be guided to integrate this learning area rather than leaving it as standalone.
- Scheduling/time allocation is a main concern in the secondary years.

### The Arts
- There are real concerns that the teaching of all the subjects of The Arts curriculum is threatened by – low time allocation, teacher capacity and over-crowded curriculum.
- Teachers need support to know how all Arts subjects can be implemented effectively - some areas may be completely omitted if there isn’t enough time in the week/term/year to do it all.

### Technologies
- Many components of this learning area, e.g. Digital Technologies will be new to primary teachers so considerable professional development will be required to implement this area effectively.
- Time allocation and current popularity of subjects such as Home Economics, Graphics and Shop are concerns for traditional subject line timetabling.
- This learning area will need to be integrated across curriculum.

### Health & Physical Education
- There is a difficulty in planning and teaching the two components of Health and PE in an integrated manner as recommended in the curriculum, when many schools have PE specialists.
- There are possibilities for integration and aligning with other traditional subjects – but two stream approach may be easier to implement in a primary context rather than secondary where Health as a separate subject does not always exist.

### Languages
- The complexity of models for implementation is an issue.
- The large time allocation combined with a shortage of teachers in the primary sector is a real concern.

### ii. General Capabilities
- For an Australian curriculum to be visionary in seeking to educate the ‘whole’ person the General Capabilities need to be ‘front and centre’ so that the content in each learning areas curriculum is viewed as means to assist students to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to develop and exhibit the General Capabilities.
When teachers use the General Capabilities effectively they are extremely powerful as they enable teachers to see a wider perspective and viewpoint and provide a channel for teachers to recognise alternative focus areas.

There is concern about the wide range of interpretations of the place, importance and meaning of the General Capabilities within educational communities, industry, and general public.

Suggested improvements:
- Provide resources to support teacher understanding of the GCs - use visual displays to link student skills with teacher knowledge. Suggest using “user-friendly” resources (e.g. YouTube clips, like the ones already made by ACARA) to unpack what the GCs mean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>More support and professional development for all teachers to take responsibility for literacy and numeracy skill development.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>The ICT capability continuum is viewed positively.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical and creative thinking</td>
<td>Teachers are looking for ways to embed critical and creative thinking skills across all learning areas. Technology may inhibit critical thinking and creativity so teachers need the capacity to use technology effectively to develop critical and creative thinking. Teachers need to develop their own higher order critical thinking skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal and social capability</td>
<td>The Personal and social capability needs to be embedded into all other subjects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethical understanding</td>
<td>The Ethical understanding capability needs to be embedded into all other subjects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intercultural understanding</td>
<td>The Intercultural capability needs to be embedded into all other subjects, with History being a particularly relevant subject.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

iii. Cross-curriculum Priorities
- At times teachers struggle with the extent to which the CCPs are to be incorporated.
- The CCPs assist with recognising diversity of cultural identity and support the development of positive world views.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures</th>
<th>Teachers need to know that Indigenous perspectives are different to Indigenous history.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia</td>
<td>The Cross Curriculum Priority – Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia at times seems to be tokenistic and does not appear to be a natural and seamless part of the whole curriculum. The rationale and purpose of the CCP needs to be better articulated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>The embedding of the Cross Curriculum Priority – Sustainability can at times be contrived except in learning areas like Science, Geography and Technology where it has a ‘natural fit.’</td>
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