

CORRECTED VERSION

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into agricultural education and training in Victoria

&

Inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students

Canberra—20 March 2012

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Ms L. Redley, Manager, Curriculum, Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (via teleconference)

The CHAIR—Hello, Lynn, it is David Southwick from the Parliament of Victoria, the Chair of the Education and Training Committee. How are you?

Ms REDLEY—I am well, thank you.

The CHAIR—You are ready to go for our inquiry?

Ms REDLEY—I am ready to go, yes.

The CHAIR—Lynn, a couple of things. I need to point out for the purposes of the inquiry, firstly, we are recording the evidence you give today by Hansard. You will have the opportunity to review that, and any typographical errors that need to be corrected. Also the evidence you give is covered by what we call parliamentary privilege which is the same privilege afforded to members of parliament.

Ms REDLEY—Thank you.

The CHAIR—As you are aware we are specifically looking at the area of agricultural education and training, and ways to encourage young people to pursue careers in that area. We are looking at courses that are currently available. We are looking at what is done at all levels currently, and also potential opportunities for the future. Thank you for your participation. We are very keen to hear about, particularly, the national curriculum. Do you want to kick off with any opening comments, or do you want us to go straight into questions and then give you the opportunity at the end if we have not covered everything?

Ms REDLEY—I think we could go straight into questions, except that I will make one comment.

The CHAIR—Sure.

Ms REDLEY—I am not sure if all members of the committee are aware that the draft *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Technologies* was released for public consultation for a period of 11 weeks last Wednesday. This is very timely because I can tell you exactly what is in the shape paper.

The CHAIR—That is terrific. I will kick it off, Lynn, and my question is around specifically the national curriculum and, firstly, if you outline the rationale for introducing a national curriculum which should be a pretty easy one for you, and also provide the committee with an overview of the process for developing the national curriculum.

Ms REDLEY—Okay. The Australian curriculum came into being following the establishment of the interim National Curriculum Board in 2008, and during that same period the ministers of education and training across Australia were developing the Melbourne Declaration Educational Goals for Young Australians. It all fits together. But basically the Australian curriculum aimed to ensure that all young Australians are equipped with the skills, knowledge and disposition that provides them with that foundation for successful and life-long learning; to ensure equity; to make clear for teachers what is to be taught across the years of schooling for all Australian students, and for students what they should learn and the quality of learning expected of them. There are a number of other reasons why an Australian curriculum is going to be a good thing but basically they are the goals.

In terms of the process for developing the national curriculum, we have three dimensions of the curriculum. We have the learning areas, we have general capability which outlines skills, knowledge and dispositions that are going to create a 21st century curriculum for students, as well as three cross-curriculum priorities in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture; Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia; and sustainability.

In terms of our processes for developing the learning areas, we follow the same process for each learning area and/or subject within a learning area, such as history and geography which are part of the broader humanities and social sciences. The first stage involves shaping the curriculum, and there are several documents and some targeted consultation and broad national consultation that occurs in that stage. We develop, in consultation with an expert advisory group, as well as having a lead writer who is the key writer for the

shaping phase. We develop an initial advice paper that we have targeted consultation with a national forum of around 100 to 140 representatives of key stakeholder groups across the country.

We then take the feedback from that, analyse it and develop a draft shape paper which is to provide the broad directions for the shape of the curriculum. That is, as I said, out for—the technologies—consultation at the moment nationally via an online questionnaire. Once we get the data back from that we will prepare a consultation report and propose directions for revision, and then a revised paper will be written that will become the blueprint, if you like, for curriculum development and provide the direction for writers. The curriculum writing phase involves development of a broad outline, firstly, and then a detailed curriculum which includes content description and achievement standards for the year levels or bands of year levels that are outlined in the draft shape paper.

There are three months of national consultation on that, and again we analyse the data, redraft the curriculum and publish it and go through a process of validating the achievement standards across the country as well to ensure that they are achievable by all students and pitched correctly. There is a number of other consultations that we do or groups that we consult with along the way. We have a national panel that provides advice at key points in the process and they are made up of representatives from each state and territory, teachers and/or education authority representatives, as well as representatives from national professional associations. There are two other phases that are the implementation phase and an evaluation stage that I can talk to in more detail if you like.

The CHAIR—That gives us a pretty good understanding. I might ask Peter to drill down a bit more specifically around agriculture.

Mr CRISP—I would like to ask you to outline the detail of how agriculture will be included in the national curriculum for foundation to Year 10 students, and then I have a couple of other sections of that, but if you could focus there and we will see how we go.

Ms REDLEY—Thank you, Peter. With agriculture it is clearly an area that will be represented in the technologies curriculum. There are two strands or subjects in the technologies learning area, and one of them is design and technology. Agriculture is a key context—we call them contexts—for the teaching of design and technology. We also have been doing some work on identifying food and fibre production across the learning areas. This is some work that has been developed in consultation with the Primary Industries Education Foundation and the New South Wales Farmers Federation. Work is being done which identifies content description in science and geography, in particular, but also history, mathematics and other areas where there are possibilities of teaching about food and fibre production which is the agreed term that we have come up with, with PIEF.

In some cases the content descriptions are not so explicit but we are doing some work on showing how content elaboration, which are there to exemplify aspects of the content description, can provide opportunities to teach about agriculture. In the technologies curriculum itself, although it is not written yet, the shape paper does explore some possibilities of a range of contexts that can be taught. We are anticipating that in the primary years, all students will learn about food and fibre production. Content descriptions and elaborations, as I said, will be written for a range of contexts but that will include food and fibre production. In Years 7 to 10, schools will be able to select from a range of technologies context. At the moment in the shape paper the proposal is that from foundation to Year 8 there be two strands of the curriculum that have a structure that is complementary, will allow for some integrated teaching or some stand-alone teaching, but from Years 9 and 10 they will be stand-alone subjects where schools will be able to provide specific subjects that include a range of technologies context, including agriculture.

Mr CRISP—Thank you, Lynn. What are the time frames for implementing agriculture in the national curriculum?

Ms REDLEY—The time frames for technologies is, as I said, we are in the shaping phase at the moment. We have national consultation until 3 June. We hope that we will then release the final shape of the Australian curriculum in August and at that point we will start the curriculum writing, the broad outline, scope and sequence and the content description and achievement standards by the end of January 2013 with consultation

happening in March through till about end of June so we can publish by the end of 2013.

Mr ELASMAR—The committee understands that sustainability is a cross curriculum priority in the national curriculum. Does this focus on sustainability provide further opportunity for schools and teachers to incorporate learning about agriculture into the curriculum and, if so, could you elaborate on this, please.

Ms REDLEY—The cross-curriculum priority is something that all learning areas look to, to ensure that it is addressed in appropriate and relevant ways in their particular learning area or subject. Definitely there is a strong relationship with technology but also across other learning areas as well. There will be a lot of opportunities for teachers to focus on particular areas of interest of students, according to local needs of students, and teach about agriculture, food and fibre production, or a range of other areas. The organising ideas for sustainability cover things like sustainable patterns of living, relying on the interdependence of healthy social economic and ecological systems. In technologies there is an underlying or an overarching idea of preferred futures—assuming that students will develop—that will engage with the idea of preferred futures when considering the technology of learning skills knowledge, as well as tools and materials and information that they are using.

Ms MILLER—Following on from that, could you describe how much flexibility will be retained in the national curriculum for individual schools or teachers to incorporate specific agricultural themes into the broader curriculum if they wish?

Ms REDLEY—One of the aims of the Australian curriculum, as we write it, is that there will be flexibility. It is intended that jurisdictions, systems and schools will be able to implement the Australian curriculum to take account of teachers profession knowledge and, as I said earlier, to reflect local context, but also to take into account, a student's family, culture and community background. The content description will have specific references to agriculture but there will be a lot of other opportunities, depending on particular projects that teachers might work on with students, or even a student's choice. Yes, there is a lot of flexibility there.

The CHAIR—Just extending on from that, currently in Victoria, agricultural and horticultural studies is offered as part of the Victorian Certificate of Education. Will an agricultural subject be developed as part of the national secondary curriculum, or will this remain the responsibility of state and territory governments?

Ms REDLEY—The proposal in the draft shape paper is that we will develop two subjects at senior secondary years, and they are design and technology and digital technology. Additional technology subjects will be able to be developed by states and territories that complement but do not duplicate Australian curriculum subjects. The idea is that if agriculture is not likely to be the design and technology curriculum, it will be more general than that, then, yes, Victoria will be able to continue with agricultural and horticultural studies. Those decisions have not been made yet.

The CHAIR—At the moment there is no move to do something that specifically encompasses agriculture into the national curriculum, is there?

Ms REDLEY—At 11 and 12, no.

The CHAIR—Okay.

Mr CRISP—Lynn, I want to build on what we talked about earlier in the curriculum development about teaching resources. Will teaching resources be developed as part of that curriculum shaping you talked about, and if they are what type of resources will be provided to support the curriculum?

Ms REDLEY—ACARA is responsible for the development of the curriculum, and states and territories are responsible for implementation, and that includes developing resources to support teachers and professional development programs. Having said that, there are some things that ACARA can do which is, as I referred to earlier, the mapping of certain cross-curriculum perspectives or themes or foci for teaching, such as food and fibre production. The work we have been developing is a mapping— with the PIEF and the New South Wales Farmers Federation providing feedback—of how food and fibre can appear across the curriculum. That will be a resource that we intend to publish following the publication of the technologies curriculum.

The CHAIR—I have one more question around agriculture and then I want to ask you something else, if I may. We have heard a lot that within the curriculum in maths and science—and I alluded to this earlier—that to embed agriculture as part of the specific units is one of the ways to encourage young people to consider agriculture. Again is that something that will be evident in the curriculum or will it be more something in which flexibility needs to come back to the individual provider?

Ms REDLEY—It is a bit hard to say how the content description will be written specifically in advance of the consultation feedback that we get. If I think about how content descriptions are written, say, for science, or geography, which are perhaps the closest—

The CHAIR—Or maths.

Ms REDLEY—Yes. There is a breadth to the content descriptions which allow flexibility but where there are key concepts or skills that are considered to be integral to learning—and we are talking concepts here mostly with the use of tools as well—then they will be identified specifically. Where there is a content description that is quite broad, there are often content elaborations that show how they can be represented in a different way, and I would imagine that is the kind of thing we are going to do for technologies as well, because one of the things that we are looking at, at the moment, is this food and fibre work that we are doing, is we have some suggestions from the PIEF and the New South Wales Farmers Federation of other content elaborations which will better exemplify the kind of things teachers can do in the classroom.

The CHAIR—We had a very good example of that yesterday with Stephanie Alexander's Kitchen Garden, that program throughout the schools, and the competencies map that in maths and measurement that is used as obviously being able to fit some of the stuff in the maths units and some of the stuff around literacy and obviously things with science as well. There are some really good examples of that being a program that engages young people, but at the same time allows them to teach generalist subjects in a more interesting way.

Ms REDLEY—I have an example here where I am looking at—this is at foundation level—the content description for science is 'Living things have basic needs, including food and water.' We have an elaboration at the moment which says, 'Recognising the needs of living things in a range of situations, such as pets at home, plants in the garden or plants and animals in bushland,' and the suggestion is that we add 'and animals on farms.'

The CHAIR—Yes.

Ms REDLEY—There is a number of ways that we can do that kind of work at the elaboration level, but there will definitely be references at the content description level as well.

The CHAIR—One last thing. I am not sure whether you are aware that we are also conducting an inquiry around gifted and talented kids.

Ms REDLEY—Yes.

The CHAIR—The new curriculum is also referred to an inquiry for gifted and talented students. There has been a concern that this curriculum does not mention or include provision for gifted and talented students. What specific consideration has been given to the needs of these children as part of consolidation and development process into the new curriculum? Also how will the new curriculum cater for the educational needs of gifted and talented children?

Ms REDLEY—We have had conversations with a number of stakeholders around gifted and talented, and certainly in the work that we do to ensure an inclusive curriculum to cater for the diversity of students across the country, it is in the back of our minds. We are writing a curriculum for all Australian students and we believe that there is sufficient flexibility in the curriculum to cater for gifted and talented children. Teachers have that flexibility that I talked about to take account of the widely different rates at which students develop and learn. Even though we have written a curriculum for particular year levels in the same way that they do now with state and territory, schools will be able accelerate students or deepen their learning and

understanding through the same strategies that they use now.

In terms of developing a separate curriculum for gifted and talented students, that is not something we are looking at doing. ACARA is, as I said, responsible for developing the Australian curriculum, but state and territory authorities are responsible for the actual curriculum implementation. Schools are able to provide individualised education plans. Personalised learning, they can work with the curriculum in that way. I have forgotten the second question.

The CHAIR—It is more around how the new curriculum will cater for the educational needs of gifted and talented children.

Ms REDLEY—The fact that we have written a curriculum with high expectations of students, and the fact that it is written in a sequence, will allow teachers to use aspects of the curriculum that are relevant for those students. I am not sure that fully answers your question but the shape of the Australian curriculum does talk about the diversity of—this is the key paper that underpins the development of the curriculum. It does talk about the need for inclusivity and diversity but does not specifically identify gifted and talented students. What it does is it talks about the flexibility of the curriculum to cater for diversity across the board.

The CHAIR—As it would with special needs.

Ms REDLEY—As it would with special needs, except that there are some routes for students with a disability that do require something that allows students who are not yet at the foundation level to be able to demonstrate their understanding and skill. The gifted and talented are at the upper end. We do have, for instance, in mathematics an extension course at Year 10, an extension curriculum—it is called NA—which allows students to accelerate and caters for the range of students across the board. But we believe there is enough scope within the rest of the curriculum to cater for those students. It tends to be more about teaching and implementation of the curriculum that will cater for the student.

The CHAIR—Thank you very much. We have concluded the questions from this end. Is there anything else that you wanted to add that has not already been covered?

Ms REDLEY—I think we have pretty much covered the notes that I had here to refer to. Yes, I am happy, thank you.

The CHAIR—You are happy and we are happy. Thank you very much for participating today in the inquiry, and good luck with the rest of the implementation of the national curriculum.

Ms REDLEY—Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.

Committee adjourned.