New South Wales consultation feedback regarding the Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship

Introduction
The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has included Civics and Citizenship in Phase 3 of development of the Australian curriculum. The Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship was released in June 2012.

The Board of Studies NSW is working with education sectors and teachers in NSW to support ACARA in the development of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship and to provide input and feedback on the development of this curriculum. This report is the summary of the NSW consultation feedback to ACARA regarding the Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship.

Background
Currently in NSW, civics and citizenship learning for Kindergarten to Year 6 is embedded in the content of the Human Society and Its Environment syllabus, and addresses areas such as social justice, civic participation, democratic processes and beliefs and moral codes. In the current 7–10 syllabuses, civics and citizenship learning is addressed through civics and citizenship cross-curriculum content. The new NSW syllabuses for Australian curriculum in English, Mathematics, Science and History, which will be implemented from 2014, include civics and citizenship content as a learning across the curriculum area.

Current situation
The Board of Studies NSW conducted consultation on the Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship. The consultation included:

- targeted focus groups for teachers (K–12) and non-school-based curriculum experts conducted at:
  - Bathurst on 31 July 2012
  - Sydney on 1 August 2012
- an online survey on the Board’s website, available from 23 July until 17 August 2012
- a submission from the NSW Department of Education and Communities.
Summary of key issues
Feedback gathered through the Board’s consultation indicated support for civics and citizenship education as a valued part of the curriculum. However, there was strong support for the integration of civics and citizenship education across curriculum areas.

The following key issues were raised:

• Civics and Citizenship as a separate curriculum
The purpose of developing Civics and Citizenship as a separate curriculum was questioned. The development of Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the curriculum has resulted in a crowded curriculum, particularly for primary. The important links with History and other key learning areas are consistent with an integrated approach. Some respondents could see no way that the treatment of civics and citizenship as a separate curriculum is feasible. The important learning related to civics and citizenship is best considered as a cross-curriculum priority.

• Inconsistencies within the draft shape paper
The draft shape paper lacks coherence. There was concern that the links between the ideas, concepts and notions that are outlined in the Informing Principles are not elaborated or followed through to the Rationale, Aims and Scope and sequence of learning F–12.

• Omission of learning F–2
The Civics and Citizenship curriculum provides learning in Years 3–10 and in the senior secondary years. The omission of learning for Foundation to Year 2 is raised as a concern. It was the view that students in these years should have the opportunity to develop skills and values that underpin active and responsible citizenship, such as respect for self, others and property; valuing diversity; understanding fair and unfair behaviour; and understanding prejudice and discrimination. A learning pathway F–12 should be articulated.

• Representation of Australia’s parliamentary democracy
A key issue identified during the consultation was the omission of essential learning related to our democratic heritage which explains the development of Australian parliamentary democracy. An understanding that Australia’s system of government is not the system of government in all countries should be included. It is also essential that there is opportunity for students to make comparative analysis between our parliamentary democracy and other democracies.

There is no mention of the important role of federation in the operation of Australian parliamentary democracy. A developing understanding of the role of the states and territories within our federation is essential.
• Consideration of the diversity of learners
There was concern that the draft shape paper is not inclusive of the diverse range of learners, which is particularly important for civics and citizenship education. In particular, the curriculum should cater for the learning needs of students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. This diversity is represented in our schools and includes migrants, children if migrants and Indigenous students. Additionally, the curriculum must cater for EAL/D students who represent a significant and increasing proportion of learners in Australian schools.

Specific comments relating to sections of the draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship

• **Context (paragraph 4 – paragraph 9)**

The phrase, ‘rigourous consideration of essential content and appropriate contexts’ (paragraph 7) raised some concerns, since the F–10 curriculum for History has been established. The appropriate inclusion of civics and citizenship, therefore, is a lost opportunity.

• **Informing Principles (paragraphs 10 a–f)**

In general, the Informing Principles were considered appropriate. There was support for the phrase ‘citizenship means different things to people at different times’ (paragraph 10 d). Consultation feedback indicated that these principles provided opportunities for student discussion and the ideas expressed would allow students to form their own opinions. However, concern was expressed that there is too much focus on the individual. It was suggested that the phrase ‘belief in civic duty’ (paragraph 10 a) requires further explanation.

• **Rationale (paragraphs 11 a–f)**

While some amendments are recommended, there was general support for the Rationale, with particular support for the statement, ‘children in schools are citizens’ (paragraph 11 e). However, there was some concern that the dot points in paragraph 11 c) are not developed throughout the remainder of the shape paper.

The following recommendations were made to strengthen the Rationale:
- include references to national Statements of Learning Civics and Citizenship (MCEETYA 2006)
- restructure paragraph 11 f) into three parts as it is too wordy in its current form
- include references to the history of Australia’s development as a democracy
- incorporate a critique of the media.
• **Aims (paragraph 12 – paragraph 13)**

Consultation feedback supported the Aims as building a concept of inclusiveness (paragraph 13 d). However, there was some concern that the term ‘multi-faith’ seemed to be in contradiction to the Informing Principles. It was suggested that further research be undertaken on the use of the terms ‘secular society’ (paragraph 10 c) and ‘multi-faith’ to reflect current research in this domain. It was also suggested that the Aims could be strengthened by elaborating the ‘attitudes’, ‘values’ and ‘dispositions’ (paragraph 13 a).

• **Defining Civics and Citizenship (paragraph 14 – paragraph 15)**

Consultation feedback on the definitions provided for ‘civics’ and ‘citizenship’ was mixed. It was suggested that since the definitions set the context for civics and citizenship learning, they should be placed in an earlier part of the document, for example, before the Aims.

The terms ‘civics’ and ‘citizenship’ are defined separately in this section of the shape paper, but are treated in an integrated way throughout the rest of the paper. There was also some concern that the definitions do not provide a clear explanation of the difference between civics and citizenship.

The statements for the definition of ‘civics’ are taken directly from the Commonwealth Government’s report, *Whereas the People?* (1994) and the structure of this definition differs considerably from the structure of the definition for ‘citizenship’. It was the view that the definition of ‘civics’ would be strengthened by including a more recent quote and by being similar in structure to that of ‘citizenship’. Other suggestions included incorporating an overarching statement in addition to the concepts.

The structure of the definition of ‘citizenship’ was strongly supported. However, there was some concern that the ‘civil’ component was limited only to rights and responsibilities.

• **Organisation of the Civics and Citizenship Curriculum (paragraph 16 – paragraph 23)**

The division of the two organisational strands, civics and citizenship knowledge and understanding and civics and citizenship skills was supported during consultation.

The terms used to describe democracy need to be consistent. It was suggested that if the term, ‘modern democracy’ (paragraph 19 b) is a new term and replaces the term ‘liberal democracy’ (referred to in paragraph 19 and also in the Aims and Rationale) it should be defined in the section Key Terms and Definitions.

Feedback indicated that the Civics and Citizenship knowledge and understanding outlined in paragraph 20 was generally inclusive. However, there was a common view that the information
provided in paragraph 20 should be mapped to the Australian curriculum for English, History and Geography. Other suggestions for paragraph 20 included:

- provide further elaborations to paragraph 20 g) to expand this aspect of the curriculum (the role of the media and information and communication technologies)
- add the word ‘cultural’ to the representations in paragraph 20 h).

It was suggested that ‘analysis’ and ‘synthesis’ (paragraph 21 b) be identified as separate skills. There was some concern that the examples provided for social media in paragraph 21 d) are not accessible to government schools in NSW.

The use of social inquiry processes in civics and citizenship (paragraph 23) is strongly supported. However, the information provided in paragraph 23 was seen to be limited and did not offer sufficient guidance to support learning opportunities in other curriculum areas, including History, Geography, Business Studies and Economics.

There was general agreement that the organisational table presented on page 11 was not meaningful and could be strengthened by including volunteering and social skills.

- **Learners and Learning F–12 (paragraph 24 – paragraph 48)**

  **Overview**

  It was the view that much of the proposed curriculum was already being delivered in Kindergarten to Year 10 through the current syllabus provision in NSW.

  The omission of learning for F–+2 is a key issue and it was also suggested that mandating civics and citizenship learning through to Year 10 should be considered. Other comments and suggestions included:

  - the wording in paragraph 26 implies that understanding the nature of Civics and Citizenship is all that is needed to become an active citizen
  - the word ‘should’ in the phrase ‘students should be encouraged’ could be replaced with ‘are to be’ (paragraph 28), to avoid the implication that this is currently happening in schools
  - include the word ‘diversity’ after the word ‘cultural heritage’ (paragraph 30).

  The concepts to be taught in the bands are identified, but do not provide appropriate guidance as to the depth required. It was suggested that more detail needs to be included in order to provide clarity about how to progress from Years 3–4 through to Years 9–10. The following specific comments and suggestions are drawn from the consultation feedback.
Years 3–4
- the concepts of law (paragraph 35) are appropriate
- connections to current syllabuses and what is happening in schools already exist and this curriculum formalises what is already being learnt
- the information provided in paragraph 35 outlines the entire civics and citizenship curriculum.

Years 5–6
- the emphasis for this part of the curriculum is on ‘civics’ only
- there should be scope in the curriculum to include an understanding of why we vote.

Years 7–8
- in general, the proposed curriculum is supported, but needs to be strengthened
- the links to Australian History are not evident and the links to other learning areas should be clearer
- the last sentence in paragraph 41 relating to the role of media should be a priority and could be strengthened to include the ethics of the media
- the phrase ‘a belief in social justice’ (paragraph 42) should be reworded to ‘a belief and commitment to social justice’.

Years 9–10
- the inclusion of problem-solving (paragraph 44) is supported
- the proposed curriculum statements should be reviewed to include more substantial content and not only processes.

Senior Secondary
- the curriculum can be mapped to existing syllabuses
- the curriculum is highly political and is almost a first-year university politics course
- at this level global politics could be included in the curriculum
- paragraph 48 should be removed as it has no relevance in this section of the document.

The following essential learning that underpins civics and citizenship education should be included:
- the principles of natural justice and the separation of powers as underpinning principles in our society
- the responses of individuals, governments and the international community to challenges in relation to human rights
- understanding of the cultural diversity of Australia, its history and development as a multicultural society
- specific rights and responsibilities in relation to anti-racism, anti-discrimination and community harmony
- specific rights and responsibilities in relation to discrimination based on gender, religion, disability and age.
• Civics and Citizenship and the cross-curriculum priorities

The integration of cross-curriculum priorities in civics and citizenship education was supported in consultation. There was concern that significant learning was either omitted or not provided in detail.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
This cross-curriculum priority would be strengthened by including reconciliation which is regarded as actively supporting civics and citizenship. Paragraph 51 was seen as being limited to civics. There was concern that the statements in paragraph 51 represent a negative perspective rather than a positive one.

Sustainability
Consultation feedback indicated that the statements in this priority do not provide a link to opportunities for students to demonstrate active citizenship in relation to sustainability in a range of contexts. This priority could be strengthened by including the influences that sustainability has on government policy which can be linked to paragraph 20 i) and caring for environments which is linked to paragraph 30.

Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia
It was suggested that an understanding of different systems of government in Asian countries and the expectation that visitors to other countries are required to obey the laws of that country is essential understanding that students should develop.

• Civics and Citizenship and general capabilities

The descriptions in the general capabilities were generally endorsed as being appropriate. Feedback was received in relation to Literacy and Intercultural Understanding.

Literacy
It should to be emphasised that the development of English language literacy should be seen as an essential competence for all students. This general capability could be strengthened by the inclusion of clear guidelines relating to the role of language and literacy within a civics and citizenship curriculum. It was also suggested that more clarity should be provided about the complex and sophisticated subject-specific and literacy demands of the curriculum.
Intercultural Understanding
The Intercultural understanding statements are clearly articulated and the focus on understanding the complexities of one’s own and others’ cultures is strongly endorsed. This area of the civics and citizenship curriculum was seen as providing opportunities for community harmony and social cohesion and promoting engagement with people of diverse cultures.

• Key terms and definitions

The inclusion of a glossary of key terms was supported and seen as essential information for teachers. The definition of the terms ‘culture’ and ‘multicultural’ was seen as an essential inclusion in this section. As these terms are complex and frequently misunderstood, a definition would assist in providing clarity.

Conclusion

Further work is required to ensure that the Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship is a contemporary document that will empower students to fulfil their potential as citizens. There is a presumption that teaching about Civics and Citizenship will lead to students becoming actively engaged in related issues throughout their lives. The ethics of being a citizen and what makes a good citizen should be included.