

Review of the Australian Curriculum

Submission

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Queensland Family and Child Commission

PO Box 15217

Brisbane City East QLD 4002

qfcc.qld.gov.au

For any information about this submission please contact

Manager, Strategic Policy

Email: policy@qfcc.qld.gov.au

Phone: 07 3900 6000

Reference: F21/343

Background

The Queensland Family and Child Commission (QFCC) is pleased to provide a submission to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in relation to the review of the Australian Curriculum.

The QFCC is an independent statutory authority of the Queensland Government. We seek to lead the development of a comprehensive children's rights agenda to give practical effect to the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* for all children and young people growing up in Queensland.

Under the *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* the QFCC is responsible for promoting the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people.¹ The Commissioners are required to engage with, and take account of, the views of children, young people and their families.²

Since 2018, the QFCC has led the Growing up in Queensland project to engage with children and young people across Queensland, seeking their views and experiences of their communities, their hopes, and their ideas about what is important to them.

Children and young people have told us they wanted a more relevant and engaging curriculum, to learn more life skills that will prepare them for adulthood.³ Their views should be considered when reviewing and amending the Australian Curriculum, to make sure their education meets their needs and supports them to enjoy their rights.

'The most important issue for young people in this era is life skills, we are not taught how to do taxes, we are not taught how to change a tyre, the list goes on.'

Participant in *Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020*

¹ *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (Qld), s.4.

² *Family and Child Commission Act 2014* (Qld), s.23(1)(a).

³ Queensland Family and Child Commission 2021, *Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020*, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/keeping-kids-more-safe/listening-children-young-people/growing-queensland>, accessed 28 June 2020, p. 45.

The views of children and young people

Summary

- Under article 12 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, children have the right to participate in decisions that will have an impact on them. Under article 28, all children have the right to education on the basis of equal opportunity.
- To make sure children can fully enjoy their rights, it is important to hear and respond to the views of children and young people while designing and implementing changes to the Australian Curriculum.
- Children and young people have told the QFCC they would like to see life skills, such as tax, savings, employment and voting better represented in the Australian curriculum.
- Sexual and mental health are also important to children and young people. ACARA should give particular consideration to the needs of LGBTQIA+ children and young people when reviewing and amending the Australian Curriculum.

Rights, participation and *Growing up in Queensland*

Under article 12 of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, children have the right to participate in decisions that will have an impact on them. Under article 28, all children have the right to education on the basis of equal opportunity.⁴

To make sure children can fully enjoy their rights, it is important to hear and respond to the views of children and young people while designing and implementing changes to the Australian curriculum. The QFCC is committed to engaging with children and young people across Queensland through *Growing up in Queensland*.

In 2018, the QFCC released its first *Growing up in Queensland* report, *This place I call home: The views of children and young people on growing up in Queensland*. It detailed the views of more than 7,000 children and young people captured through an online survey, artwork and postcards, as well as focus groups and workshops across the state.

This report showed children wanted more knowledge about the life skills they will need to make the transition from childhood into independent adulthood. They said they needed more information and skills to manage finances and to have a good physical, mental and sexual health.⁵

These views were echoed in the QFCC's most recent engagement with children and young people, conducted throughout 2020 for the second iteration of *Growing up in Queensland*. The views were published as *Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020*.⁶ Due to the unfolding COVID-19 situation, participation was restricted to an online postcards activity, an online art activity and online surveys.

⁴ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner 1989, *Convention on the rights of the child*, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>, accessed 30 June 2021.

⁵ Queensland Family and Child Commission 2018, *This place I call home: the views of children and young people on growing up in Queensland*, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/keeping-kids-more-safe/listening-children-young-people/growing-queensland>, accessed 30 June 2021, p. 6.

⁶ Queensland Family and Child Commission 2021, *Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020*, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/keeping-kids-more-safe/listening-children-young-people/growing-queensland>, accessed 28 June 2020.



More than 8,000 children and young people responded, providing a unique insight into the experiences of this generation of young Queenslanders as they met the regular challenges of school and life while adapting to a global pandemic.

There were two online surveys employed during development of *Voices of Hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020* – a junior survey and a youth survey. The junior survey was designed for children aged 8 to 12 years and the youth survey targeted children and young people aged 13 to 18.

Notably, 91 per cent of respondents to the youth survey were engaged in study, and 84 per cent of respondents were studying full time.⁷ Almost 90 per cent of participants aged 13 to 16 years indicated they planned to finish high school and fewer than two per cent intended to leave school prior to receiving their year 12 certificate.⁸

Eighty per cent of youth survey participants indicated they felt stressed about school or university results. Participants expressed a need for a more relevant and engaging curriculum and a desire to learn more life skills that will prepare them for adulthood.⁹

Data from *Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2021*

For the benefit of this review into the Australian Curriculum, the QFCC has been able to look further into the data to provide some insights beyond those available in the report.

In their responses to the youth survey, children and young people were able to nominate important issues they would like leaders to take action on. In their responses, some participants nominated skills they would like to see included in schools, such as:

Work and finances

- getting a job
- budgeting
- tax
- buying or renting property
- owning a car

Politics and history

- voting
- critical thinking
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history

Health and relationships

- first aid
- character and morality
- mental health
- relationships and sex.

⁷ Queensland Family and Child Commission 2021, *Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020*, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/keeping-kids-more-safe/listening-children-young-people/growing-queensland>, accessed 28 June 2020, p. 11.

⁸ Queensland Family and Child Commission 2021, *Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020*, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/keeping-kids-more-safe/listening-children-young-people/growing-queensland>, accessed 28 June 2020, p. 28.

⁹ Queensland Family and Child Commission 2021, *Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020*, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/keeping-kids-more-safe/listening-children-young-people/growing-queensland>, accessed 28 June 2020, p. 45.



When asked what the most important issue or issues for young people today are, some respondents focused on changes to the school curriculum, including:

Work and finances

- ‘We often don't learn the necessities for the future such as, how to pay taxes, how to apply for a job, how to vote, etc.’
- ‘The fact that we don't go out into the world with the knowledge we need. We are taught things in school that in a real world we automatically will use. But do we ever think about the things such as taxes, fees and insurance that every person is subject to. So our problem isn't that we learn the wrong things we just don't learn all the things we need to.’
- ‘Schools don't necessarily teach us what we need to live in the real world they say they do but they don't I still have no clue how to do taxes were to even start to buy or rent a place to live.’

Politics and history

- ‘The school system and making sure what students are learning are relevant to the future such as dealing with money and the process of buying a home and how the political system works etc.’
- ‘We're being underexposed to the world - there's no mention of economics and politics at school unless you choose business as a subject. This can result in uninformed people trying to make decisions in the real world.’
- ‘We need to be transparent with our history as a nation, we need to learn AUSLAN to communicate with our growing hearing impaired population.’
- ‘Lack of education of Indigenous history.’

Health and relationships

- ‘Improving sexual education at schools and discussing the growing rates of mental illnesses and strategies to put in place to lessen it.’
- ‘Teaching children how to become an adult, how to cook, clean, take care of a family, pay bills.’
- ‘Character and morality developments need to be focused on in school from an early age, and critical thinking and the exploration of one's own skills and interests should have a priority in the curriculum also.’

Opportunities for the Australian Curriculum

It is promising to see the proposed revised Australian curriculum including critical and creative thinking, digital literacy, ethical understanding, intercultural understanding, and personal and social capability as part of its general capabilities. This aligns with the views expressed by children and young people through Growing up in Queensland, which show they would like their schooling to help them develop a broad range of skills as they move into adulthood.

The proposal to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures as a cross-curriculum priority also aligns well with the views expressed by a range of children and young people, who would like to see schools engage significantly with First Nations history and the impact of colonisation on First Nations Peoples.

There are opportunities to further revise the Australian curriculum to respond to these views. While the personal and social capability learning continuum allows students to develop self-regulation and relational awareness, it does not include specific life skills such as managing housing, finances and taxes.



Similarly, the ethical understanding learning continuum shows promise in helping students to recognise and explore ethical concepts, but does not apply these to real-world examples, such as voting.

Within Economics and Business, the new curriculum proposals explore issues such as tax and finance as abstract themes, or in terms of their national or global impact. For example, the year 8 Economics and Business curriculum asks 'how does Australia's taxation system support consumers and producers in relation to consumer and financial issues or events?'

There may be an opportunity to directly explain how tax is collected and how tax returns work in practice, before applying this understanding to broader social and ethical concepts. There may also be scope to include these concepts across the curriculum to reach all students, not only those in Economics and Business classes.

This is also true for mental and sexual health classes, which are currently part of the Health and Physical Education curriculum but could be discussed more widely across the curriculum to reach students with different focus areas.

It is important to note of the 5,294 young people aged 13-18 who completed the QFCC's youth survey, almost one quarter (24 per cent) identified as LGBTQIA+. Health courses should consider the needs of this cohort, particularly given Australians who identify as LGBTQIA+ are more likely than other Australians to have symptoms of mental health disorders,¹⁰ and, in the 2020 survey, were less likely than other young people to feel they belong to their communities.¹¹

Overall, the proposed changes to the Australian Curriculum go some way to responding to the views children and young people have expressed to the QFCC. There are further opportunities to explore how including more life skills in the curriculum could help children to feel more confident in their transition to adulthood. This could also help improve children's experiences of school and their feelings of belonging in their communities.

Further, making sure children and young people have youth-friendly opportunities to engage in the review of the Australian Curriculum will help them feel adults are listening to them, responding to their views and protecting their rights.

¹⁰ National LGBTI Health Alliance 2021, *Snapshot of mental health and suicide prevention statistics for LGBTI people*, <https://www.lgbtiqhealth.org.au/statistics/>, accessed 30 June 2021.

¹¹ Queensland Family and Child Commission 2021, *Voices of hope: Growing up in Queensland 2020*, <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/keeping-kids-more-safe/listening-children-young-people/growing-queensland>, accessed 28 June 2020, p. 17.