



## **NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.**

### **Submission: Review of NSW Curriculum**

The NSW Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group Inc. (AECG) welcomes the opportunity to provide our views on the NSW Curriculum Review.

The AECG is the peak body for Aboriginal Education in NSW. We are a not-for-profit Aboriginal organisation, established in 1977 and incorporated under NSW legislation in 1992. We provide advice on all matters relevant to education and training and deliver a range of services to support:

- the attendance, engagement and educational outcomes of young Aboriginal people in early childhood education, in schools and in tertiary education and employment
- the capacity building, resilience and well-being of Aboriginal communities.

The AECG has a grassroots, community-based structure which enables effective state-wide communication, consultation and service delivery, allowing for Aboriginal Community viewpoint to be echoed throughout the organisation and beyond. The AECG is made up of 20 regional and 147 Local AECGs that operate around the State. We also support Junior AECG committees as subcommittees of their Local AECGs. Junior AECG members are made up of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Youth between the ages of 10- 18.

Because of our structure, we have an unparalleled ability to provide agreed responses to government policy, deliver localised services that meet the needs of communities and tailor training that ensures an Aboriginal voice is heard. This ensures that government policies and strategies are able to be implemented effectively, because communities have been involved in their development, design and training.

Our grassroots structure also enables:

- the adoption and implementation of new initiatives, customised to local communities
- strong community ownership of innovative education and training approaches
- consensus-building on policy and operational issues.

The AECG's governance structure and vast coordinated Network means we do not simply represent an individual's or a small group of selected individuals' views on education.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NSW AECG welcomes the opportunity to provide our views on the NSW Curriculum Review. This curriculum review brings a momentous opportunity for the NSW Education Standards Authority to operationalise its *Commitment to Aboriginal Education*. The NSW AECG expects this curriculum review to bring about positive significant changes for Aboriginal education outcomes in NSW.

Since the very first schools were erected in NSW, Western educational values and practices have been literally and figuratively enshrined within NSW curricula. As such, NSW curriculums have always been designed to support teachers to provide learning opportunities that are specifically targeted for children growing up in a Western culture. It is without doubt that this cultural/linguistic bias in NSW education has severely disadvantaged Aboriginal children and continues to do so.

Universal educational theory tells us that knowledge development is best achieved through teaching that allows students to build on prior knowledge, such as that learnt from one's family and community, prior to and outside of formal schooling. Before starting their schooling and outside of their school hours Aboriginal children are learning their Aboriginal languages, they are learning Aboriginal English and they are being immersed in, engaging with and learning through the oldest continuous culture in humanity. But, when they step onto Australian school grounds they are subjected to a significant cultural shift where all too often there is little or no value placed on speaking Aboriginal Languages, Aboriginal English and practising and learning through Aboriginal culture.

The NSW Education Act states: *that every person concerned in the administration of this Act or of education for children of school-age in New South Wales is to have regard (as far as is practicable or appropriate) to the following objects:*

*(f) provision of an education for Aboriginal children that has regard to their special needs  
(g) development of an understanding of Aboriginal history and culture by all children  
(m1) provision of opportunities for Aboriginal families, kinship groups, representative organisations and communities to participate in significant decisions under this Act relating to the  
education of their children* (NSW Government, 1990).

However a comprehensive recent research which included more than 200 schools and 825 teachers across Australia found that out of a possible 1200 minutes of teaching time, Australian teachers were on average spending 5 minutes per week (0.4% of teaching time) teaching through or about Indigenous cultures, languages, histories, literature, identities, perspectives etc.

The NSW AECG is very concerned that there is not a single mention regarding Aboriginal knowledge, cultures etc. across all NSW K-10 KLA curriculum outcomes. Therefore, without Aboriginal knowledges cultures etc. in the curriculum outcomes, we understand that NSW teachers are currently under no obligation to teach any content referring to the first peoples of this state.

A NSW Curriculum which does not mandate stand-alone and integrated Aboriginal knowledge, perspectives and cultures outcomes across all KLAs dishonours the NSW Aboriginal community, the objectives of the NSW Aboriginal Education Policy, the NSW Education Act, the Closing the Gap campaign, the NSW Education Standards Authority's



Commitment to Aboriginal Education and the raft of other Aboriginal education strategies and frameworks.

To address the past and properly contribute to 'Closing the Gap' a core purpose of schooling in 21<sup>st</sup> Century NSW must also be to meaningfully incorporate local Aboriginal cultures, knowledges, pedagogies and languages.

By this we recommend:

- 1. Curriculums which mandate the delivery and assessment of stand-alone and integrated learnings to incorporate Aboriginal knowledge, perspectives and cultures across all KLAs**
- 2. That the central tenet of the NSW curriculum must include flexibility to more meaningfully incorporate Aboriginal pedagogies, local languages, knowledges and cultures**
- 3. That the Aboriginal education provisions set out in the NSW Education Act are retained**
- 4. That, at minimum, Aboriginal students receive opportunities at every stage of their learning to learn about and through existing local Aboriginal languages as well as to participate in the recovering revoicing and re practising of local Aboriginal languages.**
- 5. That all students must learn about and be assessed on Aboriginal experiences of colonisation and the serious injustices imposed by previous, and perpetuated by current, Australian institutions.**
- 6. That all NSW students learn the truth of local histories of the Country their school resides upon.**

A NSW Curriculum which does not mandate stand-alone and integrated Aboriginal knowledge, perspectives and cultures outcomes across all KLAs dishonours the NSW Aboriginal community, the objectives of the NSW Aboriginal Education Policy, the NSW Education Act, the Closing the Gap campaign, the NSW Education Standards Authority's Commitment to Aboriginal Education and the raft of other Aboriginal education strategies and frameworks.

Curriculums which mandate the opportunities outlined above are vital for Aboriginal students to form positive rather than negative associations between their identity and their education.



## Introduction

With any review process it is worthwhile beginning with consideration to where we have come from. Across the 50 plus Aboriginal nations that encompass NSW, Aboriginal peoples have developed and delivered educational curricula, which children and adults have participated in and engaged with, for countless millennia. In Western terms, the curriculums taught prior to 1788 were wide and varied including Law, Medicine, the Arts, Languages, Spirituality, Ecology, Astrology, Archaeology, Science etc. Prior to 1788 Aboriginal education curriculums were acutely woven into broader contexts such as Country, Kin, Lore and Community with a strong focus on sustainability. Education was generally life-long and not bounded by the time and age limitations imposed in school education today. Curricula were not directed at specific age groups or delivered within confined contexts like today's 'classrooms'. Education was aligned and directed to one's readiness, capacity and progress (Marika, 1998; Elkin, 1945; Middleton, 1977).

In 1814, shortly after the British invaded and authorised the violent usurping of Aboriginal Countries, the Parramatta and Black Town Native Institutions were established. Led by Governor Macquarie, these were the first Western educational institutions to specifically invite Aboriginal students to attend. Their overarching purpose and curricula were designed to:

- *'improve' and 'civilise' students through instruction in reading, writing and religion*
- *train in manual labour for the boys and useful needlework for the girls*
- *extend enlightenment ideals to the Indigenous peoples of the Sydney colony*
- *inculcate European ideas of 'civilisation', commerce and Christianity into Aboriginal people and turn them into industrious workers;*
- *'effect the civilisation of the Aborigines' of NSW and to 'render their habits more domesticated and industrious' (Norman, 2015).*

The complete disconnect between the school's curricula to Aboriginal contexts of Country, Kin, Lore and Community make it unsurprising that both schools consistently recorded low fluctuating enrolments. The offerings of annual feast days, land grants, clothing, blankets and breast plates did little if anything to properly engage local Aboriginal communities and increase school attendance rates. While Governor Macquarie provided glowing reports of the schools' success, in 1818, Yarramundi, a Darug man, spoke of Aboriginal peoples' fear of 'men in black clothes' who came and took children to the Parramatta Institution. Others such as William Shelley, the Superintendent and Principal Instructor of the Native Institution at Parramatta, noted that Aboriginal parents had resisted the school and were reluctant to give up their children. By 1829 both schools were formally closed (Brook, Jack & Cohen, 1991).

Much has changed since the early 1800s. However for the NSW Aboriginal community change has come very slowly and been hard fought for. In NSW the right of public school principals to refuse Aboriginal students entry based on *'home conditions or non-Aboriginal community opposition'* was not formally removed by the NSW Department of Education until 1972 (Parbury, 1999: p.72; Harris, 1976: pp.7-8). And it was not until 1982 that a notion of *"an appreciation of Aboriginal cultures and societies by other Australians"* was instituted in NSW schools through the first Aboriginal Education Policy (NSW Department of School Education, 1982).

Today many academics, leaders and community members make clear arguments that for Aboriginal people the core purpose within NSW school curriculums remain ultimately the same as the core purpose of the 1814 Parramatta and Blacktown Native Institution's



curriculum i.e. *to inculcate “European ideas of ‘civilisation’ and improve students through instruction in reading and writing”* (in English). It is with real concern that in 2018 Aboriginal academics such as Laurie Bamblett state that Australian schools *“are the battering rams of assimilation”* and that *“in spite of the inclusion of content about Aboriginal histories and cultures in the Australian Curriculum, mainstream schools are still assimilating”* Aboriginal people (Bamblett, 2018). And it is not solely Aboriginal people who recognise the assimilating process education continues to have in Australia. Bill Fogarty reflects on his work as a teacher in exactly the same light. *“I had come to a point where I felt that the education I was offering could actually be detrimental to my students in the long run. I felt I was part of a process of steady acculturation, that the educational wares I was selling were diametrically opposed, and perhaps irrelevant, to the lifestyles and aspirations of my students and their families. It all felt wrong. I even thought that my role as an educator was actually a plank in a contemporary and insidious form of colonisation”* (Fogarty, 2010: p1). Furthermore, like it was for the Parramatta and Blacktown Native Institutions, Aboriginal community engagement and student attendance outcomes continue to be significant issues that schools across the country are grappling with.

The NSW AECG Inc. expects this curriculum review to bring about positive significant changes for Aboriginal education outcomes in NSW. Our submission below responds to each of the four NSW Curriculum Review consultation questions by providing evidence based analysis followed by direct quotations from our consultations with the Presidents of our Regional AECG committees.

### *What should the purpose of schooling be in the 21st century?*

Since our establishment in 1977 the NSW AECG Inc. has advocated for education in NSW to meaningfully include and value Aboriginal cultures and languages in education. What we advocate for is supported in the educational literature and theory.

As renowned educational psychologist Jerome Bruner theorised, fundamentally, across all cultures, *“a system of education must help those growing up in a culture find an identity within that culture”*. Bruner states that when an education system fails to achieve this, students will inevitably stumble in their efforts to find meaning in their schooling (Bruner, 1996: 42).

Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development theory further supports the importance of meaningful inclusion of Aboriginal languages and cultures. The famed Soviet’s theories have commonly been taught in Australian university education 101 classes and suggest that knowledge development is best achieved through teaching that allows students to build on prior knowledge, such as that learnt from one’s family and community, prior to and outside of formal schooling. (Santrock, 2008).

Vygotsky’s theory aligns with the evidence-based teaching approaches supported by the Australian Council for Educational Research’s CEO Professor Geoff Masters who states:

*“a first, essential form of evidence for teaching is information about the points individual learners have reached in their learning. This usually means establishing what they know, understand and can do as starting points for teaching and to ensure that individuals are provided with well-targeted learning opportunities and appropriately challenging learning goals”* (Masters, 2018).



Before starting their schooling and outside of their school hours Aboriginal children are learning their Aboriginal languages, they are learning, Aboriginal English and they are being immersed in, engaging with and learning through the oldest continuous culture in humanity. But, when they step onto Australian school grounds they are subjected to a significant cultural shift where all too often there is little or no value placed on speaking Aboriginal Languages, Aboriginal English and practising and learning through Aboriginal culture.

Since the very first schools were erected in NSW, Western educational values and practices have been literally and figuratively enshrined within NSW curricula. NSW curriculums have always been designed to support teachers to provide ‘well targeted learning opportunities’ for children growing up in a Western culture. It is without doubt that this cultural/linguistic bias in NSW education has severely disadvantaged Aboriginal children and continues to do so. It is also without doubt that the monocultural, monolingual curricula delivered in the Blacktown and Parramatta Native Institutions was a major reason why the institutions ultimately failed to engage the Aboriginal community and students.

For generations countless Aboriginal education experts and community members have called for a curriculum which purposefully promotes Aboriginal cultural knowledge and pedagogies so that Aboriginal children can gain pride through seeing their identity reflected in their education. However we continue to see Aboriginal education discourse focussed on literacy numeracy and attendance outcomes. The current NSW AECG President, Cindy Berwick, refutes this narrow approach:

*“We are being asked to excel in the Western way to survive in the world we live in, but it can’t be at the expense of our own cultural Aboriginal identity. The strong link between forming a positive cultural identity and health and wellbeing outcomes is well known in the psychology profession. Yet many of our education officials continue to believe that it is simply western educational outcomes which will close the gap in health, wellbeing and employment outcomes”* (Berwick, 2018).

For generations countless other Aboriginal education experts have also eloquently shown their frustration at the lack of change in regards to Aboriginal education outcomes. Former NSW AECG President Professor Bob Morgan states that:

*“all available evidence illustrates that, whilst there may be some marginal improvements that have been achieved in recent times, the overwhelming experience for Aboriginal students in ‘Eurocentric’ education is one of failure. ...Australia just seems to be reluctant to embrace the need for change, and I think it is fundamentally tied up with the notion of treating Aboriginal people as guests in the dominant educational domain”* (Morgan, 2016).

To address the past and properly contribute to ‘Closing the Gap’ a core purpose of schooling in 21<sup>st</sup> Century NSW must also be to meaningfully incorporate local Aboriginal cultures, knowledges, pedagogies and languages. By this we refer to:

**Curriculums which mandate the delivery and assessment of stand-alone and integrated learnings to incorporate Aboriginal knowledge, perspectives and cultures across all KLAs**

In addition to universal educational theories and the voices of Aboriginal education experts there are a raft of policies, strategies and frameworks which call for the curriculum reforms we recommend. Some of these include:



- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- The NSW Education Standards Authority Commitment to Aboriginal Education
- The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy
- The NSW Aboriginal Education Policy
- The Closing the Gap strategy
- The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians
- The NSW Education Act
- ACARA's Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages
- The National Aboriginal Education Policy

There are countless more policies, frameworks and strategies, some many decades old, that we could list which also highlight the importance of Aboriginal language and culture in education. But yet, while the policies call for Aboriginal languages and cultures to become integral in education, we continue to experience a very superficial minimal and at times meaningless and counterproductive level of implementation.

The purpose of schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century must be to address this deficit in education, this deficit in NSW society. To allow for meaningful change:

**the central tenet of the NSW curriculum must include flexibility to shift away from that of the monocultural monolingual curricula delivered at the Blacktown and Parramatta Native Institutions and more meaningfully incorporate Aboriginal pedagogies, local languages, knowledges and cultures.**

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The NSW AECG's **Regional AECG Presidents** were consulted on this section's key question.

### *What should the purpose of schooling be in the 21st century?*

The following quotes have been summarised in response.

*There is scope for Aboriginal perspectives to be across the entire curriculum in the 21st Century. It would be awesome if the purpose of schooling in the 21st Century included meaningfully incorporating Aboriginal knowledge such as reading Country and astronomy -techniques for navigating through the stars and etc.*

*With education entering more and more into the technology revolution there is a need to ensure our kids are also receiving the life skills to adapt to this i.e. preparing rural regional and remote students for jobs that may be away from family*



*Truth telling - for too long schooling in NSW has been teaching kids a misleading, false and partial account of colonisation. The crossing of the Blue Mountains by Wentworth, Lawson and Blaxland is one example. It has long been taught in NSW schools from the colonial hero explorer perspective whereas we know the truth is that without the guidance of Aboriginal people who knew several routes across the Blue Mountains, the three explorers would likely have never made it and possibly died in their effort. The false and partial stories told in NSW schools paves the way for negative judgement and racism in our society. Kids deserve to know the full story, the truth.*

## *What knowledge, skills and attributes should every student develop at school?*

It is only relatively recently that some school students have had the privilege of learning knowledge skills and attributes that stem from an Aboriginal cultural point of reference. As highlighted in our introduction it was not until 1982 that a notion of “*an appreciation of Aboriginal cultures and societies by other Australians*” was instituted in NSW schools through the first NSW Aboriginal Education Policy (NSW Department of School Education, 1982).

The 1982 Aboriginal Education Policy has since been through several iterations but essentially the current policy remains true to what Aboriginal communities in this state have been hoping and calling for, for hundreds of years - an education which values Aboriginal knowledge, culture and identity.

The current NSW Aboriginal Education Policy objectives are primarily focussed around:

- targeting resources and professional learning to promote quality implementation of Aboriginal studies programs; Aboriginal languages programs; Aboriginal perspectives and cross-curriculum content across all Key Learning Areas and stages of development as well as in relevant further/alternative education and training programs.
- improving quality teaching and learning through explicit strategies to engage Aboriginal students to ensure improved Literacy and Numeracy outcomes
- educating all students about Aboriginal cultures and respect for the Custodianship of Country
- ensuring that all teachers are culturally competent and schools become culturally responsive  
(NSW Department of Education and Communities, 2008)

In line with this the NSW Education Act 1990 (6) 1 states:

*It is the intention of Parliament that every person concerned in the administration of this Act or of education for children of school-age in New South Wales is to have regard (as far as is practicable or appropriate) to the following objects:*





*(f) provision of an education for Aboriginal children that has regard to their special needs  
(g) development of an understanding of Aboriginal history and culture by all children  
(m1) provision of opportunities for Aboriginal families, kinship groups, representative organisations and communities to participate in significant decisions under this Act relating to the education of their children (NSW Government, 1990).*

**The NSW AECG is supportive of the NSW Aboriginal Education Policy and the Aboriginal education provisions set out in the NSW Education Act and recommends they are retained.**

However, in terms implementation of the above legislation and policy the evidence tells us that principals and teachers appear to be forgetting, ignoring or struggling to effectively enact Aboriginal education policies and strategies. Basically schools are failing to deliver the essential knowledge, skills and attributes which Aboriginal communities want and need to be delivered in our education. In 2013 a comprehensive research which included more than 200 schools and 825 teachers across Australia found that out of a possible 1200 minutes of teaching time, Australian teachers were on average spending 5 minutes per week (0.4% of teaching time) teaching through or about Indigenous cultures, languages, histories, literature, identities, perspectives etc. The research also found a significant number of teachers weren't spending any time at all teaching Indigenous content and that there is inadequate teacher training offered to prepare them (Luke et al, 2013: pp130-131).

It is disgraceful that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Australian teachers are spending 0.4% of their teaching time delivering content that refers to Aboriginal Australia. Whilst we have advocated for reducing discrimination and including Aboriginal culture and language within education for more than forty years, we continue to see little and/or ineffective change taking place. The lack of action, change and accountability for providing an education that reflects Aboriginal students' cultural needs continues. To us this lack of action is discrimination in practice. Our kids are inherently proud of being Aboriginal. They dearly need to be able to continue being proud of being Aboriginal while they are learning in schools.

We believe the current NSW curriculum requires urgent reform to address the tokenistic minimalist approach found in the research conducted by Luke et al. To honour the NSW Aboriginal community, the objectives of the NSW Aboriginal Education Policy, the NSW Education Act, NESA's Commitment to Aboriginal Education and the raft of other Aboriginal education strategies and frameworks, curriculum reform needs to take place in order to ensure that knowledge, skills and attributes that stem from an Aboriginal cultural point of reference are fully instituted in NSW school education. By this we refer to and recommend:

**Curriculums which mandate the delivery and assessment of stand-alone and integrated learnings to incorporate Aboriginal knowledge, perspectives and cultures across all KLAs**

Unfortunately teachers in NSW have not been guided by curriculums which promote and mandate flexible localised approaches to learning that allow the cultures and knowledges of the first peoples' of NSW to be centrally located in teaching and learning. Curriculum reforms, along with committed sustainable funding and resource development, will help reduce the institutionalised sidelining of Aboriginal languages and knowledges in NSW education.



In terms of specific knowledge, skills and attributes - at minimum Aboriginal students should have ample opportunities to learn about and through existing local Aboriginal languages as well as to participate in the recovering revoicing and re practising of local Aboriginal languages. All students must learn about Aboriginal experiences of colonisation and the serious injustices imposed by previous, and perpetuated by current, Australian institutions. NSW students must learn the truth of local histories and cultural practises of the Country their school resides upon. Students must also be learning about and through contemporary Aboriginal cultural practises and be encouraged to form more intimate understandings of Aboriginal philosophies of Country and sustainability.

Additionally the NSW AECG is highly aware of Aboriginal communities' keen-ness for schools to value and support learning experiences on, through and from Country. Learning through and from Country is supported in academic literature (Fogarty, Shwab, Lovell, 2015) and links in nicely with pedagogies that are increasingly being recognised in Western education contexts such as place based education, ecological learning, pedagogy of place, problem based learning, experiential learning, community based education, outdoor education and culturally responsive and sustaining education (Gruenweld, 2005; 2008).

**There is a significant need for learning about and through Aboriginal cultures to be mandated and assessed within NSW schools rather than sidelined to the periphery of the curriculum.**

The NSW AECG acknowledges the challenges associated with delivery of effective Aboriginal education initiatives. However, with improved professional learning for principals and existing and pre-service teachers the challenges can be overcome. Proof of this can be found in the recent work the NSW AECG has undertaken to support hundreds of NSW schools through delivering a range of culturally appropriate and relevant educational experiences that have allowed Aboriginal students to see their identity valued within their education. Our STEM Camps, Literacy and Numeracy days, STEAM Camps, Language and Culture Camps, Dance Camps, and Sports Health Opportunities and Wellbeing Camps have been developed to provide outcomes across all the KLAs with a strong emphasis on Aboriginal cultural knowledge/skills. Both school teachers' and students' evaluations of these programs have shown they are highly successful and provide powerful culturally relevant learning experiences

There is a dire need for a significant increase in these sorts of educational experiences for all students but particularly for Aboriginal students in NSW. These opportunities are vital for Aboriginal students to form positive rather than negative associations between their identity and education.

Unfortunately the NSW AECG currently only has the capacity to deliver our 1-3 day programs for a tiny percentage of students in NSW. Teachers should be required to deliver the learning outcomes we deliver across all four terms of the school year. To progress further educators need to be more directly guided through curriculum reforms which mandate, and require assessment of learning outcomes that identify Aboriginal cultural knowledges, skills and attributes. They also need to be supported to teach effectively through improved professional development.

In addition to professional development teachers require supporting evidence-based resources such as has been achieved recently through the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). The NSW AECG commends the recent evidence based collaborative work conducted by ACARA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory



Group and Taskforce and Science and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curriculum specialists which illustrates that evidence based content can be sourced and tied to the cross curriculum priorities stipulated in the National Curriculum. The adding of 95 new elaborations (previously 11) to help teachers incorporate the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures as a cross-curriculum priority illustrates that with committed funding and human resources there is infinite scope for achieving educational outcomes through Aboriginal knowledges (ACARA, 2018).

The NSW AECG also applauds the work that NESAs has conducted since early 2016 in developing higher quality and broader representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures. This work needs to be retained, further resourced and continued.

Whilst the current NSW Curriculum has higher quality and broader representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, it is very concerning that there is not a single mention regarding Aboriginal knowledge, cultures etc. across all NSW K-10 KLA curriculum outcomes. The NSW AECG understands that NSW Curriculum Content is ‘suggested’ and ‘optional’ and that NSW Curriculum Outcomes are mandatory. Therefore at present, without Aboriginal knowledges cultures etc. in the curriculum outcomes, NSW teachers are currently under no obligation to teach any content referring to the first peoples of this state. Given this we question – is it any surprise that the research conducted by Luke et al found teachers are on average allocating 0.4% of their teaching time to educating students about and through the cultures of the first peoples of this state? With the above in consideration we are very concerned that NSW schools and teachers may be in breach of sections 6f, g and m1 of the NSW Education Act.

Whilst there is considerable support for developing curricula that aim to support the development, delivery and assessment of stand-alone and integrated learnings that incorporate Aboriginal knowledge, perspectives and cultures across all KLAs – the NSW AECG is aware that previous reviews of the Australian curriculum have brought the following types of criticisms regarding the cross curriculum priorities:

- *there is too much choice in terms of students being able to choose between various electives that results in missing out on significant and foundation historical knowledge, understanding and skills*
- *it promotes a superficial checklist mentality, it appears tokenistic.*
- *they added a layer of complexity which was not needed*
- *they are voluntary and so their impact is weakened. If they were to have educational validity they should have been included in specific learning areas*
- *fears about yet more content overload*
- *We are also persuaded that there is a danger of content relating to the priority covering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, culture and heritage being treated in a tokenistic and superficial manner unless taught by specialists*
- *fears that the school curriculum could easily become politicised*  
(Australian Government Department of Education, 2014)

The NSW AECG acknowledges that having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures as a ‘voluntary’ component weakens any curriculum. We also acknowledge concerns about the current incapacity of many teachers to effectively teach Aboriginal perspectives, histories and cultures. However we assert that this is a teacher quality issue rather than specifically a curriculum issue. Additionally the NSW AECG is very aware of teacher concerns regarding the ‘crowded curriculum’, particularly for Primary school teachers. We see this as a valid teacher and curriculum concern. However we believe mandating



Aboriginal knowledge outcomes in the curriculum does not equate with outcomes that are 'additional' or 'extra'. The educational programs we deliver and the recent work ACARA has conducted on science elaborations illustrates that Aboriginal knowledge and cultures can be married with literacy, numeracy STEM and other KLA curriculum outcomes.

Some curriculum reviewers will always voice their concerns about mandating Aboriginal knowledge within the curriculum. Whilst some of these concerns may appear valid the NSW AECG recommends that concerns such as those outlined above should not deter from the clear and present need for curriculum reforms that:

**Mandate and advance the delivery and assessment of stand-alone and integrated learnings to incorporate Aboriginal knowledge, perspectives and cultures across all KLAs.**

A NSW Curriculum which does not mandate stand-alone and integrated Aboriginal knowledge, perspectives and cultures outcomes across all KLAs dishonours the NSW Aboriginal community, the objectives of the NSW Aboriginal Education Policy, the NSW Education Act, the Closing the Gap campaign, the NSW Education Standards Authority's Commitment to Aboriginal Education and the raft of other Aboriginal education strategies and frameworks.

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The NSW AECG has consulted with our Regional AECG Presidents and asked:

**What knowledge, skills and attributes should every student develop at school?**

The following quotes have been summarised in response.

*Again students need to be told the truth at school through the curriculum. They need the truth so they can develop attributes that will contribute to making a better future society.*

*Students need to be able to mentally cope with the many and varied difficult situations that they will come across, we can't expect kids to excel at school if we don't look after their mental wellbeing first and foremost.*

*The whole curriculum and schooling is essentially about making kids grow up better, to become people who make a contribution to society. There is need for more depth in the curriculum and more than just Aboriginal Studies. There should be Aboriginal knowledge through every Key Learning Area across the curriculum and delivered through all forms, visual, written, verbal, performance etc.*



*The curriculum could better support student's learning through telling the truth and meaningfully incorporating Aboriginal knowledge across the KLAs.*

## ***How could curriculum better support every learner?***

The first goal of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australian cites that all Australian governments and all school sectors must:

*ensure that schools build on local cultural knowledge and experience of Indigenous students as a foundation for learning, and work in partnership with local communities on all aspects of the schooling process (MCEETY, 2008).*

The NSW AECG supports this statement and further notes that:

*“research on Indigenous education has consistently noted that the best results in engagement and outcomes arise when learning is linked to local community aspirations and values, respects Indigenous languages and perspectives, and involves local people in its development”*

(Fogarty, Shwab, Lovell, 2015).

In line with this:

**The NSW AECG recommends that the NSW curriculum could better support every learner through incorporating flexibility to advance/promote local Aboriginal community education expectations.**

We have established why Aboriginal people consider the NSW curriculum has not changed significantly in its objective and purpose since 1814 when the Native Institutions were established in Blacktown and Parramatta. Ultimately Western values and cultural norms remain literally and figuratively enshrined within the curricula our educational institutions deliver. The evidence from Luke et al and others further tell us that Aboriginal knowledge remains on the far outer fringes of, or entirely omitted from, the teaching and learning delivered in our educational institutions.

We have also outlined that NSW curriculum writers could better support every learner and, in turn, NSW society more broadly, by designing a curriculum which mandates and advances the development, delivery and assessment of stand-alone and integrated learnings to incorporate Aboriginal knowledge, perspectives and cultures across all KLAs from Kindergarten through year 12.

In terms of developing a curriculum which supports every learner the NSW AECG approves of the Melbourne Declaration's first goal that *Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence*. In determining equity, the NSW AECG concurs with Professor Geoff Masters' notion that in education it is more useful to view equity through the lens of 'fairness' (Masters, 2018). We are simply calling for fairness in the curriculum, through professional



acknowledgement that students come to school not as equals but with different identities. Aboriginal students have the right to see their Aboriginal identity reflected in the curriculum and all students deserve to benefit through developing an understanding of the knowledges of the oldest continuous culture of humanity. Therefore it is only fair that the NSW curriculum mandates that teachers deliver outcomes across all years and KLAs to support rather than diminish Aboriginal student's cultural identity. It is only fair that non-Aboriginal students do not continue receiving an education that promotes and recycles the legacy of Australia's racist discriminatory past.

The NSW AECG acknowledges the difficulties and complexities associated with our recommendations for curriculum reform. We acknowledge it would be easier for most to continue to be content with the 'voluntary' status of Aboriginal knowledge outcomes in NSW curricula, to be delivered in token if at all. We recommend that curriculum writers should not be deterred by the task but rather bolstered by the value the curriculum reform we recommend can bring for the entire NSW community.

In the Australian context of reconciliation, it is paramount that teachers are expected and required to deliver an education which recognises and values Aboriginal identity, knowledge and culture. It is of paramount importance that curriculum writers recognise this and respond by drafting a curriculum that not simply encourages but requires NSW teachers to deliver outcomes in these areas.

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The NSW AECG has consulted with our Regional AECG Presidents and asked:

**How could the curriculum better support every student's learning?**

The following quotes have been summarised in response.

*The curriculum needs to cater to all students not just the 'norm' or 'mainstream' students.*

*The curriculum must help students to learn to acknowledge Aboriginal community protocols and understand that there are different Countries within NSW and the need for appropriate respect to take place.*

*The curriculum should help students understand the importance of undertaking grassroots consultation before doing things and not just going to a place like Dubbo for consultation and expecting Dubbo will be representative of all of regional NSW.*



*Authentic rather than tick the box consultation needs to take place - education officials need to define consultation more broadly and in collaboration with Aboriginal communities, we are taking time and putting in this submission for the NSW Curriculum Review but will our voices be heard and responded to? Will a deep shared understanding be sought? Or will our contribution be more an opportunity for the 'consultation with Aboriginal communities box' to be ticked yet again - Authentic consultation needs to take place.*

## *What else needs to change?*

In addition to our recommendations above the NSW AECG is aware of the current discourse associated with the following Gonski 2.0 recommendation

- *The Review recommends the Australian Curriculum be updated based on individual student growth rather than fixed-year levels*  
(Commonwealth of Australia, 2018)

As indicated in the introduction of this submission, prior to the violent usurping of our Countries, Aboriginal curricula were not directed at specific age groups but rather aligned and directed to one's readiness, capacity and progress. The NSW AECG is interested in how the Gonski recommendation would be designed in a reformed curriculum. Through our partnerships with the NSW Department of Education and NESAs, we would expect to be consulted on this if the matter is being seriously considered.

The NSW AECG recognises the importance of stating implications that may arise from the curriculum reforms we call for. In our view some of these would include:

- **Professional development and teacher induction requirements** - There is ample evidence available which identifies the need for professional development for NSW teachers to gain confidence and effectively implement curricula for Aboriginal education outcomes.
  - **The appropriate scope for school community choices about content** - this is a problematic area which is dependent on existing understandings of the constituency of local communities' and their knowledge of relevant policy and curriculum requirements such as stipulated in the Aboriginal Education Policy and NSW Education Act etc.
  - **Flexibility of schools to support increased teaching and learning on and through Country programs** – there are numerous and increasing administrative burdens on teachers to plan and coordinate students to learn outside of the classroom.
  - **The need to increase development of quality endorsed resources** – there is a wealth of appropriate resources available however there is also many inappropriate teaching and learning resources available on the internet for example.
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The NSW AECG has consulted with our Regional AECG Presidents and asked:

*What else needs to change?*

The following quotes have been summarised in response.

*Concern current curriculum is too over crowded. The proliferation and introduction of new syllabi is overwhelming teachers at the class front line. This is concerning regarding the potential then for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross curricula content may be omitted.*

*The curriculum should include intercultural practises that are shared across Aboriginal nations*

*The curriculum needs to support more of a focus on local grassroots aspects and consultation when it comes to Aboriginal education rather than putting us all in the one basket*

*Aboriginal people should be central rather than peripheral in writing curriculum, reviewing curriculum, making recommendations on curriculum etc.*

*The true depth of culture and protocols needs to be defined for educators*

*It should be a priority that Aboriginal languages are included in the curriculum*

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