

Re: ACUADS Response to the Australian Curriculum Review

As the peak body representing the tertiary visual arts sector, the Australian Council of Art and Design Schools (ACUADS) welcomes the review of the Visual Arts national curriculum. We believe that the review process offers the potential to consolidate many of the strengths of the existing curriculum and reinforce pathways to tertiary visual art studies and related professions. In addition to creating opportunities for rich learning experiences, the existing curriculum also places a significant emphasis on Indigenous art and culture, and this is welcome.

However, we believe that overall the proposed revisions do not improve the clarity or focus of the existing curriculum and carry significant resourcing implications that impact their viability.

While the proposed curriculum places a greater emphasis on the crucial subject of Indigenous cultural protocols and a more expansive understanding of visual arts careers by acknowledging diverse industry roles (e.g. curation), this is not detailed sufficiently through the curriculum document. Our concern is that the inclusion of these elements further overburdens teachers by creating levels of content complexity and range that are inconsistent with the level of study. This complexity, combined with the ambiguous scope of each strand, may have the consequence of aggravating problems in staff retention in the Arts field.

While we applaud the inclusion of Indigenous protocols and knowledge in the curriculum in such an emphatic way, to address these areas in the ways implied by the Content Descriptions would require substantial resources and teacher training led by Indigenous artists and educators. A tension for ACARA remains where responsibility for delivery of the curriculum is assigned to states and territories. While aspects of the proposed revision have merit and are appropriately ambitious, many teachers in the system have not benefitted from recent tertiary curriculum changes that emphasise these areas of art practice and so their knowledge of these fields may be limited. Without significant engagement with Indigenous cultural leaders, it is likely that teachers would not be able to address the standards outlined. If ACARA requires Australian teachers to achieve the ambitions outlined, ACARA should invest appropriately in supporting the enactment of the curriculum across the country. This would also foster local, place-based opportunities creating a dynamic exchange between national (ACARA) and diverse state/territory contexts.

We are concerned that the proposed curriculum changes do not in their current form articulate a sufficiently clear content structure that will attract and retain students. In addition, the changes appear to be unrealistic about the extent to which complex topics such as Indigenous Knowledge, craft and design can be addressed within the narrow contact parameters, while also allowing time for the development of imaginative, experimental and informed artworks. We have made some suggestions in our survey response about how these problems could be partly remedied by the further refinement of the Strands and Content Descriptions.

Finally, we feel that the inquiry-based nature of the Senior Curriculum is not acknowledged by the proposed curriculum, and therefore does not prepare students sufficiently for further study in Higher Education and Senior learning approaches. Inquiry-based learning is complex and demanding and

requires high levels of self-direction by students as they set their own creative goals and parameters, experiment with media and ideas and analyse the results. The content elaborations at Yr 9-10 imply an inquiry-based context, however, we feel that the descriptors and standards could be revised to make this approach more explicit to ensure that school leaders allocate resources appropriately to support this process. We feel that this is a significant absence, both in terms of enabling educational attainments, as well as fostering the development of self-directed creative skills relevant to a range of career pathways and future industries.



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SURVEY RESPONSES

(The responses below were submitted to ACARA via the online survey portal, 8 July 2021)

Rationale

Q: *The rationale is clear about the importance of the learning area/subject:* **Disagree**

First Nations

The emphasis on First Nations art/cultural practice is a welcome and bold reorientation of the curriculum. It is ambitious to propose First Nations practices as a *rationale* for the subject area and this proposition invites teachers to reconsider how they are engaging with Indigenous art (both classical and contemporary) in their classrooms. However, it is critical that teachers are provided with sufficient support to engage with Indigenous practices in ways that are consistent with those practices but that also ensure that non-Indigenous cultures are not obscured. This is a very complex pedagogical field that needs to be developed and led by Indigenous practitioners and educators if it is to be addressed in non-reductive and authentic ways.

Scope

The rationale states that visual arts contributes to art, craft and design and that students will learn in and through these fields (p.17). This claim is not supported by the proposed curriculum which focusses on visual arts materials and processes. While there are points of connection, grouping art, craft and design together creates a breadth of scope that will be difficult for teachers to address given the modest contact times available to Arts subjects in most schools. Additionally, the field of design engages with very different considerations and pedagogic approaches than visual art and may lead to difficulties in curriculum and assessment. This distinction is reflected by Design and Technology curriculum and it is unclear why it is desirable to duplicate this content area.

References to style

The rationale states that one of the main aims of the curriculum is to assist students to ‘become increasingly confident and proficient in achieving a personally distinctive visual aesthetic.’ (p.17). The achievement of a personally distinctive style, seems an anachronism given the experimental emphasis of the curriculum and the emergent nature of students aesthetic sensibilities at this level. Suggested rephrase: Through the interrelationship of making and responding, they become increasingly confident and proficient in *composing and analysing visual artworks*’.

Principles and processes

The rationale is at times vague and wordy and does not include any specific information about the principles and processes of the subject area. Modes of practice are not mentioned (eg. 2D, 3D, digital and time-based) nor are the broad aims of the subject area. Suggest: ‘the cultivation of multifaceted knowledge for contributing to, and transforming, our perception of the world’.

Aims

Q: *The aims identify the major learning that students will demonstrate:* **Agree**

Reference to ‘design and inquiry processes’ (p.18). This is an unclear distinction - simplify to ‘inquiry processes’.

Remove reference to ‘craftspeople and designers’ (p.18) as these fields are not addressed in the curriculum.

‘personal aesthetic through engagement with visual arts making and ways of representing and communicating.’ (p.18). Remove reference to personal aesthetic (eg. ‘personal visual language’ is more accurate and appropriate.

Organisational Structure

Q: *The strands/sub-strands provide a coherent organisational structure:* **Disagree**

Q: *The strands/sub-strands and core concepts are clear about what is important in the learning area/subject:* **Disagree**

Strands

While we appreciate that the authors have sought to simplify the curriculum strands, we feel that the proposed groupings still create unnecessary complexity. The four strands have significant overlap and do not coherently address both making and responding modes. For example, Exploring and Connecting is entirely focussed on responding; while Creating focuses only on making. A better, more simplified, structure could allow both making and responding modes to be engaged through each strand, with potential for alignment across all Arts subjects:

- Exploring: researching, reading, viewing (responding); initiating ideas (making)
- Developing: experimenting, expanding, refining, resolving (making); reflecting (responding)
- Communicating: presenting, realising (making); reflecting, analysing; evaluating (responding)

The use of a more simplified strand structure will greatly assist processes curriculum planning and design by reducing the number of touchpoints that teachers need to engage within the narrow contact parameters of the senior classroom. It will also allow more productive focus for students by fostering more clearly differentiated objectives and assessment criteria.

Core concepts

'Learning by making and responding' and 'learning as artist and audience' (p.21) are not sufficiently differentiated. Instead consider: 'Learning by experimenting and composing' (making/artist) and 'Learning by interpreting and reflecting' (responding/audience). We feel that it is imperative that the revised curriculum gives more explicit emphasis to inquiry-based learning, a core feature of visual art education and the means via which it can contribute to and incorporate other subject areas.

Key Connections

Q: The key connections section identifies the most relevant general capabilities: **Strongly agree**

Q: The key connections section identifies the most relevant cross-curriculum priorities: **Strongly agree**

Q: The key connections section identifies the key opportunities to connect with other learning areas: **Disagree**

The Key Connections overlook the way that art and science collaborations are an increasingly common feature of contemporary art practice. There is an opportunity here to provide students with an understanding of the way in which contemporary artists are engaging with fields such as agricultural, marine and geological sciences, and expand their understanding of art's contribution to society, and the professional pathways offered by art study. For example, engaging with issues of Sustainability and the environment is a key area for engaging art and science and a common feature of STEAM investigations. This not only deepens students' learning around multifaceted themes; it also lays the foundation for the collaborative and interdisciplinary skills needed for future industries.

The cross-curriculum priority of sustainability is not sufficiently addressed in the content descriptions and elaborations. This is a significant oversight, especially given the environmentally fraught aspects of many conventional art materials. We believe that sustainability needs to be embedded across all levels and strands as it should inform the researching, conception, creation and presentation of all works of art. Environmental auditing and the measurement of carbon impact/offsets are of increasing relevance to the visual art sector and create an opportunity for students to better understand the material impact of their art works and, by extension, their activities outside the classroom.

Curriculum Elements

Key Considerations

Q: The key considerations section provides important information for planning teaching and learning: **Disagree**

In our view, there is not enough emphasis on allowing the artwork to inform and expand meaning and acknowledging that the major source of meaning may not come from the individual student themselves. From our perspective, the emphasis needs shift from the student to the making of the

artwork and the final artwork itself. This shift of emphasis may better encourage the student to take creative risks, challenge theirs and their peers understanding of the world and to discover unknown thoughts or ideas.

For example, there is an overemphasis on the student as the main generator of meaning in Table 1 (p.15-16). We would recommend that these questions expand out to engage the world, for example:

- What does this work mean to me? How does it represent my identity? Instead: What does the work I have made mean to my peers and to others? Does this align with what I thought the work was doing or saying?
- How am I planning to communicate my message through my work? Instead: What is the artwork I am making telling me it is about? How does it connect to the world and people around me? Is the artwork saying something different to what I thought it might? Are there some aspects of the work I would change to make this clearer?
- What would I like people to feel as they experience my work? Instead: What do people feel when they experience my artwork? Do I have the same feelings?
- Did someone give me an idea or some input while I was creating this work? How can I /should I acknowledge their contribution? Instead: How does this artwork connect with other past or present artworks, how is it different or the same?
- Am I pleased with the outcome of my art making / performance? Instead: Has this artwork surprised me in anyway? How have I been challenged by making this artwork and what new things did I discover? In which areas did I need to persist and why?

In addition, we were surprised to find no language in the curriculum of the value of creative risk within the artistic process, alongside the other attributes inherent in making art that include perseverance and resilience. In our view these attributes are central to art education.

Year/Band Level descriptions

*Q: The year/band level descriptions provide a clear overview of the learning that students should experience at the year/band level: **Agree***

- The band descriptions are generally clear and relevant.
- We would prefer that references to 'play' are substituted with the more accurate term 'experiment'.
- Reference to curating exhibitions in Yr 7-8 description is unrealistic in most classroom contexts due to contact time and space limitations. The requirement to present shows of student works carries significant workload implications for visual art teachers, especially in rural/remote contexts where art teachers are often teaching single-handedly. This should be qualified in the descriptions or removed altogether.
- The lack of reference to craft and design fields further reinforces the argument for the removal of these terms from the rationale/aims.

Achievement Standards

*Q: The achievement standards clearly describe the expected quality of learning students should typically demonstrate by the end of the year/band: **Agree***

*Q: The achievement standards adequately reflect a clear developmental progression. **Disagree***

*Q: The learning described in the achievement standards aligns with the essential content students should be taught. **Disagree***

The standards are concise and appropriate to the curriculum, however we have some concerns about the developmental progression, terminology and emphasis.

The Yr 9-10 standards do not reflect inquiry-based approaches to art-making and consequently, do not align with the expectations of the senior curriculum. Requiring Yr 9-10 students to demonstrate

‘personal style’ (p.32) is an inappropriate standard that implies visual rather than conceptual features. We think that it is limiting to treat the development of a personal style as more important than experimenting, risk taking and exploring propositions in open-ended ways - these are features of the senior curriculum that should be introduced in Yr 9-10.

Expecting Yr 7-8 students to ‘demonstrate and describe how they and other visual artists work within ethical and legal requirements and protocols (p.27)’ is overemphasised in both standards and elaborations. This emphasis will impact on the ability of teachers to address more pertinent issues of experimentation and visual literacies.

Content Descriptions

Q: *The content descriptions specify the essential knowledge, understanding and skills that should be learned.* **Disagree**

Q: *The content descriptions make it clear to teachers what should be taught.* **Agree**

Q: *The amount of content can be covered in each year/band.* **Strongly disagree**

Imbalanced cognitions: overemphasis on ‘evaluation’ in 9-10 content descriptions; Suggestion: rephrase to address a broader range of cognitions: eg greater use of analysis.

The use of the term ‘best practice’ (Yr 7-8, p. 27) is vague and needs a clearer definition if it is to be used. Copyright and protocol issues extend beyond the legal to complex areas of cultural practice and authorship, this complexity demands a contextual understanding that is well beyond the foundation knowledge of a Yr 7-8 student. If this content description is retained, there will need to be a substantial federal investment in engaging with indigenous artists and educators to develop teachers’ capacities to be able to teach and assess meaningfully in this area.

Use of the clause ‘to represent concepts’ (Yr 7-8, p. 28) used throughout as the aim of art-making; this is too restrictive; we feel that it is better to emphasise inquiry-based approaches. More appropriate terminology is ‘to explore ideas, materials and processes’. Art engages with a broad range of sensory and cognitive functions, such as perceptual and affectual responses. ‘Representation of ideas’ promotes a very instrumental, symbolic approach to art-making and may limit the experimental, speculative dimension of the curriculum.

Reference to ‘professional visual arts practice’ (AC9AVA10E01) creates an unnecessary ambiguity and limitation. Suggest: ‘Evaluate the ways that visual artists, across times and contexts, express a range of perspectives in *their artworks*’.

Content Elaborations

Q: *The content elaborations provide useful illustrations and suggestions on how to plan and teach the content.* **Disagree**

Q: *The content elaborations provide a range of contexts that support teachers to meaningfully integrate the general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities.* **Agree**

The descriptors place an emphasis on experimentation, but the elaborations treat this as a scientific rather than creative process. For example, the elaboration for AC9AVA8C01 (Yr 7-8, p. 29) conflates the documentation visual arts processes with steps for caring for tools, etc. While important, this may encourage teachers to prioritise the mechanics of art making over its more experimental and interpretative features.

We welcome the inclusion of cross-media experimentation in the Yr 7-8 content elaborations, however it would be good to see this elaborated a little more fully across both Levels. As many teachers will incorporate the elaborations directly into their practice, it is imperative that the articulation of digital-material experimentation is nuanced to allow multiple points of application as digital access and literacy will vary significantly across locations and cohorts. This could be achieved by providing a broader list of suggested approaches that would provide a menu from which teachers could select/adapt their approaches. Again, this is another example that reiterates the need

for ACARA to be actively involved in supporting the enactment of the revised curriculum across the country.

The cross-curriculum priorities of Sustainability and Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia have been completely overlooked in the elaborations.

Reference to 'design companies' (Yr 7-8, p.27) should be removed as this is better addressed by Design and Technology subject area and has limited relevance to the visual art context. Processes for reproduction are very different to authorship and this elaboration conflates the two areas.

Overall feedback

Q: *The introductory sections provide important information.* **Agree**

Q: *The quality of content descriptions has been improved.* **Agree**

Q: *The quality of achievement standards has been improved.* **Disagree**

Q: *The quality of content elaborations has been improved.* **Disagree**

Q: *Curriculum content has been refined, realigned and decluttered.* **Disagree**

Q: *The revised Australian Curriculum in the learning area/subject is an improvement on the current version.* **Disagree**

Improved areas:

The introductory sections provide information that promotes the significance of The Arts learning area.

The content elaborations clarify the meaning of content descriptions at each level. Most are useful examples that incorporate a variety of pedagogical strategies.

The inclusion of 'visiting art spaces or exploring art works and experiences' provides teachers/HODs with a justification for curriculum-based first-hand experiences.