July 2021

ABCN Submission to ACARA's 2021 Australian Curriculum Review Consultation:

General Capabilities – Personal & Social Capability, Critical & Creative Thinking, Intercultural Understanding and Ethical Understanding

ABCN is making a submission to ACARA's Australian Curriculum Review Consultation. This submission relates to the General Capabilities – Personal & Social Capability, Critical & Creative Thinking, Intercultural Understanding and Ethical Understanding. We have prepared a separate submission for the Digital Technologies and Digital Literacy curriculum.

Please find this submission below.

Background on ABCN

Australian Business & Community Network (ABCN) is Australia's largest network of businesses and low socio-economic schools working together to support young people to thrive in the future world of work. We support young people to develop the skills and mindsets, confidence and aspirations to succeed after school through structured workplace mentoring and school/business partnerships.

Our mentoring programs are structured to expose young people to the corporate world of work and the variety of career pathways, build relationships between young people from low socio-economic backgrounds and mentors from business to help build confidence and understanding in the young people, and build a range of skills and mindsets of young people for the world of work. For instance, our award-winning[1] programs cover capabilities such as building understanding of personal strengths, how to set and achieve goals, how to build relationships and collaborate within a team, how to lead and motivate others, how to develop innovative solutions to problems. At the same time, the business mentors develop their coaching skills, develop their understanding of different generations and cultures, and feel more engaged in their organisation. The programs have a significant impact on students in the short and long-terms. For example: 94% of ABCN Goals students understand how their strengths relate to the business world, vs 41% before the program; 90% of former ABCN Goals and ABCN Aspirations students completed year 12 in 2020, vs 68% the average for disadvantaged students and 82% national average.

Started as a non-profit in 2005, we now have almost 40 leading corporate businesses as our members: Accenture, Allen & Overy, American Express, Ashurst, Bain & Company, BlueScope, Chevron, Commonwealth Bank, CSR, Energy Australia, EY, Fujifilm, Hall & Wilcox, Hewison Private Wealth, IAG, JP Morgan, KKR, Korn Ferry, KPMG, Lendlease, LinkedIn, Macquarie, Microsoft, MinterEllison, nbn, Nous, Okta, Optus, PwC, Stockland, TAL, Tata Consultancy Services, UBS, Ventia, Watersure, Western Sydney Airport, Westpac, WSP[2]. We also have 200 low socio-economic schools as our partners https://abcn.com.au/students-schools/ .

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[1] Since inception ABCN programs have been presented with 11 Global Best Awards by the International Partnership Network in recognition of world-class business-education partnerships

[2] Note – These companies are our members but there is no implication that they contributed to ABCN's curriculum review, or that this submission reflects their views or they endorse it

Since inception, have supported over 50,000 students through mentoring, supported by over 40,000 volunteers from our business partners. For more background on ABCN and our programs, please see our website www.abcn.com.au and watch a 2 minute video https://vimeo.com/510974641

Why we decided to make a submission

We are contributing to this consultation to ensure the following:

1. The curriculum builds the capabilities that young people need to be successful in early career employment
2. The curriculum supports students from low socio-economic backgrounds who may face particular barriers in building the general capabilities needed for the future world of work.

We have a unique perspective as we work closely with both low socio-economic schools and with leading businesses. Through the delivery of our programs which focus on preparing young people for the future, and our deep business relationships, we understand the most important capabilities young people need for the world of work, and which of these they face the greatest challenges in developing.

How we developed this submission

To develop this submission, we undertook the following process:

- Advised all our member companies we were going to make a submission and invited them to be part of a consultation process
- Ran 4 consultation sessions with member company volunteers. 2 sessions were particularly focused on Digital Technologies and Digital Literacy, and 2 more broadly on the General Capabilities. However, there was significant overlap in the discussions and the outcomes from all the sessions have been fed into this submission
- Ran 4 sessions with a small group of company representatives, to ensure the feedback from the large consultation sessions was captured accurately
- Consulted with our Principal Reference Council about our initial findings from the first 2 sessions
- Reviewed literature around the future of work
- Reviewed our program feedback from schools and students over the last 3 years around Personal & Social Capabilities, and Critical & Creative Thinking

Through this process, 18 of our member companies participated in the consultation, with 66 individuals involved, and we reviewed hundreds of student and school surveys about the most important skills and mindsets they developed through engaging with mentors from professional workplaces.

The business individuals involved ranged from recent graduates, technology professionals across a very diverse set of subfields, consultants around the future of work, human resources and learning and development professionals, corporate & social responsibility professionals and other employees of our businesses who had particular interest in these topics. The companies came from the technology and telecommunications, finance and insurance, consulting, infrastructure, legal and resources sectors.

However, the views expressed in this submission are ABCN's own – there should be no implication that they represent the views of any of our individual members and we are deliberately not including the names of the companies who were involved in the consultation to ensure that there are no assumptions about whether they agree with this submission or not.

Opening remarks on the submission

ABCN believes that developing at school the personal & social capabilities, creative and critical thinking skills, ethical understanding and the appreciation of difference are vital preparation for life after school including full participation in the workforce.

The proposed Personal & Social Capabilities, Critical & Creative Thinking, Ethical Understanding and Intercultural Understanding curriculums (hereafter PSC, CCT, EU and IU curriculums) address many critical capabilities that business requires of new joiners.

While the curriculum is strong and there are many positive changes, we note:

- In our experience, and that of our schools and member companies, **many young people who are finishing school do not have the general capabilities that are required to enter the workforce**. Some of these gaps are despite the competencies being outlined effectively in the current PSC, CCT, EU and IU curriculums. Some of the capabilities are not adequately addressed in the current curriculum. In particular, in our consultation, businesses emphasised gaps around:

    - **Being able to communicate effectively, including listening effectively, with an understanding of the audience and in an appropriate way for the workplace**

    - **Being able to build relationships and rapport with a wide range of people**

    - **Empathy, being open to other viewpoints, and able to manage emotions of others in non-confrontational, constructive way**

    - **Understanding and management of self, strengths and weaknesses, motivations and how they apply to the world of work**

    - **Mindsets – Curious, learning individuals, who take initiative, are constructive and forward looking, are resilient and flexible in the face of change with appropriate levels of confidence**

    - **Being able to deliver – Reliable, responsible, strong time management skill**

    - **Applying skills and mindsets to the workplace**

- **Young people from low socio-economic backgrounds with limited professional role models from the world of work, can face significant barriers to developing some of these general capabilities to a workplace ready standard.** Students from low socio-economic backgrounds develop many of these capabilities, but lack of professional role models or interactions with the world of work may mean that they may not be initially able to adapt their capabilities to workplace environments, particularly professional ones.

- **The Learning Continuum of the General Capabilities covered in the PSC, CCT, EU and IU curriculums are not systematically included in school reports typically beyond measures of class participation, completion of work and effort.** This lack of nuanced feedback to parents on the development of these skills, both underrates the importance of these skills to their children's future, and raises questions of how deliberate the development and measurement of the general capabilities are.

- **The world of work is not a central part of the national curriculum or covered in the general capabilities**. It is covered partly in the elective Work Studies, and partly in Economics and Business. However, given that one of education's critical roles is to prepare young people for the world of work, we see this as a serious gap. This is also a critical equity issue, as this gap is most pronounced in students whose family circumstances mean that they have little or narrow exposure to the world of work. Effective and rich engagement in the world of work throughout education, starting in primary school, has been shown to have significant positive outcomes for learning, engagement and post-school success.[3]

- **Business is at the forefront of the future of work, and so can play a useful role in advising on curriculum development**, particularly in PSC, CCT, EU and IU curriculums

High-level Submission Recommendations

ABCN has developed high level and more detailed recommendations as part of our submission. All of our recommendations are to address one or both of the following 2 objectives:

1. The curriculum builds the capabilities that young people need to be successful in early career employment
2. The curriculum supports students from low socio-economic backgrounds who may face particular barriers in building the general capabilities needed for the future world of work.

Through consultation with ABCN's businesses and schools, as well as our own review of the literature and evidence, ABCN is making the following general recommendations to the curriculum review:

1. **There is a major gap in the curriculum in its lack of linkages to the world of work. We recommend this is addressed in two ways:**

    - **1. We recommend an additional cross-curriculum area be considered, around the World of Work**

    - **2**. **We recommend linking the General Capabilities curriculum, as well as other Learning Areas, into the world of work.**

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[3] **Variety of literature around this, including:** Motivated to achieve: How encounters with the world of work can change attitudes and improve academic achievement By Dr Elnaz Kashefpakdel, Christian Percy and Jordan Rehill; **https://www.educationandemployers.org/research/motivated-to-achieve**; Careers education: International literature review July 2016 Dr Deirdre Hughes OBE, Dr Anthony Mann, Dr Sally-Anne Barnes, Beate Baldauf and Rachael McKeown https://www.educationandemployers.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Careers-review.pdf;;

- Linking the curriculums to the world of work can make the curriculums richer, and more relevant and purposeful for students, and also better prepare students for life after school, including helping them better develop their career aspirations. There is a great breadth of literature to support the value that linkages to the world of work can add, in terms of student motivation, engagement, attainment and post-school succeed[4]. It is a vital equity issue as it has been shown to be particularly important to those students who do not have extensive exposure to the world of work through their families or familial networks.

2. The lack of clear ownership of some of the General Capabilities by taught curriculum areas creates a significant danger that these capabilities are not developed appropriately. This is particularly true for students whose family circumstances mean that they don't have family support to develop these crucial capabilities at home. Therefore we recommend that there needs to be **greater specification and ownership of how the specific General Capabilities are to be developed** in other learning areas to ensure they really are developed. For example, under each learning continuum description, there is the opportunity to provide content elaboration that is directed to different learning areas, which is then cross-referenced to the curriculum of those learning area.

3. Some of the **general capabilities need explicit instruction, and so the curriculum needs to identify where this is expected to happen**. In the business world, significant resources are invested in explicitly developing capabilities such as communication skills. It is recognised that they will not be developed to the competency required without that explicit instruction. This is true also in the school environment. It is unrealistic to expect students to develop strategies around conflict resolution, for example, without explicitly covering this content and practising it.

4. The **expression of the learning continuum of the general capabilities could be clearer, with more practical, hands-on examples**, **supported by learning materials**. More concrete expressions will allow educators and students to assess themselves against these. We suggest there is value in making an **expression in real-world terms, of what capabilities all students should be leaving school with, regardless of their subject choices**. ABCN is undertaking to support our school with resources around what our businesses are looking for from school-leavers and would be very open to partnering with ACARA on this.

5. **Intercultural understanding is very important but the curriculum could consider whether this should be broadened to understanding of difference**, to encompass a wide variety of understandings, as well as just intercultural.

6. The general capabilities are not generally reported on in school reports in nuanced ways, reflecting the learning continuum. However, **there are a range of tools that could be used to make some assessment of the general capabilities**, including the mindsets of young people. **We recommend ACARA to explore**

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[4] There is a variety of literature to support this. https://www.educationandemployers.org/research-main/ has a wealth of research particularly around engagement with employers. https://ablconnect.harvard.edu/make-real-world-connections-course-material provides background on the value of activity based learning and real world connections

these to help educators better assess and direct their energies to building the general capabilities. ABCN would be very open to working with ACARA on such a project.

7. **The curriculum should put more emphasis on the mindsets that are linked to the General Capabilities.** For example, a curious mindset, a learning mindset, an empowered mindset where one owns the consequences of one's actions and can also create one's future, are all highly valued in the world of work.

8. **While outside the rest of the General Capabilities, our companies see financial capability as a critical capability which should be further articulated in the curriculum.** We support the proposed curriculum changes in the mathematics curriculum that identify mathematical concepts which should be explored in financial contexts. However, research around developing financial capability argue that there are significant behavioural and "soft skill" components to financial capabilities[5] that are not addressed in either the Mathematics or Economics and Business curriculum. To address these critical elements, financial capability could be covered as an additional area of the curriculum, as either another general capability, or a cross-curriculum priority, or could be mapped to content areas in personal & social capability.

As well as this high-level submission, we have the following detailed recommendations to make. They are generally focused around the Year 9/10 Learning Continuum as this is the closest to school completion covered in this review.

Personal & Social Capability:

- **Self-awareness**

  - **Personal awareness/ Reflective practice** – More emphasis should be placed on understanding strengths – it is covered in the younger years but not the later years. Understanding of and ownership of one's strengths is critical for the world of work. It drives confidence, resilience, ability to acknowledge weaknesses and failures, and effective collaboration. In the world of work understanding of strengths then translates into communication of personal brand. Understanding what motivates you and strategies for self-motivation are also important and not covered here.

- **Self-management**

  - **Self-regulation** – We did not see enough here on taking initiative. The previous version of the curriculum expressed it more explicitly – we recommend that that isn't lost in this version of the curriculum. In the working world, young people need to really own their own careers and learning journeys. Businesses are seeking individuals who own their actions and are aware of the implications of their choices. Explicitly covering reliability and taking responsibility would also be valuable.

  - **Empowerment –** A critical capability in the world of work is appropriate confidence and a sense of empowerment – that you are in charge of your life. It is linked to emotional regulation and resilience, but we feel it should be called out separately.

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[5] https://www.financialcapability.gov.au/files/how-to-really-build-financial-capability.pdf

- **Time Management/ Organisational skills** – These are not well covered but very important skills to develop. Self-regulation as an element talks about organisational skills but this is not reflected in the learning continuum.

- **Resilience** – Good to include this but would like to explicitly talk about failure and taking lessons from failures and setbacks.

- **Social management**

  - **Feedback** – Feedback is mentioned in communication and in reflective practice of self-awareness. However, the feedback concept is vital in the world of work and should be taken further, with students seeking opportunities to give and receive feedback, and having techniques to provide and receive feedback in constructive ways.

  - **Communication** - Active listening is a key technique in communication that is not adequately covered in the curriculum. Communication strategies should be explicitly taught, including assertive, proactive communication and expectations management.

  - **Relationship Building** – Communication is discussed but there is no explicit focus on building relationships which is vitally important for the workplace.. There is relational awareness, but it isn't translated into relationship building. It links to the safe space that needs to be created for collaboration.

  - **Conflict resolution** – Example of how manage a program when it fails. Consider teaching specific techniques e.g., "Play the ball, not the person" which talks to identifying the outcome you are trying to achieve, and what is hampering that achievement, rather than the personal qualities of the individuals.

Critical & Creative Thinking:

- **Key themes:**

  - The key themes of our feedback on this capability are **that while most of the processes and skills for critical and creative thinking are well articulated, the mindset or emotional frame could be better articulated, and the iterative and collaborative nature of creative and critical thinking be acknowledged more**. Therefore, our feedback is particularly around cultivating a **truly curious mindset** – which includes elements of seeking diverse input and feedback, reflecting on the process, not being emotionally attached to ideas, as well as outlining the process as an iterative one.

  - In addition, we recommend **the capability be relabelled "Creative and Critical Thinking"** given the increased focus of creative thinking in the world of work.

- **Inquiring**

  - **Curiosity:** Having a curious mindset is vital to creative and critical thinking in the workplace, and one of the most highly rated transferable skills that our businesses identified through this consultation.

While "develop questions" includes elements of curiosity, the questions need to be both linear/ analytical and non-linear/ explorative which is not adequately reflected in the learning continuum. For example, a key technique in design thinking is asking the question "How might we…" That sort of question is not reflected in Develop Questions. As well as including this element in the continuum and element description, consider renaming inquiring as curiosity.

- **Context:** In the develop questions learning continuum, include developing understanding around current context/ lay of the land

- **Purpose and problem definition:** A crucial part of problem solving and creative thinking is understanding the purpose of the solution you are developing and/or the outcomes you are trying to achieve. It is a challenge in the workplace for people to continue to focus on really understanding the problem, rather than rushing forward to developing a solution. It is partly reflected in *Evaluate actions and outcomes* but needs to be reflected from the very beginning of the process.

- **User experience:** While empathy is included in personal and social capability and elements of user experience are included in the digital literacy general capabilities, understanding the problem from the point of view of the end-user/ beneficiaries is critical and needs to be included in this capability

- **Seeking diverse input:** In inquiring, but also in other elements of critical and creative thinking, there is an important part of seeking diverse input. This is partly reflected from "range of sources" but should be further emphasised.

- **Generating**

  - **Connect ideas and create possibilities:** There are key idea-generating and problem-solving techniques that students could be taught e.g., design thinking. Learning specific approaches should be part of connecting ideas and creating possibilities.

  - **Seeking input:** Creative thinking in the workplace normally involves seeking input and working with others. This is not reflected in the elements or learning continuum.

- **Analysing**

  - **Draw conclusions and provide reasons:** We support the development of this area including providing reasons as that is critical in the world of work.

  - **Evaluate actions and outcomes:** We support the identified changes in this section, and would suggest adding identifying unintended consequences.

- **Reflecting**

  - **Feedback and learning from failure:** We are very supportive of the reflecting part of the critical and creative thinking module. We would like to see seeking, delivering and learning from feedback and failure to be included here as it is a vital part of creative thinking. We appreciate it is articulated in the personal and social capability but there is a particular requirement for it in creative thinking.

- **Continuous reflection and Iteration:** In creative thinking and problem solving, there is a significant element of iteration – putting ideas into action, then evaluating, the going back to inquiring, then connecting ideas, then putting ideas into action etc.. Therefore, reflection and iteration should be referenced as part of every phase of critical and creative thinking.

Intercultural Understanding

Intercultural understanding is very important, but the curriculum could consider whether this should be broadened to understanding of difference, to encompass a wide variety of understandings, as well as just intercultural. Perhaps relabelled to interpersonal understanding.

- Specific comments:

    - Language of curriculum needs to go further in promoting diversity *as* normal rather than encouraging students to recognise divergence. Tone and language could be updated.

    - Greater emphasis on understanding of intersectionality would lessen tendency to identify and stereotype people from 'other' backgrounds based on ethnicity, gender, religion etc.

    - Experiential elements of learning should be emphasised in relation to cultural and linguistic diversity; current curriculum appears to emphasise taught elements.

    - Language of the three domains should reflect more active student disposition, e.g. by shifting from 'reflecting' to 'enquiring', 'engaging' to 'challenging', 'navigating' to 'adapting'.

    - Some organisations expect graduates to challenge *status quo* thinking; the curriculum as it stands does not go far enough.

Ethical Understanding:

- Language of the curriculum does not adequately acknowledge diversity of values that underpin and inform ethics.

- Ethical considerations may be integral to business practice, e.g. in law, however; maybe be expressed in terms of trust, responsibility, diligence. That should be reflected in the curriculum

In the interest of space, we haven't included the raft of papers and resources that have informed this submission, particularly those around the Future of Work. However, we are able to provide those references as required.

As part of our consultations, we have developed a body of examples of capabilities which could be used as part of the content elaboration, as well as a draft of the practical general capabilities business is looking for all young people to have. We are happy to provide these to ACARA if they are useful.

ABCN and its network of businesses are passionate about supporting young people to develop the skills and capabilities to thrive after school. If there are other forums where the shared perspective of business and education are valuable, or ways we can support our shared objectives, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Australian Business & Community Network

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