

Business education in Australia's curriculum

A statement from Business Educators Australasia Inc.

Business Educators Australasia Inc, in conjunction with its affiliates, aims to promote and extend business education in our primary and secondary schools.

Foreword

The discussion around a national curriculum and the new Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians centres on what is important to teach in our schools, when it should be taught, and how it should be taught.

- The *what* of this discussion is inevitably about subjects, studies and programs that should be included in the curriculum; what is core or mandated, and what is optional or elective.
- The *when* is about where the *what* is placed in the curriculum; that is, which students have access to *what*, and at which levels of schooling.
- The *how* is about creating the success for learners—the quality of teaching.

Over many years, through state and territory curriculum reviews, and a number of attempts at developing a national approach to curriculum, strong arguments have been mounted in support of providing business education for all students in the compulsory years of schooling. More specifically, the importance of developing in students an understanding of economics, and law-related, business and accounting studies, and learning for consumer and financial literacy has been widely advocated.

Success for this advocacy has been mixed with some jurisdictions building firmer curriculum positions for business education in its various dimensions, while others have maintained an optional or elective approach. This means, of course, that not all students have the benefit of education for economic, consumer and financial literacy.

Business Educators Australasia Inc., the peak body for business education teacher professional associations in Australia and New Zealand, believes that the current move towards developing a national curriculum for Australia should, in its second phase, ensure that business education, including education for economic, consumer and financial literacy, and developing understandings in business, is provided for every student in Australia's primary and secondary schools; that is, that business education is core in the compulsory years of schooling.

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President

Affiliated associations

Business Educators Association of Queensland Inc (BEAQ)

Business Educators Australian Capital Territory (BEACT)

Business Educators Australasia Tasmania Inc (BEAT)

Business Education Teachers Association of Northern Territory (BETANT)

Business and Enterprise Teachers Association of South Australia Inc (BETASA)

Business Educators of Western Australia Inc (BEWA)

Economics and Business Educators New South Wales (EBENSW)

Economics Teachers Association of Western Australia (ETAWA)

Economics Teachers Society of South Australia (ETSSA)

Legal Studies Association of New South Wales Inc (LSA NSW)

New Zealand Commerce and Economics Teachers Association Inc (NZCETA)

Queensland Economics Teachers Association Incorporated (QETA)

Victorian Commercial Teachers Association (VCTA)



Business education in Australian schools

Business education in Australian schools is not, typically, a subject as such. In fact, business education has many dimensions represented in subjects, electives and cross-curricular and integrated programs, all of which add to the richness of curriculum in primary and secondary schools.

In secondary schools business education subjects are prominent in the subject choice of many post-compulsory students. The subjects include accounting, business management/studies, economics, legal studies and related studies offered through different courses that provide multiple post-school pathways to employment and further education and training. These subjects, or variations thereof, depending on state or territory curriculum requirements and options, also feature towards the end of the compulsory years of secondary schooling. The variations are sometimes described in curriculum programs as commerce, work-related studies, and consumer and financial literacy studies.

In the compulsory years of schooling, business education informs a strong list of cross-curricular and multidisciplinary studies, including commerce, consumer and financial literacy, civics and citizenship, information and communication technologies (ICT), environmental studies, and studies of Asia. There are many opportunities for integration of business education dimensions into these studies in primary and secondary schools.

Importantly, there is increasing recognition of the opportunities to integrate business education with learning in English, mathematics, history, geography and science. Cross-curricular and multidisciplinary approaches are especially significant given the competitive pressure on curriculum in schools and the need to be mindful of available time and the workload of teachers.

More broadly, business education teachers see the improvement of literacy and numeracy skills in all students as their business. They take the abundant opportunities provided by business education subjects and in related cross-curricular initiatives to improve student literacy and numeracy.

So, far from being narrow in scope and range, the business education portfolio of studies and programs is diverse in nature, comprehensive in creating engaging learning opportunities on a K–12 basis, and has a futures focus. The diversity of knowledge and skills associated with business education is important in building authentic student engagement in their learning and interest in lifelong learning, life skills and vocational pathways.

Significantly, the content and the skills developed through business education are often advanced through a context of strong narratives drawing upon:

- real-life events, situations, observations and experiences
- case studies and applied learning; people, businesses and resource use
- economic and financial relationships and decisions in individual, government, regional and global contexts
- post-school pathways for students.

National and international perspectives on business education

As part of the ongoing national debate and discussion about what sort of education young Australians need in the 21st century, a report by the Council for the Australian Federation was released in September 2007. This report, *The Future of Schooling in Australia*, was clear in its view that all students should have access to studies in economics and business.¹

The report informed the subsequent Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008), which affirms economics and business as essential learning for students in humanities and social science (the disciplines of history, geography, and economics, and the study of business), one of eight *must-include* learning areas.²

This national recognition of the significance of economics, and the studies it informs, is unsurprising given that economic decisions by individuals, businesses and governments are about resource use and distributing the proceeds of production. The quality of these decisions will impact on individual, local and national wellbeing, and increasingly have global implications. What is surprising is that for most of our students in the compulsory years of schooling, acquiring even some of the literacy associated with business education is marginal and, typically, optional.

Internationally, there is strong support for business education in primary and secondary schools. In 2004, Scotland released *A Curriculum for Excellence*³, which provided explicit statements of the aims of education. It described the purposes of education as enabling all young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective communicators. This closely approximates Goal 2 of the Educational Goals for Young Australians.⁴

The supporting curriculum documents in *A Curriculum for Excellence* have a strong focus on business education in both discipline and cross-curricular perspectives. Further, *Business Education: A Portrait of Current Practice*, a recent discussion considering how business education supported the purposes of education identified in *A Curriculum for Excellence*, noted that:

The subjects taught within business education departments have many strengths on which to build to help learners develop the four capacities ... It is important to recognise also the major contribution which business education can make to priority themes such as enterprise, citizenship and sustainable development ...⁵

The 2008 edition of *Trends Shaping Education*, an OECD publication designed to help thinking about major developments that are affecting the future of education and setting challenges for schools, highlighted many of the areas that are developed through business education. Chapters include 'Global Challenges', 'Towards a New Economic Landscape', 'The Changing World of Work and Jobs', 'Citizenship and the State', 'Social Connections and Values', and 'Sustainable Affluence?'⁶

Business education for all students

The need for all of our students to have enhanced economic and consumer and financial literacy is evident in the current global economic and financial crisis. The uncertainty created by this crisis underlines the need to embed in the curriculum of all primary and secondary schools in Australia the skills, knowledge and understanding associated with economics, and consumer and financial literacy. The response to such events should be to ensure that in future all our young people develop basic economic, consumer and financial literacy.

The support for this view is not new and has long been advocated through research by those who sensibly connect life skills and lifelong learning with this literacy. Much has been written (and researched) by academics, professional teacher associations and other agencies and individuals with an interest in the area and about the need to provide all primary and secondary school students with business education. For example:

Life globally is dominated by economic transactions and it is the quality of the economic decision making at all levels of society that significantly determines the wellbeing of individuals

and nations. It is the limited understanding of economics that ultimately restricts a person's capacity to participate in society in response to individual, group, local or broader national and global needs. In order to operate effectively as individuals, as contributors to society and as informed citizens, every student needs to develop a basic understanding of economic principles and concepts and how they are applied.⁷

An economically educated citizenry is necessary to reduce the likelihood of the government failing to adhere to the preferences of its electorate. Moreover, citizens who understand how their own economic interests are bound up with the interests of other citizens are more likely to support government actions that take all citizens' economic interests into account.⁸

To the old and true adage, 'if you think education is expensive, try ignorance,' we would add a stronger emphasis and a greater awareness of the astounding costliness of economic illiteracy.⁹

The financial preparedness of our nation's youth is essential to their well-being and of vital importance to our economic future. In light of the problems that have arisen in the subprime mortgage market, we are reminded of how critically important it is for individuals to become financially literate at an early age so that they are better prepared to make decisions and navigate an increasingly complex financial marketplace. Choosing a credit card, saving for retirement or for a child's education, or buying a home now requires more financial savvy than ever before.¹⁰

Business education must be core curriculum in the compulsory years

It is not difficult, then, to find strong, reasoned advocacy for all students to develop, for example, at least basic economic, consumer and financial literacy while at school. It is unlikely that they might do this outside of school, on any worthwhile scale. However, it is difficult to find evidence that education systems take the view that these literacies should be developed in all students as part of schooling.

In the post-compulsory years students specialise in their subjects as they build their employment and further studies pathways. While they might take economics, accounting, legal studies or business management or business studies, many will not. So if we are to educate

all students in economic, consumer and financial literacy, it has to be in the compulsory years. Unfortunately, it is often in the elective rather than the core curriculum.

Business education has a strong, real-life evidence base

Our states and territories each have their consumer watchdogs and related consumer support agencies, often directly associated with a consumer ministry. Even a casual perusal of the websites of these agencies provides ample evidence of the need for economic, consumer and financial literacy. So, too, does the consumer education website of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC) at <www.fido.asic.gov.au>. The Australian Government's 'Understanding Money' website at <www.understandingmoney.gov.au> argues strongly for the incorporation of financial literacy into the core curriculum from Kindergarten to Year 10. More recently the development of the Consumer and Financial Literacy Professional Learning Program <www.financialliteracy.edu.au> through the Australian Government's Financial Literacy Foundation and Quality Teacher Program highlighted the importance of consumer and financial literacy for all students:

In the Financial Literacy Foundation's research report, *Australians Understanding Money*, young people self-assessed themselves as lacking basic knowledge, skills and confidence when dealing with a range of money-related issues. They recognised the need for consumer and financial literacy education and over 80% said they would like to improve their financial knowledge and skills, while a further 82% said being taught about money at school was beneficial.¹¹

National support for business education

Business education and the national Statements of Learning

In July 2003 the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) requested that Statements of Learning be developed in English, Mathematics, Science, and Civics and Citizenship as a means of achieving greater national consistency in curriculum outcomes across the eight states and territories. In reconfirming the purpose of Statements of Learning in May 2005, the Ministers added Information and Communication Technologies as a further area for a Statement of Learning.

Each of these Statements, available at <www.curriculum.edu.au/mceetya/statements_of_learning,22835.html>, sets out the knowledge, skills, understandings

and capacities that students in Australia should have the opportunity to learn and develop in the particular domain. For each of these Statement domains, the dimensions of business education provide rich opportunities to support learning just as they do for the National Statement for Engaging Young Australians with Asia in Australian Schools, which can be accessed at <www.asiaeducation.edu.au>.

Australian and state and territory government support for business education

The increasing awareness of the need for consumer and financial literacy saw two national responses in 2005. One was the establishment, as a division of the Australian Treasury, of the Financial Literacy Foundation <www.understandingmoney.gov.au/Content/Consumer/About>. The other was the development by MCEETYA of the National Consumer and Financial Literacy Framework. This Framework <www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/_resources/Financial_Literacy_Framework.pdf> was prepared to further learning needed to meet the National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century (1999) and is even more relevant in the context of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (which supersedes the 1999 Adelaide Declaration).

MCEETYA is clear about the purpose and the reasons for the Framework.

The Framework is designed to:

- inform the Statements of Learning that have been agreed to by MCEETYA
- provide guidance to states and territories in the development of their curricula K–10
- provide guidance to developers of support materials and the professional development of all teachers of consumer and financial literacy.¹²

The Framework defines consumer and financial literacy as 'the application of knowledge, understandings, skills and values in consumer and financial contexts and the related decisions that impact on self, others, the community and the environment'.¹³

It acknowledges that globally consumers, businesses and governments exchange goods and services on a daily basis, and in 'a climate of changing global, national, community and family economic circumstances, the form and complexity of these transactions continues to change'. It stresses the importance of consumer and financial literacy for all young people and observes that

'research indicates the economic benefits for the entire community of increased levels of consumer and financial literacy and of addressing youth debt'.¹⁴

Strong and practical national support for integrating business education dimensions in the curriculum

The National Consumer and Financial Literacy Framework is a framework that provides a strong basis for integrating consumer and financial literacy as a cross-curricular or multidisciplinary initiative. While the professional experience and training of business education teachers places them well in terms of curriculum development and teaching in this area, Business Educators Australasia appreciates that if all students are to benefit from economic, consumer and financial literacy their seamless cross-curricular or multidisciplinary integration into the curriculum is essential.

The opportunities for this integration, and for all students to be educated in economic, consumer and financial literacy, are richly illustrated in the 2008 Australian Government resource *Consumer and Financial Literacy Professional Learning Program: Facilitator and Teacher Guides*, available at <www.financialliteracy.edu.au>. Professional learning opportunities are vital in any new curriculum implementation.

Developing a more complete national curriculum for Australia: including business education in phase 2 development

The first meeting of the new National Curriculum Board¹⁵ was held on 23 April 2008, and with a brief to complete the first phase of its work by 2010 it is fortunate that so much of what is currently being done well in schools will assist in developing the national curriculum.

In addressing the June 2008 National Civics and Citizenship Education Forum, the Chair of the National Curriculum Board, Professor Barry McGaw, noted that:

in the new national curriculum effort we will:

- build on the best of what is already being done in the states and territories
- seek to learn from the practices of those countries that currently outperform us
- pay careful attention to the research evidence on pedagogy and learning and to what works best in educational practice.¹⁶

That effort, at least in the near term, will focus on select subjects in the curriculum. This was made clear in a February 2008 paper prepared as background reading for the Board's June national consultation for the national curriculum, *Into the Future: National Curriculum Board Forum*:

The remit of the National Curriculum Board, in the first instance, is to develop a national, K–12 curriculum in English, mathematics, the sciences and history. In a second phase, the remit will be extended to involve geography and languages other than English. The Board's work must be shaped by the national goals [the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians] and must connect with other areas for which curriculum will continue to be developed within the states and territories.¹⁷

This remit was confirmed at the Forum in June 2008 though Professor McGaw acknowledged that it covered only part of the whole curriculum, noting that what it does must 'clearly leave room for the rest and must be effectively connected with it'.¹⁸

The National Curriculum Board Forum background paper, in highlighting the role of national curriculum in building Australia's future, was clear about what young Australians should expect from the school system:

Their schooling should develop a sense of themselves and Australian society, a capacity and predisposition to contribute effectively to society, and the knowledge, understanding and skills with which to work productively and creatively. The schooling of Australia's young people should help to develop a cohesive society, with individual members aware of the rich diversity of histories and cultures that have shaped it, and committed to its continuing development. It should build strong foundations for future national prosperity, helping to make Australia productive and internationally competitive in the global economy.¹⁹

It is surprising, then, that in the work to be undertaken in phases one and two of a national curriculum, there is no reference to business education or its dimensions, including economics, the informing discipline in business education. This is a critical omission that must be addressed.

Notes

- 1 Council for the Australian Federation, *Federalist Paper 2: The Future of Schooling in Australia*, September 2007, <www.caf.gov.au/Documents/TheFutureofSchoolinginAustralia.pdf>.
- 2 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, December 2008, p. 14.
- 3 Learning and Teaching Scotland, *A Curriculum for Excellence*, 2004, <www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence>.
- 4 MCEETYA, *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, December 2008, p. 8.
- 5 The four capacities described in *A Curriculum for Excellence* are: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), *Business Education: A Portrait of Current Practice* (Scotland), 2006, <www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/publication/bepcp.html>.
- 6 OECD, *Trends Shaping Education*, 2008 edition, <<http://213.253.134.43/oecd/pdfs/browseit/9608081E.pdf>>.
- 7 Forsyth, A, 'Constructing Social Education Curriculum for the Twenty-first Century: the Role and Importance of Economics Education', paper presented at the AARE 2005 Conference.
- 8 Davies, P, 'Educating Citizens for Changing Economies', *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2006, pp. 15–30.
- 9 Council for Economic Education, *Campaign for Economic Literacy: Challenge and Response*, <www.councilforeconed.org/cel>.
- 10 Bernanke, B, *The Importance of Financial Education and the National Jump\$tart Coalition Survey*, Speech, Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, USA, 9 April 2008, <www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/speech/bernanke20080409a.htm>.
- 11 Crough, G, *Consumer and Financial Literacy Professional Learning Program: Teacher Guide*, 'Foreword', March 2008, p. 4, <www.financialliteracy.edu.au>.
- 12 MCEETYA, National Consumer and Financial Literacy Framework, 2005, p. 1, <www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/_resources/Financial_Literacy_Framework.pdf>.
- 13 MCEETYA, National Consumer and Financial Literacy Framework, 2005, p. 1, <www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/_resources/Financial_Literacy_Framework.pdf>.
- 14 MCEETYA, National Consumer and Financial Literacy Framework, 2005, p. 1, <www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/_resources/Financial_Literacy_Framework.pdf>.
- 15 The purpose of the National Curriculum Board is to develop a single, world-class Australian curriculum for all students from Kindergarten to Year 12. For further information, refer to <www.ncb.org.au>.
- 16 McGaw, B, excerpt from the address to the National Civics and Citizenship Education Forum, *Curriculum Perspectives*, Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA), vol. 28, no. 2, June 2008, p. 7.
- 17 National Curriculum Board, *National Curriculum Development Paper*, February 2008, p. 2.
- 18 National Curriculum Board, *Event record of the 'Into the Future: National Curriculum Board Forum'*, 27 June 2008.
- 19 National Curriculum Board, *National Curriculum Development Paper*, February 2008, p. 2.