Statement from First Issues Nations Experts on Education

We, the undersigned experts in education, are teachers, education support professionals, principals, early childhood educators, lecturers, associate professors and professors. We are First Nations people who collectively embody a millennia of minutes, thousands of hours, and hundreds of decades of long, hard work in the Australian education industry.

We make this statement in response to the mistruths that are being spread in some sections of the Australian media in relation to the Australian Curriculum review with particular reference to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority and the modest inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into the mandatory key learning areas and non-mandatory content elaborations.

We have spent our careers in the Australian education sector working with two key objectives in mind:

1. 1) To improve the education system to ensure the best possible outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners; and

2. 2) To improve the education system so it ensures that all students in Australia have the opportunity to learn about the unique diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, as the first cultures of this land.

The attainment of these objectives for all Australian students is not just our vision – it is a vision shared by the whole nation – as articulated and signed by all Australian Ministers for Education in the 2019 Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Declaration, which states in its preamble:

We recognise the more than 60,000 years of continual connection by the First Peoples of Australia as a key part of the nation's history, present and future. Through education, we are committed to ensuring that all students learn about the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to seeing all young First Nations Australians thrive in their education and all facets of life.

It is this vision for the Australian education system that is brought to life in classrooms every day through the mechanism of the Australian Curriculum.

In our expert opinion, the changes proposed in the current review of the Australian Curriculum do not "Indigenise" this version of the curriculum.

In fact the proposed changes are modest in scope and will improve the current education workforce's approach to achieving our shared objectives as a nation.

In particular, they will assist teachers and educators to respond more fulsomely to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, parents and communities by highlighting approaches that teachers can use to make the curriculum more culturally responsive and inclusive.

We further note that commentators in the Australian media are arguing that there has been an "elevation of Indigenous studies" throughout the curriculum, yet these commentators have failed to mention that the majority of the proposed changes are to the non-mandatory "Content Elaboration" section of the curriculum.

Content elaborations are "suggested learning experiences" and are designed to support teachers by providing clarity on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content, with the aim of improving teacher responsiveness.

The changes proposed in the review will contribute to both closing the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational attainment and closing the "why weren't we told?" gap in knowledge and understanding of the richness and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and in the teaching and learning of the shared history of our country.

We urge members of the Australian public to support the modest changes proposed by this review and encourage all

supporters of the changes to put in a submission to the ACARA curriculum review.

Signatories

Karel Williams, Palawa, Executive Director; Rod Little, Wilunyu and Wajuk of the Yamatji and Nyoongar Nations, Owner, Director; Shannai Clissold, Kamilaroi, Teacher; Annie Mitchell, Bundjalung, Teacher; Bel Crowley, Gamillaraay, Teacher/Pedagogy Coach; Chantal Brown, Barada Barna, Teacher; Saraya Stewart, Yidinji, Teacher; Mervyn King, Waanyi, Teacher/Trainer; Name withheld, Jingili, Curriculum; Samantha Ritchie, Mandandanji, Teacher; Chantal Brown, Barada Barna, Teacher; Name withheld, Yawuru, Teacher; Gulwanyang Moran, Birrbay and Dhanggati, Aboriginal and Cultural Diversity Officer; Anissa Jones, Boorooberongal Darug, Teacher, trainer and assessor; Carly Meares, Wiradjuri, Teacher; Alicia Morgan, Gumbayngirr
and Bundjalung, Classroom teacher; Name withheld, Wiradjuri, Project Lead, Department of Education; Anna Renfrew, Wonnaruah, Awabakal, Darkinyung, Itinerant Teacher Hearing; Narelle Daniels, Murramurang/Yuin, Teacher; Kristy Davies, Gomeroi, Classroom teacher; Lauren Castino, Gamilaraay, English Teacher; Rachel Bos, Kaurna, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Officer; Holly Sanders, Bundjalung, Classroom teacher.

The full list of signatories to this statement can be viewed at bit.ly/3z0pDWs

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
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