



VADEA Response to the NSW Curriculum Review Interim Report

Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion, designs for a future school curriculum: NSW Curriculum Review Interim Report

The Visual Arts and Design Educators Association NSW (VADEA NSW) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on *Nurturing Wonder and Igniting Passion, designs for a future school curriculum: NSW Curriculum Review Interim Report*. VADEA represents the largest membership of visual arts educators in Australia, with over 850 members. VADEA is committed to contributing in a positive and constructive way to the Curriculum Review Interim Report, in the interests of achieving a high quality Visual Arts K-12 curriculum for NSW that prepares students for the 21st Century, recognising it has its own body of knowledge as a discipline that is distinct from other arts subjects.

Many of the reform directions addressed within the Interim Report including promoting deep understanding, applying knowledge, a flexible curriculum, continuity of learning and a major project have been features of the NSW Visual Arts syllabus for two decades. Visual Arts and Design educators in NSW are leading the way in this regard and have sustained an a refined and innovative curriculum, that “supports teachers to nurture wonder, ignite passion and provide every young person with knowledge , skills and attributes that will help prepare them for a lifetime of learning” (p.x). The enduring legacy and success of the Visual Arts 7-10 and 11-12 syllabuses is strongly supported and endorsed by visual arts teachers throughout NSW, Australia and internationally (e.g. Briggs & DeLosa, 2019).

Three broad areas of curriculum reform have been identified in the Interim Report, and this submission systematically responds to each reform direction - Reforming the Content of the Curriculum; the Structure of the Curriculum; and the Senior School Curriculum. In broad terms, VADEA is supportive of an examination into the content of the NSW curriculum. Since the release of the Years 11-12 Visual Arts syllabus in 2000; Content Endorsed Courses Photography, Video and Digital Media, 2000; Visual Design, 2000; Ceramics, 2000; and Creative Arts Life Skills, 2009) and the Years 7-10 Visual Arts syllabuses in 2003; Visual Arts Life Skills; Photographic and Digital Media and Visual Design in 2004 there has been little support for ongoing meaningful consultation for research-based evaluation and curriculum development in the Visual Arts, despite having the 10th largest candidature in the HSC. In spite of this, Visual Arts has sustained a high quality, conceptually based curriculum that is aligned with the proposed directions to reduce content in many syllabuses. Due to the unique design of the Visual Arts curriculum, centred on three areas of content, the development of “deeper conceptual understanding over shallower coverage of extensive factual and procedural detail” (p.xi) is supported and actively encouraged. The Visual Arts has a long tradition of developing students’ skills in applying knowledge, as established through the content area of Practice, where the role of art practitioners is investigated in the making (Artmaking) and interpreting of art (Art Criticism and Art History) in conjunction with core concepts arising in the Conceptual Framework and explanatory theories known as the Frames. The inherent flexibility of these core concepts and principles ensures teaching and learning in Visual Arts is authentic, can be applied to the many and varied instances of practice in the artworld, and can be directed to reflect the local contexts of students, resources and teacher expertise. The importance of continuity of learning in Visual Arts is evident in the recursive nature of these core concepts, as students develop increasingly sophisticated understandings of the agencies in the art world (Conceptual Framework), through interpretative frameworks to provide orientations to understand the range of meanings and beliefs in the making and studying art (Frames). Visual Arts has demonstrated long-term sustained leadership in incorporating a major project in the curriculum. The Body of Work in Year 12 has been a feature of the curriculum since 2001, and preceded by a Major Work in earlier

iterations of the subject during the 1970s through to the late 1990s. Exemplified and showcased in annual ARTEXPRESS exhibitions in metropolitan and regional galleries throughout NSW (including the Art Gallery of NSW), the Body of Work is an example of how a students' knowledge, skills and understandings can be applied to investigations that sustain deep learning and higher order thinking and VADEA anticipates the project may be an opportunity for students to extend the depth of learning in Visual Arts.

Whilst the Interim Report contains many reform directions that would complement existing curriculum structures in Visual Arts, VADEA has concerns about the implications of suggestions within the Interim Report. VADEA supports the development of discipline-specific learning progressions and attainment levels, as opposed to generic levels for Visual and Performing Arts subjects. Although the introduction of learning progressions and attainment levels have the potential to impact teacher workload and the frequency of assessment, with implications for staffing, timetabling and the number of subjects offered to students. VADEA acknowledges the need for the development of updated, high quality standards materials which reflect contemporary teaching practices, to support professional learning, continuity and equity throughout the state. Additional concerns relate to the possibility of an integrated curriculum, with the suggestion of a new Key Learning Area titled 'Visual and Performing Arts and Entertainment'. The inclusion of Entertainment has the potential to reduce the rigour of the Visual and Performing Arts subjects, as does modularisation and options within syllabuses. Further clarity surrounding the project is required and the potential impact this would have upon the candidature in Visual Arts.

In reforming the structure and content of the curriculum, VADEA are cognisant of pressure from particular subjects and sectors to adopt the generic structure for arts education as evident in the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* (ACARA, 2015). VADEA has been resolute in the rejection of this curriculum, and we assert that this approach to curriculum does not promote deep learning in each discrete arts discipline.

Finally, VADEA assert that to ensure high quality Visual and Performing Arts learning is sustained, the common entitlement provision outlined in the NSW Education Act 1990 and the Assessment Certification Examination (ACE), which established the rules and procedures set out by NESA in relation to Secondary education in NSW, must be maintained. The mandatory nature of Visual Arts in Stage 4 has fostered a rigorous and high quality approach to Visual Arts education in NSW, which has resulted in Visual Arts appearing in the top 15 HSC subjects over a considerable number of years. Visual Arts has established its position as the pre-eminent arts discipline in the NSW curriculum, and we trust this will be acknowledged and respected in future iterations of this report and possible implementation of reform directions.

During the 2017-2018 consultation process for the Creative Arts K-6 Syllabus VADEA acknowledges that many of core conceptual features of the *Creative Arts K-6 Draft Syllabus for Consultation 2018* has the potential to compliment the reform directions outlined in this report. We formally acknowledge the consensus established throughout the consultation period amongst the arts associations (Music, Dance and Drama), in the development of this syllabus. Whilst the approval and release of this draft syllabus is currently deferred until the outcomes of the Interim Report are determined (NESA News, 4th November 2019), VADEA is confident that NESA will respect and acknowledge the work from all the arts disciplines to achieve unanimity and hope that the core elements will be sustained following the finalisation of the NSW Curriculum Review.

VADEA would like to highlight concerns about the timing of the release of the Interim Report during the HSC examinations and in the latter part of Term 4 of the school calendar. Term 4 has a very demanding schedule for teachers involving essential assessment and reporting, numerous school events and for many teachers HSC examination marking in addition to their teaching load. As a result, VADEA believes the opportunity for high quality engagement and feedback in the consultation process may be compromised.

The structure of the VADEA response is organised in alignment with each Reform Direction and where applicable, we first address the implications for the direction in relation to Visual Arts curriculum, followed by broader comments pertaining to implications for visual arts teachers.

VADEA believes that there is a significant opportunity for Visual Arts and Design educators to lead the way in the development and implementation of many of these reform directions, and we look forward to working with Independent Review Lead Associate Professor Geoff Masters AO, the Curriculum Review project team and NESAs.

Written on behalf of VADEA members,

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REFORMING THE CONTENT OF THE CURRICULUM

1. Creating a less crowded curriculum

Implications for Visual Arts curriculum

- The Interim Report has identified concerns about the ‘overcrowding’ of content in curriculum areas, however this is not relevant to Visual Arts. Unlike many other subjects, which specify topics, themes, issues or events, Visual Arts identifies three areas of content as core concepts for flexible delivery:
 - Practice - which explores the motives, perceptions, procedures and strategies artists, art critics and art historians adopt to make and interpret art
 - Conceptual Framework - a theoretical model for understanding the agencies in the art world, and the relationships between artist, artwork, world and audience
 - Frames - philosophical/theoretical and interpretive frameworks for understanding the layering of meaning, significance, value and belief in and about the visual arts, which includes subjective, structural, cultural and postmodern orientations, in making and studying art

The continuum of learning in Visual Arts is encapsulated by a limited number of core concepts which in addition to those identified above includes representation, conceptual strength and meaning, resolution. The elegant and flexible nature of the Visual Arts syllabus has resulted in an enduring legacy which is strongly supported by teachers and academics, both in Australia and internationally. At its core, students adopt the role of an artist, critics and art historians, to make artworks, develop critical interpretations and investigations in explaining artworld artefacts. The theoretical constructs of the core content emboldens teachers to adopt positions in which to enact content in meaningful and authentic ways. As a result, the dichotomy identified throughout the Interim Report, between theory and practice, has not been the experience of Visual Arts educators.

- VADEA warns against a target percentage for reduction for all syllabuses, as this would be too restrictive, particularly for subjects such as Visual Arts, where the intrinsic design of the syllabus ensures the amount of content is not overly prescriptive and members have not expressed concerns regarding the provision of content in Visual Arts courses. VADEA suggests the Visual Arts curriculum can be a leader in an attempt to reduce the burden of content. Examples of conceptually organised subjects such as English Textual Concepts and Siemon’s Six Big Ideas (Maths) were noted in the report, and VADEA believes that the Visual Arts is a ‘tried and tested’ conceptually based syllabus model, with nearly 20 years of experience and an established framework of flexible content delivery.
- VADEA acknowledges that within some areas of the Visual and Performing Arts, there will be pressure to adopt the model of Arts education identified within the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* (ACARA, 2015). VADEA has consistently advocated in opposition of this curriculum model,

which proposes a generic structure for arts education, with 5 artforms combined in a single learning area. VADEA has been reassured by the continued support of NESAs, to maintain the provision of the NSW curriculum in order to avoid diluting the rigour of the curriculum in Visual Arts. The ACARA model was deemed 'not equal to or better than what is currently in place', and if implemented in NSW, would further confound issues of overcrowding with the addition of another artform, Media Arts, which represents further content duplication as this subject stems from a curriculum history from other states and in NSW, much of this content is addressed in other subjects across the curriculum. VADEA strongly advocates for maintaining Visual Arts and Music as key mandatory arts subjects in Years 7 and 8, to avoid the potential for overcrowding in the curriculum landscape. In addition, the contraction of curriculum quality at this critical transition from primary to secondary has the potential for significant reduction in the high-quality nature of these subjects, which have demonstrated their ability to promote deep understanding.

2. Promoting deep understanding

Implications for Visual Arts curriculum

- The unique design of the Visual Arts syllabus ensures that there is clarity about core knowledge and essential concepts and principles as explained in Reform Direction 1. The enduring nature of the visual arts, visual design and photographic syllabuses over the past 20 years reflects the robust and conceptually significant basis on which these are syllabi formed. The current NSW Visual Arts curriculum is underpinned by rich traditions arising from an empirically justified research base and is informed by ongoing and shifting contemporary practice. It supports student learning in acquiring knowledge, skills and understanding in visual arts, whilst ensuring the quality of teacher pedagogy. The legacy and strength of this syllabus has been demonstrated in its flexibility to reflect shifting trends and movements in the artworld. The syllabus also respects the autonomy of the teacher, which is alluded to throughout the Interim Report, to make decisions about how to best serve their students in developing their knowledge, skills and understanding in Visual Arts and responding to the local contexts of students, which is critical in engaging students and making learning authentic. Teacher expertise and the mentoring process extends student art making practice and the development of a coherent point of view in the interpretation of art through critical and historical studies.
- VADEA recently surveyed its members and they were overwhelmingly positive in relation to the 7-10 and 11-12 Visual Arts syllabus. In particular, members cited the strength of the content areas of Practice, the Conceptual Framework and Frames and the intrinsic relationship between Artmaking and Critical and Historical Studies. Teachers in Visual Arts value the flexibility and autonomy afforded to them within this syllabus.
- VADEA recommends a discipline-based approach to determine 'core' content that is grounded in research. The current Visual Arts syllabus emerged from a rich empirical and theoretical research base and the enduring legacy of the organisation of core content is testament to this. The foundational disciplinary knowledge, skills, concepts and principles are represented in students learning as they move from naive to more autonomous understandings throughout the learning continuum. The report states the "centrality of a concept or principle is likely to be its sustained relevance across the years of school and the fact that students develop deeper understandings of that concept or principle as they revisit it in different contexts and develop increasing appreciation of its range of applications" (p.78). This is currently evident in the Visual Arts syllabus as students understanding of these concepts is recursively re-described in each level of the curriculum, with a focus on the iterative elaboration of core content as students move from primary to secondary. These concepts increasingly become more entrenched and intertwined, as they develop more sophisticated intentional theories of art, and this is reflected in recent studies in Visual Arts education (e.g. Maras, 2007, 2010, 2017, 2018a, 2018b; Brown, 2017; Thomas, 2010, 2014, 2015).
- The importance and value of research as the critical basis for high quality curriculum design has

become pertinent with the development of *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts* (ACARA, 2015). VADEA has been resolute in the rejection of this curriculum, which is at odds with the researched based Visual Arts syllabus in NSW. *The Arts* curriculum does not promote deep learning. This curriculum attempts to coalesce five disparate artforms under the guise of commonality and compromises the capacity for discipline specific knowledge and concepts in the arts. The artforms of visual arts, music, dance, drama and media arts have been organised into common Strands, which attempt to find similarities across the forms. The resulting curriculum presents a narrow and distorted vision for Visual Arts education and reduces the scope and rigour currently available to students in NSW. *The Arts* curriculum privileges aesthetic knowledge and is inherently modernist in its positioning, with its preoccupation with the structural and formal elements of art and the expressed needs of students. *The Arts* curriculum is unable to sustain a logical structure of learning, and this is repeatedly demonstrated through the disjuncture between the curriculum components, which align with broad, generic threads across five art forms and the backgrounding of Viewpoints as a vague, quasi-theoretical framework. Lastly, *The Arts* curriculum does not represent a contemporary view of art education and this is evident in the provision of *Responding* as an inadequate representation of critical and historical practice, its inability to reflect nuanced, local contexts and the lack of contemporary or postmodern conceptions of practice. The curriculum undervalues the role of practical and conceptual reasoning and provides a limited scope within which students can interpret and make artworks.

The Australian Curriculum: The Arts (ACARA, 2015) is incongruous with what is known to be best practice in Visual Arts education. The implementation or incorporation of this curriculum has the real potential of undermining the high quality curriculum and continuum of learning established in Visual Arts in NSW. National arts advocacy groups such as NAAE and AEA, in their claim to represent the interests of Visual Arts educators nationally, have sought to overturn NESAs original decision not to implement *The Australian Curriculum: The Arts* (ACARA, 2015). NESA announced in 2012 that *The Arts* 'was not equal to or better than what was currently in place' in Visual Arts in NSW. Although NESAs position has since shifted and is now based on the notion that the Australian Curriculum can be modified, re-ordered and supplemented for inclusion in NSW syllabuses, VADEA continues to have confidence in NESA to support the development of discrete, discipline specific syllabuses in K-12 for each the art forms.

3. Building skills in applying knowledge

Implications for Visual Arts curriculum

- Visual arts teachers have successfully navigated what the report refers to as 'tension' between knowledge-skills over the past 20 years. In Visual Arts, critical and historical studies and artmaking are not distinct areas, they are synergic and Practice reflects "artistic activity demonstrating the ability to make suitable choices from a repertoire of knowledge and skills" (Board of Studies NSW, 2003, p.14). Teachers in the visual arts are already prioritising the progressive development of students' skills in knowledge application and this occurs in both artmaking and critical and historical studies.

As previously outlined, the theoretical bases upon which the structure of the curriculum is predicated locates students in artworld contexts, where they demonstrate their understandings of art through practical and conceptual reasoning. The application of skills is centred on students adopting roles as artworld practitioners, including artist, critics, historians, curators and audiences and developing their knowledge in the areas of art history, art criticism and art making. In the instance of artmaking, students may produce a body of work or a portfolio, or they may work collaboratively to create a group artwork. Students enact the role of artists in developing their conceptual and material practice. The Conceptual Framework, as an area of content requires students to apply their knowledge of these intrinsic relationships in the artworld, developing their intentional agency in taking on the role of artist in making works for audiences. They also adopt the role of critic, historian or audience when investigating the relationship between these agencies in the art world, demonstrating increasing autonomy and sophistication as they understand the multi-layered relationships at play. The content area of Practice develops

students' ability to explore the motives, perceptions, procedures and strategies artists, art critics and art historians adopt to make and interpret art. Throughout these content areas, students are inculcated into becoming practitioners as they emulate a broad range of authentic, art world practices. As such, the application of knowledge in Visual Arts occurs within content-specific activities, which foster students' understanding of what it means to be an authentic practitioner in the field of Visual Arts.

- VADEA agree expected learning outcomes should incorporate and reflect the transfer and application of knowledge to meaningful contexts, however we are concerned that the relevant skills in knowledge application (such as critical and creative thinking, collaborating, interpreting information/data, communicating and using technologies) may become overly prescriptive, mandatory or replace core discipline concepts, with the potential for them to be seen as a 'tick a box' or 'mix and match' approach. VADEA's initial submission to the curriculum review (VADEA, November 2018) clearly articulated ways this is already happening in existing curriculum. ([Linked here](#))

4. A common entitlement

Implications for Visual Arts curriculum

- VADEA advocates for the common entitlement of all students from Years K-8 to learn about Visual Arts, in accordance with the current mandated provision, as outlined in the NSW Education Act. VADEA believes access to high quality Visual Arts education, ideally taught by a specialist teacher, is in alignment with expectations held by the wider community as a basic foundation of school education. The inclusion of Art as Visual Arts and Music as Performing Arts in Years 7-8 as mandatory, stems from a rich curriculum and disciplinary history and VADEA asserts that it is of critical importance that this provision is to be maintained. A reduction in this minimum, common entitlement has the potential to erode the quality of the subject and students' achievements in the upper middle and senior school years. The provision of Visual Arts in Years 7-8 should not be reduced through the introduction of additional arts subjects such as Dance and Drama. The existing provision provides students with a significant foundation of learning in the visual and performing arts, and Dance and Drama content is addressed through other KLAs at this foundational level. VADEA also acknowledges the competing challenges within this reform direction, with the suggested inclusion of a language in the primary years and question how this will be implemented in relationship to an already overcrowded curriculum.
- VADEA supports the notion that every student should develop a basic knowledge and appreciation of Aboriginal languages, cultures and histories and this should be explicit in the curriculum. We would like to acknowledge the outstanding work of Visual Arts teachers who are already addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and histories in their teaching and learning programs. The very nature of the Visual Arts syllabus supports students developing understanding of our rich Aboriginal culture and history, with investigations into historical and contemporary Indigenous practice. It is important that any addition in this area should be undertaken appropriately within the framework of the discipline. As a significant focus, it is imperative that teacher education courses support teachers' understandings in authentic and meaningful ways and there should be additional professional development opportunities in this area.
- VADEA welcomes the inclusion of the project within senior years, however not at the expense of subjects which already feature a project as part of their content including Visual Arts. We have addressed this in greater depth in Reform Direction 13. Visual Arts is well positioned to provide advice about how the project could be developed and the pedagogy required to support its successful implementation.

Implications for visual arts teachers

- Currently the challenges faced by generalist primary teachers including addressing key literacy, numeracy and social and emotional development areas could be alleviated through the

employment of specialist Visual Arts primary teachers. This is particularly relevant in relation to Reform Direction 9, to ensure a high-quality continuum of learning from primary to lower secondary school.

- VADEA acknowledges the importance for a broad foundation in primary and early secondary schooling and question the implications for students' social and emotional development in isolating those who may not reach the minimum level of knowledge, understanding and skill in a core area such as literacy and numeracy. What are the implications for those who don't reach these minimum benchmarks, and will they be prevented from experiencing a range of other subjects, which may reflect their skills and interests more appropriately? This section of the report also misunderstands the role of literacy and numeracy, which is not the sole responsibility of English and Maths teachers. Meaningful literacy and numeracy can be and should be developed across all subjects in the continuum of learning and this is implicitly understood by all arts teachers as the active construction of terminology and knowledge of the field.

REFORMING THE STRUCTURE OF THE CURRICULUM

5. Creating a more flexible curriculum

Implications for visual arts teachers

- The Visual Arts syllabuses are extremely flexible and adaptive to suit students and teachers needs and this has been addressed in previous reform directions. VADEA acknowledges the significant implications for resources and accountability with a shift towards creating a more flexible curriculum. Although Visual Arts teachers have been successfully differentiating their pedagogy to reflect the learning needs of their students and currently working within a stage and outcomes-based framework, they are faced with a considerable administrative load. The challenges associated with an alternative conception of the curriculum is that teachers may be faced with the very real problem of teaching vastly different content within the one lesson and the realities of this, from a classroom teachers' perspective are alarming. The Interim Report pays little attention to the implications of a flexible curriculum based on attainment levels or learning progressions. VADEA recognises the significant administrative requirements that teachers are currently faced with, and there is a concern that broadening the scope in the curriculum framework could exacerbate this problem.
- VADEA is also concerned with the implication for assessment within the report, with the suggestion that there may be an additional layer of assessment placed on students and teachers. This is at odds with NESAs current approach to reduce the assessment requirements on students in Stage 6. In many schools we have seen a reduction of formal assessment for students, to reduce the increasing pressure and workload. If the expectation for assessment increases there is the possibility that teachers and students will enter into a relentless assessment cycle, where in order for students to move from one learning progression to another, they have to reach an attainment level through formalised assessment. There is little mention about the role of testing and assessment in this respect, and VADEA is concerned the use of online testing may be utilised for students to move between each progression. It is imperative that teachers are entrusted to make judgements about students learning, without having to resort to formalised, online testing schemes, such as the one used for the HSC Minimum Standards.

6. Restructuring the curriculum

Implications for Visual Arts curriculum

- Although the reorganisation of curriculum into a sequence of levels is feasible in Visual Arts, we envisage problems as a student may have reached a particular attainment level in one area of the progression, but not in another. VADEA requires clarity around how existing Visual Arts core concepts would be represented in learning progressions, particularly in relation to the example

discussed on page 107-109. VADEA understands most of the evidence in relation to learning progressions stems from maths or science, and we would be interested in how the progressions have been used internationally in arts and humanities subjects. VADEA is concerned the progressions could also become lock-step, as they have the potential to become artificial, linear conceptions of the knowledge, understanding and skills at each level. There is significant research that suggests students learning is recursive, and levels can be an artificial construct which is incongruent with the cognitive process of learning (e.g. Karmiloff-Smith, 1992; Maras 2008, 2010a, 2017, 2018).

- VADEA supports the development of domain-specific attainment descriptions, as opposed to generic levels for the Arts subjects. The discipline specific knowledge, understanding and skills which underpins each Arts subject must be respected in an articulation of attainment. For example, teaching and learning is not the same in Visual Arts as it is Music, and the attainment levels must reflect the knowledge domain of each individual subject.

Implications for visual arts teachers

- The reorganisation of syllabus content into a sequence of levels has numerous implications for visual arts teachers. Currently, teachers who teach one cohort, only have to be familiar with one syllabus document. The suggestion of a syllabus for each attainment level, 22 in total (p.87-89) would significantly increase the number of syllabuses teachers have to familiarise themselves with, which currently includes three for Visual Arts. VADEA requires greater clarity in relation to curriculum design and how learning progressions would be positioned within a visual arts syllabus document.
- The Interim Report does not adequately consider the real implications for teaching and learning in relation to students working on a vast range of attainment levels at the same time. This has the potential to become challenging for some subject areas where the content is narrow and specialised and the points of accessibility for students is limited. Would teachers be investigating the same topic, but accessing it at a range of levels for students, or would they be all working on vastly different areas of content? The implications for teacher workload, planning, design and resource development is concerning. VADEA also envisages issues relating to class sizes, with numbers frequently reaching 30, and this will become challenging if teachers are preparing education resources for a significant range of levels. This proposal also raises issues relating to the practicalities of teaching and learning during lessons, monitoring student progress, teaching the required knowledge, understanding and skills, all within a limited time frame. A strong articulation of these attainment levels is required and resourcing around them would need to be developed, particularly if accountability of delivery, engagement and learning progression of students is to be aligned.
- VADEA suggests wide consultation with teachers regarding the pedagogical implications of the structure outlined in the Interim Report. Support would be required with additional planning time and reduction in teacher workload, which is currently a particular problem in primary schools. Consideration for subjects with a making component such as Visual Arts would need to factor in the provision of materials and safety practices, with the potential for students using a significant range of materials and equipment simultaneously.

7. Setting high expectations

Implications for Visual Arts curriculum

- VADEA is supportive of the continued development of high expectations in teaching and learning throughout the NSW curriculum. VADEA advocates for the development of domain-specific attainment levels as standards, rather than those proposed based on Key Learning Areas. Generic standards that identify minimum levels of attainment in the Visual and Performing Arts would present a distorted vision for learning in each of these subjects. The suggestion that learning in Visual Arts is the same as learning in Music misrepresents the discrete disciplines which underpins these subjects. The development of the Strands and Content Descriptions in the

Australian Curriculum: The Arts (ACARA, 2015) is a clear example of how an attempt to coalesce disparate subjects through a common curriculum organisational structure results in a generic account of learning. A minimum level of attainment for each KLA has the potential to reduce the perception of the arts in the broader community, as it would over-simplify the cognitive demands of each subject and dilute the intellectual rigour of each discipline.

Implications for visual arts teachers

- VADEA would be concerned about the use of externally provided assessment resources to determine student achievement in reaching the standard. Currently, the use of the standards referenced system and common grade scale works effectively, however the Visual Arts work samples provided by NESAs to provide teachers with a clear understanding of the standards at each grade level are very outdated and produced in 2003 when the Years 7-10 Visual Arts syllabus was initially released. As visual arts teachers have become more sophisticated and adept in their teaching and understanding of the syllabus and the broad scope of visual art practice has developed, the quality and range of work produced has progressed and this should be reflected in the work samples. It should also be noted that the NESAs standards materials for Stage 6 Visual Arts are very outdated, with materials produced in 2001-2002, following the implementation of the new syllabus and HSC examination. The quality and depth of work produced since this time, and the manner in which it reflects shifts in artworld practice has changed significantly, and the standards materials no longer retain relevance to teachers' practice. The use of attainment levels requires substantial work samples, standards and support materials if they are to be successfully implemented. NESAs has since released three HSC Exam Workbooks for Visual Arts (2013, 2017 hardcopy and 2014 iPad), however these only contain exemplar responses. For HSC Visual Arts, VADEA would support the release of new standards materials each year, drawn from examination benchmarks in each artmaking expressive form and the written examination, to support the professional development of all teachers and ensure consistency across the state. The development of all standards materials should be provided with the required funding, time allocation and consultation, to reflect the value and importance of materials developed.
- The Interim Report needs to consider practicalities such as those students in elective or non-elective subjects in Year 10, who should not be penalised for not reaching the standard if they choose not to continue with the subject in senior years. The HSC Minimum Standards currently plays a role in addressing minimum literacy and numeracy attainment levels for students.

8. Monitoring whether learning is on track

Implications for visual arts teachers

- The concept of students being 'on track' has the potential to be a useful tool to communicate with parents about student learning, however visual arts teachers are currently well versed in understanding where a students' learning is within a continuum. VADEA is concerned this concept has the potential to over-simplify a students' educational trajectory and may fail to consider broader influencing factors on student learning. For example, a student may be 'off track' in their learning but they may be experiencing significant mental health concerns, and this would not be factored in or represented in a simplified representation of attainment levels.
- Additional support for students is aligned to funding and many students who would be deemed 'off track', who may or may not have diagnosed learning difficulties, or whom struggle with reaching minimum attainment levels, may not receive relevant funding to provide the additional support required. Although teachers may be able to demonstrate that these students are not 'on track' in their learning progress and can employ a range of strategies to assist, there are limited funds available for additional support within the school context. There is a limited amount of support a teacher can provide a student who is 'off track' in their learning when they are required to accommodate the learning needs of so many students in their classes. VADEA advocates for an increase in funding for students with specific learning needs and the provision of funding from

governments needs to ensure that students with a range of learning needs are provided with appropriate support

9. Ensuring continuity of learning

Implications for Visual Arts curriculum

- Ensuring continuity of learning is important and if a syllabus is well designed, with an emphasis less on the acquisition of factual content, more on broader conceptual frameworks, continuity of learning should improve. VADEA asserts that arts subjects must develop discipline specific continuums of learning. In the development of the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* (ACARA, 2015) a continuum of learning across the five arts disciplines was developed, with the suggestion that learning in each of these forms is interchangeable or similar. VADEA rejects the claims inherent within this curriculum (e.g. Barbousas, 2010a; 2010b; Francini, 2010; Imms, 2010; Jones, 2010; Maras, 2010a; 2010b; 2013; Thomas, 2010; 2015) and asserts that a meaningful continuum of learning must reflect the distinct disciplinary knowledge, understanding and skills of each arts discipline.
- To ensure a high-quality continuity of learning within Visual Arts syllabuses, VADEA is supportive of the current provision outlined in the NSW Education Act 1990, which established the Creative Arts as a key learning area in Primary and Secondary contexts. In addition, the Assessment Certification Examination (ACE) established the rules and procedures set out by NESA in relation to Secondary education in NSW. Visual Arts and Music are currently the only two mandatory courses in Creative Arts, and ACE 4007 stipulates that students must complete 100-hours in each course, and these “will be taught as coherent units of study and not split over a number of years” (ACE 4007). VADEA asserts that the mandatory nature of Visual Arts in Stage 4, has fostered a rigorous and high-quality approach to Visual Arts education in NSW. Visual Arts is consistently represented in the top 15 most popular subjects in the Higher School Certificate and in 2019, the only Creative Arts subject to appear in the top 15 subjects. In 2019 Visual Arts was ranked 10th, with 9,038 unique students. When these results are compared to other arts subjects, it is apparent that Visual Arts has established its position as the preeminent arts discipline.

Implications for visual arts teachers

- There is an issue with the provision of Visual Arts specialist teachers in Primary and the training of generalist teachers. The implementation of learning progressions may have implications for syllabus design, with both general and specialised teachers working from the same syllabus document, it is imperative the quality of syllabus is not diminished. In a Secondary context, teachers are subject specialists, ensuring the scope for high quality learning in Visual Arts and the syllabus should reflect this shift.

10. Assessing and communicating learning

Implications for visual arts teachers

- VADEA members are encouraged by the possibility of long-term progress in reporting as this has the potential to shift student and parent ideologies about learning in Visual Arts. It is important that reporting on student learning is not simply reduced to a diagram (p.90 Interim Report) and it is essential that discipline specific language and curriculum constructs are evident to ensure learning is communicated within the framework of each syllabus.
- VADEA is concerned this reform direction on assessing and communicating learning is vague about the realities of how this approach to assessing and communicating learning would occur in practice. The shift towards learning progressions has implications for the type of assessments

used by teachers, the timing of assessments, reporting periods for schools and for the frequency and form of assessment used. VADEA is concerned that as students each work at different levels, a teacher may be marking 30 different assessments, at multiple times throughout the year. This has significant implications for teacher workload, planning, design, implementation, materials and resources required. These are important concerns currently being addressed by teachers, as they determine how to best organise and use their time to effectively plan for high quality teaching and learning. The implications for assessment in the report are not fully considered and many of the ideas are at variance with NESAs reduced assessment load for students. Greater clarity is required in relation to the implications for assessment in the Interim Report.

- If the move towards learning progressions is to be achieved successfully, the need for high quality guidelines and criteria is critical. The development of these materials should reflect the needs of teachers to ensure they are valuable in making critical judgements about students learning needs. Examples of student work at each level can be useful for teachers, particularly early career teachers and whenever there is a change in approach to assessment and learning. However, it is imperative that the quality of samples are of a high standard to be of value. As previously mentioned, the current provision of resources was last updated in a formal capacity when the syllabus was implemented in early 2000 and 2003. These materials require updating to reflect contemporary teaching practices, not just when a new syllabus is introduced.

REFORMING THE SENIOR SCHOOL CURRICULUM

11. Creating a more integrated curriculum

Implications for Visual Arts curriculum

- VADEA is concerned with the notion of integration in relation to academic and vocational subjects within the Interim Report and there are significant implications towards a more integrated curriculum in the senior school context.
- The integration of theory and practical application is already occurring in Visual Arts and since the current syllabus was introduced in 2000, this has been incredibly successful, exemplified in the annual ARTEXPRESS exhibition, held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and touring regional centres throughout NSW. It is imperative that in expecting every senior course to have a balance of theory and application, that this is a natural fit for the subject and reflects the discipline from which the subject is drawn from. We caution against inserting application of knowledge drawn from workplaces or jobs that have little connection with the subject itself, as this will inevitably reduce the quality and depth of knowledge within these subjects. Specifically, this balance is already occurring in the Visual Arts. Embodied within Practice, both Artmaking and Art Criticism and Art History utilise the specific discipline knowledge and conceptual understanding of the subject, to transfer and apply their knowledge, through making art and writing about art.
- VADEA is concerned that there may be a reduction in the number of subjects available, with smaller, more rigorous 'advanced courses', as this is at variance with the previous reform direction supporting a reduction in content. VADEA is apprehensive about the possibility of the incorporation of content from a range of existing subjects, with the potential for options. This is at odds with the notion of 'advanced' or 'rigorous' courses, as disciplinary knowledge, understanding, skills and attributes should be respected and accorded the relevant depth and breadth of study relevant to the subject.

Implications for visual arts teachers

- There is value in vocational courses that function outside 'academic' subjects, particularly if students are committed to a trade pathway or professional 'on-the-ground' training. These areas

do not have a disciplinary history like many other 'academic' subjects, and attempts to incorporate these courses into 'advanced' courses would be inappropriate

- VADEA is concerned with the suggestion that most subjects do not incorporate the application and transfer of knowledge. Whilst this may not be explicit in subject syllabuses, it is most definitely happening in classrooms across the state. The report seems to present a distorted view of education in NSW, and the realities of what is happening in classrooms throughout the state. VADEA would encourage the report writers to engage in a closer examination into the best practice of teachers who are currently ensuring the application and transfer of knowledge, in authentic and meaningful ways.
- The role of options within syllabuses may also impact the provision of highly qualified teachers and act as a disincentive for schools to offer a diverse range of subjects to students for selection. For students to follow their own pathway they require substantial subject choice. Schools may reduce subject availability, with students selecting second or third preferences. 'Options' also suggests that discipline knowledge is a subset of a broader, overarching subject area, and does not reflect the theoretical or disciplinary base from which most subjects have historically evolved.
- VADEA suggests caution before reducing the total number of subjects available in the senior secondary school by consolidating some existing subjects into rigorous, high-quality courses. There should be a focus on the number of students electing to choose the subject, but also considering how many subjects are offered by schools. Reducing the number of subjects available has the potential implication of narrowing the range of subjects in each field and creating a distorted senior education landscape that fails to reflect the diversity of post school options for students. Schools may also be discouraged from offering a broader range of subjects. In some schools, this already occurs with students encouraged to follow particular study pathways, often academic, at the expense of subjects like the arts, as this reflects the agenda of the school, rather than the interests of the students. VADEA would be concerned that a reduction of subjects offered and narrower fields could exacerbate this situation.

12. Recognising progress and attainment

Implications for Visual Arts curriculum

- There are significant implications in creating syllabuses linked to each attainment level in Visual Arts, as the structure of content is considerably different to other subjects. We also have serious concerns about the proposal to modularise courses.
- Greater clarity is required on the nature of the attainment levels and the way this represents syllabus content. As Visual Arts students' progress through the stages, they develop more sophisticated knowledge, deeper understandings, and increasingly refined skills. Learning in visual arts is not linear (e.g. Brown 2015, 2017; Maras 2008, 2010a, 2018, 2019; Thomas 2008, 2010b, 2014, 2015; Freeman 1980, 1994, 2004) and the way content knowledge is positioned in Visual Arts is considerably different to other Stage 6 courses. It is understood that the development of this learning is not achieved through ticking off modules or dot points of knowledge. The Conceptual Framework and the integration of concepts in Visual Arts means that modularisation would be problematic, especially in Artmaking. In addition, the use of case studies in Year 12 are reflective of the progressive development of attainment discussed in this section. Case studies focus on selected areas of investigation to reflect a point of view which may be undertaken collaboratively or as an individual. Case studies are determined within each school context and content is developed from syllabus frameworks. This ensures that the delivery of content and learning in Year 12 is not focused on the acquisition of checklist of knowledge leading up to a final examination. VADEA assert that a move towards modules would reinforce current issues with topics or dot points and is at variance with the reform directions in reduction in content and less emphasis on the HSC examination.

Implications for visual arts teachers

- There are significant impacts regarding the suggestion that students could commence senior levels of study when they are ready (p.96). This poses significant implications at a school level with issues around staffing, timetabling and programming. The report fails to address the complex issues surrounding the pedagogical implications of attainment levels and does not consider the practical application for teachers. If high quality teaching and learning is to be sustained, greater consideration is required. In addition, VADEA is concerned that the Interim Report implies a constant cycle of assessment and data collection and we are concerned that high quality teaching and learning is not addressed.
- VADEA supports the continued use of an external examination, in addition to school-based assessment, as this ensures high quality, robust teaching and learning occurs and to ensure parity for all students in all contexts. In particular, the external examination of the Body of Work is vital in maintaining the high standards of the subject, which have been developed and sustained since 2000.
- In reference to the concerns relating to memorisation and 'regurgitation' of pre-prepared responses, the inherent design of the Visual Arts syllabus and written examination avoids this issue. In Section 1 of the exam, students answer three questions based on accompanying 'unseen' artworks, drawn from vast artistic traditions and histories, and students are required to use their understanding of syllabus content areas - Practice, Conceptual Framework and Frames - to make judgements in addressing these questions. The design of this section of the exam demands students are flexible in their thinking and expressing a point of view, there is little chance of memorisation or over-preparedness. Section 2 requires students to select one question from six and write an extended response, reflecting diverse themes, issues and a range of selected artists drawn from their case studies. We have previously discussed how the syllabus frameworks supports this flexible approach to content and this is exemplified in both the written exam and Body of Work which is articulated in a comprehensive marking criteria.

13. Introducing a major project

Implications for Visual Arts curriculum

- The project has the potential to be envisaged as an opportunity for students to extend their application of knowledge, understanding and skills in Visual Arts and function as a potential extension course. VADEA has advocated for an extension course to be reinstated in Visual Arts for a number of years, as there are extremely capable students who would benefit from higher order learning beyond what is currently available in Stage 6 Visual Arts. This reform direction is underdeveloped and highlights questions about the practical application of implementing this direction in all schools for all students. It is vital that high quality, discipline specific knowledge and application is central to the project if it is to become implemented.
- VADEA is concerned that the introduction of the major project has the potential to interfere or contradict the already existing practices in subjects such as Visual Arts, Design and Technology, Music and Drama, which have a long history of a project component. In particular, Visual Arts has established itself as the most highly selected subject with a 'major project' component over a significant number of years. We have sustained significantly high numbers and in 2019 Visual Arts was the 10th most popular subject in the state. The Interim Report states, "A number of current HSC subjects include the requirement that students undertake a project as part of their study...The advantages of the proposed major project include the opportunities it provides for students to develop and demonstrate a range of essential skills not currently included in every student's program of learning in the senior years" (p.97). There is little clarity in the report around how the introduction of a major project will impact these other subjects and if students would be able to undertake multiple subjects with project components. Our members are concerned about how the introduction of the project will impact the candidature of Visual Arts and the Body of Work.

- There are numerous possibilities for how the project could be implemented in Visual Arts. For instance, students may select a content area within the syllabus for further investigation, with an emphasis on research, both in artmaking and critical and historical studies. Students may adopt the role of artist, curator, critic or art historian, and this may establish guidelines for how the project would proceed. In building upon the knowledge they have attained in the advanced course, students may write an in-depth research paper and then curate an exhibition of their artworks; or they may curate an exhibition of other artists' works, developing a theme for the exhibition and engaging in meaningful research to underpin their choices. Envisaging the project as an opportunity to extend students and utilise teachers' expertise in this manner also provides opportunities for innovative practice that may be beyond the scope of the advanced course, and meaningful connections with other artforms and creative fusion.
- Reform direction 4 states the standalone project component of the senior certificate would reflect 2 units of a students' 10-unit course selection (p.82). Currently, a 2-unit subject represents 120 hours. VADEA is concerned that although this project would involve the application of knowledge and skills, there is little indication that it would be underpinned by high quality teaching and disciplinary knowledge. In Visual Arts, students understanding of Practice is developed in the creation of their Body of Work and this is underpinned by discipline specific knowledge, skills and understanding, accompanied by an understanding of core concepts in Art Criticism and Art History. The content areas of the Conceptual Framework and the Frames establish a theoretical basis from which students can orientate their understanding of Practice, demonstrated in the development of the Body of Work. In summary, the Body of Work is unable to exist without the theoretical frameworks which provide the foundation of the syllabus. VADEA is concerned that a standalone project requires the relevant disciplinary knowledge and practice to ensure it is authentic. The implications of this also involve allocating specialist teachers in their associated fields to facilitate learning in the development of the project.
- VADEA is concerned about how the project is aligned to problem-solving or real-world contexts, as this narrows the scope for students and presents a 'work-focused' orientation to learning. Subjects such as Visual Arts, Music, Drama, Dance and English involve the creation of works which may not be designed to solve specific problems or reflect real world applications. The concept of the project, as it is presented in this reform direction, depicts a narrow view about practice and application of knowledge, which is at its core contradictory to the purpose and meaning of art. Although art may perform a cultural or societal role, the creation of art does not hinge upon its purpose or value in the world. Artworks are created for a myriad of reasons and purposes, and the Conceptual Framework and Frames offer students a means through which to navigate this often complex process. Instead, there should be a focus on research, and this could be a means through which to establish future cohorts of critical and creative thinkers.

Implications for visual arts teachers

- VADEA is concerned about the emphasis on collaboration and group work in a high stakes learning environment, where the outcome has significant implications for a students' future pathway. Although we support the option of working in a project team, in Visual Arts the emphasis is on developing an individual practice. The practical applications of assessing learning in an authentic and accurate manner are complicated with group work, and the report glosses over the challenging considerations experienced by teachers in adequately assessing group work in high stakes examination settings. In addition, the assertion that these will be undertaken "usually as part of a project team" (p.97) is inherently at variance with authentic, real-world art practice of artists. Collaborative artists are in the minority in the artworld and most artists develop an individual practice. Within a school or university setting this is undertaken with the guidance and facilitation of a teacher or lecturer/tutor, through relational pedagogy and the development of ecologies or communities of practice. In these contexts, students may work in an environment of supportive peers, who may discuss ideas or support the development of skills. In Extension English 2, students may have meetings with their advisor in small group settings, however the work is executed individually. VADEA supports the option of working in a group project team or individually in the introduction of the major project.

- In Visual Arts, the consistent assessment of student work in the Body of Work is achieved through high-quality marking criteria to make objective judgements about student work. In addition, the standards materials are available to teachers to guide them, as are professional learning days at the HSC Marking Centre and the NESA HSC Exam Workbooks. It should be noted however that the standards materials currently available to teachers in NSW were created in 2001 and 2002. These materials are significantly dated, as teachers have become more adept in their knowledge and understanding of the syllabus following its implementation and VADEA advocates for the development of new standards materials. In particular, we would encourage NESA to make available standards materials each year, in both components of the HSC examination, in order to support teachers continued professional development in Visual Arts. Other important features in the introduction of a major project include the use of progressive, formative assessment checkpoints, to evaluate student learning throughout the process. This reflects best assessment practice and helps to mitigate the issues associated with the pressure of creating a final summative work.
- Currently Visual Arts has minimised advantages that students may have regarding access to expensive resources, to provide equity of opportunity for all students. This is achieved through a sophisticated marking criteria which allows for a full range of student art practice ranging from access to cutting edge technology to more traditional and recycled art materials. With specific guidelines about the presentation of works including framing, which states “Framing and/or mounting of artworks in a body of work is not necessary” (Assessment and Reporting in Visual Arts Stage 6, 2017, p.15).

14. Redefining learning areas

Implications for Visual Arts curriculum

- VADEA members have highlighted their concerns about grouping vocational subjects with existing ‘academic’ subjects and there are a number of issues that could emerge as a result. The groupings evident in Figure 7 (p.98 Interim Report) are concerning for several reasons. The combination of ‘Visual and Performing Arts and Entertainment’ implies that Entertainment as a subject area has parity Visual and Performing Arts. Entertainment is a vocational area, not focussed on disciplinary knowledge, but with the practical aspects of the entertainment industry. Including ‘Entertainment’ reduces the perceived value of the ‘Visual and Performing Arts’ and diminishes the importance of Visual Arts as an academic discipline in the curriculum. Visual Arts and Music have a long and sustained tradition as academic subjects and are underpinned by disciplinary knowledge and practice. Visual Arts is an established academic domain and subject of study in the NSW curriculum - it is not a form of entertainment. VADEA believes the key learning area should remain the Visual and Performing Arts. Entertainment could be developed as a module within a relevant subject such as Drama or Music, where students can achieve their VET credentials and be taught by subject experts. It could be a sub-module within the advanced course.
- VADEA is concerned about the development of new advanced courses, with the possibility of replacing existing subjects, “to provide broad foundations for further study and work within particular learning areas” (p.98 Interim Report). Within this reform direction there are contradictory claims, as “broad foundations” is at variance with “rigorous, high quality courses” (p.98). VADEA has significant concerns relating to the grouping of all key learning areas and particularly note that Technologies as a distinct learning area has been divided into three KLAs. This represents an imbalance in the curriculum, which has the potential to place pressure on schools offering a range of subjects including the Visual and Performing Arts. There has been a proliferation of subjects in the area of Technologies, with little consideration to broader curriculum visions or an account of where content is already covered in other disciplines. Although VADEA understands the value in establishing a new set of learning areas to reflect a more integrated approach to curriculum, we believe there needs to be a natural and historical position that aligns with the discipline which underpins these areas.

- VADEA cautions against the reduction of courses without well considered consultation, as this has the potential to significantly narrow the field of education. We assert that there needs to be a natural and historical position within the discipline which underpins the creation of any new 'advanced' course and that subject syllabuses should remain distinct, respecting the traditions from which the subject emerges and the contemporary practices associated in the field today and into the future. We are concerned that a redefinition of learning areas has the potential to detract from established subject areas and caution attempting to identify links between subject areas and vocational areas that do not exist. In redefining learning areas, there is the real potential for reducing the field to meet in the middle, which emerged in the development of the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* (ACARA, 2015).

Implications for visual arts teachers

- Collaboration between schools, universities, vocational education providers and industries within the Visual Arts are already occurring in most schools throughout NSW. In particular, schools are collaborating with practising artists, who run workshops, create community projects or work in artist-in-residence programs. Metropolitan galleries such as Art Gallery of NSW, Museum of Contemporary Art and many regional galleries play a significant role in Visual Arts education, as teachers and students visit exhibitions and attend artist and curator presentations. Galleries also provide valuable professional learning for teachers, often at minimal cost. In addition, Visual Arts teachers often work with major institutions and groups, including Kaldor Public Art Projects, on a range of large scale projects including Your Public Art Project. VADEA also delivers professional learning workshops in metropolitan and regional areas and hosts an annual conference, with a strong artist and industry presence.
- Although Visual Arts educators can provide meaningful career advice to students, the role of a career advisor is a specialised area. The notion that teachers should be providing critical guidance on relevant post-school courses and pathways is another indication that the administrative load that teachers currently face is misunderstood. VADEA rejects the notion that teachers should become in-lieu careers advisors.
- There are wider implications for pre-service teacher education, as there are universities no longer teaching courses in particular arts and technology discipline areas and it is also increasingly difficult to source teachers with the relevant qualifications for specific subjects.

15. Reviewing ATAR

Implications for Visual Arts curriculum

- VADEA supports the reduction of the dominating influence of the ATAR. We believe this may encourage students to study Visual Arts in greater numbers, as students are often advised against selecting Visual Arts and directed towards subjects which are perceived to be higher scaled. This advice arises from perceptions that scaling in the formulation of the ATAR disadvantages students who choose Visual Arts in the HSC. VADEA would support more transparency in the calculation of the ATAR as well as a commitment from NESA that achievement in each subject is not calibrated according to the academic profile of the candidature of that subject.

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