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4 November, 2021

To the Opinion Editor, Daily Telegraph,

The article by Ms Bella d'Abrera ("Unelected officials determined to influence school history lessons", DT 3/11/21) contains several inaccuracies and misleading statements about the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and review of the Australian Curriculum.

Ms d'Abrera states that Version 8.4 of the Australian Curriculum was developed following a request from ministers in June 2019. In fact, ministers agreed on terms of reference for the review in June 2020, and Version 8.4 has been in place since 2015.

Consistent with these agreed terms of reference and timelines, in April ACARA published a comprehensive set of draft revisions for public consultation. Preparing the consultation draft involved 18 reference groups involving 360 people from all jurisdictions and the non-government sector, as well as practising classroom teachers.

Ms d'Abrera states that the draft curriculum is "completely silent on the fact that Australia is a successful and tolerant liberal democracy" and "Australia's Christian heritage is completely erased from both the past and the present."

In fact, the consultation draft included the following statements: "knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the values, principles, institutions and practices of Australia's system of democratic government and law, and the role of the citizen in Australian government and society"; "appreciating the cultural and historical foundations of Australia's Christian heritage and their impact on Australian political and legal systems" and "analysing the ideas that caused the Renaissance such as humanism, Christianity and Islamic ideology - and ancient Greek and Roman philosophies and texts".

The publication of the consultation draft was the first time an entire draft national curriculum had been made available to the general public. This was done precisely to give parents and practising teachers a say.

ACARA received thousands of submissions in response and has made changes in light of that feedback. Ministers will consider the final proposed revisions soon, according to the agreed terms of reference and timelines.

Members of the ACARA board are appointed by education ministers collectively, as set out in Commonwealth law. Board members are appointed for their expertise and experience in school education. Each minister nominates a member, as do the Catholic and independent sectors. The Board's charter is set by education ministers and the Board is accountable to them.

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ACARA is an example of how a federal system can create institutions that enable collaboration, conversation, compromise and consensus in the national interest. These are vitally important institutions in any liberal democracy.

Signed,

Mr Norm Hart

Acting Chair, ACARA Board