Submission to the Australian Curriculum Review
Joint submission of CPA Australia and the Institute of Chartered Accountants Australia

This submission has been developed jointly by the major professional accounting bodies in Australia. Together CPA Australia and the Institute of Chartered Accountants Australia (the Institute) represent over 200,000 professional accountants. Our members work in diverse roles across public practice, commerce, industry, government and academia throughout Australia and internationally.

The professional accounting bodies have worked collaboratively to influence the direction of the business and economics curriculum since 2012. We shared our views on the draft shape paper and draft curriculum. These can be made available on request. Post-election we wrote to the Minister for Education summarising the views captured in our submissions, and stressing the need for action beyond curriculum content.

Our motivation has, and continues to be, a firm belief in the importance of a sound educational grounding in business. In an ever changing world, young Australians are growing up in an environment where a business education is an essential life skill. It is essential to enable them to navigate successfully the forces of change and be active and effective members of society.

This skill is essential no matter where their future pathways lead. At a minimum, as Australia’s students grow up, their personal effectiveness and independence will depend on their ability to budget, make wise business choices and manage risks for everyday living and their futures. Further, as many young adults venture into small business,¹ the school system must provide for the development of strong financial and business skills in order to maximise and sustain profitability and success.

The three key messages conveyed in this submission are that:

- the business and economics curriculum area needs to be relevant, energised and have real world applicability, and be periodically reviewed;
- the business and economics curriculum area should commence in the early years, be compulsory throughout all compulsory years of schooling, and be extended into the senior secondary years; and
- cross-curriculum priorities should be given emphasis and shape all curriculum areas.

Gaining greatest value from the business and economics curriculum

The business and economics curriculum has only just been released. The professional accounting bodies note that some improvements are evident in the finalised content relative to the draft curriculum. We also note that there are opportunities for improvement, and that the challenge for teachers in all States and Territories will be to make it attractive and real world relevant.

Finalising curriculum content is a first and not the last step in gaining greatest value from the business and economics curriculum. Critical next steps are that:

- The business and economics curriculum be reviewed periodically. There is an opportunity to inject a greater emphasis on business in future revisions. While the final curriculum reflects more of a focus on business than the draft that preceded it, there continues to be room for improvement.

¹ Small businesses account for almost 96 percent of the count of all actively trading businesses and 46 percent of total private sector industry employment (Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (2012) Australian Small Business Key Statistics and Analysis.)
• Actual case studies, such as examples of the practices and experiences of real life businesses, are developed that provide life, colour and a context to what might otherwise be regarded as abstract concepts.

• The advice of the business community is accessed to facilitate innovations in the business and economics curriculum content and contemporary learnings. To this end, we propose that a Ministerial Advisory Board, comprising representatives from the business and education, be established. We are willing to dedicate the time and expertise of informed executives from both professional accounting bodies to participate in such an endeavour.

• Governments invest in the development of teachers’ financial literacy and specialist business and accounting skills to ensure they have a solid grounding and are equipped to impact positively students’ learnings. We note and support the Government’s focus on teacher quality. This proposal provides an opportunity to put its policy intentions into action.

Spanning all stages of learning

Early years

The OECD recommends that a financial education starts as early as possible, ideally from the beginning of schooling, and carries on until the end of the students’ time at school. The curriculum for business and economics falls well short of this recommendation: while it creates an expectation that it will be integrated into the early years, the formal entry point of the curriculum is Year 5. The professional accounting bodies urge that expectations be more explicitly communicated. By commencing learnings in this area from an earlier age, children would acquire knowledge and skills that could be developed progressively through each significant stage of their education.

Years 9 and 10

The business and economics curriculum for Years 9 and 10 is an elective. Consistent with the OECD recommendation, the professional accounting bodies’ strong view is that it should be a core offering throughout the compulsory years of schooling – from Foundation through to Year 10. Years 9 and 10 are critical years in students’ lives when they make real life links and put their learnings into practice. Increasingly Year 9 and 10 students are active consumers and workers where the skill sets nurtured through the business and economics curriculum will begin to take on a practical relevance.

Senior secondary years

The professional accounting bodies note that when the Government was elected one of its pre-election platforms was to pay special attention to the Years 11 and 12 curriculums. We encourage and support this focus. In particular, we encourage the Commonwealth Government to seek the agreement of its State and Territory colleagues to extend ACARA’s mandate for development of the business and economics curriculum into the senior secondary years.

The current disjunction between secondary and higher education should be remedied. The number of domestic students commencing studies in accounting has been static to declining since 2009. While there are a number of contributing factors, the mixed quality and content of curricula in each State and Territory is one of them.

Extending the national curriculum into the senior secondary years facilitates high quality, consistent pathways into higher education. As an example, current pathways into accounting degree programs are either inconsistent or non-existent. As a result, first year students present with varying levels of motivation and capabilities. The inconsistencies in the curriculum of each State and Territory are a frustration to academics and students alike.

Course content needs to be developed for electives, comprising electives for business, economics and accounting. The accounting elective should adopt a progressive approach, reflecting a move away from the rules-based technical approaches current in practice in a number of States and Territories. Rules-based approaches act as disincentives for students to elect to do accounting in

their post compulsory years of schooling by reinforcing negative perceptions. Progressive approaches that develop students’ critical thinking, analytical skills, interpretation and decision making are evident in Queensland and Western Australia. Drawing on the curriculum content and experiences of these States, CPA Australia and the Institute have isolated what we regard to be the hallmarks of a progressive curriculum. We are happy to share and discuss these, as appropriate.

**Emphasising cross-curriculum priorities**

The Australian curriculum should equip young Australians with the skills, knowledge and understandings that will enable them to engage effectively in local and global contexts. Accordingly it must be relevant to the lives of students and contemporary issues they face. With this in mind, the professional bodies wish to underscore the importance of two cross-curriculum priorities—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, and Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia.

A joint enterprise of the professional accounting bodies is the Indigenous Accountants Australia initiative. Together our aim is to address the dramatic under-representation of Indigenous people in the accounting profession. However, we are pessimistic that we can make a significant difference unless the curriculum engages and inspires Indigenous people while at school. This includes but goes beyond history and culture. The professional accounting bodies counsel that it includes explaining concepts and providing examples that connect with, and just as importantly, avoid disconnects with, the experiences of Indigenous people.

The Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia cross-curriculum priority is critical in a context where:

- Australia is located in the Asia region and Asia’s influence on our economy and broader social, cultural and political endeavours is increasing;
- Asia-related knowledge and skills provide young Australians with a competitive edge in today’s world;
- schools play an important role in fostering social cohesion, curiosity and respect for cultural diversity.

The professional accounting bodies support the Government’s unwavering resolve to prioritise Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia across all curriculum areas.