



AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION  
- VICTORIA  
(formerly VARE)



## **R.E. and the Australian Curriculum:**

**14 May, 2012**

### **Background:**

In October, 2010, Professor Barry McGaw, Chair of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) spoke at the AARE – VIC Annual General Meeting about the potential place for Religious Education within the evolving Australian Curriculum.

Following on from this AARE – VIC conducted a Forum about ‘RE and the National Curriculum’ at King David School, Armadale in May 2011. This Forum was attended by almost 80 educators, reflecting the widest range of religions and denominations-including Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Baha’i, Buddhist and Christian (Coptic Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Uniting Church, Baptist, Lutheran, Pentecostal and Presbyterian) representatives. A draft Submission to ACARA, *The Place for a Study of Religious and Spiritual Beliefs and Practices in the National Curriculum* was presented and further developed in response to feedback received during the Forum. This was generally supported by all participants. Subsequently a final Submission was forwarded to ACARA in July.

In November 2011, AARE representatives attended a ‘Multi-faith Roundtable’ at the ACARA offices in Sydney, where the place of general religious education in the Australian Curriculum was considered. It was explained that the Civics and Citizenship Learning Area of the Curriculum will be the specific place for delivery of Religious Education, along with ‘general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities’. During the Roundtable there was some discussion about the development of a separate Learning Area for RE, but this was later rejected by the ACARA Board.

On Monday, March 19<sup>th</sup> this year, AARE representatives attended the ACARA ‘Civics and Citizenship National Forum’ in Sydney where the *Civics and Citizenship Initial Advice Paper* was presented. It is anticipated that a draft document: *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship* will be released for consultation this or next month.

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## Concerns:

At the Civics and Citizenship National Forum it was revealed that the allocation for this area of the Australian Curriculum will be 2% of the time available for Years 3 to 10 (with the area being optional for Years 9 and 10). This represents 30 minutes per week of class time (for the levels where it is compulsory).

Within the *Civics and Citizenship Initial Advice Paper* the references to the study of religions and our multi-faith society are very much overshadowed by the focus on education about democracy, government and community involvement.

Of significant concern is the limited time provided for the consideration of religious diversity in beliefs and practices within a study area that itself is afforded only 2% of curriculum time. How under these circumstances will it be possible for schools to provide adequate opportunities for students to explore this vitally important aspect of our national and international life? Given that religious and cultural differences are potential sources of community and national discord, in some situations leading to conflict, this is of great concern.

## Response:

AARE(VIC) recognises the intention of ACARA to address the issue of the multi faith nature of contemporary Australian society, but is concerned with the minimal time that may be allocated to this important aspect of education. It appears to fall short of the commitment in the Melbourne Declaration to the spiritual development of Australian students.

AARE(VIC) believes that the study of religious practice and belief systems warrants significantly more time and space within the Australian Curriculum than the proposed allocation. The intended incorporation of this study within the Civics and Citizenship study design, along with citizenship education and general capabilities, while providing only 2% of curriculum time to these areas, suggests a less than favourable value judgement about their importance for a child's education. We would value a commitment by ACARA to revisit this time allocation in light of our concerns.

AARE(VIC) would be a willing participant in the professional development of teachers as well as the development of curriculum materials in support of the study of religion and religious practice. As a professional association of religious educators, we believe we are well placed to assist in the provision of resources to ensure that this area of the Australian Curriculum is of a world class standard.

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## **Who is AARE –VIC?**

The Australian Association for Religious Education, Victoria is open to anyone interested in or involved in religious education in schools, universities, colleges, churches or other religious contexts. It aims to: promote cooperation and understanding among educators in the field of education; to encourage the teaching of religious studies and to foster the development of religious education at all levels; to promote curriculum planning and research into the study of the teaching of religion; to facilitate conferences, seminars, publications and other activities which will improve the quality of teaching and research in the field of religious education; and to assist in the work of chaplaincy and pastoral care in schools and other educational institutions.

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