



**THE ENGLISH TEACHERS ASSOCIATION OF QUEENSLAND, INC.**

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The Director-General  
Queensland Department of Education and Training  
PO Box 15033  
City East Queensland 4002

Dear Ms Grantham

### **Curriculum into the Classroom project and teacher professionalism**

1. This association originally wrote to you on 11 March on the issue of Education Queensland's plans for implementing the Australian Curriculum, specifically in relation to subject English. That letter sought clarification as to whether the use of centrally devised unit plans was to be optional or compulsory. You replied by letter dated 15 April (Ref 11/73775).
2. While your letter provided several paragraphs of information about Education Queensland's plans for implementing the Australian Curriculum, there was no adequate clarification on the specific aspect that we had inquired about. We were puzzled and disappointed that you were apparently not prepared to be direct with us on a professional matter concerning teachers and teaching.
3. Your April letter concluded with the standard offer of further discussion and we took this up. A combined delegation from this association and ALEA (the Australian Literacy Educators' Association) met with ADG Yvana Jones on 11 May. While some useful information was provided, we did not consider that the discussion allayed our concerns about the potential erosion of teacher professionalism. However, since we were advised that further communication with schools on the issue was to be effected, we thought it reasonable to wait a couple of months before taking further action. That is the main reason that I did not reply to your letter earlier in the year.
4. In addition to being puzzled and disappointed, we were, at the time, dismayed that the situation seemed to be that most schools would be obliged to use the centrally devised Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) unit plans with only minimal amendment whether that conformed with the professional judgment of the English teachers in them or not. This was the message that we were receiving from our members working in EQ high schools.
5. We applaud the provision of exemplar plans, particularly to guide the less experienced, and appreciate your apparent desire to be economical of teacher time and effort. However, we continue to be firmly of the view that any measure of mandation around the use of centrally devised unit plans would seriously erode teacher professionalism and potentially have long term

deleterious effects on the teaching profession and public education. This view is based on the following notions:

- a. Many English teachers in EQ secondary schools have long experience of collaboratively planning school programs and their component units of work. We maintain that it is in the best interests of EQ and public education to capitalise on the introduction of a national curriculum to further develop this aspect of professional capacity rather than to erode it by requiring the use of plans devised centrally.
- b. The reservoir of planning expertise and experience in EQ high schools means that the most time-efficient method of preparing for the Australian Curriculum would, in many cases, be to review the programs currently in place and make whatever amendments might be necessary. Since ACARA has not invented a totally new version of subject English, such amendments are likely to be minimal. In short, the best “starting point” is the unit plans that are currently being used; not “one size fits all” templates devised by Head Office.
- c. ETAQ is aware of no research which demonstrates that improved educational outcomes are achieved by school systems which deny their teachers the professional right to do their own unit planning but are instead required to implement centrally prepared plans. Indeed, we believe that research is more likely to demonstrate quite the reverse.
- d. If the use of the C2C/Scribbly Gum plans is in any way compulsory, the message inferred by many will be that EQ teachers are no longer to be trusted to do their own curriculum planning. Apart from discounting the professionalism that has been a major strength of schooling in the state for 40 years, this would have to be anticipated to have a negative impact on the recruitment of quality graduates. I am a proud product of state schools (Ascot SS and Kedron SHS), a very strong supporter of public education, and someone who, in a 35-year school teaching career, was never tempted to work in the private system. In spite of this background, I consider that I could not at present, in all conscience, recommend a graduate to embark on a career as an English teacher in EQ high schools if what appeared earlier in the year to be EQ’s new regime regarding curriculum planning were to prevail.
- e. We understand that in communications to schools about the *Curriculum into the classroom* program you have made a distinction between the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of teaching. We concede that this distinction might apply well enough in some subject areas – perhaps in the business subjects that we understand that you once taught yourself. However, we would wish to state very strongly that, for our subject, such a distinction is inappropriately simplistic. ETAQ contends that in English, the packaging of learning experiences into units of work is a significant part of the ‘how’. In addition, there is no single correct set of units of work to implement any curriculum document in English. We

are confident that this view will be confirmed by English teacher educators in universities around the country.

- f. ETAQ's initial objection to the blanket imposition of centrally devised unit plans was based on the assumption that the C2C/Scribbly Gum plans would be quality documents in themselves. We understand that the plans will be "quality assured" but we take this to be a technical term with a limited meaning. It is no guarantee that experienced English teachers will agree that they are high quality plans. Some very experienced English teachers are of the view that there are significant problems with the C2C plans for Years 8-10 English released thus far and a detailed critique can be found on the ETAQ website. Negative teacher perceptions of the C2C plans is a problem in itself but it is greatly exacerbated if teachers are to be forced to use them against their best professional judgment. If, on the other hand, groups of teachers in schools can decide whether or not to use such plans, then the problem is significantly reduced.
6. You may be interested to know that at a meeting in Adelaide on 19 June the National Council of AATE, the Australian Association for the Teaching of English, the national English teacher professional body, unanimously endorsed ETAQ's concerns about EQ's plans for implementing the Australian Curriculum.
7. On a happier note, we are pleased to see indications that wiser counsels have prevailed and EQ has shifted from what was apparently its initial position in relation the mandatory use of C2C unit plans. This awareness comes from Queensland Teachers' Union channels. In response to motions passed by the union's Ferny Grove Branch, QTU President Steve Ryan has, via letter dated 27 June 2011, assured the branch that: "What the QTU has been able to negotiate with the Department is that the centrally devised unit plans associated with implementing the Australian Curriculum will not and cannot be mandated by EQ." We have no reason to doubt the veracity of this assurance.
8. This being the case, it appears that communication within EQ is not as clear as it might be. The feedback we have been recently receiving from our members has been mixed. In some schools, where sensible principals are providing what we consider to be sound educational leadership, English HODs are being told that their professional judgment is trusted and that they are at liberty to prepare for implementing the Australian Curriculum by using as much or as little of the C2C plans as they and their teachers deem to be appropriate.
9. Unfortunately, in some other schools, even very experienced English HODs are being instructed by principals that they are obliged to use the C2C/Scribbly Gum plans with only really minimal amendment. This is particularly galling since in many cases the principals involved would not personally have the expertise and experience to make properly informed judgments about what constituted a quality English program.

10. To clarify the situation, and ensure that teachers in all EQ schools are receiving the same message, we suggest that you should issue an unequivocal direction to schools to the effect that:

- a. the C2C unit plans in English are exemplars only;
- b. their use is optional; and
- c. the decision to use them or not is up to the professional judgment of groups of teachers in schools.

11. Clear communication could further be aided by adding the following FAQ items to the relevant EQ web page:

Q: Is it mandatory for schools to use the C2C unit plans?

A: Not at all. The plans are exemplars to provide guidance for the less experienced. It is up to the professional judgment of groups of teachers in schools to decide whether they will use the C2C plans. It is acknowledged that effective programs could be produced by reviewing, and amending as necessary, the units of work that schools are currently using.

Q: Is the use of the C2C unit plans completely optional?

A: Yes. It is up to the professional judgment of groups of teachers in schools to decide whether they will use the C2C plans at all or, if they do decide to use them, to what extent they will be amended.

12. We look forward to your response and would be happy to discuss any of the points raised in this letter should that be considered appropriate.

Yours faithfully

Garry Collins  
President  
English Teachers Association of Queensland (ETAQ)