
Executive summary

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Introduction
The Curriculum Corporation was awarded the tender to conduct an independent evaluation of the development processes of the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework.

It is intended that the evaluation report to the community on the benefits and opportunities that the process offered as well as report on areas that may need ongoing attention.

There are five terms of reference for the evaluation. They are the:

1. role, operation and effectiveness of the Project’s steering committee, reference group and expert group structures
2. processes of tendering and contracting services and providing directions to and managing service providers
3. consultation and trialing processes for the preliminary and trial drafts of the Framework
4. mechanisms for communicating with stakeholders
5. nature and effectiveness of the partnership between Department of Education Training and Employment (DOTE), Catholic Education South Australia and Independent Schools Board (ISB) in developing the Framework.

Evaluation methodology
The evaluation timeline was from January to 30 April 2001.

The evaluators reported to the Evaluation Steering Committee, convened by the Curriculum Policy Directorate of DOTE. The project had two evaluators, Ms Margery Hornibrook and Ms Margaret Wallace.

There were 3 main sources of data, and the data was both qualitative and quantitative.

1. An evaluation survey was posted electronically on a website to all DOTE sites and Catholic Education SA trial sites, and other locations as required, in order to provide the widest opportunity for comment. The survey had several interconnected sections to enable respondents who were involved in more than one aspect of the development of the SACSA Framework to respond, using one response mechanism only. Sites were informed about the availability of the survey by the relevant sectors.

2. The total number of responses to the on-line survey was 395. 323 of the responses came from sites in Catholic Education SA and the Department for Education Training and Employment. 61 responses were logged from members of the Experts Working
Groups (EWGs) and 11 responses came from members of the Band Reference Groups (BRGs).

3. Interviews and focus groups provided another source of data for the evaluation. Group interview invitations were extended to all Chairs and Executive Officers of the Experts Working Groups and the Band Reference Groups. Two full days of group interviews were held as well as two additional sessions, intended to extend the options for Chairs and Executive Officers. Invitations were extended to a structured random sample of members of the EWGs and the BRGs to attend two focus group sessions.

Individual or group interviews were held with:

- past and present members of the SACSA Coordinating team
- all Steering Committee members
- contract managers
- personnel from the University of SA writing team and the Project’s Directors, the Council of Educational Associations of SA, Erebus Consulting Partners and the Australian Council for Educational Research.

Principals and teachers involved in the trial sites, from both the DETE system and Catholic Education SA were interviewed following their selection on the basis of a stratified random sample.

Documents from the project were analysed and they provided information about the development process and the operations and outcomes of the project groups. They also provided data for the evaluation of the tendering and contracting of services and were one source of information about mechanisms for communication and information.

The structure of the evaluation report

Section 1 provides background to the evaluation, including its purpose and audiences.

Section 2 outlines the methodology used in the evaluation.

Section 3 gives an overview of the evaluation’s findings.

Section 4 describes the development of the project and traces its conceptual and management history. This section includes a description of the development of the Writers Brief, which was central to the development of the Framework. It also describes the role, function, broad composition and relationships of the groups that make up the project structures.
Section 5 presents the findings of the evaluation, organised against each of the evaluations terms of reference. The findings draw on data generated by each of the three sources of data for the evaluation and are to be considered together with the information provided earlier in the report about the project’s intentions and processes. These parts of the report use quotations from the interviews and from source documents to illustrate the range of perspectives evidenced through the evaluation. They are also intended to give voice to the participants in the development process.

Section 6 describes four issues that emerged from the evaluation for further consideration. They are:

- implementation
- maintaining the partnerships
- contractual relationships
- models of development.

The report includes an Attachment section. This section includes the survey and the findings from the online survey.

The report includes a series of appendices which includes the evaluation instruments, participants in the evaluation and references used in the evaluation.

**Summary of the evaluation findings**

1. The processes used to develop the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Standards and Accountability Framework delivered the product to sites within the timeline established for the project.

2. The processes used to develop the Framework were seen by the participants in the process to have many benefits.

3. The benefits of the processes used were seen to have a positive impact on both what was achieved and how it was achieved.

4. The levels of professional debate and scrutiny generated through the processes were seen to contribute to a more robust and defensible curriculum. Curriculum is contested and the Framework represents the mediation, in a political context, of competing demands and levels of contestation. The processes used to develop the Framework allowed the areas and levels of curriculum contestation to be both visible and arbitrated. For some of the respondents to the evaluation, the arbitration was not the one they sought. For others it represents a series of ‘better and better compromises’ which led to a uniquely South Australian product.
5. Many of the respondents saw powerful benefits gained through the partnerships that were established. The partnerships were evident in the composition of the project groups and in the public problem solving that the process allowed. Partnerships in and between sites and schools, and in the project groups, were evident in the data.

6. The consultation processes used to conceptualise and shape the Framework were valued by most respondents. The benefits were to be seen in the impact of the consultative processes on the development of a more interactive culture between the sites and curriculum policy as well as between practice and theory. The Framework was seen to be more rigorous because it was subject to informed opinion at pertinent stages throughout its development.

7. Outsourcing was generally seen to be a benefit in the process. The engagement of a wider range of expertise in the development of the Framework that this provided was recognised. Outsourcing was also seen to provide independent advice external to the managers and developers of the project and therefore to provide increased transparency. Outsourcing was also seen to provide access through the Australian Council for Educational Research to technical expertise for the development of the standards.

8. The project groups were seen as contributing to the project as a whole as well as fulfilling their terms of reference. The Experts Working Groups and Band Reference Groups were established to provide advocacy and expertise from their specific perspective. The project intention was the development of one Framework. There is evidence of tension between these elements.

9. Tendering and contracting services for a project of this size was a new venture for the Project Managers. There is evidence that this was a complex and challenging undertaking. The three tenders called as part of the project’s development had a specific purpose in the overall process. Each service provider met contractual obligations. Project direction was generally effective and appropriate to the purposes of the consultancy.

10. The timelines established for the project as a whole and for each of the outsourced components were seen as demanding, difficult and as exacting a high personal cost for many people who were involved in achieving them. They were also seen to provide benefit because they required an accommodation of contested curriculum issues.

11. Consultation and trialing processes for the preliminary and trial drafts of the Framework provided different levels of engagement for participants. The project groups provided access to opinions from a number of perspectives and these voices were amplified in the processes used in the consultations for the trialing draft. Many of the respondents indicate that they believe the consultation and trialing processes contributed a new and useful dimension to major curriculum development processes.
12. A number of mechanisms were developed for communicating with stakeholders in the Framework. Communication and providing information was a planned part of the development process. Assessments of their impact vary and to some extent depend upon the respondents’ predispositions towards the project as well as on the mechanism itself.

13. The partnerships that were established between three sectors (DETE, ISB and Catholic Education SA) and between the sectors and the Senior Secondary Assessment Board of South Australia (SSABSA) were seen as productive, as were other partnerships that were intrinsic to the development process. The three universities were involved in all the groups and this was seen as a benefit to the process for most.

14. A range of data underpins each of these broad statements. There are tensions evidenced in the responses to the evaluation and the people involved in the process experienced it differently. The range of views extends from those who found it most professionally rewarding to those who experienced the process as professionally and emotionally difficult.

15. The process used for this development was seen to be innovative for several reasons. One was because the emphasis on partnerships was central to the development. The other was because the development required the people involved to engage in curriculum debate and to do so in a dynamic curriculum context.