Professor Ken Wiltshire AO and Dr Kevin Donnelly
Review of the Australian Curriculum
Department of Education
GPO Box 9839
Canberra ACT 2601

3 March 2014

Dear Professor Wiltshire and Dr Donnelly,

The Australian Academy of the Humanities, one of the nation's four Learned Academies, welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Government's Review of the Australian Curriculum.

The Academy considers it imperative that the richness and diversity that characterises the current Australian Curriculum be maintained.

The central place that the humanities and arts are afforded in the Australian Curriculum not only make for a rigorous and well-rounded education, but for a society that is adaptable, creative and innovative – capabilities which are crucial to the nation's future workforce and beyond. The inclusion of English and History in the first stage of curriculum development was strongly supported by the Academy, as was the inclusion of the Languages curriculum in the second phase of development. Making languages education compulsory will be a crucial policy setting to support the Government's goal of ensuring that at least 40 per cent of Year 12 students are studying a language other than English within a decade.

The Academy also advocated for the inclusion of the Arts in the second stage of curriculum development, on the basis that Arts subjects are not a 'pleasant diversion' or 'optional extra' but an essential and productive component of a comprehensive, systematic curriculum.

There is also a good balance between the humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS) disciplines and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) in the current curriculum formation. International comparative studies suggest that those countries that do well educationally, do so across the board. The recent Australian Council of Learned Academies report *STEM Country Comparisons* found that the countries that did well in science and technology at secondary school level did so across the curriculum. The top STEM performers outside East Asia are also strong in humanities subjects such as languages and literature. There is also evidence that participation in strong humanities and arts based subjects fosters improved literacy achievement among disadvantaged pupils.

Through a comprehensive and coordinated approach to the national curriculum, Australia will forge the knowledge, cultural capabilities, artistic sensibilities, technical and scientific skills and democratic inclinations of our future citizens and their global interactions.

We note that the terms of reference for this Review refer to the consultation process in developing the Australian Curriculum. The Academy commends the breadth, and inclusive nature, of consultation undertaken by ACARA during all stages of development. It is also our view that a strong discipline-based advisory process should be maintained as the basis for curriculum development and review.

In closing, we understand that Languages will be a feature of the Government's review of teacher quality and look forward to contributing to that consultation in due course. At this stage, we would simply observe that discipline-based training is essential in all fields – people steeped in the subjects they teach make passionate, knowledgeable and effective teachers.

The Academy would be pleased to elaborate on any of the observations contained in its brief submission. Please direct your initial queries to the Academy's Executive Director, Dr Christina Parolin via email to christina.parolin@humanities.org.au

Yours sincerely,

Emeritus Professor Lesley Johnson AM FAHA
President

The Australian Academy of the Humanities is one of the nation's four Learned Academies. Established by Royal Charter in 1969 to advance knowledge of, and the pursuit of excellence in, the humanities in Australia, it comprises nearly 600 of the most influential and internationally celebrated humanities scholars in Australia. The Academy provides expert advice on the needs, attributes and contribution of the humanities disciplines within the Australian education and research sectors, and in the wider community.