19 July 2013

Strengthening Human Rights Education in the Economics and Business Curriculum: Years 5- 10

Australian Human Rights Commission submission   
to the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority

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# [Introduction](http://consultation.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Survey/Welcome/36736fad-68ea-4016-a190-631412064fc7)

The Australian Human Rights Commission welcomes the development of the Australian Curriculum and is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the draft *Years 5-10* *Australian Curriculum: Economics and Business* The Commission has made a range of recommendations throughout this submission and has highlighted several areas of the curriculum in which the human rights content could be strengthened and enhanced.

As was stated in our feedback on the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Economics and Business*, the Commission is pleased to see references to human rights in a number of areas throughout the curriculum including in the key ideas, the section on student diversity, several of the content elaborations, and in relation to ethical behaviour and intercultural understanding. However, it is the Commission’s view that there are several areas throughout the curriculum in which the human rights content can be strengthened and better reflected.

In this submission, we have made **general recommendations** for how human rights can be included in the study of economics and business and **specific recommendations** for where exactly this can occur in the curriculum, especially in the content and elaborations. The Commission has identified the recommendations using bullet points and ***italics and bold****.* Any suggested words to be removed have been struck through, and the paragraph and page references have been included.

# General recommendations

**General recommendation 1:** The Commission recommends that curriculum enable students to develop an understanding of economic and social rights, including:

* labour rights, consumer rights, the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to social security
* the impact of law and policy on economic rights, especially on the right to work and to safe workplaces free from harassment and discrimination, including on the basis of age
* Australia’s role in protecting economic and social rights beyond our borders.

**General recommendation 2:** The Commission recommends that the curriculum enable students to develop an understanding of the impacts businesses can have on human rights and the role of business to prevent and respect human rights, including:

* the impact business can have on labour rights, women’s rights, Indigenous rights, children’s rights, including through supply chains
* the domestic and international laws that require business to protect and respect human rights
* international human rights standards for business and how these are relevant for Australian businesses
* business models that actively support human rights

**General recommendation 3:** The Commission is concerned that the curriculum fails to consider the different experiences of women and men with respect to economics and business and, in so doing, adopts a male-dominated perspective. The Commission recommends that issues of sex and gender are fully integrated across the curriculum including in content descriptions and elaborations.

The curriculum should fully integrate the specific needs and experiences of women and emphasise the importance of gender equality in the areas of business and economic activity. This is particularly important due to the historical exclusion of women from economic and business activity in Australia and the ongoing unequal representation and discriminatory treatment of women in these areas.

The economics and business curriculum provides an important opportunity to encourage students to consider the obstacles and barriers that women face. Significant challenges include gaining leadership positions, receiving equal pay, being recognised and valued for unpaid caring work, and dealing with sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace. It also provides an important opportunity to educate students about the importance of taking sex and gender into account when developing laws and public policies and the impact of unequal gender representation on the Australian economy.

# Specific recommendations

## Rationale and Aims

The Commission has recommendations for the following sections of the Rationale and Aims:

**Rationale - Paragraph 3 (page 5):**

* Enterprising behaviours and capabilities such as adaptability, creativity, initiative, flexibility, leadership, innovation, perseverance, determination, ***ethical decision-making*** and intercultural understanding are integral to the Economics and Business curriculum.

**Rationale - Paragraph 5 (page 5):**

* This will enable them to contribute to the development of prosperous, sustainable and equitable Australian and global economies, and to secure their own financial wellbeing ***and the wellbeing of others.***

**Aim 1: (page 6)**

* understanding of the ways society allocates scarce resources to ~~satisfy~~ **fulfil** needs, ~~and~~ wants ***and rights***, and how they participate in the economy as consumers, workers and producers

**Aim 2 (page 6):**

* understanding of the way economic decision-making in sectors of the economy, including governments and other policy-making institutions, influences economic and business activity and affects the wellbeing of individuals, families, communities, ~~and~~ the economy, ***and the environment.***

**Aim 3 (page 6):**

* understanding the benefits of being an informed consumer; of acting rationally and ethically when making personal consumer and financial decisions; and an understanding of the effects of decisions on individuals, families, the community ~~and~~ the economy**, *and the environment.***

**Aim 5 (page 6):**

* enterprising behaviours and capabilities to contribute to the development and prosperity ***and sustainability*** of the economy.

The Commission also recommends the inclusion of an additional aim specifically related to human rights and responsibilities. This could be phrased as:   
  
***The draft Years 5-10 Australian Curriculum: Economics and Business aims to develop students’:***

* ***understanding of their rights and responsibilities as participants in the economy and in business activity.***

## Key ideas

The Commission makes the following recommendations for the key ideas:

**Resource allocation and making choices (page 7)**

* The process of using available, limited resources for competing alternative uses that satisfy our society’s ~~unlimited~~ needs, ~~and~~ wants ***and rights*** is the focus of economic and business decision-making. ~~As every need and want cannot be satisfied with available resources,~~ Choices must be made about how resources are allocated most effectively ***and sustainably***, based on the actions of consumers, producers and governments.

**The business environment (page 7):**

* The business environment is rapidly transforming owing to internal and external factors. An understanding of the way businesses are structured and operate, how they respond to challenges, ***the impacts that businesses have on communities***, and the role of interest groups in this sphere - including the role of governments, along with the effect of legal and regulatory ~~constraints~~ ***standards*** - is necessary for developing students’ economic and business literacy.

## Economics and business learning prior to Year 5

The Commission makes the following recommendations for the section on **‘Resource allocation and making choices’ (prior to year 5) on page 9:**

* Resource allocation and making choices: identifying resources; the way local resources are used to make goods and services that meet local people’s needs, ~~and~~ wants ***and rights*** as well as the needs, ~~and~~ wants ***and rights*** of people in other places; making choices - such as how they spend their money, or their time - that recognise the alternative ways of using resources.

## Years 5 – 6: Curriculum focus

The Commission makes the following recommendations for this section:

**Paragraph 2 (page 10):**

* In these years students begin to understand and appreciate the concepts of making choices, the difference between needs, ~~and~~ wants ***and rights***, and the role and interdependence of consumers, workers and producers within an economy. Students begin to appreciate the way decisions about how resources are used influence the ***rights and*** wellbeing of themselves, their family and others…. They ***start to*** develop an understanding of the changing nature of work, ~~and the importance of~~ ***different opportunities for*** participation in work, ***and the importance of fair working conditions***. Students consider the roles, ~~and~~ motives and responsibilities of businesses, and the ways they are structured to provide goods and services. ~~to satisfy needs and wants~~.

**Paragraph 3 (page 10):**

* Specific economic and business skills in Years 5-6 include … applying economic and business concepts, ~~and~~ enterprising ***and ethical*** behaviours and capabilities, ***and intercultural understanding*** to hypothetical situations, or situations not previously encountered; and reflecting and communicating the conclusions formed.

## Years 7 –10: Curriculum focus

The Commission makes the following recommendations for this section:

**Paragraph 2 (page 10):**

* In these years students develop their understanding of the market system of the Australian economy, ~~and~~***, and explore the difference between the Australian economy and other economic systems***. They explore the rights and responsibilities of consumers and businesses***. They also explore the economic rights of all people such as the right to work and the responsibilities of businesses to provide safe workplaces free from discrimination and harassment.*** ~~and~~ ***Students*** investigate the role that financial records and managing and planning for the future by individuals and businesses play in meeting personal and business goals and objectives. Students consider and understand the interdependence of sectors of the economy, ***including the role of government within the economy***, and explore how ~~that~~ decisions made in one sector ***can*** affect other sectors.

**Paragraph 3 (page 10):**

* Specific economic and business skills in Years 7-10 emphasise economic reasoning, interpretation and analysis of economic and business data and/or information; the application of concepts and enterprising ***and ethical*** behaviours and capabilities ***and intercultural understanding*** to hypothetical situations, or situations not previously encountered; the forming and drawing of conclusions based on evidence; and the communication of these conclusions to a broad audience.

# Student diversity

The Commission congratulates ACARA on its broad understanding of student diversity and is pleased to see reference to students with a disability and students with an additional language or dialect.

## Students with a disability

For the section on **students with a disability (page 11)**, the Commission recommends that in addition to the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards for Education 2005, the curriculum refer to the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability (the Disability Convention).[[1]](#endnote-1)** The Disability Convention reinforces the obligation of the Australian government to ensure an inclusive education system and to facilitate full and equal participation of people with disabilities in education.

# General capabilities

The Commission makes the following recommendations for the general capabilities:

**Ethical understanding**

The Commission recommends that there is explicit reference to human rights in the ethical behaviour general capability. The following amendment on **page 14** is recommended:

* In Economics and Business contemporary issues and/or events, students develop informed, ethical values and attitudes and become aware of their own roles, ***rights*** and responsibilities as participants in the economy.

**Intercultural understanding**

The Commission recommends that intercultural understanding include reference to the importance of intercultural understanding in the workplace, in particular the impact of racism and discrimination.

The Commission also recommends that cultural competency be addressed in the context of intercultural understanding. A culturally competent person has the understanding, skills and strategies to effectively and sensitively communicate with people who have different languages, cultures, religions, genders, ethnicities, disabilities, ages and sexualities.

The Commission recommends that the following **addition** be made to the intercultural understanding description on **page 14**:

* ***Students explore the importance of intercultural understanding in the workplace and in business activity. This includes developing cultural competency in order to to effectively and sensitively communicate with people who have different language, culture, religion, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, disability, age or sexuality***

# Curriculum content

The Commission has made a range of specific recommendations to enhance content descriptions and elaborations. The general recommendations that the Commission has made should also be applied to the content descriptions and elaborations as follows:

## Year 5 – Choices and Decisions

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| **Economics and Business Knowledge and Understanding** | |
| **Content description** | **Elaborations - Commission recommendations** |
| The nature of limited resources and unlimited needs and wants, and the choices and decisions that need to be made | * investigating the nature of needs, ~~and~~ wants, ***and rights,*** and the nature of natural, human and capital resources * ***investigating everyone’s rights to food, shelter and an adequate standard of living. This could include exploring Australia’s obligation to the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights[[2]](#endnote-2)*** * ***investigating the importance of sustainability and protecting the environment when using limited resources*** |
| The motivation for and influences on personal consumer choices and the strategies that may be used to make informed consumer and financial decisions | * describing the types of consumer and financial decisions people make to satisfy ~~their individual~~ needs and wants, for example, deciding which brands of product to buy, choosing holidays or selecting a bank account * ***exploring how ethical decision-making can inform consumer and financial choices – particularly in relation to human rights and environmental considerations*** * ~~explaining~~ ***exploring*** how price ***and advertising*** can influence consumer choice***, for example how sports stars endorsing junk food products can influence young people’s consumer decisions.*** ~~and why businesses such as department stores have sales~~ |
| The role and motives of businesses/producers in providing goods and services to satisfy needs and wants | * investigating how businesses decide what goods and services to produce, for example, by weighing up the costs and benefits of producing the goods and services, ***including financial, social, and environmental benefits*** * ***investigating the role of business and producers to respect human rights in the production of goods and services, particularly in the Asia region in the production of technology and clothing goods*** * ***investigating the role of businesses to respect the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in the production of goods and services*** |

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| **Economics and Business Skills** | |
| **Content description** | **Elaborations - Commission recommendations** |
| **Decision-making** | |
| Identify problems, develop possible solutions and use decision-making processes to reach a decision taking into account different alternatives | * identifying the costs and benefits associated with particular actions, ***including financial, social and environmental costs*** |
| **Reflection and communication** | |
| Reflect on the decisions made regarding the local issue or event and form conclusions based on evidence | * reflecting on personal decisions made with regard to the issue and/or event, for example, financial decisions and the consequences for individuals, family and the community, ***and the environment*** |

## Year 6 – Consumer and business motives

**Year Level Description**

The Commission recommends the following change**:**

* Students will build on their knowledge of the roles, ***responsibilities*** and motives of businesses by investigating the ways businesses are structured and they make choices to meet their objectives.

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| **Economics and Business Knowledge and Understanding** | |
| **Content description** | **Elaborations - Commission recommendations** |
| The nature of choices and trade-offs involved in the decisions made by consumers, businesses, workers and governments | * ***assessing the impact of resource extraction industries on the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and using the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples [[3]](#endnote-3) to assess impact*** * ***reviewing the implications of procurement policies on gender equality*** |
| The importance of being an informed consumer and the effect of individuals’ consumer and financial decisions on themselves, families, the broader community and/or the environment | * identifying sources of information that will assist in making consumer and financial decisions, for example, comparing price by weight information to help choose a brand of breakfast cereal, ***or by checking consumer guides for information how to make ethical consumer choices.*** * ***exploring the rights of people to be treated equally and without discrimination when acquiring goods and services, including on the grounds of race, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or other attribute under Australian law.*** * ~~and~~ investigating the way businesses attempt to influence consumer decisions, ***for example through marketing and advertising their company as an ethical operator*** * examining how consumer decisions send signals to the market and businesses, for example, the way preference for particular styles and colours of clothing will influence what businesses produce, or consumer preference for environmentally friendly packaging ***and products.*** |
| The way businesses are structured and the choices they make to produce goods and services using resources most efficiently, including interconnections with the Asia region | * exploring the ways businesses may be structured, for example sole trader, partnership, company or franchise, **social enterprise**, and how their operations enable them to efficiently produce goods and services * ***investigating the potential human rights violations that can occur through local and global business supply chains, including sexual harassment, discrimination, child labour, slavery, trafficking, unfair wages or unsafe working conditions – and how businesses can prevent and address human rights breaches through their policies and practices.*** * explaining why businesses should act in socially and ethically responsible ways to meet society’s changing expectations, for example, using Australian ingredients, reducing the level of waste in production processes, and discouraging the use of plastic bags~~. businesses supporting the community by through the sponsoring local sports teams~~ * ***explaining why business should act to meet human rights and environmental standards, for example, preventing and redressing industrial accidents, spillages or contamination, ensuring the appropriate use of water, land and air, assessing business impacts on housing, farming and employment needs of the local community in which they operate*** * investigating the ways businesses can and do use enterprising behaviours and capabilities to help make decisions, for example by using critical and creative thinking skills, ~~and~~ problem-solving skills, ***and participation process*es** to operate more efficiently ***and effectively***. * investigating the continuous nature of trade relationships and exchanges within and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and between these communities and others. |
| The factors, influences and trends affecting work now and into the future | * investigating current and predicted changes and trends, for example, an ageing population ***and age discrimination faced by mature workers***, work-life balance, the increasing use of outsourcing by business, the shortage of skilled labour in some industries, and ***the increasing casualisation of the workforce and its impact on young people***  ~~way we pay for goods and services~~. |

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| **Economics and Business Skills** | |
| **Content description** | **Elaborations - Commission recommendations** |
| **Economics and Business questions and research** | |
| Pose questions and plan an investigation of an economic or business issue or event at a local level | * determining questions related to an economic or business issue and/or event, for example, ‘How viable is a new eco-tourism business in the local district?’, or ‘How do decisions about products supplied by businesses (local or global) affect individuals, ~~and~~ families, ***and communities*** as consumers and/or workers, the environment and the economy?’, or ‘How are advertising, marketing and social media used to influence consumer decision-making?’ |
| Research and gather data and/or information about the selected issue or event | * collecting a range of information to respond to the question posed, for example what products does the business sell? Is this the same in other towns, cities, countries? How many workers does the business employ? Is there an impact on the environment due to the products sold (e.g. packaging)? ***Is there an impact on human rights, for example on fair working conditions?*** What is the contribution of the business to the local/national/global economy? Are consumer ‘deals’ (two for one, rewards points) beneficial? |

**Year 6 Achievement Standard**

The Commission recommends the following changes**:**

**Page 29, Paragraph 1:**

By the end of Year 6, students discuss the nature of choices and trade-offs, and the importance of being an informed ***and ethical*** consumer. They explain the ways businesses are structured and the choices they make to produce goods and services most efficiently ***and ethically***. They discuss the changing nature of work, ***the importance of fair working conditions, creating workplaces free from discrimination and harassment*** and how work contributes to the economy and the wellbeing of society

## Year 7 – Participating in our economy

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| **Economics and Business Knowledge and Understanding** | |
| **Content description** | **Elaborations - Commission recommendations** |
| The market system in the Australian economy, and the interdependence of consumers and producers | * examining the market system in Australia and identifying who is involved, ~~and~~ what role they play ***and their rights and responsibilities*** |
| The way that individuals manage their finances and plan for the future in order to meet personal goals and objectives | * ***developing literacy in financial planning and management*** * explaining procedures for safe and secure online banking and shopping including the need for financial records as part of the process ***and the right to privacy***. |
| The ways in which work can contribute to individual and societal wellbeing, and alternative ways of generating income | * exploring ways that work can affect an individual’s self-esteem, material and non-material living standards and ***their wellbeing***~~happiness~~ * investigating alternative ways individuals can generate income, for example, owning a business, being a shareholder, providing a rental service, ***or crowdsourcing online*** * ***exploring how the right to work impacts on individuals and communities*** * ***identifying how discrimination, harassment and bullying in the workplace impacts on individuals and communities*** * ***identifying where to access reliable information and advice about*** ***discrimination, harassment and bullying in the workplace, including the Australian Human Rights Commission and Fair Work Australia*** |

## Year 8 – Our dynamic market economy

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| **Economics and Business Knowledge and Understanding** | |
| **Content description** | **Elaborations - Commission recommendations** |
| The role of government in the Australian economy and why it intervenes in the market | * ***exploring some of the challenges of market economies, including the impact of deregulation (for example in the global finical crisis)*** * identifying examples of government intervention that aim to redistribute income in order to improve equity, ***equality*** and wellbeing, ***and to fulfil their human rights obligations***. ***This could include providing*** some types of goods and services not being provided by the market, or not being provided in sufficient amounts or at reasonable prices, for example, healthcare and education |
| The importance of rights and responsibilities of consumers and businesses in the Australian economy and the way these influence consumer and business behaviour | * ***understanding consumer rights and responsibilities in the online environment.*** ***This could include examining the terms and conditions of service of online social media platforms, especially for websites frequently used by young people such as Facebook, Youtube, Instagram and Tumblr.*** * identifying where to access reliable information and advice about the rights and responsibilities of consumers and business, for example departments of fair trading in each state and territory, ***and the Australian Human rights Commission*** * investigating the legal protection available to consumers and businesses in Australia, for example, statutory warranties, the Australian Consumer Law, the Australian Competition & Consumer Commission ***or the application of discrimination law to ensure equality in the provision of goods and services and how to make a complaint to the Australian Human Rights Commission*** |
| The effects of business decisions on consumers, the economy and the environment, including how businesses in Australia and the Asia region, practise ethically and socially responsible behaviour | * ***identifying the impacts that business can have on human rights, including on working conditions, women’s rights, Indigenous rights, health and safety, environment impacts, and further impacts in the business supply chain.*** * ***identifying and exploring the actions businesses can take to meet their responsibility to respect rights.*** |
| Influences on the work environment and the way individuals work | * ***analysing statistics of sexual harassment in the workplace, identifying the impact of sexual harassment on how individuals work and developing strategies to eliminate harassment*** * ***exploring examples of strategies to reduce discrimination, such as a Reconciliation Action Plan or Disability Action Plan of a business in the local community*** |

## Year 9 – How do we improve our standard of living

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| **Economics and Business Knowledge and Understanding** | |
| **Content description** | **Elaborations - Commission recommendations** |
| Ways of measuring standard of living within an economy and between economies | * defining standard of living***with regard to international human rights standards*** * comparing the standard of living in Australia with a country/countries in the Asia region ***based on international human rights standards and indicators*** |
| Reasons why standards of living vary within an economy | * identifying and explaining factors that can affect the standard of living of individuals, for example, occupation, inheritance, ***or*** ***discrimination*** |
| Ways of managing consumer and financial risks to individuals and the community | * exploring ways that consumers can secure their personal financial information, such as checking bank/credit card statements, using credible secure websites, ***and by understanding their right to privacy*** ***and security*** |
| The ways businesses seek to be competitive in the market | * exploring the innovative ways businesses seek to be competitive, ***including by promoting corporate social responsibility or ethical business practice*** * ***developing an understanding of the business case for respecting human rights, including the opportunities and risks, for example the legal and reputational damage that can result from not respecting rights*** * ***assessing the effectiveness of business advertisements for ‘fair trade’ products in various industries*** |
| The effect of changes in the work environment on individuals and the community | * discussing the changing nature of work such as casualisation, new technologies, working remotely, ***and how these impact on rights*** * exploring the impact of an ageing population on the work environment and government initiatives or responses***, including addressing age discrimination*** |

## Year 10 – How is our economy performing?

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| **Economics and Business Knowledge and Understanding** | |
| **Content description** | **Elaborations - Commission recommendations** |
| The ways the performance of the economy can be measured | * investigating the indicators for measuring the performance of the economy such as gross domestic product (GDP), unemployment trends, inflation rates, ***sustainability indexes, and international human rights standards*** |
| The effect of the economy’s performance on the sectors of the economy | * identifying government responses and analysing their effect, for example capping self-education expenses, ***subsidising particular industries***, taxes on superannuation, ***and*** ***social security programs*** |
| The interconnections between businesses in a global economy | * ***identifying the human rights issues that arise for Australian businesses in a global economy, in particular through supply chains*** * ***identifying actions businesses can take to meet their responsibility to respect human rights in a global economy. This could include developing human rights policies and practices such as conducting supply chain audits*** * ***exploring the international standards and guidelines available to businesses to help them to develop human rights policies and practices, for example the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights[[4]](#endnote-4)*** |
| The nature of work in the global economy | * identifying risks to workers, such as, isolation, ***reduced work-life balance in a 24 hour digital economy, and the casualisation of the workforce*** * discussing different viewpoints on outsourcing processes, ***including the potential lack of oversight of working conditions (including the safety and security of employees), and the impact of outsourcing on communities (both in Australia and overseas).*** |

1. United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability*, 2006, viewed July 2013 at <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966, viewed July 2013 at <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 2007, viewed July 2013 at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/indigenous/declaration.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*, 2011, viewed July 2013 at <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=11164> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)