COMMONWEALTH SCHOOLS COMMISSION AMENDMENT BILL 1984

Date Introduced: 2 May 1984
House: House of Representatives
Presented by: Hon. J.S. Dawkins, M.P., Minister Representing the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs

Purpose

To repeal the Curriculum Development Centre Act 1975 and to amend the Commonwealth Schools Commission Act 1973 in order to provide for the establishment of a Curriculum Development Council within the Schools Commission.

Background

In the early 1970s educational committees and bodies suggested that there existed a need for a national centre which would foster curriculum development for schools and joint activities between public, denominational and private school systems, as well as drawing on curriculum developments both in Australia and overseas.

On 13 June 1973, the then Minister for Education announced Cabinet's decision to establish a Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) as a statutory body with a governing Council, funded by the Commonwealth Government. Cabinet approved the following functions for the Centre:

a) curriculum development work including the production of teaching and learning materials for use in schools;

b) the commissioning and support of curriculum and materials development at regional and local levels;

c) arrangements for printing and marketing materials;

d) publication of assessments and information about equipment and materials from other sources;
e) display of equipment and materials;

f) provision of advisory services relating to curriculum and materials development.

An interim Council was appointed by the Minister on 24 August 1974. Its role was to initiate all CDC's functions and to liaise with existing bodies involved in curriculum development. On 1 July 1975, the CDC was properly established with the proclamation of the Curriculum Development Centre Act 1975. On 30 April 1981, the Review of Commonwealth Functions recommended the abolition of CDC unless State Governments were prepared to meet half of the Centre's operating costs. While the States would not agree to this arrangement, they were prepared to participate in joint curriculum projects. The Minister for Education advised the Council of the CDC that the Government intended to wind down CDC as quickly as possible, and that a Curriculum Development Branch would be established within the Department of Education. It would be concerned with projects of national significance, in particular those in Aboriginal and migrant/multicultural areas. No funds were provided for CDC in the 1982-83 Federal Budget. However, $0.3m was appropriated for the projects of national significance. Pending abolition, the CDC operated at a substantially reduced level, publishing and reprinting previously approved projects, funded from revenue from previous sales.

In the 1983-84 Budget, the Government provided for the reactivation of the CDC and for increased resources for curriculum development. For 1983-84, $1.4m was appropriated for administration and project costs associated with the reactivation of the work of the Centre.

In a press release, dated 18 March 1984, the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs announced that the CDC would be re-established within the Schools Commission and necessary legislative changes would be required. Under the new arrangements, as outlined in this Bill, the CDC will become the Curriculum Development Council, reporting to the Minister and working closely with the Schools Commission.

Main Provisions

Part II of the Bill contains provisions concerning the repeal of the Curriculum Development Centre Act 1975 which is formally repealed by clause 4.

The Minister for Education and Youth Affairs will be required to prepare a report of the CDC's operations and financial statements for the period from when they were last
prepared to the date when the CDC ceases to exist. The financial statements will need an audit report by the Auditor-General. The Minister will be required to place the report of CDC's operations, financial statements and a copy of the audit report before each House of Parliament (clauses 5-7).

Clauses 9-11 provide for the winding up of CDC. The Commonwealth will take over CDC's assets and liabilities. Any outstanding debts, liabilities or obligations will be payable from Consolidated Revenue.

Part III of the Bill contains amendments to the Commonwealth Schools Commission Act 1973. Clause 23 inserts sections 14A-14P into the Principal Act to provide for the incorporation of the Curriculum Development Council within the Schools Commission. The Council is established by the proposed section 14B and will comprise a Chairman who is a full-time member of the Schools Commission, 3 members nominated by the Minister from the Commission, not more than five other Ministerial nominees, 2 members with expertise in curriculum development and 2 other members nominated by the Australian Education Council and the Permanent Head or Deputy Secretary of the Department. The Governor-General will appoint the members as part-time members, who may hold office for up to 3 years and will be eligible for re-appointment.

The new section 14D contains provisions relating to the terms and conditions of employment of members of the Council. A member will receive remuneration as determined by the Remuneration Tribunal. The Governor-General will determine terms and conditions of employment not covered by the Tribunal. The procedure for convening and conduct of meetings is outlined in proposed section 14J. The Council will need to keep records of its meetings.

The Council's functions are listed in proposed section 14K as follows:

a) to inquire into, and to provide the Minister with information and advice on, the devising and development of school curricula and school educational materials and national school curriculum issues;

b) to devise and develop, and to promote and assist in the devising and development of, school curricula and school educational materials;
c) to undertake, promote and assist in research into matters related to school curricula and school educational materials;

d) to arrange for the printing and publication of, and of information relating to, school curricula and school educational materials;

e) to make available or supply, subject to the payment of reasonable charges, school curricula and school educational materials;

f) to collect, assess and disseminate and to promote and assist in the collection, assessment and dissemination of, information relating to school curricula and school educational needs;

g) to advise the Minister on the exercise of the Minister's powers in relation to grants to the States for curriculum projects, and on the making of agreements with an institution or person in a Territory in relation to curriculum projects;

h) to act on behalf of the Commonwealth in or in connection with matters relating to school curricula or school educational materials;

j) to publish reports on projects being undertaken, or to be undertaken by the Council; and

k) to do anything incidental or conducive to the performance of any of the foregoing functions.

In the performance of its functions, the Council is to consult and co-operate with the Schools Commission, representatives of the States, authorities in the A.C.T. responsible for primary and secondary education, and persons, bodies and authorities conducting non-government schools in Australia. The Council is required to perform its functions and exercise its powers in accordance with any Ministerial directive.

Under the new section 14P, the Council is required to provide an annual report to the Minister who will table it in Parliament. The Council may be required to provide other reports to the Minister as well as providing a copy of all reports to the Schools Commission. The Minister may request the Commission to provide comments on the reports.
Section 17A of the Principal Act will be amended by clause 26 whereby the Schools Commission will be required to provide the Minister with annual reports of the Commission's and the Council's operations.

Remarks

1. The Bill gives more detailed functions for the Council than those outlined in the Principal Act:
   a) the Bill states that the Council will need to advise the Minister on matters relating to the devising and development of curriculum and educational materials as well as on national school curriculum issues;
   b) the Council will act on behalf of the Commonwealth in matters dealing with curriculum and educational materials;

2. According to the Minister in a press release dated 18 March 1984, the reactivation of the CDC would enable the Commonwealth to play its part in providing schools and school systems with information and materials for curriculum reform and innovation. Program areas in which national curriculum activities would be co-ordinated and supported would include Aboriginal Studies, Education and the Arts, Education and Girls and Computing in Education. Major developments would be focused on secondary curriculum in accord with the aims and philosophy of the Government's Participation and Equity Program. Curriculum programs in the areas of mathematics, language and literacy, Australian studies and science would be mounted and would have an emphasis on the relationship between science, technology and society.

3. In a press release, dated 2 May 1984, the Minister stated that the "legislation would strengthen the integral relationship between curriculum issues, research priorities and the funding and program activities of the Schools Commission".

For further information, if required, contact:

22 May 1984
Education and Welfare Group
LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH SERVICE