



Submission on the New Zealand Curriculum
From the New Zealand Chambers of Commerce (Inc)
30 November 2006

The New Zealand Chambers of Commerce (Inc) is an umbrella organisation serving the interests of 34 Chambers of Commerce nationwide. These, in turn, represent over 24,000 businesses – most of the small to medium enterprises that are the backbone of business in New Zealand.

A vital, energetic business sector is essential to the standard of living of all of New Zealanders and is integral in the government's drive towards economic transformation. Businesses are the life blood of the economy. They provide employment, pay wages, produce goods and services, and determine the depth of the tax base. In so doing, they enable the government to build infrastructure and to provide benefits. If business is flourishing everyone benefits; if business is in recession the standard of living of the people suffers.

As part of the wider role education plays in New Zealand society, the education system has a crucial role to play in developing well rounded and highly skilled people that are needed to sustain the business sector. This of course is in the interests of all New Zealanders – not just employers.

The Chambers believe that a broad-based education system which values and fosters innovation and creativity is the best way to grow enterprising and entrepreneurial people. High levels of numeracy and literacy are crucial. So too is a broad curriculum to provide a solid educational foundation and encourage enquiring minds. We welcome the increased focus on foreign languages and the emphasis on science in the draft curriculum.

The Achievement Objectives

We are also pleased to see the importance of business acknowledged in the draft curriculum. However, the Chambers believe there needs to be even more emphasis on this.

For example, there are several references, in the Vision Statement and elsewhere, to business and the economy along with words such as “enterprising” and “entrepreneurial”. These references are pleasing. Their inclusion in the curriculum will go some way towards helping the education system develop people with the entrepreneurial and management capabilities to make New Zealand firms grow.

However, we note these references are mostly in the opening pages of the document. In order for the business thrust of the Vision Statement to be translated into classroom teaching, we believe this language needs to be carried through to the

detail of the Achievement Objectives. The teaching of business education needs to be more openly encouraged in these Achievement Objectives.

The Chambers are not advocating business education by itself as a means of producing entrepreneurial or successful business people. As stated above, a well rounded education system is best able to do this. Nevertheless as part of the broad curriculum, we believe there is a place for more business education.

We believe business activity generally can and should be used to provide context to all areas of learning. As well as this, business education should be a stand-alone learning area in its own right.

Business can Provide Context for a Range of Learning

Because business activity is, in one way or another, prevalent in all our lives it can greatly assist all forms of learning by providing context for a range of learning areas and subjects.

For example, the teaching of mathematical concepts can be assisted using examples based on monetary transactions and other business oriented problems such as the economics of the production process. At a higher level, financial theory may be just as mathematically challenging but more relevant than physical sciences in teaching applied mathematics. In English, communication skills can be enhanced by teaching business correspondence - which is useful in its own right. The language of marketing and advertising is also a useful context for teaching English.

As well as being useful in assisting the teaching of these subjects, business examples are beneficial in their own right as a way of teaching business and preparing students for the world beyond school.

Commerce as a New Learning Area

The draft curriculum specifies eight Learning Areas that are considered essential for general education. The Chambers are concerned that none of these are fully devoted to business oriented subjects.

As well as being sprinkled across the curriculum providing context to every learning area, we believe there is a case for the inclusion of a stand-alone Learning Area encompassing the field of Commerce.

Economics, bookkeeping, accounting, finance, commercial law and business studies, among others, are all important, long-established disciplines which are interrelated within the umbrella of Commerce. Together, these well-recognised subjects warrant the establishment of a new Learning Area within the curriculum. It is not good enough to have them lumped in with other Learning Areas such as social sciences.

Preparing Students for the Real World

Finally, the Chambers are concerned that some sections of the community think that the current inclusion of words such as enterprise, entrepreneurialism and business have an ideological bent which negatively prejudices the curriculum. Business is simply a set of interactions and undertakings to improve well-being. All enterprises, including social and non-profit enterprises, are businesses in the broadest sense of the word.

Consequently business education should not be seen as subscribing to a particular ideology but instead as preparing students for the real world. It is no exaggeration to say that the thread of business runs through all aspects of the world beyond school and it is crucial that our education system prepares children for it.

Summary of Recommendations

1. The business friendly language contained in the Vision Statement needs to be carried through to the Achievement Objectives for it to be affective in the classroom.
2. Within a well rounded and broad curriculum, more frequent use of business examples should be used to provide context for a range of teaching subjects.
3. A new stand-alone Learning Area encompassing the field of Commerce needs to be introduced.