Dear Honourable Member

The Studies of Society and Environment Association of Queensland (SOSEAQ) have grave concerns about the Masters Report: “A Shared Challenge: Improving Literacy, Numeracy and Science Learning in Queensland Primary Schools”. In particular, the Association is concerned about the absence of consideration and emphasis on Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) learnings for Queensland children. On page 1 of the report when outlining the knowledge Queensland students will need to be prepared for future challenges, Professor Masters states that Queensland children need to be prepared to face the future challenges where “knowledge-based economies are demanding more highly skilled and knowledgeable workers and global developments are demanding more informed citizens who can engage with, and make positive contributions to, the complex environmental, financial, political and social challenges of the 21st century”. After stating this, Masters then completely dismisses this area of learning and focuses only on science, literacy and numeracy. Science, literacy and numeracy are important but our students need also to be socially literate to function today and meet the challenges of the 21st century.

In a curriculum for the 21st century, we need citizens to be informed about history, geography, economics, civics, cultural understandings (especially Indigenous Australian knowledge), environmental education and the interconnections between all of these. In particular we need an education with an emphasis on global understandings and sustainability (economic, social and environmental). This is what Studies of Society and Environment concerns itself with.

Would you leave any of these things out of a student’s social understanding?

The Australian Primary Principals Association in its Charter on Primary Schooling (http://www.appa.asn.au/index.php/about/primary-schooling-charter) doesn’t think so! They state that the core curriculum for primary schools involves English, mathematics, science and social education (i.e. SOSE). The Wiltshire report on Queensland education in the early 1990s thought the same should apply to all of compulsory schooling. The latest draft of the national goals for schooling (the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians http://www.curriculum.edu.au/mceetya/melbourne_declaration,25979.html) cannot be read without seeing in their detail the scope of SOSE understandings, particularly civics and citizenship – and yet Professor Masters has been confined to report on literacy, numeracy and science only.
It is the SOSE curriculum that prepares Australian children to be informed citizens, acknowledging the multi-cultural nature of our society and prepares students to become empowered as active change agents of the future.

Reading, writing and being numerate do not occur in a vacuum. Most primary teachers teach literacy and numeracy using content mostly from SOSE and science, but both of these key learning areas need to be taught in their own right as well. We would not expect that the social learnings required to create a better Queensland or indeed a better world will get the required focus considering the emphases of this report – and in fact SOSE learning may be downplayed more than it currently is.

Hence, the Studies of Society and Environment Association of Queensland has grave concerns that the emphasis in this report on literacy, numeracy and science learnings will limit the development of Queensland students to become “informed citizens who can engage with, and make positive contributions to, the complex environmental, financial, political and social challenges of the 21st century”

It also seems ludicrous that teaching about civics and citizenship has been ignored when Queensland children performed the worst of any state in the National Civics testing. If the Masters report was commissioned due to concerns about national and international test results in literacy, numeracy and science, then why is there no concern about the poor results of Queensland students in the last two national civics and citizenship tests (held every three years like the national science testing)? If Professor Masters is concerned to recommend “a new structure and program for advanced professional learning in literacy, numeracy and science for primary school teachers” why would this not apply also to the teaching of civics as part of SOSE? Most existing teachers do not have a background in civics as part of their content knowledge, but this should be a general expectation in a democratic society.

Also, SOSE brings the domain of social factors into environmental understandings from a local to a global perspective. SOSE is the learning area which empowers learners to understand the interconnectedness and relationships between systems, resources and power.

Without an emphasis on SOSE in the Queensland school curriculum our adults of the future will become disempowered. Do our political leaders want this?

Improving Queensland children’s science, literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge is important but again we emphasise why do they need this knowledge and skills if not to become informed citizens who are able to function and contribute to society!

Our Association does support the idea of developing professional learning modules to extend teachers’ content knowledge, and of employing specialist teachers in district offices. The benefit of this was shown by the employment of Key Learning Area Regional Coordinators (KLARCS) by Education Queensland from 1994-1996. Most existing SOSE teachers would have developed their content knowledge in only one social science in their own secondary schooling and would benefit greatly by being provided with specialist learning in other areas covered by the SOSE Essential Learnings developed by the Queensland Studies Authority.
Our Association believes that whatever goes for science also goes for SOSE – both are large, multidisciplinary learning areas, heavily loaded with ever-expanding content and important skills, both encouraging inquiry and both suffering from broader expectations for teachers.

We believe that society disregards the SOSE learnings at its peril!

What’s happening to Queensland curriculum? How will our adults of the future know how to cast a vote, to know how to create a better Queensland, a better world they are part of?

**Where and when and how is social learning going to happen!!**

Our Association implores you to promote a focus on SOSE learnings for Queensland children!

Further information about the nature of Studies of Society and Environment and Environment key learning area is contained in the [document attached to this statement](#).

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Dr Joy Kennedy  
President  
Studies of Society and Environment Association of Queensland.

**Contact Details:**

Dr Joy Kennedy  
Lecturer  
Assistant Head of School (Acting)  
MTeach (Primary) Course Co-ordinator  
MTeach (Primary) Professional Experience Co-ordinator  
School of Education  
Australian Catholic University  
ABN 15 050 192 660  
CRICOS Registration: 00004G, 00112C, 00873F, 00885B  
PO Box 456  
Virginia Qld 4014  
Tel (07) 3623 7156  
Fax (07) 3623 7247  
Email: j.kennedy@mcauley.acu.edu.au