

TO: Professor John Dewar, Senior Phase of Learning Review Chair
Queensland Studies Authority
FROM: Home Economics Institute of Australia (QLD) Committee of Management
RE: QSA syllabuses for the Senior Phase of Learning

PURPOSE: To provide recommendation to the Queensland Studies Authority regarding the inclusion of Home Economics as an additional Learning Domain within the framework for the proposed Senior Phase of Learning.

To advise the Queensland Studies Authority that HEIA(Q) is committed to working collaboratively in devising a structure for the proposed domain that ensures a contemporary, futures-driven curriculum which responds to the needs of young Queenslanders preparing to enter the workforce and consequently balance work-life responsibilities.

This proposal is written in response to the information presented by Janice Chee at the Studies of Society and the Environment Focus Group Meeting and Paul Herschell at the Health and Physical Education Focus Group Meeting for the Senior Phase of Learning, held respectively on May 03 and 16 2007 at the Queensland Studies Authority. This proposal reflects the viewpoints of the members of the Committee of Management of the Queensland Division of the Home Economics Institute of Australia, HEIA(Q), and has taken into account feedback from those members who have been involved in the process.

The response is motivated by two statements made by Paul Herschell on May 16. In his address he stated "*the exercise at hand was not to cut subjects*" and that the formulation of the Senior Phase of Learning Framework is based on a "*primary principle of democratic public policy*". It is with these two statements in mind that we would like to request both adequate consideration by the Senior Phase of Learning Reference Group and Governing Body of the Queensland Studies Authority and timely feedback concerning our response.

The HEIA(Q) has no concern regarding the proposed structure for syllabuses of the Senior Phase of Learning. We do however, have concerns regarding the position of Home Economics within this framework. Currently there is no Learning Domain or Specialist Elective called Home Economics. There is, instead, a very thin distribution of some Home Economics concepts and contexts across the Social Science, Design, Environmental Studies and Health and Wellbeing Domains. These insertions are in no way representative of Home Economics as a discipline, the current senior syllabus or its philosophy, intent and nature. The proposed fragmentation of the discipline is unwise, undesirable and unacceptable in these complex new times. More than ever before, young people are being required to address the concerns of everyday living to ensure their individual wellbeing. If our young people are not equipped with the skills and knowledge to do this then they experience an increased exposure and increased vulnerability to the complexities of contemporary society. They are the future of our society, we must enhance their capabilities to confront and address issues associated with poor nutritional and mental health, family dysfunction, economic mismanagement, consumer exploitation and the like. Our young people need to be proactive and global citizens equipped to develop and maintain preferred futures for individuals and communities as they develop and maintain a work-life balance. Resultantly, HEIA(Q) advocates most strongly for the inclusion of Home Economics as an additional Learning Domain.

Name of the domain

It was suggested by Janice Chee that the discipline of Home Economics needed to adopt another name. After careful consideration this suggestion has been deemed inappropriate and irrelevant. A name change may create a new face which temporarily increases its appeal but the channelling of

energies into renaming a discipline will not produce a Learning Domain that benefits young Queenslanders. It would not progress the discipline, there would be no advantage for our young people. It could destabilise the discipline and ultimately facilitate its demise.

Home Economics is an internationally recognised discipline held in the utmost regard by non-government organisations such as the United Nations and World Health Organisation. The International Federation for Home Economics has consultative status with United Nations. The President Elect of the World Health Organisation is a Home Economist. This status signifies that the name must be retained. Fortunately, new times provide an opportunity to re-think the demands of a contemporary course, one that meets the challenges of the present and the future. A new formulation for Home Economics education and its subsequent promotion will position our discipline as one that prepares young people to live effectively within the modern world.

Current demand for the subject

Current enrolments indicate that Home Economics is valued by a considerable number of young Queenslanders. In the review of the syllabuses for the Senior Phase of Learning Meredith Gleadhill stated "*Home Economics is a strong subject area with robust student numbers across Queensland*". According to the QSA (QSA 2007, p 10) the latest figures regarding enrolment in senior Home Economics across Queensland are as follows:

Year of schooling	Number of schools	Number of students
Year 11	232	3155
Year 12	240	2957

It is our belief that a review of the Home Economics syllabus would lead to an increase in enrolments.

Home economics as a discipline

As a discipline, Home Economics is underpinned by a philosophy of individual wellbeing. The holistic nature of Home Economics addresses the social, emotional, physical, financial and intellectual wellbeing of individuals, families and communities in their everyday living. These issues are addressed across the contexts of food, textiles and living environments. There is no escaping these contexts; they are present in the everyday of every individual. Home Economics has a futures perspective considering social and technological innovation, social justice, ethics and personal beliefs. It provides an opportunity for young people to learn concepts fundamental to the individual, family and community and enables the effective functioning of individuals in a wide range of roles throughout the lifecycle. In addition, students of Home Economics learn the practical and problem solving skills as well as the reasoning processes required to inspire and instigate change, both as individuals, group members and global citizen. Subsequently they are empowered to become proactive, informed and collaborative members of our society, a global society which will continue to increase in its complexity. A Home Economics education prepares students for the associated challenges by embedding critical thinking and problem solving skills in practices such as social inquiry, empowerment and technology practice. It provides unique and authentic contexts for the development of the cognitive demands of new times.

Home Economics and the work-life balance

If the purpose of education is to prepare students for a balance of paid and unpaid life roles then regardless of whether the political view of schooling is reflective of vocational training or preparation for a life in a knowledge society, all students deserve and need an opportunity to learn the knowledge and skills presented in a Home Economics education. There is an ever increasing two-way link between paid employment and the family. Unless individual employees have the ability to manage their work and family responsibilities, employers and the productivity of both skilled and unskilled workers will suffer through absenteeism, poor morale, stress and poor performance (Edgar 2007, 3).

In his maiden speech to parliament, the Honourable Peter Costello MP (1990) stated, *“at the end of the day the fate of all Australian’s depends on the preservation of the family unit”*. As the structure of the family continues to change, our young people are relying on both their traditional family and peers for support and guidance. But, regardless of who the family is, whether it is nuclear or blended, biological or not, immediate or extended this statement is still true. Dr Don Edgar (2005, 3) stated *“the essential character of society itself is the unavoidable obligations of human beings to care for, nurture and support one another”*. In Home Economics young people learn about the importance of families, how to support the family unit, the family’s role within the community and the individual’s role within the family.

Students of Home Economics learn how to critically reflect on and analyse the sociocultural, economic and political forces that influence the ways society values both paid and unpaid work. In the future these students will be able to make informed choices enabling them to *“fulfil their dual obligations, both responsibilities towards employers and towards those family members who rely upon the income generated through paid work but who also need and rely upon the unpaid caring work that we all do as a matter of course”* (Edgar 2007, 2).

Home Economics and the health and wellbeing of individuals and families

The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion states *“to reach a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realize aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment”* (WHO 1986).

Health is a resource for everyday living. It is not limited to the health sector, but extends to a healthy lifestyle and wellbeing. The Charter also states *“people cannot achieve their fullest health potential unless they are able to take control of those things which determine their health”* (WHO 1986). A Home Economics education provides the opportunity for young people to learn the theory and practice and to apply reasoning process that can enable one to empower the self to be healthy. The resources and conditions considered fundamental to health are peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable eco-system, sustainable resources, social justice, and equity. There is no other subject that addresses these factors entirely or collectively. The holistic nature of our discipline enables this; we are unique in our position. Health promotion demands the strengthening of communities, education for wellbeing, control over oneself and the near environment in addition to improved life skills. These demands are the essence of Home Economics. A Home Economics education promotes health.

Our society is currently facing an obesity epidemic. Its intensity will most probably increase before it subsides. All levels of government have spent billions of dollars in an attempt to counteract this problem. This public health crisis, a result of uninformed decisions and poor lifestyle choices affects young and old, male and female. A Home Economics education will not provide a quick fix or bandaid answer rather, a vessel for educating young people and thereby creating generational change. Educating one student can educate an entire family. No other subject is in the position to provide the practical skills and theoretical framework to achieve this. No other subject is underpinned by a philosophy that enables this. No other group of teachers receives the education to facilitate this. Home Economics is in a unique and desirable position to provide school based nutrition education. A Home Economics education can address the practical implications for the individual and the practical implications for the everyday. A Home Economics education responds to societal issues and empowers young people to be proactive in their own lives. Home Economics teaches young people to take ownership over their lifestyle, to be responsible and accountable.

Home economics as an additional learning domain

HEIA(Q) envisages the refocusing of Home Economics and its inclusion as an additional Learning Domain in the Senior Phase of Learning. HEIA(Q) embraces this opportunity to refocus Home Economics education in Queensland schools towards our contemporary society. Rather than re-

conceptualise Home Economics in this document HEIA(Q) commits to working with the profession and QSA on this task.

We are prepared to make a substantial contribution towards ensuring a discipline with an unequivocal focus on:

- the microeconomics of the family and the individual,
- the impacts of increasing technologies on relationships,
- the impacts of lifestyle choices on individual wellbeing,
- the impacts of consumerism on society and the environment,
- the impacts of policy on the individual, families and communities,
- effective participation in interdependent new times,
- advocacy for ethics and social justice,
- the role of the individual within work, family and community environments, and
- the interconnectedness of all life.

This refocused Home Economics education would make a substantial contribution in preparing young Queenslanders for their post-school pathways.

Reference List

Costello P (1990) First Speech To Parliament - 10/5/1990, available online, retrieved 20 May 2007 from <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/firstspeech.asp?id=CT4>.

Edgar D (2007) *The war over work*, The Journal of the Home Economics Institute of Australia, 14 (1), 2-9.

Queensland Studies Authority (2007) *Subject Enrolments and Levels of Achievement in Authority Subjects by Subject, Class and Sex*, available online, retrieved 25 May 2007 from http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/yrs11_12/statistics/2006/QS1123C_2006.pdf.

World Health Organisation (1986) *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion*, available online, retrieved 22 May 2007 from http://www.who.int/hpr/NPH/docs/ottawa_charter_hp.pdf.