National Islamic studies curriculum: Process, expectations, quality control
What we heard so far about Islamic studies?

• I will not repeat what we heard yesterday about Islamic studies, but...

• …what are the problems with existing Islamic studies according to teachers, coordinators, students and parents?
Understanding the actual problems holistically can allow us to move forward in the mapping of an Islamic studies curriculum
Our empirical research found that the absence of a national (or even local) Islamic studies curriculum has resulted in a number of challenges.
No defined aims and outcomes for Islamic Studies.

Lack of clarity and cohesion among staff and between coordinators about Islamic studies.
• An apparent **lack of physical resources** has resulted in the creation of teaching aides such as booklets by individual teachers.

• This is leading to **increased pressure upon staff** to supplement teaching in classes and is resulting in a **fractured approach** to teaching Islamic Studies.

• The content of Islamic Studies is **repetitive and low-level** (no critical thinking or addressing of contemporary issues).
Senior students feel deprived of the opportunity to develop skills and more in-depth Islamic knowledge as they progress through the years.

Instead, students complained of repetition of basic knowledge from primary through to secondary school, leading to a perceived sense of stagnation in their study of Islam (contrary to ACARA’s quality criteria).
The role and place of Islamic Studies

• Regardless of how one defines the ‘Islamic,’ the role of Islamic studies in Islamic schools is undisputable.

• However, in the present study we found that there is confusion among coordinators, teachers, and school leaders as to the role and place of Islamic Studies.

• What is the place of Islamic studies in Islamic schools?
The lack of ‘clarity’ about what is to be taught leads to a failure to engage in classroom discussions, especially on practical issues of interest to the students, as our research revealed.
Our research reveals that aside from some stand-out teachers, teachers ignore or refuse to discuss topics with students (‘accommodating the reality’ is absent) that do not form part of the core content of the lesson or unit (teaching methods are ‘inflexible’).
The problem with this approach, as expressed by student participants, is that it contributes to frustration because they “expect deeper understandings” of Islam through inquiry as to the ‘why,’ (ACARA) as well as the reasoning behind Islamic principles on a variety of issues relevant to their lives.
Outcomes according to students

Students told us that they want “depth in real life issues,” to learn as Muslims “how to live in society” (to become functional Muslims), and to gain the knowledge and skills to “apply what is being learnt.”
Outcome

Islamic Studies teachers argue that they are restricted in what they can teach because they lack the ‘usual’ learning area/subject information (provided for other reaming key learning areas and subjects), guidelines or structures.

Therefore, they do not have the tools to navigate outside of the content.
How can we create an IS curriculum consistent with Australian national curriculum?

Setting the *expectations* (which is discoverable only through empirical research that asks students about their own expectations of Islamic studies) for what all young Australian Muslims need to learn, regardless of their background.
For effective implementation of the curriculum, learning areas and subjects relevant to their lives, and support material for teachers needs to be developed.
We require extensive and collaborative development process.
The process should be **guided by** the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), and the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA).
The curriculum development process would need to involve four interrelated phases:

1. Curriculum shaping,

2. Curriculum writing,

3. Preparation for implementation,

What is important in the process of development of an Islamic Studies curriculum is the quality of the product and process.
Among other criteria, the quality of the curriculum would include:

• **Clarity about what ‘is to be taught across the years or bands of schooling and the quality of learning expected of students as the progress through school’** (ACARA 2012),
Flexibility in the curriculum so that it can:

– ‘accommodate the reality [sic] of student, teacher and school diversity’ (ACARA 2012)

(for example, this would include an awareness of the various schools of thoughts – madhahib - operating within any given school and practices by students, and accommodating them, which helps avoid teacher’s bias that students often complain about)
– ‘has high standards and expectations that are challenging yet realistic’ (ACARA 2012).
• Is established on ‘a strong evidence base’ (ACARA 2012) (as the Islamic tradition would also demand).
We could also add to the list the following (but not exhaustive) criteria:

• **Is cognisant of Islamic worldview(s)** (not discussed here, as it is the subject of other authors in this book, and is beyond the scope of this chapter).

• **Is pedagogically responsive** to an ‘Islamic’ context (Islamic schools) and the needs of **Australian** Muslim students.
Collaborative effort that:

(i) involves high-level curriculum expertise nationwide,

(ii) provides opportunities for national consultation (with Islamic schools and experts from diverse fields),

(iii) ensure high-quality curriculum document.
CITE started the process:

1. Appointment of experts in: Islamic studies; pedagogical approaches; curriculum design to scope the process

2. Began scoping the project and identified that it would take 3-4 years, and around $500,000

3. Developed fully accredited Grad Cert and Grad Diploma (Islamic Education); and a Master Teaching (Islamic pedagogy)

4. Began consulting with ISSA members
THANK YOU