

CSCNEPA

Developing a twenty-first century school curriculum for all Australian students

A working paper prepared for the Curriculum
Standing Committee of National Education
Professional Associations

CSCNEPA

membership and purpose

Curriculum Standing Committee of National Education Professional Associations

Membership

Chairs and Directors of the following organisations:

- ▶ Australian Curriculum Studies Association
- ▶ Australian Primary Principals Association
- ▶ Australian Secondary Principals Association
- ▶ Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia
- ▶ Association of Principals of Catholic Secondary Schools of Australia
- ▶ Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council
- ▶ Australian Council for Educational Leaders
- ▶ Australian College of Educators
- ▶ Australian Education Union
- ▶ Australian Independent Education Union
- ▶ Australian Council of Deans of Education
- ▶ Australian Joint Council of Professional Teaching Associations
- ▶ Australian Association for Research in Education
- ▶ National Education Forum

Purpose

1. To identify and articulate the curriculum challenges for educating young people for the 21st century.
2. To contribute to the development of national approaches to curriculum.
3. To provide considered and timely responses to policy proposals and directions in curriculum that are of significance to Australia.
4. To contribute to and promote constructive and informed curriculum debate in Australia.

Developing a twenty-first century school curriculum for all Australian students

A working paper prepared for CSCNEPA, August 2007

1. Preamble

- 1.1 This working paper provides a contribution to the current debate around the **most productive national approaches to curriculum work in Australia**. It arises from the work undertaken for CSCNEPA¹ and the deliberations of the Curriculum Standing Committee during 2007 and builds on the Australian Curriculum Studies Association's (ACSA) *A Guide to Productive National Curriculum Work for the Twenty First Century*.² In its current form it is neither a formal nor endorsed statement but a working paper in progress that is being circulated as a contribution to the thinking about how national approaches to curriculum work can best contribute to the learning outcomes of young people. It is intended to provide an informed basis for continued thinking and sharing of perspectives about what a twenty-first century curriculum should achieve for all Australian students and how we can achieve it.
- 1.2 The work of CSCNEPA was communicated to MCEETYA in April this year. This communication indicated that CSCNEPA, *in the context of the current debate about national approaches to curriculum*, would be developing a statement for policy makers and practitioners outlining what a curriculum (or curricula) for the twenty-first century should achieve. Similarly, such a paper was foreshadowed in ACSA's submission to the Senate Inquiry into Academic Standards of School Education. The Senate submission indicated that one of CSCNEPA's priority activities has been to identify common ground around describing a curriculum for the twenty-first century fit for the nation's schools.
- 1.3 This working paper has been informed by the April 2007 release of a report by the states and territories produced by a steering committee of the Council for the Australian Federation (CAF), *Federalist Paper 2: The Future of Schooling in Australia*. This report includes statements on curriculum using as a starting point *The Adelaide Declaration of National Goals for Schooling for the Twenty-First Century*. The report goes beyond this to articulate new curriculum challenges and to identify what a curriculum must achieve for students and how a national approach can best meet these objectives.

1 The Curriculum Standing Committee of National Education Professional Associations (CSCNEPA) is made up of representatives of 14 of the nation's peak educational professional associations.

2 Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 2006, 'A Guide to Productive National Curriculum Work for the Twenty First Century', in *Curriculum Perspectives*, vol. 26, no. 4, p. 5.

- 1.4 ACSA's submission to the Senate Inquiry also observed that there already are National Statements in the areas of 'Engaging young Australians with Asia', 'Values education' and 'Languages education', and that the recently developed and agreed *Statements of Learning* for English, Mathematics, Science, Civics and Citizenship, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) articulate the essential skills, knowledge, understandings and capacities that all young Australians should have the opportunity to learn by the end of Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. State and territory school authorities have agreed to align their curricula with these statements by 2008.
- 1.5 This working paper is informed by the work described earlier and **adopts the position that national approaches to curriculum offer the opportunity to further advance curriculum policy and practice**. The paper identifies the kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes young people should be exposed to in the compulsory years of schooling. The paper illustrates the need to continually review what is being taught in these years. The working paper suggests that national approaches to curriculum work should promote learning that arises from disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies as well as learning that promotes the development of physical, personal and social competencies.
- 1.6 The paper is supplemented by two appendices. Appendix 1 outlines an indicative curriculum statement consistent with the position adopted within this paper. Appendix 2 is a document prepared by the U.K.'s Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, which provides a conceptual framework for a twenty-first century curriculum. Again it is included for indicative purposes only.

2. The global context

- 2.1 A twenty-first century curriculum must take into account where Australia and its citizens are located, geographically and in other ways, within a global context. Commentators on society suggest that the world that is ahead for school leavers will have the following features.
- ▶ Globalisation of economies — economic power will be centred more on China and India.
 - ▶ Reliance on international markets — entrepreneurs and workers will need to have a global outlook and international competence.
 - ▶ Likely environmental degradation due to such factors as water and energy shortages, global warming, and pandemics (e.g., AIDS and Avian Flu) — global problems will require international cooperation for global solutions, citizens with a sound knowledge of local and world-wide environmental issues, and a willingness to change societal habits in the interests of global sustainability.
 - ▶ Insecurity of nations — citizens will need to be able to engage with national and international issues of security, understand the need to build alliances, and understand the factors that generate conflict and mistrust between nations.
 - ▶ Internationalisation of employment — accelerated international migration, increased opportunities for working overseas and a greater use of multinational work teams will require citizens with heightened cultural awareness, second language skills and sophisticated interpersonal skills.
 - ▶ A knowledge economy will be the generator of most wealth and jobs — citizens will be needed with the capacity to identify problems, to work in multidisciplinary teams to identify solutions, to manage complex and multidimensional tasks, to synthesise ideas, and to communicate effectively.

These features point to the kinds of knowledge, skills and attitudes that the curriculum should assist young people to develop.

3. Purposes of a twenty-first century curriculum

- 3.1 Within the Australian context, the broad overarching purposes of a twenty-first century curriculum should be to strengthen civil society and participative democracy, to promote individual development and social cohesion, to develop economic prosperity and environmental sustainability and to prepare students for active global citizenship. These **national purposes** underpin an understanding of the role that education needs to play in ensuring that all young Australians are prepared for life in the twenty-first century.
- 3.2 A curriculum for the twenty-first century therefore should enable all students to gain an understanding of the factors that shape societies' economic, social and belief systems and to develop the personal qualities and skills required for them to be informed and responsible participants in a society that is becoming increasingly global in nature and diverse in composition and outlook.
- 3.3 However, the success of a twenty-first century curriculum will be dependent on what is experienced by young people in and out of classrooms — the result of an engaging, high quality teaching–learning process — and on the extent to which it contributes to equity and social justice, and promotes engagement, achievement and excellence. That is, consideration of a twenty-first century curriculum and **any national approach to curriculum** needs to go beyond content and skills. Student learning is dependent upon motivation and engagement. Curriculum statements will need to be flexible and responsive to diversity and designed so that teachers can tailor learning experiences to the interests and needs of students.

4. National approaches to curriculum work

- 4.1 In CSCNEPA dialogue we have understood 'National approaches to curriculum' to be of at least three types.³ The first type is one about the **National sharing** of materials, resources, and professional development opportunities. The second type is **National collaboration**, where the states and territories and the Federal Government collaborate on developing greater conceptual consistency and alignment with twenty-first century needs in the formal curriculum (for example *Statements of Learning*). The third type is the closest to the 'popular' meaning of **National curriculum**, and could result in a single, formal, official curriculum at the national level with subject descriptions and associated assessment regimes. Current public discussion regarding the 'National curriculum' tends to relate to this third type. However, a variation of this can be found in the MCEETYA Decision of April 2007 where Ministers made a commitment to go beyond working together to share high quality curriculum material (Type 1 and Type 2) to working together to develop **nationally consistent curricula** that will set core content and achievement standards that are expected of students at the end of their schooling and at key junctures during their schooling, starting with English, mathematics and science. Ministers agreed that these standards would form the basis for the National Testing and Measurement Program.
- 4.2 Studies by ACER have revealed that in the **senior years** there is substantial commonality across states and territories in terms of curriculum content in a number of key discipline areas. The national approach adopted to further this work, in the senior years, has been to focus on individual discipline-based subjects and to proceed to clarify what the core content and standards within a particular subject should be. The outcome of this national approach to curriculum work will be a set of national subjects and, whilst such an approach and outcome can be seen to be valuable (achieving efficiency through consistency) for the senior years of schooling, it will not meet the curriculum needs in the compulsory years.

³ These 'types' of national approaches to curriculum have been identified by Professor Alan Reid of the University of South Australia. Refer ACSA Forum Report on *National Approaches to Curriculum* (February 2006) and ACSA Symposium Report on *Approaches to National Curriculum Work* (August 2006), available from www.acsa.edu.au

- 4.3 In the **compulsory years** the curriculum is structured to provide students with the tools for learning, with a breadth of learning experiences and with a general understanding of core concepts and ideas in key discipline areas. Schooling in the compulsory years is also concerned with developing personal attributes, skills and values and with expanding young people's horizons and aspirations. Moreover, in the compulsory years the curriculum needs to expose students to the kinds of learning that will prepare them to succeed in the workplace, help them become well-informed and thoughtful citizens, and enable them to participate in a broad spectrum of human cultural activities.
- 4.4 By the senior secondary years the curriculum undertaken by students is diverse, the stakes and learning demands are high and the assessment is content-specific and often competitive. There is limited scope for other kinds of learning to be promoted. Whilst some systems are introducing certification rules that require students to include a community or work-based experience in their senior course of study, such initiatives will not compensate for a curriculum in the compulsory years that has failed to enable students to gain an understanding of the factors that shape societies' economic, social and belief systems and to develop the personal qualities and skills required for them to be informed and responsible participants in a society that is becoming increasingly global in nature and diverse in composition and outlook.
- 4.5 Learning in the compulsory years needs to consist of more than discipline learning. As noted earlier, national collaborative work (Type 2) has already produced *Statements of Learning*, and state and territory school authorities have agreed to align their curricula with these statements by 2008. Indeed, **as has been illustrated in current curriculum reforms in each of the states and territories**, in the compulsory years the curriculum needs to incorporate learning that arises from disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies as well as learning that promotes the development of physical, personal and social competencies.
- 4.6 Hence, national approaches to curriculum work in the compulsory years need to be more attuned to the stages of students' learning and to the nature of the curriculum in the early and middle years — building on current state, territory and national work. Such approaches would focus on what learning all students need to participate in prior to undertaking diversified senior subjects and how this learning might best be packaged (i.e., what is best learnt through disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies) so that learning experiences are coherent, grounded and engaging. This would represent a process for further refining what is included in the curriculum and for ensuring that there is adequate time for in-depth learning and for local and personal studies needs to be developed.
- 4.7 In the early years, the emphasis is clearly on the foundations of learning. In the middle years, the emphasis needs to be on developing:
- ▶ deep knowledge and skills that support advanced learning,
 - ▶ the ability to create new ideas and translate them into practical applications,
 - ▶ general competencies that underpin flexible thinking,
 - ▶ a capacity to work with others, and
 - ▶ an ability to move across subject disciplines to develop new expertise.

- 4.8 By the completion of the compulsory years all students ideally should have acquired the understanding that helps to explain society, that gives them a sense of humanity's achievements and failures and a sense of their place in history, that gives them an appreciation of the arts and an understanding of other peoples and cultures and a general overview of how our world functions.
- 4.9 The approaches to national curriculum work most suited for these emphases would seek to involve and combine curriculum generalists and 'specialists' from a variety of subject disciplines and other learning fields. The objective of such an approach to national curriculum work would be to maximise opportunities for connecting studies so that in-depth and integrated learning was facilitated and to ensure that entrenched views about content could be challenged and resolved through dialogue referenced to the broader purpose of learning in the compulsory years.
- 4.10 As well as framing the curriculum for the compulsory years, any national approach to curriculum will need to produce further changes in the way curriculum is assessed and achievements are reported. Currently, many attempts by schools to develop generic skills (e.g., personal and interpersonal skills and thinking skills), to promote interdisciplinary and group learning and to promote in-depth and authentic learning tend to be undercut by assessment regimes that largely test the recall and manipulation of facts and the ability to mimic procedures associated with a particular discipline. Assessment practices such as open-book exams, timed problem-solving tasks, work tasks based on project briefs and reports and assessment by exhibition will need to be given greater emphasis. Student reports will also need to include statements of achievement standards in 'soft skills' areas and/or 'compliance' statements related to satisfactory participation in such things as service work, work placement and community or team-based work.

5. Support for improving twenty-first century curriculum learning

- 5.1 The effective implementation of 'National Approaches to Curriculum' in the compulsory years, **with the emphasis on Type 2 collaboration**, as envisaged in this paper, will be vital for the future social and economic wellbeing of young people and the future prosperity of all Australians. However, the result of this national work should be seen as a further stage in the process of providing all young people with a curriculum that is appropriate for the twenty-first century. There seems little point in stating the 'why' and 'what' of learning in a national statement on curriculum without also addressing the most difficult part — the 'how' to implement a nationally agreed curriculum for the twenty-first century.
- 5.2 To have an impact on the teaching and learning that is conducted in classrooms around Australia, a 'national curriculum' of a Type 2 variety, will also need to stimulate and support systems and schools to implement improvements to curriculum planning, classroom teaching and learning, student management and assessment regimes that are consistent with the approaches outlined in the nationally agreed twenty-first century curriculum.
- 5.3 In order to support change at state and territory level that will be necessary to effectively implement **a twenty-first century curriculum produced from national effort**, substantial high quality curriculum materials will need to be developed together with high quality professional learning support — and will need to continue to be provided, that is, **Type 1 collaboration**.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 This working paper outlines what it is believed a twenty-first century curriculum must achieve for all Australian students and how we can go about producing it. A national collaborative effort (Type 2) should be about producing a twenty-first century curriculum designed to have all students leaving school with a broad general knowledge that helps to explain society, gives students a sense of humanity's achievements and failures, gives them a sense of their place in history, gives them an appreciation of the arts, gives them an understanding of other peoples and cultures and a sense of how the world works.
- 6.2 This paper contends that the key years for developing these understandings required for effective participation in society, are the middle years. Whilst the MCEETYA decision of April 2007 to develop nationally consistent curricula is intended to produce added value to the already produced *Statements of Learning*, this working paper argues for **deeper collaborative national curriculum work** if we are to produce a twenty-first century curriculum adequate to the global context outlined earlier and our ambition for a curriculum which contributes to equity, social justice, success and excellence for all young people.
- 6.3 Therefore, this working paper calls for national approaches to curriculum work, building on current state, territory and national efforts, which **enable ongoing dialogue** about, and act as a catalyst for improving:
- ▶ the way that curriculum work is undertaken,
 - ▶ the way that the school curriculum is 'packaged' for the different stages of schooling,
 - ▶ the content that has been traditionally taught in the school's versions of the disciplines,
 - ▶ the concepts, skills, attitudes and values that are explicitly taught, encouraged and assessed by schools,
 - ▶ current assessment regimes so that greater encouragement and reward is provided for students who demonstrate logic and problem solving skills and the capacity to work with others,
 - ▶ the way school timetables, lessons and learning activities are constructed,
 - ▶ the way that teachers work so that isolation is replaced with collaboration, and
 - ▶ the way that teachers are trained and retrained.

Appendix 1. An indicative twenty-first century curriculum

The following is a brief, indicative only twenty-first century curriculum to stimulate further debate and dialogue. It is consistent with the position outlined earlier in the working paper.

- A1.1 In order to be prepared for effective participation in twenty-first century society, by the time they leave school *all students* will need to have experienced a curriculum that assists them to develop the following indicative list of knowledge, skills and understandings. The list illustrates that the learning young people need extends beyond the concepts and skills that are usually contained in discipline-based school subjects and draws upon a number of the most recent state and territory formal curriculum statements which have already anticipated what a twenty-first century curriculum should achieve for all Australian students.

A1.2 Upon completion of the compulsory years, all young people should have experienced a curriculum that supports them to:

- ▶ be able to receive, retrieve and express increasingly complex ideas and information in visual, written and spoken form. This will require them to be highly competent in:
 - ▶ assembling, manipulating and interpreting numbers and other mathematical constructs,
 - ▶ listening, reading, writing, viewing and speaking, and
 - ▶ presenting information in a variety of forms using a variety of media.

Why? Because creativity, imagination, adaptability, social competence, problem identification and solving, and the capacity for informed decision making depend upon a good facility in language, reading and interpreting number-based information, and in presenting ideas and findings.

- ▶ have personal and interpersonal skills so they are able to:
 - ▶ sustain a healthy lifestyle and build positive relations with others,
 - ▶ establish a values framework that embraces a concern for others, and
 - ▶ understand and reflect on their personal motives and behaviours and, if need be, change these to sustain personal wellbeing and support the wellbeing of others.

Why? Because well developed skills in these areas promote self esteem, happiness, and the capacity to participate in a rich social, community and work life.

- ▶ have an historical and contemporary understanding of humanity and human society including a basic knowledge of psychology and philosophy.

Why? Because political, economic and spiritual theories and beliefs are key shapers of our world and young people need to understand how differences in these domains arose, and play out in societies in terms of values, behaviour and civic institutions.

- ▶ have an understanding of science and technology through a knowledge of specific scientific content, the history and philosophy of science, and of how applications of science and technology contribute to and impact on the world.

Why? An understanding of science and the place of science and technology in society is necessary for an understanding of our world, and of our past, present and possible futures.

- ▶ be aesthetically and creatively aware, be familiar with cultural activities and artefacts, know who have been significant contributors to cultural life in its various forms; and be supported to become producers, supporters, and consumers of cultural life.

Why? Because everyone should be equipped to participate in, appreciate and benefit from the cultural and artistic life of their society.

- ▶ be global in outlook, see themselves as citizens of the world, be culturally aware and sensitive of other societies, and be proficient in a second language.

Why? Because world social cohesion requires an understanding and appreciation of cultural difference, and the global workplace requires citizens with heightened cultural awareness and second language skills.

- ▶ be environmentally aware and ecologically responsible.

Why? Because the continuation of the planet as a place for human and other living organisms to inhabit depends upon how nature's resources are used and so the environment deserves to be singled out as an essential area for study and action.

Appendix 2. A conceptual framework for the structure of a twenty-first century curriculum

The following draft document has been prepared by the U.K.'s Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). It provides a conceptual framework for a twenty-first century. Again it is included for indicative purposes only.

Working draft July 2007

A big picture of the curriculum



Three key questions

The curriculum aims to enable all young people to become

Curriculum aims	Successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve	Confident individuals who are able to lead safe, healthy and fulfilling lives	Responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society
Every child matters outcomes	Be healthy Stay safe	Enjoy and achieve Make a positive contribution	Achieve economic wellbeing
Focus for learning	Attitudes and attributes e.g. determined, adaptable, confident, risk-taking, enterprising	Skills e.g. literacy, numeracy, ICT, personal learning and thinking skills	Knowledge and understanding e.g. big ideas that shape the world

1

What are we trying to achieve?

2

How do we organise learning?

The curriculum as an entire planned learning experience underpinned by a broad set of common values and purposes

Components	Lessons	Locations	Environment	Events	Routines	Extended hours	Out of school
Learning approaches	A range of approaches e.g. enquiry, active learning, practical and constructive	In tune with human development	Building on learning beyond the school including community and business links	Matching time to learning need e.g. deep, immersive and regular frequent learning	Opportunities for spiritual, moral, social, cultural, emotional, intellectual and physical development	Using a range of audience and purpose	Including all learners with opportunities for learner choice and personalisation

Whole curriculum dimensions

Overarching themes that have a significance for individuals and society, and provide relevant learning contexts:
 Identity and cultural diversity — Healthy lifestyles — Community participation — Enterprise —
 Global dimension and sustainable development — Technology and the media — Creativity and critical thinking.

Statutory expectations

Communication, language and literacy	Creative development	Knowledge and understanding of the world	Mathematical development	Personal, social and emotional development	Physical development								
A & D	Ci	D & T	En	Ge	Hi	ICT	Ma	MFL	Mu	PE	PSHE PW, EV+FC	RE	SC

3

How well are we achieving our aims?

To make learning and teaching more effective so that learners understand quality and how to improve

Is integral to effective teaching and learning

- Draws on a wide range of evidence of pupils' learning
- Promotes a broad and engaging curriculum
- Maximises pupils' progress
- Gives helpful feedback for the learner and other stakeholders
- Helps identify clear targets for improvement
- Links to national standards which are consistently interpreted
- Informs future planning and teaching
- Uses tests and tasks appropriately
- Embraces peer- and self-assessment

Assessment fit for purpose

To secure

- Attainment and improved standards
- Behaviour and attendance
- Civic participation
- Healthy lifestyle choices
- Further involvement in education, employment or training

Accountability measures

QCA has adapted this diagram with thanks to their colleagues at the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA).

WHAT are you trying to achieve?

Resource B

The new aims

We want the curriculum to enable all young people to become:

- ▶ successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve
- ▶ confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives
- ▶ responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society.

Successful learners who...

- ▶ have the essential learning skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology
- ▶ are creative, resourceful and able to solve problems
- ▶ have enquiring minds and think for themselves to process information, reason, question and evaluate
- ▶ communicate well in a range of ways
- ▶ understand how they learn and learn from their mistakes
- ▶ are able to learn independently and with others
- ▶ know about big ideas and events that shape our world
- ▶ enjoy learning and are motivated to achieve the best they can now and in the future
- ▶ are able to critique, weigh evidence and make judgements.

Confident individuals who...

- ▶ have a sense of self-worth and personal identity
- ▶ relate well to others and form good relationships
- ▶ are self-aware and deal well with their emotions
- ▶ make informed and ethical judgements
- ▶ become increasingly independent, are able to take the initiative and organise themselves
- ▶ make healthy lifestyle choices
- ▶ are physically competent and confident
- ▶ take managed risks and stay safe
- ▶ recognise their talents and have ambitions.

Responsible citizens who...

- ▶ are well prepared for life and work
- ▶ are enterprising
- ▶ are able to work cooperatively with others
- ▶ respect others and act with integrity
- ▶ understand own and others' cultures and traditions and have a strong sense of their own place in the world
- ▶ appreciate the benefits of diversity
- ▶ challenge injustice, are committed to human rights and strive to live peaceably with others
- ▶ sustain and improve the environment, locally and globally
- ▶ take account of the needs of present, future generations in the choice they make
- ▶ can change things for the better
- ▶ are able to handle the conflicting values they encounter in society.