



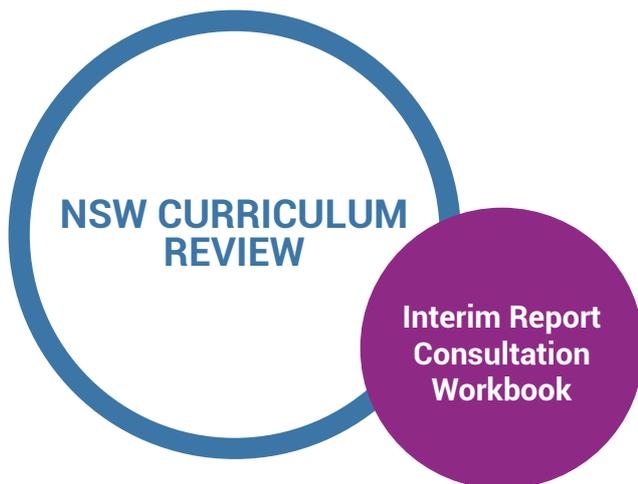
NSW CURRICULUM REVIEW

Interim Report Consultation Workbook

www.nswcurriculumreview.nesa.nsw.edu.au

NSW Education Standards Authority





In May 2018 the NSW Government announced a comprehensive review of the New South Wales (NSW) school curriculum from Kindergarten to Year 12 to 'ensure that the NSW education system is properly preparing students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century'.

Professor Geoff Masters, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Council for Educational Research, is leading the review.

The Interim Report of the Review has now been released. The Interim Report has been produced as a progress report and a basis for consultation on the broad directions it identifies. Following this consultation a final report will be prepared, including recommendations, and delivered to the Minister in the first half of 2020.

The Interim Report is informed by a first phase of public consultation on the NSW Curriculum Review, held between September and November 2018. Over 2,100 written submissions were received. The Interim Report also draws on educational research and lessons from other jurisdictions.

Purpose of this document

The Interim Report is open for public consultation. This Workbook has been developed to support the consultation process. It includes the Executive Summary from the Interim Report, the Terms of Reference for the Review, and an outline of the Interim Report's major proposals. The Workbook provides questions 'for exploration'. These may be helpful in reflecting and providing feedback on the Review's proposals.

The full Interim Report is available on the NSW Curriculum Review website.



Visit the NSW Curriculum Review website (www.nswcurriculumreview.nesa.nsw.edu.au) to:

- access the full Interim Report;
- find resources to help in developing a submission;
- read articles on curriculum reforms and related topics; and
- access updates on our consultation activities.

**Public consultation is now open
Submissions close on Friday 13 December 2019**

WORKBOOK

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OVERVIEW OF REFORM DIRECTIONS

Extract from the NSW Curriculum Review Interim Report, Executive Summary

The Review of the New South Wales school curriculum has concluded that change is required. The changes proposed by the Review are significant. They relate to the amount and nature of syllabus content, the overall structure of the curriculum, and the focus of learning in the senior years of school. Given the depth of the proposed changes, detailed planning, trialling, testing and implementation will be required over an extended period of time – possibly a decade – although the work on some changes should begin immediately.

The long-term vision is for a future school curriculum that supports teachers to nurture wonder, ignite passion and provide every young person with knowledge, skills and attributes that will help prepare them for a lifetime of learning, meaningful adult employment and effective future citizenship.

Although the school curriculum has served students well and continues to provide the foundations for a quality education, the Review was presented with strong evidence of the need for change. Broader changes in society, and particularly increasing globalisation and advances in technologies, have changed forever the world in which students live, including future employment possibilities. With a rapidly expanding range of activities now being performed by machines or outsourced to low-wage economies, occupations of the future will require levels of knowledge and skill beyond the capabilities of current and emerging technologies, including those based on artificial intelligence. The new and urgent challenge for schools and the school curriculum is to ensure that all students reach levels of attainment currently achieved by only some. This challenge is being taken seriously by some school systems internationally that recognise the risk of growing numbers of students being left unemployable and economically disadvantaged throughout their lives, with likely implications for increasing social inequalities and tensions.

However, by some indicators, current trends in student attainment in this state appear to be in the opposite direction. Although there is evidence of improvement in reading levels in primary schools (based on NAPLAN tests conducted between 2008 and 2018), the proportion of NSW 15 year olds meeting minimally acceptable standards of reading, mathematical and scientific literacy has been in steady decline (based on PISA assessments conducted between 2000 and 2015). New South Wales students slipped from being among the highest performers in the world in 2000 to being near the OECD average in 2015.¹ In other words, while low-level skills are in declining demand in workplaces, the proportion of NSW 15 year olds with only low-level skills has been growing. Reforms to the content and structure of the curriculum, although only part of the solution, are essential in addressing this challenge.

Teachers who spoke with the Review made strong calls for change. They described many current syllabuses as overcrowded with content, impacting their ability to teach effectively. They commonly described being under time pressure to cover large numbers of syllabus 'dot-points'. As a result, they experience difficulty in slowing down teaching and re-teaching to ensure students have learnt; they have limited time to teach core ideas in depth, including by providing opportunities for students to apply their learning in a range of contexts; and they often have insufficient time to build skills in knowledge application through student projects and problem-based activities. The crowded nature of many syllabuses, particularly in primary schools, but throughout the years of school, was described as encouraging superficial coverage of material rather than teaching for understanding, exploring relevance and meaning, and providing opportunities for students to transfer and apply their learning.

Teachers described most (but not all) existing syllabuses as specifying what they are to teach, when they are to teach, and how long they are to spend teaching it. This often constrains their ability to make professional judgements about what individual students are ready to learn and to adapt their teaching

¹ Some submissions to the Review questioned the continuing usefulness of measures such as NAPLAN and PISA. It was claimed that some schools now train students for NAPLAN (possibly inflating current results) and that there are now other important outcomes of schooling not measured by these assessments. Although these claims may be valid, literacy and numeracy skills remain among the most important outcomes of schooling, and NAPLAN and PISA provide the best available data on recent state and national trends.

accordingly. Teaching becomes a process of delivering the specified year-level syllabus, ensuring it is fully covered, and then assessing and grading each student on how well they have learnt what has been taught. The inflexibility arising from the expectation that teachers will deliver the same content to all students within mandated (or recommended) hours means that some students are taught content for which they are not yet ready or require more time. As a result, these students struggle, tend to achieve low grades year after year, and sometimes fall further behind the longer they are in school. On the other hand, the most advanced students – who typically begin each school year five or six years ahead of the least advanced students in the year level – often are not adequately challenged by the content of year-level syllabuses. There was concern that many of these students are not being stretched to the levels of which they are capable. The strong call from many teachers was not only for a less crowded curriculum, but also for a more flexible curriculum that allows teachers to identify and better address individual learning needs.

There were also calls for change in the senior years of school. Although the Higher School Certificate is widely described as a world-class credential, submissions to the Review pointed out that learning in these years currently is driven by the needs of post-school destinations and is bifurcated into 'academic' (mainly knowledge-based) learning, usually to maximise ATAR for selection into universities, and 'vocational' (mainly skills-based) learning for specific occupations. Current arrangements were described as promoting artificial and unhelpful distinctions between academic and vocational learning, theory and application, and knowledge and skills. There was particular concern about the undervaluing of forms of learning that would better prepare all young people for future employment. Vocational courses were described as marginalised in current senior secondary arrangements and sometimes focused on low-level qualifications and skills for particular occupations that may or may not exist in the future.

There were also concerns about the 'academic' stream in the senior years. It was observed that, when the school leaving age was raised to 17, rather than reconsidering the kind of senior years curriculum that would be appropriate for the entire age cohort, it was assumed that most students would now follow the academic pathway through ATAR to university, and those who did not could undertake vocational studies. However, teachers questioned whether this assumption met the needs of every student. Teachers also expressed concerns about the limited forms of learning promoted by current external examinations. Some were concerned about cramming, the pre-preparation of answers, and the influence examinations have on learning priorities and approaches throughout the secondary school. Others expressed concerns about ATAR now being the dominant measure of 13 years of schooling and students attempting to 'game' ATAR through their choices of subjects.

This bifurcation of learning in the senior years parallels early 20th century attempts to cater for the growing number of 'non-academic' students entering lower secondary schooling. The 'academic' and 'non-academic' streams established at that time, with their separate courses and certificates, were eventually abolished in favour of common curriculum arrangements (core plus options) for all students. A long-term reform agenda for the senior years of school will be to develop a curriculum less focused on meeting the sometimes narrow needs of particular post-school destinations and more focused on providing every student with the broad knowledge, skills and attributes they will require for further learning, life and work.

Based on consultations and submissions to the Review, three broad areas of curriculum reform have been identified. These relate to the content of the curriculum, the structure of the curriculum and the senior school curriculum. Although these areas are inter-related, they also represent distinct areas of reform. Within each area, a number of 'reform directions' have been identified.

Reforming the Content of the Curriculum

The Review's first set of proposals address the content of the curriculum, including concerns that many syllabuses are currently overcrowded. They propose a reduction in the content of most syllabuses by prioritising what is central to each subject. The intention is to promote deep learning of core disciplinary knowledge. Although depth and breadth of learning are both important, the proposed changes preference deeper conceptual understanding over shallower coverage of extensive factual and procedural detail. The intended outcome is not quantitatively less teaching or learning, but teaching and learning refocused to develop deeper understandings and higher levels of skill.

The reduction of syllabus content should begin with the identification of what is essential to a subject – the core knowledge, concepts and principles at the heart of the discipline. These include disciplinary ways of thinking and working and the 'big ideas' around which less central detail can be organised and understood. In some subjects there may be relatively few of these. An indicator of the centrality of a concept or principle is likely to be its sustained relevance across the years of school and the fact that students develop deeper understandings of that concept or principle as they revisit it in different contexts.

Deep understanding includes being able to recognise how learning is relevant to, and can be applied in, different contexts. The mere acquisition of knowledge and skills is insufficient; opportunities to transfer and apply learning to new contexts should be an integral part of every subject throughout the years of school. Applications of learning, including to meaningful challenges and problems and through projects that students undertake, also provide opportunities to build students' skills in knowledge application – such as critical and creative thinking, using technologies, interpreting information/data, collaborating and communicating.

Teachers require time for teaching of this kind. The Review was told that the school curriculum had become more crowded in recent years because of additional topics schools have been asked to address. These topics often relate to specific health, safety or social concerns not being addressed elsewhere in society. Recent additions of this kind should be revisited to determine whether all are still required, and protocols developed to determine how topics could be added or deleted in the future.

There were other concerns that time for teaching was being eroded by increasing compliance requirements. Numerous references were made to 'box ticking' and paperwork now required of teachers. The New South Wales Education Standards Authority should investigate options for reducing the time teachers and school leaders currently spend on compliance activities.

Reference was made to other factors that have impinged on teachers' time for teaching, including a reported downward drift of curriculum content into earlier years of school and teaching aimed at preparing students for NAPLAN tests.

The Review also considered the role of the curriculum in specifying a common entitlement for learning. In the early years of school, every student should receive the support they require to establish solid foundations in literacy, numeracy and social and emotional development. These areas of learning and development should be prioritised over other areas of the curriculum and resourced to ensure that every student is on track in their learning from early childhood.

Reforming the Structure of the Curriculum

The Review's second set of proposals address the structure of the curriculum, including concerns about its lack of flexibility to meet individual learning needs. They address directly the fact that students in the same year of school currently differ widely in the points they have reached in their learning, meaning that some students are not yet ready for, and others are not sufficiently challenged by, common year-level syllabus expectations. The intention of these proposals is to support teachers in establishing where individuals are in their long-term progress so that every student can be provided with well-targeted and appropriately challenging teaching.

Given that some students are two to three years behind year-level expectations and others are two to three years ahead, the process of establishing where individuals are in their learning requires a larger frame of reference than a year-level syllabus. It requires a map of long-term progress in an area of learning across the years of school.

The Review is proposing the construction of a map of long-term progress in the form of a sequence of 'attainment levels' in each area of learning. These attainment levels will describe and illustrate increasing levels of knowledge, understanding and skill, independent of student age or year level. Teachers will use these levels to establish where individuals are in their learning, with the possibility of students in the same class being at different levels. For each attainment level, a syllabus will specify the knowledge, skills and understandings required to 'achieve' that level, and also indicate the kinds of teaching likely to be most appropriate for students working at that level.

The result will be a very different curriculum structure. Students will progress through a sequence of attainment levels, possibly at different times and rates, rather than all moving in a lock-step fashion from one year-level syllabus to the next. Importantly, this proposal relates to the structure of the curriculum, not the structure of schooling; it is assumed that most students will continue to be grouped by age. The objective is to assist teachers to better identify and address the widely varying levels of readiness and learning needs within each year group, recognising that well-targeted teaching will benefit every student.

The Review's proposals will set higher expectations for every student's learning. The sequence of attainment levels will provide a frame of reference for monitoring the progress individuals make. Every student should be expected to make excellent progress every year, regardless of their starting point. The Review also is proposing the introduction of a standard (a specified level of attainment) in each learning area that every student should be expected to reach – and ideally surpass – by the completion of their

schooling. Some students will reach this standard earlier than others. The sequence of attainment levels will provide a basis for monitoring throughout a student's schooling whether they are on track to achieve this standard.

These proposals also have implications for the assessment and reporting of student learning. Rather than grading each student's performance (A to E or equivalent) against the same year-level syllabus expectations, information will be provided about the highest attainment level a student has achieved in each subject at any given time and the progress they are making toward the achievement of the next level, as assessed by their teacher. In this way, parents/carers and students themselves will be provided with information about how a student is progressing and whether they are on track with learning expectations.

Reforming the Senior School Curriculum

The Review's third set of proposals address the senior secondary curriculum, including concerns about the bifurcated nature of 'academic' and 'vocational' learning, and concerns that learning in these years often is narrowed by the particular needs of post-school destinations.

A more integrated approach to learning is proposed based on a limited set of rigorous, high-quality, advanced courses. The intention is to ensure that every student is well prepared for further learning, life and work through learning that integrates knowledge, skills and attributes and prioritises both theory and application.

Currently, a very large number of courses (more than 170) are offered in the senior years of school. These include courses developed by NESA and other courses developed by schools, universities and VET providers. Concerns were expressed to the Review about the proliferation of courses, the associated call on resources, and the variable demands of current courses, some of which result in low-level VET qualifications. The conclusion of the Review is that there needs to be a consolidation of learning in the senior years, achieved through the long-term development of a smaller number of demanding, high-quality, advanced courses.²

Over time, it is proposed that every advanced course incorporate a mix of theory and application. This mix is likely to vary from course to course, but no course should be focused only on the acquisition of theory/knowledge or only on application/skills. The implication for existing 'academic' subjects is that they will need to give greater attention to applications of learning and to developing skills in applying knowledge. The implication for existing 'vocational' courses is that they will need to give greater attention to theory and to developing students' understandings of important concepts and principles in each area of learning. The goal in both cases is more advanced learning through the integration of theory and application.

To provide additional contexts for developing and assessing students' skills in applying knowledge – such as gathering, analysing and evaluating information; working with others; communicating; thinking critically; creating and evaluating solutions; and using technologies – the Review is proposing the introduction of a single 'major project' as a standalone component of the senior certificate. Students will choose the principal learning area for their project, which will be assessed by teachers using centrally provided criteria.

The Review is also proposing a common structure of progress and attainment in advanced courses, consistent with the curriculum structure in the earlier years of school. In each course, students will progress through a sequence of several attainment levels. In this sense, each advanced course will be 'modularised' with the possibility of recognising the achievement of individual modules in the form of 'micro-credentials' based on teachers' assessments of student achievement. In some existing subjects, these attainment levels will replace current performance 'bands'. Teachers' assessments against the attainment levels will provide the school-based component of course assessments.

In addition, it is proposed that, for every course, there will be an external assessment. In some courses, this may take the form of a written examination, as at present. In other courses, external assessments may take other forms such as independent evaluations of students' performances or work and supervised, online assessments of the content of individual modules/attainment levels.

Finally, the Review is proposing that advanced subjects be grouped into a new set of learning areas such as 'business, economics and financial services' and 'visual and performing arts and entertainment'. The aim is to reduce the academic/vocational distinction and to provide new focal points for partnerships with universities, vocational education providers and industries, and for improved career advice and guidance on post-school courses and pathways.

² This proposal recognises that there will continue to be a need for courses that are accessible to students with disability.

REFORMING THE CONTENT OF THE CURRICULUM

OBJECTIVE:

to promote **deep learning** through a less crowded curriculum that prioritises the development of core disciplinary knowledge, conceptual understandings and ways of thinking and working, together with skills in applying these in real-world contexts.

REFORM DIRECTION

1

Creating a less crowded curriculum

Address concerns about the 'overcrowding' of the curriculum and the resulting pressures on schools and teachers. In particular:

- commence a review of syllabuses to identify how the volume of mandated content can be reduced in most syllabuses (an appropriate objective might be to reduce mandated content by 15 to 20 per cent, on average);
- as part of this review, check syllabuses for clarity about what is mandatory and what is not;
- consider whether there has been a drift of content to earlier years of school and whether this has added to 'overcrowding' in the earlier years;
- review recent (past five years) requests that schools address extra-curricular topics to determine whether all are still required, and review protocols for adding such topics in the future; and
- ask the New South Wales Education Standards Authority to investigate options for reducing the time teachers and school leaders currently spend on compliance activities.

The main idea

Overcrowded and overly prescriptive syllabuses create pressure on teachers and schools. They 'crowd out' the time available to teach core knowledge, concepts and skills in depth and to meet the diverse needs of students. Many current NSW syllabuses are considered by teachers to include too much content and too much prescription. Teachers want a less crowded curriculum that gives more time and space for effective teaching.

Additional requirements on teachers and schools add to a sense of increasing pressure. These added requirements can be driven by policies or regulation imposed by NESA or individual school sectors, or reflect broader government and community expectations of schools. Effective and deliberate decision making, taking into account the impact of each new requirement on teacher workload and teaching time, is needed.

To note

Consultation suggested a lack of clarity on the part of some teachers about what was optional and what was mandatory. This is leading some teachers to take a 'better safe than sorry' approach to complying. Any curriculum redesign must consider how syllabuses, regulatory requirements and extra-curricular expectations are communicated to ensure clarity on what is mandatory, and what is not.

For exploration

- For which syllabuses is a reduction in the amount of content most required?
- Is it useful to specify an average percentage reduction as a target?
- If so, is 15 to 20 per cent too large? Too small?
- Is greater clarity about what is mandatory required?
- If so, how can the design of future syllabuses improve clarity about what is mandatory and what is optional?
- Are schools being asked to address too many additional (extra-curricular) topics?
- If so, what should be considered when making decisions about such additional topics?
- How can the burden of compliance activities be reduced for schools while still maintaining effective accountability and oversight?

REFORM DIRECTION**2**

Promoting deep understanding

As part of the process of reducing the amount of mandated content in syllabuses, identify and prioritise key knowledge, skills and understandings that are central to a subject, are developed in increasing depth across the years of school, and against which less central (factual and procedural) information can be understood and organised.

The main idea

Essential disciplinary knowledge, skills, concepts and principles should be the focus of teaching and learning in every subject. Identifying this core content should guide decision-making about what is central and how the amount of mandated content in syllabuses can be reduced. These core aspects of learning need to be incorporated into syllabuses in ways that promote their progressive development over time and provide opportunities for students to transfer and apply their increasingly deep understandings to a variety of meaningful contexts.

To note

The content of existing syllabuses is highly valued, but teachers consider that there is too much of it in many syllabuses. Prioritising what is essential to a subject does not mean that other content is unimportant. The curriculum must be structured in a way that is clear about what is central and thus prescribed, and what is optional and to be included at the discretion of school sectors, schools and/or teachers to address the needs of local school communities and their students.

For exploration

- Should mandatory syllabus content focus on core knowledge, skills and conceptual understandings?
- One way to identify mandatory 'core' content is to focus on knowledge, skills and concepts that are developed over a number of years. Is this an effective approach?
- What other approaches might be useful in identifying core content?

REFORM DIRECTION**3**

Building skills in applying knowledge

Include in the expected learning outcomes of every syllabus, throughout the years of school, the transfer and application of knowledge to meaningful contexts, as well as relevant skills in knowledge application (such skills might include critical and creative thinking, collaborating, interpreting information/data, communicating and using technologies).

The main idea

Students need sufficient time and opportunities to apply their knowledge in meaningful contexts. The ability to transfer and apply knowledge and understanding to new and unseen contexts is an indicator of the depth of student learning. Opportunities to apply knowledge can give practical meaning to otherwise abstract concepts, to support student learning, interest and motivation.

The skills of knowledge application are not separate from the development of expertise in a discipline - they are an integral part of learning in every school subject.

To note

Public discussions of this topic often refer to a knowledge-skills 'tension'. The position taken by the Review is that skills of knowledge application are developed in the context of engaging with disciplinary knowledge and so are an integral part of increasing competence and attainment in a subject.

For exploration

- Should skills in applying knowledge (such as critical and creative thinking, collaborating, interpreting information/data, communicating and using technologies) be included as learning priorities in every syllabus?
- Are skills of this kind more important in some stages of school than others?

REFORM DIRECTION**4**

A common entitlement

In revising the content of the curriculum, provide every student with a 'common entitlement' (that is, a specification of what every student is entitled, and expected, to learn while at school) that includes:

- prioritising literacy and numeracy and social and emotional development over other mandated areas of the curriculum for children who require this in the early years of school;
- studying a specified range of subjects and achieving at least minimally acceptable standards in those subjects by the completion of their schooling;
- developing a basic knowledge about, and appreciation of, Aboriginal languages, cultures and histories;
- learning a language other than English from primary school;
- undertaking rigorous, high quality learning in areas of personal strength and interest in the senior years of school; and
- developing deeper understanding of content through practical applications of learning to real-world problems and meaningful projects in the senior years of school.

The main idea

Public consultation reinforced NSW community support for the curriculum to reflect common outcomes (knowledge, skills and attributes) expected of every student, supported by access to a common core of curriculum content that every student should have an opportunity to learn. This is consistent with NSW's commitment to a schooling system characterised by equity and high expectations for every student and is reflected here as a commitment to a 'common entitlement'.

Strong support remains for existing mandated subjects (Key Learning Areas). In addition, the common entitlement must reflect knowledge, skills and learning experiences considered essential to develop the foundations needed by every student by the completion of their schooling to be successful in further study, work and life.

To note

The alternative to the specification of a 'common entitlement' would be for every student to pursue learning in their areas of interest. The position of the Review is that there is some learning that should be both an entitlement and an expectation of every student. In the context of this common entitlement, and during the secondary years, students should have increasing opportunities to pursue personal strengths and interests.

For exploration

- Should there be a 'common entitlement' for every student (that is, the specification of what every student is entitled, and expected, to learn while at school)?
- Should literacy and numeracy and social and emotional development be prioritised over other mandated areas of the curriculum for children who require this?
- Should the current set of mandated Key Learning Areas in primary schools and lower secondary schools be retained as a minimum, common entitlement and experience?
- Should every student be expected to develop a basic knowledge about, and appreciation of, Aboriginal languages, cultures and histories?
- Should every student be expected to study a language other than English from primary school?
- Should every student in the senior years of school be expected to apply their learning to real-world problems and meaningful projects?

REFORMING THE STRUCTURE OF THE CURRICULUM

OBJECTIVE:

to facilitate **targeted teaching** by reorganising syllabuses into a sequence of attainment levels to support teachers in establishing where individuals are in their learning, meeting individual learning needs, and monitoring whether students are on-track with year level expectations and to meet the standards expected of every student by the end of school.

REFORM DIRECTION**5**

Creating a more flexible curriculum

Commit to the development of a more flexible school curriculum that does not specify when teachers should teach specific content and how long they should spend teaching it, but instead provides a framework that enables teachers to establish the points students have reached in their learning and to identify appropriate next steps in teaching and learning.

The main idea

Successful learning depends on teachers being able to adapt and tailor teaching to individuals' background knowledge, understandings, interests and current levels of attainment. This requires a more flexible curriculum that enables teachers to be guided by their professional judgement about what to teach, when to teach and how long to spend teaching it. Current specifications of the timing and duration of teaching create expectations that every student will progress through the curriculum at the same rate. A more flexible curriculum would support teachers to establish where individual learners are in their learning at any given time and to decide what to do next to promote further learning. Student assessments should identify, acknowledge and communicate the progress that individuals make in their learning.

To note

The process of identifying where individuals are in their learning and targeting teaching accordingly is intended to ensure that every student is challenged and extended in their learning. The aim is for every student to make excellent progress every year, regardless of their starting point. In other words, meeting students at their points of need does not lower expectations, but raises expectations for every student's progress and ultimate attainment.

For exploration

- Is there a need for a more flexible curriculum that is less prescriptive about what teachers are to teach, when they are to teach it, and how long they are to spend teaching it?
- How realistic is the alternative conception of the curriculum as a frame of reference that enables teachers to establish where individuals are in their learning?
- What are implications for resources and accountability?

REFORM DIRECTION**6**

Restructuring the curriculum

In each Key Learning Area, reorganise the K-10 curriculum into a sequence of syllabuses, with each syllabus corresponding to a particular level of attainment (knowledge, understanding and skill) rather than a particular year of school.

The main idea

Research is clear that the way to maximise learning is to provide individual learners with learning opportunities at an appropriate level of challenge. In response to this, teachers are expected to differentiate their teaching to meet the varying needs of their students. This is challenging when teachers are faced with a common, often large, set of pre-specified, year-level learning outcomes to deliver to all students. A curriculum structured as a continuum of attainment levels would support teachers to monitor, report and respond to where students are in their learning progress.

To note

This proposal does not require schools to move away from the age-based classroom groupings typical in most schools. The point is to separate the structure of the curriculum from the structure of schools, not to change the structure of schools. Individual learning plans are also not a prerequisite of this approach. Explicit, whole-class teaching would remain important. The intention is to enable the better identification of the points students have reached in their long-term progress to identify best next steps for teaching.

For exploration

- How feasible would it be to reorganise syllabus content not into year levels but into a sequence of levels of increasing knowledge, understanding and skill?
- Is this more feasible in some learning areas than others?
- How practical would it be for a teacher to have students working at more than one attainment/syllabus level?
- What support is needed for systems, schools and teachers to meet the needs of students working at different attainment/syllabus levels in a classroom?

REFORM DIRECTION**7**

Setting high expectations

In each Key Learning Area, establish a standard that every student should meet by the completion of their schooling. This standard should be set at a level of knowledge, understanding and skill necessary to function effectively in adult life and should usually be met before commencing advanced study of that subject in the final years of school.

The main idea

Studies show that there are too many Australian students leaving school without the basics, particularly in literacy and numeracy, at a time when the skill demands of the workplace are increasing. Establishing expected standards of attainment in each Key Learning Area will provide a focus for monitoring, reporting and providing appropriate learning opportunities to support every student's learning.

To note

The setting of standards is not intended to create a barrier to prevent students from advancing. The intention is to identify explicitly the level of attainment expected of students in each Key Learning Area by the completion of their schooling. This level will provide a foundation for successful further study, work and life, but will not restrict access to more advanced study.

For exploration

- In Key Learning Areas, should there be an identified level of attainment (knowledge, understanding and skill) that every student should be expected to reach, at a minimum?
- Should this apply to all Key Learning Areas, and if not, in which Key Learning Areas should minimally acceptable levels of attainment be set?

REFORM DIRECTION

8

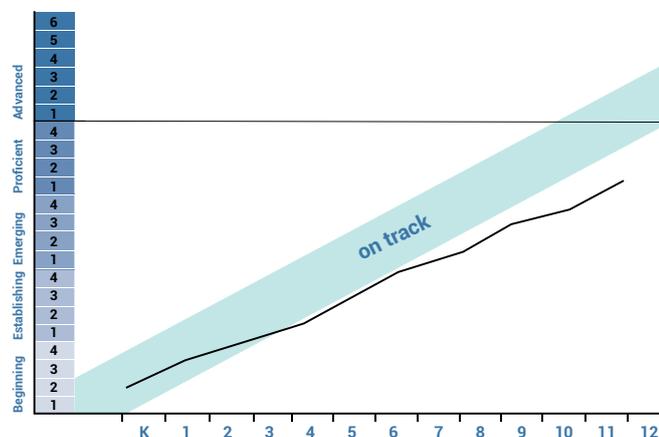
Monitoring whether learning is on track

In each Key Learning Area, encourage teachers' use of attainment levels as a frame of reference for monitoring and communicating students' learning trajectories and progress toward the achievement of the expected standard.

The main idea

The setting of clear standards that students are expected to reach by the completion of their schooling provides teachers with a way of monitoring whether students are 'on track' to achieve those standards. The use of attainment levels, rather than a specific expectation linked to a year of school, reinforces the structure of the curriculum as a continuum, with student progress monitored and communicated over time.

The Interim Report provides an example of how student progress might be tracked. Students would make progress through a sequence of attainment levels (shown below, on the left – numbering and labelling are just initial suggestions). The standard students are expected to reach is indicated by the horizontal line. The 'on track' region shows the levels students would need to reach in each year of school to be on track to achieve the standard. The hypothetical trajectory of one student who has drifted off track is shown.



To note

The diagram above would provide parents and carers (and teachers and students) with information about whether a student is 'on track' with expectations, given their year level. It recognises that, within each year level, students are likely to be working at a range of attainment levels and indicates whether a student is working within the expected range. The aim is to ensure that every student is on track from as early as possible in their schooling and that every student at least achieves (and ideally exceeds) the standard expected by the end of school.

For exploration

- Is the concept of a student being at least 'on track' through their school years a useful idea for the majority of students?
- What are the strengths and/or weaknesses of the 'on track' concept for monitoring student learning progress across the years of school?
- What are the resourcing implications for supporting a student who is performing below the 'on-track' expectation?

REFORM DIRECTION**9**

Ensuring continuity of learning

Make continuity of learning an objective in every school subject by minimising the impact of transitions between stages and years of school; providing curriculum structures that recognise and accommodate students' varying levels of attainment, regardless of year level; and removing structures that impose ceilings on how far students can progress in their learning.

The main idea

Within an area of learning, every student should be able to commence learning from where they are and continue their learning with few structural impediments and few limits on how far they can progress. This is a key to an 'inclusive' curriculum. In practice, continuity of learning often is undermined by transitions between stages or years of school – particularly if they result in changes in teaching approaches or learning environments or incorrect assumptions about what students are ready to learn. In addition, limits on learning can be imposed by low-level courses that restrict how far students are able to progress. The school curriculum should be restructured to enable the continuous, unrestricted learning of every student.

To note

The desirability of reducing the impact of transitions on the continuity of student learning does not mean that transitions (for example, between primary and secondary school) do not have value as markers in a student's increasing maturity and progress through school. Acknowledging such milestones will continue to be important.

For exploration

- How can the curriculum be structured to minimise disruptions to learning that often occur between stages or from one school year to the next?
- What would it mean to dispense with streaming (different courses) and to view students as being at different points on the same continuum of learning in a subject?
- What resources or support would systems / schools / teachers require to ensure greater continuity of student learning?

REFORM DIRECTION**10**

Assessing and communicating learning

In Key Learning Areas, replace grades against pre-specified year-level outcomes with information about the highest attainment level a student has achieved and the progress they are making toward the achievement of the next level – as assessed by their teacher. Provide this information in a form that also allows parents/carers to see whether a student is on track to achieve the proficient standard in the subject.

The main idea

A restructured and more flexible curriculum requires a different approach to assessing and reporting student learning. Marks or grades are designed to provide information about how well students have performed against common year-level syllabus expectations. But they are incapable of providing information about the points students have reached in their long-term learning or the progress they make over time. A sequence of levels of increasing attainment in a learning area provides a frame of reference for doing this and also for setting high expectations for every student's progress and attainment.

To note

A sequence of attainment levels not only provides a basis for establishing the point a student has reached in their long-term learning and for monitoring and evaluating their progress over time, but also can be used to decide and communicate (to parents/carers) whether they are on track with expectations for their age/year level. This is illustrated in the diagram in Reform Direction 8. A focus on progress provides information about a student's learning journey, not just point-in-time comparative data.

For exploration

- Should reporting be focused on communicating the points individuals have reached in their long-term progress in an area of learning?
- Should information on the progress students have made over time also become a greater focus for reporting?
- Would it be useful for parents and carers to know whether students were 'on track' to achieve the standards expected of them by the completion of their schooling?

REFORMING THE SENIOR SCHOOL CURRICULUM

OBJECTIVE:

to ensure every student is **well prepared** for further learning, life and work through rigorous senior secondary courses that integrate knowledge, skills and attributes and prioritise both theory and application in learning.

REFORM DIRECTION

11

Creating a more integrated curriculum

Commit to a long-term agenda to develop a more integrated approach to learning in the senior years of school through the development of a limited set of rigorous, high-quality 'advanced courses', each of which incorporates both theory and application and is designed to develop knowledge, understandings, skills and attributes for further learning, life and work.

The main idea

The senior secondary school is required to meet the learning needs, passions and interests of an increasingly diverse body of students. For many, the senior secondary school continues to feel dominated by preparation for university as the main post-school destination. For others, vocational options can focus too narrowly on skills needed for a particular industry or occupation. There is high demand across the community for the senior secondary curriculum to focus less on immediate post-school destinations and more on developing a strong foundation for ongoing learning, life and work for all students. Acknowledging the need for a robust underpinning of both theory and application for all options in the senior secondary curriculum would be an important step toward reducing the reported sense of hierarchy between the general education (or 'academic') and the range of program choices included within the vocational learning area.

To note

The development of a more integrated senior curriculum would be a long-term agenda requiring a number of years of planning, introduction and implementation. The Review's proposal for a smaller number of more integrated, high quality 'advanced courses' should not be confused with current uses of the word 'advanced' in relation to senior school courses.

For exploration

- Is the creation of a more integrated (less polarised into 'academic' and 'vocational') curriculum in the senior years a desirable long-term objective?
- Over time, should there be a reduction in the total number of subjects available in the senior secondary school by consolidating some existing subjects into rigorous, high-quality courses?
- What would be the implications of expecting every senior secondary course to include a balance of underpinning theory (knowledge and conceptual understanding) and transfer and application of knowledge?

REFORM DIRECTION**12**

Recognising progress and attainment

For most, if not all, advanced courses, structure the course as a sequence of attainment levels, replacing current achievement bands. Use teachers' assessments of the content of each attainment level (module) as the school-based component of a student's reported performance in the course. Supplement this with an external assessment of attainment, not necessarily in the form of a final written examination.

The main idea

For many students, the senior years currently are a period of preparation for end-of-school examinations. There is less focus on how students' knowledge, skills and understandings develop during these years. This proposal shifts attention to student progress (or growth) during the senior years, consistent with the focus in the earlier years of school. It is proposed that, in each advanced course, students progress through a small number of attainment levels (learning modules), with each level building on prior levels to develop progressively more sophisticated knowledge, deeper understandings and higher levels of skill. It is proposed that teachers assess students' achievement of each attainment level, with these assessments providing the school-based component of the course assessment and also possibly being recognised through 'micro credentials'.

To note

The key proposal here is to 'modularise' learning in each advanced course to provide a stronger focus on the development of students' knowledge, skills and understandings across these years. School-based assessments in each advanced course will provide information about this development. External assessments also may provide information about the achievement of each attainment level, or may be based on an end-of-school examination.

For exploration

- What would be the advantages and disadvantages of structuring each advanced course as a sequence of 'modules' or attainment levels through which students progressed?
- Would there be value in having teachers assess students' performances on each module and in making these assessments the basis of the school assessment in each course?
- What would be the workload implications?
- Should there be an externally assessed component of every advanced course (not necessarily in the form of a written examination)?
- What more could be done to address concerns that end-of-school examinations promote the memorisation and 'regurgitation' of pre-prepared answers?

REFORM DIRECTION

13

Introducing a major project

Introduce a major project that every student is to undertake in the senior years of school, usually as part of a project team and in a learning area of their choosing (the specifications for the project should require the application of learning to a complex problem or challenge that requires a range of knowledge and skills).

The main idea

The major project provides students with an opportunity to develop and demonstrate depth of understanding and skills in applying knowledge. Currently, this opportunity is not available to all students through their study of HSC subjects. The major project provides a context for deliberate teaching, learning and assessment of students' skills in the application of knowledge, such as critical and creative thinking, analysing and interpreting information/data, problem solving, working together, using technology and communicating.

To note

A major project in the final years of school is already a component of some other Australian senior secondary qualifications and the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program. Some current HSC subjects also require the completion of projects. The Review proposes that the major project would make up two of the ten required units for the HSC.

For exploration

- Should every student be required to undertake a major project as part of their studies in the senior years of school?
- How should the major project be implemented to:
 - support students to collaborate or work in teams?
 - identify and attribute effort of individual students?
 - minimise any advantages some students may have because of access to superior resources?
 - ensure access for all students (including those in remote settings)?
 - ensure consistent assessments of student work?
- Should the project be undertaken individually or as part of a project team?

REFORM DIRECTION**14**

Redefining learning areas

Introduce a new set of learning areas to reflect a more integrated approach to the curriculum in the senior years. Learning areas should be defined to incorporate all existing academic and vocational subjects, but the intention over time should be to reduce the number of subjects in each learning area to a set of high quality advanced courses, each of which includes both theory and application and is designed to develop knowledge, skills and attributes relevant to the learning area.

The main idea

This proposal addresses the current academic-vocational divide in the senior years of school. Currently, vocational education and training (VET) is listed as a separate learning area. This proposal defines a new set of 'learning areas', each of which is a grouping of both academic and vocational subjects. An example of such a learning area might be Business, Economics and Financial Services. Some subjects within the learning area would be more theory-based, and others would be more applied, but all should be a mix. The newly defined learning areas are envisaged as focal points for collaboration between schools, universities, VET providers and industries, as well as for course and career advice related to the area.

To note

In the first instance, the newly defined learning areas would simply be groupings of existing subjects. Over time, new advanced courses might be developed within each area, possibly replacing and consolidating some existing courses. There would be no change in students' abilities to choose courses across learning areas. And the implication is not that every advanced course should have a 'workplace' component.

For exploration

- Would the redefinition of learning areas reduce the current academic-vocational dichotomy/tension?
- How could redefined learning areas be developed to provide focal points for improved collaboration between schools, universities, vocational education providers and industries?
- How could redefined learning areas support better information on post-school pathways, including further education, training, careers and employment?

REFORM DIRECTION

15

Reviewing ATAR

The school sector should work with the university sector and the Universities Admissions Centre to explore the possibility of not calculating and reporting ATAR, replacing it instead with transparent information about the basis for constructing course-by-course selection ranks, which should show an applicant's rank in relation to the number of places available in each of their preferred courses.

The main idea

While outside the scope of this Review, there was strong feedback from consultation on the perceived dominance of ATAR as the main measure of educational success at the end of schooling. Although not widely understood, the ranking that determines whether a student is selected into a particular university course is the 'course selection rank' which can be different from ATAR because it (increasingly) also includes other information. The calculation of ATAR is thus an intermediate step in calculating individual course selection ranks. The proposal here is that discussions be held with universities about the possibility of bypassing the calculation and reporting of ATAR without impacting universities' selection processes. An alternative would be to tell students their current ranking for the courses to which they have applied (for example, 'there are 63 places and you are currently ranked 68th').

To note

There would be no change in the information available to universities or in universities' selection decisions. The aim is to reduce the public profile of ATAR (which could still be calculated if required – for example, for applicants to interstate universities). There should also be no reduction in transparency if students are told what is included in the calculation of their course selection rank for each course to which they apply and their ranking in relation to the places available.

For exploration

- Should the school sector offer to work with the university sector and UAC to explore the feasibility of not calculating and reporting ATAR as part of university selection processes?

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) has been tasked with 'a review of the NSW curriculum to ensure it equips students to contribute to Australian society in the 21st century' (the Review).

The Review is conducted in a context of a high performing NSW Education system, which strives to meet the needs of a wide range of students, including those who are Aboriginal, or from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, or living with disabilities.

The Review will undertake a comprehensive community engagement process to seek the diversity of views in the community, including the views of young people, parents, employers and those involved in the delivery of school education. These Terms of Reference have been developed following targeted stakeholder engagement.

The aim of the Review is to enhance the effectiveness of school education in NSW to:

- provide an education that engages and challenges every child and young person in learning, rewards them for effort and promotes high standards; and
- prepare each student with strong foundations of knowledge, capabilities and values to be lifelong learners, and to flourish in a world in which rapid technological advances are contributing to unprecedented economic and social change in unpredictable ways.

The Review will consider the strengths and weaknesses of the current NSW curriculum, its relationship to the Australian Curriculum and its accessibility to the diverse learners of the NSW community.

The Review, in developing its recommendations, should:

1. articulate the purposes of the school curriculum, including underpinning philosophies and principles
2. identify essential knowledge, skills and attributes as the common entitlement for all learners, ensuring parity of access to learning that is necessary for success, taking account of:
 - a. the evidence on how skills and attributes are acquired through knowledge-based disciplines
 - b. the extent of overcrowding in the curriculum
 - c. the appropriate scope for school community choices about content
3. explain how the curriculum could be redesigned and presented to better support teaching, learning, assessment and reporting, including by considering:
 - a. the desirability of identifying priorities for learning at different stages of schooling
 - b. the appropriate level of detail in curriculum documents
 - c. the breadth and depth of study
 - d. ways of improving every learner's transition into school and across the years of schooling
 - e. ways of enhancing the options and pathways for all students to further education and work
4. identify the implications of any new approach to curriculum design for:
 - a. assessment and reporting (including NAPLAN, the Record of School Achievement and the Higher School Certificate)
 - b. pedagogical practices and teacher workload
 - c. teacher preparation and ongoing professional learning
 - d. school organisation and regulation
 - e. relevant legislation
 - f. measuring the quality and impact of schooling.

The Review will have regard to:

- National policy developments and reports, including:
 - the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015*, and the national *Closing the Gap* strategy
 - *Through Growth to Achievement: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*. The Review will contribute appropriately to any related national processes
 - *Lifting Our Game: Report of the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools through Early Childhood Interventions*
 - Australia's Chief Scientist, Dr Alan Finkel's report *Optimising STEM industry-school partnerships: inspiring Australia's next generation*
 - the *Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education* conducted by Emeritus Professor John Halsey
 - the *Review of the Australian Curriculum: Final Report*
- Obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Disability Standards for Education 2015
- The 2016 BOSTES Review (particularly in relation to the crowded curriculum) and the Stronger HSC Reforms introduced from 2017
- Any significant lessons to be drawn from other Australian jurisdictions including in their implementation of the Australian Curriculum, as well as perspectives from international jurisdictions where there have been recent reviews and curriculum revisions
- Corresponding work of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to review and refine the Australian Curriculum, including international research.



**NSW CURRICULUM
REVIEW**

**Interim Report
Consultation
Workbook**

www.nswcurriculumreview.nesa.nsw.edu.au

NSW Education Standards Authority

