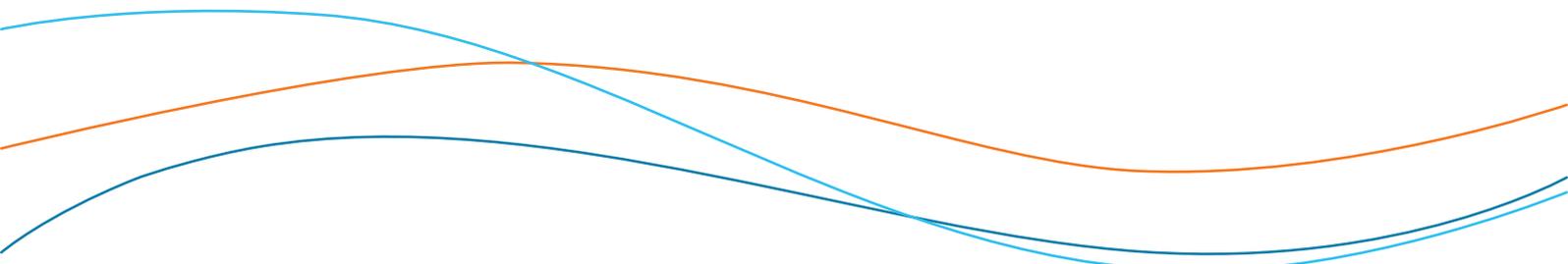


**Shape of the
Australian Curriculum:
Geography**



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Purpose

1. The *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Geography* provides broad direction on the purpose, structure and organisation of the geography curriculum and is designed to be read in conjunction with *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum v2.0*. It is intended to guide the writing of the geography curriculum from Foundation to Year 12. It reflects the extensive consultation process following the release of the *Geography Curriculum Framing Paper* and the *Draft Geography Shape Paper (2010)*, and the resulting decisions taken by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

Introduction

2. Geography is the investigation and understanding of the earth and its features and the distribution of life on earth, including human life and its impacts. It is the study of the many different “places”, or environments, which make up our world and is described as “the why of where”. Places are specific areas of the Earth’s surface, and can range from a locality to a country to a major world region. Geography answers our questions about why places have their particular environmental and human characteristics; how and why these characteristics vary from place to place; how places are connected, and how and why they are changing. Geography examines these questions on all scales, from the local to the global, and over time periods that range from a few years to thousands of years. It also looks forward to explore ways of influencing and managing the future of places including their environmental, economic and social sustainability.
3. Geography teaching nurtures students’ curiosity about places and the differences between them. It responds to their wonder about the world and its diversity, and teaches them how to explore this world directly through field work and indirectly through other types of investigation. It develops a geographical imagination that enables students to relate to other places and people, and to appreciate the cultures and perspectives of others.
4. The geographical characteristics of places studied include, but are not limited to, people, climate, production, landforms, built environment, soils, vegetation, communities, water resources, cultures, mineral resources and landscape. Some characteristics are tangible, such as rivers and buildings. Others are intangible, such as scenic quality and socioeconomic status.
5. Geography provides students with a knowledge and understanding of their own place and of Australia. This supports their development as active and engaged citizens by promoting debate and fostering informed decision-making on a range of current local, state and national issues. Students also gain knowledge of the world, as the foundation for understanding international events and trends.
6. Geography shows students ways in which they can positively influence their world as active local, national and global citizens by encouraging them to question why things are the way they are, to investigate issues and to evaluate alternative, more sustainable futures. Through exploration and discussion, students develop an informed view of their responsibilities towards the environment and to people throughout the world.
7. A geographical education can lead to careers in a wide variety of areas. These include, but are not limited to, environmental science; environmental management; natural hazard management; the location of businesses, services and facilities; urban planning and design; housing; real estate and land development; architecture; landscape architecture; tourism and travel; marketing; research and analysis; travel writing; emergency management; international trade and business; spatial information technology; surveying; mapping and cartography; local and regional development; social planning; social work; community development; international development, and education.

Geographical perspectives

8. In the investigation of places geographers use three complementary perspectives. The first is place-based. This starts with the study of the uniqueness of individual places as well as the similarities between them, and seeks to develop an integrated understanding of the relationships between the characteristics of a place. The method of comparative analysis may be used to identify the effects of factors such as climate, relative location, history, culture and governance, through comparisons of places that are similar in all but one or two key variables. A place-based perspective also includes an exploration of people's aesthetic, emotional and spiritual connections to places and landscapes and the ways in which people's lives are shaped by where they live.

9. The second perspective is spatial. One aspect of this perspective is the investigation of how places are linked to other places, such as through natural processes, the movement of people, flows of trade and investment, cultural influences, the exchange of ideas and information, political power and international agreements. Geography examines the effects of these connections and interdependencies by identifying the changes they produce and the ways these changes can be managed. A spatial perspective enables students to consider their own place in a much wider context. Another aspect involves the study of the spatial distribution of one or a small number of the characteristics of places, and the attempt to explain the patterns observed by the operation of atmospheric, hydrologic, geomorphic, biological, socioeconomic or political processes. Geographers may be particularly interested identifying and explaining regularities, or how the same processes can produce different outcomes in different places, and consequently contribute to the diversity between places. A spatial perspective teaches students how to think spatially, how to use and interpret maps of all types, and how to analyse and understand relationships between phenomena using spatial technologies. It also enables students to understand that the influence of location on the characteristics of a place depends on the relative location of other places, the infrastructure and technology that links it to those places and the economic and social relationships between them. Geographers also evaluate the environmental, economic, social and political consequences of spatial distributions and the policies that could be adopted to respond to any unwanted consequences.

10. The third perspective is environmental. This involves the study of the processes and interrelationships that form and change the biophysical environment, looking back in time as well as forward into the future. It also includes the important theme of the reciprocal relationships between the environment and human activities. Students explore the opportunities and constraints that the environment provides for human life and economic activity; they examine the different ways people have perceived, managed, used and altered the earth's environmental resources and learn about the importance of environmental sustainability for humanity's future. The concept of a system and its interdependencies may be used to help in the analysis of many of these processes and interrelationships. Students will also learn about how humans share the earth's environment with animals and other living creatures, and consider their responsibilities for other forms of life.

Geographical perspectives

11. Geography therefore includes much more than the investigation of individual places. It also involves the study of the biophysical environment, the relationships between people and that environment, the spatial distribution of phenomena across the surface of the earth, and the connections and interactions between people and environments in different places. Geography attempts to achieve a holistic and integrated understanding of its subject matter by drawing on knowledge from the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities, and incorporating this into geography's three perspectives. This assists cross-disciplinary learning and helps students recognise the connections between geography and more specialised subjects they may be studying. One or more of the three geographical perspectives, as appropriate, should be used when investigating questions and issues within the Australian Curriculum: Geography.

Geographical concepts

12. Geographical concepts are used to organise information and provide frameworks for understanding. They are the higher level unifying ideas that can be applied across several fields of the subject. The key organising geographical concepts will be defined in the glossary and include:

- change
- distance
- diversity
- interaction
- interdependence
- landscape
- location
- pattern
- perception
- place
- process
- proximity
- relationship
- risk
- scale
- space
- spatial distribution
- sustainability
- system

General capabilities

13. In the Australian Curriculum the skills, behaviours and attributes that students need to succeed in life and work in the twenty-first century have been identified as general capabilities. Over the course of their schooling, students develop and use general capabilities within and across learning areas and in their lives outside school. General capabilities and learning areas have a reciprocal relationship. Learning areas provide opportunities for students to develop and use general capabilities. Similarly, wherever general capabilities are made explicit in learning areas, they can enrich and deepen learning. In the Australian Curriculum: Geography, each of the seven identified general capabilities should be embedded in the content descriptions and/or elaborations where appropriate.

14. Geography straddles the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities, and uses a wide range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. As a result, geography contributes in varying degrees to the development of all the general capabilities identified in The Shape of the Australian Curriculum v2.0.

Literacy

15. Students become literate as they develop the skills to learn and communicate confidently at school and to become effective individuals, community members, workers and citizens. These skills include listening, reading and viewing, writing, speaking and creating print, visual and digital materials accurately and purposefully.

16. The geography curriculum will provide opportunities for the development of all these literacy skills. Students will also progressively learn the vocabulary of geography, and both its scientific and expressive modes of communication. They will use a wide variety of printed, visual and digital materials to help them learn about places, especially those they have never seen. However, they must also learn how to evaluate these resources and to recognise how language can be used to manipulate meaning. The particular development of graphical, spatial and visual skills will be achieved through work with maps, diagrams, photographs, remotely sensed and satellite images, and other visual material. Literacy skills may also be developed through an exploration of the imaginary places portrayed in literature or through the student's own writing.

Numeracy

17. Students become numerate as they develop the capacity, confidence and disposition to use mathematics at school, at home, at work and in community life. In the context of schooling, numeracy is about students engaging with whatever mathematics they need within and across all learning areas.

18. The Australian Curriculum: Geography will provide geographical contexts for applying mathematical knowledge, understanding and skills. Numeracy is vital to geography and enables student to use mathematics to analyse and answer geographical questions.

General capabilities

Students count and measure, calculate and interpret statistics, and construct and interpret graphs. In using maps, students work with the numerical concepts of grids, scale, distance, area and projections. The numerical and mapping skills specified in the Australian Curriculum: Geography should be compatible with students' mathematical understanding.

Information and communication technology (ICT) competence

19. Students develop ICT competence as they learn to use ICT effectively and appropriately when investigating, creating and communicating ideas and information at school, at home, at work and in their communities.

20. The geography curriculum will provide many opportunities to develop and use ICT skills. These include basic computing skills and the use of computer software to locate, manage, analyse and present geographical information. Geographical ICT skills include the use and application of geographical information systems (GIS) and global positioning systems (GPS) to create, manage, represent and analyse spatial data; the viewing and analysis of spatial data through remote sensing and 3D visualisations (such as Google Earth), and the management and representation of geographical data in graphical and other visual forms. The use of spatial technology is a rapidly growing area of ICT, with significant employment opportunities in the expanding spatial industry. The use of spatial technologies will be integrated into the curriculum from early primary school onwards to ensure the development of students' ICT skills matches their cognitive abilities, and the application of those skills in the topics being studied. The curriculum will also provide opportunities for students to explore the effects of these technologies on places, the location of economic activities and on people's lives, and to understand the changing spatial relationships enabled by ICT.

Critical and creative thinking

21. Students develop critical and creative thinking as they learn to generate and evaluate knowledge, ideas and possibilities, and use them when seeking new pathways or solutions. In the context of schooling, critical and creative thinking are integral to activities that require reason, logic, imagination and divergence.

22. The geography curriculum will develop students' ability to think logically, critically and creatively. Students will learn how to evaluate and use evidence, test explanations and analyse arguments. These abilities can be developed through field work and inquiry-based learning, and through topics containing questions that do not have straightforward answers. The geography curriculum will stimulate students to think creatively about the ways in which the places and spaces they use might be better designed, and about possible, probable and preferable futures. Senior secondary students may be taught decision-making methods and strategies to help them think analytically and logically. The opportunity to study current events will be built into the curriculum, as these can be used both to explore specific geographical questions and to develop students' broader ability to think critically about contemporary issues.

General capabilities

Ethical behaviour

23. Students develop ethical behaviour as they learn to understand and act in accordance with ethical principles. This includes understanding the role of ethical principles, values and virtues in human life; acting with moral integrity; acting with regard for others, and having a desire and capacity to work for the common good.

24. The Australian Curriculum: Geography will provide opportunities for students to investigate current geographical events and allow them to evaluate their findings against the criteria of environmental sustainability, economic viability, and social justice. These criteria raise ethical questions about human rights and citizenship, such as who bears the costs and who gains the benefits, and about group and personal responsibilities. By exploring such questions, students develop informed values and attitudes and become aware of their own roles and responsibilities as present and future citizens. When undertaking field work, students will learn about ethical procedures for investigating and working with people and places. When thinking about the biophysical environment, students will consider their responsibilities to protect animals and other forms of life that share this environment.

Personal and social competence

25. Students develop personal and social competence as they learn to understand and more effectively manage themselves, their relationships, and their lives, work and learning. This involves students recognising and regulating their emotions, developing concern for and understanding of others, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, working effectively in teams, and handling challenging situations constructively.

26. The Australian Curriculum: Geography will use inquiry-based learning to develop students' capacity for self-management. This gives students a role in directing their own learning and in planning and carrying out investigations, and enables them to become independent learners who can apply geographical understanding and skills to decisions they will have to make in the future. Through working cooperatively with others in the classroom and in the field, students develop their interpersonal skills, and learn to appreciate the different insights and perspectives of other group members. Geography explores how people perceive places, the meanings they attach to places, how they experience places, and how their identities and cultures are formed by the places in which they have grown up. By investigating their own place and its significance to them, students can develop a personal sense of identity, while through the study of Australia's distinctive geography they can develop their identities as Australians.

Intercultural understanding

27. Students develop intercultural understanding as they learn to understand themselves in relation to others. This involves students valuing their own cultures and beliefs and those of others, and engaging with people of diverse cultures in ways that recognise differences, create connections and cultivate respect between people.

General capabilities

28. The Australian Curriculum: Geography will provide opportunities for students to gain a more accurate understanding of other places and of the lives, cultures, values and beliefs of their people. Research in the United Kingdom and Australia, as well as the experience of teachers, shows students can have stereotyped views of other places and people from an early age and, unless challenged, these stereotypes can be difficult to shift. Through geography, students will come to understand why people in other places may see and construct their world differently. Through studies of migration and settlement in Australia, students can also learn about the diversity of people and cultures within contemporary Australia, about the places migrants have left, and about how and why migrants might see and construct their world differently.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

29. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures priority encompasses the concepts of Country and Place, People, Culture and Identity. These are interconnected and cannot be separated as each relies on the other.

30. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priority involves students actively engaging with the world's oldest continuous living cultures and the principles and virtues that are deeply embedded within these communities. These principles include caring for Country, caring for each other and respecting the systems embedded in the concepts of Country and Place, People, Culture and Identity, including the links and lessons from the past. The priority provides opportunities for learners to understand the histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples before settlement and investigate the shared histories and resulting relationships since settlement. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students it provides an opportunity to see themselves within the curriculum in an education setting that respects and promotes their cultural identities and heritage.

31. Students will be able to deepen knowledge of their country and to appreciate the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to Australia. The priority involves understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of interpreting and being in the world and appreciating that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are intrinsically linked to contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

32. Australia's unique geography is the product of ancient biophysical environments; the long and continuous history of its Indigenous peoples; the more recent influences of diverse settler and migrant cultures; and the equally diverse ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have adapted to, or sought to negotiate their position in a changing world. Geography provides an opportunity to include important aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and ways of knowing into the Australian curriculum. By finding out how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities managed their biophysical environment, students will learn from the experience of their thousands of years of occupation of this land. By learning about their perceptions of and attachments to Country, students will gain a deeper understanding of the significance of Place in human life, and learn that there are a variety of ways of thinking about and interacting with the biophysical environment and its resources. This includes an understanding that there is no single Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewpoint or experience, but that perspectives vary from place to place and group to group.

Cross-curriculum priorities

33. Geography also provides an opportunity for students to learn about the impact that colonial occupation and settlement has had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It can explore the nature of Indigenous settlement and use of the land before 1788, and the abrupt changes in the locations and lives of Indigenous peoples that resulted from European settlement. It can examine the continuing influence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures on Australian places. Geography can also investigate the ways in which more recent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience is reflected in the social geographies of Australia. Doing so highlights important issues including social inequality, locational disadvantage, environmental justice, resource management and human rights, and their application and relevance in contemporary Australia. At the same time, such inquiry offers students the opportunity to better understand their own place in a changing world, and the wider implications of social, environmental and political change on communities and cultures.

34. When incorporating these ideas into the Australian Curriculum: Geography, writers will link geography with the sequencing of content in history and science.

Sustainability

35. Sustainability is concerned with the ongoing capacity of the Earth to maintain life.

36. Actions to improve sustainability aim to reduce our ecological footprint while simultaneously supporting a quality of life that is valued – the ‘liveability’ of our society. Sustainable patterns of living meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability is both an individual and a collective endeavour often shared across communities and nations, necessitating a balanced but different approach to the ways humans have interacted with each other and with their biophysical environment.

37. Sustainability learning draws on and connects learning across the curriculum. It leads to students developing the capacity to contribute to a more sustainable future in terms of environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society for present and future generations.

38. Environmental sustainability is defined in the Australian Curriculum: Geography as the maintenance into the future of the environmental functions that support human life and human activities. What this means will be progressively developed in the curriculum from early primary school onwards. In Years 7–10 there will be a specific focus on environmental processes and systems, on the resources and services provided by the environment, and on the principles of environmental sustainability. In studying these questions geography adopts a holistic perspective.

Cross-curriculum priorities

For example, students learn not only about the environmental processes involved in deforestation and land degradation, but investigate their demographic, social, economic and political causes and consequences. Students are consequently able to evaluate the policies adopted or proposed in response to such problems against the criteria of environmental integrity, economic viability and social justice, as well as to think about actions that they can take themselves. A geographical perspective also leads to conclusions about how and why approaches towards sustainability vary from place to place. The writers will ensure that these ideas are reflected in the curriculum in appropriate ways at all stages of schooling.

39. Geography also investigates the social and economic sustainability of places. Students learn to see how this is sometimes related to changes in the biophysical environment as well as to changes in economic, social and political conditions.

Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia

40. Asia literacy is the knowledge, skills and understandings about the histories, geographies, societies, cultures, literatures and languages of the diverse countries of our region. Being Asia literate assists our young people to build harmonious local, regional and global communities. Asia literate Australians, who possess cross-cultural skills and an international mindset, will have a competitive edge in the workplace and will contribute to our national advantage. Asia literate Australians will gain substantial personal and social benefits; be better equipped to make sense of the world they live in and make an important contribution to building the social, intellectual and creative capital of our nation.

41. Study of the geography of Asia is an essential part of the proposed curriculum. Students can investigate and explore Asian places, and learn about the ways in which Australia and Asia are interconnected. A geographical perspective enables students to study Asia as an important region of the world, as individual countries, as regions within countries, and at the local level. In particular, geography enables students to learn about the diversity between and within the countries of Asia, and helps to counter stereotypes and to foster intercultural understanding. By examining the characteristics of Asian places on these different scales, a study of geography leads to a growing understanding of the varied environments, peoples, economies and cultures of Australia's neighbours. By investigating Asian perceptions of the world, students can learn to see that world in different ways.

Other considerations

Key terms

42. **Environment** : In the Australian Curriculum: Geography, the term 'environment', where unqualified, means the living and non-living elements of the earth's surface and atmosphere. It includes human changes to the Earth's surface, such as croplands, planted forests, buildings and roads. The term 'environment' will be used in the primary school curriculum, while in secondary school the more precise term 'biophysical environment' will be preferred. It is understood that there are no longer any purely natural environments, and that many environments have been greatly altered by human activities. The terms 'rural environment' and 'urban environment' may be used to refer to some environments created by human activities. The term 'built environment' will be used to specifically refer to the constructed environment of buildings, roads, railways, airports, harbours, drains, parks and wetlands characteristic of the urbanised places in which the majority of Australian students live, and which are a major site for geographical field work. These are all subsets of the biophysical environment. The terms 'human environment', 'social environment' and 'cultural environment' are not used in the curriculum.

43. **Glossary**: The Australian Curriculum: Geography will include a glossary of key terms.

44. **Equity and opportunity**: the Australian Curriculum: Geography will provide flexibility and choice for teachers and students. The factors influencing choices for study include school and community contexts, local geographical learning opportunities, local issues and available learning resources. In managing this flexibility, it is understood that a balanced geography curriculum should engage every student while catering for a broad cohort of students and a range of delivery contexts.

45. The Australian Curriculum: Geography will enable students to learn about a wide range of local, national and global events and issues, fostering their ability to follow and contribute to local and national debates. This knowledge is empowering for all students. Ensuring all students gain the geographical knowledge that enables them to participate actively in the broader community will require consideration of how best to engage every student and the way particular groups may have previously been excluded.

46. The Australian Curriculum: Geography will provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to appreciate and use the geographical knowledge of their own communities. It will also draw on the knowledge of migrant communities of their countries and places of origin, their experiences of migration and settlement, and their perceptions of Australian places.

Other considerations

47. Connections to other learning areas: the curriculum will ensure links are made to related topics being taught in other learning areas in each year. Where there are opportunities for integrated teaching, whether by one teacher in primary school or by two or more teachers in secondary school, geographical topics should be placed in the same year as related topics from other learning areas, where this is compatible with the progressive development of geographical content.

Clarity of the curriculum

48. The Australian Curriculum: Geography will be sufficiently rich and descriptive to guide teachers with limited experience, but will also avoid excessive prescription that could hamper experienced teachers from exercising their skills.

Breadth and depth of study

49. To achieve the overall aims of the curriculum, and to ensure that students learn how to investigate geographically, think critically, creatively and constructively, and develop a geographical understanding, depth will be preferred over breadth in developing the curriculum.

Pedagogy

50. The Australian Curriculum: Geography will involve field work at all stages, as this is an essential core component of geographical learning. Field work is any study undertaken outside the classroom, and could be within the school grounds, around the neighbouring streets, or in more distant locations. The curriculum will also be constructed to allow time and scope for inquiry-based learning. These learning and teaching methods will be supported by forms of assessment that enable students to demonstrate their knowledge of skills and how to apply them, and their understanding of how to think geographically and how to do geography.

51. A curriculum is not value-free, as values and attitudes cannot be divorced from content that is studied in both primary and secondary school. Fien (2003) differentiates between values, which he defines as enduring beliefs about our principles and goals, and attitudes, which are opinions about what should happen in a particular situation and which are derived from our values. It is the role of the teacher of geography to ensure that students explore and clarify their values, but it is not a teacher's role to promote specific attitudes towards specific situations. Teachers can assist students in developing informed attitudes to specific issues through a combination of study, discussion and the critical analysis of different viewpoints, including their own.

Other considerations

52. The Australian Curriculum: Geography will teach students how to use scale in the exploration of questions. Scale refers to the hierarchy of levels of investigation from the personal to the local, regional, national and global. The local area, for example, is defined as the area around the school or home that can be explored in a few hours. In geographical analysis, scale can be used in several ways. One is to make comparisons at the same level of scale. In this case, if the local area is being studied, it should be compared with other local-scale places elsewhere in Australia and the world. Likewise, studies of regional and national patterns should make comparisons at the same levels of scale. Another use of scale is to investigate the additional understanding that can be gained by studying the same phenomenon at different scales, because relationships found at one level may not apply at a different level. A third application of scale is to look for explanations for a phenomenon at a different level of scale than the one being studied, such as the influence of national economic policies on local economies, or of global warming on the local biophysical environment. Comparisons within one level of scale and analyses across different levels of scale are therefore an important aspect of geographical learning.

53. The Australian Curriculum: Geography will avoid prescribing specific case studies that all students must undertake. In early primary school, the places studied should include the local area and places of which students are aware through visits; the origins of their families; their classmates from other places; the media, and the books they are reading. In both upper primary and throughout secondary school, teachers could also choose case studies that are good illustrations of the content they are teaching; or that have similar characteristics to the location of the school, or that are the product of relationships the school may have been able to develop with other schools. In addition, teachers will identify those places and countries that are important to the area in which their school is located because of connections such as migration and trade. At the same time, the curriculum should allow teachers the flexibility to incorporate topical and current events from Australia and around the world.

54. The aims of the Australian Curriculum: Geography are to:

- develop a sense of wonder, curiosity, knowledge and interest about the variety of environments, peoples, cultures and places that exist throughout the world, providing students with a sound geographical knowledge of their own place, of Australia, and of the world
- enable students to explore and gain a good understanding of geographical thinking including its perspectives, concepts and ways of explaining
- enable students to become thoughtful and active local, national and global citizens, and to understand how they can influence the futures of places
- develop students' ability to ask geographical questions, plan an inquiry, collect and analyse information, (particularly through fieldwork and spatial technologies), reach conclusions based on evidence and logical reasoning, and communicate their findings in effective ways
- build the confident and creative use of geographical skills, and to enable students to use these skills to extend their knowledge; make sense of new situations, and to solve problems.

55. To achieve these aims, the curriculum will be engaging and intellectually challenging, and focus on a depth of understanding rather than the breadth of content. It will provide opportunities for teachers to connect with young people's present and future lives, to encourage students to use their own experiences to become active agents in their own learning, and to 'challenge and excite them with content that might be beyond their immediate horizon' (Geographical Association 2009).

Structure of the Australian Curriculum: Geography

56. The content of the Australian Curriculum: Geography is organised into two interrelated strands: Geographical knowledge and understanding and Geographical inquiry and skills.

Geographical knowledge and understanding

57. Geographical knowledge refers to the facts, generalisations, principles, theories, models and explanatory frameworks developed in geography to explain the spatial distribution of and the relationships between the characteristics of places. The curriculum recognises that this knowledge is dynamic and can be contested, and helps students to understand how people can come to different conclusions about the same questions. However, students also learn that opinions and conclusions must be backed up with evidence and logical argument.

58. Geographical understanding is the ability to see the relationships between items of knowledge; to construct explanatory frameworks and models to illustrate these relationships, and to weave them into an integrated whole. It is also the ability to use geographical knowledge to solve new problems by thinking and acting flexibly with what one knows. A geography curriculum that develops understanding emphasises explanation, helps students to relate new knowledge to existing knowledge, and provides opportunities for them to apply their understanding to questions and problems that they have not previously encountered. 'An essential educational outcome of learning geography is to be able to apply knowledge and conceptual understanding to new settings: that is "to think geographically" about the changing world' (Geographical Association 2009).

59. The geographical concepts or unifying ideas that are used to organise and understand information (paragraph 12, page 6) are a component of Geographical knowledge and understanding, but when used to guide analysis they can also be a part of Geographical inquiry.

60. The content to be studied in the Geographical knowledge and understanding strand will, wherever possible, be expressed as ideas students should, understand and be able to explain, as in the example below

Structure of the Australian Curriculum: Geography

Geographical knowledge and understanding

Key ideas

Weather and water

- the hydrologic cycle describes the movement of water between the atmosphere, land and oceans
- weather can be a hazard, but the risks can be reduced through human adjustment to the conditions presented
- water is a difficult resource to manage because it is integrated into environmental systems in complex ways, can be highly variable over time and across space, and has many competing uses.

Geographical inquiry and skills

61. Geographical inquiry refers to the methodologies that geographers use to find new knowledge, or knowledge that is new to them, and the ways that they attempt to understand and explain what they have observed.

62. Geographical inquiry starts with curiosity—with students wanting to understand and explain something that has caught their imagination. It begins with a ‘why’ question which seeks to explain what they have observed or discovered or become interested in. There is often also a ‘where’ and ‘why there’ question about location. The next steps are the development of a method of investigating the question (including the use of theory and models where appropriate); the collection, evaluation and analysis of information; the construction of an answer to the question, and an evaluation of the meaning and significance of what has been found out.

63. In addition to ‘why’ questions, there will also be ‘so what’ questions about consequences, ‘what ought’ questions about what should happen, ‘what might happen’ questions about the future, and ‘what if’ questions about alternatives. ‘What ought’ questions can lead to the development and implementation of an action plan to address a problem identified through the inquiry. The final stage is a reflection on what has been learned and how it has been learned. It includes thinking about how we know ‘what’, which involves a critical approach to sources, the ability to evaluate evidence, an awareness of different ways of knowing, and an understanding of the contestability of knowledge. However, not all inquiry requires the extensive collection and processing of information. The starting point could be a concept, or an ethical or aesthetic issue, which can be explored verbally.

64. Geographical inquiry is also about ‘how to look’ for answers. From their early explorations, students develop a growing familiarity with the approaches that geographers use to understand the object of their study, which may be some characteristic of a place, a spatial distribution, or a problem in a place.

Structure of the Australian Curriculum: Geography

These range from empirical scientific methods that attempt to develop general explanations of phenomena, to subjective interpretations that reject the possibility of such explanations and argue that we can only ever gain a personal understanding. They have different methods of collecting and analysing information, they provide different answers, and they lead to different solutions or to no solutions at all. Combined, they provide students with a basic knowledge of the variety of ways of investigating, understanding and explaining found in contemporary geography, and teach them the importance of being open to multiple explanations. Examples of statements about explanations that could be included in the Geographical inquiry strand at appropriate stages include:

- some geographical characteristics can be explained by their relative location
- some geographical features can be explained by cause and effect relationships with other places
- some geographical features can be understood through an analysis of their spatial distribution
- some geographical features can be understood as a result of individual, group or organisational decisions, or by unequal political power relationships
- some geographical features can be explained by studying how they have developed and changed over time.

65. Geographical skills are the techniques and tools that geographers use in a geographical inquiry. These start with the collection of information from a variety of resources. As schooling progresses, primary and secondary sources such as field work, maps, air photos, satellite images, spatial data, interview, reports and the Census will provide students with more information. Field work outside the classroom is an essential component of geographical education from the very beginning of schooling and at every level, as it teaches students how to investigate the complex reality of their world. Geography also develops a range of other skills. These include representing and communicating information through maps, diagram and graphs; analysing data through cartographic, statistical, graphical and qualitative methods; and modelling spatial relationships. Opportunities to learn appropriate spatial technologies should be included in both the primary and secondary school curriculums.

66. Students should learn to be critical of these methods used to obtain data and information, and they should also learn to be critical of what they are measuring and portraying. For example, when students learn technical cartographical skills, they should also learn that maps are social constructions that can portray the world in distorted and selected ways. Similarly, when they use statistical methods, they should also learn about the ways that statistics can be manipulated and about the questions that numbers cannot answer. The curriculum should teach students the appropriate methods to use for different types of inquiry.

Structure of the Australian Curriculum: Geography

67. The curriculum content to be studied in the Geographical inquiry and skills strand could be listed under the headings in the example below, as these identify each step in the inquiry process. The writers will develop this strand in ways that achieve the progressions identified in paragraph 69.

Geographical inquiry and skills

Developing a geographical question

- observation can lead to questions for investigation

Planning a geographical inquiry

- some geographical features can be explained by cause and effect relationships with other places

Collecting, evaluating and managing information

- primary and secondary data must be evaluated for accuracy and bias before being analysed
- Census data can be used to describe the growth, movement and characteristics of the populations of places
- information collected in a survey should be evaluated for reliability

Making sense of the information

- mapping the spatial distribution of a characteristic, such as rainfall, can be a first step in developing an understanding of that characteristic and suggesting possible causal relationships
- weather forecasts are based on an interpretation of synoptic charts

Communicating

- each type of communication has conventions that should usually be followed for communication to be effective
- the climate of a place can be represented by a graph of average monthly temperature and precipitation

Planning and implementing actions

- finding a way of resolving a problem depends on an understanding of the causes of that problem

Reflecting on the investigation

- each investigation should be evaluated for what has been learned about the topic investigated and what has been learned about the process of investigation

Structure of the Australian Curriculum: Geography

Relationship between the strands

68. The two strands should be taught in an integrated way, and the use of inquiry-based learning methods will help this integration. The curriculum writers will therefore identify the concepts, ways of explaining and skills that complement the knowledge and understanding strand in each year, and which match the cognitive abilities of students. The inquiry and skills strand is as important as the knowledge and understanding strand, and the curriculum must be designed to provide sufficient time for them to be taught effectively.

Progression

69. The Australian Curriculum: Geography will be structured to produce the following types of progression through the school years:

- from the description of phenomena to their analysis and explanation
- from observation to investigation, analysis, decision making, evaluation and reflection
- from places and topics that are known to places and topics that are increasingly beyond a student's own experience
- from a simple to a more complex knowledge of the process of geographical inquiry
- from the use of a few to a growing number of concepts, and a deeper understanding of these concepts
- an increasing number of ways of explaining
- increasing levels of abstraction
- involvement with values that become more progressively more contested
- an increasingly more critical approach to evidence and knowledge.

Scope and sequence of the Australian Curriculum: Geography

70. Although the Australian Curriculum: Geography will be developed year by year, this document provides a guideline across five groups of years:

- Foundation – Year 2 typically students from 5 to 8 years of age
- Years 3–4 typically students from 8 to 10 years of age
- Years 5–6 typically students from 10 to 12 years of age
- Years 7–10 typically students from 12 to 15 years of age
- Senior secondary typically students from 15 to 18 years of age

71. In developing the Australian Curriculum: Geography, writers will be guided by indicative times. These have been developed to guide the writing process, taking into account the fact that students learn at different paces and that school authorities or schools will determine what teaching time will be provided. Writers should draft the curriculum so that it can readily be taught within the indicative times.

72. The curriculum focus is on developing geographical understanding through sequential studies of the main characteristics of place, space and environment. Each year, from Foundation to Year 10, has two sets of core ideas about specific characteristics, through which students will cumulatively learn about the basic patterns, processes and principles that explain the geography of their world. One set focuses on the environmental characteristics of places, but also explores related human themes, and the other focuses on their human characteristics, but also explores environmental themes. Each year will have suggested topics that could be used to teach the core ideas, and other topics that can be used to extend and apply these ideas. However, teachers will be free to choose their own case studies. A degree of choice in case studies is essential if the curriculum is to provide relevant topics for schools in widely varying places and environments across Australia.

The table below indicates an outline of broad topics or themes for Foundation to Year 6.

Year Group	Environmental Characteristics	Human Characteristics
Foundation – Year 2	Environments and living creatures	Places – characteristics and change
Years 3–4	Landforms and environmental change	Population and culture – rural and urban
Years 5–6	Environmental risks and management	Challenges and connections - neighbouring countries

Foundation to Year 2

73. In Foundation to Year 2, the curriculum focus is on geographical awareness, on exploring the geographies of children's lives and of places near and far. Children are curious about their personal world and are interested in exploring it, so teaching is focused on helping them to observe, describe and ask basic geographical questions about the features of that world. Research shows that young children are interested in distant places as well as their own locality, and early primary school geography should build on this curiosity and encourage students to explore widely. With very young children, the selection of distant places should be guided by their awareness of and links to those places. Field work outside the classroom, and exploratory, purposeful play, are essential components of learning in these years. The geographical concepts include place, location and change. The indicative times for Foundation to Year 2 are 16–20 hours a year.

74. Suggested topics for the Geographical knowledge and understanding strand in Foundation to Year 2 may build on studies of the local area and could include:

- local places, their main characteristics and changes (links with history and science)
- distant places connected to their local place, weather and seasons (link with science)
- local environments, life forms and caring for the environment (link with science).

Years 3–4

In Years 3–4 the curriculum focus is on becoming engaged in geographical investigations of places, environments and spatial patterns. Students have a growing awareness of associations and relationships between characteristics in the local place and other places known personally to them. They are able to ask a larger number of geographical questions, undertake investigations to find answers to them, and think about causes and effects. They can identify locational and spatial patterns, and think about both their causes and their consequences. Their study of places near and far expands to a larger number and variety of places and countries, and to their connections with them. They become more aware of the need to care for the environment. Field work is an essential part of learning. The key geographical concepts include pattern, diversity, spatial distribution, relationship and interaction. The indicative times for Years 3–4 are 30–40 hours a year.

Suggested topics for the Geographical knowledge and understanding strand in Years 3–4 could include:

- population of their place (link with history)
- differences between places and why differences exist, for example, urban and rural places
- connections of places with other places, including culture
- land formations, for example mountains, plains, valleys or coasts (link with science)
- how people have changed the environment of their place and other places and also how these could be sustainably cared for and managed
- location and spatial patterns of particular environments and features
- location and main characteristics of the states, territories and major cities of Australia.

Years 5–6

75. In Years 5–6 the curriculum focus is on geographical investigation leading to involvement. Students have a growing interest in their community, and can apply this to investigations into how their community manages environmental, social and planning issues. Their study of places near and far continues to expand to places well beyond their immediate experience. Students can start to use comparative analysis to suggest explanations for the differences between places, investigate their own and other people's perceptions of distant places, and become aware of stereotypes. They can think more deeply about the spatial patterns of human activities, and the ways that regularities in these patterns can be explained. Their awareness of environmental issues can be developed by focusing on their own direct or indirect impacts on the environment, providing them with an opportunity to study the biophysical environment of human settlements, and the environment in which the majority of them live. The geographical concepts include process, system, sustainability, space, distance, proximity, interdependence, perception and risk. The indicative times for Years 5–6 are 30–40 hours a year.

76. Suggested topics for the Geographical knowledge and understanding strand in Years 5–6 could include:

- people and their origins (link with Year 6 history)
- the interconnections and interdependence of places, comparisons of their own place with at least one other place outside Australia with a similar climate, for example Papua New Guinea, the main islands of the South Pacific and New Zealand, and the ways they are connected with Australia
- environmental consequences of urban development, personal travel and household consumption
- adaptations to the risks of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions (possible link with Year 6 Science, but plate tectonics are not studied in the science curriculum until Year 9)
- why places and environments should be cared for sustainably and what this means
- spatial patterns, local planning and the management of community issues.

Years 7–10

77. The curriculum focus on developing geographical understanding through sequential studies of the main characteristics of place, space and environments continues from Foundation to Year 6 into Years 7–10. However, a more formal approach to learning is introduced in the secondary year. Each year, from Years 7–10, still has two sets of core ideas about specific characteristics through which students will cumulatively learn about the basic patterns, processes and principles that explain the geography of their world. One set focuses on the environmental characteristics of places, but also explores related human themes and the other focuses on their human characteristics, but also explores environmental themes. Each year will still have suggested topics that could be used to teach the core ideas, and other topics that can be used to extend and apply these ideas. However, teachers will be free to choose their own case studies.

Scope and sequence of the Australian Curriculum: Geography

A degree of choice in case studies is essential if the curriculum is to provide relevant topics for schools in widely varying places and environments across Australia. The table below indicates a broad outline of the topics for Years 7-10. All of the geographical concepts will have been covered by Year 10. Sustainability, citizenship and the use of spatial technologies should underpin learning across all topics. The indicative times are 50–60 hours a year in Years 7 and 8, and 60–80 hours a year in Years 9 and 10.

Year Group	Environmental Characteristics	Human Characteristics
7	Weather and water	People
8	Biotic life	Settlement
9	Landscapes and resources	Livelihood and lifestyles
10	Environmental sustainability	Human wellbeing

78. One sub-strand of topics focuses on environmental patterns and processes and their human significance.

79. The environmental sub-strand will progressively develop students' understanding of the functions of the environment that support human life and economic activity. The first of these functions is the production of raw materials from the natural resources of soil, water, forests, minerals and marine life (the earth's 'source' function). The second is the safe absorption (through breakdown, recycling or storage) of the wastes and pollution produced by production and human life (the earth's 'sink' function). The third is the provision of the environmental services that support life without requiring human action, such as climatic stability, biodiversity, ecosystem integrity, protection from ultraviolet radiation, and the recreational, psychological, aesthetic and spiritual values of environments (the earth's 'service' function).

80. The environmental sub-strand will also progressively develop an understanding of the nature of renewable, non-renewable and continuous environmental resources, and the principles of sustainability. The sustainability principles to be included are:

- renewable resources should only be exploited at or below their rates of renewal, or at a cautiously lower rate if their rate of renewal is uncertain
- non-renewable resources should not be exploited faster than the rate at which they can be substituted by other resources, or maintained through technological progress or recycling
- biodegradable wastes should not be added to the environment faster than they can be broken down and recycled
- non-biodegradable wastes should only be added to the environment at levels below those that threaten human health and wellbeing
- the services functions of the environment should be protected
- sustainability in one place cannot be achieved at the expense of environmental conditions in other places
- global sustainability depends on an equitable sharing of global environmental resources.

81. In Year 7 the focus is on weather and water, including topics such as weather and rainfall, the hydrologic cycle, weather hazards (cyclones, storms, droughts and floods), world water usage and distribution, and water resource management. This focus links with Year 7 science.

82. In Year 8 the focus is on biotic life, which links with Year 8 science. This includes studies of climate, world biomes, biodiversity, soil and food production. The study of biomes recognises that they have been extensively transformed by people, through land clearing, terracing, irrigation, grazing, new planting and other impacts, and that humans extract an average of nearly a quarter of net growth in plant biomass from them each year. Other topics could be a study of a major world biome or an extreme environment, or of bushfires, vegetation clearance and its consequences, agriculture, land degradation or suburban gardens.

83. In Year 9 the focus is on landscapes and resources. This provides an opportunity to teach geomorphology through the study of a particular landscape, such as a coast, a mountain area or a major valley. Landscapes can also be studied as a combination of geological, geomorphological, biological and cultural layers that evolve over time, providing a way of integrating several aspects of geography. This could be combined with a study of the human use of that landscape, and the ways that it is perceived, portrayed and valued by people. The year also focuses on mineral and energy resources and their effects on places, which has links with Year 9 science. Other topics could include a study of a particular landscape, coastal hazards, landscapes and tourism, landscape conservation and restoration, mining and Indigenous communities, the effects of mining on regional and urban development, or renewable energy sources. Years 7, 8 and 9 therefore cover the basic elements of weather, climate, hydrology, biogeography and geomorphology.

Scope and sequence of the Australian Curriculum: Geography

84. In Year 10 the focus is on environmental sustainability to include a deeper understanding of the ways that humans are dependent on the biophysical environment for their survival; an investigation of natural and human-induced environmental change; an examination of the meaning of environmental sustainability; and a review of the sustainability status of Australian and world environments including the oceans. It should also teach the skills needed to critically assess various ways of living more sustainably to link with Year 10 science. Additional topics could include a case study of one type of environment or one environmental resource, an exploration of the sustainability of an urban biophysical environment, or an examination of the role of the environment in the collapse of civilisations to link with the Year 10 history topic on environmental movement.

85. The second sub-strand of topics focuses on the human characteristics of places.

86. In Year 7 the focus is on people. Topics could include communities, diversity, population and population change, migration and mobility, and the spatial pattern of world cultural groups. Other areas of investigation could include the populations of countries such as Indonesia and India; the past and present migration of students' relatives; the mobility patterns of young people; the location of one migrant community in Australia, and how this has changed over time, or world refugee migration.

87. In Year 8 the focus is on settlement; the distribution of population; the reasons for cities and towns, and trends in rural settlement. Additional topics could include comparative studies of settlements similar to a school's locality, urbanisation, coastal settlement and its consequences, the future of housing, the sustainability of small towns, the prospects for closer settlement in northern Australia, or whether Australia's high level of urban concentration is a sensible or sustainable settlement pattern.

88. In Year 9 the focus is on livelihoods and lifestyles, and will be designed to introduce students to some basic principles that explain the geography of production and employment. Also included is a focus on the role of transportation and communications in influencing what is located where. Both of these themes should have an emphasis on change. Investigative topics could include a study of why transnational corporations like Google, Apple, Facebook and eBay are all located in the same place, or why computers are designed in America but made in China; a geographical investigation of sport, retailing and popular music as industries, or a study of the consequences of spatially uneven access to the internet. Years 7, 8 and 9 therefore cover the basic elements of population, settlement and economic geography.

89. In Year 10 the focus is on the geography of human wellbeing. This integrates population and economic geography around spatial inequalities in human development and welfare at the global, national and local levels of scale. Investigative topics could include global patterns in health or poverty, the geography of crime, tourism, consumption, human rights, studies in development geography, and locational disadvantage. The stream will progressively develop students' understanding of the principles of location (including the influences of proximity and agglomeration), the contrasting themes of spatial change and spatial inertia, and the consequences of the spatial distribution of people and their activities.

90. In Years 7-10, the Australian Curriculum: Geography will require studies at the global, national and local scales, as appropriate, and case studies will not be confined to Australia. Both sub-strands of systematic geography should be complemented by studies of major world regions. One of geography's major contributions to the education of young Australians is to enable them to gain a coherent understanding of the world. For example, the weather and water theme in Year 7 could be illustrated by case studies from North Africa and West Asia, and the biotic life theme in Year 8 by case studies from Sub-Saharan Africa and South America. These case studies could be extended into a more holistic and balanced study of any country selected and of its place within its region and the world. The curriculum will also explore ethical questions and the practical applications of the geographical knowledge, developing students' understanding of active citizenship.

91. Through the progressive study of geography from F-10, students will develop a sound knowledge of the distinctive way in which a geographer looks at and understands the world. This includes:

- an understanding of the uniqueness of each place, as well as the similarities between places
- an ability to think holistically in seeking answers to geographical questions
- an understanding of the place dependence of environmental and socioeconomic processes
- an understanding of the role of the environment and its resources in human life, and of the impact of humans on that environment
- an understanding of the significance of location
- an awareness of the interconnectedness of places, and of the consequences of these connections
- an ability to think about the world spatially.

The senior secondary years

92. The curriculum focus in the senior secondary years will be on extending and applying the two strands; Geographical knowledge and understanding and Geographical inquiry and skills.

93. One aim of the senior secondary curriculum is to enable students to extend their knowledge and understanding of geography through studies that examine themes from previous years in much greater depth, or which explore new areas. The content of the senior years will have the potential to raise significant questions which challenge students, and the writers will therefore ensure the content chosen does not overload the curriculum. The senior years should also have an applied focus on trends, planning, management and futures, as is appropriate for students nearing the end of their school years and approaching adulthood, particularly those not intending to undertake university study.

94. A second aim is to further develop students' knowledge of and ability to apply geographical inquiry, through a more advanced study of methods and skills, an exploration of more advanced ways of understanding and explaining, and a deeper engagement in decision making, evaluation and the discussion of ethics and values. Thinking and reasoning skills will be further developed. The teaching and learning of these aspects will be integrated into the units being studied, as in earlier years. A particular emphasis should be placed on the use of spatial technologies in analysis, representation and modelling, and on more advanced methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis. All units will also include group or individual research as a way of developing competence in geographical inquiry. This should include the collection and analysis of information to answer a geographical question, with field work to be carried out in all units where appropriate to the questions being studied.

95. One geography course is proposed, consisting of four units.

96. The first unit will examine global land cover change and its effects on the environment, including interrelationships with climate change and the oceans. Land cover change includes all the processes changing the surface cover of the Earth, such as vegetation clearance, agricultural development, vegetation degradation, drainage, irrigation, land reclamation, ice sheet retreat, soil degradation, deforestation and urbanisation. The unit will then examine the ways people seek to reverse the negative effects of land cover change, such as revegetation programs, wetland restoration and a range of urban environmental programs.

97. The second unit will include a focus on human geography and may include topics such as:

- sustaining places: sustainable futures, which could include studies of regional and urban growth and decline; the processes of rural change; environmental sustainability; urban and rural economic and social issues; urban planning and management, community sustainability, and ways of creating resilient places; schools could choose to focus on large cities, or on regional and rural places, or on a combination of both
- the geography of economic activity
- development geography
- population geography
- culture and geography
- tourism and its future
- political geography.

98. There will be opportunities for some choice to allow for a depth of study appropriate for the senior years, to give schools the opportunity to select topics that fit their location, needs and interests, and to give students some voice in what they study.

99. The third unit will have a futures orientation and could include topics such as the changing spatial structure of the global economy, global shifts in the distribution of population, international migration, urbanisation, global cities, global resource consumption and its environmental consequences, global inequalities, cultural globalisation and cultural diversity, and regionalism and localism.

100. The fourth unit will include a focus on environmental geography and could include topics such as:

- managing environmental risks (such as natural hazards, human health and environmental collapse)
- sustaining environmental resources (including energy, water, biodiversity, soils and oceans)
- the physical geography and management of a selected type of environment
- the dynamics and management of landscapes
- environmental change.

Conclusion

101. The Australian Curriculum: Geography will be designed to give young Australians the geographical understanding needed to make sense of their own world, an appreciation of the diversity, complexity and interdependence of places and their peoples, and a set of skills that will be useful in their future life. It will give them a knowledge of both Australia and of the world, and of significant trends and issues that will affect their lives. Above all, they will learn how to think geographically, how to find and evaluate new geographical knowledge, and how to be critical users of this knowledge in their adult life.

References

This paper has built on several reports and a wide range of literature on geography, learning and the teaching of geography. The key reports and reviews are listed below, along with items referred to in the paper.

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