

Australian Curriculum

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The structure and development of the Australian Curriculum (K-10)

Q: How is the Australian Curriculum organised?

A: Content descriptions and achievement standards will be the key elements of the K-10 Australian Curriculum.

Content descriptions specify what teachers are expected to teach. They include knowledge, skills and understanding for each learning area and are described for each year level. The content descriptions will provide scope and sequence to assist teaching and learning. Within this scope and sequence, teachers will continue to apply their professional judgment regarding what to cover and how to best cater for individual learning needs and interests. Examples that illustrate each content description can be found in content elaborations. These are available for those teachers and others who may require assistance to better understand the content description.

Achievement standards will describe the quality of learning students should demonstrate in relation to the content for each year of schooling. The achievement standards will focus on students':

- depth of understanding
- extent of knowledge
- sophistication of skills.

Student work samples will illustrate the achievement standards. For K-10, the achievement of the described standard will mean that a student is well able to progress to the next level of learning.

While the curriculum will make clear to teachers what should be taught and what achievement standards are expected of students, classroom teachers will make decisions about how best to organise learning that will lead to effective learning outcomes for their students.

Q: What are achievement standards and how have they been developed?

A: Each achievement standard comprises:

- a description of the quality of expected learning at a particular year level
- a set of annotated work samples that illustrates the described quality of learning.

The achievement standards focus on the depth of understanding, extent of knowledge and sophistication of skills expected in each learning area and can be read as a sequence across K-10. They describe and illustrate growth and development in the learning area.

Students who achieve the standard are well able to progress to the next level.

Curriculum writers have drawn on a combination of empirical evidence (that is, analysis of available achievement data sets) and teacher experience. Particular attention has been paid to empirical information on the sequence of learning of fundamental knowledge, skills and understanding in the learning area – what changes in learning.

Attention has also been paid to the threshold points at which students demonstrate achievement of these knowledge, skills and understanding – when these changes typically occur.

In addition, ACARA will commission some work to empirically validate the achievement standards. During and following consultation, ACARA will work with schools and state and territory curriculum authorities to collect and publish work samples to illustrate the achievement standards.

Q: Does the draft Australian Curriculum represent the whole curriculum that is to be taught to students?

A: The term 'curriculum' is typically used to refer to the sum total of intended learning experiences. The Australian Curriculum will not be the whole curriculum in that sense. The Australian Curriculum

Australian Curriculum

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

will define, for all students, a broad scope and sequence of core learning. Critical decisions about the total educational program and how it will be implemented and adapted to meet the needs and interests of students will be the responsibility of education authorities, schools, teachers, parents and students.

In relation to the four learning areas being developed in the first phase of national development, the Australian Curriculum:

- sets core content and achievement standards that are expected of students at each year of schooling
- provides flexibility for jurisdictions, systems and schools to deliver the Australian Curriculum in a way that allows all students to achieve its standards
- broadens options for students considering different futures, preparing students for further study in all areas of future employment across the trades and technical and professional fields and in new and emerging areas of knowledge
- ensures that student achievement is reported in a similar way nationally.

Q: How different is the new Australian Curriculum from the curriculum currently taught in each state and territory?

A: The writers of the Australian Curriculum have examined state/territory and overseas curriculum documents. As a result there are many elements of the draft Australian Curriculum that will be familiar to teachers. Nonetheless, the full extent of the differences between the draft Australian Curriculum and each state and territory curriculum will not be known until a rigorous mapping exercise has been completed.

At its meeting on 11 December 2009, the Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Senior Officials Committee (AEEYSOC) agreed that ACARA undertake a national curriculum mapping exercise of the first phase of the K-10 curriculum.

It was agreed that the mapping would involve an analysis of similarities and differences between the Australian Curriculum and current state and territory curriculum frameworks. This would provide useful information for ACARA during the refining and revising phase of the Australian Curriculum, and for states and territories in planning for implementation.

The mapping and analysis for K-10 English, mathematics, science and history is taking place during March and April 2010.

Q: How is the curriculum mapping exercise being undertaken?

A: The curriculum mapping methodology is based on an approach developed by Porter, Polikoff and Smithson who established a ‘uniform language’ for describing curriculum content, which was then used to analyse and compare curriculum frameworks (the intended curriculum) and classroom practice (the enacted curriculum). The project team has adapted the uniform language in English, mathematics, science and history to reflect Australian expectations.

The methodology maps curricula in two dimensions, that is, in relation to both a comprehensive list of possible content topics in a learning area, as well as in relation to a scale of cognitive demand.

In the first instance, the mapping will be undertaken by ACARA and will involve subject experts to determine the coverage of topics and cognitive demands within curriculum documents (Australian and state/territory) to address the intended curriculum. Consideration will also be given to having teachers complete the surveys to provide classroom data on coverage of topics and cognitive demands to assist in identifying differences between the proposed curriculum and what is taught in schools.

The mapping and analysis is taking place during March and April 2010.

Australian Curriculum

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: How will the Australian Curriculum take into account the differing school entry age arrangements?

A: The Australian Curriculum has been written with the assumption that the curriculum content described for Kindergarten (known variously as the Reception, Preparatory or Transition year) will be taught to all children in the year prior to Year 1.

ACARA has drafted the early years curriculum to be flexible enough so that teachers in each state and territory can address the different learning experiences and needs of individual children in the first year of schooling. Development of the Australian Curriculum for these early years has also been informed by the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF).

Q: How does the draft English, mathematics, science and history curriculum take account of, and build on, the *Early Years Learning Framework*?

A: The draft Australian Curriculum, along with the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF), support the second goal of the *Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young People*, "that all young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens".

The draft Australian Curriculum has been developed with input and feedback from ACARA writing teams and advisory panels. These include early childhood educators in states and territories, some of whom have also participated in the development of the EYLF.

A key principle in the development of the draft Australian Curriculum has been the importance of depth of learning over breadth of learning. This is significant for the early years and primary years of schooling generally to avoid an overcrowded curriculum. It will also provide teachers with flexibility to apply the key principles and practice of early childhood teaching articulated in the EYLF, that is,

'ongoing learning and reflective practice', 'holistic approaches', 'responsiveness to children', 'learning through play' and 'intentional teaching' (EYLF pp12-16).

The Australian Curriculum's focus on general capabilities and cross-curriculum dimensions also reflects the integrated and complex nature of learning as described in the EYLF's key learning outcomes, that is:

- 'children have a strong sense of identity' (history and English)
- 'children are connected with and contribute to their world' (science, mathematics and history)
- 'children are effective communicators' (English, science, history, mathematics) (EYLF p3)

Q: To what extent does the Australian Curriculum take account of the fact that Year 7 is the last year of primary school in some jurisdictions and the first year of secondary school in others?

A: During development of the curriculum, consideration has been given to the fact that Year 7 may be in primary or secondary schooling depending on school authority arrangements.

While the great majority of Australian Year 7 students around the country will be in the first year of secondary schooling, care has been taken in the development of the curriculum to not assume access to specific resources and facilities by Year 7 students.

Q: How will the Australian Curriculum affect the placement of Year 10 across the states and territories?

A: ACARA is developing the Australian Curriculum for K-12 with senior secondary curriculum building on curriculum content in K-10. States and territories will retain policies and practices that determine when, and under what circumstances, students will commence their senior secondary schooling.