

## National English Curriculum: Initial advice

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## National Curriculum Board's consultative process

### Determining the form of the national curriculum

1 The National Curriculum Board is committed to an open development process with substantial consultation with the teaching profession and the public. The Board began its consultation with the publication on its website ([www.ncb.org.au](http://www.ncb.org.au)) of *National Curriculum Development Paper*, a discussion paper in which it described the context of its work and set down a set of questions that it said it needed to answer to determine the kind of curriculum it would produce. That paper has been discussed at a national forum attended by 200 people on 27 June 2008 and in subsequent state and territory forums.

2 In the light of these discussions and its own further work the Board now sets down answers to its questions in the document *The Shape of the National Curriculum: a Proposal for Discussion*. That does not mean, however, that discussion is closed. The paper is posted on the Board's website with an invitation to anyone interested to provide comment and advice during Term 4 2008<sup>1</sup>. After this time, the Board will determine its final recommendations and post them on its website in Term 1 2009.

### Developing the scope and content of each national curriculum

3 The Board has also begun work on the shape of the national curriculum in English, mathematics, the sciences, and history. For each, the Board recruited a writer who has worked with a small advisory group to draft a relatively brief initial advice paper that provides a rationale for students studying the curriculum and a broad scope and sequence of material to be covered over the years between Kindergarten and Year 12.

4 This approach will facilitate a discussion of the key issues in each curriculum before any detailed curriculum development commences. The first discussions will be held in the following national forums attended by 150–220 people:

Monday 13 October 2008: *Science*

Tuesday 14 October 2008: *Mathematics*

Wednesday 15 October 2008: *History*

Friday 17 October 2008: *English*

5 On the day after each forum a small group of nominees from the relevant subject associations will meet with the authors and staff from the Office of the National Curriculum Board to provide their interpretation of the discussion in the forum and its implications for developing the curriculum. More detailed papers will be posted on the Board's website with an invitation to anyone interested to provide comment and advice in the period to 28 February 2009. After that, the Board will post on its website its final recommendations to guide curriculum development.

6 At each of the forums there will also be some discussion about cross-curriculum learnings, including literacy and numeracy. Feedback from the forums will form part of the consultative process that will ultimately lead to more focused consultation about literacy and numeracy as a strong foundation for all learning, as outlined in the Board's remit to develop national curriculum.

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<sup>1</sup> People can register on the website to receive email alerts when any new material is posted, particularly material on which comment and advice are invited.

### **National Curriculum Board members**

Professor Barry McGaw AO, Chair  
Director, Melbourne Education Research Institute, University of Melbourne

Tony Mackay, Deputy Chair  
Executive Director, Centre for Strategic Education, Melbourne

Tom Alegounarias, Chief Executive, New South Wales Institute of Teachers

John Firth, Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority

Kim Bannikoff, Director, Queensland Studies Authority

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Janet Davy, Deputy Chief Executive, Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training

Dr Brian Croke, Executive Director, Catholic Education Commission New South Wales

Garry Le Duff, Executive Director, Association of Independent Schools of South Australia

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### **English advisory group**

The advice in this paper was provided by an advisory group led by Professor Peter Freebody, Faculty of Education and Social Work, The University of Sydney.

The advisory group members are:

Emeritus Professor Bruce Bennett, University of New South Wales

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### **Professor Peter Freebody biography**

Professor Peter Freebody is a University Professorial Research Fellow based in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at The University of Sydney and studied for his initial degree at The University of Sydney before completing a doctorate at The University of Illinois.

Previous to this he worked at The University of New England, Griffith University, and The University of Queensland. Professor Freebody also assisted in establishing the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice at the National Institute of Education in Singapore. He has also served on various Australian state and national advisory groups in the area of literacy education and as Academic Advisor to the Queensland Minister of Education and the Arts.

Professor Freebody's research and teaching interests are literacy education, educational disadvantage, classroom interaction and quantitative and qualitative research methods.

## **National English curriculum: Initial advice**

### **The initial advice paper is the starting point for English**

The initial advice paper is the starting point for discussion about the way forward for the development of the national English curriculum. The paper's purpose is to generate discussion, draw out the issues and determine where there are agreements and tensions about the proposed ideas in the paper. As the paper was written for this purpose it does not present detail or set a firm position about the way forward.

The detail that is yet to come will be generated by participants at the forum and through extensive consultation from October 2008 until February 2009.

### **The prospect of a national English curriculum**

Historically the subject English has taken responsibility for developing students' knowledge and skills of language, literature and literacy. The new national English curriculum should continue to take responsibility for these three areas and renew and strengthen their contents in light of the capabilities that young Australians need now and for the future.

A national perspective on the development of an English curriculum offers an occasion to clarify those features of present-day Australia that matter to all Australians, a view of a nation that is pluralistic and changing, with a history of accomplishments and struggles, and a commitment to democracy. The development of a national curriculum provides an opportunity to affirm the continuing diversity and dynamism of Australia's traditions by providing a picture of how these traditions relate to our concept of the nation and of its changing place internationally.

A national English curriculum needs to be valuable to all Australian students. Their developing identities, the cultures they live in, and their understanding of how these are connected, are all shaped by the growing capabilities for which subject English takes major responsibility. Individually, these capabilities relate to participating in society. Collectively, as a nation, the way in which schools distribute these capabilities in English relates to how comprehensively and effectively the members of a diverse nation such as ours are able to bring about their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of their nation. A national English curriculum, therefore, plays a central and practical part in affirming and acting on a commitment to equity.

The national English curriculum should provide strong and clear statements of its core intentions but also sufficient flexibility and support so that educators can adapt its contents and processes according to their students' needs. It should provide a structure, rationale and a common vocabulary. Teachers and systems will need to adapt and innovate, and this, in turn will call for adequate resourcing and a reconsideration of current teacher preparation. In Australian education, it is accepted that it is the professionalism of teachers of English that makes productive innovation possible, and systems' support for their development that makes it happen.

This paper proposes a structure for a national English curriculum. It outlines some important reasons why students should engage in a focused and extended study of English. It asks the question: 'What is the rationale for school subject English?'

It summarises some of the debates that have occurred in and around the teaching of English language, literature and literacy. The paper then describes the proposed aims, framework and elements of a national English curriculum, followed by discussion of some of the features of 21<sup>st</sup> century education that the curriculum needs to cover. It concludes with a statement of the advances in English education the new curriculum should aspire to.

### **The reasons for studying English**

Because it helps students become active and effective participants in all aspects of their lives, English remains a priority area of study in Australian schools. It has a distinctive part to play in developing:

1. accurate, purposeful, critical and creative understanding of, and expression in English
2. access to, and fluency in the oral and written language of schooling and the forms of specialised knowledge it represents, preparing young people for further education and training, a range of vocational settings and enjoyable lifelong learning
3. access to, and appreciation of the traditions of Australia's culture and literature in its diverse forms, and of the ways in which these are informed and influenced by past and current developments internationally
4. an increasingly clear and informed understanding of how we come to negotiate, debate and find value in English language, literature and literacy
5. a respect for, and a disposition toward speculation, imaginativeness, innovation, and experimentation, and a curiosity about how English language, literature and literacy relate to individual and collective experience
6. an active working knowledge of a common language and literature to help sustain and advance a linguistically and ethnically complex country.

In language- and literacy-saturated societies such as Australia, oral and written English capabilities directly affect the quality of personal experience and the quality of social life. The broader the range of settings in which people are capable, the more varied are the experiences in which they can take part, from which they can learn, and upon which they can actively exert influence by contributing knowledge and opinion.

There are persistent indications that unacceptable inequities exist in how students achieve in English. Other countries with comparable demographics show less dramatic variations, in particular as they relate to socio-economic and Indigenous status. A national English curriculum, because of its particular responsibility for quality learning in language, literature and literacy is an important part of a renewed national effort focused on high achievement for all students.

## Debates in English education

Like many other complex curriculum domains, English education has experienced continuous debate, renovation and reform. These debates, about many aspects of language, literature and literacy, have been valuable. They have positioned the teaching profession well for the collective work needed to achieve a level of consensus, in the long-term interests of its present and future students that the preparation of a national English curriculum demands. A brief summary of some of these debates follows.

### Core knowledge base

Across different places and times the contents of the three mutually informing elements of study that have comprised English education – language, literature and literacy – have varied, as have the relationships among them. There have been fluctuations in the scope and rationale for the selection of texts of value and the capabilities needed to learn from them, and variations in the relationship among these elements, their relative priority in educational programs, and the explicitness with which their separation is maintained. What seems comparatively steady through these changes in the study of English, however, has been an attention to knowledge about English as a language, knowledge about literature in English, and broadening students' repertoire of practical capabilities in oral and written English.

A national English curriculum will need to consider the ways these inter-related bodies of knowledge will constitute its core: knowledge about the English language, knowledge about literature, and knowledge about how to use English accurately and effectively across a broad range of settings. These elements, and the ways in which they inform and support one another, make up the essentials of subject English.

### Beginnings and basics

There have been long-standing debates about the teaching of 'the basics' in the early years of schooling – grapheme-phoneme correspondence, phonological and phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, grammar, spelling, and conventions of punctuation, and so on. Three overall conclusions seem to have general support from the extensive research literature on this topic:

1. The explicit and systematic teaching of sound-script correspondences is important, and not just for students who are in their first year or so of schooling, or for whom English is not a first language.
2. The gains made through effective acquisition and consolidation of this knowledge in early schooling need to be maintained by ongoing attention in the later school years to other resources that develop vocabulary development, text comprehension and construction, so that there is connection to other aspects of reading and writing.
3. The acquisition of this knowledge does not readily take place at the same time or tempo for all students.

The explicit teaching of decoding, grammar, spelling and other aspects of the basic codes of written English will be an important and routine aspect of the national English curriculum. It should be planned, put into practice and consolidated as part of a program in English education, and it should be available to students throughout the school years.

### **The materials of English**

The subject of English has historically been largely about the reading and writing of printed texts. More recently there has been debate about the growing significance of visual and non-print communication such as speaking and listening, combinations of visual information with language, and the new digital developments. In considering the tasks that young learners face in school, in their further education and training, and in workplaces, the argument has been that subject English should expand its scope to include more focus on these non-print forms.

Clearly these forms of communication are expanding in and out of formal education, and so they have an important place in a national English curriculum.

### **The place of literature and Australian literature**

Debates about the selection of texts and, within that process, of literary texts, are ongoing. The national English curriculum will need to consider ways in which students acquire the motivation, skills and knowledge to appreciate more specialised approaches to literature. Literature will be a core element at every stage of the curriculum, and the mutual reliance of language, literacy and literature should be acknowledged. Teaching strategies should explicitly reinforce the connections among them.

A national English curriculum points to the responsibility of schooling for the English language and literature of Australia—as these currently stand, in their historical context, and in their ongoing relevance to this country. A feature of Australian education in English language and literature is that it has become gradually more open to international English and world literature. Knowledge of these matters should form part of what young Australians know about English and about being Australian. The presence of Australian literary works and a growing appreciation of the place of Australian literature among other literary traditions, should be a core element of the national English curriculum.

### **Understanding, analysing, appreciating and constructing**

There are different ways students can approach understanding, analysing, appreciating and constructing texts. For some years now there have been differences of opinion about the use of 'critical literacy' which covers a range of positions and practices to do with the analysis of texts in terms of their potential philosophical, political or ideological assumptions and content. The national English curriculum will need to consider, at different stages of schooling, what emphasis is required to support young people as they move from learning to read to reading to learn and as they increase their understandings of how to interpret texts, especially when they are more complex and extended. This includes how they are constructed and evaluated, and how their effects on us result from the features of the texts themselves and from the personal, social and cultural conditions in which they are used.

### **The teaching of grammar in English**

Over some decades the teaching of grammar as part of English in Australia has been a topic of contention for teachers, universities, schools and the general community. Whether grammar should be taught at all, when, how much and what particular form(s) of grammar should be taught have all been strongly contested.



As part of a strong commitment to equity and quality, the teaching of grammar, progressively building knowledge and fluency over the full course of the school years, will be a significant feature of the national English curriculum. This commitment includes traditional word- and sentence-level grammar, text-level grammar that teaches text types and patterns, and the functional relations between these levels.

In summary, in Australia the related fields of English language, literature and literacy education owe much of their richness and sophistication to the conduct of debates such as these. The development of a national English curriculum presents the opportunity to clarify important points of coalition. These and other debates will continue to influence decisions in schools and regions as the curriculum is further developed, implemented and adapted across the country.

## The elements of the national English curriculum

### Principles

The national English curriculum should:

- be developed around a view of the coherent and connected bodies of knowledge that students accumulate, broaden and refine over the school years.
- involve a systematic movement back and forth between learning the knowledge, skills and dispositions that characterise the discipline, and applying them in new settings.

This dual goal of learning in English—knowledge about language, literature and literacy, and the increasingly powerful application of that knowledge to different kinds of texts—is a general model for the interaction between the elements outlined below.

### The Elements

1. The three Elements to be considered for the national English curriculum work together in interconnected ways.
  1. *Knowledge about the English language*: a coherent, dynamic and evolving body of knowledge of how the English language works in its various modes and settings.
  2. *Informed appreciation of literature*: an enjoyment in and increasingly informed appreciation of the English language in its capacity to convey information, to express emotion, to create imaginative worlds and to convey aesthetically and ethically significant experiences through encounters with a variety of literary texts.
  3. *Growing repertoires of English usage*: the ability to understand and produce the English language accurately, fluently, creatively, critically, confidently and effectively in a growing range of settings.

**Element 1: Knowledge about English**

This area draws attention to the need for students to develop a coherent body of knowledge about how the English language works in its significant oral, written and other forms. The development of this body of knowledge should be regarded as a fundamental responsibility of the English curriculum. A focus on grammar, spelling and conventions of punctuation will be necessary across all stages of schooling. Students need to know how to correctly construct a sentence.

Many students in their early experiences of books may need systematic attention to phonological awareness and sound-letter correspondences (more technically referred to as grapheme-phoneme correspondence or GPC).

The explicit teaching of GPC and of other aspects of written and spoken English should be regarded as an important aspect of an English curriculum and therefore as routine. It should be conceptualised, put into practice and consolidated as part of a program in English education and it should be available to students throughout the school years. Knowledge about English enables learning that is portable and applicable to new settings through the school years and beyond. It provides the basis for the development of the other two Elements.

Across all stages of schooling there is a need for systematic exposure to a usable, increasingly specialised language for talking and learning about these aspects of English, including word-, sentence- and text-level grammar. Establishing greater continuity in the study of English in Australian schools across all years of schooling is a priority.

Students need to know what constitutes accuracy, fluency and confidence in the foundational aspects of understanding, speaking, reading and writing language and image and their combinations.

This should be accompanied and motivated by the integrated language experiences provided in Elements 2 and 3. It will also take the form of direct teaching and learning of language and image patterns, the outcomes of which should be explicitly reintegrated into contextualised reading and writing activities.

All students need to develop their understandings of how language functions to achieve a range of purposes that are critical to success in school. This includes reading, understanding and writing texts that describe, narrate, analyse, explain, recount, argue, review, and so on. A shared language for talking about these processes enables students, teachers and others to discuss, with continuity from year to year, how language differs across settings and purposes, and the implications of those differences for language use. It enables a body of knowledge to be built continuously. This is not to say that this building process will be either linear or the same for all students.

Students should expand their understanding of how language builds knowledge and belief about the world, and of how pervasive this process is in their everyday lives, including in increasingly specialised contexts such as schools and workplaces. Students also need to grow in their knowledge of how language enables people to interact effectively, to build and maintain their relationships, and to express and exchange their attitudes, feelings and opinions.

Students need to know how to create clearly constructed, coherent, organised sentences, paragraphs and texts through the language choices they make, and how to talk systematically about these processes of creation and choice. Knowledge about features of language use is aimed at providing the foundation that will help students broaden their repertoires of language knowledge, engage with a variety of audiences, and make, exchange and negotiate evaluations of the aesthetic and social value of texts.

## **Element 2: Informed appreciation of literature**

Engaging with literary texts is an educational experience that is worthwhile in its own right. Literature and other arts-related learning experiences can also enhance imaginative approaches to learning more generally as well as flexibility of thought and motivation to learn.

Element 2 is fundamentally about students' intellectual and affective engagement with and study of literary texts of aesthetic value. The term *literary texts* is taken to cover a broad range of forms, including picture books, multimodal texts, novels, short stories, poetry and drama, and a variety of non-fiction forms. The term also covers the relationship of these forms of writing to other media including cinema, television and digital and multi-media products.

This is where the body of knowledge of English as a language is put to work, consolidated and deepened as the school years progress. It involves the study of past and present English works that aim to exploit the imaginative potential of the English language and the study of *how* that potential is exploited in literature.

Over the school years, Element 2 should come to gradually incorporate gradually more informed reflection on the processes by which some works have become regarded as worth special attention. This calls for negotiation around the processes of valuing, and around the significance of those processes – why literature in some form, and with whatever levels of controversy, has persisted in mattering to individuals and cultures. As with all aspects of the national English curriculum students' skills, knowledge, dispositions and values should be developed in coherent and cumulative ways over the school years. In that regard, informed intellectual and affective engagement is an important steps toward more formal understandings of literature.

Like Element 1, Element 2 entails a process that should begin in the early school years and be systematically broadened and deepened as the school years progress. A significant component of this involves attention to texts that are judged to have particular potential for enriching young learners' lives and expanding the scope of their experience. This process should begin with accessible and appropriate texts related to young children's daily lives. It should gradually incorporate, over the primary school years, literature written for children and young adults; it should evolve through the middle and secondary years toward the textual forms developed as part of the more specialised study of literary texts.

In the culminating years there should be a strong focus on analysing the historical genres and literary traditions of Australian literature and world literature. By the final years of secondary schooling, students' written and oral accounts of their engagement with literary texts should show that they can apply a coherent body of knowledge about the English language to literary criticism, history and appreciation. In this way the senior years of secondary English should begin to connect directly with the more formal expectations of literary studies as a humanities subject at the university level.

### **Element 3: Growing repertoires of English usage**

This area aims to encourage educators to help students expand and consolidate their repertoires of English in use. The aim is to provide learners with accuracy, confidence, fluency and efficacy in their use of English across a growing range of settings. The spontaneity of oral language and the way it is embedded in the immediate context, gradually becomes complemented by the more considered, crafted and distanced language of the written mode; from the everyday language of personal experience towards the more abstract, specialised and technical language of schooling; and from informal interaction with a limited number of familiar people towards more sophisticated interpersonal skills with a wide range of known and unknown audiences.

The emphases are on breadth of repertoire and depth of mastery, earned through the application of understandings developing through Element 1 work.

Schools have a responsibility to develop in students broadly-based capabilities in oral and written uses of English as well as understandings about how English language combines with graphic and other visual formats. This includes familiarity with and gradual mastery of a range of texts that are important to everyday life and to learning in schools, in print and digital contexts. If Element 1 can be thought of as 'learning about' English language, then Element 3 is focussed on 'learning to' use it. The knowledge driving the application, expansion and consolidation of students' repertoires of capabilities in English is generally drawn from Element 1.

In turn, the motivation for learning about the English language comes from the demands of expanding and consolidating English capabilities in Element 3 work. Students' accurate, fluent and confident engagement with texts is based on development in the enabling skills of decoding, spelling, punctuation, and grammatical accuracy, along with handwriting and word-processing skills. Similarly, processes and strategies that support comprehension and expression in reading and writing texts will also underpin more proficient and effective uses of English.

The role of picture and multimodal texts in enhancing students' engagement, motivation and enjoyment in the early years of schooling has long been recognised. Picking up on Element 1 work in Element 3 will also involve the systematic exploration and production of multimodal texts throughout the school years, in turn incorporating a growing understanding of how visual texts work, their structures, interpretation, and the effects of certain features.

### **Outlining the national English curriculum**

These Elements are aimed at providing a template for developing and adapting new curriculum materials, and for planning, developing and coordinating units and lessons in short and long time frames. They also provide a framework for communicating to students, parents, and institutions. In practice, however, the Elements are in regular interaction; no one of them of itself constitutes a program in school English. Their educational meaning arises from the ways in which they can be made to inform one another.

The curriculum should define the *key stages* that will be used to sequence learning subject English. The aims of each stage should be described along with how each builds on the previous stage and provides a platform for the subsequent stage. This curriculum should focus on four stages of schooling: early years, primary years, junior secondary and senior secondary. There needs to be continuity through traditional

transition points: transition to school, transition to secondary school, transition to upper secondary, transition to further education and/or workplaces.

An additional level of planning for the implementation of the Elements across the stages should be developed through the specification of categories of capabilities (skills, habits, knowledge, dispositions and values) for acquiring and coordinating knowledge of English.

These categories of capabilities should at least cover:

1. how to understand, coordinate and use the material codes of spoken and written English and the components of images
2. how to build, connect and coordinate the meanings that come together to enable the comprehension and composition of texts in English
3. how to interpret and produce a wide repertoire of texts appropriately across a growing variety of settings
4. how to analyse and synthesise textual materials accurately, critically and imaginatively.

There should be flexibility in the timeframes for learning in these Elements, with an awareness of the powerful equity implications of a lockstep, rushed or crowded curriculum, and of the ongoing need to increase the levels of engagement and intellectual quality that characterise learning in Australian schools. The national English curriculum must be able to be applied with high levels of success across a range of conditions in which teachers work.

In considering these Elements and resources, some aspects of learning will clearly receive more focus, time and attention at different points along the Kindergarten/Primary/Reception (KPR)-12 continuum. That is, we can think of these particular domains of knowledge as 'ramping up' steeply at certain points in time and leveling out at others.

As the learning of one set of capabilities consolidates, it will reach a point where it comes to provide a platform for another domain to receive increased pedagogical attention. While the Elements will be engaged at all stages, emphases on different capabilities will vary at different times across stages of schooling.

## **A 21<sup>st</sup> century English curriculum**

Every curriculum for school is built, however carefully or explicitly, on a view of the future. The formation of a national English curriculum calls for reflection on the changes that are now reshaping Australian life.

Australia is a society saturated by language, literacy and communication media. More and more of the routine daily activities of citizens in all aspects of their lives and conducted through oral and written language and images. People's sense of belonging in, and contributing to local, community, institutional, national and, increasingly, virtual communities is strongly influenced by their ability to understand, interpret and produce communications.

Australia is a nation in which over 60 Indigenous languages are spoken, along with over 100 imported 'community' or migrant languages. The various indigenous and community languages brought by students into Australian schools display many

contrasting conventions. The teaching of English in Australian schools is taking place amid a shifting assortment of ideas about what language is, how it works, how it is inscribed and represented, and how it contributes to the experiences of individuals and to the cohesion of communities. This valuable diversity brings with it a responsibility to ensure that all students have a confident command of the uses of English that they need to participate actively as learners, citizens and workers. This feature of contemporary Australian life stresses the responsibility of the national English curriculum to explicitly teach pronunciation, decoding, spelling, word-, sentence- and text-level grammar, informed appreciation of literature—in short, to build a platform for the development of all of the components of how to read and write, speak and listen adequate to the demands of present-day Australian life.

A national English curriculum should meet the needs of all students, including students who are learning English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D). These students make up about one quarter of the Australian school population. They include children of recent or settled migrants, refugee students, considerable numbers of rural, remote and urban Aboriginal learners, and increasingly, international students undertaking schooling in Australia. Such learners might know no English at all, or they might have limited English proficiency; they might be illiterate in their first language, speak a dialect of English, or be orally fluent in everyday English but lack competence in the language of schooling. These students are over-represented in the long tail of underachieving learners in literacy assessments.

The national English curriculum should provide guidance for all teachers KPR-12 in supporting these students. A more responsive approach to the support of these students can help increase their engagement with and success in academic curriculum content; a less responsive approach, or a partitioning of English language and literacy support into a separate area outside of school curriculum, can minimise participation in lessons and engagement with the intellectual content of the curriculum. In this regard, consideration needs to be given to a language proficiency scale for EAL/D learners to enable assessment of their needs and monitoring of their progress.

The richness brought by Australian students to school is not only linguistic: Australia's evolving ethnic composition brings with it variations in cultural, social and moral interests, embodied in a range of literatures, including the inscriptional and narrative traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. These different literatures embody the experiences of Australians and influence the development of their skills, knowledge, dispositions and values.

Digital technologies have had significant effects on the ways in which many people, groups and communities work, meet and stay in touch, share, build and store knowledge, entertain themselves, and access material for pleasure and learning. This in turn has implications for the ways in which young people learn in school and how individual and classroom work can be organised. An obvious implication is that there are now new opportunities for teaching with digital and online materials.

For schools and school systems this issue is made more complex by the unevenness of access to digital and online facilities and thus to contact with the 'flows' – knowledge, ideas, commodities, money, and people – of globalisation. The easy assumption that all Australian communities and students have equally functional access to digital and online resources should be resisted in the construction of the national English curriculum.

Globalisation, in the form of the rapid and substantial international movements of people, money, ideas, and knowledge, has contributed to changes in the structure of the Australian labour market. Many of the students now in Australian schools are heading for work sites that are markedly different from those encountered by their parents and grandparents. For instance, there has been a significant proportional increase in work that involves sophisticated levels of language and other symbolic skills at the expense of work in semi-skilled, agricultural and manufacturing sectors. There has also been an increase in how often young people change jobs. These developments combine to put pressure on young people's communication skills in English and on their ability to learn quickly in a range of unfamiliar conditions. This is one reason why English language and literacy capabilities are crucial to productivity.

All of these changes impact on Australian students and the ways in which they need to use and learn about English. These developments are part of the dynamism of the Australian language, literary and literacy experience, and they put pressure on the need for a clear, practicable, coherent and inclusive English curriculum. They also highlight the need to keep adapting and revising content and process in the teaching of English across the country.

### **Aspirations of the national English curriculum**

How should the national English curriculum aspire to advance English education now that it has a national pool of talent and experience at its disposal? Three potential advances are outlined briefly here.

Continuity and cumulative learning are important, because discontinuities and fragmented curriculum experiences, no matter how engaging in their own right, present unnecessary difficulties to students who are struggling. The national English curriculum should explain how each Element builds continuous, cumulative patterns of learning as part of its projection as a discipline.

Across the years of schooling, Australian students should learn how the English language is constructed: patterns of pronunciation and spelling; the grammatical classification of words; and sentence and text grammar; the bases for responding to literary texts; the construction of texts that combine visual and linguistic information, and so on. The approach taken here is based on informed understanding first of the connections between explicit knowledge and cumulative learning, and second of the substantial relationship between, on the one hand, explicit teaching and learning, and, on the other, educational equity and quality.

With regard to Element 2, the national English curriculum should comprise a systematic program of study in English literature. This entails answering the question: 'What will be learned about literature, the literary experience, and the past and future "histories" of literature that we can teach in a principled way over this timeframe?' The national English curriculum should aim for an informed engagement that is intensified and extended by an increasingly systematic understanding of the processes of artistic creativity, composition, the practices of aesthetic craft-work that have been conventionally valued, and an historically-based understanding of why and how those processes have come about.

The national English curriculum should deal head-on with commonly expressed concerns about 'the loss of literature in primary English' and 'the loss of language and literacy education in secondary English'. Both of these would constitute a 'loss of English' as this paper has attempted to constitute it. Primary and secondary students will benefit from a more systematic clarification of the importance of the three Elements of English from KPR -12 and from their more systematic interaction across that entire span. A foundational idea of this is that it is important for planning, theorising and communicating to distinguish between explicit knowledge about the English language, in its variety and complexity, an informed appreciation of literature, and an ability to use English in its important forms and settings. In the implementation of rich educational experiences that systematically build capabilities over time, however, it is the interaction of these three Elements that matters most.



## Curriculum materials consulted

### Curriculum Corporation: Statements of Learning for English

[http://www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/resources/SOL\\_English.pdf](http://www.mceetya.edu.au/verve/resources/SOL_English.pdf)

### Australian Capital Territory: Every chance to learn curriculum framework

[http://activated.act.edu.au/ectl/resources/ECTL\\_Framework.pdf](http://activated.act.edu.au/ectl/resources/ECTL_Framework.pdf)

### New South Wales

K-5

[http://k5.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/files/english/k5\\_english\\_syl.pdf](http://k5.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/files/english/k5_english_syl.pdf)

17-10

[http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus\\_sc/pdf\\_doc/english\\_1710\\_syllabus.pdf](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_sc/pdf_doc/english_1710_syllabus.pdf)

Stage 5 (11-12)

[http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus\\_hsc/pdf\\_doc/english\\_syl.pdf](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_hsc/pdf_doc/english_syl.pdf)

### Northern Territory

[http://www.det.nt.gov.au/education/teaching\\_and\\_learning/curriculum/ntcf/docs/learning\\_areas\\_english.pdf](http://www.det.nt.gov.au/education/teaching_and_learning/curriculum/ntcf/docs/learning_areas_english.pdf)

### Queensland

English syllabus (P-9) currently being revised

<http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/syllabus/1740.html>

English Essential Learnings and Standards

<http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/assessment/3150.html>

### South Australia: Key Ideas and Outcomes R-10

[http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/index\\_fsrc.asp?t=LA](http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/index_fsrc.asp?t=LA)

### Tasmania: K-10

<http://resources.education.tas.gov.au/item/edres/e0c82c3e-a59b-b515-3a45-170b1aa032234/1/syl-elall.pdf>

### Victoria: Victorian Essential Learning Standards

[http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/downloads/vels\\_standards/velsrevisedenglish.pdf](http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/downloads/vels_standards/velsrevisedenglish.pdf)

### Western Australia: K-10

[http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/internet/Years\\_K10/Curriculum\\_Framework/](http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/internet/Years_K10/Curriculum_Framework/)

### British Columbia

K-17

[http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/ela\\_k17\\_2005.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/ela_k17_2005.pdf)

8-12

[http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/ela\\_8\\_12\\_20017.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/ela_8_12_20017.pdf)

12 Literature

<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/englit12.pdf>

Performance Standards

[http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/perf\\_stands/](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/perf_stands/)

**Ontario**

1-8

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/language18currb.pdf>

9-10

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english910currb.pdf>

11-12

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english1112currb.pdf>

Grade 12 English Literacy

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/english12curr.pdf>**California English curriculum grades K-8**<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/im/elaeldmatrixlinks.asp>**Finland (Mother tongue and Literature)**[http://www.oph.fi/ops/english/POPS\\_net\\_new\\_2.pdf](http://www.oph.fi/ops/english/POPS_net_new_2.pdf)**Singapore**

Overview of primary curriculum

<http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/primary/curriculum/>

English Language syllabus for primary and secondary

<http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/syllabuses/languages-and-literature/files/english-primary-secondary.pdf>

Literature in English (Lower secondary)

<http://www.moe.gov.sg/education/syllabuses/languages-and-literature/files/literature-in-english-lower-secondary-20017.pdf>**Hong Kong**

Primary 1 - Secondary 3 (Years 1-9)

[http://www.edb.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content\\_3118/index.pdf](http://www.edb.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content_3118/index.pdf)**England**

England Key Stages 1-4

[http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/uploads/English%201999%20programme%20of%20study\\_tcm8-12054.pdf?return=/key-stages-1-and-2/subjects/english/keystage1/index.aspx%3Freturn%3D/key-stages-1-and-2/subjects/english/index.aspx](http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/uploads/English%201999%20programme%20of%20study_tcm8-12054.pdf?return=/key-stages-1-and-2/subjects/english/keystage1/index.aspx%3Freturn%3D/key-stages-1-and-2/subjects/english/index.aspx)[http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/uploads/QCA-017-3332-pEnglish3\\_tcm8-399.pdf?return=/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/english/keystage3/index.aspx](http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/uploads/QCA-017-3332-pEnglish3_tcm8-399.pdf?return=/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/english/keystage3/index.aspx)

England new Key Stage 3

[http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/uploads/QCA-017-3333-pEnglish4\\_tcm8-415.pdf?return=/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/english/keystage4/index.aspx%3Freturn%3D/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/index.aspx](http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/uploads/QCA-017-3333-pEnglish4_tcm8-415.pdf?return=/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/english/keystage4/index.aspx%3Freturn%3D/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/index.aspx)

England new Key Stage 4

[http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/uploads/QCA-017-3333-pEnglish4\\_tcm8-415.pdf?return=/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/english/keystage4/index.aspx%3Freturn%3D/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/index.aspx](http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/uploads/QCA-017-3333-pEnglish4_tcm8-415.pdf?return=/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/english/keystage4/index.aspx%3Freturn%3D/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/index.aspx)**South Africa**

R-9

<http://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/GET/doc/home.pdf>

10-12

<http://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/HomeLang/English%20Home%20Language.pdf>

### **Ireland**

[http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/foundation\\_stage/areas\\_of\\_learning/](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/foundation_stage/areas_of_learning/)

Primary

[http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key\\_stages\\_1\\_and\\_2/northern\\_ireland\\_curriculum\\_primary.pdf](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key_stages_1_and_2/northern_ireland_curriculum_primary.pdf)

Key Stage 1 Language and literacy statutory guidelines

[http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key\\_stages\\_1\\_and\\_2/areas\\_of\\_learning/statutory\\_requirements/ks1\\_language\\_literacy.pdf](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key_stages_1_and_2/areas_of_learning/statutory_requirements/ks1_language_literacy.pdf)

Key Stage 2 Language and literacy statutory guidelines

[http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key\\_stages\\_1\\_and\\_2/areas\\_of\\_learning/statutory\\_requirements/ks2\\_language\\_literacy.pdf](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key_stages_1_and_2/areas_of_learning/statutory_requirements/ks2_language_literacy.pdf)

Key Stage 3

[http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key\\_stage\\_3/statutory\\_curriculum\\_ks3.pdf](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/key_stage_3/statutory_curriculum_ks3.pdf)

### **Scotland**

Scotland is currently developing a new curriculum called Curriculum for excellence.

They have s information on their website in relation to English and literacy.

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/outcomes/literacyandenglish/>

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