

23 March, The Age Schools Summit, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre

The New Australian Curriculum - where to from here?



Thank you for that welcome Adam and thank you to Becky Allen for that interesting and thought-provoking address.

I wish to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are meeting, **Bunurong Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nation.**

I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present, and the Elders of other communities who may be here today for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia, and by extension, all of us.

This time last year I was speaking to you as ACARA was about to publish a consultation draft of the national curriculum for public feedback.

That was the first time in its history that a draft of the Australian curriculum had been open to the public as one document for consultation.



At the time I said: “I expect we will see a stirring of the passions. No doubt some will argue the proposed revisions don’t go far enough, while others will say they go too far.”

A year on I think we can safely say those predictions have come to pass.

The Australian Curriculum Review attracted an enormous amount of public attention.



Not just the glaring headlines and multiple front pages and endless Twitter “debate” but significant and genuine community interest and some reasoned and well written media pieces as well.

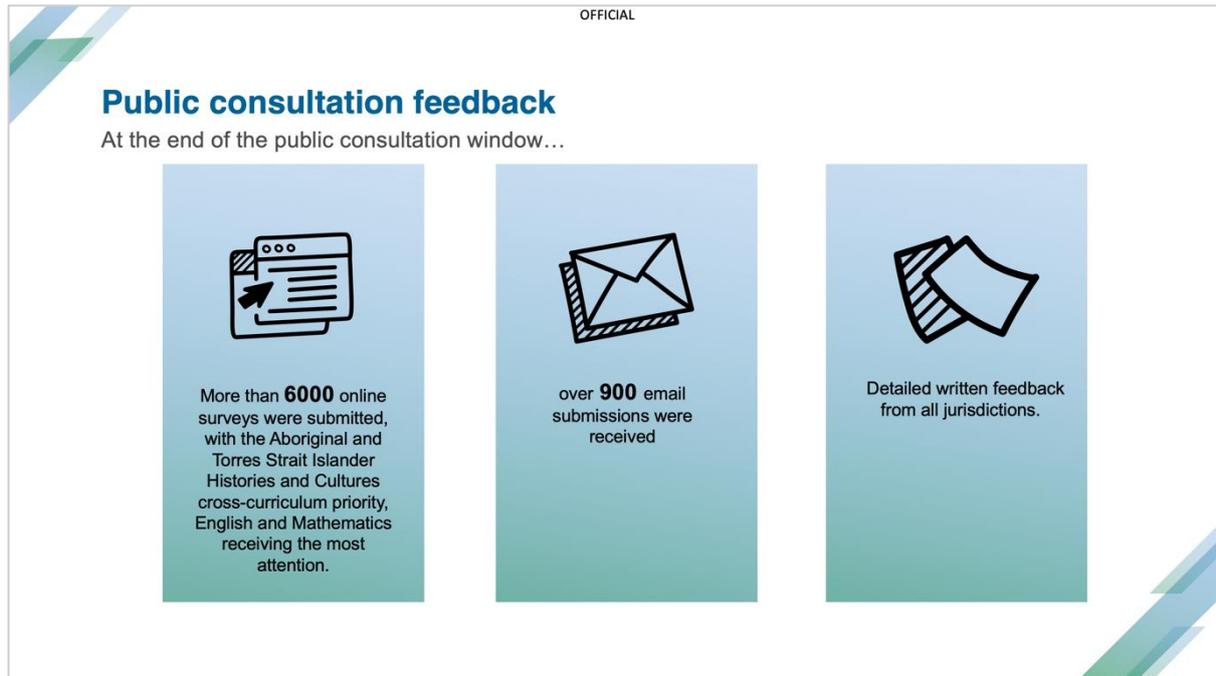
The truth is I would have been deeply disappointed if the release of the consultation draft had not triggered passionate discussion about what we teach our children. That would have been an indication that our society no longer cared about the education our children receive.

The issue of what we teach to the younger generation is always going to be value laden. That’s because a national curriculum is an expression of the community's aspirations for its children. It's a self-expression of the community's values.

But we also need to recognise that we live in an increasingly diverse culture. Whether that degree of diversity and difference in world views becomes a problem for us depends on us, and on how we educate our children.

The challenge that we face as a nation - culturally, socially, politically - is, in the words of WB Yeats, ensuring that “the centre holds”, namely that we can all continue to support diversity through a common commitment to reasoned and respectful democratic debate as the mechanism for determining the rules which determine our common life and contribute to the common good.

Education is crucial to that, which is why a vibrant and vigorous debate about how the national curriculum shapes the values that we as a country want to promote, is important.

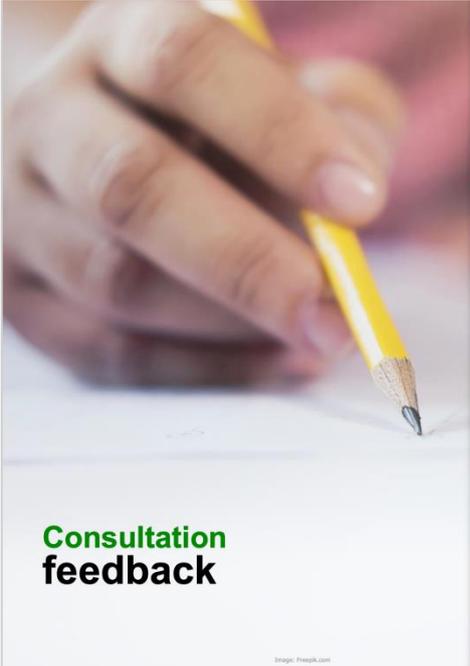


Community consultation is therefore essential. At the end of the public consultation window:

- more than 6000 online surveys were submitted, with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority, English and Mathematics receiving the most attention.
- over 900 email submissions were received
- detailed written feedback from all jurisdictions.

There was a lot of support for many aspects of the consultation draft as well as a lot of criticism.

Overall, the feedback from consultation agreed the proposed revisions for each learning area were an improvement on the current Australian Curriculum, v8.4; the introductory sections were more helpful, that content had been refined, and that achievement standards and content descriptions had improved in their clarity across all learning areas.



**Consultation
feedback**

- in English, being clearer about the importance of phonics for learning how to read
- in Mathematics, concern with respect to the year levels at which certain concepts were introduced and the view that some changes could be seen to be advocating particular pedagogical approaches
- in History and in Civics and Citizenship, concern at whether the religious, cultural and historical roots of Australia's success as a prosperous and democratic nation were adequately recognised
- in Health and Physical Education, ensuring there was explicit content for teaching about consent within the context of respectful relationships.

However, a clear message was that there was further work to be done to reduce and refine curriculum content, especially in F-6.

There was also a high level of feedback and public comment in relation to specific aspects that required further attention. These were:

- in English, being clearer about the importance of phonics for learning how to read
- in Mathematics, concern with respect to the year levels at which certain concepts were introduced and the view that some changes could be seen to be advocating particular pedagogical approaches
- in History and in Civics and Citizenship, concern at whether the religious, cultural and historical roots of Australia's success as a prosperous and democratic nation were adequately recognised
- in Health and Physical Education, ensuring there was explicit content for teaching about consent within the context of respectful relationships.

ACARA has listened carefully to that feedback to hear what the community and especially what the teaching profession had to say.

As a result the version that was sent to Ministers for endorsement, in accordance with the process set out in the Terms of Reference agreed by them in 2020, was much better than the consultation draft.



Meeting the aims of the review

-  Content has been revised and realigned to ensure it is up-to-date, has a strong evidence base and matches the high standards expected in other high-performing countries.
-  It is easier and clearer for teachers to use and understand.
-  It has been reduced and refined to improve useability and implementation, especially for primary school teachers.
-  The outcome is a curriculum that sets high standards and will support improvement in Australia's educational outcomes.

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We did this work through regular meetings of 20 reference groups comprising curriculum experts and practicing teachers.

The outcome is a curriculum that sets high standards and will support improvement in Australia's educational outcomes.



Ministers considered the final draft on 4 February and all Ministers were supportive of the revisions to six out of eight learning areas, the cross-curriculum priorities and the general capabilities.

However, as is well known, Ministers have asked us to do some further work in Mathematics and the Humanities and Social Sciences to address issues raised by the Western Australian minister and the acting Commonwealth Minister, and to bring back those further amendments to Ministers in April.

What are these areas that need further attention? Minister Robert tabled the letter he wrote to the ACARA Chair, Mr Derek Scott, in Senate Estimates last month, so it is on the public record. In that letter he outlined the following issues, which are similar, but not exactly the same, to those raised by the Western Australian Minister:

Further work on Maths and HASS

Mathematics:

- lifting standards to ensure they match those of high-performing nations (this could include being clear about which operations students need to be able to do without a calculator)
- ensuring a focus on mastery of foundational material in the primary curriculum
- ensuring content descriptors are written clearly

HASS:

- further reducing the volume and complexity of the content, so teachers know what content is essential to teach
- ensuring that key aspects of Australian History, namely 1750–1914 and Australia's post World War 11 migrant history, are appropriately prioritised and can be taught within the time available.

Both:

Reduce the number of elaborations and ensure they support evidence-based teaching.

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In both Maths and HASS, we have been asked to look closely at the elaborations to see where they can be reduced in number and support evidence-based teaching, noting, as I mentioned, that a criticism of the consultation draft was that it could have been interpreted as straying into pedagogical territory.

ACARA will also undertake further work in the important area of the mental health for young Australians, this will occur in Health and Physical Education Learning Area.

We are on track to meet that request, and in doing so we need to be work towards consensus among all nine ministers, including those who were willing to endorse the version considered on 4 February. We are hopeful that before long Ministers will collectively endorse a final version.

So, on that assumption, which I hope is not too heroic, the question arises, where to next?

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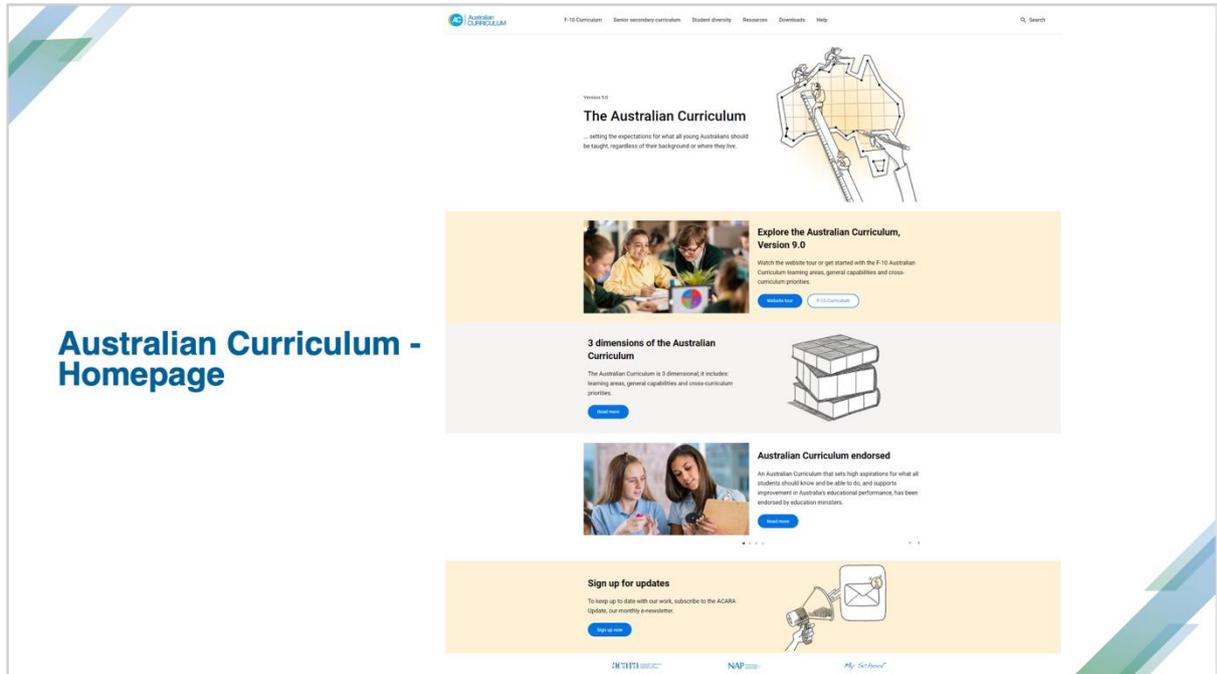
From INTENDED curriculum to DELIVERED curriculum

- The Australian Curriculum should be seen as a tool for the profession.
- It should assist teachers in making decisions about what, when, and why to teach particular content knowledge and skills.

Ministerial endorsement is not the end of the story. In fact, it really only the beginning. It will set out the **intended** curriculum, but as teachers all know, the intended curriculum has to be effectively **delivered** in the classroom, which means it has to be presented in a way that is useful for teachers.

The curriculum, at the end of the day, should be seen as a tool for the profession, to assist you in the decisions you make about what, when and why to teach particular content knowledge and discipline-specific skills.

To that end, ACARA has also been working to completely revamp the Australian Curriculum website to present the curriculum digitally, with features that teachers have asked for.



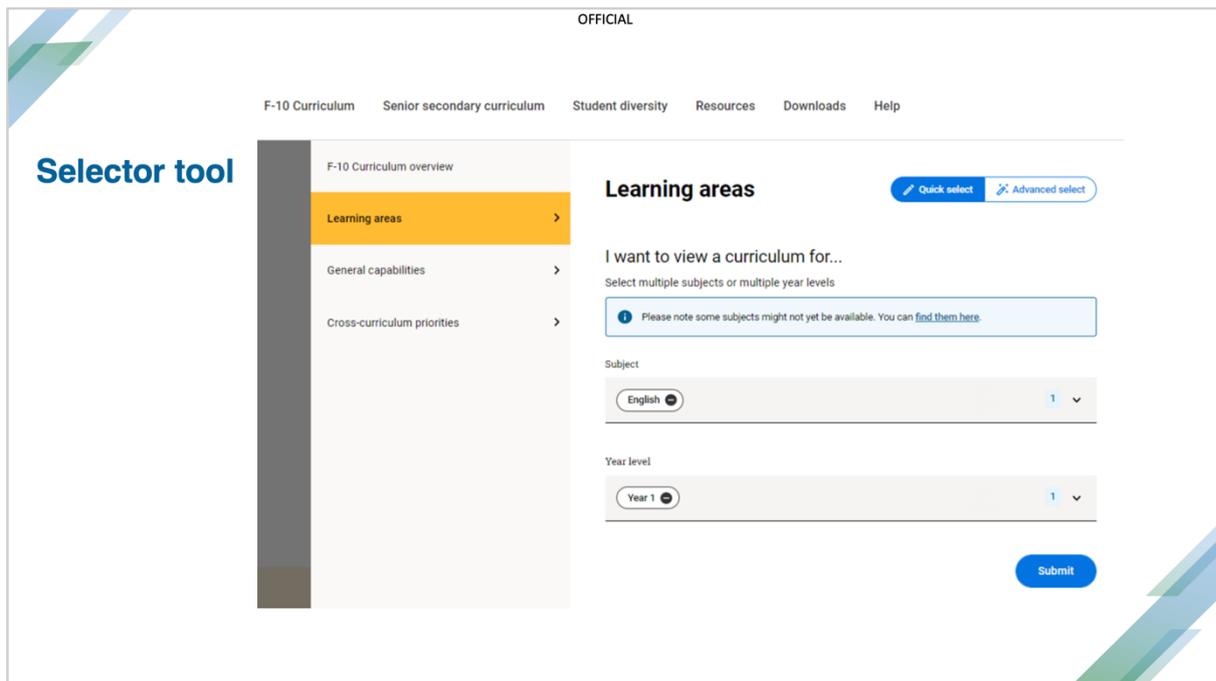
The website will go live a few weeks after the curriculum has been endorsed. Subsequent website releases will add extra features and publish support resources and work samples as they progressively become available.

We believe this new way of presenting the Australian curriculum is going to be a game-changer for teachers.

A key aim of the review is to give teachers time back so they can teacher for deeper understanding. This website does that.

It has been designed with the needs of teachers in mind and teachers from across Australia have been involved in user experience testing.

There's a range of features to help you to view, explore and plan and I am going to go through a couple now to give you a preview.



This selector tool is your gateway to the Australian Curriculum.

Everything you need is accessible from the top menu. You'll find all the information about the F-10 curriculum here.

This is where you can get advice about planning and implementation, explore the different dimensions, and access various resources.

There's also a quick menu to download curriculum materials, help pages to answer your questions, and a search tool to help you explore.

All curriculum materials are also now in Word rather than PDF – making it easier for teachers when lesson planning to edit and work with the content to suit their purposes.

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Inline glossary

AC9M8M03

solve problems involving the **circumference** and area of a circle using formulas

 [Elaborations \(4\)](#)

AC9M8M04

solve problems involving duration, including using 12- and 24-hour time across multiple time zones



circumference

The boundary (perimeter) of a circle. The length of the circumference C is given by $C = \pi d$, where d is the diameter. Alternatively, it is given by $C = 2\pi r$, where r is the radius.

The In-line glossary is a new feature which saves you from having to toggle back and forth to look for word definitions.

Instead of having to look things up in a separate document you will be able to simply hover over the word then a pop up with the definition is displayed.

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Learning areas

Technologies context: Engineering principles and systems ^

[AC9TDE6K02](#)

explain how electrical energy can be transformed into movement, sound or light in a product or system




Connections to General capabilities and Cross-curriculum priorities

[Elaborations \(5\)](#)

[Related content \(1\)](#)

Connections across Learning area

Teachers used to the 8.4 curriculum will know well how laborious it was to move between the three dimensions of the curriculum, that is, the LAs, the CCPs and the GCs.

The new website has done the work for you so that you can clearly see the connections between the three dimensions as well as between the learning areas.

You can see here highlighted on the slide the icons that connect to GCs and CCPs as well as to relevant content from other Learning Areas at the same level.

Another important development in this curriculum is that we have only put in these connections where relevant, and we have cut back the overall number so that it is far more practical for teachers.

We are showing only relevant and authentic content to support planning and integrated teaching for better outcomes.

The development of the GCs and CCPs are best done through learning area content. These are not areas that are taught separately but rather through the learning areas where they are most authentic.

The eight learning areas still have primacy of place in the curriculum.

But it is through the teaching of the learning areas that students develop the general capabilities and an understanding of the cross-curriculum priorities.

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Learning areas

Content descriptions: Design and Technologies, Years 5 and 6

Knowledge and understanding ^

Technologies and society

[AC9TDE6K01](#)

explain how people in design and technologies occupations consider competing factors including sustainability in the design of products, services and environments

[Elaborations \(6\)](#) [Related content \(0\)](#)

Technologies context: Engineering principles and systems

[AC9TDE6K02](#)

explain how electrical energy can be transformed into movement, sound or light in a product or system

[Elaborations \(5\)](#) [Related content \(1\)](#)

Content descriptions: Science

Science understanding ^

Biological sciences

[ACSS6U01](#)

investigate the physical conditions of a **habitat** and analyse how the growth and survival of living things is affected by changing physical conditions

[Elaborations \(7\)](#) [Related content \(1\)](#)

Earth and space sciences

[ACSS6U02](#)

describe the movement of Earth and other planets relative to the sun and **model** how Earth's tilt, rotation on its axis and revolution around the sun relate to cyclic **observable** phenomena, including **variable** day and night length

With that in mind, the new website allows you to view multiple learning areas across the same year/band level.

This will help inform teaching and means you can have a bespoke view that shows you what you need to know for your lesson planning with the website seamlessly giving you the information you need.

For example if you are planning for an integrated lesson around STEM, you can have a detailed view of what you need for Year 5 science and design technologies.

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Achievement standards and content descriptions

Subject achievement standard ^

By the end of Year 6 students explain how people design products, services and environments to meet the needs of communities, including sustainability. **For each of the 3 prescribed technologies contexts they explain how the features of technologies impact on design decisions and they create designed solutions.** Students select and justify design ideas and solutions against design criteria that include sustainability. They communicate design ideas to an audience using technical terms and graphical representation techniques. Students develop project plans, including production processes, and select technologies and techniques to safely produce designed solutions.

The achievement standards and the content descriptions work hand in hand.

The achievement standard describes the expected quality of learning students should typically demonstrate by the end of the year or band, while the content descriptions specify the essential knowledge, understanding and skills that students are expected to learn.

The newly designed website makes what was once two single-lane roads into a dual-lane highway.

Instead of having to work between the achievement standards and the content descriptions separately, the website brings them together, clearly showing the connections.

For example, you can click on a sentence in an achievement standard and it will highlight the part of the content description to which it relates.

Let's say you are in year 5 or 6 Design and Technologies and you are looking at where those students need to be by the end of the year. If you click on the first part of that achievement standard it will take you straight to the relevant content description.

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Knowledge and understanding 4 Processes and production skills 1 [Simple view](#) [Detailed view](#)

Highlighted achievement standard [Clear highlight](#)
For each of the 3 prescribed technologies contexts they explain how the features of technologies impact on design decisions and they create designed solutions.

Technologies and society ^

[AC9TDES6K01](#)
explain how people in design and technologies occupations consider competing factors including sustainability in the design of products, services and environments
Elaborations (6) [Related content \(0\)](#)

Technologies context: Engineering principles and systems ^

[AC9TDES6K02](#)
explain how electrical energy can be transformed into movement, sound or light in a product or system
Elaborations (5) [Related content \(1\)](#)

Technologies context: Food and fibre production; Food specialisations ^

[AC9TDES6K03](#)
explain how and why food and fibre are produced in managed environments
Elaborations (1) [Related content \(0\)](#)

Investigating and defining ^

[AC9TDES6P01](#)
investigate needs or opportunities for designing, and the materials, components, tools, equipment and processes needed to create designed solutions
Elaborations (6) [Related content \(0\)](#)

Generating and designing ^

[AC9TDES6P02](#)
generate, iterate and communicate design ideas, decisions and processes using technical terms and graphical representation techniques, including using digital tools
Elaborations (6) [Related content \(4\)](#)

Producing and implementing ^

[AC9TDES6P03](#)
select and use suitable materials, components, tools, equipment and techniques to safely make designed solutions
Elaborations (6) [Related content \(4\)](#)

Achievement standards and content descriptions

You can see here the related content descriptions are highlighted in the same colour. This makes them easy to see and further supports your planning. So teachers don't have to make a judgement about which content description connects to which part of the achievement standard – that work has already been done for you.

We have also embarked on updating resources, and work samples and illustrations of practice will be the next key tranche of work for us - supporting teachers to access high quality online teaching resources to make their task less time consuming.



In particular, ACARA is undertaking work that relates to the fact that we had overwhelming support for the new mandatory strand in Year 7 History that focusses on the First Nations histories and cultures.

While teachers are supportive of this important addition to the curriculum, many are also understandably concerned that they be able to teach it and to assess student knowledge and skills appropriately and authentically.

Across all parts of the country there are stories that tell the continuous and ongoing connection to culture and place that First Nations peoples have, and the revised curriculum ensures that First Nations voices are respected in schools.

Many science teachers will be familiar with the extensive Teacher Background Information that ACARA published in October 2019. This resource supports the teaching of science by respectfully incorporating First Nations peoples science and demonstrating how they developed and applied their knowledge of the world. This knowledge and these practices have been taught to each generation for over 60,000 years.

ACARA is planning to do something similar in relation to Deep Time History of Australia. We will be working closely with the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) to integrate their extensive collection of cultural items and knowledge, with appropriate cultural permissions, to develop resources for teachers

that help them teach this subject in an authentic, culturally responsive way, with confidence.

We will continue to work with ACARA's First Nations Advisory Group, local elders and knowledge custodians to ensure that we respectfully continue to develop curriculum and resources.

In saying that, I am aware that I am speaking in Victoria, and the Victorian version of the Australian Curriculum already includes four content descriptions on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, and that has been the case for the last five years.

So in preparing support materials for the Deep Time strand, we will be drawing on the Victorian expertise and experience.

I'd also like to note here that we will also be drawing on Victorian expertise when it comes to consent education and respectful relationships, a very key area for us in this Curriculum Review and we have heard the community feedback in relation to more explicit content for teaching about consent within the context of respectful relationships.

So while we wait hopefully for endorsement, we also plan purposefully for the next phase of implementing the updated Australian Curriculum.

Our focus is on what support we can give teachers and states and territories to help them adopt and adapt the new curriculum to their own situation.

The current Australian Curriculum website with Version 8.4 curriculum and all support resources will remain available at the same time that Version 9.0 is published on the new website.

Both websites will be live until such time as there is no need for schools to access Version 8.4 of the Australian Curriculum.

“The school curriculum expresses a nation’s aspirations for its next generations...What constitutes essential school learning will always be contested because behind it is a debate about what knowledge is of most worth. Curriculum stirs the passions – and that is a good thing. Curriculum is never completed. It is never perfect and should always be a work in progress”.

Barry McGaw
Former Chairman of the ACARA Board

I hope this has been a useful update on the process of revising the Australian Curriculum and a conditional and provisional answer to the question of “Where to next?”

As the inaugural Chair of the ACARA Board, Barry McGaw, stated at the time of 2014 Review of the Australian Curriculum:

The school curriculum expresses a nation’s aspirations for its next generations. The curriculum must strike a balance between developing young people’s understanding of their national history and culture and preparing them for a future that is increasingly global and largely unpredictable. What constitutes essential school learning will always be contested because behind it is a debate about what knowledge is of most worth. Curriculum stirs the passions – and that is a good thing. Curriculum is never completed. It is never perfect and should always be a work in progress.

To achieve its aims, it must represent broad community consensus, achieved through consultation, dialogue and compromise, and be based on well-informed and researched evidence and be acceptable to nine ministers in a federal system.

In concluding, I’d like to offer some brief reflections on debates about the overall educational system of which the curriculum is an integral part.

Frequently these debates refer pejoratively to a so-called “industrial model” of schooling. What people tend to mean by this is that schooling

can sometimes seem as if it were organised to be a factory for the production of workers for the economy.

It is often accompanied by criticisms of standardised tests such as the VCE and NAPLAN or PISA. However, as Pasi Sahlberg, formerly of the Finnish education department and the UNSW Gonski Institute, wrote in 2015, while PISA has a number of faults and unintended consequences, but it has also many benefits, including serving as a wake-up call to countries about declining educational standards and equity. Much the same could be said about NAPLAN.

One of the major problems is how NAPLAN results are reported in the media, with some news outlets (not The Age, of course) focussing on raw achievement scores without any reference to a school's level of socio-educational advantage or the degree of progress students at the school make from one test to the next. Such reporting of raw score rankings is practically meaningless, as around 80% of the difference between school means is explained by the socio-economic factors.

Instead we need to focus on what schools are doing to lift student performance between one assessment and the next, and focus on what high-progress schools are doing and think about how their good practice can be replicated. With NAPLAN moving to Term One next year and with all schools online from this year, the results will come back earlier to schools to allow them to be used more effectively.

We owe this to our students, particularly those from disadvantaged communities, so that their literacy and numeracy skills can give them access to the richness of other areas of the curriculum, including history, mathematics, science, literature and the arts.

Nevertheless, one area where I think the "industrial model" critique has some validity is that the way we justify learning these subjects needs to be thought about as well. While equipping students with knowledge and skills that will enable them to get a job and earn a living - and in so doing contribute to our shared economic life - is an important purpose of education, that is only the most basic purpose of education, catering to our most basic needs for food, clothing and shelter.

A more sophisticated version of this rationalisation is that education helps us to solve real world problems. So it should, but is that the only reason we should learn anything? What if those problems are utterly trivial, so-called "first world problems"? According to the writer Matthew

B. Crawford, one American textbook seeks to encourage the study of physics because it is useful, and as an example of its usefulness, the authors point out how modern razor blades give a smoother shave due to the use of ultra-thin films derived from plasma physics techniques. As Crawford says, “All true enough, but how drab, how utterly uninspiring.”

We are in danger of allowing this utilitarian focus to dominate our thinking about education.

It’s as if the role of education is not to *liberate* us, but to *harness* us all the more effectively to the impersonal, global mechanism that is the modern economy the role of which is to deliver us ever more comfort at ever lower cost.

But the human spirit is so much bigger than the needs of the body and the economy. As well as food, clothing and shelter, we crave understanding, we crave relationship with others, we crave meaning and purpose. While many jobs are meaningful precisely because they are genuinely useful to others, when it comes to school, usefulness is not the only rationale for learning.

We have unrestricted desires to know reality, to understand the world, and to live a life worth living, to live a good life. These needs and desires characterise us as human beings.

So how is education catering to these deep human needs?



“Aha! Now I get it!” : the moment of INSIGHT

The experience of learning something new - the lightbulb moment when we realise that our horizons and our capabilities have expanded, especially when it comes after struggling to grasp a difficult concept or master a difficult skill - is an “aha!” moment of pure joy. We need more such joyful moments in our schools.

This can be achieved when students realise, with the help of their teachers, that **happiness can be had, not just a job**, through close attention to the world around them, methodical analysis, and careful reasoning; through experiencing **right now** the joy of a new insight attained or a new skill mastered for its own sake, not just for the sake of some future usefulness.

So we need to ensure students experience the joy of learning. Joy is not the same as fun, which there’s nothing wrong with, but fun can be had without learning anything, whereas joy is the fruit of genuine learning. Fun is usually noisy, whereas joy is often quiet. Fun is external; joy is internal. Fun is short-lived and superficial, but joy can be lasting and deep. Let’s make our classrooms places where students experience the quiet, deep, interior and lasting joy of learning, regardless of whether we are having fun or whether that learning is “relevant” according to some utilitarian calculus.

The new Australian Curriculum will hopefully make this joy a more common experience. Feedback from teachers will verify whether or not that is the case, and will inform its future iterations. Thank you.