



Australian Government

Review of the Australian Curriculum

Preliminary Report on the progress of
the Review of the Australian Curriculum

28 March 2014

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Comments and Inquiries

Further information on the Review of the Australian Curriculum can be found on the [Strengthening the Australian Curriculum](http://www.studentsfirst.gov.au/strengthening-australian-curriculum) website (<http://www.studentsfirst.gov.au/strengthening-australian-curriculum>).

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Letter to the Minister



The Hon Christopher Pyne MP
Minister for Education
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

28 March 2014

Dear Minister

In accordance with the requirements of the Terms of Reference provided for the Review of the Australian Curriculum, we are submitting our Preliminary Report on the progress of the Review.

Our work to date has encompassed a wide range of activities and methodology, including detailed analysis of the process adopted for the design and implementation of the formal national curriculum documentation. The Review has also commenced a research program looking at international experience from high performing education systems, as well as national commentary and studies of the Australian experience.

We are currently in the midst of extensive personal consultations with key stakeholders, including all of the state and territory education and curriculum authorities. In the near future we will also commission subject area specialists to assess the curriculum material in each of the designated learning areas using criteria which we have designed for this purpose.

The widespread interest in this Review, across the nation, is evidenced by the more than 1,500 submissions which have been received; indeed, in response to requests from interested stakeholders we extended the deadline for submissions by a fortnight.

Following the results of our research, and the feedback from all of the consultations and submissions, together with a range of material which has been forwarded to us, we will begin synthesising all of these findings, within the framework of the Terms of Reference for the Review, to produce our final report.

Essentially, we are endeavouring to determine whether the intended Australian Curriculum is designed to deliver, and is so far delivering, what students need, parents expect, and the nation requires to equal the best performing international systems.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to all who have taken the time to make submissions or meet with us in fruitful discussions. Our thanks also go to the Secretariat, which is providing services to the Review of a high professional standard.

Yours sincerely

Dr Kevin Donnelly

Professor Kenneth Wiltshire

Background

Terms of Reference for the Review of the Australian Curriculum

The Review of the Australian Curriculum is guided by the following Terms of Reference:

- The Review of the Australian Curriculum will evaluate the development and implementation of the Australian Curriculum.
- The Reviewers will consider the robustness, independence and balance of the Australian Curriculum, including:
 - the process of curriculum shaping, development, monitoring, evaluation and review.
 - the curriculum content from Foundation to Year 12 for subjects developed to date, with a particular focus on the curriculum for English, mathematics, science, history and geography.
- The Reviewers will provide recommendations to the Commonwealth Minister for Education regarding:
 - the curriculum shaping process followed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to ensure that the curriculum is balanced and offers students an appropriate degree of choice and diversity
 - the process of curriculum development to be followed by ACARA for the development and revision of all future curriculum content
 - the content in learning areas, cross curriculum priorities and general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum
 - the ongoing monitoring, evaluation and review of curriculum content used by ACARA to ensure independence, rigour and balance in curriculum development.
- The Reviewers will provide a preliminary report to the Commonwealth Minister for Education by 31 March 2014. The Panel will provide its final report to the Commonwealth Minister for Education by 31 July 2014.

Scope

A fundamental part of the Review is an evaluation of the *robustness, independence and balance* of the process of development and content of the Australian Curriculum. These concepts are central to the Review. It is important to note that the development of the Australian Curriculum and the content of the curriculum itself represent two separate but related areas of focus. Both of these are important areas of focus to ensure a high quality national curriculum that fosters choice and diversity.

The Terms of Reference acknowledge that the scope of the Review is wide-reaching and will cover consideration of the scope and structure of the Australian Curriculum, development processes, the curriculum content from Foundation to Year 12 curriculum (or other years as applicable) in all learning areas completed to date as well the nature of its implementation in states and territories. Given the curriculum for languages are still outstanding and expected to be presented to education ministers for consideration during 2014, it is beyond the scope of the Review.

Towards a national curriculum

Education is a benefit for the individual, society and the economy. A highly educated population is central to Australia's future. Central to the development of a high quality education system is the curriculum that is intended to be taught to every student, no matter where they go to school.

A robust, relevant, independent, balanced and up to date curriculum should form an essential part of the culture, understanding, skills and ethical values passed on from one generation to the next. It must provide young Australians with the knowledge and skills critical to succeed in life, and to understand where they come from and their place in the world.

Historically, states and territories have independently created their own curricula. More recently, there has been shared endeavour across the country that has seen greater consistency between jurisdictions, and now for the first time in its history, Australia has the basis of a national curriculum.

The past 35 years have seen several attempts at curriculum collaboration in Australia. There have been various propositions put forward as to the value of a single national curriculum – that it would promote equity or be efficient and economical.

Despite the contestability of the rationale at different times, there have been significant efforts since the late 1980s for a national focus on curriculum in Australia. These efforts have been largely shaped by the respective roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth and the state and territory governments under the auspices of the Ministerial Council for Education.

Twenty five years ago the former Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs produced a collaborative statement on goals for schooling: the *Hobart Declaration on Schooling*. This statement stimulated much of the subsequent effort for a national curriculum framework and the nascent national statements and profiles for English, mathematics, science, studies of society and environment, languages other than English, the arts, health and physical education and technology.

Ten years on, education ministers once more committed to collaborate for the purposes of developing curriculum and related systems of assessment, and accreditation as part of an updated set of national goals for schooling – the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*. While the Adelaide Declaration did not constitute clear agreement to develop a single national curriculum, further progress was made in terms of mapping areas of commonality, overlap and differences in the official curricula of the states and territories, although attempts to progress curriculum development at the national level were still largely unsuccessful.

The next decade really saw national curriculum collaboration move into a new phase. In August 2006, education ministers approved statements of learning for mathematics, science, civics, English and information and communication technologies, which described the essential skills, knowledge, understandings and capacities that Australian students should have the opportunity to learn during their schooling.

It took a further declaration from education ministers in 2008 (this time the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*) to provide the final impetus for the development of a national curriculum, which has led to curriculum content being endorsed for English, mathematics, science, history and geography. Other curricula for the arts, health and physical education, technologies, civics and citizenship, and economics and business have been developed but not yet fully endorsed. The Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Languages is the last learning area to be developed.

The development of the Australian Curriculum has not been without discussion, debate and disagreement. Every citizen of Australia is a stakeholder in this discussion, so it is natural and healthy for there to be keen debate about the content of the school curriculum. Collectively, we all have a shared interest in ensuring a high quality Australian school curriculum.

It is important that the Australian Curriculum not be a static document, but rather one that improves over time, to ensure it retains its importance as the agreed and common base for what is being taught in Australia's classrooms. It is vital that we get it right before it is fully implemented across the country. It is timely, therefore, to undertake a review of the Australian Curriculum.

The Review of the Australian Curriculum

Establishment of the Australian Government Review of the Australian Curriculum

The Review of the Australian Curriculum was announced by the Hon Christopher Pyne MP, Minister for Education, on 10 January 2014, fulfilling an election commitment by the Australian Government.

Preliminary and Final Reports

The Review of the Australian Curriculum Terms of Reference require the Reviewers to provide a Preliminary Report to the Commonwealth Minister for Education by 31 March 2014.

The Reviewers have been tasked with undertaking a process that is consultative and comprehensive, and which will report against the Terms of Reference. The views of parents, educators, business groups, state and territory governments and other stakeholders have informed, and will continue to inform, the work of the Review.

The aim of this Preliminary Report is to outline the direction of work undertaken to date. Given that consultations, research and analysis are continuing, it is not the intention of the Reviewers that this report pre-empt the outcomes of the Review by reporting any finding, drawing any conclusions or setting forth recommendations.

The Reviewers will provide recommendations to the Australian Government as part of the Final Report which will be provided to the Minister by 31 July 2014.

The Australian Government has committed to discussing the outcomes of the Review with the states and territories, including issues around implementation.

Review appointments

Professor Kenneth Wiltshire AO and Dr Kevin Donnelly were appointed by the Minister to undertake the Review of the Australian Curriculum. These appointments to the Review of the Australian Curriculum followed the process specified in the Australian Government Cabinet Handbook.

Both Reviewers have extensive experience in education and training. Professor Kenneth Wiltshire AO is the J D Story Professor of Public Administration at the University of Queensland Business School. He was Australia's Representative on the Executive Board of UNESCO, which included two years as the Chair of the Program and External Relations Commission of the Board. His work in education has included conducting the Review of the National Board for Employment, Education and Training, undertaking the role of Special Adviser to the Australian National Training Authority, chairing the Review of the Queensland School Curriculum, chairing the Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority of Queensland and serving as a member of the Advisory Council of the International Institute of Educational Planning in Paris.

Dr Kevin Donnelly is one of Australia's leading education commentators and authors. He is currently Executive Director of the Education Standards Institute and Senior Research Fellow at the Australian Catholic University. His experience in education includes benchmarking and evaluating curriculum for state and Commonwealth governments as well as the New Zealand Business Roundtable. In addition to 18 years' teaching experience, Dr Donnelly's work has included positions with the Victorian Education Department's Post Primary English Committee and Post Primary Taskforce, the Year 12 English Panel of Examiners, the Victorian Board of Studies and the federally funded Discovering Democracy Programme and inquiry into the Australian Certificate of Education.

Conduct of the Review of the Australian Curriculum

Review process

The Review of the Australian Curriculum is being informed by consultation and research to ensure that there is a comprehensive and transparent understanding of the broad range of views on the curriculum.

This approach will give stakeholders who have real concerns an opportunity to put their views on the record. It is also taking an evidence-based approach to examining both the process of the Australian Curriculum development and the content of the curriculum documents.

The Review is an open, independent, professional and transparent inquiry. It is also separate to any monitoring and review processes being undertaken by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

A Secretariat has been established within the Australian Government Department of Education to support the Review. The Secretariat consists of four departmental officers with additional support provided as required.

Panel meetings

The Reviewers have held four formal panel meetings since the establishment of the Review.

Panel meetings have focused on determining the methodology of the Review, its scope, the research evidence that the Reviewers will consider and the place of the Australian Curriculum in the broader architecture of Australian education.

Further meetings are scheduled before the final report is submitted to the Australian Government in July 2014.

Public submissions

Public submissions opened on 10 January 2014 on the *Students First* website alongside the launch of the Review of the Australian Curriculum.

Members of the community were invited to respond to issues being considered by the Review of the Australian Curriculum. Submissions were able to be submitted by individuals, organisations and companies.

Participants were encouraged to make a submission via the online form¹. Submissions made via post or emailed directly to the Australian Curriculum Review mailbox were also accepted. The submissions process was undertaken in accordance with *Terms and Conditions for Public Submissions in the Australian Government Department of Education*.

¹ <https://submissions.deewr.gov.au/Forms/AustralianCurriculum/pages/index>

A number of channels were used to raise awareness of the submissions process, including via the Australian Government Department of Education and *Student First* websites². Advertisements were also placed in the *Australian Financial Review* (31 January 2014) and the *Weekend Australian* (1 February 2014). A copy of the advertisement is at **Appendix A**.

The submission round was initially due to close at 5 pm AEDT on Friday, 28 February 2014. Due to the high level of interest, the public consultation period of the review was extended for a further two weeks to 5 pm AEDT on Friday, 14 March 2014.

The call for submissions to the Review of the Australian Curriculum resulted in over 1,500 submissions from a broad range of stakeholders. The Reviewers are encouraged by the volume and breadth of submissions received. This level of response attests to the significant interest that the Review of the Australian Curriculum has engendered in the Australian community.

A qualitative analysis of the submissions is currently being undertaken by the Secretariat to inform the recommendations that will be included in the final report.

Stakeholder consultations

The Reviewers have embarked upon a series of targeted consultations with education stakeholders to inform their deliberations. These included consultations with state and territory government and non-government education authorities.

During February and March, the Reviewers conducted face to face stakeholder consultation meetings in Canberra, Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney. Further face to face stakeholder consultation meetings are being held in Adelaide and Perth in April. Meetings have also been scheduled with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

Details of stakeholder organisations invited to meet with the Reviewers to date are at **Appendix B**.

Given that stakeholder consultations are ongoing, this Preliminary Report will not draw any conclusions about the issues or key messages emerging from these consultations.

The Reviewers would like to thank those who have contributed to the Review of the Australian Curriculum so far, giving generously of their time, experience and expertise.

² <http://www.studentsfirst.gov.au/review-australian-curriculum>

Research – International and national evidence

Following their appointment, the Reviewers identified areas of analysis and research to be undertaken by the Secretariat.

While ongoing, this has included:

- aims and principles underpinning curriculum development
- archival documents provided by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority that underpinned the development of the Australian Curriculum
- recent curriculum renewal projects, particularly by members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation countries with records of top educational outcomes for their students.

Professor Wiltshire has also held extensive discussions with representatives from the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, the English Department for Education and UK based think tanks. The evidence gathered as part of these official discussions related to international comparisons, principles of curriculum development and approaches used. These meetings also allowed Professor Wiltshire to obtain knowledge and relevant information regarding the reform of the English national curriculum and lessons that can be applied to the Review of the Australian Curriculum.

Next Steps

Consideration of content issues

As part of the approach to the Review of the Australian Curriculum, subject area specialists are being commissioned to evaluate the curriculum which has been developed to date. A scoping brief has been prepared which is at **Appendix C**.

A central element of the work of the Review is an analysis of the curriculum documentation for the following learning areas:

- English (Foundation to Year 12)
- Mathematics (Foundation to Year 12)
- Science (Foundation to Year 12)
- History (Foundation to Year 12)
- Geography (Foundation to Year 12)
- The Arts (Foundation to Year 10)
- Technologies (Foundation to Year 10)
- Civics and Citizenship (Year 3 to Year 10)
- Economics and Business (Year 5 to Year 10)
- Health and Physical Education (Foundation to Year 10)

In conducting the curriculum analysis and benchmarking aspect of the Review, subject area specialists will focus on the content specified in the Australian Curriculum, notably the knowledge, understanding and skills component, with a particular emphasis on its comprehensiveness, structure and sequencing.

Essentially, the Reviewers are seeking to assess:

- whether the intended Australian Curriculum represents what Australian students should be taught in schools
- how the intended Australian Curriculum in each subject area compares with that of high performing countries and those facing similar challenges
- whether the Australian Curriculum reflects what evidence based research suggests is a sound, rigorous and balanced curriculum.

Appendix A

Advertisement for submissions to the Review of the Australian Curriculum



Australian Government

Department of Education

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT REVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

The Australian Government has appointed a panel to conduct a Review of the Australian Curriculum.

The panel wants to hear the views of all interested members of the community on the Australian Curriculum.

The panel is seeking submissions from individuals and organisations in response to its Terms of Reference which are available at the Students First website
<http://www.studentsfirst.gov.au/review-australian-curriculum>.

The Review will evaluate the Australian Curriculum's robustness, independence and balance and examine its content and development process.

Submissions should be provided by 5pm AEDT Friday 28 February 2014 through the Students First website at
<http://www.studentsfirst.gov.au/review-australian-curriculum>.

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Appendix B

Stakeholder organisations invited to meet with the Reviewers to date

Association of Independent Schools of New South Wales
Association of Independent Schools of South Australia
Association of Independent Schools of the Australian Capital Territory
Association of Independent Schools of the Northern Territory
Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia
Association of Parents and Friends of Australian Capital Territory Schools
Australian Association for the Teaching of English
Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers
Australian Capital Territory Board of Senior Secondary Studies
Australian Capital Territory Council of Parents and Citizens Associations
Australian Capital Territory Education and Training Directorate
Australian Council of Commerce and Industry
Australian Council of Deans of Education
Australian Council of State School Organisations
Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
Australian Curriculum Studies Association
Australian Education Union
Australian Geography Teachers Association
Australian Industry Group
Australian Parents Council
Australian Primary Principals Association
Australian Science Teachers Association
Australian Secondary Principals Association
Australian Special Education Principals' Association
Business Council of Australia
Catholic Education Commission, New South Wales
Catholic Education Commission of Victoria
Catholic Education Office, Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn
Catholic Education Office of Western Australia
Catholic Education South Australia
Council of Catholic School Parents New South Wales/Australian Capital Territory
Federation of Catholic School Parent Communities
Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales
Federation of Parents and Friends Associations of Catholic Schools, Queensland
History Teachers' Association of Australia
Independent Education Union of Australia
Independent Schools Council of Australia
Independent Schools Queensland
Independent Schools Tasmania

Independent Schools Victoria
Isolated Children’s Parents’ Association of Australia
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Principals Association
National Catholic Education Commission
New South Wales Department of Education and Communities
New South Wales Parents Council
Northern Territory Board of Studies
Northern Territory Catholic Education Office
Northern Territory Council of Government School Organisations
Northern Territory Department of Education
Office of the Chief Scientist
P&Cs Queensland
Parents and Friends Federation of Western Australia
Parents Victoria
Queensland Catholic Education Commission
Queensland Department of Education
Queensland Independent Schools Parents Council
Queensland Studies Authority
Social Educators’ Association of Australia
South Australia Association of School Parents Clubs
South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) Board of South Australia
South Australia Department for Education and Child Development
Tasmanian Catholic Education Commission
Tasmanian Catholic Schools Parents and Friends Federation
Tasmanian Department of Education
Tasmanian Qualifications Authority
Tasmanian State School Parents and Friends Incorporated
The Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards, New South Wales
Universities Australia
Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body
Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Victorian Parents Council
Western Australian Council of State School Organisations
Western Australia Department of Education
Western Australian School Curriculum and Standards Authority

Others

Associate Professor Raymond Brown, School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University
Professor David Andrich, Graduate School of Education, University of Western Australia
Professor John Sweller, School of Education, University of New South Wales
Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney, Dean, Indigenous Education, University of Adelaide

Appendix C

Scoping brief – Benchmarking the Australian Curriculum

- Subject area specialists will provide an analysis and evaluation of the following factors across the whole learning area being reviewed:
 - the content of the learning area, as specified in the subject’s content descriptions and content elaborations, particularly relating to its:
 - robustness (defined as academic rigour, structure and sequencing, detail, clarity, succinctness and evidence of a foundation of aims, values, and principles)
 - balance (including a comprehensive inclusion of key core and basic knowledge facts, concepts and themes, without bias as to selectiveness of content and emphasis)
 - scope for choice and flexibility in curriculum delivery without undue encouragement of the adoption of ephemeral or other practices which are not evidence based.
 - the soundness of the general capabilities and achievement standards in terms of the extent to which they have been linked to curriculum content in this learning area.
 - the appropriateness and relevance of the methodology to embed the three cross-curriculum priorities across this learning area, and whether there are alternative approaches which could have been developed to introduce these themes.
 - the extent to which the core content in this learning area allows flexibility in classroom delivery for different school contexts and different stages of schooling.
 - any significant treatment in the Australian Curriculum documents for this learning area of related issues such as explicit and implicit assessment, pedagogical and epistemological characteristics.
 - whether the curriculum documentation in this learning area is friendly for students, teachers, and parents, and for development of accountability and reporting measures which will lead to effective school community engagement.
 - whether the curriculum for this learning area encourages a love of learning, a joy of discovery, and a quest for knowledge and related skills.
- Using four or five key content areas, skills, and/or topics considered essential in terms of the subject being evaluated, subject area specialists will also assess how the Australian Curriculum for this learning area compares with the curriculum of two other relevant countries, focussing on their approach to the inclusion and design of key learning content, core knowledge and accompanying rationales (the key content areas etc and the countries to be chosen will be determined following consultation between the subject area specialist and the Reviewers and documentation will be provided).