

National Curriculum Board

The Shape of the Australian Curriculum

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1. Preamble: National Curriculum Board processes

Determining the form of the national curriculum

The National Curriculum Board (the Board) is committed to substantial, open consultation with the profession and the public in the development of curriculum. The Board began its consultation with the publication on its website (www.ncb.org.au) of the National Curriculum Development Paper. This discussion paper described the context of the Board's work and set down key initial questions that needed to be answered in the development of the national curriculum. That paper was discussed at a national forum on 27 June 2008, attended by 200 people, and in subsequent state and territory forums.

In the light of these discussions, the Board set down answers to its key questions in the document *The Shape of the National Curriculum: A proposal for discussion*. That paper was posted on the Board's website, along with an open invitation to comment and provide advice, during Term 4, 2008. It was discussed at state, territory and national forums that were conducted following its release and was the subject of written submissions provided to the Board through to the end of January 2009.

This document, *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum*, takes account of consultation, feedback and decisions made by the Board in early 2009. It provides a broad outline of the shape of the national curriculum and will be used to guide the writing of the national curriculum in specific learning areas which, in accord with the Board's remit, will start with English, mathematics, the sciences and history.

Developing the scope and content of each national curriculum

In August 2008, as it was working on this paper, the Board commenced work on a national curriculum in English, mathematics, the sciences and history. For each learning area the Board recruited a writer who worked with a small advisory group to draft a brief initial advice paper. The purposes of those papers were to provide a rationale for the study of the curriculum areas and to outline a broad scope and sequence of material to be covered over the years Kindergarten to Year 12 (K–12).

This approach was aimed at stimulating discussion of the key issues in each curriculum area before any detailed curriculum development commenced. Initial discussions were held at a series of national forums held in October 2008.

More detailed 'framing papers' were posted on the Board's website with a public invitation to comment and provide advice in the period up to 28 February 2009. Final recommendations to guide curriculum development were posted on the Board's website following its April meeting.

2. Building Australia's future

Changed context

Education plays an important part in forming the young people who will take responsibility for Australia in the future. If it is to play this part effectively, education must address the intellectual, personal, social and economic development of young Australians, and it must do so at a time when ideas about the goals of education are changing and will continue to change.

Twenty years ago, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs produced a collaborative statement on goals for schooling: the *Hobart Declaration* of 1989. In 2008 ministers nominated five major changes that, over that twenty-year period, have changed the ways in which people have come to interact with each other, and the consequences of those changes for schooling. These changes have been described in the *National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (see Box 1).

Box 1: Changes over the past 20 years with implications for education

- Global integration and international mobility have increased rapidly in the past decade. As a consequence, new and exciting opportunities for Australians are emerging. This heightens the need to nurture an appreciation of and respect for social, cultural and religious diversity, and a sense of global citizenship.
- India, China and other Asian nations are growing and their influence on the world is increasing. Australians need to become 'Asia literate' by building strong relationships with Asia.
- Globalisation and technological change are placing greater demands on education and skill development in Australia and the nature of jobs available to young Australians is changing faster than ever. Skilled jobs now dominate jobs growth and people with university or vocational education and training qualifications fare much better in the employment market than early school-leavers. To maximise their opportunities for healthy, productive and rewarding futures, Australia's young people must be encouraged not only to complete secondary education, but also to proceed into further training or education.
- Complex environmental, social and economic pressures such as climate change that extend beyond national borders pose unprecedented challenges, requiring countries to work together in new ways. To meet these challenges, Australians must be able to comprehend and use scientific concepts and principles, and approach problem-solving in new and creative ways.
- Rapid and continuing advances in information and communication technologies (ICT) are changing the ways people share, use, develop and process information and technology, and young people need to be highly skilled in ICT. While schools already employ these technologies in learning, there is a need to increase their effectiveness significantly over the next decade.

Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, December 2008, p.4.

Schooling must not only deal with these remarkable changes but also, as far as possible, anticipate the kinds of conditions in which young Australians will need to function as individuals, citizens and workers. These future conditions are distant and difficult to predict. We expect almost all young Australians who begin primary school in 2011 will continue their initial education until 2022. Many will go on to post-secondary education and not complete their initial education until the mid-2020s and later. However dimly the demands of societies in the mid-2020s can now be seen, some serious attempt must be made to envisage those demands and to ensure they are taken into account in present-day curriculum development.

A curriculum for the 21st century will reflect an understanding and acknowledgment of the changing nature of young people as learners and the challenges and demands that will continue to shape their learning in the future. Young people will need a wide and adaptive set of knowledge, skills and understandings to meet the changing expectations of society and to contribute to the creation of a more productive, sustainable and just society.

Curriculum will be only one element that influences how well young Australians are prepared for their futures by their education, but it will be important because it sets the level of expectation of their learning. High-performing countries set high expectations. They support the fulfilment of those expectations with high-quality teaching, school and system leadership, and commitment and support from families, communities, business and industry. Providing high-quality education is valuable to the community at large and justifies people's investments in time, effort and resources.

The commitment to develop a national curriculum reflects a willingness of Australians to work together, across geographical and school-sector boundaries, to develop a world-class curriculum for all young Australians. It will enable us to work collectively in defining what all young Australians should learn and in creating and sustaining a world-class education system. It involves national acceptance of responsibility for high-quality, high-equity education across the country. Working nationally offers the prospect of harnessing expertise and effort in the pursuit of common national goals. This national effort offers economies of scale and a substantial reduction in duplication of curriculum development and support, for the benefit of students in our schools.

The advent of a national curriculum also offers a unique opportunity to ensure that all young Australians learn about the history and cultural background of the nation's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, of the contribution that has been made to Australia, and of the impact that colonial settlement has had on Indigenous communities, past and present. For Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, a national curriculum provides the opportunity to establish and pursue excellence within education settings that respect and promote their cultural identity.

National collaboration in education in Australia is not new. The 1989 *Hobart Declaration* and the 1999 *Adelaide Declaration* both authorised and stimulated national effort. The 2008 *National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* provides a framework for the Board's development of a national, K–12 curriculum in English, mathematics, the sciences and history, and later in geography and languages.

Goals of education for young Australians

The Board's work overall is guided by the National Declaration on *Educational Goals for Young Australians*, adopted by ministers in December 2008. The National Declaration commits 'to supporting all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens' (see Box 2) and to promoting equity and excellence in education.

Box 2: Educational goals for young Australians

Successful learners...

- develop their capacity to learn and play an active role in their own learning
- have the essential skills in literacy and numeracy and are creative and productive users of technology, especially ICT, as a foundation for success in all learning areas
- are able to think deeply and logically, and obtain and evaluate evidence in a disciplined way as the result of studying fundamental disciplines
- are creative, innovative and resourceful, and are able to solve problems in ways that draw upon a range of learning areas and disciplines
- are able to plan activities independently, collaborate, work in teams and communicate ideas
- are able to make sense of their world and think about how things have become the way they are
- are on a pathway towards continued success in further education, training or employment, and acquire the skills to make informed learning and employment decisions throughout their lives
- are motivated to reach their full potential.

Confident individuals...

- have a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing
- have a sense of optimism about their lives and the future — are enterprising, show initiative and use their creative abilities
- develop personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience, empathy and respect for others
- have the knowledge, skills, understanding and values to establish and maintain healthy, satisfying lives
- have the confidence and capability to pursue university or post-secondary vocational qualifications leading to rewarding and productive employment
- relate well to others and form and maintain healthy relationships
- are well prepared for their potential life roles as family, community and workforce members
- embrace opportunities, make rational and informed decisions about their own lives and accept responsibility for their own actions.

Active and informed citizens...

- act with moral and ethical integrity
- appreciate Australia's social, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, and have an understanding of Australia's system of government, history and culture
- understand and acknowledge the value of Indigenous cultures and possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- are committed to national values of democracy, equity and justice, and participate in Australia's civic life
- are able to relate to and communicate across cultures, especially the cultures and countries of Asia
- work for the common good, in particular sustaining and improving natural and social environments
- are responsible global and local citizens.

Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, December 2008, pp. 8–9.

The national curriculum will address the goals for young Australians, but success will also depend on substantial action through the continued support of schools by education authorities.

One important lesson learned from past efforts to overcome inequity is that an alternative curriculum for students who are regarded as disadvantaged does not treat them equitably. It is better to set the same high expectations for all students and to provide differentiated levels of support to ensure that all students have a fair chance to achieve those expectations. This is a view put by, for example, many leaders in the Indigenous community on behalf of their young people.

Within its remit to develop curriculum for particular learning areas, the Board will work to ensure that its curriculum connects with curriculum developed by the states and territories.

3. The national curriculum

Principles and guidelines for development

The development of the national curriculum is shaped by the following principles and guidelines for development.

- a) The curriculum should make clear to teachers what is to be taught, and to students what they should learn and what achievement standards are expected of them. This means that curriculum documents will be explicit about knowledge, understanding and skills, and that they will provide a clear foundation for the development of a teaching program.
- b) The curriculum should be based on the assumptions that all students can learn and that every student matters. It should set high standards and ensure that they apply to all young Australians while acknowledging the different rates at which students develop.
- c) The curriculum should connect with and build on the *Early Years Learning Framework* being developed for the pre-K phase.
- d) The curriculum should help prepare all young Australians to become fulfilled and competent citizens and workers. It should build firm and meaningful foundational skills as well as provide the basis for developing expertise for those who move on to specialised advanced studies in academic disciplines, professions and technical trades. It should anticipate an increase in both the proportion of students who remain in education and training to complete Year 12 or equivalent vocational education and training, and the proportion who continue to further study.
- e) The curriculum should provide students with an understanding of the past that has shaped the society, culture and environment in which they are growing and developing, and with knowledge, understandings and skills that will help them in their futures.
- f) The curriculum should be feasible, taking account of the time and resources available to teachers and students, and the time it typically takes to learn complex concepts and ideas. In particular, the national curriculum should recognise and appreciate that in the primary years teachers are responsible for several learning areas.
- g) The primary audience for national curriculum documents should be classroom teachers. Documents should be concise and expressed in plain language which nevertheless preserves a complexity in ideas appropriate for professional practitioners. Documents should be recognisably similar across learning areas in language, structure and length.
- h) Time demands on students must leave room for learning beyond the scope of the national curriculum.
- i) The curriculum should allow jurisdictions, systems and schools to implement it in a way that values teachers' professional knowledge and that reflects the needs and interests evident in local contexts, as it will be teachers who decide how best to organise learning for students. Organisation of learning should take account of individual family, cultural and community backgrounds; acknowledge and build on prior learning experiences; and fill gaps in those experiences.

- j) The curriculum should be established on a strong evidence base related to learning, pedagogy and what works in professional practice, and it should encourage teachers to analyse and evaluate their practices systematically.

Curriculum content: Knowledge, understanding and skills

The Board recognises the entitlement of students to a core of knowledge, skills, understandings and values that will provide a foundation for their future contribution to Australia's society. This learning will provide the basis for success at and beyond school, and help young people continue their learning after they have left school.

The national curriculum will detail what teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn for each year of schooling. The curriculum will describe the knowledge, understandings, skills and dispositions that students will be expected to develop, in sequence, for each learning area across the years of schooling. Each curriculum sequence will represent what is known about the progression of learning in that area, recognising that there will need to be some variability in, for example, the order of topics in some areas.

The *National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* identifies three broad categories of outcomes that the curriculum should deliver for students (see Box 3). The national curriculum will be developed in light of these categories.

Box 3: Intended educational outcomes for young Australians

A solid foundation in knowledge, understanding, skills and values on which further learning and adult life can be built

- The curriculum will include a strong focus on literacy and numeracy skills. It will also enable students to build social and emotional intelligence, and nurture student wellbeing through health and physical education in particular. The curriculum will support students to relate well to others and foster an understanding of Australian society, citizenship and national values, including through the study of civics and citizenship. As a foundation for further learning and adult life the curriculum will include practical knowledge and skills development in areas such as ICT and design and technology, which are central to Australia's skilled economy and provide crucial pathways to post-school success.

Deep knowledge, understanding, skills and values that will enable advanced learning and an ability to create new ideas and translate them into practical applications

- The curriculum will enable students to develop knowledge in the disciplines of English, mathematics, science, languages, humanities and the arts; to understand the spiritual, moral and aesthetic dimensions of life; and open up new ways of thinking. It will also support the development of deep knowledge within a discipline, which provides the foundation for inter-disciplinary approaches to innovation and complex problem-solving.

General capabilities that underpin flexible and analytical thinking, a capacity to work with others and an ability to move across subject disciplines to develop new expertise

- The curriculum will support young people to develop a range of generic and employability skills that have particular application to the world of work and further education and training, such as planning and organising, the ability to think flexibly, to communicate well and to work in teams. Young people also need to develop the capacity to think creatively, innovate, solve problems and engage with new disciplines.

Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, *National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, December 2008, p.13.

Teachers understand the developmental diversity in the students they teach and are responsible for organising learning opportunities to meet individual learning needs. Organising the curriculum by year level will help teachers do this and will reduce the risk of repetition of content from year to year as students change teachers or schools.

Some of the variation among students in their level of development and progress can become the basis for inequities in their educational experiences. The Board will not accommodate these disparities by setting different expectations for different groups, since that reinforces differences and creates inequitable outcomes. The primary role in dealing with these differences lies with school systems, schools and teachers.

The national curriculum will try to maximise the opportunities for all students to realise their potential. This will be enhanced through material and professional learning support provided to teachers to help them recognise and build on the learning that each child brings to school. For students for whom English is not their first language, for example, this support should include material and advice that best helps them to master the language demands of school subjects.

Solid foundation in literacy and numeracy for further learning

Because literacy and numeracy are the foundations on which much further learning depends, it is important that literacy and numeracy capabilities are developed early. The foundation for literacy will be built primarily in English and the foundation for numeracy primarily in mathematics, but both literacy and numeracy must be reinforced and strengthened through teaching of other learning areas.

The Board's remit also requires it to develop 'a continuum of learning in literacy and numeracy skills, ranging from basic competence in the early years through to the advancement and extension of these skills in the middle and later years of schooling'. The development of these continuums means that these foundation skills are not regarded only as initial or minimal competences. Literacy and numeracy need to keep developing across the school years as the curriculum areas put them to work in increasingly distinct and complex ways. The nature and functions of literacy and numeracy become more differentiated as the school subjects become more recognisably different, based more and more on their informing disciplines.

Recent international comparisons of the performances of school students in reading and mathematics show clearly that the demonstrated capabilities of both higher- and lower-performing students can fluctuate significantly. That is, it is important to conceptualise literacy and numeracy over the full range, from the acquisition of initial skills to the development of sophisticated skills, put to work in different ways in different knowledge domains and social contexts. The national curriculum documents will deal explicitly with this issue.

Deep knowledge and skills

The K–12 national curriculum will provide the settings in which students can develop increasingly deep knowledge and skills. In the selection of content for particular learning areas, the Board will take account of the rapid expansion in bodies of knowledge and of the challenges this presents to curriculum development.

The national curriculum will emphasise the fundamental knowledge, skills and understandings that are the core of a learning area. It will also specify some contexts and related knowledge as essential for all students, where these are based on age, grade or stage considerations. In other cases, teachers will be able to choose how best to introduce and develop increasingly deep understandings of concepts and processes, maximising the engagement and learning of every student they work with, every day.

The Board will develop a national curriculum that provides for rigorous, in-depth study, preferring depth to breadth wherever a choice needs to be made, with consideration also being given to the teaching and learning time available.

The national curriculum will always try to deliver a balance between knowledge and process that reflects what is known about the development of expertise in a learning area. Experts solve problems more effectively, quickly and efficiently than novices do, not only because they can call on automated, learned responses, but because they consider problems in ways that make good solutions easier to find. The way in which experts think about problems reflects their deep knowledge and understanding of the discipline from which the problems are drawn.

The K–12 national curriculum will help students begin to develop the knowledge and understandings on which the major disciplines are based. This is partly because some students will go on to develop specialised levels of expertise in their further studies. But it is also because, as active citizens, all young Australians will need knowledge and understandings that allow them to make informed decisions about complex issues, as they weigh up options that may have personal and social consequences. Rich and systematic engagement with a discipline-based curriculum in school can form the bases not only of specialised vocational success, but also of confident and knowledgeable civic activity.

Each discipline offers a distinctive lens through which we interpret experience, determine what counts as evidence and as a good argument for action, scrutinise knowledge and argument, make judgments about value, and add to knowledge. Rather than being self-contained or fixed, disciplines are interconnected, dynamic and growing, and a discipline-based curriculum allows for cross-disciplinary learning that broadens and enriches each student's learning.

In each learning area the national curriculum will provide a rationale for the choice of curriculum content. This rationale will make clear to teachers and students why the content chosen is important for students, and will outline the broad scope and sequence of learning to be expected through the K–12 years. The rationale will make clear how certain choices were made — whether they were based on 'big ideas' that are essential to deep understanding of a domain of knowledge; learning that is essential for particular further learning; or other important considerations such as the students' developing sense of personal identity, an 'Australian identity' or Australia's geographical and historical context.

The scope and sequence for each learning area will ensure that learning is appropriately ordered and that unnecessary repetition is avoided. It will help schools and teachers coordinate curriculum across a number of years of schooling.

International comparisons of educational performance and engagement suggest that Australians are high performers, but that they do not particularly like the learning in which they perform well. Students' attitudes to the knowledge, understandings and skills they are developing will be influenced perhaps more by teaching than by curriculum, but the curriculum can help if its content is sufficiently coherent over time, if students can understand their progress in learning, and if the curriculum is relevantly connected to their lives and futures.

The national curriculum will describe a learning entitlement for each Australian student, clearly explaining what is to be taught and learned in each area. Implementing the national curriculum, as in the case of state and territory curriculums, will rely on teachers' professional judgments about how best to organise learning for students, how to reflect local and regional circumstances, and how best to take advantage of their own specialised professional knowledge and their students' interests.

General capabilities

Not all learning is contained in the learning areas into which the school curriculum has traditionally been divided. Reflections on the nature of work in the 21st century typically identify important general capabilities, and many people argue that schools should help students develop them. As shown in Box 3, the *National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* sees these as including 'planning and organising, the ability to think flexibly, to communicate well and to work in teams ... the capacity to think creatively, innovate, solve problems and engage with new disciplines'.

The Board will deal explicitly with general capabilities within the national curriculum to avoid any risk that they will receive inadequate or unsystematic attention because they are supposed to be addressed 'across the curriculum'. Curriculum documents will indicate how learning in a particular area will contribute to the goals in the national declaration, how connections can be made between the discipline areas and how particular general capabilities will be explicitly dealt with in each area.

Each capability will be represented in each learning area in ways appropriate to that area. Some will be included because they need to be developed and applied in the particular learning area. Others can be taught and learned by students in any learning area; their development will depend on teachers' choices of classroom activities. The curriculum documents will be explicit on how the general capabilities are to be handled in each learning area and how links can be made between learning areas.

The national curriculum will specifically cover the following general capabilities.

- **Literacy** knowledge, skills and understanding need to be used and developed in all learning areas. Initial and major continuing development will be in English but the national curriculum will ensure that this competency is used and developed in all learning areas.
- **Numeracy** knowledge, skills and understanding need to be used and developed in all learning areas. Initial and major continuing development of numeracy will be in mathematics but the national curriculum will ensure that this competency is used and developed in all learning areas.
- **Information and communications technology (ICT)** skills and understanding are required for all learning areas. Some aspects of ICT competence are as much about information management as about the use of technology, so an important aspect of the competence is the ability to evaluate the source, reliability, accuracy and validity of information that abounds in cyberspace. New digital technologies are used in creative and artistic pursuits, and in civic and political activities. These opportunities for private and public expression, unimagined half a generation ago, will make up important elements of the national curriculum.
- **Thinking skills** refers to a range of kinds of applied intellectual activities that are involved in using information to achieve outcomes. They include elements such as solving problems, making decisions, thinking critically, developing an argument and using evidence in support of that argument. Thinking skills constitute the core of most intellectual activity.
- **Creativity** enables the development of new ideas and their application in specific contexts. It includes generating an idea which is new to the individual, seeing existing situations in a new way, identifying alternative explanations, seeing links, and finding new ways to apply ideas to generate a positive outcome. Creativity is closely linked to innovation and enterprise, and requires characteristics such as intellectual flexibility, open-mindedness, adaptability and a readiness to try new ways of doing things.
- **Self-management** enables a student to take responsibility for their own work and learning. It includes managing one's learning; monitoring, reflecting on and evaluating one's learning; identifying personal characteristics which contribute to or limit effectiveness; planning and undertaking work independently; taking responsibility for one's behaviour and performance; and learning from successes and failures.
- **Teamwork** enables a student to work effectively and productively with others. It includes working in harmony with others, contributing towards common purposes, defining and accepting individual and group roles and responsibilities, respecting individual and group differences, identifying the strengths of team members, and building social relationships.
- **Intercultural understanding** enables students to respect and appreciate their own and others'

cultures, and to work and communicate with those from different cultures and backgrounds. It includes appreciation of the special place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; respect for Australia's multicultural composition; communicating and working in harmony with others within and across cultures, especially in relation to cultures and countries of the Asia-Pacific; and appreciation of difference and diversity.

- **Ethical behaviour** involves students understanding and acting in accordance with moral and ethical principles. Ethical behaviour includes the willingness, determination and capacity to think, make judgments and behave independently. It includes identifying right and wrong and having the willingness, determination and capacity to argue the case for change; understanding the place of ethics and values in human life; acting with moral and ethical integrity; acting with regard for others; and having a desire and capacity to work for the common good.
- **Social competence** will enable students to interact effectively with others by assessing and successfully operating within a range of changing, often ambiguous human situations. It includes initiating and managing personal relationships; being self-aware and able to interpret one's own and others' emotional states, needs and perspectives; the ability to manage or resolve conflicts and to foster inclusive and respectful interactions; and participating successfully in a range of social and communal activities.

Cross-curriculum perspectives

There are other cross-curriculum matters that can be thought of as perspectives rather than capabilities. These are:

- Indigenous perspectives, which will be written into the national curriculum to ensure that all young Australians have the opportunity to learn about, acknowledge and respect the culture of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders
- a commitment to sustainable patterns of living which will be reflected, where appropriate, in national curriculum documents
- skills, knowledge and understandings related to Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia.

Each of these perspectives will be represented in learning areas in ways appropriate to that area. The curriculum documents will be explicit on how the perspectives are to be dealt with in each learning area and how links can be made between learning areas.

Achievement standards

Curriculum content identifies what teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn. Curriculum content typically includes areas of knowledge, concepts, skills and processes that students are expected to learn and will be described for a particular learning area at a particular year level (e.g. Mathematics, Year 5).

Achievement standards will provide an expectation of the quality of learning that students should typically demonstrate by a particular point in their schooling (i.e. the depth of their understanding, the extent of their knowledge and the sophistication of their skills).

Across K–10, achievement standards will be described for each year of schooling, providing a description of the quality of learning (drawing together knowledge, skill, understanding etc.) that most students might be expected to achieve and which represents a standard deemed adequate to enable the student to make further progress in the learning area. This achievement standard will be linked to a C grade when reporting to parents.

The sequence of achievement levels across K–10 will describe and illustrate progress in the learning area.

This sequence will provide teachers with a framework of growth and development in each of the learning areas.

Work samples will play a key role in establishing and communicating achievement. The examples of student work will include the task and a student's response, with an assessment and annotations setting out the basis for the judgement.

The development of the achievement standards will take account of what is known from research about how to improve students' learning. If teachers are to understand individuals' current levels of attainment so that they can target teaching on needs, they must have a grasp of the growth and development of students' thinking about fundamental concepts in an area of learning. A sequence of achievement levels provides teachers with an articulated framework of growth and development that will assist them to do this.

Year-by-year achievement standards will help teachers to know where students are at any given point. Teachers will, however, continue to use formative assessment information to diagnose learning difficulties, or to decide how to teach the next lesson. They will continue to use formative assessment, conducted on a regular basis, to make adjustments to their instruction and to generate feedback to enable students to adjust their learning.

The curriculum content and achievement standards will also be used to inform the development of national assessment programs. It will be possible to 'calibrate' results of assessment programs against the sequence of achievement levels, providing finer-grained detail about students' levels of achievement and progress that can be useful for monitoring purposes at the system and whole-school levels.

For Years 11–12, subject-specific achievement standards will be developed. These will describe a range of levels of achievement expected of students studying the particular course. They will be designed to support reporting to students and parents, to ensure consistency of assessment and reporting across states and territories, and to contribute to the discrimination in assessments required for post-school pathway selection. The Years 11–12 achievement standards will be designed to be applicable in jurisdictions with external examinations and with school-based assessment.

The achievement standards will not assume how students will be asked about or might be able to demonstrate their learning. While they will guide and inform assessment, particular assessment methods used will be determined by teachers, schools and school authorities.

Reporting to parents

A–E grades, or equivalent, are used to report to parents. These grades are designed to help parents and guardians to interpret their child's performance in a simple and direct way. Is their child achieving at the level expected of students in the Year level? Is there cause for concern? Is their child falling behind and in need of additional assistance to be able to succeed in school? Is their child moving ahead faster than other students in the same Year level and in need of extension studies?

In conjunction with the development of curriculum content and achievement standards, the national curriculum will provide a consistent nomenclature to describe the quality of achievement associated with each A–E grade. The use of A–E grades will aid the articulation of the extent to which a student has met the achievement standard for a particular year of school. For example, students would be awarded a grade of C or above only if they have met the achievement standard for that year/stage. A C grade might indicate a satisfactory level of achievement and an A grade an outstanding level of achievement. A D or E grade would suggest that follow-up is required as these levels of achievement would present a cause for concern to teachers, student and parents.

Annotated student work samples will be used to illustrate the differences in quality of student work and would be developed for, at least, the A/B and C/D cut-off points. The collection of these work samples will build on work that is already in place in states and territories. The collection will provide a common and national reference point for greater consistency in teacher judgment within and between classrooms, schools, states and territories.

4. Curriculum development

The National Curriculum Board's curriculum development process has been designed to generate broad discussion and consultation on the shape and design of the national curriculum.

To guide curriculum development for particular learning areas the Board has adopted a process that involves four interrelated phases: curriculum framing, curriculum writing, implementation and curriculum evaluation and review.

The activities that occur within each of these phases, and the timelines for each curriculum development project, are outlined in the document National Curriculum Board: Curriculum development process. This publication can be found at www.ncb.org.au (under 'Publications').

5. Pedagogy

It is clear that pedagogy and curriculum content and processes cannot be treated entirely discretely, and that best current pedagogy and practice must be used when constructing curriculum documents. Even so, while the national curriculum will make clear to teachers what has to be taught and to students what they should learn and what achievement standards are expected of them, classroom teachers are the people who will decide how best to organise learning for students. They will make decisions about the pedagogical approach that will give the best learning outcomes.

6. Implementation

The Board is to develop a national K–12 curriculum in English, mathematics, the sciences and history by the end of 2010. Timelines for each of these curriculum development activities can be found at www.ncb.org.au.

Implementation will follow, commencing in 2011. National curriculum implementation issues will be significant considerations for the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), working with the states and territories through the Australian Education Systems Officials' Committee (AESOC) and their curriculum authorities. Consideration will be given to the sequencing of implementation from 2011.

As part of its work to develop the national curriculum, the Board has discussed factors that will influence implementation strategies. They include:

- the extent of difference between existing curriculum requirements, in terms of what is to be taught and assessed, in any particular year or over a sequence of years
- the extent of change in how the curriculum is organised, in terms of organisation of the curriculum content (such as by years of schooling) and how achievement standards are presented
- the extent to which state and territory credentialing or other arrangements require additional material to be developed and made available to teachers (such as assessment requirements, examination specifications and sample papers for senior years)
- the extent, and place in the cycle, of curriculum change, such as primary teachers dealing with multiple new curriculums, or education systems part-way through an existing curriculum change.

The national curriculum development process provides for briefing sessions with state and territory authorities, professional associations, publishers and so on, beyond the consultation processes built into the curriculum development process.