Core P–10 Australian Curriculum

A report to the Minister for Education from the Board of the QCAA

June 2016

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Background

Queensland has been steadfastly committed to implementation of the Australian Curriculum since the first learning areas became available. The notion of a curriculum that would establish national consistency through explicit expectations for what young Australians should be taught — regardless of where they live or their background — continues to receive widespread support from schools and education stakeholders alike.

Queensland's strong support for the national education reform agenda led to its adoption of the P–10 Australian Curriculum without modification. It has since achieved substantial implementation of the initial learning areas, with teachers generally acknowledging its rigour and the benefits of its discipline specific and multi-dimensional nature.

The implementation process has not occurred without challenges for many schools. In particular, the volume of curriculum content has resulted in a range of workload issues for teachers. These have increased as the P–10 Australian Curriculum learning areas have been incrementally developed and endorsed by the ministerial council, and complementary resources have been developed and introduced within Queensland to support assessment, reporting and implementation.

Responding to concerns raised by schools and stakeholders, especially in relation to workload pressures, the Minister for Education announced in December 2015 that the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) would work with school sectors and stakeholders to identify the Core P–10 Australian Curriculum for Queensland schools before consulting further on implementation timelines.

Approaches to implementation

Queensland's implementation approach

Queensland's distinctive approach to implementation of the Australian Curriculum acknowledges the primacy of the school sectors in determining specific policies and strategies for implementation and supporting schools to achieve agreed milestones. The activities of the QCAA and school sectors occur within a mutually agreed timetable for implementation established in December 2012.

Queensland schools access the information they need to develop classroom curriculum from various points. The curriculum content and achievement standards are available directly from ACARA's website. The QCAA provides advice and guidelines, and resources to assist with assessment and reporting requirements. Schools also receive specific polices and advice regarding curriculum implementation from school sectors, diocesan offices and individual school authorities.

Interstate perspectives

Queensland's approach contrasts with the implementation approaches taken by the larger jurisdictions, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia, where there is acknowledgement that implementation of the unmodified P–10 Australian Curriculum places too great a burden on schools. They have adapted the curriculum to suit their curriculum frameworks, planned revision activities and jurisdictional priorities, while remaining true to its intent. In effect, a modified Australian Curriculum has been developed by each curriculum authority, with direction on implementation provided to schools across all sectors.

Analysis of the curriculum in these states shows a range of modifications, including:

- combining content descriptions
- editing and rewording content descriptions
- adding content descriptions
- removing content descriptions
- providing additional detail to clarify content descriptions
- removing content strands
- adding detail to achievement standards
- rewording and reordering the achievement standards
- banding year-by-year content descriptions and achievement standards
- converting banded curriculum to year-by-year curriculum.

The timelines for implementation in these states are longer than in Queensland. This aspect of their respective approaches reflects the research evidence, which suggests that to achieve widespread and consistent implementation of educational reform initiatives they must be supported in an ongoing manner for at least seven years.[1]

The implementation approaches of the other states found some support in the findings of the Australian Government's independent *Review of the Australian Curriculum*, conducted in 2014. The reviewers acknowledged in their final report that the curriculum was overcrowded and in need of rebalancing. Subsequent requirements for ACARA to address the issue have not resulted in significant change.

There is now public recognition that the full curriculum developed by ACARA is not *implementation-ready* in the way it is articulated to jurisdictions. It is no longer presented as an *entitlement* for all students but rather an *aspirational* curriculum that is subject to jurisdictional curriculum and school authority decisions about the focus, priorities and implementation timeline for their schools.

Queensland school and stakeholder perspectives

Despite there being a range of implementation achievements, it is clear from QCAA's consultation activities that many schools and education stakeholders are frustrated by workloads, curriculum demands and time pressures that have resulted from implementation of the P–10 Australian Curriculum. This frustration is of concern to decision makers, as it threatens to undermine the implementation achievements of recent years. While ACARA's goal was to develop a curriculum that would not consume more than 80% of the time available to schools, it is clear that many are struggling to find a place for the additional regular activities (such as religion lessons, sport, weekly assemblies) or occasional activities (such as concert rehearsals, community or service projects, commemorative events) that occupy time in the school week.

Teachers, curriculum leaders and even parents have reported that the Australian Curriculum is challenging for schools to implement effectively within the time available, and that this is resulting in unnecessary stress on teachers and students. The problem is particularly acute in small

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[1] Pendergast, D., Main, K., Barton, G., Kanasa, H., Geelan, D. & Dowden, T. 2015, The Education Change Model as a Vehicle for Reform: Shifting Year 7 and implementing junior secondary in Queensland. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, 15(2), 5-19

schools where there are multiple year levels in one classroom — a common feature of Queensland schooling.

QCAA's consultation activities included:

- meetings with key stakeholders, including school sectors, teacher unions, professional associations and parent/carer groups

- forums and other events that have involved around 500 curriculum leaders and educators across Queensland (including regional locations), focusing on principals, deputy principals, heads of curriculum and heads of department

- meetings of the QCAA's various consultative bodies, including P–10 Australian Curriculum Working Groups

- meetings with special education curriculum leaders.

The overall view of those consulted is reflected in the feedback from curriculum leaders. An overwhelming majority considered the Australian Curriculum to be too extensive for implementation in the time available to schools. The general view was that Australian Curriculum implementation has increased assessment pressure and compromised the capacity of schools to support deep learning. Approximately half of the curriculum leaders consulted did not consider there is sufficient clarity in the Australian Curriculum about what should be taught and assessed, or that the timelines for implementation have been appropriate.

Curriculum leaders also provided advice on appropriate models and strategies to address the overcrowded curriculum and strategies for a balanced formative and summative assessment program. The diversity of models and strategies further reinforces the need for clarity about the focus for curriculum in each phase of learning.

Defining a Core P–10 Australian Curriculum for Queensland

The consultation findings indicate that Queensland needs to modify its implementation approach in order to capitalise on what has already been achieved, while respecting the varying capacities of schools. Accordingly, the QCAA has developed and considered a number of options for a core P–10 Australian Curriculum, taking into account the clear views of teachers, school leaders and education stakeholders. In identifying a preferred approach, the QCAA has sought to balance the need to:

- address the concerns about curriculum content overcrowding expressed before and during the consultations

- avoid significant imposition on teachers' workloads

- provide schools with the flexibility to do more than is suggested, if they have the resources and commitment to do so.

It considers that a way to achieve this is to make strategic modifications to learning areas other than English, Mathematics and Health and Physical Education (HPE) to identify core and discretionary content within each learning area, while providing options for implementing the curriculum in the remaining learning areas (e.g. an option to offer at least three Arts subjects per band including one performing art and one visual art).

The key features of this approach to defining core include:

- No modification to the English and Mathematics content across all year levels. QCAA was unable to identify any potential modifications that would provide teachers with significant

additional time. This would support Queensland's commitment to raising literacy and numeracy standards across P–10 and making further gains in NAPLAN performance.

- No modification to the HPE content across all year levels to ensure schools have sufficient capacity to address the emotional, social and physical development needs of students.

- Introducing discretionary content descriptions in Science in the *Science as a Human Endeavour* strand to support schools to prioritise the learning which is the focus of assessment and the achievement standard. Only learning that is duplicated in other strands or is not specifically outlined in the achievement standards would become discretionary.

- Reducing repetition of the *Inquiry and skills* strand in Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS).

- Providing flexibility in the Technologies learning area by allowing schools choice in the contexts they implement in each band.

- Providing flexibility in the Arts learning area by allowing schools choice in the subjects they deliver in each band.

- Schools/school sectors determine which language/s should be learnt and when to introduce language learning in Prep to Year 6, consistent with ACARA's advice. (Note: The Department of Education and Training strongly encourages schools to offer a Languages program from Prep to Year 12. The provision of Languages is required from Years 5 to 8).

- Minor modification to the achievement standards – the benchmarks for what students should typically be able to understand and do – in learning areas where there has been a reduction.

- Providing additional guidance for teachers about the content descriptions that support students to meet the expectations of the achievement standards within each learning area.

Table 1 specifies the Core P–10 Australian Curriculum that all students would study in line with this revised approach. Schools would be free to offer additional learning from within the Australian Curriculum.

Table 1: Core P–10 Australian Curriculum

Please note the following terms are used in the table below:
- core — the content descriptions that assist students to meet the expectations of the achievement standard
- discretionary — the content descriptions that schools may choose to implement
- optional — aspects of the curriculum that schools make choices about within a learning area.

Learning area	Prep–Year 2	Years 3–4	Years 5–6	Years 7–9	Year 10
English	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified
Mathematics	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified
Science	• content descriptions unmodified in Science Understanding and Science Inquiry Skills • some discretionary content descriptions in *Science as a Human Endeavour Strand* • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified in Science Understanding and Science Inquiry Skills • some discretionary content descriptions in *Science as a Human Endeavour Strand* • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified in Science Understanding and Science Inquiry Skills in Years 7 to 9 • some discretionary content descriptions in *Science as a Human Endeavour Strand* in Year 7 and Year 9 • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified in Science Understanding and Science Inquiry Skills • some discretionary content descriptions in *Science as a Human Endeavour Strand* • achievement standards unmodified
Health and Physical Education (HPE)	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified.	• optional • content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified

Learning area	Prep–Year 2	Years 3–4	Years 5–6	Years 7–9	Year 10
Humanities and Social Sciences **Subjects:** • History • Geography • Civics and Citizenship • Economics and Business	• study Humanities and Social Sciences in Prep, Year 1 and Year 2 • study the content descriptions of *Inquiry and Skills Strand* at least once per year • content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• study Humanities and Social Sciences in Year 3 and Year 4 • study the content descriptions of *Inquiry and Skills Strand* at least twice per year • content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• study Humanities and Social Sciences in Year 5 and Year 6 • study the content descriptions of *Inquiry and Skills Strand* at least twice per year • Economics and Business sub-strand discretionary • content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• study History in Years 7 to 9 • complete at least 2 of the 3 in-depth studies in History per year • study Geography in Years 7 to 8, optional in Year 9 • Civics and Citizenship and Economics and Business optional in Years 7 to 9 • content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• optional • content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified

Learning area	Prep–Year 2	Years 3–4	Years 5–6	Years 7–9	Year 10

Technologies
 	
Subjects:
 	
• Design and Technologies
	• study at least 2 of the 3 contexts per band:
	  – Engineering principles and systems
	  – Food and fibre production/Food specialisations
	  – Materials and technologies specialisation
	• study each context twice across Prep to Year 6
	• content descriptions unmodified
	• achievement standards unmodified
		• study at least 2 of the 3 contexts per band:
		  – Engineering principles and systems
		  – Food and fibre production/Food specialisations
		  – Materials and technologies specialisation
		• study each context twice across Prep to Year 6
		• content descriptions unmodified
		• achievement standards unmodified
			• study at least 2 of the 3 contexts per band:
			  – Engineering principles and systems
			  – Food and fibre production/Food specialisations
			  – Materials and technologies specialisation
			• study each context twice across Prep to Year 6
			• content descriptions unmodified
			• achievement standards unmodified
				• study at least 3 of the 4 contexts by the end of Year 8:
				  – Engineering principles and systems
				  – Food and fibre production
				  – Food specialisations
				  – Materials and technologies specialisation
				• Year 9 optional
				• content descriptions unmodified
				• achievement standards unmodified
					• optional; if studied, select at least 1 context:
					  – Engineering principles and systems
					  – Food and fibre production
					  – Food specialisations
					  – Materials and technologies specialisation
					• content descriptions unmodified
					• achievement standards unmodified

• Digital Technologies	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• study in Years 7 to 8 • Year 9 optional • content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• optional • content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified

Learning area	Prep–Year 2	Years 3–4	Years 5–6	Years 7–9	Year 10
The Arts **Performing Arts subjects:** • Dance • Drama • Music **Visual Arts subjects:** • Media Arts • Visual Arts	• study at least 3 of the 5 Arts subjects per band • study 1 performing arts subject, 1 visual arts subject and an option of either for the third subject • subjects not studied are discretionary • study all 5 Arts subjects across Prep to Year 6 • content descriptions unmodified for subjects studied • achievement standards unmodified for subjects studied	• study at least 3 of the 5 Arts subjects per band • study 1 performing arts subject, 1 visual arts subject and an option of either for the third subject • subjects not studied are discretionary • study all 5 Arts subjects across Prep to Year 6 • content descriptions unmodified for subjects studied • achievement standards unmodified for subjects studied	• study at least 3 of the 5 Arts subjects per band • study 1 performing arts subject, 1 visual arts subject and an option of either for the third subject • subjects not studied are discretionary • study all 5 Arts subjects across Prep to Year 6 • content descriptions unmodified for subjects studied • achievement standards unmodified for subjects studied	• study at least 1 of the 5 Arts subjects in Years 7 to 8 • Year 9 optional • content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified	• optional • content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified
Languages	• schools determine which language/s and when to introduce (Note: The Department of Education and Training strongly encourages schools to offer a Languages program from Prep to Year 12. The provision of Languages is required from Years 5 to 8) • content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified					• Year 9 and Year 10 optional (Note: The Department of Education and Training strongly encourages schools to offer a Languages program from Prep to Year 12. The provision of Languages is required from Years 5 to 8) • content descriptions unmodified • achievement standards unmodified
Work Studies					• optional content available for Year 9 and Year 10 • QCAA will embed into Career Development: A short course • if completed in Year 10, students could gain credit towards QCE

The proposed approach to defining core would:

- reduce the content currently included in the P–10 Australian Curriculum
- provide guidance for teachers and schools
- create stability in priority learning areas, such as English and Mathematics.

It would also provide an opportunity to address some discernible gaps in the curriculum, such as the need for specific advice and resources for students with a disability (discussed below), and advice about the nature of the learner and priorities for learning within each phase of learning. In relation to the latter, it was evident from the consultation feedback that there is at least some inconsistency across schools about the priorities that focus learning in each phase and curriculum decision-making.

Supporting students with disability

Across Australia, all states and territories offer general advice about providing students with disability access to the Australian Curriculum on the same basis as their peers, as required under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Cwlth, 2006). The advice from each state and territory indicates that:

- most students with disability can engage with the curriculum, with adjustments made to instructional processes and assessment strategies which enable students to achieve educational standards commensurate with their peers
- a small number of students with disability will require teachers to make adjustments to the complexity of the curriculum content, focusing instruction on content different to that taught to others in their age group
- for a very small number of students with disability, their learning will be below the Foundation level standard. Most of these students have a significant intellectual disability.

New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia provide specific curriculum for students with disability. All other states and territories offer general advice about providing students with disability access to the Australian Curriculum on the same basis as their peers based on ACARA's advice and in accordance with the national standards.

Queensland should follow the lead of these jurisdictions and provide school leaders and teachers of students with disability with professional learning and resources to support implementation of the P–10 Australian Curriculum. QCAA is able to assist and support schools to engage with the teaching and learning resource they elect to use.

Draft time allocations

Modification of the curriculum could be accompanied by updated advice about time allocations, which would address teachers' concerns about the lack of time to teach the Australian Curriculum within current allocations.

ACARA provides advice on indicative time allocations for each year and subject as a guide for writers in developing the curriculum. The advice states that the Australian Curriculum should not take up more than 80% of the total teaching time available in schools. Schools and school authorities are to make policy decisions regarding time and sequences of learning when implementing the curriculum.

Currently in Queensland, the QCAA provides advice on minimum time allocations based on ACARA's indicative timings[2] that provide flexibility for schools to make decisions about how:

- discretionary time is used
- total available time is used.

The hours do not assume how schools should organise learning and are not required hours. The independent and Catholic sectors refer schools to QCAA's indicative time allocations, while the state sector provides specific advice on time allocations.

Various approaches are in use in other jurisdictions. New South Wales has developed time allocations for P–10 with minimum and maximum percentages across most learning areas. Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania do not provide specific time allocations. Guidelines are provided for the learning areas but decisions about recommended time allocations per sector, per subject and per year are made at the school level. The Northern Territory refers schools to time allocations based on ACARA's indicative timings. The Australian Capital Territory provides time allocations for languages and physical activity. South Australia provides mandated times for English, mathematics and science and refers schools to ACARA's indicative time allocations for the remaining learning areas.

The QCAA has developed draft advice for schools showing how the Prep to Year 6 Australian Curriculum can be taught in 80% of a typical 9 am to 3 pm five-day school week (see Appendix 1). The remaining 20% of the school week would be discretionary time for regular or occasional priority activities. Following adoption of the proposed core, further advice would be provided for Years 7 to 10.

The newly defined Core P–10 Australian Curriculum could be communicated to schools and school sectors within six to twelve months of a decision about what constitutes core.

Concluding remarks

The proposed approach for identifying a Core P–10 Australian Curriculum and providing advice on time allocations would realise the following benefits:

- minimum curriculum expectations will be clear for teachers, parents/carers and the wider community
- local decision making will be supported
- teacher workload will be reduced
- there will be more time to support deep learning and to consolidate learning
- students' engagement with the curriculum will be maximised.

Once a decision has been made in relation to the proposed approach for identifying core, consideration may be given to an appropriate implementation schedule that takes into account the time needed for familiarisation with each learning area, including the provision of targeted professional learning.

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[2] Queensland Studies Authority, (2011) *Time Allocations and Entitlement: Advice on implementing the Australian Curriculum F(P)-10,* www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/p_10/ac_time_alloc_entitlement_advice.pdf

Recommendations

Following consideration of the consultation findings and other evidence from within Queensland and interstate, the QCAA makes the following recommendations for a change in approach to the implementation of the P–10 Australian Curriculum in Queensland.

1. **That support is given for the proposal to define a Core P–10 Australian Curriculum for Queensland schools and school sectors.**

   If adopted, the proposal for a Core P–10 Australian Curriculum in Queensland would provide schools and teachers with:

   - clarity about aspects of the curriculum that are considered most important for the year or band of schooling

   - a framework within which to make a range of local decisions that best suit their school community and resourcing

   - time needed to:

     - support deep learning

     - revise and consolidate learning

     - engage in pedagogies that best support learning.

   The QCAA could develop and communicate the Core P–10 Australian Curriculum to schools within six to twelve months of a decision to proceed.

2. **That the QCAA publishes clear statements about the nature of the learner and the priorities for learning within each phase of learning (Prep to Year 2, Years 3 to 6, Years 7 to 9, and 10) to assist schools and school sectors when making decisions about the priority given to particular aspects of the curriculum.**

   Advice about the nature of the learner and priorities for learning within each phase could be used to support curriculum decision making.

3. **That the QCAA streamlines its current range of resources and develop new resources to support the implementation of the Core P–10 Australian Curriculum in Queensland.**

   The range of resources may include:

   - models of how to implement the Australian Curriculum learning areas/subjects

   - advice on designing quality assessment that is aligned to the achievement standards

   - advice on making judgments using evidence in student work

   - annotated samples of student work that illustrate the evidence of the achievement standards.

4. **That school leaders and teachers of students with disability are provided with professional learning and resources to support implementation of the P–10 Australian Curriculum.**

   This could include:

   - opportunities to understand and develop a deep knowledge of the intent of the eight learning areas

- resources that clarify and exemplify the advice provided by ACARA to enable teachers to provide personalised learning for the diverse range of students with disability.

QCAA would then assist and support schools to engage with the teaching and learning resource they elect to use.

5. **That Queensland teachers be given clear advice about the minimum time that the Core P–10 Australian Curriculum would remain the curriculum expectation.**

This commitment would:

- provide a period of curriculum certainty

- support the uptake and implementation of the Australian Curriculum in Queensland

- reduce the workload of teachers over the longer term and provide time for them to master implementation of the curriculum.

ACARA's Corporate Plan (2015–16) indicates that the next revision of the Australian Curriculum will be undertaken from 2019–2020, six years after the endorsement of the Australian Curriculum.

A period of five to seven years could be considered.

6. **That the timelines for implementation of the Core P–10 Australian Curriculum be revised.**

The timeline would:

- clearly specify the year by which all learning areas are to be implemented

- provide flexibility to account for individual school readiness to implement particular learning areas.

A revised implementation plan would need to take account of the time needed for familiarisation with each learning area, including the provision of targeted professional learning.

Appendix 1: Time allocations for Prep to Year 6 — draft advice

This advice shows how the Prep to Year 6 Australian Curriculum can be taught in 80% of a typical 9 am to 3 pm five-day school week. The remaining time is available for additional activities at the school's discretion. Schools use this time for activities such as religious education, sport, concert rehearsals and special projects.

The calculations are based on:

- 25 hours per week x 40 weeks per year = 1000 hours per year
- 10-week terms
- 20-week semesters
- 1% is equal to 15 minutes per week (therefore, 1 hour per week = 4%).

Table 2 shows ACARA's recommended time allocations per learning area and QCAA's proposed allocations, both as a percentage and broken down into hours per week, term and semester. Figure 1 shows the QCAA percentage allocations in a pie chart.

Table 2: Time allocations for Australian Curriculum Prep to Year 6

Learning area	ACARA time allocations			QCAA-proposed time allocations			
	Prep – Year 2	Years 3 & 4	Years 5 & 6	Prep – Year 6	Hours per		
					week	term	semester
English	27%	22%	20%	28 – 32%	7.0 – 8.0	70 – 80	140 – 160
Mathematics	18%	18%	16%	18 – 20%	4.5 – 5.0	45 – 50	90 – 100
Science	4%	7%	7%	6 – 8%	1.5 – 2.0	15 – 20	30 – 40
Humanities & Social Science	4%	8%	12%	4 – 10%	1.0 – 2.5	10 – 25	20 – 50
Health & Physical Education	8%	8%	8%	6 – 8%	1.5 – 2.0	15 – 20	30 – 40
Technologies	2%	4%	6%	4 – 6%	1.0 – 1.5	10 – 15	20 – 30
The Arts	4%	5%	5%	4 – 6%	1.0 – 1.5	10 – 15	20 – 30
Languages	5%	5%	5%	4%	1.0	10	20
Core	72%	77%	79%	74 – 94%	18.5 – 23.5	185 – 235	370 – 470
Discretionary	28%	23%	21%	6 – 26%	1.5 – 6.5	15 – 65	30 – 130
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	25	250	500

Figure 1: QCAA proposed time allocations for Prep to Year 6

Discretionary
(up to 20%)

Health and Physical Education
(6 – 8%)

Languages
(4%)

Humanities and Social Sciences
(4 – 10%)

The Arts
(4 – 6%)

Technologies
(4 – 6%)

Science
(6 – 8%)

English
(28 – 32%)

Mathematics
(18 – 20%)