



MONITORING OF THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM REPORT 2019

AN ACT CROSS-SECTORAL RESPONSE

Introduction

As part of ACARA's commitment to provide advice to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Education Council on the scope of refinements to the Australian Curriculum, feedback has been sought from all State and Territory curriculum authorities on the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. The feedback sought is based on identified themes in ACARA's program of research on international trends in curriculum design. ACARA has invited a response from all sectors in the ACT on the following:

1. Essential content – Is there room for improving the content of the Australian Curriculum to allow more depth and rigour over breadth?
2. The place of the general capabilities – Are there better ways of embedding the general capabilities into the learning area content and achievement standards?
3. Recognition of First Peoples – Is the place of Australia's First Peoples appropriately covered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Culture cross curriculum priority?
4. Support for implementation – What advice and resources could ACARA provide to better support teachers to implement the curriculum?

This report is the collaborative work of the ACT Education Directorate (ACTED), Archdiocese of Canberra Goulburn Catholic Education (CECG) and the Association of Independent Schools ACT (AISACT) in response to the aforementioned themes. All sectors work together as integral partners in the implementation of the ACT's *Future of Education: An ACT Education Strategy for the Next Ten Years* and support ACT schools in the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. This response reflects the voice of teachers and leaders in the ACT in relation to school based design and delivery of the Australian Curriculum in ACT schools.

Context

Under the Education Act 2004 (the Act) Section 30, the Director-General of the ACT Education Directorate (ACTED) determines the curriculum requirements for students attending public schools from preschool to Year 10. This is the Australian Curriculum. Section 86(6) of the Act requires non-government schools to meet the curriculum requirements for students attending government schools. The ACTED is currently revising and updating the Curriculum Requirements, which sets out the responsibilities and requirements for implementation of the ACT Curriculum. The ACT Cross-Sectoral Curriculum Group (ACTCCG) acts as a consultative body in this domain.

Implementation of the Australian Curriculum in the ACT is supported by the ACTCCG which works to ensure cross sectoral collaboration in the implementation of the Australian Curriculum, and in building the capacity of schools in the ACT to engage with its full depth and breadth. The ACTCCG consists of representative members from each sector. Each sector shares curriculum implementation challenges and strategies, and provides a suite of professional learning opportunities for schools in unpacking the Australian Curriculum, Achievement Standards, General Capabilities, Learning Progressions and Cross Curriculum Priorities.

In accordance with policy, ACT schools are required to develop and deliver teaching and learning programs that adhere to the requirements of the ACT Curriculum as per Table 1. ACT schools can choose to deliver the Australian Curriculum as written, or through a curriculum framework recognised by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). The three-dimensional design of the Australian Curriculum incorporates learning areas and subjects (achievement standards and content descriptions), general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities. All three dimensions are included as a part of the ACT Curriculum.

The ACTED, the AISACT and the CECGs' respective curriculum sections provide support to their schools in the design, delivery and scope and sequencing of the Australian Curriculum, and the assessment of student achievement against the Australian Curriculum Achievement Standards. The agreed requirements for curriculum delivery in all ACT schools are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Curriculum requirements for ACT schools

Learning Area Year	English	Mathematics	Science	Humanities and Social Sciences	The Arts	Technologies	Health and Physical Education	Languages
K	Compulsory	Compulsory	Compulsory	Study all HaSS subjects	Study all Arts subjects over the band.	Study both Technologies subjects over the band.	Compulsory	Opportunity to study at a language over the band
1	Compulsory	Compulsory	Compulsory	Study all HaSS subjects			Compulsory	
2	Compulsory	Compulsory	Compulsory	Study all HaSS subjects			Compulsory	
3	Compulsory	Compulsory	Compulsory	Study all HaSS subjects	Study all Arts subjects over the band.	Study both Technologies subjects over the band.	Compulsory	Study one of the eight priority languages – French, German, Italian, Spanish, Indonesian, Japanese, Chinese/Mandarin and Korean. (ACT Public Schools- Minimum of 60 min/per week)
4	Compulsory	Compulsory	Compulsory	Study all HaSS subjects			Compulsory	
5	Compulsory	Compulsory	Compulsory	Study all HaSS subjects	Study all Arts subjects over the band.	Study both Technologies subjects over the band.	Compulsory	
6	Compulsory	Compulsory	Compulsory	Study all HaSS subjects			Compulsory	
7	Compulsory	Compulsory	Compulsory	Study all HaSS subjects			Study a minimum of two Arts subjects over the band	
8	Compulsory	Compulsory	Compulsory	Study all HaSS subjects	Compulsory			
9	Compulsory	Compulsory	Compulsory	Study History in Y9 & 10. Opportunity to study Geography, Civics & Citizenship or Economics and Business over the band	Opportunity to study at least one Arts subject over the band	Opportunity to study Design and Technologies over the band	Compulsory	Opportunity to study at a language over the band
10	Compulsory	Compulsory	Compulsory				Compulsory	

Source: ACT Education Directorate, Learning and Teaching 2019

At February census 2019, there were 78,752 students enrolled in ACT public and non-government schools (see Table 2). These enrolments are spread across 88 public schools and 52 non-government schools, comprising of 18 independent schools and 28 Catholic schools.

Table 2: School enrolments in ACT schools 2019

	Public schools	Catholic systemic schools	Independent schools	Total all schools
Preschool	4641	590	857	6088
Primary (K-6)	26486	8586	5682	40754
High	11598	4195	6002	21795
College	6427	1317	2371	10115
Subtotal schools	49152	14688	14912	78752

Source: https://www.education.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1370264/February-2019-census.pdf

Methodology

For the purpose of the ACT's response to ACARA's Monitoring of the Australian Curriculum, teachers and leaders across all schools in the ACT were provided opportunity to discuss their work and engagement with the Australian Curriculum in relation to the themes set by ACARA. Curriculum forums were held with representatives from primary and secondary public and non-government schools providing feedback for the report. A survey was also sent out to a number of schools across the ACT from which responses contributed to data collection and feedback to further inform the response to ACARA. This feedback information has been synthesised into this report.

Essential content – Is there room for improving the content of the Australian Curriculum to allow more depth and rigour over breadth?

'The planned curriculum is presented through the learning areas, with an understanding that the capabilities and priorities are 'embedded or 'integrated' in some way within the content described for each of the learning areas.'¹ Schools in the ACT are strengthening their understanding of how to best engage with the Australian Curriculum and realise the planned curriculum with students.

Teachers reported varying degrees of understanding of the intent of the curriculum in relation to content, with the 'overcrowded curriculum' still a common belief. For some teachers (and schools) there is still the misconception that every content description must be addressed and there is a pressure particularly in primary schools to get through all of the content knowledge. This is highlighted in the arts and technologies where teachers in primary schools consider the breadth of content too extensive, and confidence to teach in primary schools is lower due to the breadth in areas that are typically taught by specialist teachers in high schools. The K-2 HASS curriculum is also considered too broad to enable depth and rigour. Teachers commented that the 'year 10 maths content is too full' and mathematics teachers feel 'there are too many concepts and too much repetition.' Similarly, teachers identified that the content in year 10 science is also too full, an effect of relocating some topics from the years 7-9 science curriculum as part of the recent Australian Curriculum Review process.

To this end each sector has designed a more targeted approach to working with schools to support teacher clarity in what is required in working with the Australian Curriculum and its continuous implementation. Teachers in the ACT are advised and supported to use the achievement standards as a starting point to plan student learning because the achievement standards state what the students will be able to understand and do; teachers then choose the appropriate content descriptions to meet the needs of their students in their context. Teachers are supported in knowing their students (level of readiness, interests, learning profiles –culture, backgrounds, gender) as this informs how learning can be differentiated to allow depth and rigour. The ACT is continuing to support teachers and schools in accessing the National Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions to support student learning, the potential of which is yet to be realised in all ACT schools.

Teacher feedback identified that schools are valuing the level of support that is being offered to better engage with the curriculum and would like clearer messaging around the shape of the curriculum; and how 'the elements might be fleshed out in conceptually rich ways'² in order to fully realise the intent of the curriculum and the place of essential content in teaching and learning practice. The three dimensional design enables the Achievement Standards to be met. However, an articulated narrative around the design would better equip teachers with the understanding of and confidence in translating the intended curriculum into practice. What constitutes *essential* content continues to be a contentious point of

¹ Scarino, A. (2018) The Australian Curriculum and its conceptual bases: A critical analysis. In *The Australian Curriculum: Promises, problems and possibilities* Edited by Alan Reid and Deborah Price Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) 2018

² Ibid, p.24

discussion, one which the ACT sectors would welcome the opportunity to further discuss and engage in through ACARA forums.

The ACT supports the view that there is always room to improve the content for more depth and rigour, however a more pertinent issue is the understanding of the Australian Curriculum and the role of the content in relation to the Achievement Standards. Is the question one of improving content for depth and rigour or is it more improving the messaging around the selection of appropriate content to provide depth and rigour whilst meeting student needs in contexts of learning? Teachers would benefit from an enhanced and nuanced understanding of three-dimensional learning design and its inherent flexibility in delivery which provides for rich depth and rigour.

The Place of the General Capabilities – Are there better ways of embedding the General Capabilities into learning area content and achievement standards?

The ACT supports that the three-dimensional design of the Australian Curriculum is intended to prepare students to live and work successfully in the 21st century. The *Future of Education Strategy* articulates an intent to position 21st century capabilities as an increasing focus within the curriculum. General capabilities comprise an integrated and interconnected set of knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that students develop in their learning across the curriculum, in co-curricular programs and in their lives outside school. ACT teachers are committed to furthering their understanding of how the learning continua of the general capabilities provide guidance on what can be expected of students in each capability at different stages of schooling.

Schools in the ACT have a professional appetite for authentically embedding the general capabilities into the learning area content. This is evident in the ACT's *General Capabilities in Action* learning series (supported by ACARA) in 2018 and the ongoing professional learning suite of workshops and school based projects designed to build teacher capacity in engaging with the general capabilities. Teacher feedback indicated that there is a universal understanding of the importance and place of 21st century skills and the interconnectedness of the general capabilities: 'The general capabilities are the guiding force of 21st century skills.' Teachers also indicated that they would like to engage in further discussion and dialogue focusing on designing learning through the lens of the general capabilities: 'Could the cube be flipped so that the general capabilities are the focus as they are a more natural fit?'

Teachers acknowledged that the general capabilities' icons attached to the content descriptions identify that they are addressing the capabilities when planning the teaching and learning program, rather than intentionally planning to develop capabilities in context. A further layer to the complexity of this issue is that there are beliefs in some schools and the broader community that the literacy capability belongs in English, the numeracy capability belongs in Mathematics and similarly, that ICT is covered in Digital Technologies. However, high school teachers in the forums identified that 'all teachers are educators of the general capabilities.'

Leaders in the ACT are keen to work with teachers in this space to dispel these myths and provide further clarity. This would enable leaders to work strategically to place the general capabilities as a key element with equal weighting and value; and share the responsibility for student improvement across all learning areas. It was also identified that 'some schools are trying to work across learning areas' to see the interdisciplinary relevance of the capabilities. Further, there is an expressed interest in "the other four" capabilities; critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, intercultural understanding and ethical understanding and the potential to do a better job with these. Many teachers acknowledge that the translation of the icons as indicators of coverage is only as valuable as the pedagogy that accompanies the learning.

Teachers see the general capabilities as a key element of the three dimensional design of the curriculum. Some teachers are confident in embedding the general capabilities; in a small cross-sectoral sampling, over

50% of teachers surveyed identified they are familiar with the three dimensional design of the curriculum and more than 70% are confident in embedding them into learning areas. In addition, pre-and post-workshop data from the ACTED suite of professional learning indicated increased understanding of the general capabilities and confidence in working with them. Teachers commented that 'it does not make sense to embed all capabilities in all learning areas equally. There are places where they fit naturally and complement the learning area specific content or skills and places where this is not the case. They should be used to enrich the curriculum and add the extra transferable dimension to the learning.' Pre-and post-workshop data from the AISACT suite of professional learning evidenced similar key learnings, 'General capabilities require explicit planning in a school-wide approach and embedding in pedagogy, topics and resources. The intentional teaching of the general capabilities is crucial and is part of a global shift [in education].' Teachers are now seeking ways to authentically incorporate the general capabilities across learning areas and embed them into teaching and learning practice.

Overall the ACT views that there is potential to foreground the general capabilities as the key driver of the Australian Curriculum if we are to truly realise the goal of 'All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.'³ Lucas and Smith (2018) consider how capabilities can help all young people thrive throughout their lives - from the early years, through schooling, and beyond. Strategies that support effective implementation of a capability-rich curriculum, in turn, improve the quality of education for all Australians. Lucas and Smith note that 'Australia's inclusion of capabilities in teaching and learning policies and frameworks is aligned with a worldwide shift in the past decade⁴... today the question is not *if* we should seek to teach young people to be capable or *what* capabilities matter, but, given the evidence of their importance, *how* best to do this for all your Australians and *who* should play a role'.⁵

Recognition of First Peoples – Is the place of Australia's First Peoples appropriately covered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross curriculum priority?

The placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures as a cross curriculum priority in the Australian Curriculum appropriately reflects the intent of the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. The challenge for all ACT schools is: how can we as educators, support, embrace and model the mindset that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are part of the curriculum and, to embed Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures at every opportunity in delivery of all learning areas?

Feedback from ACT educators, and from within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, has indicated that there is a strong desire for more support in implementing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority. The ACT is working cross sectorally to engage schools in embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross curriculum priority through a project that leverages off the publishing of the additional 95 science elaborations published by ACARA. The project seeks to engage groups of teachers in action based research that enables:

1. Teachers and students to understand and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories & Cultures as part of student learning;
2. Teachers and students to actively engage in mindsets that supports and acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures (reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world's oldest continuous living cultures); and

³http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf

⁴ Lucas, B. & Smith, C. (2018). *The Capable Country: Cultivating capabilities in Australian education*, Mitchell Institute policy report No. 03/2018. Mitchell Institute, Melbourne. Available from: www.mitchellinstitute.org.au p.1

⁵ *ibid*, p. 3

3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to see themselves, their identities and their cultures reflected in the curriculum of each of the learning areas, able to fully participate in the curriculum and build their self-esteem.

The elaborations will not only support teachers but have the potential to make learning more relevant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and support their participation in STEM subjects.

There is a synergy between the intercultural understanding general capability and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority, which supports teachers in realising that all learning areas contribute to a deepening of students' knowledge and understanding of Australia and Australia's First Peoples. This relationship is one to be fostered on two fronts:

1. by ACARA through its articulation of the intent and three-dimensional functionality of the curriculum; and
2. through each jurisdiction's support to implement all facets of the curriculum.

Clarity of direction and professional development are foundational for teachers to better understand their role in relation to this dimension of the curriculum. The ACT Government's *The Future of Education, An ACT strategy for the next 10 years paper and the Strategic Plan 2018-21* identifies strengthening cultural integrity through staff development programs, such as the ACTED's 'Engoori' training and 'Cultural Integrity Leadership' programs, and the inclusion of a cultural integrity continuum as part of the school improvement review processes and annual improvement planning conversations. Opportunities for teachers to engage in cultural competency professional development are enablers for positive mindsets for the position of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures as an important dimension in the curriculum.

The key question seems to be, is it a **priority** or a **perspective**? If taught as a perspective, the evidence suggests that some teachers are including an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective in learning design, with the perspective sitting most comfortably in studies of society and culture, humanities and the arts. The implication, that if viewed as a priority beyond these learning areas, can lead to confusion as to what that means for the work of the teacher in ensuring that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures are authentically prioritised in all three dimensions of the Australian Curriculum. Teachers are concerned that their efforts may be tokenistic or culturally inappropriate, especially where the priority is not a natural fit. To this end teachers have requested more resources and support in this area, and have welcomed the support provided in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander science elaborations.

The ACT position on the recognition of First Peoples is that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures has been strengthened through the work of ACARA in relation to the science elaborations. Teachers have expressed interest in whether the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures might be extended to other discipline area content elaborations.

How can ACARA better support teachers in implementing the Australian Curriculum?

In acknowledging the interplay between curriculum and pedagogy, and in particular the choice of pedagogy when implementing curriculum in teaching and learning programs, ACT teachers and leaders indicated a desire for more clarity in this area. An articulation of the role of national, state and territory bodies, as well as systems and schools, in relation to the continuous implementation of the Australian Curriculum may assist teachers in their work. The ACT can see the potential for future collaboration between ACARA and AITSL to provide support and guidance including examples of exemplary, evidence-informed curriculum and pedagogy.

ACARA positions that 'The three-dimensional design of the Foundation – Year 10 Australian Curriculum recognises the importance of disciplinary knowledge, skills and understanding alongside general capabilities

and cross-curriculum priorities.⁶ Elaborating on this statement to unpack how the three dimensions might be fleshed out in conceptually rich ways to enable depth and rigour in the teaching of the Australian Curriculum would be of benefit to teachers.

In a Foundation to Year 10 curriculum, the Australian Curriculum covers different stages of schooling that require a structure and design accordingly. Primary schools are challenged by the design of the curriculum in discipline areas when delivery is scoped and designed using a conceptual or integrated approach for delivery in the classroom to ensure sufficient learning is addressed to realise the achievement standards. Is there a better way of organising the curriculum that caters for the different stage of schooling approaches?

Conclusion

ACARA has sought feedback from all State and Territory curriculum authorities on implementation of the Australian Curriculum based on identified themes borne out of research on international trends in curriculum design. The ACT Education Directorate, Archdiocese of Canberra Goulburn Catholic Education and the Association of Independent Schools have prepared this report informed by feedback across each sector on essential content improvement for depth and rigour; the place of the general capabilities and the recognition of First Peoples; and further support for implementation.

The ACT identifies there is room for sharpening the essential content to allow more depth and rigour over breadth. A refined and nuanced understanding of the three dimensional design and its inherent flexibility in delivery may amplify opportunity to provide greater depth and rigour in conceptually rich ways.

Generally, teachers across the ACT value the general capabilities as an integral component of the three dimensional design of the curriculum, many indicating that they are familiar with and confident in embedding them into learning areas. The ACT sees potential in foregrounding the general capabilities as the key driver of the Australian Curriculum if we are to truly realise the goal of 'All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.' This may become increasingly relevant with greater focus given to expanding Learning Progressions that are skills based.

Educators in the ACT indicated a strong desire for greater support in implementing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Culture cross-curriculum priority beyond learning areas where its coverage is a natural fit. The ACT has welcomed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander science elaborations and see the benefit of extending the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures to other discipline area content elaborations to strengthen coverage as a priority.

Continuous implementation of the Australian Curriculum can only be benefited by continuous refining and shaping of the Australian Curriculum. All sectors in the ACT have welcomed the opportunity to provide feedback on the themes identified by ACARA for the true potential of the Australian Curriculum to be realised.

Bibliography

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⁶ <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/learning-areas/>

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