

**The Australian Curriculum –
P to 10 Maths, Science, English and History**

Response of the Victorian Independent Education Union

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Victorian Independent Education Union represents both the professional and industrial interests of more than 17,000 teachers, principals and other education staff in Victorian non-government schools.
- 1.2 VIEU welcomes the opportunity to respond to the draft Years P to 10 Australian Curriculum in the four learning areas of Maths, Science, English and History. VIEU has worked with expert groups of its members to examine the draft documents and has been part of the Victorian consultation process, including working as a member of the Australian Curriculum State Reference Committee.

2.0 Inadequate development and implementation timeline

- 2.1 A major issue arising from the consultation period on the draft curriculum documents for English, Maths, Science and History is the inadequacy of the time frame to properly develop the Australian Curriculum as a world class curriculum.
- 2.2 The draft documents have served the purpose of beginning the clarification and articulation of what we believe students from the first year of schooling to Year 10 should know and be able to do. However the clear message of the consultation period is the need for much greater work to be done on developing an overarching framework within which the full curriculum will operate. There is a need for greater clarity in both the conceptual nature of the curriculum model, and the way in which the design and delivery of programs will be able to integrate all of the key components of the curriculum in a development continuum across all subject areas in all stages of schooling.

At this stage, the documents shaping the Australian Curriculum, albeit in four discipline areas, are underdeveloped and lacking this essential conceptual clarity.

- 2.3 Specialist teachers and subject organisations have identified in each of the draft curriculum discipline areas many areas needing significantly greater work in terms of the content specifics, the organisation of that content, and areas which should either be included or rationalised.

Of significant importance is the identification that particularly in Science and History, there is far too large a body of content than can logistically be taught in years P to 10. Teachers are concerned that the overcrowding of these curriculum documents can only lead to superficial and disjointed learning of key concepts, and that successful developmentally appropriate organisation of current learning in Victorian in the four areas will be seriously compromised by the vast quantity of content and aspects of the organisation of learning in the draft documents.

3.0 Overarching Framework

- 3.1 A significant issue raised by teachers is the lack of clarity about how the separate, specific curriculum approaches in the four discipline areas and the different General Capabilities sit together in a cohesive whole. This lack of an integrating framework for the four learning areas will become an even greater problem when the other subject areas are later developed and required to be implemented.
- 3.2 There are concerns that the lack of a unifying and integrating framework in respect to the learning areas (disciplines) will lead to a fragmented, disjointed and repetitive approach to learning across the broad curriculum.
- 3.3 In addition, the advantages of including General Capabilities in the curriculum will not be realised because there is no overarching design framework which allows for these to be incorporated in a developmentally appropriate and comprehensive way *across* disciplines and stages of schooling. The issues raised in respect to the General Capabilities are further elaborated in that section of this response.
- 3.4 VIEU believes that one of the main areas which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency is the development of an Overview Statement which clearly articulates the philosophy and purpose of a curriculum framework, and elaborates the way in which the various components of the curriculum, for example, the specific Disciplines and General Capabilities, the Year level structuring, content descriptors and achievement standards, link together in a developmental way from the first year of schooling to Year 10.
- 3.5.1 From the clear feedback from teachers in Victoria, the union believes that in order to be effective, relevant and of high quality, the Australian Curriculum needs to be conceptually designed as a Framework and its purpose clearly articulated in terms of how the documents are to be interpreted and used in relation to school programs.

VIEU believes that the curriculum should not mandate the design of school programs but articulate the essential learnings for students, which are not necessarily rigidly taught in separate subjects or even mandated in single year levels. The Framework needs to allow for some level of flexibility in course design and delivery.

4.0 Structure

- 4.1 Significant concerns have been raised about what is seen to be excessive rigidity in and limitations on the development and delivery of school-based programs. In particular, concerns have been raised about the need for the curriculum structure to enable the delivery of individual learning pathways, particularly at years 9 and 10.
- 4.2 VIEU is strongly supportive of the view that the curriculum documents, and in particular an overarching statement, should make clear to schools that the year by year approach and subject by subject structure of the documents do not mandate a particular curriculum delivery structure, but elaborate the

essential learnings and the progression of learning. Victorian teachers and schools are concerned particularly that the curriculum has moved from elaborating essential learnings and achievement standards in stages of schooling to rigid content lists and achievement standards at specific stand alone year levels.

The curriculum documents should not hinder or prohibit schools from developing and delivering integrated curriculum approaches and individual learning pathways.

- 4.3 The stand alone year by year organisation of the curriculum is seen as particularly problematic. It is noted that some of the strands in Science for example, are designed over a two year basis. As an appropriate way of managing the content and achievement objectives in the discipline based curriculum, teachers and specialist discipline-based organisations have recommended covering content and achievement standards over stages (for example over two years), not single year levels. This is seen as particularly important to ensure a developmental knowledge and skills continuum, and to avoid the content overlap that currently exists in the draft documents' year by year approach. A 'stage' approach would allow for greater depth of learning to be structured more appropriately for students.
- 4.4 VIEU would recommend that before any implementation occurs, a number of specific areas need further clarification, including:
- flexibility in the year by year design;
 - time allocation to subjects. The Australian Curriculum in P to Yr 10 should not prescribe the allocation of time to different subject areas, except as a guide to the amount of time necessary for full coverage of the curriculum in that discipline at a year level/stage;
 - mandatory reporting for subjects in years 9 and 10;
 - concerns about the inflexibility of learning pathways approach at Yrs 9 and 10;
 - design flexibility – impact of inflexibility on integrated curriculum/interdisciplinary approaches will be caused by mandated reporting of specific content at particular year levels.
 - overcrowded content and organisational concerns of the proposed year level curriculum, particularly as raised by State forum feedback and submissions of the Maths, Science and History Teacher Associations.
- 4.5 In relation to Years P- 2, concern has been expressed that the current curriculum documents need to acknowledge and better align with contemporary philosophical and conceptual approaches to learning in the early years. This raises the issue of whether the achievement standards and content descriptions of all disciplines, and all the General Capabilities are covered or reported on, particularly at each specific year level. The discipline areas of Science and History need to be re-examined with this in mind. Assessment and reporting against the achievement standards as framed are of particular concern at the P to 2 level.

The lack of articulated connection between the Australian Curriculum

documents and the national Early Years Learning Framework is also an area of concern expressed in relation to Years P to 2.

5.0 General Capabilities

- 5.1 In members' feedback to VIEU, the inclusion of General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum is generally well supported by teachers and there was a general view that those capabilities proposed in the draft curriculum were appropriate.
- 5.2 However, in the draft documents themselves, the General Capabilities are seen to be poorly developed in the curriculum and conceptually very weak. Teachers have voiced concerns that the structural approach evident in the drafts, that is, the idea that the General Capacities will just be embedded seemingly haphazardly and selectively in the specific discipline content and achievement standards, results in a piecemeal and unstructured "catch-as-you-can" approach. The lack of a developed scope and sequence statement for various General Capabilities was a cause of concern. The Australian Curriculum needs to have a well developed design construct for the General Capabilities which clearly links the specific General Capability components with each stage of schooling. Stage of schooling would be the more appropriate organisational structure than year level.
- 5.3 In addition, the model needs to build in flexibility in the linking of the General Capabilities to specific discipline based curriculum. As an organising tool, the curriculum document must enable a sensible and practical meshing of general Capabilities and Discipline based components across the full suite of curriculum, across the specific stages or phases of schooling. Failure to do this will result in an overloaded curriculum which is repetitive and lacking in coherence.
- 5.4 While the inclusion of ICT as a General Capability gives the scope for a well sequenced and comprehensive approach to ICT learning across Years P to 10, the draft curriculum documents' lack of definition and articulation of developmentally appropriate skills and knowledge means that at some year levels there are discrepant and different elements of ICT appearing in the content descriptors and achievement standards in the same subject and year level. In Maths, teachers found some of the stated uses of ICT to be either outdated or only one of a number of possible technologies relevant to the areas concerned. The General Capability of ICT is a very important area of the Australian Curriculum and requires much more thorough work. It is important to have clear a developmental concept of ICT from year to year/stage to stage.

6.0 Subject Specific comment

- 6.1 In this submission VIEU does not intend to outline the specific issues in the four draft documents in terms of the appropriateness of content descriptors and achievement standards, nor the organisation of those content and standards at particular year levels.

- 6.2 While acknowledging that the documents are drafts, VIEU is however very concerned that there are so many issues raised by experienced classroom practitioners, the relevant Professional Subject Teacher Associations and other experts about too much content in History and Science, sequencing inaccuracies and areas excluded in Maths and Science, and overlap and repetition. VIEU urges ACARA to seriously take on board these key design problems raised in submissions.

Teachers are very concerned that if the issues raised in the consultation period are not addressed by significant re-examination and re-working, the curriculum will result in superficial coverage, confusion and lack of consistency from learning program to program and significant workload issues as teachers try to grapple with curriculum documents that are inherently unclear, lacking consistency and deliverability.

7.0 ESL and Special Needs Learners

- 7.1 A clear message from VIEU members and the broader consultation at the state level is that the draft documents need to contain statements that address the needs of ESL and special needs students.
- 7.2 The Australian Curriculum as a framework generally, as well as subject specifically, needs to incorporate a flexible and developmentally appropriate approach for these students.

8.0 Cross Curriculum dimensions

- 8.1 In relation to the cross-curricular areas of indigenous history and culture, commitment to sustainability, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, a key issue raised was the lack of clarity about how these will be required to be integrated into and reported on in specific learning areas (subjects).

9.0 Assessment and reporting issues

- 9.1 VIEU takes the opportunity in this response to highlight the need for extensive work, including consultation on the area of assessment and reporting. The timeline for the implementation of the Australian Curriculum in the four discipline areas will be inextricably linked to timelines of reporting on achievement. Teachers are concerned that there are appropriate resources and professional development targeted to assessment as well as to planning and program development.
- 9.2 In addition, there will need to be debate about whether assessment and reporting scales focus on specific year level achievement standards alone or on a wider developmental continuum such as a stage of schooling. This issue has been an ongoing issue for members of VIEU in non-government schools. The current A to E approach in Victoria of assessing and reporting against a broader developmental continuum with C indicating achieving at the standard expected, remains an issue.

10.0 Implementation Support Necessary

- 10.1 The consultation period, the implementation of the P to 10 Australian Curriculum in the first four learning areas, and the subsequent subject areas will require not only significant and extensive work in interpreting the new documents in the light of current curriculum requirements and practices, and the reworking of existing curriculum programs across schools and at individual teacher level, but also significant professional development of teachers in years P to 10.
- 10.2 The new curriculum will require teachers to not only manage expanded content, skills and knowledge requirements in specific subject areas without compromising depth of key concept learning, but to integrate the General Capabilities within and across discipline areas at year or stage level, in a developmental continuum from P to 6 and 7 to 10.
- 10.3 In addition, while the Australian Curriculum may outline subject by subject content requirements and outcome standards, the complex task of the teacher is to plan and deliver flexible and developmentally appropriate learning pathways for students in engaging and relevant ways. The resources and skills required to successfully deliver what is a larger and more complicated curriculum cannot be underestimated. It is incumbent on the federal and state government to ensure a comprehensive professional development resourcing strategy to accompany the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. Without this teaching and learning will be significantly compromised and the impost of the new Australian Curriculum will have seriously compromised the quality of education currently provided in Victorian schools.