

**Decision Making in the Curriculum Development Process and  
raising the Quality of Academic Standards: What does a  
Review of Australian Curriculum Documents tell us?**

**Michael Watt**

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Author: Michael G. Watt

Address: 316 Churchill Avenue, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7005, Australia

Phone: 61 3 6225 1335

E-mail: michaelgwatt@internode.on.net

Cataloguing in Publication Data

Watt, Michael G.

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1. Education –Australia – Curricula. 2. Curriculum evaluation – Australia.

## Preface

This paper was written and refined on several occasions. The foundation for the paper derived from two articles, 'National curriculum collaboration: the state of reform in the states and territories' and 'The national education agenda, 1996-2000: its impact on curriculum reform in the states and territories' published in the Australian Curriculum Studies Association's journal, *Curriculum Perspectives*, in 1998 and 2000. Subsequently, subject matter from these two articles formed the substance of papers presented at conferences of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association held at the Education Development Centre in Adelaide, South Australia, in September 2003 and at the University of the Sunshine Coast in Mooloolaba, Queensland, in September 2005. The inspiration to examine the context of curriculum change again arose from a desire to learn more about what factors in the decision-making process are likely to determine the quality of curriculum documents used by education systems in Australia. Calls from politicians during the federal election campaign in 2007 for a rigorous, world-class national curriculum to be set seem likely to encourage educators to investigate what factors may be responsible for determining a high quality curriculum. This paper represents an attempt to identify the extent to which educators in Australia have provided answers to this question.

The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions made by the following people relating to particular aspects covered in this paper. Trish Wilks of the Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training is thanked for reviewing the section of the paper on the Australian Capital Territory. Gail Smith of the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training is thanked for reviewing the section of the paper on the Northern Territory. John O'Brien of the New South Wales Board of Studies is thanked for reviewing the section of the paper on New South Wales. Judith Gardiner of the Queensland Studies Authority is thanked for reviewing the passage referring to the *Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework* in the section of the paper on Queensland. Paul Herschell of the Queensland Studies Authority is thanked for reviewing the passage referring to Queensland's senior secondary curriculum in the section of the paper on Queensland. Kym Linke of the South Australia Department of Education and Children's Services is thanked for reviewing the passage referring to the *South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework* in the section of the paper on South Australia. Tony Mercurio of the SACE Board of South Australia is thanked for reviewing the passage referring to the SACE Review in the section of the paper on South Australia. Irene Gray of the Tasmania Department of Education is thanked for reviewing the passage referring to the Tasmanian Curriculum in the section of the paper on Tasmania. Michael Brakey of the Tasmania Department of Education is thanked for reviewing the passage referring to Tasmania Tomorrow in the section of the paper on Tasmania. David Howes of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority is thanked for reviewing the section of the paper on Victoria. David Wood of the Curriculum Council of Western Australia is thanked for reviewing the passage referring to the *Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 Education in Western Australia* in the section of the paper on Western Australia. David Wood, John Gougoulis and Joan Slattery of the Curriculum Council of Western Australia are thanked for reviewing the

passage referring to Western Australia's senior secondary curriculum in the section of the paper on Western Australia.

### **Biographical note**

Michael Watt taught in several secondary schools in Tasmania, and worked as an education officer in the Tasmania Department of Education. He holds masters' degrees in educational studies and education from the University of Tasmania, and a doctorate in education from the University of Canberra. He currently works as an education consultant.

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine the extent, to which factors in the process of decision making involved in curriculum development in Australia, have determined the quality of curriculum documents. Searches on web sites of education organisations and electronic databases of educational literature were conducted to identify source documents and research literature. Content analysis method was applied to identify evidence in written communications about factors affecting decision making in the process of curriculum development. The results showed that curriculum development is conducted at the national level and in all states and territories, except Tasmania, by a two-tiered structure of committees. Super-ordinate committees make decisions in overseeing and coordinating the work of subordinate committees, which are responsible for conceptualising curriculum. Curriculum co-construction, in which super-ordinate committees make decisions in overseeing and coordinating the work of teachers in conceptualising curriculum, forms the principal means for undertaking curriculum development in Tasmania. The results indicated that the findings of research studies, investigating the decision-making process, identify formal and informal relationships between particular groups playing crucial roles and the dynamic process of interactions between these groups, but offer few insights to improve understanding of what factors in the decision-making process influence the development of a rigorous curriculum. Policy makers and education officials, who wish to gain greater insight into particular factors influencing decision making in the process of curriculum development, could apply one of four evaluation techniques outlined in the conclusion.

## **Decision Making in the Curriculum Development Process and raising the Quality of Academic Standards: What does a Review of Australian Curriculum Documents tell us?**

Launched by opposition leader Kevin Rudd in January 2007, the Australian Labor Party's 'Education Revolution' proved to be one of the party's key policies, ensuring that education was an important issue in the 2007 federal election campaign. As the campaign proceeded, politicians from the major parties released detailed policies indicating a consensus had been reached on establishing a national framework for ensuring what students are taught. In February 2007, the Australian Labor Party (2007) proposed that a national curriculum board should set national standards for English, History, Mathematics and Science by 2010. In May 2007, the Australian Government's budget for 2007-2008 included a Realising our Potential schooling package, which proposed establishing national standards for English, Australian History, Mathematics and Science in year 10. Following conclusion of a six-week campaign in November 2007, the Australian Labor Party was elected to office in the House of Representatives with 83 seats, the conservative coalition Liberal and National parties were reduced to 65 seats with independents retaining two seats. Early in 2008, Prime Minister Rudd and the Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, appointed a chair and deputy chair for the National Curriculum Board, whilst state and territory education agencies, the National Catholic Education Commission and the Independent Schools Council of Australia appointed representatives. Charged with developing a national curriculum for kindergarten to year 12, the National Curriculum Board convened its inaugural meeting in Canberra in April 2008.

The rationale for this new phase in national curriculum collaboration derived from calls by federal politicians to achieve greater national consistency in curriculum outcomes. It led the Australian Government to commission studies to identify the extent of consistency in the content of state-level curricula for both the primary and junior secondary level and the senior secondary level. These studies, which revealed a high level of consistency in the content of curriculum documents across both levels, led to the development of Statements of Learning for English, Mathematics, Science, Civics and Citizenship, and Information and Communications Technologies. At the same time, the Australian History Summit, convened by the Australian Government in August 2006 to develop a model curriculum framework for teaching Australian history in schools, opened a wider debate about who should set curriculum, what role the federal government should play in funding curriculum development, and what involvement the public should have in determining what is taught in classrooms. It led to a call for the approach used to develop a model curriculum for Australian history to be applied to develop a model curriculum for other core subjects. It was argued that a national board of studies, consisting of representatives from the states and territories, would use the best examples of state-level curricula to develop such a model curriculum.

In the USA, evidence is emerging that the nature of the decision-making process determines the quality of content standards developed by states. Finn, Julian and Petrilli (2006) identified that visionary leadership rather than consensus building, willingness to overcome contests between competing interests, real expertise in academic disciplines, and an inclination to draw on the excellent standards of pacesetter states are key factors affecting the development of rigorous state standards. Reliance on large committees and stakeholder consensus in developing state standards leads to encyclopaedic coverage, convoluted organisation and inferior quality in writing. Instead, forceful leadership in bringing opposing parties on committees around to accepting the importance of detailed and explicit standards produces rigorous state standards. Reliance on teachers, seen by some state education officials as the only legitimate group capable of developing school-level standards, leads to state standards lacking in detail and rigour. Instead, inclusion of academics with subject matter expertise on committees produces detailed and rigorous state standards in academic disciplines. The view held by many state policy makers and education officials that standards must be developed within their state's borders to be legitimate, leads to a failure to build on excellent standards developed by pacesetter states. These conclusions, which were derived from successive studies examining the quality of state standards undertaken by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, suggest that these factors have contributed, individually or in combination, to particular states' achieving exemplary scores for developing standards.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent, to which factors in the process of decision making involved in curriculum development in Australia, have determined the quality of curriculum documents. The main section analyses decision making applied to develop national initiatives and the curricula of the states and territories by reconstructing the sequence of events in the process objectively and accurately. The discussion section examines the contribution of benchmarking studies, the findings of this review, studies by educational researchers and surveys of teachers' attitudes to identify what factors have influenced the decision-making process involved in developing national initiatives and the curricula of the states and territories. The paper concludes by outlining evaluation techniques, which could be applied to gain a greater understanding of factors in the decision-making process affecting the quality of curriculum documents.

## **Methodology**

The first step in this study involved searching the web sites of national, state and territory education agencies and accreditation boards to identify documents referring to curriculum reform efforts. Two types of documents identified from these searches were examined. Content analysis method was applied to determine policy contexts of curriculum reform efforts from policy documents, and identify the purpose and organisation of curricula from curriculum documents. The second step in the study involved searching electronic databases to identify research literature referring to curriculum change. Two types of research literature identified from these searches were examined. Content analysis method was applied to identify qualitative data reported in benchmarking studies and surveys, and elucidate particular

models of curriculum change discussed in research literature. Inferences were drawn from the evidence collected from these sources about factors influencing decision making involved in the process of curriculum development.

Reporting results involved preparing draft summaries, which were referred to officials in education agencies and accreditation boards for review and comment. The draft summaries were then revised on the basis of responses before being organised chronologically, and incorporated into the commentary.

### **National Consistency in Curriculum Outcomes**

With the appointment of Dr Brendan Nelson as Australian Government Minister for Education, Science and Training in November 2001, the national education agenda shifted towards establishing greater national consistency between education systems. This change was reflected in the Plan for Higher Standards and Values in Schools, the Liberal and National parties' policy for the federal election held in October 2004, and the *Schools Assistance (Learning Together – Achievement through Choice and Opportunity) Act*, passed by the Australian Parliament in December 2004. Coming into effect through regulations signed in August 2005 the *Schools Assistance Act* introduced new requirements, reflecting the Australian Government's national priorities for education intended to improve educational programs, increase student performance, and enhance family involvement in education. The requirements to achieve greater national consistency included introducing a national assessment program in English, mathematics, science literacy, civics and citizenship, and information and communication technologies.

### ***National Consistency in the Primary and Junior Secondary Curriculum***

In July 2002, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) commissioned the Curriculum Corporation to survey the states and territories on their provision of curriculum. Produced by the Curriculum Corporation (2003), the report of this study found that the structure, bands and organisation of most curriculum documents were related to the national statements and profiles, but they varied considerably in the extent, to which the content students should learn, was specified. They incorporated cross-curricular and essential organising principles, although there were differences in the ways these principles were conceptualised and the status they were given. All the states and territories specified performance indicators in their curriculum documents, but there were differences in the ways they were applied. With the exception of the New South Wales syllabuses, the allocation of time was rarely mandated. Student achievement was not widely assessed by the states and territories. A comparative analysis of the organisation of these curriculum documents indicated that a common format applied in many learning areas, and it was possible to identify broadly equivalent outcomes in some learning areas, although there were clear disparities in what students should attain. Furthermore, they included outcomes defined in terms of content students



should achieve as well as teaching and learning activities that should take place in the classroom. Many education agencies had developed curriculum documents that were not based on discrete learning areas, but on cross-curricular, essential learning and equity issues, pedagogy, and student assessment. In addition, each education agency had produced documents to support implementation of curricula by providing guidance to teachers for developing programs and assessing students.

After considering this report in July 2003, MCEETYA agreed to develop Statements of Learning for English, Mathematics, Science, and Civics and Citizenship, and in May 2005, added Information and Communications Technologies, which had been included in legislative requirements by the Australian Government. In 2004, MCEETYA directed the Australian Education Systems Officials Committee (AESOC) to develop the Statements of Learning for English as a pilot project (Holt, Ludwig, Moore and Randall, 2004). Endorsed by MCEETYA in February 2005, the Statements of Learning for English were revised by AESOC in August 2005, approved by the Ministers out-of-session and published by the Curriculum Corporation (2005). The Statements of Learning for Mathematics, Science, Civics and Citizenship, and Information and Communication Technologies were developed during 2005, approved by MCEETYA in August 2006, and published (Curriculum Corporation, 2006a; Curriculum Corporation, 2006b; Curriculum Corporation, 2006c; Curriculum Corporation, 2006d). The development of the Statements of Learning was undertaken by project teams of curriculum specialists overseen by a steering committee of officials from state and territory education agencies. The Statements of Learning set out statements of learning and professional elaborations, which build on the statements of learning by providing more details, organise knowledge, understanding, skills and capacities by strands. State and territory education agencies and independent systems were required to implement the Statements of Learning in their next cycle of curriculum review, at latest by January 2008.

### ***National Consistency in the Senior Secondary Curriculum***

In 2005, the Australian Government commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research to investigate options for a single Australian Certificate of Education. In its report, the Australian Council for Educational Research (2006) recommended that a national standards body should identify essential content and develop achievement standards in core subjects, and award an Australian Certificate of Education. In June 2006, the Australian Government commissioned the Australian Council for Educational Research to examine the common content, essential content and standards of achievement in English, mathematics, physics, chemistry and Australian history in curriculum documents used across Australia at the senior secondary level. Curriculum documents were analysed to identify their rationales, domains of learning, curriculum content, assessment requirements, moderation procedures, and expected achievement standards. A group of experts rated the importance of topics, and identified other topics they considered important, but missing in the curriculum documents.

In the report of the study, the Australian Council for Educational Research (2007) found that the degree of consistency varied from subject to subject, almost all essential content was represented in each curriculum document, and there was a high degree of consistency in assessing students' achievements. Consistency in content ranged from 85 to 95 percent in physics and chemistry, 90 percent in high-level mathematics, but only moderate degrees of consistency were found in English and Australian history. The experts judged that almost all topics in physics, chemistry, mathematics, and English were essential, but no topics in Australian history were essential. Although a high degree of consistency in assessing students' achievements was found in chemistry and physics, greater variance was found in mathematics, Australian history and English. From this study, it was recommended that core content for each subject should be identified, and a set of national academic standards should be developed for the core content in each subject (Masters, 2006).

### ***Australian History***

At an address to the National Press Club in January 2006, Prime Minister John Howard called for renewal of the teaching of Australian history in schools as a structured narrative to replace a fragmented stew of themes and issues. In August 2006, the Minister for Education, Science and Training, Julie Bishop convened the Australian History Summit to seek advice on ways the Australian Government could strengthen the place and maintain the integrity of Australian history in the curriculum, and establish a narrative in the teaching of Australian history in schools. Two discussion papers were prepared for the Summit. Taylor and Clark (2006) analysed state and territory curriculum documents identifying inconsistencies in approaches for teaching Australian history. Melleuish (2006) presented an academic's viewpoint about the subject matter that should be taught to students in years 3 and 10. At the Summit, 23 public figures, academics, historians and history teachers participated in three sessions before releasing a communique stating that the study of Australian history should be planned sequentially through primary and secondary schooling, and form a subject in years 9 and 10.

Following the Summit, Minister Bishop commissioned a study to develop a model curriculum framework for Australian history in years 3 to 10 based on the key issues identified by panels at the Summit. The Australian History Curriculum Reference Group, consisting of four historians appointed in June 2007, used the model curriculum framework to develop a guide for teaching Australian history as a subject in years 9 and 10. In the guide, the Australian History Curriculum Reference Group (n.d.) set out the skills students should acquire, a program of study founded in a series of topics and milestones based on a chronological approach, and a range of historical perspectives to provide a context for the topics.

## **Curricula of the States and Territories**

### ***Overview***

Release of the national statements and profiles in July 1993 promoted curriculum reform in the states and territories. In New South Wales, the *Education Reform Act* of 1990 led to development of a curriculum. The Australian Capital Territory and Victoria aligned existing curricula to the national statements and profiles. Reforms concluded in Queensland in 1994, Western Australia in 1995, the Northern Territory and South Australia in 1999, and Tasmania in 2000 led to development of curricula. Table 1 outlines key features of these curricula.

### ***Australian Capital Territory***

Beginning in 1984, the Australian Capital Territory Schools Authority developed curriculum frameworks in eight learning areas following initiation of a five-year plan for curriculum renewal. In 1990, working parties of teachers aligned the *ACT Curriculum Frameworks* with the national statements, a process which was completed in December 1993. In addition, the Australian Capital Territory Board of Senior Secondary Studies uses course framework development groups, consisting of academics and teachers, to develop course frameworks for years 11 and 12. Course frameworks, which provide a basis for schools to develop courses on a five-year rotation cycle, consist of an introduction, rationale, goals, guide to selection of content, pedagogy, assessment, achievement standards, and moderation.

Appointed in September 2003 to review the curriculum for Australian Capital Territory schools, the Curriculum Renewal Taskforce, consisting of representatives from the public, Catholic and independent sectors, unions, universities and parent organisations, formulated a set of criteria to evaluate the curriculum and proposed a set of principles to guide curriculum development. In the report on an evaluation of the *ACT Curriculum Frameworks*, the Curriculum Renewal Taskforce recommended replacing them with ACT Curriculum Requirements (Australian Capital Territory Department of Education, Youth Affairs and Family Services, 2004). Released in April 2004, a discussion paper presented a set of possible principles and ten propositions about the ACT Curriculum Requirements. More than 170 submissions, elicited in response to 123 meetings convened with teachers, parents and students, indicated strong support for the principles, but less support for the propositions. The scope and detail of the curriculum review, outlined in a report released by the Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training (2005a), were determined from these responses. To mark the completion of the first phase, the Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training (2005b) released a curriculum statement. It defined the curriculum as all learning planned, guided and implemented by the school, its purpose to develop each student as a learner, person, community member and contributor to society, and its basis founded in a set of ten principles.

**Table 1**

**State and Territory Curricula**

<b>State or Territory</b>	<b>Title of Curriculum</b>	<b>Related Components</b>	<b>Structure</b>	<b>Bands</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Release Dates</b>
Australian Capital Territory	<i>Curriculum Framework for ACT Schools</i>	course frameworks (11-12)	eight nationally agreed learning areas	early childhood (P-2); later childhood (3-5); early adolescence (6-8); later adolescence (9-10)	essential learning achievements	<i>ACT Curriculum Frameworks, 1993; Curriculum Framework for ACT Schools, 2007</i>

**Table 1  
(cont.)**

**State and Territory Curricula**

<b>State or Territory</b>	<b>Title of Curriculum</b>	<b>Related Components</b>	<b>Structure</b>	<b>Bands</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Release Dates</b>
New South Wales	not applicable	<i>K to 12 Curriculum Framework</i> ; learning area syllabuses (stages 1 to 3); subject syllabuses (stages 4 to 5); subject syllabuses (stage 6)	six learning areas* (stages 1 to 3); eight learning areas* (stages 4 to 6)	early stage 1 (K); stage 1 (1-2), stage 2 (3-4), stage 3 (5-6), stage 4 (7-8), stage 5 (9-10), stage 6 (11-12)	outcomes and indicators organised by strands (stages 1 to 3); outcomes and content organised by strands (stages 4 to 6)	<i>K to 12 Curriculum Framework</i> , 2002; syllabuses, revised periodically

**Table 1  
(cont.)**

**State and Territory Curricula**

<b>State or Territory</b>	<b>Title of Curriculum</b>	<b>Related Components</b>	<b>Structure</b>	<b>Bands</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Release Dates</b>
Northern Territory	<i>NT Curriculum Framework</i>	subject outlines (11-12)	four domains of Essential Learnings*; four domains of Learning Technology*; English as a Second Language; eight nationally agreed learning areas; Indigenous Languages and Culture	key growth points 1, 2, 3 (entry points), band 1 (end of 2), band 2 (end of 4), band 3 (end of 6), band 4 (end of 8), band 5 (end of 10), beyond band 5 (extension level)	outcomes and indicators organised by strands	<i>NT Curriculum Framework, 2002; revised NT Curriculum Framework, under revision</i>

**Table 1  
(cont.)**

**State and Territory Curricula**

<b>State or Territory</b>	<b>Title of Curriculum</b>	<b>Related Components</b>	<b>Structure</b>	<b>Bands</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Release Dates</b>
Queensland	<i>Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework</i>	<i>P-12 Framework for Syllabus Development</i> ; key learning area syllabuses (1-10); subject syllabuses (1-10); senior syllabuses (11-12)	eight nationally agreed learning areas; subject syllabuses*	end of 3, end of 5, end of 7, end of 9	essential learnings organised by strands	<i>Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework</i> , 2008; <i>P-12 Framework for Syllabus Development</i> , under development; syllabuses, revised periodically

**Table 1  
(cont.)**

**State and Territory Curricula**

<b>State or Territory</b>	<b>Title of Curriculum</b>	<b>Related Components</b>	<b>Structure</b>	<b>Bands</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Release Dates</b>
South Australia	<i>South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework</i>	subject outlines (11-12)	three learning areas* (birth-3 years of age); seven learning areas* (3 years of age-reception); eight nationally agreed learning areas (reception-12)	early years (birth-2), primary years (3-5), middle years (6-9), senior years (10-12)	key ideas and standards organised by strands	2001



**Table 1  
(cont.)**

**State and Territory Curricula**

<b>State or Territory</b>	<b>Title of Curriculum</b>	<b>Related Components</b>	<b>Structure</b>	<b>Bands</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Release Dates</b>
Tasmania	<i>Tasmanian Curriculum; Post Year 10 Curriculum Framework</i>	syllabuses (11-12)	seven curriculum areas*	standard 1 (end of K), standard 2 (end of 2), standard 3 (end of 5), standard 4 (end of 8), standard 5 (end of 10)	standards and stages organised by strands	<i>Essential Learnings Framework 1, 2002; Essential Learnings Framework 2, 2003; Tasmanian Curriculum, 2008; Post Year 10 Curriculum Framework, under development</i>

**Table 1  
(cont.)**

**State and Territory Curricula**

<b>State or Territory</b>	<b>Title of Curriculum</b>	<b>Related Components</b>	<b>Structure</b>	<b>Bands</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Release Dates</b>
Victoria	<i>Victorian Essential Learning Standards</i>	studies (11-12)	four domains of the Physical, Personal and Social Learning strand*; five domains of the Discipline-based Learning strand*; four domains of the Interdisciplinary Learning strand*	laying the foundations (preparatory-4), building breadth and depth (5-8), developing pathways (9-10)	learning focus statements and standards organised by dimensions	<i>Curriculum and Standards Framework</i> , 1995; <i>Curriculum and Standards Framework II</i> , 2000; <i>Victorian Essential Learning Standards</i> , 2005

**Table 1  
(cont.)**

**State and Territory Curricula**

<b>State or Territory</b>	<b>Title of Curriculum</b>	<b>Related Components</b>	<b>Structure</b>	<b>Bands</b>	<b>Format</b>	<b>Release Date</b>
Western Australia	<i>Curriculum Framework for K to 12 Education in Western Australia</i>	syl-labuses (11-12)	over-arching state-ment; eight national-ly agreed learning areas	early child-hood (K-3), middle child-hood (3-7), early adoles-cence (7-10), late adoles-cence, early adult-hood (10-12)	over-arching learning out-comes; learning area learning out-comes	1998

## Key

(The key specifies details indicated by an asterisk in the table):

1. New South Wales: Stages 1 to 3 - Creative and Practical Arts; English; Mathematics; Human Society and its Environment; Personal Development, Health and Physical Education; Science and Technology. Stages 4 to 6 - Creative Arts; English; Mathematics; Human Society and its Environment; Languages other than English; Personal Development, Health and Physical Education; Science; Technological and Applied Studies.
2. Northern Territory: Essential Learnings - Inner Learner; Creative Learner; Collaborative Learner; Constructive Learner. Learning Technology - Problem-Solving and Decision-Making through Research; Communicating through Presentation, Publication or Performance; Operating Computer Components; Information Communication Technology in Society.
3. Queensland: Subject Syllabuses - Agriculture Education; Business Education; Home Economics Education; Industrial Technology and Design Education; Information and Communication Education.
4. South Australia: Birth to 3 years of age - Physical Self; Psychological Self; Thinking and Communicating Self. 3 years of age to reception - Arts and Creativity; Communication and Language; Design and Technology; Diversity; Health and Physical Development; Self and Social Development; Understanding our World.
5. Tasmania: Curriculum Areas - Arts; English-literacy and Languages other than English; Health and Wellbeing; Mathematics-numeracy; Science; Society and History; Vocational and Applied Learning.
6. Victoria: Physical, Personal and Social Learning - Health and Physical Education; Interpersonal Development; Personal Learning; Civics and Citizenship. Discipline-based Learning - Arts; English and Languages other than English; Humanities (Economics, Geography, and History); Mathematics; Science. Interdisciplinary Learning - Communication; Design, Creativity and Technology; Information and Communications Technology; Thinking.

For the second phase, essential learning achievement reference groups of teachers, academics and representatives of professional associations, appointed in March 2005, drafted markers of progress. In February 2006, the Curriculum Renewal Taskforce reduced the number of essential learning achievements from 36 to 28 to remove duplication identified by the reference groups, and agreed on a structure for essential learning achievements. An overview, markers of progress and essential content, aligned to the Statements of Learning, were written for each of the 28 essential learning achievements. Following reviews by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority and the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, the Curriculum Renewal Taskforce approved the draft curriculum framework consisting of 26 essential learning achievements. In July 2006, the Department of Education and Training convened a conference in Parliament House, at which 240 teachers were familiarised with the second phase to enable them to lead curriculum renewal in their schools, and the draft curriculum framework was released for the third phase.

In the third phase, teachers were provided with a range of professional learning experiences to explore processes for using the essential learning achievements to review and develop school curriculum, and to develop plans for implementing the curriculum framework from 2008. Between September 2006 and July 2007, the draft curriculum framework was reviewed through three activities. In trials in 22 schools, the essential learning achievements were mapped against the existing school curriculum and a scope and sequence of learning was developed for nominated learning areas. The Australian Council for Educational Research evaluated the draft curriculum framework. Teachers, parents and community members provided feedback on the draft curriculum framework directly and on-line.

Following revision of the draft based on responses to the review, the Minister for Education launched the *Curriculum Framework for ACT Schools* at the Centre for Teaching and Learning in Stirling in November 2007. Early in 2008, copies of the *Curriculum Framework for ACT Schools* were distributed to teachers for implementation over three years, and it was released on-line in February 2008. Published by the Australian Capital Territory Department of Education and Training (2007), the *Curriculum Framework for ACT Schools* outlines ten principles, the place of essential learning in the curriculum, the structure of the essential learning achievements, the functions of pedagogy and assessment in school-based curriculum, and 25 essential learning achievements.

### ***New South Wales***

Initiated in May 1995, the Review of Outcomes and Profiles recommended in the report, published by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training Coordination (1995), that the alignment of the syllabuses to the national profiles should be replaced with outcomes based on stages. In 1996, the Board of Studies released a model for developing syllabuses and support documents, and establishing an understanding of the place of outcomes in syllabuses. The process, adopted by the Board of Studies in November 2001,

for developing or revising each syllabus consists of several phases. Initially, a subject-based Board Curriculum Committee of education and union officials, higher education personnel, and representatives of principal, teacher and parent organisations conducts research and consultation to identify issues pertinent to preparing a writing brief. A Project Team of curriculum, assessment and publishing specialists prepares the writing brief, and then revises it following consultation with the education community. Then the Project Team uses the writing brief to develop or revise the syllabus subsequent to review by the education community. After final revision, the syllabus is approved by the Minister for Education and Training and published. Implementation of the syllabus in schools is evaluated to assist in its eventual revision. Revised syllabuses for stages 1 to 3 were approved for English in March 1998, Human Society and its Environment in October 1998, Personal Development, Health and Physical Education in August 1999, Creative Arts in December 2000, and Mathematics in November 2002. The Science and Technology syllabus is being revised between May 2007 and June 2009. Syllabuses for stages 1 to 3 consist of an introduction, a rationale, an aim and objectives, an overview of learning, foundation statements, outcomes and indicators organised by strands, content overview, and general principles for planning, programming, assessing, reporting and evaluating.

In 2002, the New South Wales Teachers' Federation lobbied the Minister for Education and Training to undertake a study into the demands that assessment and reporting of outcomes were placing on primary teachers. Published by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (2003), the report on an evaluation conducted by the University of Sydney found that teachers were positive about using outcomes, but unclear whether all outcomes were mandatory. It recommended that mandatory outcomes should be defined for literacy and numeracy, program frameworks presenting the mandatory outcomes should be developed, and assessment and reporting frameworks should be designed. In response, the New South Wales Board of Studies (2004) published a consultation paper containing a draft set of mandatory outcomes chosen by more than 30 veteran primary teachers. The analysis of 600 responses from teachers, who reviewed the draft set, indicated strong support for the view that teachers do not need to formally assess and record achievement of individual syllabus outcomes, but a reduction in the number of outcomes is insufficient to lessen workload. Rather than identify particular outcomes as mandatory, the Board of Studies developed a set of foundation statements for each stage, setting out knowledge, skills and understanding students should achieve, to replace the stage statements in the syllabuses for stages 1 to 3.

In 2000, the Board of Studies developed a draft framework to provide a basis for reviewing syllabuses. Following consultation, a revised draft was produced in March 2001, and then submitted for review by focus groups and organisations. Their responses indicated broad support for the direction established in the draft, particularly the move towards a standards-based approach for syllabus design. In October 2001, the Board of Studies approved a set of criteria to be used to ensure that standards of high quality are met by syllabuses, and that the intentions of the framework are achieved. Published by the New South Wales Board of Studies (2002), the *K to 10 Curriculum Framework* covers six elements. Syllabuses should provide a

clear understanding of the purpose of learning. Syllabuses should specify the broad learning outcomes essential for all students. The development of curriculum requirements and syllabuses should be guided by principles of student engagement, a core curriculum, explicit standards, inclusiveness, and maximising student learning. The curriculum should provide a K to 10 standards framework. Syllabuses should be developed according to a defined process and approved according to specified criteria. The Board of Studies should establish guidelines for courses of study.

The *K to 10 Curriculum Framework* guided the revision of the syllabuses for stages 4 and 5 commenced in September 2001. Each Board Curriculum Committee used evaluation reports, prepared by teams of teachers, to recommend directions for the revision of each syllabus. The Project Team prepared and distributed a writing brief within the education community for consultation. The revised writing brief was then used to revise the existing syllabus, so it would reflect a contemporary understanding of teaching and learning emphasising outcomes, content, and assessment for learning against standards. Each draft syllabus was revised following review, approved by the Minister for Education and Training, and published and distributed to schools. Syllabuses for stages 4 and 5 consist of an introduction, a rationale, the place of the subject in the curriculum, an aim, objectives, syllabus structure, outcomes, a continuum of learning, the content organising outcomes and content statements by strands, and assessment.

The development of syllabuses for stage 6 was affected by the Review of the Higher School Certificate initiated in 1995 with the publication of a discussion paper, in which McGaw (1996) examined the history of the Higher School Certificate as a means to identifying curriculum, assessment and reporting, and post-secondary destinations. In a report analysing the outcomes of 38 public hearings and more than 1,000 submissions following a public review of the discussion paper, McGaw (1997) presented a report outlining 26 recommendations, each supported by a proposal and schedule for action related to curriculum, assessment and reporting, and post-secondary destinations. In accepting the major directions proposed in this report, Aquilina (1997) presented the New South Wales Government's reforms to the Higher School Certificate. In order to redesign the new structure of courses for stage 6, the Board of Studies appointed a Project Team to evaluate the extent to which each Board-developed syllabus needed to be revised. A draft report for each syllabus was then presented for consultation across the education community before final reports were produced and presented to the Board of Studies in June 1998. The recommendations of each report were used by the Project Team to develop a writing brief, a process begun in August 1998. Following consultation across the education community, the writing brief was revised and approved as the basis for syllabus development. Each syllabus was then developed and presented to the education community for review between February and April of 1999, prior to final revision on the basis of responses. Following approval by the Minister for Education and Training in April and May of 1999, the new syllabuses were published and distributed to schools in July 1999. Syllabuses for stage 6 consist of a rationale, a continuum of learning, an aim, objectives, outcomes, course structure, the content organising outcomes and content statements by strands, and assessment and reporting.

## ***Northern Territory***

A review of education led the Northern Territory Department of Education (1999) to release a discussion paper proposing that a curriculum framework should be developed. Endorsement of this proposal in August 1999 led the Action Curriculum Team, appointed in December 1999, to disseminate an information and analysis pack in January 2000 for each school to nominate its preferred degree of involvement in the curriculum review. The first phase involved distributing an options pack to schools in March 2000 outlining key elements for the proposed framework and offering teachers an opportunity to shape it. The options pack was revised by the Action Curriculum Team on the basis of responses, and distributed to teachers for refinement in April 2000. The second phase involved appointing focus groups, each consisting of a writing team and a trialling team, to the eight learning areas and indigenous languages and culture. Following receipt of responses to the second distribution, the writing teams revised the options pack in August 2000 to form a trial framework, which was disseminated to teachers and revised on the basis of the responses to form a pilot version. Piloted in more than 90 schools during February and March of 2001, the pilot version was revised and presented for public review by parents, business and industry groups in July 2001. Following evaluation by the Curriculum Corporation in November 2001, the Northern Territory Board of Studies approved the framework in March 2002. Published by the Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training (2002), the *NT Curriculum Framework* consists of components on essential learnings, learning technology, English as a second language, the eight learning areas, and indigenous languages and culture. Each learning area statement organises outcomes and indicators by strands.

In September 2002, the Northern Territory Government commissioned Charles Darwin University to review the quality of secondary education. In its report, Charles Darwin University and Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training (2003) recommended refining the outcomes and indicators in the *NT Curriculum Framework*, modifying the enterprise strand in Studies of Society and Environment to reflect a cross-curricular perspective, and providing secondary teachers with professional development. The Northern Territory Government presented the report's recommendations for a three-phase public review involving workshops to discuss the recommendations with stakeholders, stakeholders discussing the recommendations with their local communities, and representatives from school communities leading public forums to consider the propositions that had emerged. Socom and Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training (2004) reported that the review confirmed the views of primary teachers that the *NT Curriculum Framework* should not be changed, but some secondary schools lacked support to implement it.

In February 2005, the Northern Territory Government launched the Building Better Schools program intended to improve secondary education. An element includes developing a Teaching and Learning Framework, which outlines and establishes the essential features of good pedagogy. The Teaching and Learning Framework will be aligned to a revised *NT Curriculum*



*Framework* and the SACE Board of South Australia's subject outlines. Revision commenced in 2007 with five focus groups working to incorporate the Statements of Learning into the *NT Curriculum Framework* by using the Structure of Observed Learning Outcomes and student work to underpin the process. The groups worked with a consultant from the University of New England in Armidale, New South Wales, to revise the outcomes and identify content, and a consultant from the Australian Council for Educational Research to develop performance standards. The revised *NT Curriculum Framework*, with these elements incorporated into Mathematics, English, Science, Civics and Citizenship, Learning Technology, Essential Learnings and Indigenous Languages and Culture, is expected to be released as early as 2009 but possibly later. Teachers will be supported in implementing the revised *NT Curriculum Framework* by on-line curriculum resources available through a searchable repository.

### **Queensland**

The Review of the Queensland School Curriculum (1994) recommended that the structures for managing the curriculum should be changed, new syllabuses should be based on the national statements and profiles, and student learning outcomes should be incorporated into new syllabuses. Although the Mathematics syllabus was published in 1987 and the English Language Arts syllabus was published in 1994, the Queensland School Curriculum Council acted on these recommendations by developing new syllabuses for the remaining six learning areas. The process adopted for developing each syllabus consisted of several phases. Initially, a subject-based Syllabus Advisory Committee of education and union officials, higher education personnel, and representatives of teacher associations and parent organisations prepared a design brief presenting a plan for the project and the results from screening available curriculum documents. A Project Team of curriculum specialists used the design brief to prepare the draft syllabus. Then, the draft syllabus was trialled and piloted in selected schools. Following an evaluation of the process and product of the trial and pilot conducted by an independent evaluator, the draft syllabus was revised and published. Sourcebooks, consisting of modules providing the basis for planning units of work, were prepared to assist teachers implement each syllabus. The syllabuses for Science, and Health and Physical Education were published in 1998. The syllabus for Studies of Society and Environment and subject syllabuses for Civics, Geography and History in years 9 and 10, and Languages other than English for Chinese, French, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese and Korean in years 4 to 10 were published in January 2000. Curriculum guidelines for Languages other than English in years 1 to 3 were published in December 2000. Syllabuses were published for Technology in March 2002 and the Arts in June 2002. In 1999, reviews of the English and Mathematics syllabuses were initiated. Following trial and revision, the revised Mathematics syllabus was published in October 2004. Following trial in 2005 and 2006, and revision in 2007, the revised English syllabus will be published in 2009. Beginning in April 1999, five subject syllabuses were developed, trialled and approved in July 2003. The key learning area syllabuses present a rationale, organise key learning area, core learning and discretionary learning outcomes by strands, discuss assessment

procedures and outline principles for reporting student performance. In addition to these components, the subject syllabuses include guidelines for planning courses.

In April 2005, the Queensland Government appointed a six-member Policy Steering Committee and an Expert Advisory Group to oversee and inform development of the *Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework* by the Queensland Studies Authority. Early in 2006, a project team of curriculum specialists developed draft essential learnings and standards, identified from outcomes in the syllabuses and the Statements of Learning. Then, the Queensland Studies Authority appointed 32 partner schools and 114 trial schools to develop and trial resources for the *Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework*. The partner schools trialled the draft essential learnings and standards by developing sample units of work and assessments. The trial schools and some of the partner schools trialled versions of the Queensland Comparable Assessment Tasks in 2006 and 2007. Another group of schools trialled locally-developed assessment tasks, an alternative form of the Queensland Comparable Assessment Tasks. The partner and trial schools involved in trialling the essential learnings and standards provided detailed feedback at four forums held across Queensland. Launched at a conference in Brisbane in April 2008, the *Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework* consists of five components. Sets of essential learnings in each learning area describe what all students should know, understand and be able to do at the end of years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Sets of standards, aligned to the essential learnings, provide performance standards. An assessment bank, an on-line collection of resources aligned to the essential learnings and standards, was launched in 2008. The Queensland Comparable Assessment Tasks, trialled individually in schools in September and October of 2008, provide performance-based tasks administered annually to students in years 4, 6 and 9 for English, mathematics and science. Guidelines for reporting, which provide advice for twice yearly reports and individual student achievement in the Queensland Comparable Assessment Tasks, were also released in 2008.

The essential learnings and standards will be incorporated into the syllabuses. Their revision will be guided by a *P-12 Framework for Syllabus Development* intended to produce syllabuses of high quality and equity. In a project commissioned by the Queensland Studies Authority, Luke, Weir and Woods (2008) conducted a review of international literature, commissioned seven papers from leading scholars, and examined the context of curriculum reform in Queensland to inform the design of the *P-12 Framework for Syllabus Development*. They concluded that whilst syllabus design cannot affect student achievement, it can form an element of a strategy for enhancing learning. They found that the technical form of the syllabus must be accessible and economical, and provide a guide by indicating coverage for a specific phase, organising content by dimensions, specifying standards, and identifying standardised and moderated assessments. Syllabuses should be developed through a process involving technical and field analysis, syllabus writing, and trial. This strategy should include elements for aligning pre-service teacher training, raising teacher qualifications, offering in-service support for school leaders, providing on-line professional resources, aligning assessment and accountability, and enhancing shared understanding of

standards. The findings of this study led the Queensland Studies Authority to develop a *P-12 Framework for Syllabus Development* consisting of P-12 syllabus design principles, a P-12 assessment policy, year 10 guidelines and a P-3 framework. From June to September of 2008, the Queensland Studies Authority consulted teachers about aligning this set of documents to provide a *P-12 Framework for Syllabus Development* at a series of 17 forums held across Queensland and visits to 11 schools, and at meetings with education officials, higher education personnel, union officials, and representatives of principal, teacher and parent organisations. The majority of the participants, particularly teachers and school administrators, supported the concept of developing a *P-12 Framework for Syllabus Development*. However, the Queensland Studies Authority identified from responses that the P-12 syllabus design principles and the P-12 assessment policy should be refined, the design brief for the year 10 guidelines should be revised, and new elements should be developed for the P-3 framework.

In 2005, the Queensland Studies Authority initiated a review of senior secondary syllabuses to ensure they met the needs of students, the community, employers, higher education and training providers, and offered flexibility to be delivered in various localities. The *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*, requiring young people to complete year 10 and then participate in education or training for a further two years, and the introduction of the Queensland Certificate of Education, which allows students to engage in a broader range of learning and bank their achievements in a learning account, provided the context for the syllabus review. Students are awarded the Queensland Certificate of Education when they have fulfilled the learning requirements at the specified standard and met literacy and numeracy requirements.

The review involved commissioning six papers from leading scholars on various aspects relating to syllabuses, and conducting three phases of consultation. Between August and October of 2005, the Queensland Studies Authority consulted youth and parent groups, union officials, employers, higher education personnel, and principals about key issues and options for syllabus development. Provided with a background paper and questions to focus discussion at meetings, stakeholders commented on valued knowledge, ways of organising content in syllabuses, the appropriateness of syllabuses for different post-school pathways, the relationship of year 10 to the senior phase of learning, and the relevance of the current syllabus review procedure. In addition, students at four schools provided input for the first phase. The second phase began in October and November of 2005, when the Queensland Studies Authority held 15 forums with stakeholders across Queensland and held seven meetings with peak stakeholder organisations. A consultation paper, developed in response to the first phase, was used to focus discussion on the same five key issues and direct feedback collected from more than 100 submissions. In response to this feedback and a colloquium for stakeholders held in May 2006, the Queensland Studies Authority produced a blueprint presenting a rationale for the future development of syllabuses based on four principles: coherence, rigour, flexibility and connection. In July 2006, the blueprint was distributed to schools, institutes of technical and further education, universities, employer organisations, government agencies, and community groups with an invitation

to send representatives to focus group meetings held in 12 localities across Queensland in October and November of 2006. In addition, meetings were held with the peak stakeholder organisations, education sectors, and Queensland Studies Authority staff. Participants agreed that the four principles were important in developing syllabuses, but some believed that the principle of connection could be subsumed into the other three principles or into the principle of coherence. The principles of coherence and flexibility and the notion of fields of learning, within which there are a range of study patterns, generated most comments. In November 2006, a second colloquium for stakeholders was convened to examine fields of learning and study patterns in greater detail. Following the colloquium, work began on a final report with recommendations that future syllabuses should be organised into 12 disciplinary areas and offer the flexibility to develop courses of varying length and degrees of difficulty to accommodate the different pathways students choose.

### **South Australia**

Following a public review, the South Australia Department of Education and Children's Services (1997) published a declaration establishing five strategic directions: developing the individual and society; achieving unity through diversity; strengthening community; creating a spirit of enterprise; and becoming global citizens. In order to reflect the strategic directions, a curriculum statement was released in 1998 to provide a basis for integrating the existing curriculum documents used in South Australia. A Steering Committee of education officials and higher education personnel, supported by four curriculum band reference groups and 20 experts' working groups consisting of teachers, academics, parents and representatives from interest groups, was appointed to oversee their integration. In May 1999, more than 1,000 teachers were consulted about the existing curriculum documents to provide an information base for developing a new curriculum framework. A Writing Team of 37 educators from the University of South Australia and the Council for Educational Associations of South Australia produced a preliminary draft in November 1999. The report of an evaluation of the preliminary draft presented recommendations to direct the Writing Team in preparing a draft framework, which was trialled in more than 100 schools and reviewed in all other schools. The responses from the trial were used to develop the framework, which was published by the South Australia Department of Education, Training and Employment (2001). The *South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework* consists of sections covering curriculum scope and standards, and accountability. The curriculum scope and standards, which consist of component frameworks for four bands, organise key ideas and standards by strands. The accountability section outlines assessment and reporting policies.

In 2005, the Department of Education and Children's Services launched the Moving Forward with SACSA Strategy to promote student achievement by relating the intent and philosophy underpinning the *South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework* to teaching, learning and assessment through two components. The engagement option supported teachers to explore pedagogy, essential learnings, assessment, and data for

learning through facilitated professional learning and resources developed by innovation sites. The innovation option supported selected innovation sites to develop and trial resources before they are shared with other schools across South Australia. The Moving Forward with SACSA Strategy supports schools to provide data on student achievement to a central bank, and apply aggregated data to improve learning for targeted groups of students. A peer-reviewed moderation process is used to quality assure these data.

The *South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework* is supported by a range of initiatives including Ideas for Practice. The Learning to Learn initiative is facilitated by a network of project colleagues, who work with education providers to expose participants to research about learning, constructivist pedagogy, and methodology. Working with Outcomes presents case studies on nine schools working successfully to implement the key ideas and standards. Local educator networks collaborated to produce materials available in a searchable database, Educators' Ideas. Insites provide starting points for teachers to plan educational programs in each learning area. The Consistency in Teacher Judgment Project led teachers from 14 schools to develop teaching, learning and assessing programs, and guides for interpreting evidence. A partnership between the South Australian Primary Principals' Association and the Department of Education and Children's Services led to the SACSA companion document initiative for each learning area. Teaching and assessing guides developed by South Australian teachers, which are stored in a searchable database, present units of work, learning and assessing materials, and materials to support specific needs.

In February 2004, the South Australian Government appointed a three-member panel to determine a curriculum and assessment framework for the South Australian Certificate of Education, which would meet the diverse needs of all students and result in high and more socially equitable levels of retention, completion and pathways beyond school. In May 2004, a discussion paper, distributed to the education community for consultation, led to more than 200 meetings held across South Australia, collection of over 170 submissions, convention of a conference in June 2004, and the coordination of meetings in the Northern Territory. From September 2004, two expert writing groups and a reference group of stakeholders assisted the panel analyse information collected from the consultation, review literature and examine strategies to address key issues.

In its report, the Ministerial Review Panel (2006) identified seven principles, derived from analysing this information, to guide reform of the South Australian Certificate of Education. The panel proposed that the new South Australian Certificate of Education should incorporate the five capabilities of communication, civic participation, health, wellbeing and personal development, knowledge work, and work to provide an extended learning initiative, a personal learning plan and an approved learning plan for each student to complete. The panel applied the concept of a learning space to describe the roles of multiple learning sites, information and communication technologies, and schools in providing students with choice in developing individual learning plans accredited through a learning credit bank and supported by a comprehensive transition support system. A new funding arrangement, called a youth learning entitlement, should be provided to

operate the learning space. The panel recommended that a new senior secondary curriculum for South Australian and Northern Territory schools should be based on six elements. A set of capabilities, presenting knowledge, skills and dispositions, should be developed through each learning unit. Frameworks, incorporating learning outcomes, should be developed for 40 one-semester learning units. The South Australian Certificate of Education should consist of two stages with year 10 forming a staging post for senior secondary education. The curriculum should be personalised by incorporating a personal learning plan and an extended learning initiative, each of two units, one to be studied in year 10 and the other in year 12. New requirements for improving literacy and numeracy should be included in the communication capability. The use of information and communications technologies should be expanded. The panel recommended that greater reliance should be placed on teacher judgment in assessment. Teachers should be responsible entirely for assessing students in stage 1 and for 70 percent of assessment in stage 2 through a moderation procedure with external assessments making up the other 30 percent. Construct-referenced performance standards should be developed for each learning unit for teachers to judge the extent to which students have achieved learning outcomes. A scale for reporting student achievements on the performance standards should be adopted. A quality assurance system, involving appointment of accredited assessors and an institute of educational assessment, should be designed to assist teachers in assessing student achievements. The South Australian Certificate of Education should be awarded on completion of 200 credit points, consisting of a personal learning plan and an extended learning initiative, each of 20 credit points, and an approved learning program of 160 credit points. A record of achievement should also be issued as an official transcript of results. Mechanisms should be established to accredit locally developed curriculum, broaden the contribution of vocational education and training studies, and extend credit for partially completed units and short stand-alone courses. The SACE Authority should forward results for making decisions about tertiary entry to the South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre. An Office of Senior Secondary Renewal should be established to implement the new South Australian Certificate of Education over three defined phases. An independent review of the relevant legislation should be commissioned to ensure that the statute gives effect to the report's recommendations and a statutory authority can perform the roles required under the legislation.

Release of the report in March 2006 led the Minister for Education to seek advice on its recommendations from the SACE Review Implementation Steering Committee, consisting of education officials from the public, Catholic and independent sectors. The South Australian Government accepted the Committee's advice by adopting 25 of the report's 26 recommendations, 11 with amendments. Forums held for principals in South Australia in May 2006 and the Northern Territory in June 2006 provided the Steering Committee with feedback for implementing the new South Australian Certificate of Education. Subsequently, the Steering Committee appointed groups to provide advice on eight specific areas, and held an expert advisory forum in August 2006 to discuss design elements for the new South Australian Certificate of Education. The work of these groups led to the development of a series of consultation papers, to which educators responded in October and November of 2006. Following trials of personal learning plans and approaches to improve literacy

and numeracy skills in 42 schools in 2007, these features were piloted in all schools in 2008. In March 2008, the South Australian Parliament passed legislation, which led to the foundation of the SACE Board of South Australia in July 2008.

Over a nine-month period commencing in August 2008, the Steering Committee oversaw revision of the existing learning area and subject outlines over five rounds. In addition to including capabilities, performance standards, and A to E grades in each outline, requirements for external assessment were incorporated into each stage 2 outline. Each outline was revised in response to input collected by questionnaire from subject teachers, higher and further education personnel, employers and parents. Responses were analysed by a consultant to identify emerging issues, writers to ascertain subject-specific issues, and learning area committees and subject reference groups to ensure feedback met requirements for the new South Australian Certificate of Education. A report, providing a summary of responses from the consultation, was used by these groups to produce a draft of each outline for approval by the Accreditation and Recognition Committee, a standing committee of the SACE Board of South Australia. Each subject outline consists of an introduction, a learning scope and requirements, and an assessment scope and requirements.

### ***Tasmania***

Consultation with the education community in 1999 led the Minister for Education to release proposals for education, training and information provision for public review in February 2000. Analysis of 160 responses led to the formulation of five goals, which were incorporated into a policy statement. Published by Tasmania Department of Education (2000), the policy statement presented a long-term plan for transforming the education system, including development of a curriculum.

Following release of the proposals for education, training and information provision, a Consultation Team was appointed to conduct a three-year project to develop a curriculum, consisting of three phases: clarifying values and purposes; specifying content; and developing teaching and assessment practices. A decision-making process, called 'co-construction', was used during each phase. The Consultation Team, which designed the project, consulted stakeholders, facilitated meetings with principals and project officers, and developed drafts of the frameworks, varied in size according to its tasks. In 2000 and 2001, it consisted of a group of two to eight personnel, but in 2002 it was expanded to support a larger number of partnership schools and involve specialists responsible for learning areas. Each school, which had been selected to participate in the project, nominated a project officer, who facilitated exchanges between the school's teachers and the Consultation Team. During the course of each phase, the project officers met at state-wide and regional meetings to work on particular aspects of curriculum design. Principals in partnership schools played an important role by establishing a climate of trust and ensuring the precedence of the project, as well as participating in meetings with principals from other partnership schools.

Beginning in June 2000, district reference groups led more than 6,900 teachers, child-care professionals, business people, community members and students at meetings focusing on clarifying the values and purposes of public education. The report on the consultation, released in October 2000, led to the publication of a statement in December 2000 identifying seven values and six purposes as important. The Values and Purposes Statement formed the basis for developing 'working' essential learnings organised into five categories, each containing a description and several key elements. Selected in November 2000, 20 partnership schools worked with the Consultation Team to refine 'working' essential learnings, determine outcomes and standards to describe knowledge, skills and competencies, and identify teaching and assessment practices consistent with the values and purposes. Published by the Tasmania Department of Education (2002), *Essential Learnings Framework 1* presented a Values and Purposes Statement, essential learnings, culminating outcomes, and learning, teaching and assessment principles. More than 40 partnership schools worked with the Consultation Team during 2002 to specify sets of expectations for students at different levels to provide the basis for outcomes and standards. Published by the Tasmania Department of Education (2003a), *Essential Learnings Framework 2* consisted of three components. Introduction to the Outcomes and Standards outlined the structure of the framework, and described reporting procedures and support available to assist teachers. Outcomes and Standards organised key element outcomes and standards of the essential learnings. Learners and Learning Provision discussed key advances in the understanding of how learning occurs, and what is known about distinctive features of learners at different stages in their development.

Developed by the Consultation Team and 53 partnership schools, the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Guide* provided a range of on-line resources to facilitate curriculum planning. Designed to be dynamic and undergo refinement and expansion, the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Guide* was released on the Internet in April 2003. Following refinement of the curriculum, resources from the *Learning, Teaching and Assessment Guide* were incorporated into the eCentre for Teachers, a portal launched on the Internet in 2005. Renamed the Curriculum Centre and launched in June 2008, these resources consist of curriculum documents, teaching and learning advice, resources and support advice, assessment and reporting advice, and curriculum and on-line tools.

Controversy over the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments arose in September 2005, when parents criticised convoluted language contained in brochures disseminated to them in August 2005. A publication, referred to as a 'jargon buster', which the Department of Education released on its web site to explain this language, also drew criticism. These actions provided substance for an adversarial debate in the news media between supporters and detractors. In acknowledging that language used in the brochures could have been clearer, the Minister for Education directed the Department of Education to remove the 'jargon buster' from its web site. Late in October 2005, the Tasmanian Government launched a six-week campaign to promote the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments to parents through advertisements on commercial television channels, and the controversy subsided.



This controversy led the new Minister for Education, appointed in April 2006, to announce in response to consultation with the education community that the curriculum would be refined. In August 2006, a committee of principals produced a plan for simplifying the curriculum framework, developing scope and sequence statements, and devising a simpler assessment system. Following review by focus groups of teachers, a revised plan for developing the Tasmanian Curriculum was released in February 2007. Curriculum specialists worked with teachers to develop and refine documents for each curriculum area. English-literacy and Mathematics-numeracy syllabuses were released in July 2007. Arts, Health and Wellbeing, Languages other than English for French, German, Indonesian, Italian and Japanese, Science, and Society and History syllabuses were released in October 2007. Chinese, and Vocational and Applied Learning syllabuses, and the Information and Communications Technologies cross-curricular and checklists for Years 6 and 10 were released in June 2008. Each syllabus presents a rationale statement, organises five standards, each consisting of three stages, by strands and lists resources, and presents an assessment evidence guide.

In February 2003, the Department of Education released a paper for public comment on the scope and purpose of a strategy for post year 10 education and training. Subsequently, a set of nine issues' papers was disseminated to facilitate discussion about learners' needs at a series of regional and stakeholder forums. A Project Steering Committee, supported by several reference groups, drew on submissions made by community members at the forums to design the strategy, which was released in December 2003. In the policy statement, the Tasmania Department of Education (2003b) outlined a vision, purposes and values for the strategy to guide post year 10 education and training, and set out outcomes to be achieved through a range of initiatives organised into four tracks: guaranteeing futures; ensuring essential literacies; enhancing adult learning; and building learning communities.

One initiative under guaranteeing futures involved reviewing the curriculum for years 11 and 12 to develop a curriculum framework aligned to the *Essential Learnings Framework*, identifying a model for syllabus development, and addressing issues relating to delivery, organisation and resources for post year 10 institutions. Facilitated by a Project Team and supported by school-based project officers, the curriculum review was initiated in February 2004 through discussions with the post year 10 education community about values, purposes and outcomes, and conversations with Catholic and independent schools. These discussions focused on articulating a set of values and purposes for education and training in years 11 and 12, defining outcomes that students should achieve by the end of year 12, and developing statements on learning and assessment for years 11 and 12. In April 2005, the outcomes of this work were presented in a paper intended to promote discussion around the structures and organisation of learning. Following consultation on the substance of the paper, development of the *Post Year 10 Curriculum Framework* was completed in the second half of 2005. In 2006, the Project Team with the support of school-based project officers worked with senior secondary colleges and schools in the Catholic and independent sectors to implement the *Post Year 10 Curriculum Framework*.

In June 2007, the Government of Tasmania (2007) released the Tasmania Tomorrow initiative intended to improve retention in senior secondary education, adjust for skill shortages, and provide businesses with access to skilled employees. Under this initiative, the eight senior secondary colleges and TAFE Tasmania would merge to form three new institutions in 2009. Post-secondary students choosing a path to university would attend an academy. Post-secondary and mature-aged students seeking practical and applied experience would attend a polytechnic. Trainees, apprentices and employees of businesses would be offered flexible training through a training enterprise. The formation of these new institutions would be facilitated by pathway planning introduced into high schools under *Tasmania: A State of Learning*. Pathway planning officers would work with students in years 8 to 10 to make choices to attend either an academy or a polytechnic. A three-month consultation, involving 22 forums, led to a decision in November 2007 to phase in the transition to the Tasmania Tomorrow initiative by allowing local communities to commence at their own discretion by 2011.

A Steering Committee of representatives from the existing post year 10 institutions was formed to make decisions about policy and resources for the new institutions. Three education programs working groups, consisting of teachers, academics, and industry and union representatives, were formed to design educational programs for the new institutions. Their reports were used by the Steering Committee to develop three discussion papers, which were released in March 2008. The educational program for the Tasmanian Academy would be based on the *Post Year 10 Curriculum Framework*, once values, purposes and outcomes had been aligned to the needs of students choosing a pathway to university. All students in the academy could choose from the full range of foundation and pre-tertiary courses for credit towards the Tasmanian Certificate of Education. While many students could transfer from year 10 directly to pre-tertiary courses, some would need to participate initially in foundation or bridging courses. Opportunities would also be provided for students to enhance the pathway to university through extension units, bridging courses and opportunities to study university courses. The educational program for the Tasmanian Polytechnic would provide multiple entry and exit points. Students would develop theoretical knowledge and practical skills through applied learning and team work for particular vocational courses. The educational program for Skill Connections would offer teaching, learning and assessment services in trade, technical and vocational skills. Responses to the discussion papers, obtained from the staffs of senior secondary colleges and TAFE Tasmania, and participants at a conference on polytechnic education held in Hobart in May 2008, were used by teachers at two workshops to develop a guide outlining the educational programs for the three institutions. Published in June 2008, the guide was supplemented by the launch in August 2008 of a web site providing prospective students with information about the new institutions, and the release in October 2008 of a handbook for each institution setting out courses.

## **Victoria**

A review of the curriculum, initiated in July 1993, led to the development of a draft framework by eight key learning area committees, each supported by several working groups. Following a state-wide review and revision of the draft framework, the Victorian Board of Studies (1995) published the *Curriculum and Standards Framework*, which formed an important component of the systemic reform initiative, Schools of the Future. In May 1998, the Minister for Education initiated a review of the *Curriculum and Standards Framework*. The fourteen-member CSF 2000 Advisory Committee consulted stakeholders to develop a directions paper, which served as a basis for consultations with principals at a series of forums held across Victoria. Commencing in October 1998, CSF key learning area committees, consisting of teacher majorities representing each education sector and level, revised the eight key learning areas over a six-month period. Following a state-wide review of the revised draft framework, the Victorian Board of Studies (2000) published the *Curriculum and Standards Framework II*.

In April and May of 2003, round-table discussions on school improvement, curricular reform, professional and workforce development, innovation and excellence led the Minister for Education to call for reform of the education system. Appointed in August 2003, four leadership groups visited schools and conducted regional forums across Victoria to inform their views for developing a ministerial statement. Published by the Victoria Department of Education and Training (2003), the ministerial statement outlined three directions to reform the curriculum, professional development and school improvement. Curriculum reform would encompass developing a framework of essential learning, improving student assessment, promoting principles for teaching and learning, and applying a new approach for allocating resources to meet student learning needs.

A review of curriculum documents used in 14 Australian and foreign jurisdictions led the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2004a) to conclude that specification of essential learning was a key element for a curriculum. This conclusion formed the basis for a discussion paper outlining a new approach for the curriculum released at 18 forums held across Victoria in March 2004. The discussion paper was revised, published as a consultation paper by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2004b), and disseminated to education experts at a conference held in March 2004. Ten regional seminars were convened to assist more than 800 curriculum leaders facilitate discussions in schools, more than 30 consultations were held with principals, and focus groups were conducted with parents. Almost 1,000 responses to an on-line survey, analysed by Deakin University, formed the basis for the report on the consultation. Published by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2004c), the report indicated a high level of endorsement for the proposed reform. Led by the P-10 Curriculum and Assessment Committee and supported by the Working Party on Curriculum Reform, 16 reference groups comprising more than 250 educators from across the public, Catholic and independent sectors developed learning standards.

The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2005) released the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* in two stages. The rationale and structure, descriptions of the domains of essential learning, descriptions of the

stages of learning and characteristics of learners at six levels, and a set of assessment principles were released on-line in December 2004. The learning focus statements, standards for each domain, and sample units were released on-line in February 2005, and later distributed to schools on a DVD. The *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* comprise three strands, consisting of several domains, which describe the essential knowledge, skills and behaviours students should learn. Each domain organises learning focus statements and standards by dimensions.

Four procedures were applied to validate the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* in 2005. An independent evaluation of the standards was conducted. A comparability study was undertaken in five learning domains using national and international curriculum documents. Assessment tasks in specific domains at particular levels were trialled in many schools. Feedback was provided through an on-line questionnaire. Revised *Victorian Essential Learning Standards*, published in December 2005, resulted from the validation processes.

The Department of Education and Training and the Catholic Education Commission collaborated to develop four support materials, which were distributed to schools on a second DVD in March 2006. Curriculum planning guidelines provide a model, consisting of five phases, to support school-based curriculum planning. In the first phase, an audit of the current provision of curriculum should be conducted for individual students, student groups and the whole school. In the second phase, a curriculum plan should be developed by interpreting the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* for individual students, student groups and the whole school. The third phase involves implementing the curriculum plan. The fourth phase involves monitoring student learning as the curriculum plan is implemented. The fifth phase involves evaluating the curriculum plan and student performances at key points. Principles of learning and teaching for years P to 12, providing a structure to assist teachers focus on professional development, present six principles for quality learning and teaching practices. Assessment information is presented for the preparatory year through to year 10, and for years 11 and 12. Assessment advice, an assessment self-assessment tool, a set of five assessment professional learning modules, a process for developing multi-domain tasks, and a list of references are provided for teachers in the preparatory year through to year 10. The Knowledge Bank provides resources for teachers to contribute case studies to an on-line collection on teacher practice and to produce digital stories, and to obtain information on funding opportunities, on-line events for professional development, and using a range of information and communication technologies in innovative ways.

In February 1997, the Minister for Education initiated a review of the Victorian Certificate of Education. Overseeing the review, the Committee of Review, consisting of education officials, academics, principals and business leaders, solicited more than 400 written submissions, consulted more than 90 organisations and groups, visited a representative sample of schools, contracted a marketing company to conduct focus group meetings and a public phone-in, and a research centre to conduct telephone interviews with 200 parents and 400 students. In its report, the Committee of Review on the Victorian Certificate of Education (1997) presented 34 recommendations. The

Victorian Certificate of Education should be modified to accommodate the needs of a more diverse student population, reflect the enhanced role of vocational education and training programs in schools, and reflect these changes in calculating the tertiary entrance rank. Building on the *Curriculum and Standards Framework*, the curriculum for years 11 and 12 should be based on a set of adopted principles, and encompass studies developed either by the Board of Studies or by industry. Standards-based learning outcomes should be developed, and competency standards applied to vocational education and training programs within the context of a mixed system of external examinations and school-based assessments moderated by an external reference test. Guidelines for accrediting courses should be revised to reflect the review's recommendations, and accommodate the appointment of expert panels for benchmarking new courses against national and international standards. A three-year plan should be developed to apply information technology to deliver the Victorian Certificate of Education more efficiently.

Following the Minister for Education's announcement of the review's findings in December 1997, the Board of Studies appointed expert studies panels. Consisting of higher and further education personnel, teachers and representatives of employers, the expert studies panels reviewed the studies intended for implementation in 2000, presenting their reports in June 1998. After revision of the accreditation guidelines in April 1998, the Board of Studies released a schedule in May 1998 of studies to proceed to accreditation for implementation in two rounds during 2000 and 2001. Each study, which is revised on a rotation cycle by a review panel of teachers, academics, and representatives of industry and business, consists of an introduction, assessment and reporting information, an outline of each unit, and advice for teachers.

### ***Western Australia***

The Ministerial Committee to Review Curriculum Development (1995) recommended that a curriculum council, representing the public, Catholic and independent sectors, should be formed to coordinate curriculum development for kindergarten to year 12 by developing a curriculum framework. Appointed by the Interim Curriculum Council, formed in June 1996, learning area committees of teachers, further and higher education personnel, parents and representatives from industry and the community developed a draft framework, which was distributed to teachers and interest groups in July 1997 for a six-month review involving public meetings, focus group sessions and a student forum. Analysis of more than 1,800 responses found that whilst respondents agreed the framework would enable more effective curriculum planning, there were features some respondents wished to be changed, and its implementation would require extensive professional development. Revised over six months by the Curriculum Framework Committee, the framework was approved and published by the Curriculum Council of Western Australia (1998). The *Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 Education in Western Australia* consists of an overarching statement and eight learning area statements. The overarching statement outlines seven key principles and 13 overarching learning outcomes. A further 66 learning

outcomes are specified in the learning area statements. The Curriculum Council of Western Australia released three sets of professional materials to support implementation of the *Curriculum Framework*. An introductory book presented a guide for school-based curriculum development. The Getting Started series of nine books presented case studies focusing on teachers' experiences in a learning area or across the curriculum. A bibliography presented a list of resources.

As part of the review reported by the Taskforce on Structures, Services and Resources supporting Government Schools (2001), teachers indicated a need for additional support materials to provide advice about the content students should be taught. Beginning in 2003, the Curriculum Council of Western Australia oversaw curriculum specialists develop curriculum guides for the eight learning areas. Scopes and sequences of content for the outcomes in the *Curriculum Framework* were defined, and reference groups of teachers were consulted to identify the key focus of learning at each level of development. Two types of curriculum guide were written in 2004 in consultation with the particular reference group, and published in 2005. The curriculum framework curriculum guides sequence the content over the four phases of development identified in the curriculum framework. The elaborated curriculum guides expand the material presented in the curriculum framework curriculum guides, showing typical sequences of content that students should be taught within a particular phase. Revised curriculum guides for English, Mathematics, Science, and Society and Environment, incorporating the Statements of Learning, were published in December 2007.

Publication by the Education Department of Western Australia (1998) of the *Outcomes and Standards Framework* led to the introduction in 1999 of a policy and guidelines for teachers to use it for planning educational programs. This initiative led the Department of Education and Training to design the Curriculum Improvement Program, requiring public schools to develop and implement curriculum improvement program plans. The first phase of the Curriculum Improvement Program enhanced the position of the curriculum framework in schools, led teachers to collaborate with other teachers, increased the role of school administrators in curriculum leadership, and extended district curriculum teams to meet schools' needs. Beginning in 2002, the Curriculum Council of Western Australia coordinated a review of the student outcome statements and progress maps produced by the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia with a view to producing a common set of progress maps. Progress maps, the outcome of this work, were released in 2005 for use in Catholic and independent schools. The Western Australia Department of Education and Training (2005) published the revised *Outcomes and Standards Framework* based on the progress maps. Its publication led to the second phase of the Curriculum Improvement Program focusing on three elements. First, procedures were developed to clarify minimum expectations schools needed to meet regarding the revised policy and guidelines, and a common report form was developed. Second, the revised *Outcomes and Standards Framework* was introduced, focusing on applying its new standards to define student performance. Third, support was provided through professional development and resource materials. In an evaluation of the second phase, Loudon, Chapman, Clarke, Cullity and House (2006) found from focus groups of officials, school administrators and teachers, and

surveys of school administrators and teachers that officials and school administrators were more positive about the program than teachers. Many public school teachers believed implementation of the program was flawed, it was ineffective in improving assessment and reporting, it increased workload, and it failed to improve student outcomes.

In September 2005, the Minister for Education and Training announced that syllabuses would be developed for kindergarten to year 10. In 2006, stakeholders were consulted, reference groups of teachers were formed to advise on the phases of development for each learning area, and specialist reference groups were appointed to advise on Australian history, and civics and citizenship. In 2007, syllabus advisory committees were appointed to develop syllabuses for early childhood, middle childhood and early adolescence, a Jurisdictional Validation Panel was formed to validate the syllabuses, and a National Advisory Panel was convened to provide feedback on the articulation of the syllabuses with national positions. After working versions had been reviewed by teachers at a series of workshops and trialed in 50 schools, they were revised to produce the syllabuses, which were published in December 2007 for use in all schools. Each syllabus presents an introduction, a rationale statement, teaching approaches for the particular phase of development, content organised into broad understandings and suggested topics, and advice on whole school and classroom planning. The syllabuses for middle childhood and early adolescence also present advice on assessment.

With the publication of the *Curriculum Framework*, it became necessary to determine whether the existing system of post year 10 education was compatible with its intentions. In August 1998, the Curriculum Council of Western Australia appointed the Vision Implementation Working Group to determine the directions for a post year 10 review. In consultation with a Community Reference Group, a Student Reference Group and several focus groups, the Vision Implementation Working Group examined the extent to which post year 10 courses could be aligned to the outcomes, and released a discussion paper in October 1999. Review of the discussion paper involved 350 information sessions and the collection of 600 submissions. Analysis of the submissions led to recommendations that a single curriculum structure of approximately 50 courses of study should be aligned to the *Curriculum Framework*. After a review involving information sessions, public meetings and exploratory course-of-study activities, the recommendations were revised on the basis of responses to an on-line survey and written submissions, and published by the Curriculum Council of Western Australia (2001). In March 2002, the Minister for Education released a summary of the directions in the report supporting development of approximately 50 courses of study aligned to the *Curriculum Framework*.

Beginning in August 2002, the Post-compulsory Education Committee oversaw reference groups, consisting of representatives from the public, Catholic and independent sectors, professional associations, universities, industry and commerce, develop draft courses of study, which incorporated an outcomes-focused philosophy endorsed by stakeholders during the consultation. Following review by teachers, the drafts of the new courses of study were revised. The Curriculum Council accredited new courses of study

for Aviation in October 2004, Engineering Studies, English, and Media Production and Analysis in March 2005, and Physical Education Studies, Applied Information Technology, English as an Additional Language, and Earth and Environmental Science in 2006. In analysing the new courses of study developed in 2005, Penney (2007) reported that they presented a dynamic vision of knowledge, offered flexibility through the organisation of units, which provided multiple entry points, provided pathways to university, vocational education and training or employment, and related outcomes to relevant needs of students.

In March 2005, controversy arose over teachers' concerns about implementing outcomes-focused courses, particularly in relation to increased teacher workload and student assessment. Subsequently, the news media attributed these concerns to an underlying dependence in the new courses of study on outcomes-based education. Concern among some teachers about this issue led them to form a pressure group, People Lobbying Against Teaching Outcomes, and launch a web site in June 2005. At the same time, this controversy led the Western Australian Government and the Minister for Education to initiate separate inquiries.

In May 2005, the Western Australian Government announced that the Legislative Assembly's Education and Health Standing Committee would conduct a twelve-month Inquiry into Changes to the Post-Compulsory Curriculum in Western Australia. Of the 182 written submissions received by the Committee, a substantial number raised concerns about the proposed curriculum, commented on significant issues relating to assessment, moderation and examinations, and discussed details concerning implementation of the new courses of study. After holding 24 hearings, the Education and Health Standing Committee (2005) released an interim report, which examined the readiness of the education system for the proposed changes. The Committee recommended that the Curriculum Council of Western Australia should publish a schedule in 2006 for the commencement of all courses of study, a list of support materials, and the dates when the materials should be provided. Core support material should be provided by the end of the first term in the year preceding the implementation of a new course of study. In the case when this could not be met, implementation of a new course of study should be delayed until the following year. In its final report, the Education and Health Standing Committee (2006) focused on distinguishing between changes introduced in the original proposal and recent changes made since May 2006. Recent changes for assessing student performance, coupled with a moderation procedure and a General Aptitude Test, reduced demands on teachers and enabled students to choose courses for which they showed aptitude and interest. The current schedule for implementing the courses of study should continue. The financial implications for the change were substantial, but difficult to measure, because they were distributed across different sectors. Amalgamation of courses into a single-tiered system, placing equal value on all courses, would provide a system capable of catering for diverse needs and offering flexibility for students to move across pathways. The Committee's three non-government members produced a minority report recommending a twelve-month delay in implementing the new courses of study.



In June 2005, the Minister for Education formed the Ministerial Taskforce on Issues surrounding Proposed Changes to Post-Compulsory Education. The Taskforce worked with the Curriculum Council of Western Australia's secretariat to recommend processes for resolving issues relating to the provision of support materials and professional development, factors affecting assessment, examinations and moderation, and improving communication. In its report published by the Curriculum Council of Western Australia (2005), the Taskforce presented 10 recommendations relating to assessment and courses of study, external assessment, moderation and scaling, professional development and resources, communication, evaluation, and cross-sectoral collaboration.

In September 2005, the Minister for Education acquiesced to the growing opposition by agreeing that implementation of courses of study, scheduled for 2007, could be delayed, if they were not ready. Soon afterwards, the Western Australian Government announced additional funds and professional development would be provided to schools to implement new courses of study. In January 2007, the Minister for Education appointed a consultant to oversee 48 juries, randomly selected from teachers nominated by schools, review the courses of study. Each jury sought and considered submissions from stakeholders, and reviewed the course of study to determine whether it could be accredited or needed further refinement or revision. Of the 38 juries in the first round, two recommended approval of the draft courses of study, 13 recommended refinements of the draft courses of study, and 23 recommended revisions of the draft courses of study. In the second round, two juries reviewed the two mathematics courses of study for approval. In the third round, eight juries reviewed the courses of study already implemented in schools, identifying a range of issues affecting seven of the courses of study, their content and description. However, the jury, which reviewed the English course of study, found it was flawed, and recommended it be rewritten. Subsequently, the consultant oversaw a procedure for teachers to examine documentary evidence to validate that the juries' recommendations had been adopted by the Curriculum Council of Western Australia. The outcome of this procedure indicated that teachers were satisfied with the level at which juries' recommendations had been adopted. At the beginning of 2008, all the courses of study had been reviewed, validated by teachers and accredited with 21 being implemented in schools in 2008 and 31 being implemented in schools in 2009. Each course of study consists of a rationale, course outcomes, course content, course units, time and completion requirements, vocational education training information, resources, an outline of each course unit, and outcome progressions.

The controversy over outcomes-based education led proponents and detractors to publish their own interpretations. Alderson and Martin (2007) contended that the Curriculum Council of Western Australia incorporated an outcomes focus into the *Curriculum Framework*, rather than adopting outcomes-based education. Content analysis of the *Curriculum Framework* indicated that it was derived from a broad research base. The seven principles underpinning the *Curriculum Framework* were drawn from literature on school effectiveness. However, the Curriculum Council of Western Australia failed to understand fully the challenge the *Curriculum Framework* posed for many teachers, a situation which could have been avoided through

comprehensive planning to manage the change. Principles set out in the *Curriculum Framework* to guide assessment, which were drawn from the areas of formative and authentic assessment, contributed to the importance of assessment in its development. Berlach and McNaught (2007) concluded that difficulties teachers experienced in implementing the *Curriculum Framework* were reminiscent of problems teachers experienced with outcomes-based education in other settings. Teachers were provided with voluminous documentation, which was often vague and discordant. As a consequence, professional development activities focused on deciphering such documents, rather than improving teachers' effectiveness in classrooms. The explication of a large number of learning area outcomes in mathematics, for instance, exacerbated this problem, leading to inconsistency in the progress maps and the elaborated curriculum guide. They argued that education leaders needed to resolve the division wrought in the education community by this controversy. Berlach and O'Neill (2008) concluded that the lack of agreed understanding about a curriculum design for the outcomes-focused courses of study led to a process, in which decisions were adopted and then rejected in an attempt to stem discontent. They argued that the English course of study, based on the study of transactional texts and creative writing, arose after a protracted contest between stakeholders, in which proponents of outcomes-based education supported the study of a wider range of texts than just literary texts. The examination paper incorporated outcomes containing many aspects that required not only plotting against progress maps, but also assessment at equal value. Content analysis of two versions of the examination revealed that they assessed spontaneously generated performances rather than an acquired body of knowledge derived from focused learning.

## **Discussion**

This review shows that the move to establish greater national consistency between education systems led policy makers to commission research studies focused on determining the common content in curriculum documents developed by the states and territories. The study reported by the Curriculum Corporation (2003) found that the structure and organisation of most curriculum documents for the primary and junior secondary level were based on the national statements, but incorporated cross-curricular and essential organising principles that led to variation in the content students were required to learn. The study reported by the Australian Council for Educational Research (2007) found that almost all essential content was represented across all curriculum documents for the senior secondary level and there was a high degree of consistency in assessing students' achievements, although the degree of consistency varied markedly between subjects. Little, if any, attention, however, was given in either study to examining the quality of academic standards expressed in these documents. The failure of policy makers to evaluate the quality of curriculum documents as an element of these research studies represented a serious shortcoming in establishing a rationale for developing a rigorous, world-class national curriculum for all Australian students.

Despite the lack of attention in these studies to the issue of quality in curriculum documents, the Australian Government commissioned Education Strategies, a consulting group based in Melbourne, to benchmark the quality of outcomes at the primary level in curriculum documents used in the six states and the Northern Territory. The methodology employed two techniques. A synthesis of research findings from international studies on educational achievement identified that the three approaches of a syllabus format, outcomes-based education, and standards-based education were associated with practices of curriculum development in the participating countries. Then, four subject experts applied the criteria of academic rigour, detail, clarity, and ease of measurement to analyse outcomes for 'multiplication and division' and 'fractions and decimals' in mathematics, 'chemical matter' and 'physical world' in science, and 'literature' and 'beginning reading' in English. From this analysis, Donnelly (2005) reported that the quality of outcomes in mathematics, science and English at the primary level varied considerably in terms of evidence of academic rigour, detail, clarity and ease of measurement. Curriculum documents from South Australia showed very strong or strong evidence in outcomes for 'multiplication and division' and 'fractions and decimals', and documents from New South Wales showed strong evidence in outcomes for 'fractions and decimals'. Curriculum documents from the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia showed very strong or strong evidence in outcomes for 'chemical matter' and 'physical world'. Curriculum documents from South Australia showed strong evidence of detail and clarity in outcomes, and documents from Queensland showed strong evidence of detail in outcomes for 'literature'. Curriculum documents from New South Wales showed strong evidence in outcomes for 'beginning reading'. Although it was concluded that Australian curriculum documents were based on the principles of outcomes-based education, Donnelly contended that the curricula of all the states and territories, except New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, were moving towards a transformational model of outcomes-based education. It was argued that adoption of this approach required translation into a syllabus format at the local level, failed to deal with essential learning based on academic disciplines, favoured a developmental approach to learning focusing on formative assessment, and gave precedence to a constructivist approach to learning.

Release of this report drew criticisms from a broad range of commentators. Policy makers in states, which had rated poorly in the report's findings, denounced the study as biased, being motivated by the author's affiliation to the Liberal Party and personal opposition to outcomes-based education. Academics criticised the rationale for the study, the appropriateness of the methodology and the quality of report writing. Reid (2005), a professor of education at the University of South Australia, criticised the report for failing to meet the basic standard of relating evidence to results. For instance, an assumption about a relationship between the quality of curriculum documents and teaching lacked credibility, the attack on outcomes-based education was misplaced since many state curricula were standards-based, and there were inconsistencies present in conclusions drawn by the researchers. Derewianka (2006), a professor at the University of Wollongong in New South Wales specialising in language education, criticised the report's conclusion that the New South Wales English syllabus for stages 1 to 3 lacked attention to

phonological awareness and language functions to construct meaning in literary texts.

The controversy arising from the release of this report not only undermined the credibility of its findings, but also impaired the prospect of applying this approach in the future to gain a deeper appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of curriculum documents. Consequently, the findings from this single benchmarking study are questionable with regard to determining the extent, to which factors influencing the decision-making process, affect the quality of outcomes in curriculum documents. Since benchmarking studies have not yet provided sufficient evidence to draw conclusive judgments about the influence of particular factors on the quality of outcomes in curriculum documents, it is imperative to examine other sources for such information.

It is feasible to identify from this review the organisation of groups responsible for curriculum development in each state and territory. A two-tiered structure of committees, in which each tier performs a particular function, forms the principal means for undertaking curriculum development in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia. In this procedure, a super-ordinate committee makes decisions in overseeing and coordinating the work of subordinate committees, which are responsible for conceptualising curriculum. Membership of super-ordinate committees is usually broad-based, representing a wide range of stakeholders. Teachers and academics, but sometimes business people and parents, constitute the membership of subordinate committees. The principle for decision making underlying this organisation is based on determining curriculum from widely held agreement about the educational goals of the system by balancing educators' and scholars' professional judgments about what constitutes challenging, important content with the views of parents, the business community, and the public about what young people need to learn. Curriculum co-construction, in which a super-ordinate committee makes decisions in overseeing and coordinating the work of teachers in conceptualising curriculum, forms the principal means for undertaking curriculum development in Tasmania, but was also used in Queensland for developing the *Queensland Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework*. In this procedure, membership of super-ordinate committees is usually restricted to representatives from the education community. The principle for decision making underlying curriculum co-construction is based on engaging practitioners in conceptualising the curriculum for the purpose of establishing a constituency of support for curriculum change.

This analysis of decision making underlying the process of curriculum development employed in the states and territories concurs with the findings of earlier studies. Marsh (1994) asserted that the authority innovation decision-making model of curriculum change, whereby decisions were made by super-ordinate groups and carried out by subordinate groups, was applicable to the process of developing the national statements and profiles between 1986 and 1993. Marsh identified that ministers for education, the Australian Education Council, the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, the Curriculum Corporation, and chief executive officers of state and territory education agencies and accreditation

boards formed super-ordinate groups, which interacted through complicated relationships based on hierarchy, formal or informal contacts. Professional associations, principals and teachers formed subordinate groups, which were excluded from decision making, because they lacked the same degree of access to knowledge. The limited scope for a broad-based process of consultation with the wider community inherent in the authority innovation decision-making model of curriculum change was recognised by critics, who contested in 1993 that the mathematics profile was flawed. Ellerton and Clements (1994) attributed this controversy to the failure of decision makers to consult university-based mathematicians, and later to politicians' and bureaucrats' refusals to heed their advice.

Other researchers have analysed the decision-making process involved in curriculum change at the state level. Referring to the New South Wales English syllabus for stages 1 to 3 published in 1994, Gibbs (1998) concluded that its quality was diminished by stakeholders reaching consensus over subject-specific ideological stances, and by political interference compromising extensive consultations involving committees, experts and teachers. Sellar (2005) found that development of the *South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework* involved experts' working groups and curriculum band reference groups reaching consensus over opposing ideological stances. A Steering Committee, which exercised ultimate authority in approving the framework, acted on the advice of these groups in overseeing the work of a Writing Team. Referring to the New South Wales history syllabus for stages 4 and 5 published in 2003, Simpson and Halse (2006) found stakeholders formed temporary coalitions based on agreements over particular issues. However, the decision-making process failed to establish consensus on three of four key issues, because stakeholders' positions were grounded in different premises. The evidence from these research studies suggests that the relationship between super-ordinate and subordinate committees is likely to lead to consensus building, rather than visionary leadership, dominating decision making in the process of curriculum development.

The findings of these research studies are limited to identifying formal and informal relationships between particular groups playing crucial roles in the decision-making process and identifying the dynamic process of interactions between participants. Other evidence needs to be considered, in conjunction with the findings of these studies, to determine which of the two approaches to decision making seems more likely to produce rigorous academic standards. Large-scale surveys of teachers' attitudes about the impact of curriculum on their work would provide one source of evidence, but examples are largely absent from the Australian context. Such a survey of teachers, instigated by controversy within the Tasmanian community over the Essential Learnings curriculum and assessments in 2005, provides evidence to judge whether co-construction is an appropriate approach for developing rigorous academic standards. The Australian Education Union (n.d.) reported that 2,635 teachers, representing more than 58 percent of the 4,539 teachers working in Tasmania's public schools, responded to a questionnaire distributed in July 2006. Analysis of the data identified that teachers experienced many of the difficulties implementing an outcomes-based curriculum that commentators in other settings have reported. As well as inadequate professional

development, lack of technical support and insufficient time for collegial work, respondents reported that the *Essential Learnings Framework* provided inadequate guidance on issues relating to content. Only a little over one-third of respondents agreed that they could use it to select academic disciplines. Less than one-sixth of respondents agreed that it offered sufficient guidance on what content to teach, and less than one-fifth of respondents agreed that it offered sufficient guidance on how to sequence content for students or offered sufficient guidance on methods of teaching. Moreover, less than one-third of respondents agreed that concepts were organised appropriately within three key elements of the *Essential Learnings Framework* for facilitating effective student learning. These data suggest that co-construction provides an inadequate decision-making process for developing a curriculum of high quality. It is likely that this situation can be attributed to two factors. Reliance on teachers, rather than academics with real expertise in subject matter, to develop curriculum may have led to difficulties teachers experienced in selecting academic disciplines, identifying specific content and determining the sequence of content. Failure to act deliberately by producing a curriculum document through consensus may have resulted in convoluted organisation, educational confusion and shoddy writing.

This discussion shows that researchers have offered few insights to improve understanding of what factors in the decision-making process involved in curriculum change in the Australian context affect the development of rigorous academic standards. Although it is difficult to determine from the limited evidence presented in such studies whether the factors identified by Finn, Petrilli and Julian (2006) affect the quality of curriculum documents, it can be inferred that super-ordinate groups, given ultimate authority to oversee curriculum change, follow a mode of decision making, which controls opportunities for input in reaching deliberative solutions. Therefore, the symbiotic relationship existing between super-ordinate and subordinate committees could promote either consensus building or visionary leadership as the dominant decision-making mode under different circumstances. There is little evidence from research studies to support a view that willingness to overcome contests between competing interests plays an important part. Real expertise in academic disciplines is probably seen by policy makers and education officials to play an important part, but there is little evidence from research studies to support this view. Some states, particularly Victoria, have shown an inclination to benchmark curriculum documents against exemplary documents from pacesetting countries, but little evidence can be drawn from research studies about efficacy of this approach.

In spite of a pessimistic judgment about the possibility of research into decision making in the process of curriculum development providing relevant information, it is promising to report that one example acknowledging its importance was identified in this review. In a project commissioned by the Queensland Studies Authority to inform the design for a *P-12 Framework for Syllabus Development*, Luke, Weir and Woods (2008) acknowledged the importance of the decision-making process in curriculum development. It should begin with a project leader commissioning a committee of curriculum, subject matter and industry experts to review current curriculum documents, convening teachers, principals and locally based personnel to streamline feedback, consulting academics, professional leaders and community

stakeholders, and benchmarking documents against exemplary documents from pacesetting jurisdictions. Data from surveys of teachers' perceptions about the existing curriculum should play an important part in balancing the views of committee members engaged to develop a new curriculum. On the basis of such field evidence, specifications should be prepared to guide the writing process. A project writer should supervise teacher writers prepare an initial draft. Then the draft should be submitted to extensive review and revised. Finally, the draft should be trialled and revised to produce the curriculum document. Implementation of the curriculum document should be supported by professional development and lesson plans, curriculum resources and assessment techniques provided on-line.

## **Conclusion**

Development and implementation of new curriculum aligned to academic content standards is likely to be fraught with many potential difficulties. Exemplary curriculum documents should be identified and screened for review from the wide range of documents available internationally. The scope and sequencing of subject matter should be based on widely held agreement on the educational goals of the education system by balancing educators' and scholars' professional judgments about what constitutes challenging, important content with the views of parents, the business community, and the public about what young people need to learn. Assessments, which hold students and schools accountable for academic performance, should be aligned to academic content standards. State-level curricula should be aligned to national standards. Guidelines should be produced to assist teachers in selecting curriculum materials and developing appropriate teaching approaches. Teachers should be offered professional development to provide the knowledge and skills to teach new curriculum, and schools should be supported in becoming high performance organisations focused on improving student learning. A comprehensive accountability system using multiple measures should be designed to provide incentives for success and intervention to support failing schools. Financial and physical resources should be provided to support improvement with flexibility to meet local needs.

This review was restricted in its consideration to identifying which factors in the decision-making process influence the scope and sequencing of subject matter in the curriculum. The results of the study showed that the intent of policy making has been directed to identifying common content in curriculum documents, rather than determining the quality of these documents. However, the policy decision to develop a rigorous, world-class national curriculum may shift the focus of policy making towards identifying and studying these factors. In this case, attention to determining a more reliable decision-making process for developing curriculum needs to take account of other elements, outlined in the previous paragraph, for building standards-based education.

Policy makers and education officials, who may wish to gain greater insight into particular issues relating to these elements, could consider applying an evaluation technique from those approaches outlined below. Each of four

approaches is examined by outlining its purpose and methodology, and by specifying its source and studies conducted using the particular approach. The order of presentation of the four approaches represents an expansion in purpose. The first approach is restricted to the issue of decision making, but later approaches encompass an increasing number of elements.

In the first approach, the policy arenas for decision making in the process of developing curriculum and academic content standards are analysed. This approach involves a team of prominent experts interviewing members of committees, staff and stakeholders, analysing submissions, scrutinising drafts of curriculum documents developed by committees, and examining articles published by the news media. The National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing based in the University of California at Los Angeles used this approach to examine the work of California's Commission for the Establishment of Academic Content and Performance Standards between October 1996 and December 1998 within the wider political context in California. In the report on the study, McDonnell and Weatherford (1999) concluded that the Commission fulfilled its potential as a deliberative body by providing multiple opportunities for public input and the commissioners subscribed to deliberative norms. However, the political process in which standards policy was shaped impinged on the Commission's efforts to ground decisions on reasoned deliberation. Initially, the Governor attempted to influence its direction, and when the Commission began developing performance standards in a direction opposed to the Governor's preference, it was dissolved. The shift in the balance of political responsibility weakened the state superintendent, but gave the state board, which followed a mode of decision making opposed to reaching deliberative solutions, ultimate authority in approving the standards. Teacher unions, education groups and the business community supported the initiative to develop state standards, but played little active part.

In the second approach, standards documents are benchmarked through in-depth reviews. In this approach, a set of criteria are specified to evaluate the quality of standards documents. Nationally recognised subject matter experts are contracted to apply the criteria to assess states' standards documents. Several organisations have published benchmarking reports, which are viewed by policy makers and education officials in the USA as offering endorsements on the quality of states' standards. The American Federation of Teachers published reports on the quality of states' standards, as well as on curriculum, assessments and accountability, in 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2006 and 2008. The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation published reports on the quality of states' standards in 1998, 2000 and 2006. Editorial Projects in Education, the publisher of the weekly newspaper, *Education Week*, and the monthly journal, *Teacher Magazine*, has published annual reports on the condition of education in the states since 1997. These annual reports rate states on their effort to develop state standards. Achieve provides states, commissioning its benchmarking service, with an in-depth review involving thorough evaluation based on comparisons with exemplary standards from other states and countries, focusing on clarity, specificity, coherence, progression, and rigour. A set of guiding questions, customised to the particular state's needs, may be prepared to ensure that the most



important aspects are evaluated. Detailed feedback and recommendations for improvement may follow the review.

In the third approach, an alignment protocol is applied to analyse the alignment between a state's standards and the assessments a state administers to students. An alignment protocol, developed by Achieve, incorporates the four dimensions of content centrality, performance centrality, challenge, and balance and range considered central in determining the degree of alignment. The alignment protocol is applied in a three-phase procedure of examining the match of the assessment to standards item-by-item, the challenge posed by the assessment, and the balance and range of the assessment. Following these analyses, judgments are made about whether the state is measuring what it expects of students by looking at the assessment as a whole and then across year levels. Achieve provides states, commissioning its alignment service, with a customised report.

In the fourth approach, comprehensive reviews of systemic reform policies are provided for states. This approach involves a team of prominent experts reviewing various aspects of a state's education system, state policies and practices, interviewing stakeholders, and making recommendations to build on the reform strategy by applying three strategies. First, the review team examines documents available from the state education agency, state board of education, universities and task forces, as well as training materials, curriculum frameworks supporting standards, scoring criteria, external studies of education reform, news articles, and web sites. Second, the review team interviews stakeholders involved in the reform effort. Third, the review team considers the information in the documents and that obtained from the interviews in drafting the report. Staff from the sponsoring organisation is given an opportunity to review the draft before the final report is produced. Achieve provides states, commissioning comprehensive reviews, with a customised report.

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