

Terms of Reference

Review of the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary subjects

Background

The Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary provides students with increased opportunities to make choices about pathways through school and beyond. These choices are informed by previous success and enjoyment; future options for training, learning or employment; and the setting in which the learning is to occur. The senior school curriculum offers more opportunities for specialisation in learning, including within the regular school program and through accredited vocational education and training (ACARA 2020: 23).

There are 15 senior secondary subjects across English, Mathematics, Science, History and Geography. These were endorsed by education ministers as the agreed and common base for the development of the jurisdiction's senior secondary courses. English, Mathematics, Science and History subjects were endorsed in December 2012, and Geography was endorsed in July 2013.

Curriculum and school authorities in each jurisdiction have determined the pace and nature of the implementation of the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary subjects.

It is over 10 years since the first subjects were published. Now that the F–10 Australian Curriculum Review is complete and Version 9.0 has been published, it is time to undertake a minor review of the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary subjects to ensure alignment from Foundation to Year 12.

Senior Secondary subjects and structure

Each Senior Secondary learning area comprises a number of subjects:

- 4 English subjects: English, English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D), Essential English, Literature
- 4 Mathematics subjects: Essential Mathematics, General Mathematics, Mathematical Methods, Specialist Mathematics
- 4 Science subjects: Chemistry, Biology, Earth and Environmental Science, Physics
- 3 Humanities and Social Sciences subjects: Ancient History, Geography, Modern History.

The Australian Curriculum for each senior secondary subject specifies content and achievement standards. The content describes the knowledge, understanding and skills that are to be taught and learnt. The achievement standards describe the quality of learning (the depth of understanding, extent of knowledge and sophistication of skill) expected of students who have studied the content for the subject.

Aims of the review

The review will aim to improve the alignment between the F–10 Australian Curriculum Version 9.0 and the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary. The review will be underpinned by the education goals of the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (2019). The review will consider the changes made to jurisdictions' senior secondary courses since 2012 that may impact the content of the curriculum within its existing structure.

Specifically, the review will:

- improve the alignment between the Australian Curriculum Version 9.0 and the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary
- improve the quality of content descriptions and achievement standards, removing ambiguity and ensuring consistency and clarity of language and cognitive demand
- improve the digital presentation of the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary in line with agreed content changes and current website components.

Principles

The following principles will guide the scope and approach to the review:

1. The review will be undertaken within the existing 3 dimensions of the Australian Curriculum and published subjects; that is, the 15 discipline-based subjects, 7 general capabilities and 3 cross-curriculum priorities.
2. The review will be undertaken within the existing structural elements of the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary; that is, learning outcomes, content descriptions and achievement standards as described in the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum* Version 5.1 paper. Consideration will be given to the inclusion of content elaborations.
3. The content of the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary in the 4 learning areas will be reviewed, although content changes will not necessarily be of the same scale or magnitude across the learning areas.
4. The review will involve consultation with the profession and engagement with key stakeholders; content changes will be made by subject matter experts and those with expertise in senior secondary education (including teachers, school leaders, curriculum officers, academics, professional and industry organisations).
5. The review will draw on current research, evidence, curriculum developments and learnings from implementation to identify where curriculum content could be refined and realigned.
6. The review will maintain the Australian Curriculum as an inclusive curriculum, defined by its capacity to recognise and respond to the diversity of learners.
7. The Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary will continue to be published as a digital curriculum on the Version 9.0 Australian Curriculum website.

Key directions

Key directions outlined below will guide the review process to identify where and how the content of the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary can be refined and realigned to the F–10 Australian Curriculum Version 9.0.

The Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary comprises rationale and aims, learning outcomes, content descriptions and achievement standards.

Learning areas or subjects, structures and content

Content descriptions detail the knowledge, understanding and skills to be taught and learned within a given subject, including the Australian Curriculum general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities that naturally align with the subject.

The review will look to:

- ensure the content of senior secondary subjects provides an appropriate pathway for work and vocational and tertiary study
- align the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary with the Version 9.0 Australian Curriculum to provide an appropriate sequence of learning
- remove ambiguity and ensure the meaning is clear to teachers
- remove unnecessary duplication and repetition within the learning area and across learning areas
- ensure consistency and clarity of language across each year level and across all learning areas
- align the cognitive and performance demand of content descriptions and achievement standards within and across learning areas and year levels
- reflect new evidence and research developments in the learning area.

Achievement standards describe what students are typically able to know, understand and do as they progress through senior secondary units. They refer to the quality of learning (the depth of understanding, extent of knowledge and sophistication of skill) demonstrated by students within a given subject.

The review will look to:

- improve the quality of achievement standards to ensure the description of what students know, understand and can do is central to the achievement standard and aligns with the essential content students are expected to learn as described in the content descriptions
- provide one achievement standard for each pair of units
- strengthen the cognitive alignment between achievement standards and content descriptions
- improve the consistency and clarity of language used in the achievement standards across the 4 learning areas.

Learning outcomes will describe in broad terms what a student is expected to have learned as a result of studying the specified content. Learning outcomes will describe the major dimensions of content, namely the knowledge, understanding and skills required by the subject. Four to six learning outcomes will be written for each unit; some will focus on knowledge and understanding and some on skills.

The review will look to:

- align the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary learning outcomes with the Version 9.0 Australian Curriculum level descriptions
- ensure consistency and clarity of language across each year level and across all learning areas.

Examples of context are optional supports for implementation of the curriculum. They provide teachers with suggestions on ways they can tailor learning area content to meet their local circumstances and include the general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities when teaching the learning area content.

The review will look to:

- consider if examples of context are the best way to provide illustrations and suggestions; if they are retained, the review will look to improve the quality and currency of examples of context, ensuring they are fit-for-purpose; that is, they make the content descriptions and achievement standards accessible and meaningful to teachers, and provide illustrations and suggestions of how to program and teach the content

- consider if elaborations should be provided for each content description; if supported by the working group, elaborations will be added.

General capabilities

The 7 general capabilities (Critical and Creative Thinking, Digital Literacy, Ethical Understanding, Intercultural Understanding, Literacy, Numeracy, and Personal and Social capability) are addressed through the content of the learning areas in the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary.

The review will look to:

- identify the skills and behaviours described in the general capabilities through explicit inclusion in the content descriptions of each subject.

Cross-curriculum priorities

The 3 cross-curriculum priorities (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia, and Sustainability) are addressed through the content of the learning areas in the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary.

The review will look to:

- improve the relationship of the cross-curriculum priorities with learning area content, including them explicitly in content descriptions, and/or elaborations, but only where it is essential and most authentic to do so to contribute to learning in that learning area, and removing any repetition of content between the cross-curriculum priorities and the learning areas.

Considerations

The review will have regard to:

- the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (December 2019)
- ACARA's *Shape of the Australian Curriculum* paper (Version 5.0) and ACARA's *Curriculum Design* paper (Version 3.1). Note: Some small revisions will be made in these 2 documents to reflect the minor review of Senior secondary subjects, as agreed by the ACARA Board
- relevant national policy developments and initiatives
- any emerging insights from Australian jurisdictions in their implementation of the Australian Curriculum, including recent reviews, as well as perspectives from international jurisdictions where there have been recent reviews and curriculum revisions.

Approach

ACARA's Curriculum team will lead the review process for the review of Senior Secondary. The Curriculum Specialists for each learning area will lead the review of each learning area subject.

ACARA's F-12 Curriculum Reference Group (CRG) will be the key advisory group with oversight of key issues emerging from across the learning area review processes. ACARA's other existing advisory structures will also provide the mechanism for wider stakeholder engagement and consultation.

Subject matter teacher professional associations, academics and other key stakeholder groups including industry and the VET sector will be engaged and consulted throughout the review process in a range of ways appropriate to each learning area. This could include:

- participating in an initial forum to clarify the scope of the work for each subject and the consultation process
- providing feedback at 2 points in the review timeline.

A working group will be established for each subject, which will include nominations from those members of F–12 CRG interested in being engaged in the review process.

Teacher focus groups could also provide feedback.

Timeline for the review of the Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary

The review will commence in 2023 with preparatory tasks and be completed for the 15 subjects by December 2025.

The revised Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary will be published on the Version 9.0 Australian Curriculum website for implementation from June 2026.

Dates	Activities
2023	Preliminary mapping of Version 9.0 Australian Curriculum to Unit 1 Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary
2023 – November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms of Reference and timeline approved by ACARA Board. • EMM paper for noting in relation to this work.
2023 – December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish working groups for the set of subjects to be reviewed in 2024 • Develop stakeholder engagement and communications plan
2024 – January to February	Kick-start review process. Develop review guidelines, procedures and project management systems.
2024 – March/April	Forums for up to 8 subjects from 4 learning areas
2024 – April to June	Review process in progress across up to 8 subjects from 4 learning areas
2024 – July to August	Round 1 consultation with working group, critical friends and interested organisations
2024 – September	Feedback from consultation considered
2024 – October	Round 2 consultation with working group
2024 – November to December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise documents for editing • Revisions to Australian Curriculum: Senior Secondary in 4 learning areas for up to 8 subjects to ACARA Board for approval in February 2025
2025 – January to February	Review process and develop project plan for next 7 or 8 subjects
2025 – February	Approval of 8 subjects by EMM
2025 – March	Forums for up to 8 subjects from 4 learning areas

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2025 – April to June	Review process in progress across up to 8 subjects from 4 learning areas
2025 – July to August	Round 1 consultation with working group, critical friends and interested organisations
2025 – September	Feedback from consultation considered
2025 – October	Round 2 consultation with working group
2025 – November to December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise documents including editing • Revisions to Australian Curriculum Senior Secondary in 4 learning areas for up to 8 subjects to ACARA Board for approval in February 2026
2026 – February/March	EMM paper for noting, re Senior Secondary subjects reviewed and approved by the ACARA Board.
2026 – March to May	Version 9.0 website authoring and preparation for launch Preparation of teacher and parent/carer communication materials
2026 – June	Australian Curriculum Senior Secondary web pages go live