

## OFFICIAL

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### **Curriculum review a chance to transform education**

“An educated, enlightened and informed population is one of the surest ways of promoting the health of democracy.”

These words from Nelson Mandela are as true for Australia today as they were for South Africa when he spoke them in Johannesburg in 2003.

The power of education, as noted in the Alice Springs Mparntwe Education Declaration agreed by all Australian education ministers in 2019, is that it transforms lives.

Through education, young people are able to realise their full potential for living creatively, healthily and productively. As competent citizens, they go on to contribute to Australia’s future wellbeing, our national prosperity and social cohesion. Can there be anything more important to a nation than the quality of the education our young people receive?

The Australian Curriculum represents our country’s expectations for the next generation. It is an articulation of the knowledge, skills and understandings that we as a nation believe are needed for young Australians to be productive and well-adjusted adult citizens, regardless of where they live or their background. In short, it is the foundation for realising a vision for an education system of excellence.

In 2008 all Australian governments agreed that a national curriculum would have a key role in delivering quality education for young Australians. The Australian Curriculum was developed over a number of years, learning area by learning area, beginning with new curricula for English, Mathematics, Science and History.

The Australian Curriculum was first reviewed in 2014. The current version has been in place since 2015 and will go on to be reviewed every six years.

On Thursday the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) will release for public consultation, proposed revisions to the Australian Curriculum, one of the most significant documents guiding our nation’s education system to have been released in recent years. This is the opportunity for all of us to join the school education conversation.

This is the first time the Australian Curriculum has been reviewed in its entirety, rather than by individual learning area. By viewing it as a whole we have the opportunity to assure cohesiveness and consistency in accordance with an over-arching organising vision.

This Review is being undertaken at a pivotal point in our history.

Not only is there growing alarm at the steady decline in the performance of Australian students in international assessments, but recent results in the triennial Civics and Citizenship assessment indicate that the level of knowledge and understanding of the profound value and significance of democracy is lacking. This should concern us all.

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According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), our 15-year-old students' scores in literacy, numeracy and science are in long term decline, and for the first time in the assessment's history, Australia has failed to meet the OECD average in mathematics performance.

While multiple factors contribute to a worsening report card – teachers know this better than anyone – the Australian Curriculum has a part to play in turning these results around.

The events of 6 January in Washington this year show us just how fragile our democracy can be, and we need to ensure our education system strongly supports a commitment to, and respect for, knowledge, facts, truth and respect.

This includes when it comes to listening to the experience of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Australian Curriculum reflects the national aspirations for our students and future generations. We seek both to give them an understanding of the past and present, including where they are from, our cultures, histories and values, while also learning the knowledge and skills they need to be ready for a future that is more uncertain and changeable than it has been for previous generations.

The Australian Curriculum is the basis upon which all state and territory curricula is developed and is a joint and collective effort of hundreds of educators and curriculum experts from all around the country.

The release of the draft revisions this week for public consultation creates the opportunity to shape a world-leading national school curriculum that delivers the excellent education outcomes our students deserve and need to thrive in an increasingly complex world.

The new Australian Curriculum will be available to schools and systems for implementation from early next year. It needs to serve the needs of our students, employers, society and the nation. And it needs to be teachable. To be successful, we must ensure our teachers and principals are fully supported and receive the assistance, and the resources they need to achieve our national vision for education.

I urge as many Australians as possible, particularly our teachers, to take some time to visit the Australian Curriculum consultation website and share your thoughts.

<https://australiancurriculum.edu.au/consultation>