

# Queensland response to the draft Years 3–10 Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship

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# 1. Introduction

The Queensland Studies Authority (QSA), in partnership with Education Queensland (EQ), Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) and Independent Schools Queensland (ISQ), appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Years 3–10 Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship. Queensland supports the development of an Australian Curriculum that will provide consistent and explicit curriculum expectations across the nation.

This response provides a summary of feedback from:

- representative curriculum and learning area committees of the QSA
- representatives of the Social Educators' Association of Queensland (SEAQ)
- representatives of the Australian Catholic University (ACU) — McAuley at Banyo and the Queensland University of Technology (QUT)
- representatives of Queensland's three schooling sectors, representing and advocating for 1400 EQ schools, 296 Catholic schools and 188 Independent schools.

The response identifies strengths, issues and concerns for the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to consider in finalising the Years 3–10 Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship.

The response is organised in the following way:

- key strengths of the draft curriculum and broad issues and concerns, with suggested ways forward
- specific feedback on each section of the draft curriculum with subject specific issues, concerns and suggested ways forward.

## 2. Key strengths, issues and concerns

### Strengths

The following strengths were identified in consultations.

- The Rationale and Aims are generally clear in identifying the importance of Civics and Citizenship learning as it relates to Australia's political and legal systems and to effective participation in contemporary Australian society.
- The two strands of *Civics and Citizenship: Knowledge and Understanding* and *Civics and Citizenship Skills*:
  - provide a structure consistent with other Australian Curriculum subjects
  - are suitably integrated
  - have an appropriate scope.
- The use of sub-strands in *Civics and Citizenship: Knowledge and Understanding* (Government and democracy; Laws and citizens; and Citizenship, diversity and identity) create continuity across Years 3–10 and build a developmental sequence of learning across year levels.
- The *Civics and Citizenship Skills* strand incorporates and promotes an inquiry approach that is appropriate for this subject and links to the skills across the Humanities and Social Sciences learning area.
- The elaborations provide a range of possibilities and ideas for teachers.
- The draft curriculum incorporates increasing complexity in the content descriptions and elaborations that can plot student progress from Year 3 to Year 10.
- The General capabilities and Cross-curriculum priorities are clearly evident and appropriately represented.
- The key inquiry questions provide an overview of the content to be studied in each year level and go some way to promoting an inquiry approach to this learning.
- The year level descriptions are helpful in providing teachers with guidance about the key concepts to be covered in each year level.

### Issues and concerns

The following key issues and concerns were raised in consultations.

- The amount of content in the *Civics and Citizenship: Knowledge and understanding* strand is excessive. The number and complexity of concepts across the three key focus areas will promote a superficial treatment and will certainly not foster deep understanding of the key concepts underpinning Civics and Citizenship.
- The draft curriculum further highlights significant inconsistencies across subjects in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) learning area relating to:
  - terminology and language use including syntax — for example, questioning(s) and interpreting(ation)
  - incorporating all content descriptors in achievement standards
  - timing of the progression from local to regional, to national and to a global focus P–10 — this is out of sync with Geography in particular.

- This curriculum does not reflect the diverse nature of Australian society. It is content heavy which does not allow students an opportunity to properly explore and challenge their own values and dispositions. This limits the capacity of students to learn about being active citizens. Students may have the opportunity to learn a great deal of knowledge content but they will not have time to investigate how it applies to them and their community. It is much better to have a curriculum that promotes authentic engagement by outlining essential content that can be treated in more depth.
- There is an overemphasis on government and legal processes. Much of this content is often inappropriate for the age of the student. The lack of balance between skills and knowledge content will skew teaching towards more didactic approaches. This is in sharp contrast to the stated desire to make the students 'reflective, active and informed decision makers'.
- If the curriculum is to contribute to creating active and informed citizens for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century it must allow teachers space to create opportunities for their students to engage critically in discussions about the changing nature of Australian society and to participate in local and global communities.
- The use of the term 'First Peoples' is not used in the Australian Curriculum Cross curriculum priorities. Advice from the Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Committee is that all references within the Australian Curriculum should be consistent and that the most respectful term is 'Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples'.

#### **Ways forward**

- Revise the curriculum to significantly reduce the amount of content in the *Civics and Citizenship: Knowledge and Understanding* strand. The revised content should be based on advice about what is achievable within the time allocation.
- Revise to improve consistency across subjects within the Humanities and Social Sciences learning area. For example:
  - add a section on the Humanities and Social Sciences learning area in the curriculum. The same section should be added to the Years 5–10 Australian Curriculum: Economics and Business
  - use consistent terminology and language
  - align progression from local to regional, to national and to a global focus to other HSS subjects especially Geography.
- Acknowledge the diverse nature of Australian society and focus on building capacity to learn about being active and informed citizens and to engage critically in discussions on the changing nature of Australian society and participation in local and global communities.
- Reduce the emphasis on government and legal processes and make the curriculum more age appropriate and engaging.
- Replace the term 'First Peoples' with 'Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples'.

## 3. Section by section analysis

### Rationale and Aims

#### Strengths

The following strengths were identified in consultations about the Rationale and Aims.

- The Rationale provides clarity about intent and scope of the draft Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship.
- The Aims of the learning area clearly express the overall intention of the draft Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship.
- Despite the issue with use of the term, 'First Peoples', the Rationale does attempt to position Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the 'first citizens of this land'. This could be further strengthened by replacing the term 'acknowledges' and rephrase the sentence as follows:

The curriculum recognises that learning about Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first occupants of Australia is important for students as it develops their understandings of the concepts and values associated with identity, belonging and civic systems in the past and within contemporary Australian society'

#### Issues and concerns

The following issues and concerns were identified in consultations about the Rationale and Aims.

- The Rationale is clear but the curriculum content does not always build from the big ideas it describes. The intent of the Rationale needs to be reflected throughout the curriculum. It is currently too introspective and does not view Australians as citizens of the world. It also fails to fully grasp the nature of modern Australia as a multicultural and multi-faith society and it discourages a reflective examination of society.
- The Rationale lists concepts such as 'respect, civility, equity, justice and responsibility' but the curriculum features few opportunities for students to engage fully in discussing what these mean in their lives.
- The second sentence in the Rationale needs rewording. The notion that students 'will... become beneficiaries of ... society' is value-laden. The Melbourne Declaration very clearly states as one of the goals, all Australian students will become 'active and informed citizens'. The Civics and Citizenship curriculum provides the best opportunities for students to be active participants in civic life and valued 'contributors to' rather than 'beneficiaries of' society.
- The Rationale should recognise that students are already active citizens of Australian society and this is the case even before they attend school. The Civics and Citizenship curriculum needs to provide the opportunity for active participation directed at improving and benefitting society and its systems.
- The second aim needs to include regional and global contexts if it is to reflect the Rationale.
- The third aim is expressed in a disjointed manner — the aim should not describe the skills as 'including'.

- The skills in the third aim should be called 'inquiry skills' to emphasise the importance of inquiry. They need to reflect what is in the strands and not a selection of these skills thus prioritising some skills over others. For example 'questioning' is currently missing in the aims and it is one of the critical skills of Civics and Citizenship.
- The fourth aim describes participation in the civic life of their nation at a local, regional and global level but the curriculum content has limited global content.
- The fourth aim should be expressed as 'the Values and dispositions to participate in the civic life of their multicultural and multi-faith society at a local, national, regional and global level' to better reflect the Rationale.

#### **Ways forward**

- Refine the Rationale as suggested above.
- Conclude the first sentence of the Rationale with '...contemporary Australian society and the world' otherwise there is a danger of being too introspective which is inappropriate in the modern world.
- Redraft the statements about Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Rationale.
- Reverse the order of the first and second aims for internal consistency — that is, the first aim should be second and the second aim should be first aim
- Revise the aims to better reflect the intent of the Rationale.
- Refine the wording of the second aim to include regional and global contexts.
- Refine the wording of the third aim to make it more coherent and definitive and use the term 'inquiry skills'.
- Refine the fourth aim as suggested above.

## **Organisation of the learning area**

### **Strengths**

The following strengths were identified in consultations about the Organisation of the learning area.

- The structure of *Civics and Citizenship: Knowledge and Understanding* is supported and the use of sub-strands is appropriate and useful.
- It is helpful that there is some consistency with other learning areas, especially subjects in the HSS learning area. At this point of development it is particularly important to ensure consistency between this subject and Economics and Business.
- The key messages in the *Implications for teaching, assessment and reporting* section (page 13) are supported.
- In the *Civics and citizenship across Years 3–10*, the emphasis in Years 7 to 10 on developing a broader awareness of, and concern with, civics and citizenship issues is supported.

## Issues and concerns

The following issues and concerns were identified in consultations about the Organisation of the learning area.

- Questioning and research should include ‘Australia’s political, legal and social systems and how they relate to the world picture’. Without this addition the course is too introspective.
- With Civics and Citizenship and Economics and Business, the skills can be more generic as the discipline base of this curriculum is less established than History and Geography. The skills should be identical in structure, i.e. have the same sub-strands.
- The statement in the *Relationship between the strands* section — ‘The sequencing and description of the Civics and Citizenship Skills in bands of schooling will assist in multi-age programming...’ (page 6) — will only apply where classes are arranged in the particular two-year banding described in the Australian Curriculum. This is often not the case.
- The *Implications for teaching, assessment and reporting* section is new and has not been included in previous published curriculum documents. While the key messages are generally supported, a phrase like ‘if a teacher judges that a student’s achievement is below the expected standard, this suggests that the teacher programs and practice should be reviewed’ moves into implementation considerations that jurisdictions and their school sectors are responsible for.
- In the *Civics and citizenship across Years 3–10*, the F–2 section needs to be clearer and should describe the civics and citizenship themes and concepts that students will have opportunities to learn through other learning areas and subjects.

### Ways forward

- Refine the description of Questioning and research.
- Use bullet points rather than italics within the *Organisation of the learning area* section to focus more clearly on the three key focus areas at each year level.
- Refine the *Implications for teaching, assessment and reporting* section and remove the statement indicated above.
- Review the *Civics and citizenship across Years 3–10* for consistency and intent i.e. determined whether this section will describe all Civics and citizenship learning within this subject and how it will be included in other subjects/learning areas.

## Student diversity, General capabilities and Cross-curriculum priorities

The following points were raised in consultations about the Student Diversity, General capabilities and Cross-curriculum priorities sections.

- The descriptions of how Student diversity, the General capabilities and Cross-curriculum priorities apply to the Civics and citizenship curriculum were generally supported.
- The section on the General capabilities shows how each capability is embedded in the draft curriculum but it is questionable if there is an opportunity to address the General capabilities authentically within the time allocations for this subject.
- Cross-curriculum priorities are not always age appropriate.



- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority has been treated in a rather simplistic and tokenistic way in the draft curriculum. For example, it is understood that ‘first contact’ between Aboriginal Australians and British migrants occurs in the Year 4 curriculum but it is questionable whether students in Year 4 would have the sophistication to understand ‘forms of local governance found in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities’. Also customary law is very sensitive in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and advice on these sensitivities needs to be made apparent.
- The section on Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia is minimal.

#### **Ways forward**

- Review the Cross-curriculum priorities with a focus on developing authentic, achievable and enabling curriculum content in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures and Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia.
- Review the Cross curriculum priorities to be age appropriate.

## **Curriculum content**

### ***Strengths***

The following strengths were identified in consultations about the content descriptions.

- At a broad level, the curriculum content is appropriate and generally develops from what is described in the Rationale and Aims.
- Generally the content descriptions are written clearly and the differences between the descriptions at different year levels are evident. A progression is obvious and is mostly appropriate for knowledge and understanding, the three sub-strands, and skills.
- At Year 6, the content descriptions align well with the Year 6 History content. This should be the case for all year levels, especially in Years 3 to 6/7. The links to the published Australian Curriculum: History and Geography should be clear and obvious.

### ***Issues and concerns***

The following issues and concerns were identified in consultations about the content descriptions.

#### ***Civics and Citizenship: Knowledge and Understanding***

- In many instances, the complexity of concepts and levels of abstraction are too challenging for the age of the students for which the curriculum is written.
- A more supportive developmental sequence would enable students to more effectively access the curriculum. For example, Year 3 should include the foundational concepts that address a big question such as ‘What is a government and why do we have governments?’
- Within the Citizenship, diversity and identity sub-strand, the curriculum needs to reflect that each student’s ‘identity’ will continue to be shaped across the years of schooling and include opportunities for students to develop understanding of the non-static nature of ‘identity’.

- While most descriptions are clear, some are ambiguous — for example:
  - Year 3 (Citizenship, diversity and identity) description, ‘How a person’s identity, including their own, can be shaped by the different cultural, religious and/or social groups to which they may belong’ does not make clear what students need to learn. It would be more appropriate for students to be able to define identity and what defines groups as cultural, religious or social.
  - Year 5 (Government and democracy) description, ‘The key values that underpin Australia’s democratic system of government’ is very broad. The actual key values need to be identified. It is debateable that the three values listed in the elaboration are actually the key values of the *system* of government.
- The Year 3 (Government and democracy) content description is beyond the cognitive ability of the majority of Year 3 students. Aligning the content with the Year level description ‘familiar and personal’ is a preferable starting point and language such as ‘how are fair decisions made in groups?’
- In Year 4 (Government and democracy) the second content description has the inclusion of forms of local governance found in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This should be optional as it is more relevant in some communities than others and this needs to be obvious at the local level if it is to be meaningful for Year 4. The term ‘governance’ (as opposed to ‘government’) is confusing and requires further explanation for this year level.
- In Year 4 (Law and citizens), the second content description specifies ‘The qualities and values considered to be important for “good” laws, such as laws applying equally to everyone’. To give greater clarity, the principle of a ‘good law’ needs to be explained. This could be achieved with the inclusion of some of the elaboration in the content description.
- The Year 5 (Law and citizens) first content description that includes the experiences of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples under the law may be challenging for Year 5 students and needs to be more specific so it is not misunderstood and treated insensitively.
- The complexity of some of the Years 5, 6 and 7 content descriptions is an issue. For example one of seven content descriptions for Year 7 is ‘The key features of government under the Australian Constitution with a focus on: the division of powers; the separation of powers; the roles of the Houses of Parliament; and the formation of governments’. This could be the entire course for Year 7. The content descriptions for these year levels need to be rewritten to indicate the depth required.
- To better align with the published Australian Curriculum: History and Geography, Year 6 should include much of the content that is currently described at Year 7.
- The Year 7 content needs to be more focused on real world issues especially under the Citizenship, diversity and identity sub-strand. In Year 7, students should be engaged in looking at a local or real world problem or issue and determining how political and legal systems operate in regard to the problem or issue and how they can influence or participate in these systems.
- The Year 9 content is very traditional and makes little attempt to be contemporary. The amount of content is large and repeats material that has been previously studied. The study of this content will be elective at the majority of schools and, with Year 10, must be more engaging than the draft delivers.

## Civics and Citizenship Skills

- There is no clear alignment between the Civics and Citizenship Skills and the skills for History, Geography and Economics and Business. This creates an unhelpful curriculum construct that does not support teachers, especially primary school teachers, to develop an integrated approach or consolidate student learning across the HSS learning area.
- Primary teachers are very concerned about the separate inquiry approaches being utilised in the four subjects within the HSS learning area. The requirement to teach students not only different knowledge and understandings but also different inquiry approaches within each of the four subjects creates an unnecessary division especially for learning at this level. This approach to curriculum development does not support primary teachers to develop integrated programs.
- The Skills outlined in Year 9 are far too involved for the time available for teaching the subject and do not always match the Knowledge and understanding descriptions — for example, problem solving and decision making.

### Ways forward

- Reduce the amount of content in the Knowledge and understanding strand, particularly from Years 5, 6 and 7, to enable students to develop deeper understanding of the key concepts underpinning Civics and Citizenship.
- Reduce the complexity of concepts and/or level of abstraction to better match student cognitive developmental levels.
- More clearly identify expectations in content descriptions.
- Include foundational concepts in Year 3 to enable students to access the later curriculum.
- Clarify terminology in content descriptions such as ‘identity’ in Year 3 — either demonstrate with a context or provide a glossary.
- Revise Year 6 and Year 7 content to build synergies with Australian Curriculum: History and Geography. For example:
  - in Year 6 (Government and democracy) ‘...researching the historical process including the Magna Carta’ relates to Year 8 History. It would be better to investigate Australian laws and policies at this year level
  - in Year 6 (Analysis, synthesis and interpretation) ‘...explore stereotypes in society related to homeless people, minority groups and people with a disability’ should also include refugees, migrant, and indigenous peoples.
  - move Year 7 content about the constitution and the change through referendum to Year 6 when the Australian Curriculum: History requires the teaching of Federation and social change for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the 20th century and when the 1967 referendum is critical
  - move Year 7 content about Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples and migrant groups to Year 6 as this is where the students study migration (History) and diversity of peoples (Geography).
- Revise Year 8 which has far too much content, much of which could be moved to Year 7.
- Refocus Years 9 and 10 on inquiry skills and the investigation of contemporary, controversial issues to do with some of the principles of government, the judicial system or national identity. A possible example for Year 10 is to explore the issue of whether Australia does maintain a civil society which recognises its responsibilities

within Australia and internationally through some specific case studies.

- Revise the content descriptions for each year level to:
  - make them realistic for the time allocated for this subject
  - be age appropriate and engaging for students
  - be more reflective of the contemporary, global world and our multicultural and multi-faith society.
- Redevelop the Civics and Citizenship Skills and use identical or very closely aligned sub-strands to Economics and Business. The following framework is suggested:
  - Planning and researching
  - Working with sources, evidence, data and information (Analysis and interpretation)
  - Communicating and responding.

## Content elaborations

The following points were identified in consultations about the content elaborations.

- While the Content elaborations effectively provide a range of possibilities and ideas for teachers, there is concern that some suggest a higher level of expectation than the content descriptions require. This is potentially misleading for non-specialist teachers.
- In Year 5 (Laws and Citizens) ‘...comparing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ engagement with the legal system to other groups’ presents a deficit model.

### Ways forward

- Review the ‘pitch’ of content elaborations, particularly at lower levels, to align with student cognitive developmental levels and to match expectations of content descriptions.
- Ensure the elaborations are appropriate for the age of students (e.g. remove action pledges at Year 7) and provide clear examples that are able to inform teaching and learning within the time allocation for the subject.

## Achievement standards

The following points were identified in consultations about the Achievement standards.

- The language in the Achievement standards does not always match the content descriptions — for example, the *key features* of Australia’s *court system* in the content description and the *key principles* of Australia’s *system of justice* in the achievement standard. These are not the same and the achievement standard appears to be more challenging than the content description.
- In several instances there is a misalignment between the inquiry question and the achievement standard.
- Some Achievement standards:
  - do not accurately reflect the content descriptions and curriculum intent. For example, in Year 3, students learn ‘how some decisions are made in a democracy’ (content description) and develop a ‘basic understanding of democracy’ (year level overview) yet the achievement standard requires students to explain ‘key democratic processes’

- need to better reflect a level of expectation at each band level, rather than using generic terms that can be scaled up or down to fit different developmental levels. In some instances the standard is ambiguous because it could be pitched up or down — for example, Year 4: ‘significant factors’, ‘key issues’.
- do not demonstrate appropriate developmental progression.
- The Year 8 Achievement standard states that students can ‘recognise the different types of law’ in Australia. The knowledge and understanding content description implies that students will understand the differences between these laws. ‘To recognise’ is a skill that can be taught through a formulaic approach that does not require an understanding of those differences. There is a lack of alignment between what is to be taught and what students are expected to demonstrate that they have learnt.
- While high expectations and academic rigour are supported, the Year 10 achievement standard is highly aspirational and it is not reasonable to expect Year 10 students to demonstrate this level of knowledge, understandings and skills in the time allocated for the curriculum content.
- There is a lack of consistency in pitch and expectation with other HSS subjects.

### **Ways forward**

- Review the achievement standards to ensure they:
  - accurately reflect the curriculum content
  - identify the particular level of expectation at each particular band level rather than using generic terms that could be applied to higher or lower stages of schooling
  - provide an appropriate developmental sequence or progression.
- Review the achievement standards to ensure the first and second paragraphs are aligned. For example in the second paragraph of the Year 4 achievement standard students are asked to ‘create questions about the society they live in’ but in the first paragraph they are describing examples of local government services. The second paragraph would be better expressed as ‘create questions about government services in the local community’.
- Review the year-level descriptions, content descriptions and achievement standards for alignment. In the Year 3 achievement standard, for example, it states that ‘students explain key democratic processes’; however this term is not mentioned in the year-level description or the content descriptions.
- Review the pitch of the achievement standards against the published subjects — History and Geography and the draft Economics and Business curriculum.

## **Links to other learning areas**

The following points were raised in consultations about links to other learning areas:

- Economics and business should be included in this section.
- The inclusion of a section on the HSS learning area should appear earlier in the document.
- The key link between the learning areas and within the learning area is the skills and this could be represented in a tabular form.
- A greater focus on concepts is needed in this section to allow primary teachers and curriculum planners to integrate, i.e. the use of data in Mathematics.

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