

Queensland response to the draft Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation

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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 Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation. Queensland supports the development of an Australian Curriculum that will provide consistent and explicit curriculum expectations across the nation.

This response is a summary of the collated Queensland feedback from:

- representative curriculum committees of the QSA
- professional associations
- representatives of the three school sectors, representing and advocating for 1400 EQ schools, 290 Catholic schools and 188 Independent schools.

Queensland's consultation identified strengths and a range of issues and concerns for ACARA's consideration when redrafting the draft Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation.

This response is organised in the following way:

- an overview of the key strengths, issues and concerns
- an analysis of the key issues and concerns with suggested ways forward.

Key strengths

The QSA, EQ, QCEC and ISQ agree that the draft Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation shows the following strengths.

- The draft Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation is aligned to the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008). It foregrounds support for all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens.
- The draft Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation responds to the requirements of the Disability Standards for Education (2005) developed under the *Disability Discrimination Act* (1992).
- The provision of the draft Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation and the subsequent consultation process supports the educational needs of students with disability.
- The organisation by four phases of progression — Responsive, Exploratory, Active and Purposeful — supports the recognition of levels of disability and provides opportunities for teachers to individualise learning.
- Links to the F–10 Australian Curriculum for English and Mathematics provide opportunities for teachers to individualise learning to suit the needs of their students.
- The Mathematics phase level descriptions outline elements to be taught that acknowledge the different rates at which students with disability develop.

- The structure of the draft curriculum is the same as the F–10 Australian Curriculum, which is familiar to teachers, and uses the same online format, making it easy for teachers to access, find and view the information they need.

Key issues and concerns

The following general key issues and concerns have been identified for consideration in the redrafting of the draft Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation:

- timelines for consultation and implementation
- intended audience
- the landscape of the curriculum for students with disability
- the nature and breadth of the phases, with particular reference to the Responsive phase
- the inclusion and use of achievement standards
- inconsistent style and use of terms and language.

Analysis of key issues and concerns

1. Timelines for consultation and implementation

1.1 The short timeline

Queensland educators have expressed their general agreement with the need for a curriculum to support the educational needs of students with disability. However, educators have expressed concern in the delayed release of the documents and the very short timeline for consultation. While the short timeline is a difficulty, teachers are keen to have a document that they can use to move toward implementation of the Australian Curriculum. Feedback from Queensland practitioners suggests that some schools would choose to implement during 2012, while others would use 2012 as a familiarisation year and implement in 2013. Both groups expressed the need for a high quality product that is responsive to feedback.

Way forward

- Extend the feedback and revision process to 2013.

1.2 Version control

If the feedback and revision process remains open and responsive for an extended period of time, it is essential that ACARA maintain version control and communicate their changes accurately and in a timely manner.

Way forward

- Maintain version control and communicate changes.

2. Intended audience

Queensland educators are concerned that the title of the document and the inconsistency of message in the overview statements of the English and Mathematics draft curriculum make the intended audience for this curriculum unclear. The title *Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation* suggests that the curriculum sits prior to the Foundation level without specific reference to the intended audience, and this may have negative implications for older students with disability.

The second paragraph gives clear direction that the intended audience are students with disability; however the final paragraph confuses this intention. The statement, *this curriculum is not intended for use by teachers of students of school entry age nor are they intended for students whose learning and achievement has been affected by disrupted learning backgrounds*, when read in conjunction with the title Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation it may incorrectly imply that:

- the curriculum ceases at school entry age and does not provide for older students with disability
- the curriculum is designed for students of before school entry age. In the Queensland context, this may imply use in a Kindergarten setting. Queensland has developed the

Queensland kindergarten learning guideline to provide for students before their entry to the Preparatory Year

- students enrolled in the Foundation Year (Preparatory Year in Queensland) without disability may access the draft Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation instead of the F–10 Australian Curriculum if their learning is thought to be connected to the Purposeful phase.

The title *Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation* gives a misleading suggestion that all students with disability would be working on this curriculum. A title that includes the words *progressing to Foundation* is problematic and alternatives should be investigated. Queensland educators suggested the title of the curriculum should accurately reflect the audience and have suggested that the title *students with significant intellectual impairment* be used. This suggested title is more appropriate as students with disability will be accessing the same level of curriculum as their age peers with modifications to enable access and success with the curriculum. Clarity in this area may alleviate some of the possible issues outlined.

Way forward

- Consider revising the title to clearly articulate the audience. Suggestion:
 - Australian Curriculum: Students with disability
 - Australian Curriculum: Students with intellectual impairment.
- Identify the intended audience more clearly, with specific reference within the text to students with disability.
- Ensure that overview statements with clear connections to the audience (students with intellectual impairment /disability) remain as foregrounding information for each learning area of the draft Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation curriculum when presented online.

3. The landscape of the curriculum for students with disability

Queensland educators require detailed information regarding the landscape of the curriculum for students with disability. This consultation process has enabled practitioners to provide feedback on the draft curriculum for English and Mathematics but the final suite of material that will constitute the draft Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation curriculum remains unclear.

The present draft curriculum is written as two discipline-specific learning areas. However, teachers require information about the total curriculum landscape that will be available for their students. Through this provision teachers would be able to clearly identify where important functional content would be placed in the curriculum, and how it links to the F–10 content descriptions.

Feedback has outlined the need for information regarding:

- the development of additional learning areas
- the timeline for development
- planning for teaching and learning in the transition
- the design of learning areas to reflect life skill programs.

Additionally, in the current presentation of the draft curriculum, the general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities, which are included in the F–10 Australian Curriculum, are not evident. Queensland educators are unclear as to whether the general capabilities and

cross-curriculum priorities will be embedded into the content descriptions within the four phases in a similar way to the F–10 Australian Curriculum.

Way forward

- Provide clear and timely information to teachers regarding the curriculum landscape.
- Consider further learning areas that have close connection to life skills programs and functional performance.
- Provide information about whether the general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities will be embedded in the content descriptions.

4. The nature of the phases

The draft Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation is divided into four phases of progression which are designed to be used flexibly according to the needs of the individual student. Although the overview statements describe the phases as overlapping and interrelated, the structure of the document using the Foundation curriculum content and achievement standards as reference points implies that students' learning would progress incrementally through phases. Contrary to this, students with disability may always remain in a phase, take considerable time to move forward or may at times regress. The overview statements and the structure of the documents do not make clear the intention of the curriculum or consider the nature of the learning in the context of students with disability.

Queensland educators felt that the curriculum was written with early years language which may be outside the knowledge of all teachers of students with disability and lead to inconsistencies in interpretation.

Way forward

- Provide overview statements that clearly highlight curriculum flexibility within the current progression framework.
- Consider revising the title *Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation* to reflect the flexible nature of the curriculum.
- Provide unambiguous and detailed advice to teachers in relation to the use of the curriculum including a rationale for the names of the phases.

5. The breadth of the phases

5.1 The Responsive phase and pre-intentional students

While the curriculum is described in phases, Queensland educators felt that the phases, the content descriptions and elaborations do not adequately cover the needs of all students who may engage in this curriculum. The curriculum requires intentionality for access, therefore pre-intentional students are not considered in the breadth of this curriculum as they could not access the Responsive phase as it is currently presented.

Furthermore there is a significant amount of assumed knowledge on behalf of the teacher to be able to know who is a pre-intentional learner and how the subsequent fundamental learning they require can be identified and delivered. Pre-intentional students require access to this curriculum.

Within this stage, the English phase level descriptions place an emphasis on literary and written texts. Feedback suggests that greater emphasis needs to be placed on the Language strand and on spoken texts in all phases.

Way forward

- Rewrite the Responsive phase to address the learning of pre-intentional students.
- Consider the inclusion of a fifth phase prior to the Responsive phase that describes the behaviour of pre-intentional students.
- Clarify the meaning of terms such as *respond* and *react* to be inclusive of pre-intentional students.

5.2 The relationship of content to phases

Queensland educators outline that there are some clear links between the Foundation content and the phases, particularly the Exploratory, Active and Purposeful phases. However, inconsistencies within and across the phases of the draft curriculum are apparent. At times there is a considerable increase in expectation across the phases. Further inconsistency occurs as some content descriptions do not build logically, e.g. a prior phase may demand higher expectation or level of engagement.

The four phases in the Mathematics curriculum are organised by the strands and sub-strands of the Foundation curriculum. It does not include every proficiency strand in the four phases, acknowledging the different rates at which students with disability develop.

Conversely, the four phases in the English curriculum are organised by the strands and sub-strands used in the F–10 Australian Curriculum. In this structure there are content descriptions for all sub-strands across all four phases. In English, this has led to an unnecessary restatement of content to address all sub-strands. For example, the Responsive phase contains 34 content descriptions that address 13 sub-strands. The English curriculum appears to focus less on the development of students with intellectual disability by using the entire F–10 Australian Curriculum organisation.

Way forward

- Review the content descriptions for consistency of expectation and appropriateness of level.
- Narrow the content descriptions and remove sub-strands if inappropriate to the phase level.
- Provide advice that clearly highlights the flexibility of the curriculum within the current progression framework and the F–10 Australian Curriculum.

5.3 Elaborations

ACARA provides elaborations to illustrate and exemplify content. Queensland educators are concerned that some elaborations are teaching strategies rather than clarification of the content descriptions. Educators are concerned that the current presentation of the elaborations will potentially influence teachers to adopt behavioural approaches to teaching in order to respond to the elaborations as they are currently written. Feedback also indicated that some elaborations do not align to the content description and at times provide inappropriate examples. In addition, some elaborations have higher levels of understanding than the content descriptions imply, e.g. the content description *Copy their name and recognise some of the letters within their name* has the elaboration, *Identifying the letters of the alphabet*.

Way forward

- Review the elaborations to ensure they clarify the content descriptions.

5.4 *Student age-range within the phases*

Acknowledging that the draft Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation describes content and not pedagogy, it remains important for the curriculum overview to address the need for content and its presentation to be appropriate for the student's age. This is particularly important in the Queensland context where the age-range can cover thirteen years of schooling.

Way forward

- Include a statement in the overview addressing the age-appropriate contextualising of the curriculum.

6. The inclusion and use of achievement standards

6.1 *The inclusion of achievement standards*

The draft Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation includes achievement standards for each of the four phases that describe what students are typically able to understand and do. Queensland educators have questioned the inclusion of achievement standards for students with disability. When the achievement standard is written for each phase it implies that students may attain the elements described in each phase. However, the focus of this curriculum is on students with significant intellectual disability who are likely to remain in a phase for extended periods of time or have elements from various phases in either a progressive or regressive pattern. The inclusion of an achievement standard at each phase does not assist teachers to clarify the progress of student learning.

Way forward

- Remove achievement standards or clarify their purpose in this curriculum.

6.2 *The use of the achievement standards*

Queensland educators felt that the achievement standards were too general to be able to capture all that a student had learnt from a level and that at times there was an increase in demand from the content descriptions to the achievement standard. In addition, they were unsure how to use these achievement standards. Most students with significant intellectual impairment do not demonstrate all the content descriptions at one level prior to moving on to the next. Instead, they demonstrate content descriptions from various strands and sub-strands in a non-linear manner. It is unlikely that such an overarching standard would be used to describe student learning, to report to parents/carers or be used in student profiles. Feedback also suggested a preference for a monitoring tool outlining what students know and can do rather than an overall statement of the achievement standard.

Way forward

- Remove the achievement standards or clarify their intended use in the curriculum.
- Develop a monitoring tool.

7. Inconsistent style and use of terms and language

The draft Australian Curriculum for students with disability progressing to Foundation has a number of inconsistencies which detract from the clarity of the document. The document should be reviewed for inconsistencies in relation to style and use of terms and language.

The inconsistencies include:

- using different terms for the four phases in the English phase level description — the document uses Responsive, Exploratory, Purposeful and Independent instead of Responsive, Exploratory, Active and Purposeful
- using Foundation content descriptions that do not include elaborations as a reference point
- using terms with both generalised meaning and meaning specific to students with disability, e.g. does the term *communication* include Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)?
- repeating elaborations
- incorrectly using *rhyme* for *rime*
- including incomplete sentences in the content descriptions.

Way forward

- Include terminology appropriate to students with disability.
- Include a glossary of terms to provide definitions of the terminology used in the curriculum and those specific to students with disability.
- Provide elaborations for the Foundation level reference point.
- Revisit documents to address inconsistencies and editorial issues.

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