

# General capabilities: A starting point

Advice on implementing the Australian Curriculum

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

## Introduction

The Australian Curriculum aims to fulfil the goal of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008) to develop students who are successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.

The general capabilities are essential 21st century skills that, together with the curriculum content of each learning area and the cross-curriculum priorities, form part of the Australian Curriculum's three-dimensional curriculum design. The implementation of the Australian Curriculum in Queensland schools from 2012 is an opportunity to plan for effective inclusion of the general capabilities in teaching and learning programs.

Effective inclusion of the general capabilities requires support at a strategic level within the school. Whole school strategic planning to support inclusion of the general capabilities may take the form of:

- support from school leaders to develop a whole school, shared understanding of the general capabilities
- planning for teaching, learning, assessment and reporting by deepening teachers' content knowledge and refining their understandings of the skills, behaviours and dispositions required by the general capabilities.

The general capabilities are being revised so that they all have similar junctures. This work is scheduled for completion at the end of 2012.

The following advice offers broad suggestions for:

- a school review to determine how well the general capabilities are included
- approaches for how to include the general capabilities in teaching and learning programs.

## General capabilities

The Australian Curriculum has seven general capabilities. The seven capabilities are divided into two groups. One group focuses on capabilities that support students to be successful learners, while the other group focuses on capabilities that develop ways of being, behaving and learning to live with others.

The general capabilities are support materials, and have been embedded by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in the learning area content descriptions. For each general capability, ACARA has provided:








- an introduction describing the nature and scope of the capability
- organising elements
- a learning continuum that describes the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions students develop at particular stages of schooling.

The Literacy and Numeracy continua are organised into five stages, describing student learning at the end of Years 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10. Continua for the other five capabilities are currently organised into three stages, describing student learning at the end of Years 2, 6 and 10, to approximate the end of early childhood, primary, and junior secondary years in most states and territories.

ACARA is undertaking further work during 2012 to refine the general capabilities continua to include other year levels. While this work is in development, the current junctures provide schools with a good starting point for working with the general capabilities.

Table 1 shows the conceptual and Year level divisions of the general capabilities.

**Table 1: General capabilities**

<b>Group 1: Supporting students to become successful learners</b>	<b>Stages: by end of</b>
Literacy 	Years 2, 4, 6, 8, 10
Numeracy 	Years 2, 4, 6, 8, 10
Information and communication technology (ICT) capability 	Years 2, 6, 10
Critical and creative thinking 	Years 2, 6, 10
<b>Group 2: Developing ways of being, behaving and learning to live with others</b>	
Personal and social capability 	Years 2, 6, 10
Ethical behaviour 	Years 2, 6, 10
Intercultural understanding 	Years 2, 6, 10

## Strategic review: Providing focus and expert support systems

The following suggestions provide schools with a framework to assist in a review of the school's current position in relation to the general capabilities. This process is designed to support schools to begin effectively including the general capabilities in school programs.

### Reflecting on our vision and structure

- What approach to the general capabilities is suited to our school?
- What are the valued and prioritised features of our school culture?
- What is our school's shared vision for the general capabilities?
- What are the systemic priorities that impact on our school's decisions in relation to the general capabilities?
- What are our school's goals and expectations for including the general capabilities?
- How will the goals and expectations be collaborated on and shared with staff?

## Reflecting on our current position

- What existing programs or frameworks do we have that will support the general capabilities?
- What does our school do well in existing programs or frameworks?
- What are the areas we need to strengthen or modify?

## Reflecting on our planning

- How will our goals and expectations for including the general capabilities fit with other school initiatives and priorities?
- How will the general capabilities be integrated into teaching and learning?
- What consideration will be given to the general capabilities in relation to the way our school provides for assessment and feedback?
- What assumptions are made about students' backgrounds, cultures and prior knowledge that may have an impact on the general capabilities?
- What knowledge and skills will students require to engage in new learning experiences related to the general capabilities?

## Reflecting on our resources

- What are the implications for resource selection and allocation when including the general capabilities in school programs?
- What does our school currently have, and what needs to be considered, for effective implementation and inclusion of the general capabilities?
- What is the capacity of our staff to effectively develop the knowledge and skills of the general capabilities with students? Areas for consideration might include community and staff expertise, recruitment, and professional development and training
- How will we create a supportive school environment for the inclusion of the general capabilities?

# Teaching and learning review: Providing for professional learning

The following suggestions assist in planning for teaching and learning by deepening teachers content knowledge and refining their understandings of the skills, behaviours and dispositions required in the general capabilities

## Reflecting on our awareness of the general capabilities

- How aware of the general capabilities are our school's teaching and learning community?
- What understanding do they have of the general capabilities in relation to:
  - nature and scope
  - place in the learning area
  - evidence base
  - organising elements
  - learning continuum?
- What are the strengths, weaknesses and priorities for development in this area?

## Reflecting on our current content knowledge

- What is the current level of content knowledge about each of the general capabilities?
- What knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions are required at particular stages of schooling?
- What curriculum planning processes will assist in effectively including the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions of the general capabilities in our teaching and learning programs?

## Reflecting on our professional learning

- What are our school's needs for professional learning? Schools should consider a range of formal, collegial and informal opportunities.
- What role will school leaders play in promoting, participating in and leading professional learning and development for our school?
- What role will teacher professional learning communities, mentors and coaches play in providing depth of knowledge and refining skills needed by our staff?
- What level of other expert professional development will be required by our staff?
- Where will we access professional development opportunities outside the scope of our school?

# Approaches for implementing the general capabilities

The general capabilities encompass knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that are embedded across the whole curriculum. The intent of the general capabilities is conveyed within each Australian Curriculum learning area and in each capability's overview and learning continuum. Schools and teachers draw on all of these elements to plan teaching, learning and assessment that provide opportunities for students to work with the general capabilities.

The following approaches offer ways to include the general capabilities in school programs. Schools might select one or combinations of the approaches to best suit their students, community and school.

## Approach 1: Embedded general capabilities

The Australian Curriculum identifies, using icons, where the general capabilities have a natural fit within the content descriptions in each learning area. Schools and teachers could follow this principle of "natural fit" to plan teaching, learning and assessment to elaborate on the general capabilities in tagged and non-tagged areas of the curriculum.

In an embedded general capabilities approach, teachers and school leaders require deep understanding of the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions of each general capability in order to identify opportunities in the teaching and learning program. This approach means that the general capabilities are not assessed and reported on separately.

## Approach 2: Focused general capabilities

Schools select particular or grouped general capabilities (see Table 1) as focus areas across the whole school, stages/phases, or year levels while the remaining general capabilities are embedded and provided for by teachers' professional decision making.

Examples of a focused general capabilities approach could include:

- a whole school focus on one, some or all of the Group 1 general capabilities that support students as successful learners. The focus is explicitly planned for and is foregrounded in the curriculum
- a whole school focus on one, some or all of the Group 2 general capabilities that develop ways of being, behaving and learning to live with others. The focus is explicitly planned for and is foregrounded in the curriculum
- a whole school, stage/phase, or year level focus on particular general capabilities. The focus is explicitly planned for and is foregrounded in the curriculum. For example, a stage focus in a primary school could plan for a focus on:
  - Literacy, Numeracy, and Personal and social capability across P–2
  - ICT capability and Intercultural understanding in Years 3 and 4
  - Critical and creative thinking and Ethical behaviour across Years 5–7.

In a focused general capabilities approach, teachers and school leaders require deep understanding of the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions of each general capability and particular capabilities identified for focus in planned teaching and learning experiences. In this approach, schools decide how to assess and report on the general capabilities.

## Approach 3: Framing school culture with the general capabilities

Schools have an opportunity to align the general capabilities with existing programs that frame the school's curriculum and/or school culture. They also have an opportunity to introduce new programs that directly incorporate the general capabilities as a framework for curriculum or school culture. Schools might consider how professional learning communities, school events, timetabling and planning processes may be used to enhance this approach.

Examples of a framing school culture with the general capabilities approach include:

- social and emotional programs
- welfare programs
- spiritual programs
- cultural programs
- civic programs
- excellence programs
- arts programs.

In a framing school culture with the general capabilities approach, the remaining general capabilities are embedded and provided for by teachers' professional decision making. Teachers will require deep understanding of knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions of all the general capabilities and a comprehensive understanding of the capabilities closely connected to the program. In this approach, schools decide how to assess and report on the general capabilities.

## More information

For more information, please:

- email the Australian Curriculum Branch at [australiancurriculum@qsa.qld.edu.au](mailto:australiancurriculum@qsa.qld.edu.au)
- phone (07) 3864 0462
- visit the QSA website <[www.qsa.qld.edu.au](http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au)> and search for "General capabilities".