NSW Response to the Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education

Introduction
The Board of Studies NSW is working with the education sectors and teachers in NSW to support ACARA in the development of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education and to provide input and feedback on the development of this curriculum. This report is the NSW response to ACARA regarding the Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education.

The Board of Studies NSW’s consultation included:
• teacher (K–12) focus groups conducted in metropolitan and regional areas
• a Health and Physical Education Reference Group of academics, professional associations, systems and sector representatives, and specialist teachers of PDHPE
• an online survey on the Board of Studies website
• written submissions from the Association of Independent Schools NSW and Catholic Education Commission NSW.

Summary of Key Issues
Feedback gathered through the Board’s consultation indicated the Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education generally provides a sound basis for developing the Australian curriculum for health and physical education. Nonetheless, a number of important concerns emerged through consultations.

The following key issues were raised:

• Sequential and developmental learning in the scope and sequence
Feedback indicated the proposed learning descriptions in the scope and sequence lack developmental rigour and clarity. It was recommended that the statements in the scope and sequence reflect a more developmental and sequential flow. As students engage with the content across the bands, higher order learning, complexity of concepts and skill development in both strands need to be apparent.

• Current and emerging key health concepts
If current and emerging health concepts are to be identified in the relevant sections of the draft shape paper, they should be consistently represented across the bands of learning. The draft shape paper lacks consistent detail in regard to how content is described, making a
logical progression in learning difficult to track. It is acknowledged that further content detail will be provided at the next stage of curriculum development.

• Protective behaviours and road safety
In avoiding the emphasis on risk factors and groups at risk, the draft shape paper jeopardises opportunities for students to develop strategies to minimise risk and harm in different situations and environments. There was a common view presented regarding the lack of direct reference to the concept of safety in a variety of contexts. In the main, concern was expressed in relation to protective behaviours and road safety. To a lesser degree water safety was also identified.

It was recommended by education stakeholders in NSW that the term ‘health, safety and wellbeing’ be used in place of ‘health and wellbeing’ throughout the draft shape paper.

• Balance of the content strands
The imbalance of the two content strands with a heavier weighting towards the personal, social and community health strand was raised by teachers and stakeholders. It was felt that this presents a risk of devaluing movement and physical activity knowledge, understanding and skills.

• Representation of movement and physical activity
The draft shape paper scope and sequence was considered to lack appropriate reference to the teaching of movement skills and sequential movement skill development. It was recommended that the movement and physical activity statements be enhanced through increased rigour and include higher order skills. Explicit reference to fundamental movement skills, with progressive skill development and increasing complexity throughout the scope and sequence statements was recommended.

• Consideration of the diverse learning needs of students
The capacity of the draft shape paper to be translated into curriculum that is inclusive of all students was questioned. In particular, the lack of inclusive language was a concern.

• Proposed course structure
The course structure of two strands and the development of content for Foundation followed by two-year bands were supported. The response to the proposal for two separate courses in the senior secondary curriculum received a mixed reaction. The opportunity to specialise was supported; however there was also a rationale for a third integrated senior secondary health and physical education course.

Specific comments relating to sections of the draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education

• Introduction (para 4 – para 8)
Cultural and linguistic diversity is a defining characteristic of Australia and a feature of most schools and includes migrants and children of migrants as well as Indigenous students. To some extent, the draft shape paper acknowledges the diverse nature of learners and classrooms including reference to cultural diversity. However, further work is required to ensure the diversity of learners is more fully and consistently reflected and that the relationship between the learner and the curriculum is evident.
It was suggested that the draft shape paper should acknowledge the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of Australian learners in the Introduction section. This will provide direction for curriculum writers to build on experiences, abilities, interests and knowledge that students from all backgrounds bring to learning in health and physical education. It was also recommended that ‘ethnic and ethnicity’ (paragraph 7) be replaced by ‘cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds’ and that this be used throughout the paper.

It was recommended that an explicit reference to ‘safety’ be made in the Introduction (paragraph 4), for example ‘to adopt lifelong healthy, safe and active living.’

The notion that students can develop ‘physical fitness in movement skills’ (paragraph 6) was challenged. Further references throughout the document suggest that students will increase levels of competence and confidence which was deemed more appropriate.

• Nature of the Health and Physical Education learning area (para 9 – para 21)
(a) The intention of the strengths-based approach was supported in principle. However, it was felt that this approach was not reflected consistently throughout the draft shape paper. It was also noted that the proposition of a strength-based approach assumes the predominance of strengths and resilience in all young people. The availability of current research to support a strengths-based approach and the theoretical underpinning of such an approach was raised.

(b) The focus on the educative outcomes also received in-principle support. It was agreed that the curriculum is not the ‘fix all’ however it was recommended that the valuable role of the parent/carers and the broader school community in ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of children and young people be recognised.

In any school there are young people experiencing poor wellbeing and/or who are vulnerable to risks to their health, safety, welfare and wellbeing. At these times they may need to seek the help or support of others to be safe and well. A reference to the importance of seeking help and being supported by others in order to be safe and well was suggested.

(c) The inclusion of health literacy received support from a range of consultation sources. Many noted that this is currently represented in the NSW curriculum and is highly valued and important learning for all students.

(d) The phrase ‘value learning in, about and through movement’ raised some comments as it is not clear how a curriculum would demonstrate this in the affective domain. Amending the statement to ‘Promote learning in, about and through movement’ was suggested.

(e) While the inquiry-based approach was supported, the reference to students learning to ‘question the social, cultural and political factors that influence health and wellbeing’ was perceived to be inappropriate. Students should be challenged to develop higher-order thinking skills such as the ability to evaluate, assess and analyse influences in a variety of health and movement contexts.

• Inclusive practices in health and physical education (para 22 – para 24)
There was a general consensus that the draft shape paper acknowledges the need for the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education to provide for the diverse range of students. However, it was felt that the paper could be clearer on how the curriculum will
recognise diversity and provide flexibility to support teachers in their planning of programs that build on each student’s strengths and abilities ( paragraphs 22–23).

Students learning English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EAL/D) represent a significant and growing percentage of learners in Australian schools. In this section no reference is made to EAL/D students and their learning needs.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in NSW are diverse in many ways, but are connected through their Aboriginality and identity. These students may use a variety of traditional languages and non-standard dialects of English as their main or home language. It was recommended that the draft shape paper recognise and acknowledge the diversity of backgrounds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from both urban and rural settings, and the diverse needs of these students.

- **Importance of a healthy school environment (para 25)**
  Consultation feedback was mixed in relation to the inclusion of this section. Some indicated support for this statement but felt the term ‘health-promoting school’ may be more appropriate as it is the term used in the World Health Organisation framework. However there was a view expressed that this was not a specific curriculum matter but rather a broader whole-school concept and as such should not be included.

- **Aims of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (para 26 – para 27)**
  While the intent of the aims was generally supported, further refinement was recommended. The aims were considered by some as too wordy and lacking clarity. This view was more common among K-6 teachers.

  It was suggested that the first aim be divided into two separate aims. For example:

  1. Learn to individually and collaboratively access, evaluate and synthesise information to enhance and advocate for their own and others’ health, safety and wellbeing.
  2. Make decisions, seek help and take actions to protect, enhance and advocate for their own and others’ health, safety and wellbeing.

  Consultation feedback indicated that the aims lack balance between developing knowledge, understanding and skills expected in the health domain and the physical education domain. It was also felt that the aims were not consistent in aspiration and demonstrate low-order expectations of students in relation to movement and physical activity. This low expectation is carried through to the scope and sequence.

  A further concern raised was that the fourth aim relating to physical activity and sport could potentially be achieved without active participation.

  A suggested revised aim is: ‘Understand and appreciate the significance of lifelong physical activity to personal, social, cultural and health practices and outcomes through participating in a range of movement based activities’.

  It was recommended that the aims be more clearly reflected throughout both strands of the draft shape paper. For example, the aims include the statement that students ‘…seek help and take actions to protect, enhance and advocate for their own and others’ health and wellbeing’. However there are limited clear or consistent references to this in the paper.
• Structure of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (para 28 – para 37)
The two proposed integrated strands and the recommendation to teach both strands in each year were strongly supported. There was an imbalance noted between the two strands across the draft shape paper and a lack of explicit integration. The learning descriptions are weighted towards the personal, social and community health strand. It would be beneficial to establish clearer links between the two strands and reassess the emphasis given to each in the scope and sequence learning descriptions.

The description of the personal, social and community health strand could be enhanced by more clearly distinguishing between personal health management and social and community empowerment. This could be achieved by giving greater emphasis to the skills required for advocacy and what is required to affect change on a broader scale.

Within the movement and physical activity strand, further emphasis is required on participation in physical activity. The explicit development of fundamental movement skills as the basis for more specialised movement skills and for movement competence and confidence in physical activity requires strengthening.

It was recommended that the movement and physical activity strand description be refined to more closely reflect the aims. For example, paragraph 35 could incorporate ‘selecting, acquiring, developing, applying, evaluating and appraising the skills, concepts and strategic awareness required for physical activity participation and enhanced performance’.

• Organisation of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (para 38 – para 44)
The organisation of the curriculum into the seven bands of learning was strongly supported, including the separation of the Foundation year. There was some concern regarding the notional time allocation of 80 hours for the crowded primary curriculum, particularly Foundation to Year 2 where emphasis is on the development of fundamental skills in literacy and numeracy.

The proposed development of two subjects in the senior secondary curriculum generated mixed reactions. The positive outcome was the opportunity for students to specialise and participate in more in-depth learning of either health or movement and performance, or both. Concerns raised included the assessment of the movement and performance course, and the impact on curriculum offerings in smaller schools.

The proposal for senior secondary curriculum poses a risk to the current NSW structure of an integrated health and physical education subject. The draft shape paper endorses the value of the integration of the dimensions of the health and physical education learning area in Foundation to Year 10. This justifies the need for an integrated model of study for senior secondary students. The integrated approach to the health and physical education curriculum offers a well-rounded approach and lends itself to many of the tertiary courses and employment opportunities available.

• Scope and sequence of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (para 45 – para 104)
There was a common view presented through consultation that the scope and sequence lacks appropriate sequencing and development in the context of the key health issues. Specific health issues are identified in early and late bands (eg Years 1–2, paragraph 62 and Years 9–10, paragraph 96), however it is difficult to track the development of knowledge,
understanding and skills in relation to these across the subsequent bands. Explicit examples of health issues are identified in some years, yet general descriptions and non-specific language are used in others.

It was suggested that the scope and sequence is wordy and repetitive, which in some instances adds to the difficulty of tracking the sequential development of concepts across the bands. It was recommended that the repeated reference to the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education be removed or at least reduced to enhance readability.

The absence of key content at the various stages of development was raised. While some specific examples are included, others considered important are not identified. The content area which drew the most comment from teachers and key stakeholders in NSW was the limited reference to road safety and protective behaviours.

In the movement and physical activity area consultation feedback questioned the absence of an explicit reference to fundamental movement skills. Movement skill development should be reflected in the scope and sequence learning descriptions with increasing complexity. The lack of a consistent representation of aquatics was also of concern considering the access that children have to water environments in Australia.

With regard to balance, the personal, social and community health strand was considered more detailed and prescriptive in comparison to the movement and physical activity strand.

The language used throughout each of the bands of learning could be amended to enhance consistency and better demonstrate a sequential development of knowledge and skills. In some areas the language implies prior learning which is not clearly apparent in the scope and sequence. For example, the use of the words ‘critically reflect’ in Years 7–8 (paragraph 82) is inconsistent with the application required by students in the preceding and following bands. It was recommended that the scope and sequence learning descriptions move from knowledge and comprehension in the early years to greater application and analysis in the middle years and then increasing opportunities for synthesis and evaluation in the later years of secondary schooling.

Understanding that the development of specific content by ACARA is yet to occur, there was an expectation amongst teachers that the ‘scope and sequence’ would identify the current and emerging content to be addressed in each band of learning and the inconsistency in this regard remains problematic.

• **General Capabilities and Health and Physical Education (para 105 – para 125)**

The integration of the general capabilities was supported providing that it is meaningful and enhances learning about key concepts, and does not result in an overcrowding of the health and physical education curriculum.

**Literacy**

While the teaching of specific terminology and the understanding of the language of movement (paragraph 108) are supported, the increasingly complex and sophisticated subject-specific language and literacy demands of the upper primary and secondary curriculum could be more easily identifiable.

It was recommended to amend the third sentence in paragraph 107 to ‘Students learn to comprehend, respond to and compose texts…’ to reflect that, through health and physical education, students learn to respond at a critical and sophisticated level.
Numeracy
Numeracy skills apply to both of the proposed strands in health and physical education. Emphasis is given to the concept, health literacy, in the paper. Health numeracy skills are also an accepted concept concerned with the qualitative aspect of health information and referenced by the World Health Organisation. Strong numeracy skills will assist students to become critical consumers capable of accessing and evaluating information and services.

The following suggested text would strengthen the description of numeracy in the draft shape paper and complement the literacy statement:

‘Numeracy assists students in becoming critical consumers able to access, interpret, analyse, challenge and evaluate the ever-expanding and changing knowledge base in the health and physical education field. Students learn to comprehend data, digital information and text related to health and physical education.’ (Paragraph 111)

Critical and creative thinking
It was raised as a concern that the movement of ‘dance’ is first referred to within this capability yet is not clearly identified in earlier sections.

Personal and social capability
Health and physical education is uniquely placed as a learning area that is able to identify many of the skills within the personal and social capability learning continuum. The capability should have a broader relevance than just to young people who have a degree of control over themselves and their world. It should acknowledge the life experiences of many young people that have been ‘challenging’ to the extent that they have not been able to manage them ‘constructively’. Account should be taken for practices that can help young people regain health, safety and wellbeing when they have been vulnerable or exposed to risks.

Ethical behaviour
The opportunities for health and physical education to advance ethical behaviour are well identified in the draft shape paper. The addition of key text would strengthen the crucial role health and physical education plays in cultivating ethical behaviour. References to ethical behaviour should be woven through the curriculum from Foundation to Year 10 in an age-appropriate way, touching on the elements of understanding concepts, reflecting on personal ethics and exploring values, rights and ethical principles.

Intercultural understanding
The general capability of intercultural understanding was strongly endorsed. It reflects the need for a renewed emphasis on developing intercultural understanding internationally and within a culturally and linguistically diverse Australian context. The nature of the health and physical education curriculum area provides opportunities to develop shared responsibility for healthy, cohesive societies.

The capability statement is clearly articulated with a focus on understanding the complexities of one’s own and others’ cultures, particularly in relation to self. It promotes engagement with people of diverse cultures in ways that recognise differences, create connections and cultivate respect between people. The statement could be further enhanced through a focus on
exploring and countering attitudes and values that underpin racism and prejudice, and manifest as discriminatory and racist behaviour.

- **Cross-curriculum priorities in the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education (para 126 – para 136)**
The authentic integration of cross-curriculum priorities in health and physical education was supported through consultation. There were concerns regarding the lack of opportunities or examples demonstrated in the current scope and sequence.

**Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia**
It was noted that the use of the word ‘power’ in paragraph 130 may be viewed as controversial. The following text is suggested for consideration:

> ‘This priority provides a regional context for learning in all areas of the curriculum. It reflects Australia’s extensive engagement with Asia in social, cultural, political and economic spheres. Many Asian nations are growing rapidly and are regionally and globally influential. An understanding of Asia underpins the capacity of Australian students to be active and informed citizens, working together to build harmonious local, regional and global communities’.

It was considered beneficial to include text that describes how movement and physical activity in Australian society has been influenced by the culture and beliefs of Asian peoples.

- **Glossary (para 137 – para 154)**
The glossary definition of ‘wellbeing’ (paragraph 4) should be broadened to include an education, school or student focus. The spiritual dimension should also be acknowledged.

Various terms are used throughout the draft shape paper that require a high level of specialist knowledge. Some felt that this detracted from the draft shape paper’s readability.

It was recommended that the glossary be broadened to incorporate terms that are used throughout the draft shape paper that require specialist health and physical education knowledge. It was suggested that the National Safe Schools Framework may be an appropriate source for some of these definitions.