NSW Response

Draft Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education Foundation to Year 10

Introduction

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is managing the development of the Australian curriculum. ACARA released the draft *Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education Foundation to Year 10* in December 2012 for consultation until 12 April 2013.

The Board of Studies NSW is working with the education sectors in NSW to support ACARA in this initiative and to provide input and feedback on the development of the curriculum. This report is the NSW response to ACARA regarding the draft *Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education Foundation to Year 10*.

The Board of Studies NSW consultation included:

- teacher (K–12) consultation meetings conducted at:
  - Coffs Harbour on 21 February 2013
  - Ashfield on 26 February 2013
  - Hornsby on 5 March 2013
  - Kotara on 21 March 2013
- a Health and Physical Education reference group of academics, professional associations, system and sector representatives and specialist teachers of PDHPE was conducted on 4 April 2013
- an online survey on the Board of Studies website which was available until 12 April 2013
- written submissions from the Catholic Education Commission NSW and Sydney Catholic Education Office.

Summary of key points

The Board’s consultation meetings, online survey and key stakeholder reference group indicated that that many aspects of the draft *Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education Foundation to Year 10* are supported. Consultation highlighted some key issues that require further review and these are outlined below.
Organisation and content structure

The draft curriculum proposes two content strands, *Personal, social and community health* and *Movement and physical activity* under which six key ideas are included to provide a guiding framework. The purpose of these key ideas as an organising structure and guiding framework within an integrated curriculum is not clear and requires further explanation.

The division of content descriptions into these key ideas risks the separation of content, which is intended to be integrated for both content strands. Teachers may teach key ideas and content descriptions in isolation, reducing the quality and relevance of the learning for students.

The draft curriculum identifies three principles of a strengths-based curriculum. As the key ideas reflect these principles, they may be unnecessary. It may be that the purpose, intention and useability of the curriculum would remain the same if the key ideas were removed and the principles promoted as statements on which to build student learning experiences. It is recommended that consideration be given to the removal of the key ideas as organisers to simplify the structure of the curriculum, or more clearly define their purpose.

It would also be valuable to include a diagram to demonstrate the interrelationship between the organisational components of the draft curriculum. Central to this diagram should be the skills that are critical for effective learning in health and physical education and which assist students to adopt a healthy, safe, active and fulfilling life. These skills were clearly identified in the ACARA’s *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education* (page 11).

Content descriptions and the health and movement contexts for learning

The intention to provide flexibility for education jurisdictions and schools to determine the health and movement contexts at a local level is supported and will increase the likelihood of more meaningful and relevant learning for students. The NSW syllabus development process will utilise this flexibility in order to clarify for schools the essential learning for NSW students. However, from a national perspective the current model regarding the contexts for learning may:

- lead to essential learning being bypassed or unintentionally missed
- jeopardise the continuum of learning in each key context across the bands
- impact on planning as it may be difficult to acknowledge prior learning
- lessen national consistency in health and physical education.

It is recommended that the contexts for learning remain separate from the content descriptions as this provides flexibility to cater for the diversity of schools and students. However, stronger evidence-based guidance on what is age-appropriate learning for each relevant context across the bands would be beneficial. This may be provided through the band descriptions or a scope and sequence style table for each of the contexts for learning.

The draft curriculum must also acknowledge the diversity of schools and the potential for differing moral views and values. The content descriptions need to be developed with the flexibility for schools in the non-government sector to address issues in a manner reflective of their ethos and specific community needs. In addition, it was noted that greater prominence should be given to the role of religious traditions, families and parents in ethical formation and as a source of values and knowledge to support children and young people to make healthy and safe choices.

Number of content descriptions

There is concern regarding the amount of content presented in the draft *Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education Foundation to Year 10*. While this is difficult to
assess due to the flexibility provided by the overlay of the contexts for learning on the content descriptions, it is felt that there is potentially a significant amount to cover.

The inclusion of more content descriptions in the later bands of learning is also questioned. This has the potential to impact on opportunity for students in the later years of schooling to explore issues in depth. The content descriptions in the later bands also contain the higher order learning expected of these students (eg analyse) and the band descriptions identify more contexts for learning. These further compound the potential for an overcrowded curriculum.

It is strongly recommended that the content descriptions be reduced and amalgamated where appropriate.

**Accessibility and consistency of language**

The draft curriculum uses and interchanges various specialised terms synonymous with the health and physical education context including *movement concepts, complicated patterns* and *elements of effort, space, objects and people*.

Specialist health and physical education teachers would recognise this terminology and be able to effectively translate this into teaching programs and quality learning experiences for students. However, the more specialised terminology may be a barrier for generalist teachers in primary school settings. The language used within the curriculum must be accessible for all teachers.

In addition, some content descriptions are verbose and require refinement to clarify the focus. It is recommended that where possible, the language used throughout the draft curriculum be simplified.

Where relevant, it would also be beneficial to use terms and phrases consistently (eg *healthy relationships* and *positive relationships*) and provide support through the glossary to develop a consistent understanding of more specialised terminology.

**The representation of safety**

It is recommended that the draft curriculum strengthen and present a more consistent coverage of the required knowledge, understanding and skills to promote safe behaviours, especially in relation to child protection and road safety.

The absence of safety from the rationale dismisses the value of safety in the health and physical education curriculum. Although safety links to health and wellbeing, the explicit mention of safety is required to guide all teachers in the essential learning.

To strengthen the value of safety throughout the document the consistent use of the term *health, safety, wellbeing and physical activity participation*, where appropriate, is recommended.

It is also suggested that the three key ideas under the *Personal, social and community health* strand include safety. These would read ‘communication and interacting for health, safety and wellbeing’ and ‘contributing to healthy, safe and active communities’.

In addition, it is recommended that safety be included in the following content descriptions to promote the alignment of the contexts for learning with the content descriptions:

- 3.5 investigate everyday decisions that influence health, safety and wellbeing and plan for healthy, safe and active choices
4.6 examine different types of relationships and develop skills to establish and manage a range of relationships that enhance their health, safety and wellbeing

5.5 evaluate personal, environmental and social factors that can influence decisions people make about their health, safety and wellbeing, and propose and apply strategies to make and implement healthy, active and safe choices

5.6 investigate the nature and benefits of a range of relationships and examine the impact these relationships can have on their own and others’ health, safety and wellbeing

6.2 analyse the implications of behaviours such as prejudice, marginalisation, homophobia, discrimination, harassment and exclusion on the health, safety and wellbeing of the community and propose counter-measures to alleviate this behaviour.

Promoting participation in movement experiences

In some cases the content descriptions in the Movement and physical activity strand should be enhanced to promote participation in physical activity. Content descriptions detailed in the understanding movement key idea in particular need strengthening in this regard.

Challenge and adventure activities and outdoor education

There was some concern raised in regard to the challenge and adventure activities movement context. In the main, this related to the capacity of primary schools and generalist primary teachers to deliver the experiences identified in this context. It is recommended that a broader and more accessible set of examples be included.

The representation of outdoor education in the draft curriculum is supported. The benefits of participation in outdoor education and its valuable role in the education of young people are acknowledged. However, it is also important to recognise the range of factors associated with the implementation of quality outdoor education programs. These include access to facilities, staff expertise and financial constraints.

NSW provides schools with flexibility regarding their approaches to the delivery of outdoor education programs. Schools may choose to implement outdoor education through mandatory or elective courses and also through extracurricular programs. The flexibility provided through the draft curriculum in regard to outdoor education will allow this approach to continue and as such is strongly supported.

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

Analysis of consultation feedback highlighted a range of specific issues relating to each section of the draft curriculum. These issues are outlined below.

Rationale

The rationale is considered lengthy and at times repetitive, particularly paragraph three. The use of the term expertise in movement skills, physical activities and performance may be perceived as reflecting a sense of elitism. Feedback received during consultation demonstrated an inconsistent understanding of expertise.

The use of alternate words would assist to promote lifelong participation in physical activity and more closely replicate the principles of the strengths-based curriculum, and students’ capacity to enhance their own and others’ physical activity performance.
It is suggested that the word *expertise* be amended to *proficiency* to reflect a curriculum focused on enhanced performance and lifelong physical activity participation.

It was also suggested that a reference to the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of Australia be included and linked to the health and physical education curriculum and that there be increased acknowledgement of the spiritual dimension.

**Organisation**

**Contexts for learning – Health contexts**

The *alcohol and drugs* context for learning provides explicit examples of what is appropriate learning for some bands of learning. For example, *safe use of medicines* is identified as the appropriate learning within this context for Foundation and Years 1 and 2. Additionally, *tobacco* is clearly identified as the drug suitable for learning for Years 3 and 4. This specific guidance does not continue in other bands of learning, nor does it transfer to other contexts for learning.

It would be beneficial to replicate this approach for other contexts for learning across the bands as it will provide clearer guidance regarding the specific age-appropriate learning within each context. It may also be valuable to explore the possibility of linking the contexts to relevant content descriptions, but still maintain the flexibility by not embedding them directly into the content description.

The opportunities for exploring the *difference and diversity* content through a strengths-based approach are strong throughout the draft curriculum. It is noted that *difference and diversity* interrelates with contexts outside of the *relationships and sexuality* context. Identifying *difference and diversity* as an example under the *relationships and sexuality* context limits the scope of learning. Consideration should be given to including *difference and diversity* as a stand-alone context for learning to increase the scope and connectedness through integration with other contexts.

The *relationships and sexuality* context for learning should provide opportunities for students to evaluate the influence of expectations on standards of behaviour and learn about appropriately expressing sexual feelings. It is suggested that expanding the suggested content to reflect the age-appropriate development of skills and knowledge in planning and managing positive sexual health would be beneficial. This should also include reference to Blood Borne Viruses (BBVs), such as viral hepatitis and HIV/AIDS. A broader acknowledgement in the draft curriculum of opportunities for teaching blood awareness would be beneficial considering the increased popularity of tattooing and piercing.

Consultation feedback also recommended that the role of the family and parents be strengthened through the advice on selecting health contexts and also greater acknowledgement of the family and parents through the content elaborations.

**Contexts for learning – Movement and physical activity contexts**

The *challenge and adventure activities* context has the potential to be both confronting and inequitable to many teachers, particularly generalist teachers in primary schools. The examples provided are not accessible for all students, nor do they cater for student diversity, including students with a disability.

Consideration should be given to renaming this context *Initiative, challenge and adventure activities* and including examples which are more accessible to all students and teachers. These examples should be listed first, followed by the more adventure-based activities such as rock climbing, canoeing and surfing.
In addition, the role of problem-solving and decision-making skills to promote cooperation and team building should be included within the description of this context.

**Health and Physical Education across Foundation to Year 10**

The inclusion of the *relationships and sexuality* context for learning from Year 5 onwards is inappropriate and has the potential to mislead teachers. The statement appears to be guiding the introduction of explicit teaching about puberty (4.3), which is one aspect in the developmental sequence of sexuality education from Foundation to Year 10. As such, it promotes a very narrow view of this context for learning. Age-appropriate concepts such as the role of power, establishing and managing relationships, protective behaviours and bullying and harassment are important learning for Foundation to Year 10.

In addition, the Foundation band description includes initiating and maintaining healthy relationships in a range of contexts, which suggests a place for the *relationships and sexuality* context for learning in this band.

It is recommended that the explicit mention of Year 5 as the starting band for the *relationships and sexuality* context for learning be reviewed and additional guidance on the age-appropriate learning and suitable content for each band level (similar to the strategy used in the *alcohol and drugs* context for learning) be provided. However, this should continue to allow schools to address issues in a manner reflective of their ethos and specific community needs.
Student diversity

The student diversity statement appropriately reflects the commitment of ACARA to ensure the Australian Curriculum caters for the diverse needs of students across Australia. Many students bring a range of culturally and linguistically influenced experiences and knowledge of health and physical activity to the learning environment.

While the document attempts to describe the diversity of EAL/D learners, the complexity of the diversity of these learners for whom English is an additional language or dialect remains unclear. It is suggested to include a paragraph that focuses on the importance of recognising and building on the experiences and knowledge of students from a language background other than English.

It was suggested that the title be renamed Students learning English as an additional language or dialect to enhance consistency with the other subtitles in this section.

The inference that sexual and gender diversity are issues that students face is inappropriate in an otherwise positive document. Sexual and gender diversity should not be viewed as an issue, but rather an element of diversity within the school community which should be catered for. Schools and communities have a responsibility to take opportunities when implementing the health and physical education curriculum to ensure that teaching is inclusive and relevant to students. It is suggested to rewrite the last sentence in same sex attracted and gender diverse students to remove the reference to diversity as an issue.

Foundation to Year 10 curriculum

Guiding questions

The purpose of the questions to be explored within each band of learning is unclear. These questions do not clearly link to the content descriptions or the achievement standards. There is a risk of teachers programming only around the guiding questions which may reduce the opportunities for integrating content descriptions. It is essential that student learning reflects real life contexts, through integration of contexts for learning and content strands.

It is suggested that further advice explaining how the questions within each band description guide student learning and link with other organising structures within the draft curriculum be provided.

Progression of learning across the bands

The curriculum should show a clear progression of learning across the bands for key concepts. This consistent progression of learning is not always apparent. New concepts are integrated into content descriptions at some bands resulting in the learning progression being disrupted or unclear.

At times the expected learning in one band does not provide the prior knowledge, understanding and skills for progression at further bands. For example, the expected learning of personal and social skills needed to interact with others effectively is not evident within the Foundation band, yet students are expected to practise these skills in Years 1 and 2 (2.6).

A review of the progression of learning across content descriptions is recommended. This should include reviewing the progression of learning from content descriptions 4.7 to 4.8 and also 5.5 to 6.5.
Amount and repetition of content

Consultation feedback indicated teachers have concerns with the potential amount of content to be covered within the draft curriculum. Content descriptions vary in density and weighting of concepts causing concern in regards to the breadth of learning rather than the desirable depth and quality of learning in health and physical education. This is especially the case in the later bands of learning. For example, content description 5.5 is dense in high-level knowledge, understanding and concepts when compared to content description 5.4.

It is recommended that the content descriptions be reduced and amalgamated. In this regard, consideration could be given to incorporating content description 1.9 into 1.7, 2.14 into 2.10 and 3.14 into 3.1. Also, synthesising content descriptions 5.5, 5.7 and 5.9 may reduce content overlap.

Achievement standards

The achievement standards could more effectively reflect a balance between the learning in each content strand. In some cases the achievement standards do not reflect the content descriptions for that band. It is suggested to review the achievement standards to ensure the language used for each band reflects the content descriptions and expected learning.

It is considered that some terms used within the achievement standards present challenges for teachers determining levels of achievement, including the terms reflect and explore. The achievement standards should use terms that demonstrate a clear and objective way of measuring achievement.

General capabilities

Literacy (LIT)

The description of literacy and its significance within the health and physical education curriculum is strongly supported. The emphasis on developing skills that empower students to be critical consumers and to communicate effectively for a variety of purposes and to a range of audiences is welcome.

However, without deep knowledge of language, students cannot become competent in literacy. A focus on teaching specific terminology and the understanding of the language of movement is endorsed. The increasingly complex and sophisticated subject-specific language and literacy demands of the upper primary and secondary curriculum could be made clearer.

The important role of understanding language in the development of literacy competence should be emphasised.

Numeracy (NUM)

Numeracy skills are applicable to both of the proposed strands for Foundation to Year 10 and the description of numeracy under the general capabilities is supported. It provides a well-rounded view of how numeracy can be embedded within the health and physical education curriculum. However, the intent of the description is not consistently reflected within the content of the draft curriculum.

It would be beneficial to link to numeracy skills and understandings from the mathematics curriculum where numeracy has been identified against health and physical education content descriptions. For example:
in the Foundation year, students could use direct and indirect comparisons to compare length of objects and decide which is longer (1.2)

in Years 3 and 4, students could construct displays using lists, tables, picture graphs and simple column graphs, with and without the use of digital technologies (3.15)

in Year 5, students could compare 12 and 24 hour time systems and convert between them

in Year 6, students could interpret and use timetables (4.9).

Critical and creative thinking (CCT)

The description of critical and creative thinking is well supported. The description effectively addresses this general capability though it could be broader to include a reference to applying new ideas and acting on intuition.

The general capability of critical and creative thinking is well marked throughout the online document though further examples could be highlighted.

Ethical behaviour (EB)

The ethical behaviour statement provides a clear framework for learning in the curriculum and the draft curriculum provides a range of opportunities for students to engage with ethical behaviours. It is integral to the achievement of the aims of the health and physical education curriculum and can be found in the content of both strands.

There is an emphasis on the application of ethical behaviour in movement-based learning experiences. Students are asked to demonstrate ethical behaviour such as the application of rules in a range of physical activities. Students should be challenged to also understand the purpose and development of these ethical standards.

The recent decision to change the name of this general capability to ethical behaviour will require a change in emphasis. Providing opportunities for students to develop their understanding of the basis of individual ethical decision-making is an essential aspect of understanding personal health and supports a strengths-based curriculum. Feedback also noted that the influence of religious and cultural factors, and families and parents on ethical behaviour should be strengthened.

Ethical behaviour is first identified in Years 5 and 6. There are many opportunities for the development of ethical understanding in an age-appropriate context in earlier years. Identifying additional opportunities for students to engage with an understanding of ethical decision-making strategies will support the achievement of the curriculum aims.
Glossary

There are various specialised terms used throughout the document which require expertise and high-level understanding of health and physical education contexts, including but not limited to contextual factors, movement concepts, movement strategies, complicated movement patterns. It would support teachers, especially generalist primary teachers, to include within the glossary clear definitions of terms with which they may not be familiar.