

Queensland response to the draft Australian Curriculum materials for students with disability

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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 *Australian Curriculum materials for students with disability* (the draft materials). 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 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, 292 Catholic schools and 188 Independent schools.

A number of the schools who provided feedback participated in the Australian Curriculum, Reporting and Assessment Authority's (ACARA) trialling of the draft materials with teachers of students with disability.

Queensland's consultation identified strengths and issues and concerns for ACARA's consideration when redrafting the *Australian Curriculum materials for students with disability*. This feedback has been organised to reflect the structure of the consultation survey:

- Using the Australian Curriculum to meet the learning needs of students with disability:
Draft advice for teachers
- Draft extended learning continua for the Literacy and Numeracy general capabilities.
- The Personal and social capability continuum, as it is currently published on the Australian Curriculum website
- Examples of teaching and learning activities to meet the learning needs of students with disability in English, Mathematics, Science and History.

It also contains a section on adjustments made to the draft materials during the ACARA trial.

The Queensland response provides:

- general comments addressing the broad strengths and issues and concerns, with suggested ways forward
- specific feedback on each section of the draft materials, with suggested ways forward.

2 Key strengths and issues and concerns

2.1 Strengths

Queensland consultation participants agree that the draft *Australian Curriculum materials for students with disability* show the following strengths.

- The draft materials:
 - are aligned to the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008). They foreground support for all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens
 - respond to the requirements of Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cwlth) developed under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cwlth)
 - provide comprehensive advice that supports schools to implement the *Australian Curriculum for students with disability*
 - emphasise
 - the Australian Curriculum as a curriculum for all students
 - an understanding of curriculum provision for students with disability within the broader context of planning for diverse learners, rather than as a response to disability-specific issues
 - clearly explain how the three dimensions of the Australian Curriculum (the learning areas, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities) provide the flexibility that enables teachers to address the diverse learning needs of all students, particularly students with disability.
- The provision of extended continua emphasises the relevance of the general capabilities of Literacy, Numeracy and Personal and social capability to support teachers in personalising learning for students with disability. In particular, the extended continuum for Literacy has a strong focus on communication, recognising the symbolic nature of communication for many students with disability.
- Consultation participants strongly supported the importance given to the Personal and social capability.
- The teaching and learning examples, although limited, provide further information on how to use the general capabilities learning continua to adjust age-appropriate learning area content.

2.2 Issues and concerns

Consultation participants identified the following issues and concerns for consideration in the redrafting of the *Australian Curriculum materials for students with disability*.

- A clear statement is needed about the range of students with disability for whom the draft materials are designed.
- While using a student's chronological age as the starting point for planning teaching and learning programs with a content focus suits most learners in mainstream settings, it presents greater challenges for teachers planning for students with complex needs in non-mainstream settings.

- Some consultation participants viewed as problematic the identification of a student's chronological age as the starting point for planning teaching and learning programs when planning for students with significant intellectual and multiple impairments.
- Some consultation participants expressed concern that the processes outlined in the draft materials are overly complex and difficult to achieve. For example, in special education settings where curriculum, instructional and environmental adjustments occur on a daily basis, it would not be realistic to consult with the student or parent/carer about all the adjustments needed to individualise student learning daily.
- The position of this curriculum in relation to the Foundation level is unclear.
- The distinction between this curriculum and the learning areas which are linked to chronological age is unclear.
- Use of the terms "reflex responses" or "reflex behaviours" and advice to teachers to "assign meaning to the behaviour" of a student who is functioning at the pre-intentional level is problematic.
- While it is recognised that states and territories are responsible for assessment and reporting, the Australian Curriculum materials for students with disability need to be written in a way that allows states and territories to implement assessment and reporting requirements.

Ways forward

- Revise and enhance the draft materials to clarify their purpose and to provide more details about how these materials can be differentiated and adjusted for students with disabilities that have different types of impairments and, consequently, different learning needs.
- Clarify the full range of students addressed by the materials.
- Provide consistent and aligned statements about student learning across and between the continua that are based on an understanding of early cognitive and communicative pathways.
- Consider removing all:
 - references to "reflex responses" and "reflex behaviours"
 - advice that teachers should ascribe meaning to behaviours that are displayed by learners at the pre-intentional stage of learning.
- Consider writing in a way that allows states and territories to implement assessment and reporting requirements.

3 Section-by-section analysis

3.1 Using the Australian Curriculum to meet the learning needs of students with disability

ACARA seeks clarification and asks if:

- the purpose of the advice materials is clear
- the structure of the advice materials is logical
- the advice materials clearly describe how to use the Australian Curriculum to meet the learning needs of students with disability.

Strengths

Consultation participants identified the following strengths in consultations about the Using the Australian Curriculum to meet the learning needs of students with disability section.

- The purpose of the advice materials is clear, articulates that the Australian Curriculum is a curriculum for all, and aligns with previous curriculum messages.
- A number of consultation participants strongly supported the acknowledgment that, for some students, progress will be assessed in relation to their individual learning goals.
- The structure of the advice materials is logical and clear and the layout is user-friendly.
- The expansion of the general capabilities identifies the core content and associated skills clearly and succinctly and is strongly supported.
- The starting point for the sample materials enables the progression of examples to be contextualised.

Issues and concerns

Consultation participants raised the following issues and concerns in consultations about the Using the Australian Curriculum to meet the learning needs of students with disability section.

- While the draft materials provide comprehensive advice to support schools to implement the *Australian Curriculum for students with disability*, greater acknowledgement of those students with disability who can access curriculum and achievement standards as part of a same-age cohort is needed.
- Some consultation participants viewed as problematic the identification of a student's chronological age as the starting point for planning teaching and learning programs when planning for students with significant intellectual and multiple impairments.
- The diverse needs of learners referred to in the draft materials related to the *Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)* definition of disability is broader than the cohort of students who have a verified impairment within the current Queensland context. While the advice is focused on a student with disability, it could be applied to the full range of students with diverse learning needs.
- A number of consultation participants indicated support for the section on adjustments and found that the process outlined in the flow chart provides clear steps for teachers to meet the learning needs of all students. However, some participants disagreed with this position and expressed concern that the flow chart reinforces a "one size fits all" approach to students with disability.

- The draft materials need to be informed by an understanding that students with disability are a heterogeneous group, both within and across each of the impairment “categories” covered by the DDA definition of disability, requiring a more individualised and specific approach than is acknowledged by the draft materials.
- While the draft materials acknowledge that some students with disability function across the four stages of communication, “what” needs to be taught and “how” these students learn is not valued enough. Advice on modifying a task that was designed for same-aged peers does not foreground the “purpose” of the task for the student with disability.

Ways forward

- Review the materials to reflect the complex nature of using the Australian Curriculum to meet the learning needs of students with disabilities.
- Revise and enhance the advice on using a student’s chronological age as the starting point to ensure that it foregrounds that:
 - using a student’s chronological age as the starting point represents every student’s entitlement across all areas of the curriculum
 - individual levels of learning can be identified along the F–10 sequences of the learning areas
 - the purpose of the extended continua is to support teachers in locating the current level of students with disability who cannot be identified on the F–10 sequences of the learning areas
 - the use of student data should inform decisions about adjustments to curriculum for students with disability.
- Reconsider using chronological age content as the starting point for planning. Replace it by using what the individual student brings to the learning as a starting point for planning.
- Assist teachers in understanding the differentiation of curriculum provision by revising the flow chart and the Adjustments section to:
 - emphasise the links between the flow chart and the Adjustments section
 - include multiple pathways for the diversity of planning requirements
 - provide more differentiation of curriculum adjustments to make it clear how the content is differentiated for students with different learning needs.
- Clarify that learning goals are based upon adjustments to the curriculum and are not a replacement for the curriculum.
- Refine and clarify the meaning of “on the same basis” and provide examples.
- Consider revising the wording:
 - of “shift emphasis” (second box of flow chart on page 4). This is a curriculum for all and teachers can shift along the general capabilities continuum that aligns with the students they have
 - around intentional behaviours (page 14) from “can control behaviour of others” to “can gain the attention of others” and from “other people can be used to obtain something” to “other people can give something”.
- Continue developing examples and learning activities that cover a range of students with disability.

3.2 Draft extended learning continuum for the Literacy general capability

ACARA seeks clarification and asks if:

- the draft extended Literacy continuum describes a progression of skills, knowledge, behaviours and dispositions that is inclusive of students with disability
- the skills, knowledge, behaviours and dispositions described in the draft extended Literacy continuum are detailed enough for use in programming and in the teaching of students with disability.

Strengths

Consultation participants identified the following strengths in consultations about the draft extended learning continuum for the Literacy general capability.

- The draft extended Literacy continuum:
 - acknowledges that students with disability operate across the entire range of the continuum and takes into account students who are at school with literacy levels below entry to the school standards
 - has statements that may be used to assist with the creation of Individual Education Plans (IEP) goals and specific individual planning. The description of communication behaviours and symbols of the four draft extension levels provide a useful guide to assist teachers in their planning. However, not all consultation participants supported this position
 - encourages multiple modes of communication and participation at differing levels of ability.

Issues and concerns

Consultation participants raised the following issues and concerns in consultations about the draft extended learning continuum for the Literacy general capability.

- While the draft extended Literacy continuum clearly describes a progression of skills, knowledge, behaviours and dispositions that are inclusive of students with disability, more detail is needed to ensure that they are inclusive of students with significant intellectual and multiple impairments.
- The draft extended Literacy continuum does not provide enough detail to assist with effective planning and teaching of students with significant intellectual and multiple impairments.
- The distinction between the ability to “use conventional behaviours to communicate intentionally” and the level of literacy and language development is not clear.
- Use of the terms “reflex responses” or “reflex behaviours” and advice to teachers to “assign meaning to the behaviour” of the student who is functioning at the pre-intentional level is problematic.
- The draft extended Literacy continuum does not consider the diversity of chronological ages that is likely to be in a single class.

- Consultation participants raised concerns about using the draft extended Literacy continuum in a special education setting because:
 - not enough consideration is given to the challenging behaviours in a special education setting and the importance of implementing learning experiences that are functional and engaging. Best practice tells us that student disengagement leads to an increase in behaviour escalations
 - a clearer emphasis is needed on developing the fundamental communication skills that are necessary for students with disability to participate in their school and wider community and that takes into account a student’s cognitive ability
 - it modifies the way in which materials and content are presented so that they no longer address individualised learning goals.

Ways forward

- Provide additional detail and examples in all levels to support teachers making adjustments, including examples for students with disability categories other than physical impairment or minimum communication.
- Consider developing further levels of progression, for example an additional level called “progressing through symbolic”; (1a – 1d) text knowledge, grammar knowledge, word knowledge, visual knowledge.
- Consider removing all:
 - references to “reflex responses” and “reflex behaviours”
 - advice that teachers should ascribe meaning to behaviours that are displayed by learners at the pre-intentional stage of learning.
- Clarify distinctions and relationships between conventional modes of communication and literacy development.
- Remove the pedagogical “notes for teachers” from the levels and replace these with more descriptions, indicators or elaborations of students’ literacy behaviours for each of these levels. Revise the pedagogical advice to include all aspects of Rowland’s Communication Matrix as a separate resource for teachers.
- Incorporate examples of learning that are meaningful and engaging and acknowledge the rich social environment of special education settings, e.g. mealtime sessions where students are responding to “natural” interactions that are occurring between their peers and adults — asking questions, using sentences, describing their feelings.
- Ensure the draft extended Literacy continuum shows a progression of skills, knowledge, behaviours and dispositions that is inclusive of all students with disability by including all the stages of the Communication Matrix.
- Include information regarding the use of sign language and Auslan and expand information on Braille.
- Provide draft level 2 descriptions for consultation.
- Review the use of the term “instruction”. Consider replacing it with the term “teaching”.

3.3 Draft extended learning continuum for the Numeracy general capability

ACARA seeks clarification and asks if:

- the draft extended Numeracy continuum describes a progression of skills, knowledge, behaviours and dispositions that is inclusive of students with disability
- the skills, knowledge, behaviours and dispositions described in the draft extended Numeracy continuum are detailed enough for use in programming and in the teaching of students with disability.

Strengths

Consultation participants identified the following strengths in consultations about the draft extended learning continuum for the Numeracy general capability.

- The overviews of each organising element are appropriate and realistic.
- The examples provided in the draft extended Numeracy continuum are a good source for understanding what is required to make adjustments in planning for students with disability, particularly relating to skills in calculating and estimating, and using measurement.

Issues and concerns

Consultation participants raised the following issues and concerns in consultations about the draft extended learning continuum for the Numeracy general capability.

- One additional level in the draft extended Numeracy continuum is not sufficient to cover the breadth of skill development in numeracy before the end of the Foundation level.
- While the draft extended Numeracy continuum clearly describes a progression of skills, knowledge, behaviours and dispositions that are inclusive of students with disability, more detail is needed to ensure that they are inclusive of students with significant intellectual and multiple impairments.
- The six interrelated elements are described in a clear progression of skills and knowledge that apply to students in special education environments. However, some consultation participants expressed concern that some examples given — such as using fractions, interpreting and drawing, and using measurement — are not applicable to the daily lives of students in their particular special education context where catering for future independence is a high priority.

Ways forward

- Consider developing further levels of progression to assist planning for the numeracy development of students with significant intellectual and multiple impairments.
- Revise the progression of skills in the draft extended Numeracy continuum so it clearly states the expectation for students with disability, e.g. “Level 5 (Year 6) Calculating and estimating”.
- Develop further functional examples of learning activities across the draft extended Numeracy continuum that focus on supporting the future independence of students.

3.4 Draft extended Personal and social capability continuum

ACARA seeks clarification and asks if:

- the draft extended Personal and social capability continuum describes a progression of skills, knowledge, behaviours and dispositions that is inclusive of students with disability
- the skills, knowledge, behaviours and dispositions described in the draft extended Personal and social capability continuum are detailed enough for use in programming and in the teaching of students with disability.

Strengths

Consultation participants identified the following strengths in consultations about the draft extended Personal and social capability learning continuum.

- The progression of skills will enhance the development of IEPs as the social–emotional component of learning has an explicit voice within the curriculum.
- The draft extended Personal and social capability continuum:
 - clearly aligns with specific issues for students with disability, particularly students on the autism spectrum
 - is applicable in particular special education settings, providing valuable learning opportunities for students that will help them with their post-school options.

Issues and concerns

Consultation participants raised the following concern in consultations about the draft extended Personal and social capability learning continuum.

- While consultation participants strongly supported the draft extended Personal and social capability continuum, some participants indicated that it does not provide a clear progression of skills and is not sufficiently detailed for use in the effective planning and teaching of students with disability.

Ways forward

- Extend the Personal and social capability continuum in the same way as the Literacy and Numeracy capabilities to ensure the inclusion of students with significant intellectual and multiple impairments.
- Develop juncture points consistent with the other continua. Currently, the draft extended Personal and social capability continuum is beneficial for two-year staged progressions but is unclear on how class teachers will show growth is occurring.
- Provide pre-Foundational advice in addition to Foundational advice.
- Provide draft level 1 descriptions for consultation.
- Provide further examples to assist teachers with designing appropriate learning activities.

3.5 Examples of teaching and learning activities to meet the learning needs of students with disability in English, Mathematics, Science and History

ACARA seeks clarification and asks if the teaching and learning examples clearly illustrate how the general capabilities learning continua can be used to adjust age-appropriate learning area content of the Australian Curriculum to meet the needs of students with disability.

Strengths

Consultation participants identified the following strengths in consultations about the examples of teaching and learning activities.

- Participants strongly supported the development of teaching and learning examples that illustrate how the general capabilities learning continua can be used to adjust the age-appropriate learning area content of the Australian Curriculum to meet the needs of students with disability.
- The examples provided make it clear that the Australian Curriculum can be adjusted for students with a disability and that the general capabilities are an integral part of the curriculum.
- Provision of examples recognises the high level of support students with disabilities need.

Issues and concerns

Consultation participants raised the following issues and concerns in consultations about the examples of teaching and learning activities.

- The limited number of examples of teaching and learning activities does not provide enough range and depth to effectively illustrate to teachers the ways to adjust learning area content to meet the needs of the range of students with disability.
- Consultation participants expressed concern at the amount of time that teachers may require to engage with the documents in order to develop understanding of how to make the necessary adjustments to engage students in learning.
- Not every student requiring adjustments will have a verified disability. Teachers need to document adjustments for any student in their planning and may need professional development to understand these practices.
- Some consultation participants were concerned that, while some surface differentiation is evident within the examples, they are mostly used as a context to develop communication skills rather than as a means of gaining an understanding of the learning area content.
- The level of adjustment made to content at the chronological age makes it difficult to identify the curriculum that remains.
- Students with disabilities do not progress at the same rate as their peers.

Feedback specific to examples from each learning area

English

Comments specific to the English example are summarised below.

- More information is needed to explain that a book is a context in which to develop communication and literacy skills.
- The levels within the continuum and the original stage definitions on page 3 of the example are inconsistent. Considerable difference exists between intentional behaviour and intentional communication.

Mathematics

Comments specific to the Mathematics example are summarised below.

- The example on page 3 is supported as it shows teachers how to use an age-appropriate context with cognitively-appropriate content descriptors for the student.
- The example on page 4 uses an age-appropriate context, but switches to the Numeracy continuum indicators when the content descriptions for Foundation in Mathematics would have been sufficient.
- The use of the social story is supported, although more than one example of a response is needed.
- The significance of the role of Jayden in the example is not made clear.

Science

Comments specific to the Science example are summarised below.

- Page 3 of the Science example focuses on aspects of the Year 2 and Year 4 Literacy continuum and not on the appropriate level of Science understanding.
- Consultation participants expressed concern regarding:
 - assumptions about students who use eye gazing and their ability to understand the cognitive requirements of Science.
 - advice to teachers to ascribe meaning to involuntary action (page 7).

History

Comments specific to the History example are summarised below.

- “Comprehending” appears in all other levels but not in the “d” level. A comprehending text should be included in the 1d example. An example of the scaffolded questions and graphic organisers is also needed.
- Sample 1d does not model good use of widgets as it would be more appropriate for a student to record this information. It may be beneficial for a Year 10 student to use voice technology, however, foregrounding one supplier is a concern.
- The usefulness of the History example is limited — it is a literacy activity within a History context with no History content examined or assessed to determine student learning.
- Reliance on the teacher assigning meaning to student “frowning” is problematic.

Ways forward

- Provide further examples of teaching and learning activities that acknowledge a range and degree of disability.
- Develop the examples further to show a sequence of learning episodes.
- Consider removing all:
 - references to “reflex responses” and “reflex behaviours”
 - advice that teachers should ascribe meaning to behaviours that are displayed by learners.
- Consider using other types of adjustments that are not reliant on visual and symbol orientation and provide more examples in a variety of Year levels for each.
- Clarify the terms “modifications” and “adjustments”.
- Consider revising and trialling the learning area examples to make clear the differentiated learning area content that is to be assessed for all cohorts of students with disability.
- Revise the materials to recognise the balance between functional and curriculum-based goals for students with disability.

3.6 Students with disability Queensland trial: Adjustments to the draft materials

During the consultation period, the draft *Australian Curriculum materials for students with disability* were trialled nationally by 50 teachers of students with disability. ACARA seeks clarification and asks teachers who trialled the draft materials to describe the adjustments (if any) made to enable students with disability to access and participate on the same basis as other students.

Summary of responses

- A number of participating teachers reported that the draft materials support and clarify processes for adjusting learning for students with disability. These include the following adjustments to learning area content that aligned with students’ chronological age (Year level):
 - by drawing on content earlier along the F–10 learning sequence
 - by referring to the general capabilities learning continua
 - to incorporate goals from an individual plan.
- Examples of adjustments described by teachers who participated in the trial include:
 - starting with the age-equivalent Year level description and achievement standard (e.g. Year 10 Science) and identifying a concept or small element from the content description to create a context for the learning of the students (e.g. “predict ... motion of objects”)
 - selecting concepts from the Science Foundation Year level description (e.g. “observe and describe”) before moving on to identify communication behaviours from the Symbolic level 1d of the Literacy general capabilities learning continua
 - using a concept from the Year 8 History Year level description (e.g. ancient and modern or old and new) and setting it in the context of the Olympics, with a focus on developing students’ communication and literacy skills.
- A number of participating teachers indicated that using the draft materials helped them to focus on planning, identifying and teaching appropriate content.

Way forward

- Consider developing an online training module as professional development for teachers.

Queensland Studies Authority

154 Melbourne Street, South Brisbane

PO Box 307 Spring Hill

QLD 4004 Australia

T +61 7 3864 0299

F +61 7 3221 2553

www.qsa.qld.edu.au
