



Report to Department of Education, Science and Training
Findings and Recommendations

Australian Certificate of Education
- Exploring a Way Forward -

Part One - General Information

Q1: Is your interest in this report primarily as a (select one)

<input type="radio"/>	School student	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Parent of (a) school-aged child/children	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Parent of student/s who has/have already completed Year 12	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	School teacher/principal	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	Other educator	<input type="radio"/>
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Other (please describe below)	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

The Professional Teachers' Council NSW (PTC) is the peak body for professional teachers associations in NSW representing its 47 member associations. The PTC represents teachers across the state, at all levels of the education system, early childhood to tertiary educators, in government and non-government sectors in all Key Learning Areas (KLA).

Q2: Gender N/A

<input type="radio"/>	Male
<input type="radio"/>	Female

Q3: Region N/A

<input type="radio"/>	Metropolitan
<input type="radio"/>	Non - Metropolitan

Q4: In which State/Territory do you reside?

<input checked="" type="radio"/>	New South Wales
<input type="radio"/>	Victoria
<input type="radio"/>	Queensland
<input type="radio"/>	Western Australia
<input type="radio"/>	South Australia
<input type="radio"/>	Tasmania
<input type="radio"/>	Northern Territory
<input type="radio"/>	Australian Capital Territory

The compilation of this response to the report *Australian Certificate of Education: Exploring a way forward (ACE)* was through consultation and comment from the PTC board and the PTC's member associations. The views of the PTC associations are integrated into this response.

A number of associations have indicated that there has been confusion as to whether the consultation on the ACE was proceeding given the outcome of the July Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) meeting. MCEETYA did not endorse the common Year 12 curriculum paper.

Part Two - PTC NSW view on Report's recommendation

Recommendation 1 is:

That curriculum essentials be identified—at least in some nominated mathematics, English, science and social science/humanities subjects—to ensure that all Australian students have opportunities to engage with the fundamental knowledge, principles and ideas that make up these disciplines. Essential elements of subject curricula should be identified by national subject panels comprising subject matter and assessment experts and members of the relevant professional subject associations.

Q5. On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is Strongly support, 2 is Support, 3 is Neither Support nor Oppose, 4 is Oppose and 5 is Strongly Oppose), please indicate your level of support for **Recommendation 1**.

1	Strongly support	<input type="radio"/>
2	Support	<input type="radio"/>
3	Neither support nor oppose	<input type="radio"/>
4	Oppose	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
5	Strongly oppose	<input type="radio"/>

Comments (optional)

Every student in Australia should have access to a suite of rigorous, challenging and relevant courses that cater for the diverse needs of our students. Improving curriculum offerings for students to develop and achieve their learning potential is supported by the PTC. A national curriculum may provide a mechanism for students to travel nationally and maintain consistency in curriculum.

However, a framework which establishes broad curriculum content and outcomes could establish consistency across Australia.

Australian students are already achieving world class educational outcomes because of the high quality curriculum and teaching they already experience, despite differences that exist between state curricula. There is a great deal of difference in the current curriculum structures from state to state. Reaching a consensus on ACE that reflects common syllabus outcomes/content across states will be a challenge.

The syllabuses across states and territories have different purposes, outcomes, structure, content, assessment mechanisms, implementation and delivery. These assist in supporting local and regional differences to better cater for all Australian students.

Curriculum Essentials

Curriculum essentials suggest a process of inclusion and exclusion. In determining what is essential one determines what is not essential. This applies when the focus is on a discipline or where the focus is on all disciplines.

Curriculum essentials must describe more than a list of 'content'. Outcomes, processes, strategies, problem solving and communicating solutions are fundamentals and should be included in the curriculum essentials. The PTC associations clearly advocate that curriculum essentials must not be 'reductionist' and should "be more than the lowest common denominator of the curriculum".

The PTC raises the question that why are curriculum essentials only necessary in certain disciplines? This distinction has the potential to create subject hierarchies which will be contrary to meeting the needs of all students through the current diverse range of subject choices. A limited selection of courses as part of the ACE credential also devalues Australia's cultural and artistic development when the Arts, Languages and Technology and Applied Sciences are clearly excluded from the list of valued disciplines.

The recent Science and Technology Audit launched by the Minister for Education Science and Training indicated that there was a need to support the Technology and Science based courses. Technology has not been given its dues here. During her address to the Sydney Institute, the Minister, Julie Bishop in response to a question relating to the Arts indicated that the Arts would

also be taken care of through her portfolio. The ACE consultation does very little to encourage the development of the Arts through the Year 12 curriculum.

Students will no longer have the incentive to study subjects or extension courses that are not recognised by a national accreditation or deemed as essential. Students will become reluctant to study subjects that are not part of ACE, as they will be perceived to be of a lesser status.

Subjects that are not part of the ACE nominated disciplines will suffer from a lack of candidature, resources and incentives to study. Why should a student devote their attention to something which will not be recognised? Education for Year 12 is already separated for some students who wish to study Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses, as some schools prefer courses that are perceived to be academic.

Curriculum essentials should identify the fundamental knowledge, skills and understanding of disciplines. The identification of and explicit reference to curriculum essentials for our most capable and talented students and for those student that require support is vital. Will much of the current emphasis on embedding numeracy, literacy, ICT etc into each syllabus be overshadowed by the development of core subjects? Subjects such as Mathematics and English are more than numeracy and literacy, what will happen to the other content? The other content is as important and integral but will this be lost?

National Subject Panel

The composition of the National subject panel must facilitate curriculum essentials that have depth and vision to ensure courses are of the highest standard for the future, not just statements of status quo commonality. They must reflect significant teacher representation and involve members of professional subject associations. Curriculum specialists across all states would need to be included to ensure a balance of curriculum and learning for students.

The responsibility for decision of the “common essentials” makeup needs to include more than bureaucrats - many of whom have not been in a classroom environment for years (and decades in some cases), and are perceived to be out of touch with current teaching and learning environments within schools.

The inclusion of members of professional teaching associations, who have current or recent teaching experience, is vital for the development of fundamental knowledge, principles and ideas suggested as part of ACE.

Recommendation 2 is:

That achievement standards be developed—at least in some nominated English, mathematics, science and social science/humanities subjects—to ensure that students’ results in these subjects can be compared throughout Australia. Achievement standards should be benchmarked internationally and could take the form of A to E grades in a subject.

Q6 On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is Strongly support, 2 is Support, 3 is Neither Support nor Oppose, 4 is Oppose and 5 is Strongly Oppose), please indicate your level of support for **Recommendation 2**.

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Strongly support | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2 | Support | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3 | Neither support nor oppose | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4 | Oppose | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |
| 5 | Strongly oppose | <input type="radio"/> |

Comments (optional)

This recommendation was opposed from our member associations.

The focus on a national certificate for tertiary entrance is divergent from the university approach of allowing different paths of entry into courses. Universities are increasingly using methods of enrolment that benchmark existing state and territory assessment reporting, and complement examinations, such as interviews and portfolios.

How will ACE ensure comparability in student performance measured against the ACE standards, when different measures of student achievement are used in different states? The report does not consider the benchmarking already in place in the development of the individual state curricula. The ACE does not consider how courses that students undertake that are not part of the ACE courses will be treated as part of the credential or separate to the ACE credential. A clear purpose for the ACE needs to be articulated.

If ACE is to be developed around an A-E reporting system, clear descriptors need to be created for each band. How would student differences be recognised? How might a student who has excellent recall of facts but limited application skills be assessed and a student who may not recall facts as well but is stronger in applying the knowledge to solve problems and provide solutions. Reporting on this would be difficult under an A-E grading system without a considerable investment in descriptor development, assessment reliability/validity and teacher professional development.

Achievement standards need to be developed for each course rather than for each subject to ensure that valid measures of student achievement can be reported. Whilst the notion of achievement standards is suitable and appropriate, the current recommendations of assessing students need to be valid and reliable to have credibility.

Contrary to the notion of reducing duplication across states, it is believed that this has the potential to introduce more bureaucratic steps into the process, especially if it is in addition to the current state based achievement standards.

Associations have expressed concern about the guarantee of more rigour and efficiency than the current processes in NSW. The ACER report does not indicate how the development of national achievement standards would improve the quality of schooling.

Nominated subjects would dominate other subjects and receive more attention, funding and resources. The subjects selected may not be most beneficial for the life long learning of the student - but rather as a way to make reporting consistent. Thus, the current benefits of a diverse system of education are defeated.

Academic subjects seem to be the focus if the ACE, whereas the vocational subjects seem to be regarded as non important. In the current school environment, the academic subjects receive more kudos for the school (overall marks and band 6 awarded in NSW), while in some environments, the vocational education courses are providing long term employment viability for students and the community.

Recommendation 3 is :

That, as part of the Australian Certificate of Education, all students undertake a national Key Capabilities Assessment part way through Year 12 of a number of key skills.

Q7 On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is Strongly support, 2 is Support, 3 is Neither Support nor Oppose, 4 is Oppose and 5 is Strongly Oppose), please indicate your level of support for **Recommendation 3**.

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Strongly support | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2 | Support | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3 | Neither support nor oppose | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4 | Oppose | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5 | Strongly oppose | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |

Comments (optional)

This recommendation was strongly opposed from our member associations.

The imposition of another set of tests on students, teachers and schools already negotiating the pressures of a demanding assessment regime, demonstrates limited regard for the welfare of our students. Research demonstrates that this type of skills assessment can narrow the focus of education as students are drilled on how to achieve well at this assessment rather than the higher order learning that takes place in classrooms, and has a limited value on the real learning of students. If information for key competencies is required for assessment of student performance,

more support for this test seems to be at the end of compulsory schooling (at the end of year 10, in conjunction - or replacement) with the current NSW School Certificate.

The KCAs will be yet another layer of examinations to impact on Year 12 HSC students. The suggested proposal are more 'basic-skills' orientated than the current NSW HSC examinations, but if these results are used to moderate student achievement in the HSC, it will have a major impact on the student. It is believed that this impact will be detrimental and detract from the purpose. In view of assessment, using KCA results to moderate student achievement in different types of assessment activities is not reliable as they are measuring different things. A basic skills approach is different to measurement of content specific knowledge and skills.

The subject areas with the greatest candidacy in NSW, English and Mathematics, have indicated their reservations of having a singular test to assess numeracy, literacy and other life skills. Such a test would be reductionist in its approach. It would also require students to be taught how to achieve in such a test (e.g. how to respond to particular styles of questions, how to manage time in such a test, familiarity with the paper's format). This would mean that curriculum would need to be reduced to accommodate the test. It is not believed to be beneficial, helpful or necessary. These skills are assessed in NSW throughout the Year 11 and 12 courses; this is embedded into the curriculum and syllabus of each subject.

The educational purpose, other than to categorise and assess, is largely irrelevant to the percentage of students who move through tertiary education. The skills that secondary schooling develops in these students are superseded by tertiary skills which are more valuable to employers. The use of basic skills results from a KCA to calculate university entrance scores is believed to be a flawed system with many more problems than the current system. Universities require richer data and a wider set of outcomes to make selections.

With the addition of KCA to the existing knowledge and skills content, will the timing of this additional assessment be dropped from stage 6 to stage 5 to reduce the concept of 'disadvantaged students' who are not progressing into formal senior education. For example, some students in NSW do not pursue a mathematics or science course in stage 6. They have chosen not to continue in these subjects, as their future study and/or employment do not require these subjects. If ACE testing requires testing in KCA of mathematics (or is the focus on numeracy?) will these students be disadvantaged? To imply that all students should have this knowledge is politically idealistic, but does not recognise the notion of student choice.

Will these test results be used in a manner which inhibits a rich and fulfilling curricula, apply increased pressure on students, parents and teachers and inhibit the value of education to the student and the community.

Recommendation 4 is :

That an ACE Award of Excellence be introduced. This Award would be issued by the Australian Minister for Education, Science and Training to students who meet international standards of excellence in their school subjects and on the Key Capabilities Assessment.

Q8 On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is Strongly support, 2 is Support, 3 is Neither Support nor Oppose, 4 is Oppose and 5 is Strongly Oppose), please indicate your level of support for **Recommendation 4**.

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Strongly support | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2 | Support | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |
| 3 | Neither support nor oppose | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4 | Oppose | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5 | Strongly oppose | <input type="radio"/> |

Comments (optional)

The recognition of outstanding student excellence across all subjects/courses is strongly supported from our member associations. This idea is comparable to current practice in acknowledgment of superior performance in NSW. Will all disciplines be recognised? Will vocational students be

recognised and awarded with similar respect as their academic colleagues? Or will differences in subject status create a level of discrimination?

Outstanding results in a KCA should not be recognised in the same manner - are basic skills the background purpose of education, with a focus on subject achievement of more benefit to the student, teacher and school. It should be deemed as an assistant to achievement for students who do well in specific subjects.

Recommendation 5 is :

That a national standards body be established for this purpose. This body would not be an awarding body, but would be responsible for identifying essential curriculum content in nominated school subjects, developing achievement standards and managing the annual Key Capabilities Assessment.

Q9 On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is Strongly support, 2 is Support, 3 is Neither Support nor Oppose, 4 is Oppose and 5 is Strongly Oppose), please indicate your level of support for **Recommendation 5**.

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Strongly support | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2 | Support | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3 | Neither support nor oppose | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4 | Oppose | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |
| 5 | Strongly oppose | <input type="radio"/> |

Comments (optional)

This recommendation was opposed by the PTC member associations.

All curriculum including assessment and standards need to be treated together. Having a national standards body and a separate curriculum body for a small set of courses will fragment the Australian curriculum at the Year 12 level. To fragment curriculum in this manner ensures ACE's consistent failure.

The proposed national standards body is similar to the existing organisation in the VET frameworks across Australia. The key components of the National Training Framework are the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) in which VET qualifications in each industry area are standard across Australia, and the National Training Packages which contain three endorsed components on which AQF VET qualifications are based. Units of competency, assessment guidelines and qualifications are standardised and recognised across Australia

The recommendations that professional teaching associations assume responsibility for the identification of the core curriculum are a welcome commitment. The recommendation recognises the significant and ongoing work professional organisations are providing for teachers in dialogue and quality teaching. The recommendation also identifies that teachers are in the best position to identify the needs and interests of their students, especially within the local school context to impact on school learning.

Recommendation 6 is :

That all students in the final years of secondary school be given access to the Australian Certificate of Education. Following agreement to incorporate essential curriculum content in nominated subjects, to report against common achievement standards, and to incorporate the Key Capabilities Assessment, each of the existing senior secondary certificates would be eligible to become the Australian Certificate of Education.

Q10 On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is Strongly support, 2 is Support, 3 is Neither Support nor Oppose, 4 is Oppose and 5 is Strongly Oppose), please indicate your level of support for **Recommendation 6**.

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Strongly support | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2 | Support | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3 | Neither support nor oppose | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4 | Oppose | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5 | Strongly oppose | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |

Comments (optional)

This recommendation was opposed from our member associations in its current written format:

Whilst the principle of having a single nationally accepted and recognised certificate is supported from some associations, the ACE format is not endorsed. Our member associations have significant reservations about the KCA (as stated earlier), the valuing of some disciplines and ignoring others, the reductionist “essential” and therefore “non-essential” curriculum and the short timeline to develop the ACE.

Will the proposed ACE cover all levels of achievement or is it only aimed at the academic finest? While an ACE is supported, the ACE proposal format and implications are not a progressive step towards learning for all Australian students, consistency and achievement.

Part Three - PTC NSW view about the Report

Q11: Do you support the concept of a nationally consistent Year 12 certificate?

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | Strongly support | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2 | Support | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3 | Neither support nor oppose | <input checked="" type="radio"/> |
| 4 | Oppose | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5 | Strongly oppose | <input type="radio"/> |

Q12: Are there any other comments you would like to make about the issues raised in the report?

Comments (optional)

This report on ACE was evenly supported and opposed from our member associations. There was some support of a nationally consistent ACE however the opposition towards ACE is based on the inadequate timeline for development, naivety in relation to assessment reliability and validity, the ACE structure and proposals. The success of the current systems in place for students, teachers and school communities has not been recognised by the ACE report. The report does not provide convincing reasoning for the overhaul of state and territory curricula.

With the diversity of the current state-wide systems, each state will defend its own system and thus resist any alteration to established curriculum; a workable ACE is not feasible in its current structure. An ACE that is an addition in assessment, similar to the ASAT test, or designed to be so generic that existing systems will fit in as they are now, will have doubtful credibility within the Australian and International community.

In terms of accreditation, it is believed that the ACE system will become an additional layer of policy and implementation documentation. Schools being schools, if ACE gains credibility, will test it, inevitably leading to more assessment tasks for Year 12 in each subject area. Additional documentation to demonstrate compliance will be strongly opposed within education, with a focus on teachers, principals and schools. The projected timeline for implementation in 2009 does not allow an appropriate level of consultation and action prior to a massive budget commitment to implement this change.

Any initiatives that recommend additional assessment for students are not supported. Diverting attention from achievement during Stage 6 (years 11 & 12) will adversely affect many students, teachers and school communities. The question remains - What will be the advantage for NSW students, teachers and the community to embrace this change?