

# Australia's new curriculum goes national in 2011

*Prof Barry McGaw, Chair of the National Curriculum Board, outlines the scope of the new curriculum and how it will be implemented*

If all goes according to plan, Australia's first national schools' curriculum, covering English, history, science and maths, will be implemented in 2011. And like all things in the 21st century, it will be accessible electronically.

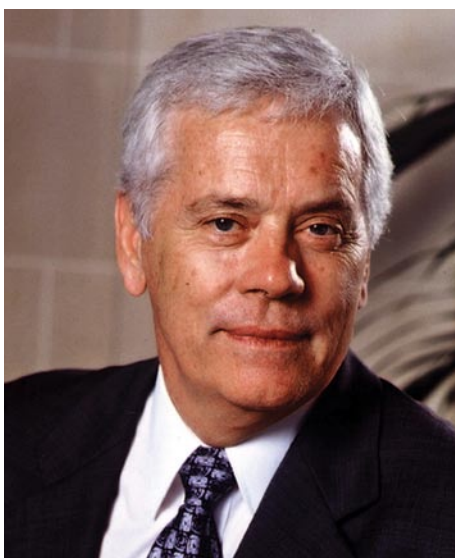
Leading the charge is Prof Barry McGaw, Chair of the National Curriculum Board. He told *Education Today* that the challenge of implementing a national curriculum lies in making sure all the resources are in place to support teachers properly.

The other key is to ensure that professional development programs are well linked to what the board proposes, including initial teacher education programs at university.

At the start of the curriculum development process, the "top four": English, maths, science and history were the only subjects suggested to go national. However, before the board was appointed in April last year, geography and languages were added for development in the second phase.

Then in May this year, state, territory and federal ministers decided to add the arts as well. Currently discussions are underway to consider making the whole curriculum national and a report will be tabled in October.

Prof McGaw says the benefits of a national curriculum are significant, including consistency across Australia for both students and teachers who move states as well as the possibility of achieving a higher quality curriculum by drawing on expertise across the nation.



*Prof Barry McGaw*

He said it was quite an extraordinary shift. "It's not just the Commonwealth driving this, nor is it just education ministers," he emphasised. "The National Curriculum Board was appointed by the Council of the Australian Government."

## The curriculum online

In undertaking such a mammoth task there are many considerations, one being the risk of creating an unduly long document. Prof McGaw said the board purposely tried to avoid that by thinking electronically. He said the interesting

thing about this approach was the opening up of other ways to introduce knowledge.

"Our plan is to think about the curriculum in electronic terms as well as in a book, so teachers only read what they need," he added. "In an electronic format, experienced teachers can look at what they are supposed to teach this term and understand what to teach, whereas new teachers could look up what resources to use via a live link or read resources other teachers may have posted."

For example, the contents of the maths curriculum for Kindergarten to Year 12 might take just three pages to lay out. However, information on the kinds of achievements expected of teachers, complete with annotated examples of real student work, would just be a 'click' away, as would other resources.

## Teaching English

The board proposes that English is now taught with three strands: language, literature, and literacy and language.

Prof McGaw likes the idea because under the language strand students will learn about the nature of language, its grammar and spelling. A draft framework for grammar has also been developed for the board's review. It includes detail such as when to introduce passive and active voice, causes and phrases and conjunctions and prepositions.

"Our proposal is to teach grammar in context. For example, in learning about active and passive voice students will see the different

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effects of writing in the two ways," Prof McGaw explained. "People ask me how will the teachers teach grammar when they themselves have never learned it, like most people under a certain age group. My answer is that it's easy to learn grammar. I learned it in primary school."

He said two good resource books on the subject were *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* and *My Grammar and I, or is it Me?*

## Aboriginal knowledge

Aboriginal history will be included in the new curriculum, including life prior to European settlement. The place of Aboriginal languages will be considered when the treatment of languages other than English is developed.

## Phasing-in

There will be some phasing-in, based upon what the students have already studied. All of the states have requirements about periods of bonuses for Years 11 and 12 so the board can't introduce a change without giving a full year's notice, thus allowing Year 10 to make informed choices.

The sequential nature of some aspects of the national curriculum may also require phasing-in if work for one year is closely dependent on students having also completed the prior year under the new curriculum.

## Opportunity for comment

The board now has the shape of the top four curriculum subjects and has recruited curriculum writers and advisory panels. They are currently expanding the broad scope and sequences to develop a more detailed statement. After finalising the drafts, the board will post the documents on its website for comment.

"So we are having an open process," Prof McGaw added. "We've done rather well really in terms of acceptance of the documents that we have produced but there will be lots of discussion and debate as we go forward. I'm hopeful we'll resolve any problems."

The plan is to introduce the new national curriculum for English, maths, science and history six months before teachers need to implement the changes in 2011. Other curriculum subjects will go national in a further two phases, with precise timing yet to be established.

The National Curriculum Board has now become part of the new Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), which has also responsibility for national assessment and reporting on school performance.

*For information go to [www.ncb.org.au](http://www.ncb.org.au)*

## Prof Barry McGaw AO, PhD

Prof Barry McGaw is a Profial Fellow (half-time) at the University of Melbourne where he is Executive Director of the Assessing and Teaching 21st Century Skills Project, a collaborative initiative of Cisco, Intel and Microsoft.

Prior to returning to Australia at the end of 2005, he was Director for Education at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). He had earlier been Executive Director of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and Prof of Education at Murdoch University.

Prof McGaw is a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, the Australian Psychological Society, the Australian College of Educators and the International Academy of Education. He received an Australian Centenary Medal in 2000 and was appointed an Officer in the Order of Australia in 2004. He was the 2005–2006 recipient of University of Illinois Alumni Award for Exceptional Achievement.

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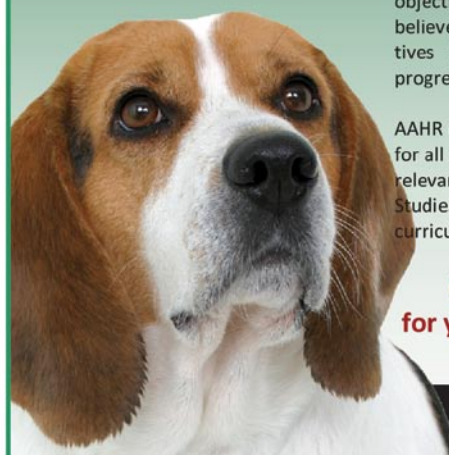
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