

REVIEW OF SYLLABUSES-SENIOR PHASE OF LEARNING RESPONSE TO BLUEPRINT

The Review

The proposed principles for the development of future syllabuses - coherence, rigour, flexibility and connections, provide an overarching framework that recognises the purpose of the senior phase of learning and ensures that all young people have the knowledge and skills to effectively participate in life, further education and employment.

All young people need skills such as communication, literacy, numeracy, information technology, interpersonal skills and working in teams, accessing information and deriving meaning from information, problem solving, relationships, time management, personal health and safety and financial literacy.

All young people need a knowledge of vocational learnings, work readiness and some contact with the world of work during the senior phase of learning. To move successfully from school to work or from school to further study, students will need a knowledge of career options and pathways, training options and community agencies and the skills to learn throughout their working lives.

Principle 4 Connections

To build connections through future syllabus design that includes explicit advice and guidance connecting the learning in the senior phase with past learning in Prep to Year 10 and future learning in further education, training and adult life.

The belief that the Senior Phase of Learning should be concerned with preparing all young people for a range of post-school destinations is educationally sound and ethically valid. Regardless of the subject combinations selected by students it is important that they exit the Senior Phase of Learning with the skills for life long learning and a positive attitude to learning to ensure that they will seek learning opportunities throughout their adult life.

At 15 years of age, young people will have difficulty determining their future goals, comprehending the range of available career opportunities and recognizing the life skills they will need in adulthood. Therefore, all young people need the skills for, and the attitude to, learning, to enable them to continue to learn throughout life, the skills to participate in work and the skills to engage in life activities. School communities will need to value different kinds of learning and to value all student pathways. Schools will need to be sufficiently resourced to ensure all students are able to access a variety of learning programs and that teachers and school communities have the skills, time and flexibility to develop appropriate programs.

Young people in Year 10 will be at different stages of their learning journey and will therefore need programs that build on their strengths and work on their weaknesses. Year 10 therefore, should be a time to consolidate learning, to ensure that students meet a standard of literacy and numeracy to participate in further learning, work and life. In order to achieve this the purposes of continuation, remediation, acceleration and specialization are sound and appropriate.

Vocational skills, the employability skills, career education and knowledge of the world of work are essential learnings for students as they develop their Senior Education and Training Plans. Certificate I in Work Education and/or a short course on career development based on the Australian Blueprint for Career Development would provide students with the necessary underpinning knowledge and skills needed to document their SET plan. By earning credits towards the Queensland Certificate of Education such learning would be given credibility within the curriculum framework and not seen as just an "add-on". For such a program to be offered, professional development would be required for teachers and resources would need to be provided to schools. All teachers need to be informed of the career opportunities in their field of learning and the imparting of such knowledge should not be the sole domain of VET teachers.

The OP still tends to be the main influence on the design and style of syllabus developed and the method by which teachers value, deliver and assess subjects. Subjects such as Work Education, Career Development, adult literacy and numeracy skills and vocational certificate courses are written in terms of outcomes and achievement of the outcomes is determined by the evidence that is gathered over a period of time and in a range of contexts. Criteria based assessment in the Senior Phase of Learning is less flexible and reports on the extent to which criteria has been mastered and thus creates an attitude of winners and losers.

OP calculations tend to rely on criteria-based assessment and give insufficient credit to competency-based assessment results except at Certificate III. Schools are also being asked to report on student achievement in terms of A-E; such reporting is at odds with competency-based reporting. Tertiary institutions need to identify the skills required for their specific courses of study rather than the results gained in Year 12. Students would need to gather evidence to prove that they have the required skills to be successful in a particular course of study. Assigning different values to subjects for tertiary entrance reinforces the attitude that some learning is more valuable than other learning.

Many schools are unaware of the tertiary ranking system and thus students and parents are poorly informed about the opportunities for further study based on the attainment of vocational competencies. Higher education authorities, training providers and employers need to be informed of the great

work being done by schools in vocational education and the quality of the work being achieved by students. Educators need to ensure that vocational skills are transferable and articulate to further study and work. Greater understanding by all stakeholders is a worthwhile objective.

When taken together, the syllabuses available to students in the Senior Phase of Learning, should form an overall curriculum that creates a learning continuum from Prep to Year 12, provides balance across the learning and ensures all young people have the skills for further study and work regardless of the mix of subjects they undertake. Constant and rapid change make it difficult for syllabus design if the syllabus focuses on content. Core learnings and essential skills including vocational learnings should form the basis against which every syllabus and curriculum document should be referenced.

S D Harrington
December, 2006

Sandra Kenman
Executive Officer, VETNetwork Australia
Tel: 07 32541431
Fax: 07 3358 5881
vetnetwork@bigpond.com
www.vetnetwork.org.au