Establishing the Continuum of Learning K-10 in New South Wales Syllabuses

Julie Hurrell
Office of the Board of Studies
New South Wales

Introduction
In 2000, the New South Wales Board of Studies commenced development of a K – 10 Curriculum Framework to establish parameters for the NSW curriculum for the compulsory years of schooling. The Curriculum Framework identifies the learning essential for all students and guides the evaluation and revision of individual syllabuses. It draws on an understanding of contemporary teaching and learning that emphasises outcomes and standards.

In 2001, New South Wales embarked on a revision of its Years 7 – 10 curriculum in order to address a number of identified issues. These included overlap, overcrowding of the curriculum and the need to develop syllabuses that recognise student’s previous learning and therefore provide the basis for further learning.

The Curriculum Framework has been an essential point of reference throughout the current review of Years 7 – 10 syllabuses by ensuring that the curriculum is coherent, challenging and allows for developmental continuity. It promotes consistency and coherence across years of schooling and between syllabuses.

All K – 10 syllabuses approved by the Board of Studies must meet the criteria established in the K-10 Curriculum Framework. This ensures that syllabuses for the compulsory years of schooling are relevant, contemporary and of the highest quality.

This paper provides an explanation of how the key principles of the K – 10 Framework are evident in revised syllabuses and how within key learning areas a K – 10 continuum of learning has been developed.

Background
The Primary and Secondary Curriculum in New South Wales
There are six stages of learning in the New South Wales curriculum each aligning to years of schooling. There are three stages of learning in Primary education: Stage 1 (including Early Stage 1/Kindergarten and Years 1 and 2); Stage 2 (Years 3 and 4) and Stage 3 (Years 5 and 6). There are three stages of learning in secondary education schools: Stage 4 (Years 7 and 8); Stage 5 (Years 9 and 10) and Stage 6 (Years 11 and 12).

In the Primary curriculum (K – 6) there are six learning areas in which programs of study are based on:
English
Mathematics
Personal Development, Health and Physical Education
Creative and Practical Arts
Human Society and its Environment
Science & Technology.

In the Secondary curriculum (Years 7 – 10) there are eight learning areas with mandatory and elective courses available:
English
Mathematics
Science
Technological and Applied Studies
Human Society and its Environment
Personal Development, Health and Physical Education
Languages
Creative Arts.

Syllabus Development in New South Wales
The Board's syllabus development process is based on principles of project management, and emphasises consultation and quality assurance. Syllabus development projects are designed in four phases.

Phase 1 - Syllabus review
A review of the existing syllabus provision and a plan for its revision or development. For new syllabuses this phase will require development of a proposal for syllabus development.

Phase 2 - Writing brief development
Development of a writing brief for the draft syllabus that takes account of the broad directions established during the syllabus review phase. The writing brief is disseminated widely for consultation to schools, to interested groups and to individuals.

Phase 3 - Syllabus development
Development of a syllabus package as defined by the project plan. This phase includes a further period of extensive consultation.

Phase 4 - Implementation
Implementation of a new or revised syllabus is conducted by schools. During the 'life cycle' of the syllabus the Board’s role is to collect data on syllabus implementation.

This phase of the process leads, in turn, back to Phase 1.

To assist with monitoring of the process and quality assurance, the Board establishes representative Board Curriculum Committees. These committees monitor and provide advice on the quality of material produced by project
teams and ensure the integrity of the process as a whole. They report directly to the Board of Studies on whether the agreed processes have been followed, whether due attention has been given to the views identified during consultation, whether the syllabus development processes have been observed and they advise on the quality of the syllabus package in relation to the original, approved writing brief.

Membership of Board Curriculum Committees includes representatives of key groups involved in education in New South Wales. They are appointed during the Syllabus Review Phase for the duration of the project.

Cross Curriculum Content
The Curriculum Framework requires that syllabuses incorporate relevant cross curriculum content.

Cross-curriculum content includes information and communication technologies, work, employment and enterprise, key competencies, literacy, numeracy, Aboriginal and indigenous, civics and citizenship, difference and diversity, environment, gender and multicultural. Historically, these areas have been included in syllabuses to varying degrees or have appeared as separate documents that teachers have integrated into their teaching and learning programs.

The Board has developed a detailed map of the content that all students should be exposed to in relation to each of the cross curriculum content areas. Decisions have been made concerning the content to be included in particular syllabuses and the stage of schooling at which students should experience this content.

In this way there is a continuum in these areas that is sequential, avoids overlap and does not let important learning be overlooked.

The K – 10 Curriculum Framework is embedded in syllabuses
Each revised Years 7 – 10 syllabus contains information that relates directly to the framework and provides a basis to assist teachers to make decisions about current and future student learning. The entire syllabus outcomes, content and assessment advice is directly accountable to the framework’s broad learning outcomes and principles.

Section 1 explains the place of the syllabus in the K – 10 curriculum. It details the broad learning outcomes for learning and the purpose for learning. This allows teachers to reflect on what is important for all students and how, through the study of particular syllabuses, they can make a contribution to the holistic development of the child.

Section 3 in each syllabus contains a diagram that shows the place of the syllabus in its learning area. This, together with the stage statements and
outcomes that describe learning that has been achieved at the end of a stage, illustrates the continuum of learning for this subject.

How have each of the syllabuses ensured the continuum of learning K – 10?

English Learning Area
With the transition from English Year 6 to Years 7 English there is an acknowledgement that there are students in Years 7 – 10 who have not achieved Stage 3 outcomes. The inclusion of stage statements provides a guide for teachers as they design teaching and learning programs for students in the classroom. They can look at this section when making informed decisions about the teaching and learning activities that each of their students might typically be involved in to demonstrate achievement of outcomes. The syllabus also contains advice to teachers on ways to assist students who may not yet have demonstrated Stage 2 outcomes.

Mathematics Learning Area
The K – 6 and Years 7 – 10 Mathematics syllabuses have been developed concurrently and this has provided not only opportunities to remove any areas of overlap within syllabuses but to also consider the continuum of learning and strengthen it K – 10. To assist in this regard, both syllabuses now have a common process strand, five content strands, and a common scope and continuum of key ideas.

The K – 6 syllabus contains the Scope and Continuum of Key Ideas from Early Stage 1 to Stage 5 as well as Stage 4 outcomes and content. The Years 7 – 10 syllabus contains the outcomes from Early Stage 1 to Stage 5 as well as Stages 2 and 3 outcomes and content.

The inclusion of this information in both syllabuses allows primary and secondary teachers to look back, look at now and look forward in order to select the most appropriate learning opportunities for their students so that they may progress in a seamless way in their learning.

Science Learning Area
In NSW Primary schools, students study Science and Technology which incorporates aspects of both Science and Technology. As they progress into secondary schools, they experience study of a discrete Science syllabus and a range of Technology syllabuses.

The Science and Technology K – 6 Syllabus and the Years 7 – 10 Science Syllabus are structurally different. There are six content strands in the K – 6 syllabus: Built Environments, Information and Communication, Products and Services, Living Things, Physical Phenomena and The Earth and Its Surroundings. The latter three are science related. The Years 7 – 10 Science syllabus contains five Prescribed Focus Areas that are the emphases that are to be applied to each
unit of work that is developed: history of science, the nature and practice of science, applications and uses of science, implications for society and the environment, and current issues, research and development.

The Years 7 – 10 Science syllabus includes a K – 10 continuum of outcomes which has been developed by mapping the knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes from the K – 6 science related content strands to the Years 7 – 10.

One key skill that provides continuity from Science and Technology K – 6 to the Years 7 – 10 syllabus is investigation. Student investigations become increasingly sophisticated as they explore more complex scientific concepts and contexts.

Technology Learning Area
The Science and Technology K – 6 Syllabus links to the Years 7 – 10 syllabuses through the key concepts of design, produce and evaluate. Of the six content strands in the Science and Technology K – 6 Syllabus there are three that have a technology focus (Built Environments, Information and Communication and Products and Services). The key concepts, along with the technology related content strands from the K – 6 syllabus, provide a basis to develop a continuum of learning.

The K – 6 content strands directly relate to the 3 areas of study of the same name in the revised Years 7 – 10 Technology (mandatory) Syllabus. Years 7 – 10 electives within the learning area also contain content that directly relates to the three relevant K – 6 content strands.

Creative Arts Learning Area
Creative Arts syllabuses K – 10 provide students with experiences in a variety of artforms. The artforms are independent of each other, each having its own continuum of learning established through the development of specific knowledge, skills and understanding K – 10.

In Creative Arts K – 6, students experience Visual Arts, Music, Dance and Drama. In Stage 4, students must study Visual Arts and Music. Elective study in Years 7 – 10 may include Dance, Drama, Visual Design and Photographic and Digital Media and further study in Visual Arts and Music.

In K – 6 Visual Arts, students learn through making and appreciating and this is built upon in Stage 4 Visual Arts through a more conceptualised and focused study. In Music, the key ideas of performing, organising sound, and listening explicitly link to Stage 4 through particular styles, periods and genres of music.

Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE) Learning Area
The current Years 7 – 10 Geography and History syllabuses were developed at the same time as the current HSIE K – 6 syllabus and a continuum of learning
was established. However, one of the broad directions from the evaluation of the current Geography and History syllabuses was that the continuum needed to be made more explicit.

The HSIE K – 6 syllabus has four content strands that incorporate aspects of both Geography and History. The strands are Change and Continuity, Cultures, Environment and Social Systems and Structures. In Stage 4, Geography and History become separate subjects and the skills relating to each become more specialised. This provides a challenge in syllabus revision to ensure a seamless transition from Year 6 to Year 7.

Each of the four K – 6 HSIE strands generally form a continuum link to a specific syllabus in the HSIE Learning Area. However in some cases, aspects of K – 6 strands could be addressed in other syllabuses. For example, aspects of K – 6 Social Systems and Structures would be built upon in the Years 7 – 10 History syllabus as well as having a direct link to the new Cultures, Societies and Identities syllabus.

Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) Learning Area
One of the broad directions to emerge from the evaluation of the existing Years 7 –10 PDHPE syllabus was the need to refine the complex structural layers of the syllabus.

The K – 6 syllabus consists of eight discrete strands that present the scope of the learning area in ways that are easily understood by generalist teachers. The revised Years 7 – 10 PDHPE Syllabus integrates these concepts to form four more holistic strands that better reflect marrying of issues in this learning area. It also includes all outcomes K – 10 to further explain and support the continuum from the K – 6 and Years 7 – 10 syllabus.

The skills of communicating, decision-making, interacting, moving, planning and problem-solving are shown in increasing sophistication from K – 10. Due to the increasing autonomy of young people in Years 7 – 10, planning is presented as an additional skill that has its genesis in decision-making and problem solving in K – 6.

Languages Learning Area
A K – 10 Languages Framework was developed to provide a blueprint for languages syllabus development K – 10. An Aboriginal Languages framework was developed from the K – 10 Languages Framework to guide the development of Aboriginal language syllabuses.

There are two pathways for a Languages student. The first pathway is for those who have a continuous study of language K – 10. The second is for those who may not have studied the language prior to Stage 4. These syllabuses have been developed as a K – 10 document to cater for the multiple points at which students enter the study of a language. Teachers will use their professional judgment to decide at which point a student enters a
course based on previous student experience in languages. Appropriate programs of learning may then be developed for individual students.

All language syllabuses have three objectives that incorporate the following themes – Using Language, Moving between Cultures and Making Linguistic Connections. The objectives provide a structure for the development of outcomes and related content that establish a continuum.

Conclusion
The K – 10 Curriculum Framework promotes the establishment of a continuum of learning that is evident in all revised K – 10 syllabuses in New South Wales. It encourages consideration and reflection of where students have come from in their learning, what they might typically be doing currently and where they might progress to next. This empowers teachers to more accurately assess students needs and provide the most appropriate teaching and learning experiences for the range of students in their classroom.