

Draft New Zealand Curriculum: Feedback November 2006

This document provides comment from the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE) to the Ministry of Education on the draft *New Zealand Curriculum (July 2006)*. It covers:

- Previous PCE comment on the key competencies and revised draft statement (June 2005, August 2005).
- Suggestions for improvements to the current draft curriculum.

Previous PCE comment on the key competencies

The PCE has an ongoing interest in education for sustainability, as highlighted in our 2004 report *See change: Learning and education for sustainability*.¹ On 7 April 2005 and 8 August 2005 the PCE provided feedback to the Ministry of Education on the proposed key competencies, highlighting:

- The importance of education for sustainability
- Principles of education for sustainability
- Consistency between the proposed competencies and the principles of education for sustainability
- The government's international and domestic commitments to sustainable development and education for sustainability
- Reports commissioned by the Ministry of Education that highlighted the importance of education for sustainability
- The need to make sustainable development and environmental sustainability more explicit in the school curriculum
- Suggestions for changes².

¹ Copies of this report are available at www.pce.govt.nz

² If you require copies of this earlier feedback, please contact Livia Hollins (details are provided at the end of this document).

Comments on the draft New Zealand Curriculum Statement

The PCE has examined five key components of the Draft New Zealand Curriculum and provided comments and recommendations for change. Recommendations for what changes should be made to reflect these points are provided in the current Draft New Zealand Curriculum text in bold.

Vision

Comment

- Visual presentation of the Vision is good, emphasising New Zealand as a diverse and multicultural country within a global context.
- It is important to integrate the focus of the Curriculum on economic growth and a knowledge-based society within a wider context, including the future, and health and well-being of people and the environment. The focus of the New Zealand Curriculum should be consistent with the government's current goals for New Zealand. Economic transformation is one of the government's three key themes that will shape its priorities for the next decade.³ The government has identified five key themes as critical to economic transformation, including environmental sustainability.⁴
- It is important to explicitly recognise the connection that New Zealand citizens (are global citizens) have with the local and global environment, and natural world. This should be emphasised through the Vision.

Recommended changes

‘Education has a vital role to play in helping our young people reach their individual **and collective** potential and develop the competencies they will need for further study, work and lifelong learning. It is by developing these competencies that they are equipped to participate fully in New Zealand's society and contribute to the **transformation of our economy**⁵. Education is the key to sustaining our nation's development and to its successful transformation into a knowledge-based society’.

‘Our young people will be...

Connected:

- Able to relate well to others **and local and global environments**’.

‘Lifelong learners

³ <http://www.dpmc.govt.nz/dpmc/publications/government-priorities.html>

⁴ <http://www.dpmc.govt.nz/dpmc/publications/government-priorities.html>

⁵ This is consistent with the government's goals for New Zealand, <http://www.dpmc.govt.nz/dpmc/publications/government-priorities.html>

- Literate and numerate
- Critical and creative thinkers
- Active seekers, users, and creators of knowledge
- Informed decision makers
- **Future thinkers?**

Principles

Comment

- Add Environmental Sustainability as a principle to highlight responsibility (citizenship) and involvement (connections and participation) for contributing to a sustainable future and economic growth within environmental limits.
- In order to distinguish Excellence from a Value, 'The pursuit of excellence' should replace Excellence, and be broadened to include collective excellence and celebrating the success of others.
- The focus on cognitive ideals should be changed to provide opportunities for experiential learning and considering the future.
- The Treaty of Waitangi is central to the relationship between peoples, and between people and the natural environment in New Zealand. The Curriculum should recognise this and include reference to the Treaty.
- Recognising the need for coherent pathways of education at all levels is important, and the current lack of these pathways limits education for sustainability in schools.

Recommended changes

'Pursuit of Excellence:

All students are empowered to learn and achieve to the best of their abilities and to seek **collective and personal excellence** regardless of their individual circumstances, **and celebrate the success of others**'.

'Learning to Learn:

All students experience a curriculum that enables them to become active, confident, creative and innovative learners, thinkers **and participants**'.

'New Zealand (replacing cultural) Heritage:

All students experience a curriculum that reflects New Zealand's bicultural **and natural heritage and** its multicultural society. **All students** have the opportunity to experience a curriculum that reflects and values te Ao Maori **and the Treaty of Waitangi**'.

'Connections:

All students experience a curriculum that makes connections with their lives and engages the support of their families and communities, **and helps them to understand their dependence on the natural world**'.

Recommended new principle

Environmental Sustainability

- **All students experience a curriculum that gives them the opportunity to learn in holistic (integrated or interdisciplinary) ways that provide them with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to equip them to contribute to a sustainable future.**
- **Students will learn through relevant real world experiential learning, understanding the environmental, economic, social and cultural context that we live and work within, and thinking about how what we do now will affect the future.**

Values

Recommended changes

‘New Zealand students are encouraged to value:

- respect, for themselves, for others, for human rights, and **for all living things**
- equity, **through** fairness and social justice **for all**
- **sustaining** (replace care for) **the** environment, **for the benefit of future generations**, the Earth and its interrelated ecosystems’.

‘Through their learning experiences students will learn about:

- different kinds of values, such as moral, social, cultural, aesthetic, economic **and environmental**’.

‘Through their learning experiences, students will develop their ability to:

- ...make ethical decisions and act on them **for the benefit of themselves, their community, and their natural world**’. Or ‘**Make adequate decisions for a changing world for a sustainable future**’.

Key competencies

Comment

It is imperative that the Key Competencies support sustainability, and student development of an understanding of human impact on the environment (positive or negative). A clearer explanation of why competencies are important is needed. Comments on specific competencies are explained below.

Managing self

- This competency highlights the importance of 'taking account of the wider social context' while managing one's self. Although this is very important, the competency does not mention the need to take account of the wider environmental context.

Participating and contributing

- It is important the students develop a sense of belonging (and on this basis participate and contribute) to New Zealand's unique natural environment. A sense of belonging to our unique natural environment will add to *'belonging in a range of contexts'* and foster *'confidence to participate and contribute actively in new roles'*.

Thinking

- This competency highlights the importance of creative, critical and logical thinking but should also promote 'futures thinking', which is a critical component of education for sustainability.

Recommended changes

'Key competencies are the capabilities people need in order to live, learn, work and contribute as active members of their communities. Competencies are more complex than skills.

Competencies contribute to students' ability to relate to wider society and the natural environment, work independently as well as cooperatively and collaboratively, consider and understand the impact their choices can have on themselves and others, as well as on the environment and future opportunities. Capable people draw on and combine all the resources available to them: knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values'.

Managing self:

- 'It is about students knowing who they are, where they come from, where they fit in, **and what contribution they are capable of making.**'
- 'They act appropriately and are aware of the effects that their words and actions may have on others **and on the environment. They take responsibility for their actions.**'

Relating **with** others

Participating and contributing:

- ‘They understand the importance of balancing rights, roles and responsibilities and **take action to ensure** the quality, **well-being**, and sustainability of social, physical and economic environments’.

Thinking:

- ‘Students who have well-developed thinking and problem-solving skills are active seekers, users and creators of knowledge. They reflect on their own learning, draw on personal knowledge and intuitions, ask questions, **make connections**, **consider the future** and challenge the basis of assumptions and perceptions’.

Designing a school curriculum

Comment:

The PCE is pleased to see the suggestion of consideration of '*significant themes*' when developing a school curriculum, '*to offer opportunities for engaging students and integrating learning across key competencies and learning areas*', and is supportive of the use of '*sustainability*' as a suggested theme. It is imperative that the core principles of education for sustainability are included throughout every school's curriculum.

Recommendations:

- Actively promote the uptake of the '*sustainability*' theme for curriculum design.
- Strengthen language around integrated learning and teaching so that '*integration*' is an expectation.
- Support uptake of the '*sustainability*' theme through:
 - Post implementation support documents for sustainability to provide in-depth development and application of integrated approaches to learning and curriculum delivery.
 - A diagrammatic model explaining how all sections of the curriculum can be integrated across levels including secondary (using '*sustainability*' as an example).

Further information

For further information about this feedback, please contact:

- Dr Morgan Williams, Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment
morganw@pce.govt.nz or (04) 495 8356
- Livia Hollins, Environmental Investigator
livia@pce.govt.nz or (04) 495 8351