



GTA NSW SUBMISSION TO THE STAGE 6 GEOGRAPHY REVIEW

The following submission by the Geography Teachers Association of New South Wales, attempts to represent the viewpoint of 21 Councillors who are experienced Geography teachers having taught or are currently teaching Stage 6 Geography. Furthermore, the Councillors teach across Sydney, Canberra and in regional centres such as Wagga Wagga and Tweed Heads across all education sectors. The following comments reflect GTANSW Councillor viewpoints about the current Stage 6 Geography and Life Skills Syllabuses and future directions the syllabus document might take.

The aim of this submission is to comment on perceived areas of strength and weakness of the current Stage 6 Syllabus, where there is a degree of consensus among Councillors. It is hoped the following viewpoints may assist in the development of a document addressing the future directions for Stage 6 Geography.

The overall feeling is that components of the current syllabuses are liked by teachers and it is hoped the areas identified would remain or be incorporated into a future syllabus document. There is also a recognition that in many areas the current Syllabus is out of date, particularly when consideration is given to the nature of modern society and education, features of the new K-10 Geography Syllabus and the Australian Curriculum for senior students. Views on the HSC examination follow a similar thread with a change of focus to the application of knowledge, understanding and skills recommended.

Syllabus strengths, weaknesses and suggestions

- The *structure and requirements* are clearly presented.
- In most part, the course is *manageable and appropriate* although this is an area of *concern* given the content of the new Geography Syllabus K-10, global changes since the current syllabus was written and the demand for workplace skills that include collaboration, critical thinking and creativity.
- There is scope for *flexibility* in the delivery of content, choice of case studies, illustrative examples and the integration of contemporary issues within the Syllabus.
- Requirements for the integration of *fieldwork, tools and skills* are clearly stated and linked to topics. This could be enhanced with the inclusion of new technologies and a clearer integration of content and skills within topics. Modern tools like augmented

STAGE 6 GEOGRAPHY SYLLABUS

reality, GPS, remote sensing, are not explicit in the Stage 6 Syllabus, clearly illustrating that the current skills and tools have become outdated.

- There is a *balance* of both physical and human geography across both years and the opportunity for teachers to integrate local studies.
- Whilst the *course outcomes* for both preliminary and HSC are clear, the appropriateness of some is questioned including P1 and H1 - given that student achievement of these is difficult to assess.
- The syllabus *no longer builds on the knowledge and skills developed in the K-10 syllabus*. There should be a rethink of the transition from Stage 5 to Stage 6 taking into consideration both content coverage and concepts to modernise and remove overlap.
- The inclusion of Aboriginal students is explicit and achievable however there is a lack of *inclusiveness* in relation to Special Education, Gifted and Talented students, EAL/D and Torres Strait Islander students. More direction is needed to ensure these students can better access Stage 6 Geography. Some suggestions on enhancing *inclusiveness* include an Extension Course, a lower level course and an enhanced Life skills Course. There is an opportunity to apply Gagne's model for *Gifted and Talented* as well the Maker Model, as suggested in policies for these students.
- There is ample opportunity to incorporate the *Cross-Curriculum Priorities, General Capabilities* and other *Learning Across the Curriculum Areas* in a revised geography syllabus through an inquiry such as the SGP, choice of case studies, topic content, studies of contemporary issues, fieldwork and inquiry learning - as occurs with the current syllabus. If the Syllabus is carefully composed these can be represented explicitly (as in the case of traditional management of ecosystems), implied (as in the numeracy skills built into studying topographic maps) or as an integral component of what is being studied (as in personal and social capability and work and enterprise skills developed when completing the SGP)

Topics

Preliminary

- *Biophysical interactions* content is considered relevant and appropriate with room for a focus on contemporary issues. The foundation studies based on the four spheres provide a good conceptual basis for further biophysical studies. This topic structure could be integrated into a topic selected from the Australian Curriculum.
- *Global Challenges*. Population studies are highly relevant and appropriate. The other challenges investigated through topics such as: Cultural Integration, Development, Political Geography and Natural Resource Use are still relevant but need a new approach, possibly through the lens of a case study or issue. There is considerable overlap between Human Wellbeing in Stage 5 and Development.

STAGE 6 GEOGRAPHY SYLLABUS

- The *Senior Geography Project* is considered a key component of the preliminary course for the development of geographical inquiry skills and engagement with the subject. It is both relevant and appropriate but could be updated with improved guidance for teachers, a new name (Senior Geography Inquiry/ Investigation and greater emphasis on critical and creative thinking; and citizenship (Local problems, Local solutions).

HSC

- *Urban places* – relevant but content no longer appropriate. Too content heavy and concepts are outdated. The overlap with stage 5 Changing Places needs to be considered.
- *Ecosystems at Risk* – highly relevant and appropriate but the content could be restructured to a more user-friendly format. For example, two separate references to biophysical interactions in the core and case studies confuses students.
- *People and Economic Activity* – considered mostly relevant and appropriate. This unit needs a general introductory section about the nature of economic activity to cover some types of questions in the HSC examination. There is some feeling that the enterprise study could be replaced by a fieldwork or investigation based on the economic activity. This could broaden options for investigating an element of the topic at a local scale. Other subjects contain studies of enterprises / businesses such as Business Studies and Food Technology.

Note: There was worthwhile discussion about how climate change might be dealt with in a new Senior Syllabus. A range of options were suggested from a separate topic or component to integration where relevant. Current studies in climate change across the curriculum 7 – 10 was also a consideration.

Life skills

The Life Skills Syllabus (outcomes and content) is neither relevant nor appropriate to the needs of NSW Senior Life Skills students. It fails to develop solid geography knowledge and skills while at the same time building the Life Skills needed to transition from school to future studies or work.

A format similar the Life Skills component of the new 7-10 Geography Syllabus would be appropriate and build on the geography they are now experiencing in Stage 5.

Comments made regarding the diversity of learners, Cross-Curriculum Priorities, LAC's and others also apply to consideration of a new Life Skills Syllabus.

HSC Examination

Likes

- General structure 60 / 40 Short answer and extended responses and gives enough scope for all students.
- Stimulus booklet – 4 pages
- Internal choice in extended response questions
- All year 12 topics are examined

Dislikes (This is a summary of concerns rather than a consensus)

- Questions encourage rote learning rather than critical thinking and application of knowledge and understanding.
- Not enough reference to the integration of fieldwork within the wording of questions
- Little specific reference to the stimulus booklet outside the skills and some short answer questions
- Inconsistency in the number of time consuming skills calculation questions from year to year, particularly those involving multiple steps (There may be six one year and two the next).
- Questions becoming too obtuse or narrow in recent years due to the age of the current Syllabus – there is nothing left to ask.
- Short answer questions that are too broad and could be answered as an extended response.

Suggestions (Consensus)

- Retain the stimulus booklet and make greater use of it in questions that require the application of knowledge and understanding as well as skills.
- Inclusion of a formula sheet for numeracy based skills questions as occurs in Mathematics, Sciences and Business studies.
- Provide clear exam guidelines and specimen paper to ensure clarity and consistency in teacher approaches to preparing students for the HSC exams such as how different skills are to be taught and marked.

Australian Curriculum

Any new Syllabus should be based on what is best for NSW and reflect the best features of the current Syllabus while drawing on the Australian Curriculum. This may be best achieved with new topics that integrate the best of both documents to create a contemporary study of geography relevant to C21st learners and workers.

The Geography Teachers Association of New South Wales looks forward to further consultation with NESA and participation in the process to develop Stage 6 Geography and Geography Life skills.

Lorraine Chaffer

President GTANSW

On behalf of the Geography Teachers Association of NSW