



30 August 2019

Geography Teachers Association of NSW and ACT Feedback on the Draft Stage 6 Geography and Stage 6 Life Skills Geography Syllabus

The following submission by the Geography Teachers Association of NSW and ACT, represents the views of twenty Councillors who are experienced Geography teachers having taught or are currently teaching Stage 6 Geography. Furthermore, the Councillors teach across Sydney, Canberra and regional centres such as Wagga Wagga and Newcastle and across all education sectors. GTANSW Councillors attended consultation meetings with NESA and Department of Education and canvassed the opinions of Geography teachers through an online survey. This submission focuses heavily on the views of members expressed in that survey.

The submission summarises suggestions and comments on the Draft Stage 6 Syllabus.

1) Perceived strengths of the Draft Stage 6 Geography and Stage 6 Life Skills Geography Syllabus.

a) Syllabus Structure and Rationale

- i) The Draft Stage 6 Geography and Stage 6 Life Skills Geography syllabuses are set out in a familiar and consistent format to other Stage 6 syllabuses and the Geography K-10 syllabus. This is strength of the syllabus as it ensures continuity and understanding of the syllabus components.
- ii) The aims, rationale and outcomes of the Stage 6 Draft Syllabus clearly describe the nature, purpose and intended learning of the Stage Course
- iii) The continuums of geographical concepts, geographical inquiry skills and geographical tools are appropriate to Stage 6 and build on those developed in Stage 5.

b) Content

The GTA Council and members agreed with the following aspects of the Draft Stage 6 Geography and Stage 6 Life Skills Geography Syllabus content:

Year 11

- i) The Year 11 topics cover appropriate content that builds on learning from Stages 4 and 5 and allows for the use of contemporary and relevant studies at a range of scales and relevant to school location and resources.



- ii) The Year 11 topic 'Earth's Natural Systems' is an appropriate foundation for other topics in Years 11 and 12 and builds on Stage 4 and 5 learning.
- iii) The 'Human Systems' focus on the nature of the human footprint on earth and the processes and systems that cause change and transform places provides an appropriate foundation for undertaking a study of Human – Environment Interactions (Year 11), a Geographical Investigation (Year 11), Urban Places (Year 12) and Ecosystems and Global Biodiversity (Year 12)
- iv) The topic 'Human - Environment Interactions' provides the opportunity to investigate the interaction of human and natural systems through a selected study. The study options for 'Human – Environment Interactions' are clear, appropriate and well-structured and provide flexibility for content selection appropriate to school location and available resources.
- v) The 'Geographic Investigation' provides opportunities for students to engage with their local area, a geography topic that interests them and undertake primary data collection. Allocation of more time for the Geographic Investigation is overwhelmingly supported and welcomed.

Year 12

- vi) It is the opinion of GTA Councillors and members that the two Year 12 topics cover appropriate content that builds on learning from Year 11 and Stage 5 and allows for the use of contemporary and relevant studies at a range of scales and relevant to school location and resources.
- vii) The topic 'Planning for Sustainability' provides students with an opportunity to consolidate and build on prior knowledge and understanding of sustainability and challenges to achieving sustainability and to display that understanding through the development of a sustainability plan. It also enables teachers provide authentic learning by using local case studies and engaging local stakeholders. This topic also provides links to vocational relevance of Geography.
- viii) 'Urban and rural places' has a focus on settlements and the processes causing change. Two studies of settlements at different scales focus on investigating change and responses to change. The topic content is clear, appropriate and well-structured and provide flexibility for content selection appropriate to school location and available resources.



- ix) 'Ecosystems and Global Biodiversity' has a focus on investigating ecosystems - stresses, change and management and global trends and actions in relation to biodiversity. The content is clear, appropriate and well-structured and provides flexibility for content selection appropriate to school location and available resources.
- x) The mandatory requirements for fieldwork maintain the integrity of Geography as a discipline that engages in learning outside the classroom.

c) Tools and Skills

The tools and skills included in the syllabus build on those developed in Stage 4 and 5. The tools and skills provide opportunities to access inquiry-based teaching and learning through the use of the tools. The inclusion of a higher order skills provides opportunities for critical thinking, analyzing, synthesizing and communicating information, skills that are vital in the world of work.

d) Draft Stage 6 Life Skills Geography Syllabus

The Draft Stage 6 Life Skills Geography Syllabus structure mirrors the topics in the Draft Stage 6 Syllabus. This is an appropriate structure for teaching Life Skills students in the Geography classroom. The Outcomes, Geographical Inquiry Skills, Tools and Concepts are appropriate for Life Skills students in Stage 6.

e) Assessment Requirements

The assessment requirements for Years 11 and 12 are clearly set out, appropriate, allow flexibility and provide students with opportunities to demonstrate learning. The specific details provided for assessing fieldwork ensure students engage in primary inquiry methodologies. The proposed examination specifications are clear, appropriate and will provide students with opportunities to demonstrate learning. The GTA Council and members welcome the inclusion of a question in Section II of the examination that requires integration and application of knowledge from more than one topic.



2. Areas for Consideration

The GTA Council and members express concern in the following areas of the Draft Stage 6 Geography syllabus:

- a) The Year 11 content includes three topics and the Geographical Investigation providing exciting new opportunities to renew the study of Geography including contemporary content. However, the overcrowded nature of the content in two of the topics 'Earth's Natural Systems' and 'Human Systems' may make meaningful teaching and learning challenging. It is suggested that some of the options in the Year 11 course be moved to Year 12. Also providing case study examples for 'Earth's Natural Systems' would assist teaching and learning.
- b) The Year 12 'Urban and Rural Places' topic, by comparison with the other units of work lacks sufficient detail to guide teaching and learning and would benefit from the inclusion of dash points. There is some concern that students may avoid studying a rural place and avoid the intention of the topic. There is also concern that all other states study a mega city outside Australia and yet in NSW students will potentially never study large foreign cities. One suggestion could be that students' study:
one rural place,
one urban suburb or precinct and
one megacity.
Also, the definition of a "mega-region" in the glossary would be beneficial.
- c) For the Year 12 'Planning and Sustainability' topic there is some confusion about the content focus of the human activity and there is a request for this be clarified. Also, some people felt more options should be included to facilitate fieldwork for students in urban locations eg tourism, a development project. The 'plan for sustainability' has raised concern about what the plan would look like. A definitive structure would aid understanding.
- d) There is also concern that the time allocation of 50 hours is too much time for the two main topics in Year 12 and leads to the possibility of students disengaging. As both 'Urban and Rural Places and 'Ecosystems and Global Biodiversity' topics have a sustainability focus a recommendation is to integrate the 'Planning and Sustainability' content into whichever of the two major topics is taught first. The benefit of integrating the sustainability content would be to make time for a new, interesting topic be added to Year 12 content as the draft topics 'Urban and Rural Places and 'Ecosystems and Global Biodiversity' are similar, with some changes, to the current syllabus.
- e)



- f) **Tools and Skills.** While the GTA Council and Members highly value the integration of tools and skills there are concerns around comprehensively covering all geographic tools. Further, rather than separate lists of Geographic Tools and Skills provided for Year 11 and 12 a combined list for Stage 6 might be appropriate. GTA Councillors understand that the tools are a part of the content and can see the justification of including these on the content page. The support documents could provide clarity in this area.
- g) **Organisation of content diagram.** It is suggested that the placement of the concepts and content topics be reversed to align with the K to 10 syllabus structure diagram. The current diagram indicates that the concepts of change, place and space are relevant to Year 11 and scale, interconnection and environment are relevant to Year 12. The unbroken colour of the concepts ring clearly indicates that the concepts encompass all topics, yet again some clarification may be needed to avoid confusion.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback.

Sharon McLean
Vice President

On behalf of the Geography Teachers Association of NSW and ACT



The
Geography Teachers' Association
of NSW & ACT Inc

ABN: 59 246 850 128

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- Mail: PO Box 699 Lidcombe NSW 1825 ● Phone: 02 9716 0378
 - Fax: 02 9564 2342 ● Email: gta.admin@ptc.nsw.edu.au ● Web: www.gtansw.org.au
 - Professional Teachers' Council NSW, 67-73 St Hilliers Rd , Auburn NSW 2144

AN AFFILIATE OF THE AUSTRALIAN GEOGRAPHY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION INCORPORATED (AGTA)