



Media Release

STANSW Urges Further Extension of NSW Curriculum Reform Timeline, Expresses Concerns Over New 11-12 Science Syllabuses

The Science Teachers Association of NSW (STANSW) is urging the NSW Government to further extend the NSW Curriculum Reform timeline, as the association expresses deep concerns over the implementation of new science syllabuses.

Despite the recent announcement from the NSW Government that the timeline for curriculum reform was being extended, a new draft of the 7-10 Science Syllabus is due to be released in late 2023, and the initial stages of syllabus review for 11-12 Science have commenced.

STANSW, representing science educators across NSW, recently gathered an expert think tank and surveyed members to review the first draft of the 7-10 syllabus. “The initial draft of the 7-10 syllabus needed extensive revisions” said Dr Lauren McKnight from STANSW Council. “The structure did not clearly present the essential knowledge and skills students require, there was an inconsistent use of statements and descriptors, concepts were arranged inconsistently without clear learning progressions, and often with considerable “hidden” required knowledge. From what we saw, it needed a complete overhaul, so to be planning for a final version so soon is concerning”.

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) have now also commenced gathering subject matter experts and syllabus writers for the development of new 11-12 science syllabuses for Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Earth and Environmental Science, and the corresponding Life Skills syllabuses.

“It is essential to note that the current 11-12 science syllabuses were only implemented in 2018, and teachers are only just mastering the contents and requirements” said Margaret Shepherd, President of STANSW. “Introducing new syllabuses so soon puts additional strain on teachers. It takes considerable time for adjustment, programming and implementation.”

“We have the technology now to implement small, step-wise improvements to the 11-12 syllabuses, which would be far more effective and efficient,” said Ms Shepherd. “Now is not the right time for a whole new version”.

“Schools in NSW are faced with unprecedented teacher shortages, unmanageable teacher workloads and high rates of burnout. To implement multiple new syllabuses at this time will only exacerbate the existing challenges. This places the education system at even greater risk.”. “Teachers require adequate time, support, and resources to adapt and refine their practice.”

STANSW is also concerned that a rushed timeline for syllabus reform limits the opportunities for consultation. “The quality of an educational reform depends on input and collaboration from educators who possess first-hand knowledge of the classroom dynamics” said Dr McKnight. “STANSW firmly believes that an inclusive and consultative approach is vital to curriculum reform, and this simply cannot occur on a rushed timeframe when educators are already at breaking point.”

Key recommendations from STANSW are:

- Pause the development and implementation of new 11-12 sciences syllabuses: STANSW advocates for a focus on iterative improvement with a mechanism for further improvements, rather than another overhaul at this time.
- There is a necessity to develop a comprehensive K-12 concept map in the science syllabuses, to represent the learning progression of scientific ideas to facilitate the development of logical, cohesive syllabuses.
- Focus on support and retention of teachers, who continue to be overworked and overwhelmed.

ABOUT

The Science Teachers Association NSW has been inspiring Science Teachers and the learning of science in NSW, providing leadership and promoting excellence in science education. We are an association led by science educators who volunteer their time to foster an environment of supportive collegiality.

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