



GENERAL CAPABILITIES

ETHICAL UNDERSTANDING

Consultation – introductory information and learning continua

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REVIEW OF THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM F–10: GENERAL CAPABILITIES

Ethical Understanding

Introduction

The terms of reference for the Review of the Australian Curriculum F–10 (the Review), require the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), to “revisit and improve where necessary, the learning continua for the general capabilities with reference to current research”.¹

General capabilities equip young Australians with the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century. General capabilities are developed through learning area content; they are not separate learning areas, subjects or isolated skills.

The F–10 Australian Curriculum includes seven general capabilities:

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Digital Literacy (formerly Information and Communication Technology (ICT) capability)
- Personal and Social capability
- Ethical Understanding
- Intercultural Understanding.

General capabilities are addressed through the content of the learning areas; discipline-based content knowledge is important for the development of general capabilities. The teaching of learning area content will be strengthened by the application of relevant general capabilities, as will the development of the general capabilities through appropriate learning area contexts.

Opportunities to develop general capabilities in learning area content vary. Some general capabilities are essential to, and best developed within specific learning areas; others support learning in any learning area. General capabilities are identified in content descriptions where they are developed or applied through learning area content. They are also identified in content elaborations where they offer opportunities to add depth and richness to student learning.

¹ Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2020, *Terms of reference: Review of the Australian Curriculum F–10*, p. 4.

Organisation of the general capabilities

Each general capability has an introduction that provides a description of the capability and a rationale for its inclusion in the Australian Curriculum.

Each general capability is presented as either a learning continuum or a learning progression and is structured around elements and sub-elements.

A learning continuum has been developed for five of the seven general capabilities, and describes the knowledge, skills and behaviours that students can reasonably be expected to develop from Foundation to Year 10. The continua map common paths for the development of knowledge, skills and behaviours in each of the elements and sub-elements across six levels for Critical and Creative Thinking, Digital Literacy, Personal and Social capability, Ethical Understanding and Intercultural Understanding.

For the Literacy and Numeracy capabilities, more detailed learning progressions have been developed to describe the learning pathway(s) along which students typically progress regardless of age or year level. The National Literacy and Numeracy Learning Progressions describe the skills, understandings and capabilities students typically acquire as their proficiency increases in a particular aspect of the curriculum over time, and help teachers ascertain the stage of learning reached, identify any gaps in skills and knowledge, and plan for the next step to progress learning.

Review of the Ethical Understanding capability

The Review of the Ethical Understanding capability followed a similar process to that of the other general capabilities:

- a) Research related to ethical understanding was sourced and reviewed.
- b) An analysis of the learning continuum was undertaken for horizontal and vertical alignment.
- c) The continuum was compared with a range of learning area content descriptions for the purpose of ensuring alignment of concepts and expectations.
- d) The continuum was compared to the continua of the other general capabilities to identify commonalities and align language and ‘at level’ descriptions across continua.
- e) An external expert panel was convened to critique and provide input into drafting improvements to the continuum.
- f) Evidence gathered in the research, analysis and comparison phases was used to refine and propose revisions of the continuum for consultation and feedback through ACARA’s reference groups, advisory groups and expert panels.

The Review of the Ethical Understanding learning continuum found:

- some sub-elements that retain or change focus from level one to level six
- some sub-elements that provide progression through the choice of actions (cognitive verbs) and others that do not do this effectively
- misalignment of sequences or descriptions across levels
- sub-elements that do not provide a clear purpose
- sub-elements that do not provide clear links to content or context.

The Review identified the following opportunities to improve the Ethical Understanding learning continuum:

- revisit and update element and sub-element structures and titles
- revisit and improve element and sub-element descriptions and developmental sequences
- improve the relationship of the Ethical Understanding continuum to learning area content.

As a result of the Review, the following key changes were made to the Ethical Understanding learning continuum:

- a) The number of elements was reduced from three to two.
- b) The first element includes sub-elements related to meta-ethics (ethical and moral concepts) and has been renamed ‘Understanding ethical concepts and perspectives’.
- c) The second element includes sub-elements related to normative ethics (the theories about how to be ethical) and applied ethics (the application of ethical thinking in responding to issues), and has been renamed ‘Responding to ethical issues’.
- d) The third element was removed; the sub-elements were combined or renamed to reflect their placement within the new elements or across more than one sub-element.
- e) The following changes to sub-elements were made:
 - ‘Recognise ethical concepts’ was renamed ‘Explore ethical concepts’.
 - ‘Examine values’ was renamed ‘Examine relationships between values and ethical norms’ and moved to the first element.
 - Aspects of ‘Consider consequences’ were included in a refocused sub-element named ‘Recognise influences on ethical behaviour and perspectives’, in order to go beyond just the consideration of the consequences of behaviour.
 - ‘Explore rights and responsibilities’ now comprises, in part, a new sub-element named ‘Explore ethical perspectives and frameworks’, along with other aspects of ethical frameworks not included in the original learning continuum.
 - ‘Explore ethical concepts in context’ was renamed ‘Explore ethical issues’ and moved to the second element’.

- ‘Reason and make ethical decisions’ was combined with ‘Reflect on ethical action’ and renamed ‘Making and reflecting on ethical decisions’.
 - ‘Consider points of view’ appears in ethical perspectives as described across multiple sub-elements.
- f) The sub-element descriptions were refined to be more reflective of the stages of schooling and nature of learners at these stages.

A comparison of the structure of the current to revised learning continuum follows in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of the current and revised elements and sub-elements of the Ethical Understanding learning continuum

Current elements	Current sub-elements	Revised elements	Revised sub-elements
Understanding ethical concepts and issues	Recognise ethical concepts	Understanding ethical concepts and perspectives	Explore ethical concepts
	Explore ethical concepts in context		Examine relationships between values and ethical norms
			Recognise influences on ethical behaviour and perspectives
Reasoning in decision making and actions	Reason and make ethical decisions	Responding to ethical issues	Explore ethical perspectives and frameworks
	Consider consequences		Explore ethical issues
	Reflect on ethical action		Make and reflect on ethical decisions
Exploring values, rights and responsibilities	Examine values		
	Explore rights and responsibilities		
	Consider points of view		

Attachment 1 presents the updated description and learning continuum for the Ethical Understanding capability.

Attachment 2 presents the current learning continuum as a comparison.

Attachment 1. Ethical Understanding – revised consultation version

Description

Ethical understanding requires an understanding of ethical and moral concepts, theories about how to be ethical, and the application of ethical thinking in response to issues.

Ethical understanding involves students building a strong personal and socially oriented ethical outlook that helps them to manage context, conflict and uncertainty, and to develop an awareness of the influence that their values and behaviour have on others.

Ethical understanding involves students exploring ethical issues and interactions with others, discussing ideas and learning to be accountable as members of a democratic community.

Ethical understanding is developed through the investigation of a range of questions drawn from various contexts in the curriculum.

Structure

The Ethical Understanding learning continuum is organised into two elements:

- Understanding ethical concepts and perspectives
- Responding to ethical issues.



Figure 1: Organising elements for Ethical Understanding

Each element comprises a set of sub-elements to describe the key skills and knowledge reflected in the element, as shown in Table 2.

Australian Curriculum: General capabilities – Ethical Understanding.
Consultation curriculum

Table 2: Elements and sub-elements of the Ethical Understanding learning continuum

Element	Sub-elements
Understanding ethical concepts and perspectives	Explore ethical concepts
	Examine relationships between values and ethical norms
	Recognise influences on ethical behaviour and perspectives
Responding to ethical issues	Explore ethical perspectives and frameworks
	Explore ethical issues
	Make and reflect on ethical decisions

Understanding ethical concepts and perspectives

This element is organised into three sub-elements:

- Explore ethical concepts – students identify and examine ethical concepts. They discuss and examine the dimensions of ethical concepts and how they relate to the actions we take in a range of contexts.
- Examine relationships between values and ethical norms – students understand the role that values and norms have in ethical decisions. They consider how a range of values relate to established norms of ethical behaviour.
- Recognise influences on ethical behaviour and perspectives – students recognise the interrelationship of factors that impact their ethical behaviour and perspectives. They consider how factors such as reason, emotions, habits of behaviour, character traits, obligations and duties impact ethically considered responses.

Responding to ethical issues

This element is organised into three sub-elements:

- Explore ethical perspectives and frameworks – students develop an understanding of different ethical frameworks and how these inform ethical perspectives and decision making. Ethical frameworks include: approaches that address the role of consequences on ethical actions; approaches that deal with issues of duty, justice and fairness; and approaches that focus on virtues in the ethical decision-making process.
- Explore ethical issues – students bring together their understanding of the first four sub-elements of the Ethical Understanding learning continuum to investigate ethical issues. They apply their understanding of ethical concepts, values, norms, ethical frameworks and perspectives to curriculum-related ethical contexts.
- Make and reflect on ethical decisions – students reach decisions and reflect on those decisions regarding the issues they investigated. They recognise the factors that impact on ethical decisions, determine alternative responses to an issue, and consider how these may impact potential outcomes.

Ethical understanding learning continuum (revised version)

Sub-element	Level 1 (Foundation)	Level 2 (Years 1–2)	Level 3 (Years 3–4)	Level 4 (Years 5–6)	Level 5 (Years 7–8)	Level 6 (Years 9–10)
Understanding ethical concepts and perspectives						
Explore ethical concepts	identify examples of ethical concepts such as right and wrong, good and bad	identify ethical concepts such as right and wrong, honesty and fairness, and describe actions and behaviours associated with these	identify ethical concepts such as respect and fairness and describe how the situation or context affect actions and behaviour.	identify and describe ethical concepts such as truth, integrity and justice and explain how perspectives may vary according to the situation or context.	examine the consistency in meaning of ethical concepts such as freedom, justice, and rights and responsibilities, in a range of situations and contexts	analyse the similarities and differences between ethical concepts, such as integrity, equality, respect and tolerance, with sensitivity to the situation and context
Examine relationships between values and ethical norms	identify examples of values and ethical norms and explain why they are important	identify how values and ethical norms influence decision-making	explain how values and ethical norms influence responses and decision making in a range of situations and contexts	Explain how the relationships between values and ethical norms influence responses and decisions related to ethical issues	Describe the relationship between the role of individual and community values and ethical norms when responding to ethical issues	evaluate the importance of values when reaching a position on an ethical issue and analyse their role in challenging and defending ethical norms, with sensitivity to individual, and community contexts
Recognise influences on ethical behaviour and perspectives	Identify examples of how emotions affect behaviour	identify how emotions and behaviours interact, and share examples of when they match and when they do not	explain the relationship between emotions and decision making and describe how emotions can affect behaviour and decisions in different situations	explain how habits and behaviour shape character and examine how they inform ethical perspectives across different contexts	explain how different character traits such as honesty, trust, courage, and selflessness interact with obligations or duties to determine ethically appropriate responses in diverse contexts	explore and evaluate examples of the tensions between conflicting obligations in issues of personal, social and global importance
Responding to ethical issues						
Explore ethical perspectives and frameworks	identify examples of different consequences explain how these might affect the way people behave or act	identify the similarities and differences between values such as caring, compassion and empathy, and examine the effects they have on ethical decisions	examine the differences between rights and responsibilities, and care and respect, and how these influence perspectives and ethical decision making	explore ethical frameworks that use consequences, virtues and duties to guide ethical decision making and examine how they inform our ethical perspectives	analyse the differences between ethical frameworks and examine how these differences might be resolved when making ethical decisions	analyse examples of conflict between individual freedoms and rights, and obligations and responsibilities, in local and global social and political contexts
Explore ethical issues	identify from examples how ethical problems may be difficult to resolve	identify different perspectives and approaches when discussing ethical issues	consider how values and ethical perspectives apply to issues in a range of situations or contexts	use different ethical frameworks to examine both personal and social issues understanding that perspectives or approaches may vary in different situations or contexts	analyse the relationships between values, ethical perspectives and ethical frameworks for complex social issues	apply knowledge of ethical concepts, values, perspectives and frameworks to respond to complex ethical issues and make judgements about their significance in different contexts
Making and reflecting on ethical decisions	Identify how peoples' emotions, wants and needs impact their choices and actions	identify the influence of perspectives and values on ethical decisions	recount and examine own processes of ethical reasoning and explain decision-making with reference to ethical perspective and values	consider alternative ethical responses to an issue when making and reflecting on ethical decisions within different contexts	consider how assumptions such as values and beliefs influence approaches to ethical issues, and analyse how these affect outcomes	analyse biases when applying ethical concepts, values and ethical frameworks, in order to explore and evaluate ethical decisions in a range of complex contexts

Attachment 2

Ethical Understanding learning continuum (original version)

Sub-element	Level 1 Typically, by the end of F	Level 2 Typically, by the end of Year 2	Level 3 Typically, by the end of Year 4	Level 4 Typically, by the end of Year 6	Level 5 Typically, by the end of Year 8	Level 6 Typically, by the end of Year 10
Understanding ethical concepts and issues element						
Recognise ethical concepts	identify ethical concepts arising in familiar contexts, such as good and bad behaviours	describe ethical concepts, such as right and wrong, honesty, fairness and tolerance	identify ethical concepts, such as equality, respect and connectedness, and describe some of their attributes	examine and explain ethical concepts such as truth and justice that contribute to the achievement of a particular outcome	analyse behaviours that exemplify the dimensions and challenges of ethical concepts	critique generalised statements about ethical concepts
Explore ethical concepts in context	describe familiar situations that involve ethical concepts	discuss ethical concepts within a range of familiar contexts	discuss actions taken in a range of contexts that include an ethical dimension	explain what constitutes an ethically better or worse outcome and how it might be accomplished	analyse the ethical dimensions of beliefs and the need for action in a range of settings	distinguish between the ethical and non-ethical dimensions of complex issues
Reasoning in decision making and actions element						
Reason and make ethical decisions	identify examples from stories and experiences that show ways people make decisions about their actions	discuss how people make decisions about their actions and offer reasons why people's decisions differ	explain reasons for acting in certain ways, including the conflict between self-respect and self-interest in reaching decisions	explore the reasons behind there being a variety of ethical positions on a social issue	analyse inconsistencies in personal reasoning and societal ethical decision making	investigate reasons for clashes of beliefs in issues of personal, social and global importance
Consider consequences	identify links between emotions and behaviours	describe the effects that personal feelings and dispositions have on how people behave	examine the links between emotions, dispositions and intended and unintended consequences of their actions on others	evaluate the consequences of actions in familiar and hypothetical scenarios	investigate scenarios that highlight ways that personal dispositions and actions can affect consequences	analyse the objectivity or subjectivity behind decision making where there are many possible consequences
Reflect on ethical action	identify and describe the influence of factors such as wants and needs on people's actions	give examples of how understanding situations can influence the way people act	consider whether having a conscience leads to ways of acting ethically in different scenarios	articulate a range of ethical responses to situations in various social contexts	analyse perceptions of occurrences and possible ethical response in challenging scenarios	evaluate diverse perceptions and ethical bases of action in complex contexts
Exploring values, rights and responsibilities element						
Examine values	identify values that are important to them	discuss some agreed values in familiar contexts	identify and describe shared values in familiar and unfamiliar contexts	examine values accepted and enacted within various communities	assess the relevance of beliefs and the role and application of values in social practices	analyse and explain the interplay of values in national and international forums and policy making
Explore rights and responsibilities	share examples of rights and responsibilities in given situations	identify their rights and associated responsibilities and those of their classmates	investigate children's rights and responsibilities at school and in the local community	monitor consistency between rights and responsibilities when interacting face-to-face or through social media	analyse rights and responsibilities in relation to the duties of a responsible citizen	evaluate the merits of conflicting rights and responsibilities in global contexts
Consider points of view	express their own point of view and listen to the views of others	recognise that there may be many points of view when probing ethical dilemmas and identify alternative views	describe different points of view associated with an ethical dilemma and give possible reasons for these differences	explain a range of possible interpretations and points of view when thinking about ethical dilemmas	draw conclusions from a range of points of view associated with challenging ethical dilemmas	use reasoning skills to prioritise the relative merits of points of view about complex ethical dilemmas