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**Title:** Curriculum, assessment and reporting in special educational needs and disability: A thematic overview of recent literature

**Date:** 2012

**Originally published by:** Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

**Place of publication:** Sydney, NSW

**Example citation:** Garner, P., Forbes, F., Fergusson, A., Aspland, T. and Datta, P. (2012) *Curriculum, assessment and reporting in special educational needs and disability: A thematic overview of recent literature*. Sydney, NSW: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority.

**Version of item:** Final report

Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting  
in Special Educational Needs and  
Disability:  
*A Thematic Overview of Recent Literature*

Australian Curriculum:  
Students with Disability

January 2012  
[www.acara.edu.au](http://www.acara.edu.au)

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**October 2011**



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## Executive Summary

This report is an explicit recognition of a commitment to apply the principles of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young People* (2008) to **all** students. It represents an opportunity for Australia to develop curriculum, assessment and reporting (CAR) provisions for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Disability which benefit from international efforts to formulate inclusive approaches in education and to construct a world-class response to their educational needs.

Australia is a signatory to key international agreements which affect students with SEN and Disabilities in all of its educational settings. The *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) and *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2008) are pivotal pieces that influence this commitment for appropriate provision for students with SEN and Disability. Add to this Australia's status as a signatory on the *Salamanca Agreement* (1994) and this demonstrates a commitment to inclusive educational practices by government.

The call for an inclusive curriculum is universal in Australia. It does not emanate solely from the special education sector which has co-authored this report. Commitment to educational inclusion for all is also apparent in other mainstream peak associations. It is thus supported across all sectors of the education system.

This report confirms that CAR is a complex issue for a cohort of students that is not a homogenous group. It is a group that has a right to have its individual and collective needs catered for in an inclusive curriculum with appropriately student-centred assessment and reporting to show progress over time and an opportunity to have curricula constantly improving.

## Organisation & Approach

- The purpose of this report is to provide an overview analysis of current international and national policy and practice in relation to curriculum, assessment and reporting for students with SEN and Disability. The international scoping is necessarily selective, to indicate recent trends. It gives particular scrutiny to CAR policy and practice in England, given that country's long-standing experiences with national curriculum assessment and reporting for this group of students.
- This report provides some suggested ways in which provision in relation to CAR for students with SEN and Disability can be improved in the development of the Australian Curriculum in accordance with its overall remit.
- In this report CAR is used throughout as a term which captures the synergy and linkage between its three constituent elements – curriculum, assessment and reporting. Justification for such an approach is embedded within the literature review.

## Findings

- Major themes are highlighted concerning CAR practice and policy for students with SEN and Disability in this report. Whilst by no means exhaustive, they do draw attention to those areas which need commitment and action from policymakers.
- There is a demonstrable synergy between CAR practices in the two literature reviews under each of the 6 identified themes. Each review suggests that important synergies exist between curriculum, assessment and reporting in SEN and Disability; this is a notable feature of leading-edge practice.
- There are strong indications, exemplified in the literature surveyed in this report, that pedagogy is immutably linked to CAR for students with SEN and Disability.
- Australian-focused literature emphasises attitudes, skills and competencies rather than the curriculum *per se*. The latter is far more evident in the English and some international literature. This represents a major distinction between the two sets of sources identified.
- Some important tensions in CAR for SEN and Disability emerge in the literature highlighted in this study. Of particular note in this respect are the disparities between policy and practice facing schools, principals, teachers, students and their parents on a daily basis.
- This report illustrates that there is an absence of coherence in CAR for students with SEN and Disability across many national settings. In England, there remains a continuing debate – over 30 years from the inception of a ‘curriculum for all’ – concerning efforts to secure a truly ‘inclusive’ national curriculum for students with SEN and Disability.
- The report shows that, in Australia, the onus is principally on the teacher to make ‘appropriate curriculum adjustments’ to cater for the needs of all students including those with SEN and Disability regardless of appropriate training or expertise. Differentiation of the curriculum is promoted at the level of policy in all states and territories but policy is silent on methods of differentiation.
- Whilst the use of standardised ‘mainstream’ approaches (for instance, differentiation by content, task and learning target) in CAR for students with SEN and Disability is seen as one way of promoting greater educational inclusion, there is a widely held belief – noted in the literature scoping – that such homogeneity can lead to a failure to provide appropriate learning experiences for students with SEN and Disability. The national benchmark (NAPLAN), rather than setting targets for individual students based on their assessed needs, drives policy and provision.
- The report points to a tension between curriculum and assessment. There is evidence that schools are using international assessment tools as curriculum. The purpose of such assessment devices appears to have been misinterpreted by practitioners in an attempt to find strategies to teach students with SEN and Disability. This is undertaken in good faith, but in the absence of any substantive curriculum guidance.
- The report points to the absence of targeted research in Australia in respect of CAR for students with SEN and Disability. An attendant focus on researching the educational outcomes for this group of students is similarly characterised by a demonstrable lack of ground-level data which can help inform progression and transition.

## Context of the study

This study was undertaken for the Australian Curriculum, Assessment & Reporting Authority (ACARA).

A scoping of the literature relating to CAR is provided. This considers a variety of illustrative materials, drawn from a range of sources, which seeks to provide an overview of recent theoretical and practical orientations in the field and an indication of some of the challenges and opportunities that exist. The literature identified in this process is drawn from a number of country settings, to illustrate the international nature of this important issue. England in particular is used as a 'national curriculum' has been in place in that country for over 30 years.

The scoping addresses the literature from an understanding that 'curriculum', 'assessment' and 'reporting' in SEN and Disability are immutably linked and inter-connected aspects of provision. Our analysis of these literature sources confirm a widely held belief amongst practitioners that such overlaps form an indelible component of effective practice.



## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this literature scoping exercise is to:

- highlight key themes from the English/International literature which describe recent CAR developments for SEN and Disability students in settings where an inclusive national curriculum has been operating over time
- consider each of the selected themes in the context of the recent Australian experience
- identify emergent questions for those involved in the development of a 'national curriculum' in Australia.

The scoping exercise has adopted an approach which, whilst not following a 'systematic review' methodology, allows an overview of recent developments in the field to be undertaken, according to a set of pre-determined selection criteria.

*The intention of this literature scoping is to identify useful themes, validated by practitioners, which can be exemplified in English/International and in Australian contexts. What it does not seek to do is to offer a comprehensive, systematic review of all core and associated literature in the field of CAR for students with SEN and Disability in either an international or a discreet Australian context: that task is viewed as an extended piece of enquiry, falling outside of the immediate remit of the present report.*

### 1.1 Scoping Exercise Methodology

Large scale literature reviews have been popular in education for a number of years. Various methodologies have been adopted (Girden, 1996). More recently there has been a move towards utilising so-called 'systematic reviews', which offer a fixed and pre-determined template via which research literature in a given field is evaluated. The approach has its critics (see, for example, Torrance, 2004); one criticism has been that such an approach to scoping literature appeared to be aimed at other researchers and not at practitioners or policy-makers. This has been a major consideration in compiling this scoping study.

The present literature scoping has excluded substantial reference to the significant body of generic material relating to curriculum, assessment and reporting. This action has been taken because such materials are extensive and readily accessible in a range of formats (see, for example, Hargreaves, Earl & Schmidt, 2002; Webb & Jones, 2009).

On the contrary, this literature scoping exercise has involved the selection of a set of literature resources which are easily accessible to both policy-makers and to ground-level practitioners in schools. The scoping exercise deals with literature evidence from England and an indicative range of international sources in order to provide maximum usefulness. A common set of inclusion criteria for the references utilised is used:

- (i) date (2000-2010)
- (ii) focus – curriculum/assessment/recording (CAR)
- (iii) context – schools and educational settings, both mainstream & special
- (iv) evidence-base – transparent & data-informed

(v) accessibility – connected directly to policy and practice. The materials selected were reviewed by the project team, and their key features which connected to CAR, were summarised.

Given that CAR challenges in the context of a national curriculum have existed in England for over 30 years a small reference group (8 members in total) was established in that country. This comprised school-based practitioners (including head teachers), tutors contributing to professional development courses in SEN and Disability, and personnel involved in formulating or mediating official policy. This group was invited to identify a set of core themes which, based on their professional experience in the field, informed CAR aspects of their work. This was amplified by their perception of international practice in CAR, including that in other parts of the UK. The group identified 6 themes from its deliberations. As a result, literature relating to CAR will be considered using the following descriptors:

- (a) inclusive
- (b) appropriate
- (c) consultative
- (d) accountable
- (e) flexible
- (f) delivery by a trained & informed workforce.

Each of the above themes has been utilised to scope both English and the Australian developments in CAR, on the basis that they have been identified as one way of mapping the CAR territory in a national setting (England) that is now over 20 years into its 'national curriculum experience'. This comparative orientation is well established in the literature on the transfer of educational policy and practice (Phillips, 2005).

Subsequently, in a brief discussion of the findings of the scoping exercise, a number of key issues for policy-makers and practitioners are raised for consideration.

## 1.2 Methodology References

Girden, E. (1996) *Evaluating research articles from start to finish*. California: Sage.

Torrance, H. (2004) 'Systematic reviewing – the "call centre" version of research synthesis. Time for a more flexible approach'. Paper presented to the ESRC/RCBN seminar on systematic reviewing, 24 June, University of Sheffield.

Hargreaves, A., Earl, L. & Schmidt, M. (2002). Perspectives on alternative assessment reform. *American Educational Research Journal* 39,1: 69–95.

Phillips, D. (2005) 'Policy Borrowing in Education: Frameworks for Analysis', in: J. Zajda (ed.) *International Handbook on Globalisation, Education and Policy Research: Global Pedagogies and Policies*, Springer.

Webb, M. & Jones, J. (2009) 'Exploring tensions in developing assessment for learning 'Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 16 (2), 165-184.

## 2. SECTION 1: ENGLAND & INTERNATIONAL

### 2.1 Introduction

A National Curriculum (NC) was introduced in England (and Wales) in 1988. This was promoted as a 'curriculum for all' (e.g. NCC, 1989) which was to have relevance to all children (e.g. NCC, 1990; NCC, 1992). However, commentaries from the period leading up to, and subsequent to the implementation of the NC revealed significant levels of doubt as to the appropriateness of the arrangements that had been formulated (Ashdown, Carpenter & Bovair, 1991; Carpenter, Ashdown & Bovair 1996; Rose, Fergusson, Coles, Byers and Banes, 1996). Subsequent critiques of the English NC have raised a range of issues which have been underpinned by queries regarding the extent to which 'entitlement' and 'access' were embedded within the original framework (Carpenter, Ashdown and Bovair, 2001). These earliest critiques highlighted a set of issues which, notwithstanding some positive development in the subsequent 20 years, continue to inform the ongoing debate regarding the application of the NC protocols to a diverse range of students – in particular, those children and young people with what are termed 'special educational needs' (SEN).

Subsequently two reviews of the NC were commissioned (DCSF, 2009) both of which alluded to the difficulties which might be experienced by children with SEN and Disability. The Rose Review (DCSF, 2009a) indicated that the then existing NC framework was not necessarily appropriate for this group. The Cambridge Primary Review (2009) also indicated that lack of flexibility resulted in a narrowing of CAR focus, a process which did nothing to enhance the learning experience of SEN and Disability groups.

Six themes appear to capture the spirit of those discussions during the initial phase of NC application. Thus, the introduction of a NC in England & Wales has seen intensive professional and academic debate regarding inclusion (Lunt & Evans, 2002), appropriateness (HMI, 1994), consultation (Oliver & Barnes, 1998), accountability (Slee, Weiner & Tomlinson, 1998), flexibility (Visser, 1997) and training and professional development (King-Sears 2008; Mittler 2000). These themes have been interrogated and validated by the project reference group, in terms of their applicability as descriptors of CAR processes in Special Education. They are used in this literature scoping as a means of defining the context of post-2000 progress regarding aspects of CAR in England.

In considering these issues, it is important to recognise the obvious synergies that are apparent between them. For example, as Florian, Rouse & Black-Hawkins (2007) have noted, the overlaps between accountability and inclusive provision create significant tensions for schools, echoing earlier critiques (for instance, those of Lunt & Norwich, 2000). Consideration of each theme therefore requires acknowledgement of the interdependency of the complete raft of issues identified.

#### (a) inclusive

The English NC was introduced without specific pre-planning for the inclusion of CAR for students with SEN and Disability (Armstrong, 1999); rather Garner and Hinchcliffe (2001) note that while the NC was being formulated, the National Curriculum Council stated 'it was impossible to legislate for the enormous diversity of special educational needs' (cited p305). Despite the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority reporting that only 34 per cent of teachers in schools perceived the NC to be inappropriate for students with severe/profound and multiple learning difficulties, Byers (2001) reflects back on that negative response and the 'anti-NC backlash' from certain quarters of key stakeholders. The period immediately following 1988, and especially the decade from 2000-2010, has seen significant progress, albeit as an afterthought, regarding the inclusive dimension of the NC.

The earlier period saw the National Curriculum Council (NCC) issue a series of 10 advisory pamphlets (for example NCC, 1989; 1990; 1992). These raised the notion of the curriculum as needing to be 'broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated' (NCC *op.cit.*). In spite of this guidance, a consistent view held by practitioners was that these materials were both limited and partial. They were claimed to be lacking an underpinning philosophy (Carpenter, Ashdown & Bovair, 2001), and to be out of synchronisation with current school-based curriculum development, which highlighted the diverse needs of individual students (Armstrong, *op.cit.*).

These commentaries influenced the revision of the NC in 1999 (QCA 1999a: 1999b) which sought to introduce an overarching statement of curriculum values. This was intended to promote a range of more inclusive practices in CAR, including developments based on three key principles: setting suitable/appropriate learning challenges; responding to diverse student needs and overcoming barriers to learning and assessment for individuals (see Garner, 2009 for a brief discussion). Despite this, there remained a continued understanding by ground-level stakeholders that these principles were only selectively applied to the school population (Davis & Watson, 2001), leaving a significant proportion of students (notably those with the most significant educational need) without full and embedded access to the curriculum (O'Brien, 1998). Assessment processes continued to marginalise this group further by excluding them from often unachievable nationally prescribed attainment levels.

To meet these shortfalls, in 2001 a set of additional complementary guidelines was issued relating curriculum and assessment (QCA, 2001). This highlighted the need for a flexible approach in curriculum and its assessment. An emphasis was placed on individualised curricula (QCA, *op.cit.*). During the development of these guidance materials, it became apparent to the project team, through consultation with the field, that schools wanted a nationally agreed format for CAR for a discrete population of students with SEN and Disability who were operating below entry level 1 of the NC (unpublished notes from the Research and Development team, 2000). The final materials offered performance descriptions below level 1 (P scales) for every NC subject.

Subsequently the emergence of a range of approaches for this group, orientated towards their greater inclusion within the substantive curriculum arrangements, was a *leitmotif* of more recent development. An inclusive CAR framework will begin by acknowledging the diversity of the learning needs of all students (Wedell 2008) and valuing each student equally (Gillinson & Green 2008).

Considerable international focus has been placed on the need to make CAR sensitive to an increasingly wide range of students. In 2008 the *European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education* (EADSNE) resolved to promote Community-wide 'inclusive assessment', stating that '...Assessment processes, procedures, methods and tools are a crucial factor in supporting the learning of all students, including students identified with special educational needs' (EADSNE, 2009). The resolution went on to define a set of characteristics via which inclusive approaches in CAR might best be addressed. In common with contemporary thinking, EADSNE stated that 'innovative practice in inclusive assessment demonstrates good assessment for *all* (our emphasis) pupils' (*ibid*). In the United States, ongoing emphasis on including SEN and Disability students within mainstream curricular and assessment processes has been apparent since the enactment of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* in 2004 and is widely referenced in the research literature (see for example Wesling & Fox, 2009).

Exemplars of this principle in a wider international context can be drawn from widely different spatial settings. In Canada, Bennett & Wynne (2006), in their report to government, recommended that 'Every student receive effective instruction, based on research, continual assessment, and successful, evidence-based practice' (p.2). In other respects it has been convincingly argued

(for example, by Dettmer, Thurston, L. & Dyck, 2005) that inclusive schools tend to use more 'authentic' assessment measures with a focus on monitoring student progress.

### **(b) appropriate**

In identifying 'relevance' as a key element in CAR, the NC (NCC, 1989; 1999) introduced the potential to ensure that the curricular arrangements for SEN and Disability in England were aligned to the needs of individual students. The consequent struggle to ensure that 'fitness for purpose' became a feature of provision was apparent throughout the subsequent period. In Wales, Ware and Donnelly (2004) for example, described their difficulties in making use of the P scales to meaningfully assess students, including those with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD).

As a consequence of this research and trialling, led by Ware and Donnelly, the Welsh Assembly Government published their *Routes for Learning* (WAG, 2006). The aim of these materials was to more accurately assess and meet the needs of those at the earliest stages of learning (with what were termed 'additional needs') and to enable school staff to plan and measure more effectively curriculum progression.

'Our learners are entitled to access a curriculum and assessment framework which is fit for purpose and meets their specific needs - there is little benefit...if they are included in structures that fail to do this' (WAG, 2006 p46).

The value and appropriateness of these guidance and assessment materials was recognised across England. Scottish schools made a unanimous decision to adopt the use of them to complement their earlier 'Elaborated 5-14 Curriculum and Associated Programmes of Study' (LTS, 2001). In Northern Ireland, the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) gained copyright permissions to adapt the Welsh materials for their own context; *Quest for Learning* was produced as a result (CCEA, no date).

Practitioners in England were also considering the overall appropriateness of the P Scales as an assessment tool for students working below NC level 1. Lobbying from schools to adopt the WAG (2006) materials was unsuccessful – missing an opportunity to share a common assessment for the first time, across England. Martin, (2006) furthered the debate on the performance descriptions. He commented on their perceived ineffectiveness as a consequence of their original purpose as a target-setting tool, designed to aid whole school improvement rather than assist the learning of individuals. Aird & Aird (2006; 2007) amplified Martin's critique, focusing particularly on students with profound difficulties. According to these authors, the CAR materials contained insufficient levels of detail to be of value to end-users. As they state:

Enhancing student engagement in the learning process, however, is of little value unless evidence of achievement and attainment can be readily recorded and used formatively to promote further learning (Aird & Aird, 2007, p.18).

The same theme has more recently been the subject of discussion by school practitioner internet forums (SLD forum, SENIT, PMLD network, SENCo forum for example). Many schools have further developed specialist curricula for this group of students (e.g. The Bridge School, 2010; Barr's Court School (no date); Castlewood School, forthcoming; St Margaret's School, 2006).

An official response to the challenge of making CAR more appropriate to the wider population of students with SEN can be illustrated by reference to the English *National Strategies* (DfE, 2010). Resources and guidance contained within these make reference to the 'waves of intervention' model.

This suggests ways in which CAR processes can be modified and made more relevant to the needs and potential outcomes of children and young people who underachieve. This approach can be viewed as running parallel to, and complementary to, the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001), which has, over the last 15 years, articulated statutory arrangements for assessing the learning needs of the SEN and Disability population in England.

The concept of appropriateness in CAR procedures has been widely exposed in the international literature. It has been a term which appeared widely in debates regarding curriculum provision and has, for instance, been highlighted at country-specific level in the case of Belgium by Mortier, Hunt, Leroy, Van de Putte. & Van Hove (2010), who illustrated ways in which appropriate responses to children with intellectual disabilities are best delivered as a response by 'communities of practice'. Elsewhere, in the USA, Janney & Snell (2006) and Lee, Soukup, Little & Wehmeyer (2009) stressed the need to make CAR adaptations to ensure an appropriate student experience. Amplifying the need for a systemic approach in securing appropriate CAR measures, EURYDICE (2009) highlighted the dangers of a narrowing curricula and classroom practice which invariably result from *inappropriate* strategies. Similar concerns are identified generically at an international level by Salvia, Ysseldyke & Bolt (2009).

### **(c) consultative**

A crucial dimension of NC development has been the perception that, in England, the process has historically been one of 'being done to', rather than one of an embedded involvement in CAR development (Barrow, 1984). This suggests that inputs from a range of key stakeholders, including teachers and the children themselves, are of paramount importance in the curriculum process (Colwill & Peacey, 2001; Gillinson and Green, *op.cit*; Wedell, *op.cit*; Byers, Davies, Fergusson and Marvin, 2008).

Existing research confirms the importance of this approach. EMSEN (2005; 2006) demonstrated the practical application of this way of working towards including children and young people as cornerstones in the CAR process. Elsewhere, Shevlin and Rose (2008) and Carnaby, Lewis, Martin, Naylor & Stewart (2003), have noted that the involvement of students in planning and delivery of the curriculum at critical stages of learning is an essential factor for supporting greater inclusion. Morgan and Byers (2008) and Byers *et al* (*op.cit.*) demonstrate how young people with SEN and Disability have clear ideas about their priorities for learning and about their learning conditions. Taylor (2007b) sees this kind of involvement as being central to the emergence of individualised learning within more generic curriculum arrangements.

Recent and forthcoming guidance on using an 'assessing pupil progress' approach (APP) gives high profile to the importance of consulting with key stakeholders as valued practice - including young people themselves and their peers, along with their families and other allied professionals (QCA 2009a: QCDA forthcoming). These guidance materials also demonstrate the value of schools working collaboratively to ensure rigour and reliability of teacher judgements on progress. Specialist settings and mainstream schools consulting with each other prove particularly beneficial to both the robustness of the teacher assessment agreements, but also to a greater and shared understanding about CAR for students with diverse needs ( EMSEN 2005; 2006).

The DCSF (2009a) guidance on maximising progress for students with SEN consulted widely with key stakeholders. These responses influenced the guiding principles of this set of resources for schools, including a more direct involvement of parents and an exploration of the role of teachers and teaching assistants as formative contributors to the assessment process.

The legislation on *Every Child Matters* in England (DfES, 2004) introduced the notion of a 'common assessment framework' (CAF), which seeks to maximise inputs from a range of stakeholders into the process. In reviewing its progress, Easton, Morris & Gee (2010) point to 5 factors for ensuring its effectiveness; of these, the need to engage children, young people and families as equal partners was signalled, as this ensured that any assessment would be more likely to be holistic and proactive.

Elsewhere, there has been a global tendency towards including a wider range of stakeholders in the CAR process. Not only has this been viewed as commensurate with inclusive practice, but it connects with a crucial dimension of international legislation, which protects the rights of all children. This has been identified by Dettmer, Thurston & Dyck (*op.cit*) who describe a significant tradition of consultation in formulating and conducting assessment for students with special needs. Reference can be made to such indicative historical examples as those by Caplan (1970) in Israel and by Haight (1984) in Vermont, USA. Usefully, Dettmer *et.al* (*ibid*) charts the school-based processes which are required to ensure effective application of consultative assessment.

More recently, following the impetus provided by IDEA (1990) in the United States, schools and state-wide systems became increasingly attuned to multi-stakeholder inputs in CAR, as both a formative and evaluator part of the process (Kluth & Straut, 2001). IDEA has since been subsumed within the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* IDEIA (2004) which more closely aligns its intentions with *No Child Left Behind* (2001) and strengthens both the parental contribution to assessment, and the provision of defined outcomes within the IEP process. Friend & Cook (2006) and Choate (2004) also provide indicative examples from the USA of the centrality of collaboration and consultation in planning and delivering SEN and Disability students' learning.

#### **(d) accountable**

Schools increasingly experience challenges with assessment practices due to the tensions between 'assessment of learning' or accountability (to meet national standards and benchmarks) and 'assessment for learning' or pedagogy. They also have to be accountable to a range of ground-level stakeholders, not least parents or carers. Accountability in CAR processes has become a significant consideration during the last 20 years. This has been apparent in the case of both the mainstream (Black-Hawkins, Florian & Rouse 2008; King-Sears, *op.cit*) and the special school sectors (Lacey, 2010; Aird and Aird, *op.cit*; Imray, 2007). The movement towards marketisation in education as a whole (Lunt & Norwich, *op.cit*) has had a widespread and often deleterious effect on students who experience SEND. In England, the so-called 'standards agenda', informed by national performance tables, together with the impact of the increase in choice and open-enrolment has resulted in a narrowing of curriculum opportunity for some children (Black-Hawkins *et al.*, *ibid*).

The English SEN Strategy (DfES 2004b) stated a need to create a data set for those students with SEN and disability who were working below NC level 1; at this point they had scant information about either the achievements or rates of progress for this population. As a picture began to emerge, a disparity in rates of progress across this group became apparent. To address this difference in progression across schools, DCSF produced guidance and data sets for demonstration (2009b). This guidance laid out 3 key principles: high expectations are key to securing good progress; accurate assessment is essential to securing and measuring student progress; age and prior attainment are the starting points for developing expectations of student progress.

A common theme from the literature concerns the relationship between inclusion and achievement. Despite the lack of evidence to substantiate the perceived detrimental association (Farrell, Dyson, Polat, Hutcheson and Gallannaugh, 2007) schools continue to identify this as a reason not to 'become

more inclusive'. Where the two do impact negatively they tend to relate to social inclusion (Blandul 2010, Black-Hawkins *et al, op cit.*).

King-Sears (*op.cit*) comments on the 'increasing pressure to ensure high students' scores' (p58) imposed on schools by high-stakes or large-scale assessment in the USA. She continues to suggest a response to minimise these consequences of teachers 'teaching to the tests' is to maximise differentiation techniques to enable all students to progress.

The concept of progress and the focus of either attainment or achievement create tensions for schools. The literature reports on progress of students with SEN and Disability in particular, for example, questioning the relevance of assessment tools. Recent guidance in England for this population (e.g. QCA 2009a, QCA 2009b, QCDA, 2011) clarifies and distinguishes between linear or hierarchical progress and lateral progress (where progress is evidenced within a level, but perhaps across subject or other contexts). Both are valid. However, it may be that the latter form is more representative of progress for this group of students (WAG, *op.cit*; Aird and Aird, *op.cit*; Martin, 2006; Bridge School, *op.cit.*).

Black-Hawkins *et al (op.cit.)* comment on the move towards a reconceptualisation of 'difficulties in learning' as being 'dilemmas for teaching'. They cite work by Hart, Dixon, Drummond and McIntyre (2004) which demonstrates exciting possibilities when 'teachers stop seeing children as points along a continuum in a positive or negative direction from an average point'. (p14). The backwash of this kind of policy-orientation has subsequently been witnessed within CAR.

Elsewhere, Sebba, Thurlow & Goertz (2000) demonstrated that the quest for accountability within CAR was a concern which had long-standing interest across many national settings. Recent discussion has highlighted the variance of views regarding what ought to be the focus of 'accountability' in CAR (Bennett & Gitomer, 2009). A range of generic and specialist literature in the thematic area of special education and disability has sought to interrogate accountability in terms not only of outcomes for students directly, but also for schools as a whole, as well as communities (with a particular focus on both social cohesion and longer-term economic impact).

#### **e) flexible**

"Starting from the aim of meeting individual needs in relation to a relevant curriculum, schools would be able to devise a flexible approach to grouping which meets both the objectives of inclusion and the effective progress of individual pupils" (Wedell, 2005 p.10)

The Special Educational Needs & Disability Act (SENDA) (DfES, 2001) in England requires schools to make 'reasonable adjustments' as necessary to meet individual and diverse needs to CAR and access arrangements. Descriptions of the English government's drive towards personalising learning detail the need to make education more responsive to meeting the individual needs and raising achievements of all students (Humphrey and Lewis, 2008). They suggest these goals are, as yet, unmet. Duke (2010) explores this personalisation concept further, alluding to the challenge of changing the mindset of school from being curriculum-centred on subject content, to a student-centred approach.

Many of the emphases on flexibility in CAR that are apparent in an English context are echoed in other national settings, as indicated by Meijer (2003). In many locations explicit and considered attention was directed towards ensuring that flexible systems in CAR were supported and enhanced. For example, EADSNE (*op cit.*) included a recommendation that all national policies should be 'fit for purpose', that support materials for schools and teachers should be 'varied and flexible', and that



monitoring standards across all dimensions of CAR, a 'holistic/ecological view of student learning, should be followed.

Many of the CAR processes currently operating in English schools have an embedded assumption that they offer a flexible response to the needs of students. Thus, an appropriately differentiated or adapted curriculum has long been advocated (Lewis, 1991; Fletcher-Campbell, 2005; King-Sears, *op.cit*) as a means of securing adaptations at every stage in the learning and teaching process. The approach is highly particularised in such CAR interventions as P-Scales (Martin, *op.cit*) and others designed to address high-level, low-incidence needs. Similarly, the use of individual planning (Taylor, 2007b) and its widespread application in schools throughout England as 'individual education plans' has enabled at least some sense that NC requirements or formats can be re-interpreted by practitioners.

Flexibility in CAR has many dimensions - a point well illustrated by the relatively recent focus upon 'assessment for learning' (William, 2007) and 'assessment as learning'. The latter concept, in the context of young people with special educational needs and disabilities, has been neatly illustrated by the *Western and Northern Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Education* (2006).

King-Sears (*op.cit*) describes the inflexibility of some US schools in their focus of 'getting through the curriculum' (content) and the test content, which results in a narrow curriculum with scant in-depth instruction or meaning; a responsive pace to match learning needs is incompatible with this approach. This approach is emphasised in large numbers of other studies in the USA (for example, Copeland & Cosbey, 2009).

#### **(f) delivered by a trained & informed workforce**

Sheehy, Rix, Collins, Hall, Nind & Wearmouth (2009) infer that to include students effectively there is a need to examine the quality of learning and participation. Pedagogy, when viewed in its broadest sense (to include for example, classroom practices, curriculum, learning environments, deployment of staff etc.) is integral to success.

There continues to be much debate over the pedagogies necessary to meet the diverse needs of school populations (e.g. Hart *et al*, *op.cit.*; Wedell, 2008; Lewis and Norwich, in *SEN Policy Options Steering Group*, 2009) and associations with the skills levels of the school workforce as possible cause for the underachievement of students with SEN and Disability (Hartley, 2010). Fergusson (2010) engages practitioners in on-line debate regarding the challenges faced by the school workforce today in meeting the needs of students with what appear to be increasingly more complex needs (see also Carpenter, 2010) within a context that offers fewer opportunities for professional development focused on SEN and Disability issues. She highlights the dilemma faced by many schools in England with the demise of specialist pre-service teacher education (in 1990), of an ageing workforce of teachers, experienced in the education of students with severe learning difficulties/profound multiple learning difficulties (SLD/PMLD).

A review of this situation has recently been undertaken (DCSF, 2010a). In the context of this specific group of students, this review examined the recruitment and retention of personnel to this specialist arm of the education workforce. Recommendations laid out the need for career-wide continuing professional development opportunities beginning with a six-month 'introduction' programme following straight on from completion of regular Qualified Teacher Status. A recent change of government has left this implementation plan 'on hold'.

Two broad schools of thought remain regarding the need for specialist or generalist pedagogy to the planning, teaching and assessing of students with SEN and Disability. Mittler (*op.cit*) indicated that the most effective pedagogy (and, by extension, perhaps also the broader arrangements for CAR) are based on the premise that a pedagogy which is inclusive is not an add-on to existing pedagogy but rather it develops from sound pedagogy, which can become good pedagogy for a more diverse range of students. Florian (2008) explores this idea further, suggesting that inclusive education is a teacher's response to student diversity utilising the 'structures and processes available to all students', rather than something different. She suggests that the effectiveness of this approach depends on the teacher's ability to select the most appropriate strategy rather than aiming for 'the greatest good got the greatest number' (p.203). Kershner (2000) developed a model clarifying the teacher's role alongside a typology of learning aims to enhance participation, achievement and active learning.

The collaborative work of Florian & Kershner (2009) focused on a holistic teaching approach where combinations of the most appropriate strategies were chosen by teachers. This approach based itself on an 'acceptance of difference'. Yet what is not acknowledged here to any extent are, for example, is having the necessary understanding, knowledge and skills to make informed decisions on the most appropriate responses to student need (Fergusson, *op.cit*). Florian (*op.cit*) suggests on one hand that teachers should divorce themselves from notions of not being qualified to teach students with additional needs, but the question is rather more about confidence. She does however, allude to the need to 'prepare' teachers to 'respond to difference' and to understand inclusive practice requires understanding that it is more than differentiation.

Despite a persistent sense that 'special education means special pedagogy', Lewis and Norwich (in *SEN Policy Options Steering Group, op.cit*) found little evidence to that effect. They very clearly commend the crucial need to distinguish between 'common teaching principles and strategies and the different, practical application and implementation for students with SEN. This might be achieved, it is suggested, by recognising the need for more intense and focused teaching for those with SEN and Disability.

Many others in the field would contend this position, particularly when considering individuals with more complex learning needs (e.g. Lacey *op.cit.*; Victoria School, 2009; Imray, *op.cit.*; Aird and Aird, *op.cit*; WAG, *op.cit*; Ware and Donnelly, *op.cit*) - claiming a clear need for specialist, fit-for-purpose pedagogy.

Lewis and Norwich (in *SEN Policy Options Steering Group, op.cit*) offer a context to place these contentions. As we talk of a continuum of SEN and the matching continuum of provision, what has been missing from professional debate, they suggest, is the notion of a 'continua of teaching or pedagogic approaches'. This concept enables flexibility and responsiveness in meeting diverse needs, which may change by context or over time.

Lacey (*op.cit*) and others (e.g. Byers *et al.*, *op.cit*) suggest that in embracing personalised learning, where the student is at the heart rather than the curriculum, and assessment *for* learning as supporting process, teachers and other school personnel will need to reconsider their roles and the way they view their teaching and learning practices. Wedell (*op.cit*) adds to this debate and the need to move away from 'one size fits all', enquiring how we achieve the necessary '*student aware pedagogy*' that enables teachers to identify the 'nature' of the learning difficulty or disability...assessing the implications for its consequences' (p130).

The perceived tensions between pedagogy and accountability have been discussed earlier in this paper. However, the dimension of teacher 'preparedness' within this context has not. In the English context, OfSTED (2010) undertook a major review of SEN and Disability. In their reporting, they identify essential features observed in the most effective practice for this group of students.

Predictably these draw on the expertise of teachers having thorough and detailed knowledge - of the students firstly; of teaching strategies and techniques (including assessment for learning); about the subjects or areas of learning; and their knowledge and understanding of how learning difficulties/disabilities can affect children and young people's learning, noting that 'the best teachers seen were confident to adjust the lesson to take account' [of differing student need] (p44).

Internationally there has been increased concern about the content of teacher training and professional development programmes, leading to certification. Much of this is based on queries regarding the level and appropriateness of content with regard to coverage of special education and disability issues. EADSNE (*op.cit*) and EURYDICE (*op.cit*) offer overviews of European provision in teacher education. What is apparent from the documentation is that individual provision varies, although there are signals of movements away from specialist undergraduate programmes in SEN and Disability, a situation which Mittler & Daunt (1995) had noted was already well established in that latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rainforth (2000) and Giangreco, Edelman, Broer & Doyle (2001) each confirm the importance of professional development for teachers of SEN and Disability students in the USA, an ongoing *leitmotif* in the US literature, relating to the development of inclusive educational systems.

In spite of such policy shifts there remains an influential body of opinion arguing that 'training for teaching students with special needs should be a part of initial teacher education for all teachers, as most teachers will have children with special needs in their classrooms at some stage throughout their careers' (ETUCE, 2008). At the same time, it is also noted that such a paradoxical situation is consistent with approaches in many other post-industrial settings (Blake & Monahan, 2007).

Overviews of these systems highlight an ongoing raft of concerns which parallel those experienced in England and other parts of Europe.

## **2.2 Summary Comment: England and International**

The six themes identified by the project reference group appear to have continued relevance across all forms of special provision in CAR in schools and other settings. The materials selected point towards continuities across school systems in a range of national, cultural, social locations. The literature scoping exercise addresses each theme in isolation, and does so to emphasise the importance of each; no synthesis has been attempted. However, it is clear from the scoping of these various literature sources that a considerable synergy exists between all of these dimensions of CAR. Moreover, the literature identified for each theme indicates that all six are sensitive to individual contexts, both nationally and regionally. This highlights an ongoing issue in the use of these sources, relating to the transmission of policy and practice. Policy-makers and practitioners need to bear in mind the range of political, cultural and social factors which inform CAR provision.

## 3. SECTION 2: AUSTRALIA

### 3.1 Introduction

Disability is a significant concern for the present Australian government. The Australian Bureau of Statistics states that in 2003 3.9 million people in Australia (20%) had a disability and 64% of these citizens received income from government pensions or allowances. Further, in 2008, more than 732,000 Australians were identified as receiving a Disability Support pension. In 2003, it was identified that 101,700 students with an intellectual disability were placed in schools. However, of these students, 66% had learning difficulties, 41% experienced social difficulties and 31% communicated unsuccessfully in the broader society. Further, of that cohort, only 9% of students proceeded to post-school study options (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Bulletin, Number 67, 2008).

Based on available statistics (2010), there are over 150,000 students with disability enrolled in schools in Australia, (4.6% of young Australians). Eighty per cent of students with SEN and Disability are attending mainstream schools. Of this number, 89% are in public school facilities (DEEWR, 2010). This highlights the significance of, and the need for, targeted government funding to support students with SEN and Disability to access and participate in an educational setting without experiencing discrimination – a high priority for any Australian government.

This cohort is identified as an increasingly marginalised group of Australians who suffer from social exclusion (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). This situation exists despite Australia's economic prosperity and government intervention; students with SEN and Disability fall further behind mainstream groups in relation to wealth, education, health and opportunity.

In 2008, Australia became the 28<sup>th</sup> signatory to the *UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. This implies that all levels of government are responsible for removing existing discriminatory practices that exist across all sectors. The *National People with Disabilities and Carer Council* has developed a *National Disability Strategy* (2010). This strategy is preceded by the *National Disability Agreement* (2009) which emphasises the significance of a coordinated effort across whole of government “to enable people with disabilities to access services and participate as valued members of society” (*National Disability Agreement* 2009). In Education, the *Disabilities Standards for Education* (Attorney General's Department, 2005) (derived from the *Disability Discrimination Act* 1992) mandate the obligations of educational organisations such as schools to ensure that students with disabilities and students without disabilities are treated equitably, and are offered equal opportunities to access fair and equitable education.

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) commits to supporting *all* Australians to become successful students, and promotes equity and excellence in education. It is in this context that the Australian government has legislated for the development of the Australian Curriculum.

As in the case of the English/International overview, the 6 themes used in surveying current Australian arrangements in CAR for students with SEN and Disability have to be viewed as interlinked. The previously stated synergies and interdependence between the themes identified in the English/International examples, as highlighted by Florian, Rouse & Black-Hawkins (*op.cit*) and Lunt & Norwich (*op.cit*), apply potently to the Australian context.

## (a) inclusive

The notion of an inclusive curriculum in Australia is still 'an emergent topic in need of much research and discourse' (Aniftos & McLuskie, 2003). It has been the subject of considerable attention within education policy discussion over the last 10 years, as well as being a recurring topic of research and subsequent academic literature (Carrington, 1999; Wills & Cain, 2002; Pearce, 2009). Inclusive practices have certainly become an established feature of provision in many State settings, the culmination of integrated approaches that have been apparent since the 1930's (Ashman & Elkins, 1998).

The 1992 *Disability Discrimination Act* (Commonwealth of Australia, *op.cit*) resulted in a significant increase in the numbers of students with disabilities enrolled in mainstream schools (DEEWR, *op.cit*). Subsequently the *Disability Standards for Education* (Attorney General's Department, *op.cit*) recognised that students with disabilities must be able to access the curriculum – and by inference the attendant CAR protocols.

The influential *Shut Out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia, National Disability Strategy Consultation Report* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009), has identified community frustration with education in Australia, particularly in relation to students with disabilities. This regarded education as being critical to a child's social and emotional development, to establishing a sense of identity and a sense of place in the world. Its data-evidence reported respondents as believing that the system had little capacity to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The Report was characterised by a feeling that little was being done to promote the benefits of inclusion for educational provision as a whole in relation to CAR.

As in other national settings, educational inclusion in Australia has prompted tension and debate, with proponents arguing various positions, based on 'rights' on one hand and 'efficacy and school effectiveness' on the other. The polar position adopted by stakeholders is hinted at in the literature (see for example, Jenkinson, 1999; Forlin, 2004). The attitudes of practitioners are viewed as crucial (Forlin & Bamford, 2005). Critically these showed considerable discrepancy between classroom-based teachers, school leaders and education administrators. Remarking on these different standpoints, Pearce (*op cit.*) highlights the implications for CAR, stating that:

'It is very difficult for teachers to be inclusive if their schools and the education system are not also inclusive. Inclusion must be a systemic priority or policies will be tokenistic and funding will not be forthcoming. Education systems must offer inclusive policies, funding, resources, expertise, professional development and a curriculum which promote and facilitate inclusion.'

The received wisdom, emerging from the limited number of published Australian studies is that effective CAR for diverse students requires strategic development of the attitudes, skills and competencies of all stakeholders, not simply those who engage directly with disabled children or those with SENs. Parents, for example, giving evidence for the National Disability Strategy Consultation Report (*op. cit.*) indicated that they believed their child with a disability was only receiving 'second-best' in terms of educational provision.

All State authorities argue for the inclusion of special needs students in schools that implement government curriculum. But whilst existing research articulates the philosophical advantages of inclusion (Forlin, 2006) and advocates of social justice argue for the rights to SEN students to be included in mainstream schooling (Slee, 2005), attempts to differentiate the curriculum for such students have limited success (Knight, 2007). These students become alienated from a curriculum

that is misaligned to their needs and development, resulting in a subsequent need for high-cost interventions, both during and after their period of compulsory schooling.

### **(b) appropriate**

The concept of appropriateness, or aligning CAR protocols to the needs of all students, has been a central feature in debates regarding the efficacy of State and territory-developed curriculum initiatives over the last decade. Certainly, it has also been the focus of attention in the academic literature (Dowrick, 2002). The concept of 'appropriateness' introduces a range of considerations which are as valid for the general school population as they are for a discrete, exceptional group of students.

An example of this endeavour to secure an appropriate alignment of curriculum pedagogy, assessment and reporting can be seen in the QCAR Framework (Queensland Government, 2010). Assessment has a critical role in this, aimed at developing the assessment capacity of Queensland teachers in Years 1 to 9 through assessment tasks, school-based assessments, social moderation and an 'assessment bank'. However, according to Masters (2009), the review conducted between 2008-2009 to identify emerging issues in the areas of curriculum, assessment, teacher quality and existing practices in Queensland schools did not explicitly highlight disabled or SEN students, although the report did refer to 'inadequate attention paid to personalised learning for students with differing abilities'.

Helpfully, however, Masters (*ibid*) did point towards the need to develop whole school CAR planning to ensure a rich and challenging curriculum. It was argued that this needed to be led by an 'active engagement with professional development to build content and pedagogical content knowledge'. This Queensland theme has its iterations within the Australian literature. Carrington & Elkins (2002) illustrate the shifts in thinking that such an orientation requires, with a move away from a deterministic curriculum offer to one which is mediated at ground-level via practitioners and other stakeholders.

The concept of appropriate provision has also been considered in respect of particular sub-groups within the generic SEN and Disability definition. Clark (2009) has identified specific pedagogies for working with students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), whilst Ford (2007) has undertaken a similar investigation for those presenting 'significant behavioural challenges'. Whilst offering some distinctive learning and teaching approaches in discrete categorical areas, these and other studies are also highlighting that there are some core principles that should be applied, and that these will be common in both mainstream and specialist provision. At the same time, existing overviews of the Australian context illustrate that there are highly particularised sets of attitudes, skills and knowledge which inform CAR for students with the most significant disabilities in schools (Shaddock *et.al*, 2007).

Further indications show widespread concern by practitioners that CAR innovations need to be connected directly to the challenge of incorporating provision within the 'normative' curriculum development process, rather than it being 'additional to' (Deppeler, Loreman & Sharma, 2005). This requires considerable imagination, skills and knowledge, as a greater diversity of student needs should be addressed within, rather than outside of, the emergent Australian Curriculum (AC). Ford (*op cit.*), Clark *op cit.*) (and Efron, Sciberras & Hassell (2008) give examples of this diversity and point to a requirement to make curriculum adaptations to meet identified learning needs.

### **(c) consultative**

Many of the existing CAR processes in special education emphasise a commitment to enabling stakeholder participation (Davis, 2008). Indeed, the notion of a consultative approach in special education is evidenced in a number of States (Bourke & Carrington, 2007). Dowrick (*op.cit*) argues

that an Australian approach should enable ‘...all stakeholders to collaborate’ and that ‘this approach incorporates many of the positive aspects that have emerged from recent research in special education’ (*ibid*, p.194). She goes on to observe that:

‘If existing educational arrangements, such as current school curricula, inhibit societal acceptance of students with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) and Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties (PMLD), then surely those educational arrangements must be changed’ (*ibid*, p.194).

Burnett & Carrington (2006) also emphasise the need for consultation. Projecting ideas about the 2050 special school, they state that ‘The curriculum is drawn from an agreed national framework, further developed in consultation with the local community’. For Burnett & Carrington, that ‘community’ includes the students themselves, their teachers and parents or advocates. The emphasis would be placed on negotiation and dialogue. One example of the application of such consultative principles is provided by Shield (2004), where joint actions, including by the students themselves, are apparent in the development of a language programme for children with mild disabilities.

Davis (*op.cit*) offers a good example of how consultation can operate, in order to allow a school community to collaboratively plan how it is to improve student learning outcomes. The use of individual education plans (IEPs) and individual transition plans (ITP) are notable procedures to enable this to happen. Consultation, leading to more effective provision in CAR processes, is indicated as a potent means of supporting students, families and teachers to provide ‘the most effective instructional programmes to support students in achieving their maximum potential’ (Spedding, 2005).

A consultative theme is exemplified at another level by Hartshorn, Gray, Murray, Biggam, Beamish & Bryer (2004). These authors report on a school-university partnership, designed to provide CAR supports to students with severe disabilities. The work undertaken sought to establish a set of practices for students with disabilities; consultation with teachers increased both the context, relevance and measurability of the statements. The process bore some of the hallmarks of the ‘P-Scale’ processes in England.

The literature also suggests that consultation is required in order to maintain work-balance, thereby avoiding the onset of damaging work stressors when planning for and meeting the needs of students with disabilities (McLennan, 2009). A consistent supply of trained personnel in the field of disability/SEN is by no means a given (ASEPA, 2007a), so the need to provide professional support of this kind is an important dimension of the issue.

One aspect of consultation in special education which has formed a prominent strand in the literature emerging from individual jurisdictions is the growth of a willingness to engage in dialogue on CAR issues in respect of disability. This is both on the part of the States and Territories, and those organisations and associations connected with SEN and Disability. These developments are in sharp contrast to the conditions reported earlier. Dempsey (2002), for instance, suggests that that the Australian States and Territories at that time were ‘somewhat reluctant’ to participate in the reporting process for students with a disability. Accordingly, he proposed that ‘leadership by the Commonwealth is the only likely avenue by which improvements in reporting for these students may come about’.

Consultation on matters relating to CAR has also been characterised by literature illustrating parental involvement. Disability advocacy groups have long positioned themselves at the centre of debates regarding educational provision. The Australian literature, however, points to tensions between parents of disabled and non-disabled students, often relating to such issues as inclusion within mainstream, resource provision and a perceived negative impact on curricular performance by non-disabled students in inclusive classrooms (Horrocks, 2001) Elkins, van Kraayenoord & Jobling, 2003). There also appears to be, in at least some jurisdictions, a '... scarcity of research studies in relation to implementation of the curriculum, assessment and reporting for students with special needs in Tasmania. The Department of Education has not yet conducted research in Tasmanian schools to examine teachers' experiences and students' performances with the curriculum (Watt, 2007). This also infers that the question of alignment remains under-researched'.

#### **(d) accountable**

In much the same way that accountability is a policy issue of increasing importance in many international contexts, it has assumed particular relevance within discussion regarding CAR for children and young people with disabilities and SEN in an Australian context (AASE, 2005). As in other international settings, schools have to address the tensions between 'assessment of learning' or accountability (to meet national standards and benchmarks) and 'assessment for learning' or pedagogy. They also have to be accountable to a range of ground-level stakeholders and agencies, not least parents or carers. Mawdsley, Cumming & Russo (2004) offer an interesting comparative account of the dilemmas of including students with disabilities within national accountability measures and high stakes assessment with reference to Australia and the United States.

Dowrick (*op cit.*) has offered some illustrations of the difficulties and the potential for linking CAR processes, particularly assessment, to a general imposition on practitioners to 'make an impact'. National curricula, and associated testing, are commonly viewed as a means of securing accountability. In respect of students with disabilities, the challenges inherent in providing test accommodations have been surveyed by Dempsey & Conway (2004). These authors identify 'accountability' as a major issue, and chart some of the then recent developments in an Australian context. In a subsequent publication (Dempsey & Conway, 2005) they make recommendations regarding the greater participation of students with disabilities in national testing.

One example of a State-wide response to CAR accountability is that of the Victorian Auditor General's report (2007). This has sought to ensure that the *Programme for Students with Disabilities* (PSD) is accompanied by clear measures of performance and an appropriate level of accountability. A similar set of issues has been encountered, and reported on, in South Australia where, in the introduction of the *South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework* for all children (as described by Horrocks, *op.cit.*), the range of standpoints and interpretations by which accountability could be viewed and interpreted is illustrated.

Current evidence suggests, perhaps counter-intuitively, that inclusive practices in fact improve the performance of students without disabilities. In part, this may be because of the increased attention given to pedagogy and curriculum differentiation which generalizes teaching skills to all students. This is an important issue and needs further attention at national level. The OECD education indicators certainly provide a potential window to investigate this outcome more fully and even to link costs with outcomes.

One issue which hallmarks much professional discussion, and is signalled at various points in recent literature, is the quest to secure equity in the provision of resources. Individual jurisdictions have



sought to deliver their responsibilities in CAR for students with disabilities, but have had to do so under significant scrutiny from both special education stakeholders, and those holding a more generic education brief or interest. Reporting to the 2010 *NSW General Purpose Standing Committee No 2*, for example, evidence submitted by the *NSW Primary Principals' Association* indicated that: 'Funding at our school is based on testing, however, we are only allocated four support learning days a year, so all that time in testing, then we get no help, after chasing all year, regardless of what the testing says. So a different approach to determine children's needs is needed'.

A contemporary view of the ongoing task of ensuring that CAR meets the various needs of stakeholders is provided by Duke (2010), from a Queensland perspective, who states that emphasis is placed on an expectation that all schools and teachers 'enable all students, including students with disabilities, to access and achieve the learning described in the mandated curriculum document'. One issue arising from this and other work, is the extent to which teachers distinguish between 'curriculum' and its 'assessment', raising a question for practitioners concerning whether or not teachers can be accountable if they do not distinguish between the two. The role of teacher assessment is an important element in overall CAR procedures (see, for instance, Stanley, McCann, Gardner, Reynolds and Wild, 2009). An Australian overview of the mainstream implications of this points to a need to provide professional development in this area - to both mainstream and (perhaps to a lesser degree) special school practitioners.

#### **(e) flexible**

All Australian States and Territories have made a commitment to differentiating the curriculum with a view to supporting the needs of all students, including students with SEN and Disability. The development of a range of CAR interventions and protocols has been stimulated in part by the diversity of educational provision across the States. But although flexible responses have been regarded as largely beneficial, recent reviews of provision for students with disabilities and learning difficulties have raised concern at a number of levels.

Shaddock, MacDonald, Hook, Giorcelli and Kelly, in their *Review of Special Education in ACT Schools* (Service Initiatives Pty Ltd, 2009), provide a good illustration of the current dilemmas involved in ensuring that there is an inbuilt flexibility in CAR for diverse learning needs. The review involved Public, Catholic and Independent schools. The existing Curriculum Framework - *Every Chance to Learn* – was perceived as providing teachers and schools with the flexibility to decide how best the essential learning and particular adjustments could be planned for all students including students with special needs. The review team found many examples of good practice in ACT Public schools, and highlighted the provision of a wide range of educational options for students with a disability and increasing flexibility.

However, certain curriculum issues were also identified in the review in relation to schools. These raise important issues in the task of enhancing or developing flexible systems in CAR. A flexible approach to planning and delivery via differentiating the curriculum was a demanding and time-consuming task even for highly skilled and experienced teachers. It required the collaboration of teams of teachers, sometimes with expert assistance from support services. Moreover, differentiating CAR for students with very high support needs was viewed as particularly problematic. The review also noted that linking of *Every Chance to Learn* to the student's Individual Learning Plan (ILP) was a complex process, especially in cases where the student had very precise and functional needs which required systematic instruction over a significant period of time to ensure that the knowledge and skills were learned and could be applied.

In summary, in the ACT, differentiation of the curriculum was complex and time-consuming and placed heavy demands on teachers, many of whom had several students with a disability in their class (Service Initiatives Pty Ltd, *op cit.*). Plentiful literature is available that captures similar sentiments highlighting the impact of the differentiated curriculum and that the process of individualising learning places enormous strain on teachers, schools and the community.

Personalised approaches in CAR are exemplified by Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), which are in widespread use in Australia and form an adaptation of the general model of Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) that have been a part of special education for over 30 years. ILPs are commonplace for students with special needs in schools, functioning within the general Curriculum framework, and are central to the process of curriculum differentiation. The efficacy of this approach has, nevertheless, been questioned. With specific reference to the Australian Capital Territory, considerable variation was revealed in their application and usefulness (Service Initiatives Pty Ltd, *op.cit.*). These commentators, along with others, pointed to professional uncertainty about their efficacy, as well as raising concern about their review, accountability and quality assurance. In sum, the ACT review indicated that the development and implementation of ILPs was time-consuming and resource intensive, and was a crucial area which needed immediate attention (Service Initiatives Pty Ltd, *ibid*).

Horrocks (*op cit*) interviewed parents, principals, educators and students with disabilities regarding the use of ILPs in South Australia (referred to as the Negotiated Curriculum Plan (NCP) in that State). The findings of this study are instructive, in that they point particularly to a need for flexibility. Thus, Horrocks (*op cit.*) argues for a sharper focus on long and short-term goals and the use language that is jargon free. She also identified a requirement to focus on the students' strengths, needs, achievements and interests and to explore the interface with competency assessments to enhance the employability of students with disabilities. In New South Wales, a similar patchy application of IEPs was noted in *The Provision of Education to Students with a Disability or Special Needs Report* (2010), the inquiry participants raising several concerns regarding the IEP's, including that they were not developed routinely, and that their quality was variable. In addition, teachers felt they had inadequate time or training to develop IEPs and that it was difficult to implement a modified curriculum without additional support. The lack of time, additional support personnel and teacher training to make appropriate curriculum adjustments for individual students was significantly voiced from many of the teachers.

Flexibility is required at all levels of CAR provision. One example of this can be found in the work of Deppeler, Loreman & Sharma (*op.cit.*), who see the need for adaptations in the ways that special education teachers operate. They advocate a more diversified function, with specialist practitioners acting as consultants to whole schools. Again, this pedagogical orientation has its echoes elsewhere (see, for example, Edwards, Daniels, Gallagher, Leadbetter & Warmington, 2009).

#### **(f) delivery by a trained & informed workforce**

Recognition that CAR in special education requires personnel who have a discreet set of skills and knowledge has been apparent in the Australian literature over the last 10 or more years. Wills & Cain (*op.cit.*) recommended a set of skills and competencies which were necessary to ensure that students with disabilities and learning difficulties could be included within mainstream contexts. Burnett & Carrington (*op.cit.*), in considering special schools, see the future of specialist provision for students with SEN and Disability as resting firmly on the way that teachers are trained and supported; this needs to be consistent with the development of a set of attitudes and skills. They argue that:

'Teachers are the key people working with individuals to assess their progress towards negotiated goals. For those with more significant disabilities, they are the significant adult, along with the parents, in developing appropriate learning opportunities and goals to enable students to continue to develop, improve and achieve' (*ibid*, 4)

In a position paper on the state of teacher training with regard to SEN and Disability, ASEPA (2007a) linked the onset of inclusive education with a paradoxical decline in specialist training. Thus, it argued that:

'In many circles there is a philosophical view due to the inclusion movement that there is no longer a need for special educators. As a consequence of the lack of demand for specialisation, there are fewer university courses available to train special educators'.

The importance of this evident shortfall has been highlighted by Braden (2004), who indicated that when students with disabilities were challenged and supported to produce high intellectual quality work, their work quality was comparable to non-disabled peers. What Braden refers to as 'authentic instruction' by trained staff is the principal determinant of success. In special education, however, the individualised needs of students may be such that the term 'authentic instruction' may need to have a wide range of variants. Such a position is reinforced in the Australian literature. Thus, Subban & Sharma (2006) identified teachers' classroom skills as being a major factor for success. Kortman (2001) went even further, talking of the 'indispensable role' of special education and its teachers. Meanwhile, Forbes (2007) pointed to a shortfall in the numbers of specially trained teachers of students with disabilities and special needs in mainstream schools: 'The practice of inclusion has created a demand for expertise within regular education for specialist knowledge that is currently not being met. This is placing unrealistic demands on teachers with little or no knowledge of the specific needs of these students' (*ibid.*)

The issue of training in special education has been compounded by the apparent high level of negative perception towards disabled students by general educators. Carroll, Forlin & Jobling (2003) have identified a worrying tendency for teachers in training to express feelings of discomfort, uncertainty and fear in respect of students with disabilities. These authors connect this with a growth in confidence when programmes are provided for trainees which enable them to gain greater understanding and skills in working with such school populations.

In recent years the professional associations in Australia have been explicit in demanding action to redress the shortcomings in both initial teacher preparation and their ongoing professional development in this area. For example, the *Australian Association of Special Education* (AASE, 2007) states:

'Training courses must provide graduates with the necessary competencies if students with special education needs are to receive a quality educational programme. After graduation, teachers and administrators require systematic development of their skills, knowledge and values, to ensure curriculum and instruction practices benefit all students, and are based on research validated principles' (AASE, *op.cit.*)

In addition, an ageing special education workforce in many States impacts on this issue, as identified by ASEPA (2007b, *op.cit.*).

### 3.2 Summary Comment: Australia

The situation in Australia, as portrayed in indicative literature used to illustrate this scoping, reflects close parallels with CAR dilemmas and debates that are ongoing elsewhere. Whilst the six themes selected in this scoping exercise were identified by ground-level participants in the CAR process in the field of SEN and Disability in one local setting in England – people who have had direct engagement with the issues involved in CAR within a national curriculum context over 30 years - there is sufficient evidence to suggest in this brief literature scoping that substantial synergies exist in Australian settings.

The scoping exercise will conclude with a summation of the challenges that CAR processes present to policy makers and curriculum developers operating at school-level. These will be posed as a series of questions, which could contribute to an agenda for discussion as provision for SEN and Disability students *within* the emergent Australian Curriculum as it is refined and valorised.

### 3.3 Summary of the composite literature (England/International & Australia)

With a notable exception, there is a demonstrable synergy between CAR practices in the two reviews under each of the 6 identified themes.

#### **Inclusive**

- Both reviews demonstrate that CAR approaches are both limited and partial in meeting the needs of students with SEN and Disability
- The literature highlights a requirement to provide a broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated approach to CAR
- CAR practices are most likely to be effective where pre-planning was evident
- Australian-focused literature emphasises attitudes, skills and competencies rather than the curriculum *per se*. The latter is far more evident in the English and some international literature. This represents a major distinction between the two sets of sources.

#### **Appropriate**

- The notion of 'fitness for purpose' is a consistent feature, as are CAR adaptations to meet the needs of individuals.

#### **Consultative**

- Inputs from key stakeholders (practitioners, students, families etc.) are viewed as crucial for successful interventions
- Consultation and planning regarding delivery are vital dimensions of delivery.

#### **Accountable**

- Assessment of learning (as indicated by high-stakes testing) appears inconsistent with CAR approaches in SEN and Disability, which emphasise assessment *for* learning
- Both literature sets highlight a difficulty in isolating curriculum from its assessment for students with SEN and Disability.

## **Flexible**

- Resources and approaches in CAR need to be varied and differentiated
- A holistic, 'ecological' view of student performance is a feature of responses which best meet learner needs.

## **Delivered by a trained and informed work-force**

- Both reviews identify the need for a distinct professional skill-set and a corpus of knowledge for authentic instruction in SEN and Disability
- Also highlighted is the ageing demographic of teachers in SEN and Disability and a limited opportunity for systematic pre-service training and subsequent professional development.

## 4. SECTION 3: SOME EMERGENT QUESTIONS

### 4.1 Introduction

We have sought to focus attention on six aspects of CAR which need to be interrogated when considering provision for students who have SEN and Disability in schools. These themes and principles have been identified as strands in both the Australian and the English/International literature, and would appear to be important elements to guide developments in CAR in schools. Certainly, these are identified as long-standing characteristics of the landscape of policy-making and professional practice in England, which in a sense provides an instructive example of the task of embedding provision for this group of students within an emerging Australian Curriculum.

Whilst certain features of educational provision for students with SEN and Disability obtaining in Australia are culturally and socially unique, it is equally the case that overarching international similarities predominate. The summary section of this report points to a series of questions which emerge from the thematic consideration of the literature. They are presented below, as a stimulus for debate and discussion to inform national approaches in CAR for students with SEN and Disability. They cover philosophical, policy and practice related dimensions of CAR. These questions can be directed to each of the individual elements of CAR (i.e. curriculum, assessment and reporting) for separate consideration. However, such are the continuities, overlaps and synergies between the three, it is more sensible to interrogate them in a holistic manner.

### 4.2 Key questions in CAR development for SEN and Disability students

The questions posed below raise issues and subsequently some overview commentary regarding responses to the challenges identified. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this report to offer a systematic interrogation of each issue, it is nonetheless a contribution to what will be a significant national discussion on the future direction of CAR for students with SEN and Disability in Australia.

- Do the principles of CAR as applied to all students reflect current understandings of what comprises inclusive practice?
- To what extent do CAR processes result in differences in *what* and *how* students with Disability/SEN learn?
- In what ways do CAR processes encourage learning progress for these students, and how is this measured?
- What level(s) of adjustment(s) needs to be applied in CAR to promote the inclusion of all students?
- Are disabled and SEN students advantaged/disadvantaged by exclusion from certain CAR processes? In what concrete ways are these made manifest?
- What are the substantive mechanisms required in CAR to secure maximum involvement of students, parents and other stakeholders?
- How best can CAR processes be directly mediated by teachers and other professionals working in schools and settings?
- Do CAR processes stimulate or restrict learning for these students, and if so, in what way?

- How do CAR processes for SEN and Disability students inform curriculum planning, provision & renewal?
- What comprises more effective (for whom?) summative assessments for SEN and Disability students & how is this used to *improve* rather than *impoverish* student learning?
- Does involvement in some of the core mainstream CAR processes automatically require measurement against norm-referenced standards?
- What are the direct social and economic consequences of shortcomings in CAR provision for SEN and Disability students – and how are these measured?
- How can we ensure that a national framework incorporates ‘best practice’ principles & operations from all jurisdictions & also from international contexts?
- How can Federal guidance to practitioners regarding CAR be framed to ensure that context-related issues and individual needs are appropriately addressed?
- Is there a need to explore the efficacy of ‘common assessment frameworks’ in cases where there is the most significant disability/SEN?
- To what extent is teacher training and other professional training viewed as a necessary component in a systematic response to CAR for disabled students and those with SENs?

The main issues in relation to development of CAR policy and practice in respect of students with SEN and Disability need to be set in the context of emergent ideas regarding the purpose, quality and outcomes of provision for this group of students. In this dynamic situation, several considerations are paramount, appearing frequently in the literature concerning CAR, both in Australia and on a broader international canvas. Three of the foremost are:

1. Raising achievement of students with SEN and Disability via CAR processes has close parallels and continuities with issues facing the mainstream school population.
2. A new emphasis of CAR practice which extends initial identification, categorisation and resource allocation, to a more holistic approach, one which is multi-stakeholder in practice and is directly connected to teaching and learning.
3. Providing tools via which CAR in separate settings can be linked to mainstream schools, thereby giving all stakeholders an opportunity to participate in problem-solving.

Each of these three concerns has been the subject of ongoing policy responses in many countries. It is fair to say that, across the extent of CAR practices, they proscribe the challenges that continue to face policy-makers, administrators and ground-level practitioners.

Finally, there is current and ongoing debate regarding the appropriateness of so-called ‘Student-led, Creative, Relevant Unspecified Fun For Youngsters - SCRUFFY targets’ (Lacey, 2010) which points to the dilemmas inherent in providing appropriate and measurable learning experiences for this group of students. These are described as a process in which CAR is, as Lacey has stated, ‘student-led, creative, relevant unspecified fun for youngsters’. Whilst SCRUFFY targets have been viewed as especially appropriate to PMLD students, they carry important messages for a wider SEN and Disability population. As Lacey (*ibid*) remarks ‘they (*sic*) can take forever to get onto the next measurable skill but that doesn’t mean they are not learning. It’s just hard to quantify the broadness

of a smile or the depth of noticing something happening.' And in England, the recent emphasis has been on the notion of student progression, which has sought to focus as much on a student's rate of progression in learning as well as their absolute attainment (DCSF, 2009).

The scoping of the literature, purposely partial and selective as it is, highlights the absence of mature systems of CAR provision for students with SEN and Disability in most countries. In part this can be explained by the relative infancy of national curricula for mainstream students in the modern era; indeed, whilst we have focused on CAR literature in an international context, we have been drawn to recent and contemporary provision in England because it is now moving into a more mature phase of national curriculum provision. This has included over the last 10 or more years, systematic attempts to address CAR issues for students with SEN and Disability.



## 5. Appendixes

### Appendix 1 - Glossary

Acronyms are in widespread usage in the field of Special Education Needs and Disability. In consequence they are used extensively in this scoping document or in the resources which have been referenced, in both Australia and in English/International contexts as follows:

**AC** – Australian Curriculum

**ACARA** – Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

**ASEPA** – Australian Special Education Principals Association

**CAR** – Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting

**EMSEN** – East Midlands Special Educational Needs Partnership

**EURYDICE** – European Education Systems Network

**HMI** – Her Majesty's Inspectorate

**LD** – Learning Difficulties

**NC** – National Curriculum

**NCC** – National Curriculum Council

**OfSTED** – Office for Standards in Education

**PMLD** – Profound and Multiple Difficulties

**QCA** – Qualifications & Curriculum Authority

**SEN** – Special Educational Needs

**SENCo** - Special Educational Needs Coordinator

**SENDA** – Special Educational Needs and Disability Act

**SLD** – Severe Learning Difficulties

*It should be noted that the report adopts the generic term 'student' throughout, rather than 'pupil', 'children', 'learner' or 'young person'*

*It should also be noted that the terms 'national curriculum' and 'Australian Curriculum' are used interchangeably in the report.*

## Appendix 2 - Acknowledgements

The authors of this report wish to thank the following organisations and individuals for their various contributions to this report:

### **In the United Kingdom:**

Ms Corallie Murray (Head teacher, Fairfield's Special School, Northampton, England)

Ms Lesley Bush (Crownbridge Special School, Pontypool, Wales)

Mr Steve Cullingford-Agnew (University of Northampton)

Miranda Brookes (Senior Teacher of Visual and Sensory Impairment, Leicester City LA)

Becky Steed (Deputy Head-teacher, Fairfield's Special School, Northampton)

### **In Europe**

Professor Zora Jachova (University of Skopje)

Professor George Theo Pavlidis (Macedonian University of Thessaloniki, Greece)

Professor Paul Bartolo (University of Malta)

Ms Nora Sabani (UNICEF)

Dr Amanda Watkins (European Agency for Special Needs Education)

### **In USA**

Professor Christopher R.L. Blake (Mount Mercy University, Ill)

### **In Australia:**

*ACT-* Patrick Kelly, Helen Strauch, Ian Copland and Lynette Abbott.

*NSW-* Gerry Gray, Susan Jones, Cate Pinnington and Brian Smyth-King.

*Northern Territory-* Christine Smith and Virg Summers.

*Queensland-* Annette Macan and Emily Sangster

*South Australia-* Libby Burns, Stephen Inglis and Jeanette McMullan.

*Tasmania-* Christine Butterworth, John Brookes and Terese Phillips.

*Victoria-* David Howes, Ian Claridge, Elspeth Adamson and Ross Lukies.

*Western Australia-* Julie Hornby, John Newman and Jacqueline Burns.

Nick Burnett - Consultant i-for-k Ltd

John Enchelmaier - Private Consultant

Chesleigh Hargreaves – ASEPA

Tracey Chappell – ASEPA

Amanda Martin – Peel Language Development School

Sheree Vertigan – President ASPA

Sarah Leighton – proof reader

Elio Novello – proof reader

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