

**Years 9-12 Project**

# Multi-level Courses

Options Paper



February 2020

A paper to discuss areas for consideration in the Years 9 to 12 draft Curriculum Framework.

The Years 9 to 12 Project is seeking to engage a greater number of learners through contemporary and innovative approaches to course design and delivery. Concepts such as Access and Student Agency are central to this work. Fundamental to the project's mission is the opportunity for learners to make individual progress over time along a defined learning continuum. Multi-level courses provide a range of entry points for each student appropriate to their stage of readiness and allow for students to reach their potential within a subject or course area.

## This Paper Includes:

[Rationale](#)

[Evidence Base](#)

[Current State](#)

[Questions for Tasmanian Stakeholders](#)

[Options for Tasmania](#)

## Rationale

From 2020 all students will participate in education and training until they complete Year 12, attain a certificate III or they turn 18 years of age (*Education Act, 2016 cited in Department of Education Years 9 to 12 Education Framework 2018-2022*).

Moving towards multi-level courses would support more flexible learning opportunities for the greater number of young people expected to be engaged in education. With greater student participation in TASC accredited courses into the future there is a need for more flexible course provision.

Multi-level courses are proposed as a way to meet the needs of the expected increased number of learners in an effective and efficient manner:

*"With greatly increased participation in the senior secondary school, students on entry are inevitably at very different stages in their learning. The challenge is to meet individuals at their varying points of need with appropriately challenging learning activities, and to monitor and acknowledge the learning progress they make across the senior years."*<sup>1</sup>

Multi-level courses would enable the bringing together of existing disparate learning opportunities into a coherent progression of learning for students, ensuring scaffolding, support and growth through defined levels of complexity.

There are a number of advantages to the development of multi-level courses.

These include:

- **Student progression** – learners enter a course at a level suited to them and then continue along a continuum of growth, progress and achievement.
- **Continuity** – well-designed courses containing multiple levels ensure continuity and consistency between levels in terms of learning outcomes, course content, assessment criteria and work requirements
- **Personalisation** – Learners are supported to progress their learning in a timeframe that is appropriate to their stage of understanding, potential and readiness to learn. Multi-level courses recognise that students within a year group may span six years of development and that, for all students, provision is made to have an appropriate starting point and then stretch points to extend their learning.
- **Localisation** – Schools plan for and meet the needs of their learners and the broader local community in contextually responsive and appropriate ways. Course/subject offerings are provided based on data regarding student levels of achievement and capacity to grow.
- **Customisation** – Teachers differentiate all aspects of their teaching to provide maximum engagement for students at level.
- **Viability/sustainability** – course/subject viability is ensured, particularly in smaller schools where vertically integrated classes can be timetabled.
- **Vertical integration/alignment** – reduces the risk that learning is repetitive. Multi-level course/subjects ensure that content knowledge, skills and understandings build from level to level and content is not repeated unnecessarily.
- **Coherence** – concepts are sequenced from basic to more advanced through a range of levels. Student growth points are built into course design.
- **Transferability** – knowledge, skills and understandings are taught progressively and can be transferred to the next level/stage of learning or in other contexts.
- **Optimum provision** – Multi-level courses ensure that all subjects/courses are available to all students at most levels, no matter what a student's current level of understanding/competence is. This ensures curriculum breadth and inclusivity and (theoretically) 100% potential student participation in learning.



- **Student Pathways** – Multi-level courses allow for defined student pathways within a course/subject and between courses/subjects. Pathways out of courses/subjects into further study, training, employment or self-employment are made explicit.
- **Reduction in the number of TASC courses/subjects, depending on implementation model** – an overall reduction in the number of courses occurs, due to current single year courses being conflated into multi-level courses. This leads to greater efficiency in course development, accreditation, teaching, assessment, moderation and quality assurance of courses.
- **National Comparability** – interstate jurisdictions have multi-level courses in the senior secondary years.

Implementation of multi-level courses is also supported by the Years 9 to 12 Review, with the Review Report stating that the structures and curriculum for Years 9 to 12 should enable continuity of learning. In addition, Recommendation 1 of the report of the Years 9 to 12 Review Workshop states:

*The curriculum for senior secondary students be developed based on a developmental model from Years 9 through to Year 12 that is sufficiently flexible to enable multiple pathways regardless of where students are undertaking their schooling in Tasmania.*

## Evidence Base

Contemporary approaches to education embrace concepts such as growth, progression, continuity and depth. Multi-level courses are designed to ensure that each of these concepts feature within the design of existing and new courses.

Dylan Wiliam has identified seven principles of curriculum design that are helpful in looking critically at curriculum design (Wiliam, 2013). These principles provide a useful frame for teachers, schools and curriculum developers to consider ways to make curriculum relevant, purposeful and effective.

In summary these principles are:

- **Balanced** – the purpose of schooling should be to help each child find their element, and the only way to do that is to ensure that each child has a broad and balanced curriculum.
- **Rigorous** – a curriculum develops disciplinary habits of mind – powerful ways of thinking that are developed through sustained engagement with the discipline.
- **Coherent** – within the internal logic of each discipline or subject, it is necessary to ensure that what they experience in the different activities they engage in is coherent.
- **Vertically integrated** – the curriculum promotes progression in learning; material taught at one point in time builds on materials taught earlier and feeds into what is taught later.
- **Appropriate** – the rate at which children learn varies greatly, specifying the curriculum in terms of what has to be taught in ‘key stages’ creates freedom for flexible sequences and allows a greater focus on ‘big ideas’.
- **Focused** – curriculum is often crowded with content, be clear about what the ‘big ideas’ of the subject are.
- **Relevant** – the curriculum should provide opportunities for students to specialise – to pursue their interests in greater depth than would be required of all students.<sup>ii</sup>

## OECD

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has developed a similar set of “design principles” for changes in curricula and education systems. These include:

- **Concept, content and topic design:**
  - » **Student agency** – the curriculum should be designed around students to motivate them and recognise their prior knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.
  - » **Rigour** – topics should be challenging and enable deep thinking and reflection.
  - » **Focus** – a relatively small number of topics should be introduced in each grade to ensure the depth and quality of students’ learning. Topics may overlap in order to reinforce key concepts.
  - » **Coherence** – topics should be sequenced to reflect the logic of the academic discipline or disciplines on which they draw, enabling progression from basic to more advanced concepts through stages and age levels.
  - » **Alignment** – the curriculum should be well-aligned with teaching and assessment practices. While the technologies to assess many of the desired outcomes do not yet exist, different assessment practices might be needed for different purposes. New assessment methods should be developed that value student outcomes and actions that cannot always be measured.
  - » **Transferability** – higher priority should be given to knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that can be learned in one context and transferred to others.
  - » **Choice** – students should be offered a diverse range of topic and project options, and the opportunity to suggest their own topics and projects, with the support to make well-informed choices.



- Process design:
  - » Teacher agency – teachers should be empowered to use their professional knowledge, skills and expertise to deliver the curriculum effectively.
  - » Authenticity – learners should be able to link their learning experiences to the real world and have a sense of purpose in their learning. This requires interdisciplinary and collaborative learning alongside mastery of discipline-based knowledge.
  - » Inter-relation – learners should be given opportunities to discover how a topic or concept can link and connect to other topics or concepts within and across disciplines, and outside of school.
  - » Flexibility – the concept of “curriculum” should be developed from “predetermined and static” to “adaptable and dynamic”. Schools and teachers should be able to update and align the curriculum to reflect evolving societal requirements as well as individual learning needs.
  - » Engagement – teachers, students and other relevant stakeholders should be involved early in the development of the curriculum, to ensure their ownership for implementation.<sup>iii</sup>

## Current State

Currently, all TASC accredited courses are stand-alone at one level:

- most courses are at Levels 2 or 3.
- there are few courses at Level 1 and even fewer at Level 4.
- there are Preliminary to Level 1 courses for 8 Learning Areas.
- some Level 3 courses articulate from Level 2 courses and others are stand alone.

Issues:

- There is currently little scope for learners to move between levels to reflect their ability, performance and learning potential.
- Modularisation or micro-credentialing would be problematic under current structures (i.e. courses at one level only, course size specifications etc).
- At any given level, there is inconsistency in the application of levels of complexity to courses; between and within Learning Areas.
- Some sets of courses have a clear relationship between adjacent levels, e.g. Physical Sciences - Foundation Level 2 and Physical Sciences Level 3, whereas others are distinct at adjacent levels e.g. Project Implementation Level 2 and Student Directed Inquiry Level 3.
- Currently, apparently related courses at adjacent levels vary in the degree to which there is a clear progression of learning. The range and nature of variation has clear impact on learner choice and outcomes.
- Levels of Complexity, as currently defined for TASC accredited courses, require greater redefinition to align with the Years 9 to 12 Education Framework Principles.

The Preliminary to Level 1 suite of courses provide an example of multi-level courses developed in a manner that gives coherence across the curriculum and within each learning area.

Other Australian jurisdictions also provide examples of various structures for how multi-level courses can be implemented, that allow students to work and be assessed at different levels.



## Future State - Options for Tasmania

There are a number of ways in which multi-level courses could be implemented in Tasmania. These include:

- a course consists of Levels 1-3/4, where Level 1 leads directly to Level 2 (Option 1)
- a course consists of Levels 2-3/4, where Level 1 courses allow progression into more than one Level 2 course (Option 2)

Decisions about which option should be chosen must take into account other aspects of the Year 9-12 Project, specifically:

- modularisation
- progression and levels of complexity of learning within and between Levels
- whether levels are identified using:
  - » numeric labels (such as 1, 2, 3 and 4)
  - » descriptive labels (such as Provisional, Foundation, Specialised and Extension).
- the scope for movement, assessment and achievement at every level for different design sizes at different times of the year.
- articulation into and between levels:
  - » prerequisites
  - » co-requisites/ complementary requirements
  - » entry and exit timing - learners should be able to move between levels where they can achieve and meet the requirements of the Level they are being assessed at
- the relationship between Years 9-10 provision and levels, and the assessments within them.

For the options described below multi-level courses can be developed to:

- have a range of levels at defined levels of complexity
- allow for assessment at the level that reflects learners' performance against the standards.
- have a progression of content and assessment that is closely related between the levels of the course
- maintain equivalence of levels within and between learning areas.

## Questions for Tasmanian Education Stakeholders

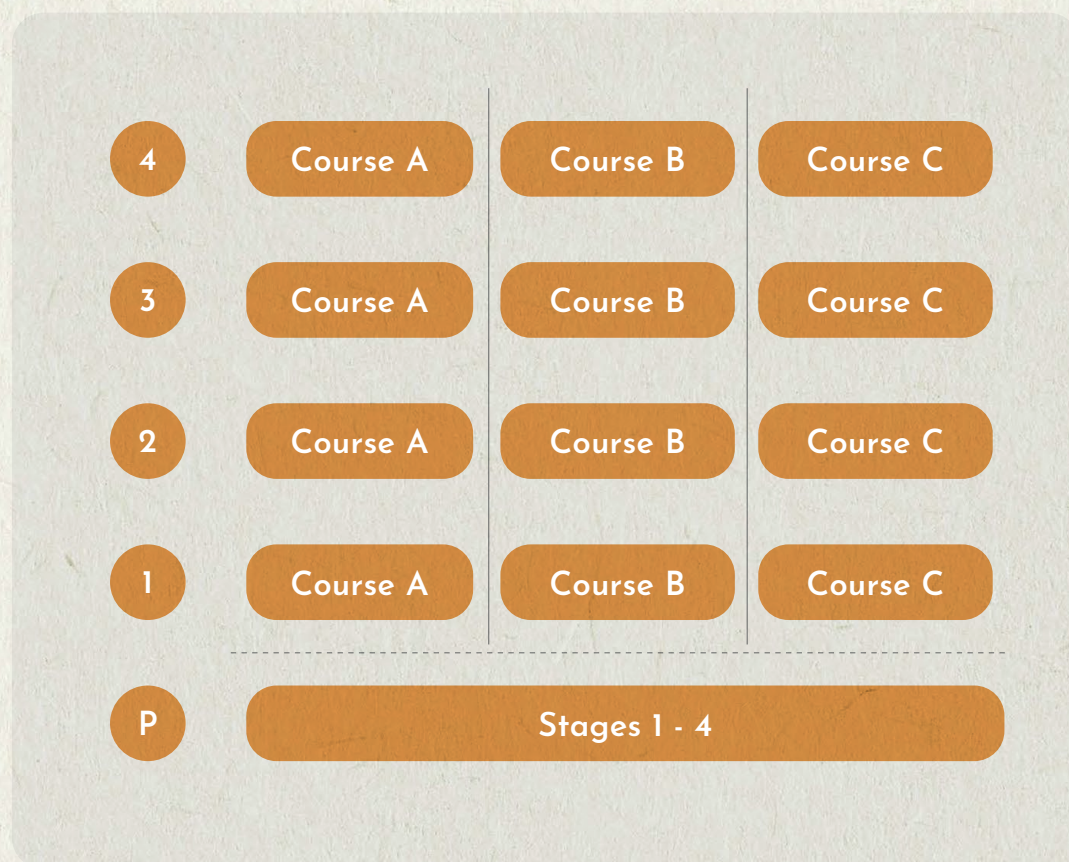
Questions for Tasmanian education stakeholders in progressing this work include:

- Will multi-level courses/subjects help to improve student participation, engagement and achievement?
- How can multi-level courses support a diverse range of student interests, aspirations and pathways?
- How can multi-level courses support schools to deliver highly targeted programs of study?
- Of the options available for multi-level courses, which one will best serve the needs of Tasmanian students and educators?
- What are potential challenges for Tasmania in developing multi-level course?



## Option 1A:

Multi-level courses from 1 - 3/4



### Advantages

- supports progression from 1-2, 2-3, 3-4 directly within a single course
- learners at level 1 can be introduced to the core skills and concepts of the subject/discipline
- there is a uniformity of course design across a suite of courses
- allows for learning in every course at every level (optimum provision)

### Disadvantages

- there may be a perception that learners are 'siloed' into course streams.



## Option 1B:

Multi-level courses from 2-3/4 (or 1-3/4 as appropriate) and separate smaller level 1 courses:



### Advantages

- supports progression from 1-2, 2-3, 3-4 within a single course
- provides flexibility for learners and providers to package level 1 offerings
- smaller level 1 offerings could be easily integrated into other offerings for Year 11 and 12 learners
- potentially more offerings for learners entering at level 1- across a range of courses/ learning areas



## Option 2A:

Multi-level courses from 1-3/4 - level 1 units/modules have flexible pathways to other similar courses:



### Advantages

- supports progression from 1-2, 2-3, 3-4 within a single course
- supports progression into a range of other 2-4s
- flexible pathway options at lower level leading to more specialist content at mid to high levels

### Disadvantage

- may require some repetition of learning outcomes and content at level 1 in courses with a similar range of pathways



## Option 2B:

Multi-level courses from 2-3/4 (or 1-3, 2-3 or 1-4 as appropriate) and separate level 1 courses with flexible pathways



### Advantages

- supports progression from a generalist level 1 into range of 2-4s as well as 2-3, 3-4
- general level 1 courses can introduce a breadth of learning experiences adapted to learner needs and future pathways
- students don't specialise immediately – this can occur at higher levels

### Disadvantage

- could perpetuate a perception that level 1 courses are not part of a progression into higher levels
- may not support learners to access specific knowledge skills and understandings at level 1 to support movement into level 2.

<sup>i</sup> Masters, G. N. (2016) Reform and the senior secondary school. Australian Council for Educational Research. pp. 4

<sup>ii</sup> Wiliam, D. (2013) Redesigning Schooling – 3. Principled Curriculum Design. The Schools Network Ltd. Pp. 8.

<sup>iii</sup> OECD (2018) The Future of Education and Skills. Education 2030