



What's in the CAPS Package?

A Comparative study of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS): FET Phase

Overview

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Structure of Curriculum Documents

- **NCS** consists of:
 - Subject Statement for each subject
 - Learning Programme Guidelines
 - Subject Assessment Guidelines
 - Examination Guidelines
 - Various subsidiary documents for certain subjects
- Hence, **minimum of four** subject-related docs need to be consulted

Structure of Curriculum Documents

- **CAPS** consists of:
 - Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for each subject
 - National Protocol for Assessment (Gr R – 12)
 - National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement (Gr R – 12)
 - Examination Guidelines introduced in 2014
- Hence, **two** subject-related docs need to be consulted

Comparison of the Introductory pages for NCS and CAPS

Rationale

The rationale presents the socio-political view of the learning to be undertaken: it explains the necessity for the learning proposed.

- Essential rationale is similar in both documents in terms of situating the curriculum within the aims of the SA constitution.
- In addition, NCS includes:
 - Rationale and description of **OBE**
 - Large amount of information on the **background** and **history** of the NCS. Much of this relates to redressing the imbalances caused by apartheid education.
- Some of this additional material has been dropped in the CAPS due to its different positioning historically (>17 years post-democracy) and educationally (post-OBE)

General Aims

The general aims explain the overarching intention of what the curriculum is expecting to achieve.

Similarities between CAPS and NCS :

- Both mention the curriculum conveying the **knowledge, skills and values** which should be communicated in a post-apartheid South Africa.
- Both contain a **similar list of values**, which includes social justice, human rights, environmental awareness and respect for people from diverse cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds.
- Both curricula mention importance of **inclusivity**

Differences between CAPS and NCS:

- NCS goes into **more detail** regarding **redressing** past imbalances in education, and the values associated with a democratic SA.
- **Inclusivity** is listed in passing in NCS, but is **foregrounded** in CAPS (described in detail as one of the general aims)

Purposes

The purposes provide an explanation, in general terms, of what the curriculum intends to help the learner achieve.

- Purposes are clearly outlined and very similar for NCS and CAPS:
 - **Equipping** learners, irrespective of their socio-economic background, race, gender, physical ability or intellectual ability, with the **knowledge, skills** and **values** necessary for self-fulfilment, and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country;
 - Providing **access** to higher education;
 - Facilitating the transition of learners from education institutions to the **workplace**; and
 - Providing employers with a sufficient **profile** of a learner's competences.

Principles

The principles embody underlying values / beliefs about what is important and desirable in a curriculum, which guide the structuring of the curriculum.

Similarities between CAPS and NCS:

- Both contain a list of principles, which reiterate the **values** of human rights, inclusivity, environmental and social justice
- Both documents maintain that the curricula are based on a **high level** of **skills** and **knowledge**
- Both documents mention **progression** of concepts / skills from simple to complex

Differences between CAPS and NCS :

- Both documents include the importance of **IKS**, but these are discussed at much **greater length** in the NCS, where the narrow Western construction of knowledge and intelligence is challenged
- NCS discusses the following, which are not in CAPS:
 - **Integration** within and across subjects
 - **Articulation** and **portability**
- Difference in underlying **educational principles**:
 - NCS = OBE, described as “*participatory, learner-centered and activity-based education*”
 - CAPS = “*encouraging an active and critical approach to learning, rather than rote and uncritical learning of given truths*”

Design Features



- NCS introduces Learning Fields, and critiques the traditional notion of a **subject** as a '*specific body of academic knowledge*' with emphasis on knowledge at the expense of skills, values and attitudes
- NCS specifically mentions the intention to **blur subject boundaries** to encourage subjects to be viewed as '*dynamic, always responding to new and diverse knowledge, including knowledge that traditionally has been excluded from the formal curriculum*'
- CAPS makes no mention of the meaning of the term 'subject' → implies a reversion to a **traditional** understanding of subjects, and a reinsertion of **clear discipline-boundaries**

The Type of Learner Envisaged

Similarities between CAPS and NCS:

- Both documents include **Critical Outcomes:**
 - Creative problem solving
 - Cooperation
 - Self-management
 - Information handling
 - Communication
 - Responsibility towards society and environment
 - Application of knowledge to real world

Differences between CAPS and NCS:

- CAPS phrases CO#2 as “*work effectively **as individuals and with others as members of a team***”
- NCS includes **Developmental Outcomes**, not in CAPS:
 - Reflection on learning
 - Responsible citizenship
 - Cultural and aesthetic sensitivity
 - Education and career awareness
 - Entrepreneurship

Differences between CAPS and NCS (contd):

- NCS contains additional list of ideals to develop in learners, eg
 - Respect for democracy, equality, human dignity and social justice
 - Lifelong education
 - Thinking that is logical and analytical, as well as holistic and lateral
 - Transfer of learning to unfamiliar situations

Differences between CAPS and NCS (contd):

- The move away from OBE has also resulted in a shift from **discovery-based** learning to a more **content-driven** learning approach.
- This has led to a shift in the position of the learner from being a **participant** in the learning process, as a negotiator of meaning, to a **recipient** of a body of pre-determined knowledge.
- Significantly, there has also been a loss of the intention to develop critical thinking about **knowledge validity** and **bias**, which is captured in some of the LOs of the NCS.

The Type of Teacher Envisaged

- NCS describes teacher role as being:
 - *“key contributors to transformation of education in SA”*
 - *“qualified, competent, dedicated and caring”*
 - *“able to fulfil the various roles outlined in the Norms and Standards for Educators”*
- CAPS makes **no mention** of the envisaged teacher, and leaves very little room for interpretation of what and how to teach

Trends in Research Findings across Subjects

Nature of the Documentation

- In all subjects, teams regarded CAPS documents as more **user-friendly** than NCS
 - Fewer subject documents in CAPS than NCS
- The accessibility of the **language** was considered acceptable for both curricula.
 - Less educational jargon in CAPS
- For all subjects except Accounting, there has been an improvement in **alignment** between the documents
 - At time of research CAPS had 1 document per subject
 - Subsequent introduction of Examination Guidelines may introduce alignment issues and inconsistencies

Curriculum objectives

- Objectives are **similar** for NCS and CAPS.
- Some NCS objectives are missing from CAPS:
 - Objectives related to **socio-political** and **ethical** awareness, and **sensitivity** to cultural beliefs, prejudice and practices in society
 - The need for the development of skills related to **self-employment** and **entrepreneurial** ventures
- Mathematics evaluation team:
 - There is ‘*a **de-emphasis** in the CAPS of the more explicit **transformatory agenda** that is articulated in the NCS*’

Curriculum objectives (contd)

- English FAL evaluation team noted that **CAPS omits** objectives that include human experience, aesthetics of language, and social construction of knowledge.
 - *‘The CAPS has removed the explicit **recognition of unequal status of languages and varieties** - a key specific objective articulated in the NCS.’*
- Suggests a **profound shift** in the curriculum
 - Has become a **technical instruction** with academic performance as the single most important indicator of educational achievement
 - Takes **little or no account** of **current realities** for learners, parents and teachers, the state of language and culture, or the challenges posed by the economy

Breadth and Depth of content

Methodology

- To compare content breadth: The sub-topics were tabulated and totalled for each grade and for the full FET curricula
- To compare content depth: The depth of the content was estimated using a scale of 4 levels:
 - 1 = introductory; superficial; definitions and descriptions
 - 2 = involving simple relationships and numerical work
 - 3 = involving deeper relationships, complex computations and interpretations
 - 4 = high level of abstraction; conceptually challenging; complex understanding of relationships; demanding mathematical computations and problem solving

Findings on breadth of content

- **Increase in breadth:**
 - Economics (increase in Gr 10 and 11 content)
 - Mathematics (15% increase in breadth across FET)
- **Similarity in breadth:**
 - English HL, Accounting, Business Studies, History
- **Decrease in breadth:**
 - Physical Sciences, Life Sciences, Geography and English FAL (only in teaching plans)
- **Main concerns:** Mathematics and English FAL

Findings on depth of content

- **Increase in depth:**
 - Economics (marginal increase)
 - Mathematics (significant increase)
- **Similarity in depth:**
 - Accounting, Business Studies, Geography and Physical Sciences
- **Decrease in depth:**
 - Life Sciences and English FAL
- **Unable to compare depth:**
 - English HL, History and Mathematical Literacy

Specification

- On the whole, level of specification of content is **higher in CAPS** than in NCS
- Exceptions:
 - **Economics** – NCS provides clear **command verbs** in ASs, these are not included in CAPS
 - **English HL** – ‘language structures’ not woven into CAPS, but listed in Appendix
 - **English FAL** – numerous gaps in teaching plans in CAPS, and lack of specification of depth required
- Hence majority of CAPS docs provide ‘*clear, succinct and unambiguous*’ statements of learning

Levels of Curriculum

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES
SUPRA	International	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Common European Framework of References for Languages
MACRO	System, national	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Core objectives, attainment levels• Examination programmes
MESO	School, institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School programme• Educational programme
MICRO	Classroom, teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching plan, instructional materials• Module, course• Textbooks
NANO	Pupil, individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Personal plan for learning• Individual course of learning

From “Curriculum in Development” – Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development

Specification (contd):

- Shift in **level** at which curriculum is pitched.
 - NCS is developed at '**macro**' level,
 - Focuses on **attainment** levels in the LOs and ASs
 - **Design** of instructional programme is left to the **teacher**
 - CAPS is developed at '**meso**' / '**micro**' level,
 - Structure is that of an **instructional programme**
- Hence CAPS offers more **assistance** to teachers **unsure** of their subject knowledge
- **Skilled** teachers may find CAPS overly prescriptive and hence **demotivating**

Pacing

- Pacing was **difficult to judge** in the NCS
 - Lower levels of specification
 - Flexibility granted to teachers to determine pace in response to the varying needs of learners
- For CAPS, most teams found that pacing is likely to be experienced as **fast** by the learners
- Exceptions:
 - **Geography** and **Mathematical Literacy** consider CAPS pacing to be **moderate**

Progression within grades

- NCS:
 - Sequence within grades was left to teacher / education departments / textbooks
 - Hence progression could not be commented on
- CAPS:
 - Sequencing leads to **clear progression** within grades for **Accounting, Economics, Business Studies** and **Mathematical Literacy**
 - For other subjects, reasoning behind sequencing is not always clear, and in some cases does not appear to have been designed with progression in mind

Progression across grades

- NCS:
 - Progression across grades is **clearly evident** through **ASs**
 - Clear **increase in cognitive demand** in the way in which these are expressed per grade
- CAPS:
 - Clear progression in **content** and **skills** across the grades
 - Exceptions:
 - **English HL:** CAPS only offers guidelines as to *how* progression should take place, but does not give sufficient guidance to teachers to ensure a clear increase in the level of complexity or difficulty
 - **English FAL:** “*almost no specification as to the expected depth of topics to be covered in each successive grade, and no indication of progression across the phase*”

Assessment guidance

- NCS:
 - Baseline, diagnostic, formative and summative assessment
 - Distinction between formal and informal assessment
 - Methods of recording include rating scales, task lists or checklists and rubrics
- CAPS:
 - Formal and informal assessment
 - Conflation of formative + informal, and summative + formal
 - No mention of assessment as an aid to diagnosing or remediating barriers to learning
 - Method of recording is purely based on marks

Assessment guidance (contd)

- CAPS has **simplified assessment** from the elaborate approach of NCS
 - Reduces the complexity and administrative load caused by assessment under the NCS
 - Raises the question of the possible loss of valuable insights that can be gleaned from a more nuanced approach to assessment
- CAPS has greater emphasis on controlled **tests** and **exams**, de-emphasis of continuous assessment

Integration between subjects

- NCS:
 - Explicit mention of integration between subjects was only marginally greater in NCS than in CAPS in **History, English HL and English FAL**
 - In all other subjects the NCS showed a **low** level of integration with other subjects, in spite of the stated intention of cross-subject integration
- CAPS:
 - All teams found the level of integration between subjects to be **low**

Integration with everyday knowledge

- Some subjects, eg **Mathematical Literacy** and **Accounting**, have a natural link with the everyday world, and these evaluation teams reported a high level of integration with learners' everyday lives for both NCS and CAPS.
- Other subjects, namely **Economics, Physical Sciences, Life Sciences, English FAL** and **English HL**, reported a **drop** in the level of integration with everyday knowledge from NCS to CAPS.

Curriculum coherence

- NCS:
 - *Intention* for **horizontal coherence**, in its description of integration between subjects
 - Horizontal coherence was not achieved in practice, due to lack of explicit integration across subjects
 - Lack of consonance in curriculum design
- CAPS:
 - Horizontal coherence is not a design consideration
 - Strongly discipline-based approach to knowledge
 - Clear and coherent **vertical alignment**

Curriculum coherence (contd)

- **Advantages** of vertical alignment of CAPS:
 - **Clarity** regarding exact terminology, content and skill requirements within each discipline.
 - Likely to lead to a more **rigorous induction** into the discourse of each discipline.
- **Disadvantages** of vertical alignment of CAPS:
 - **Loss** of explicit development of the ability of a learner to **transfer** concepts and skills between subjects and into the everyday world.

Implications for SA Context

- Clearer specification of content in CAPS is **helpful** for majority of **SA teachers** who lack subject confidence
- Prescribed activities require **specialised equipment**
 - **Economics**: required learner support materials are not available in all South African classrooms
 - **Physical and Life Sciences**: Fewer than 5% of South African schools have equipped, functioning laboratories (based on statistics from Equal Education, 2012)

Concluding Remarks



- Shift from **discovery-based** learning to **content-driven** learning:
 - Shift in power / position of **learner** in learning process from **participant** in negotiating meaning to **recipient** of pre-ordained knowledge
 - **Diminishing role of teacher** in curriculum development
- **Narrowing** of focus to a more clearly discipline-specific approach, with strong subject boundaries
- Shift from strong focus on group work to focus on learner taking **individual** responsibility
- Loss of critical thinking about **knowledge validity** and bias

- Most teams concluded that the CAPS are a distinct **improvement** over the NCS with regard to providing *‘statements which are clear, succinct, unambiguous, measurable, and based on essential learning as represented by subject disciplines’*.
- Exceptions:
 - **Mathematics:** CAPS is significantly more demanding than NCS in both breadth and depth
 - **English FAL:** disparity between topics in the content overview and in teaching plans
 - **English HL:** lack of guidance regarding the texts to be selected, and language structures should be incorporated

Repackaging or Recurriculation?

- **Content:** For none of the subjects would one say that the changes made in moving from NCS to CAPS are extreme enough to be considered as a full re-curriculation
- **Theoretical framing, approach and organising principle:** CAPS is not a mere repackaging of the NCS, but a full re-curriculation
 - NCS is strongly framed around issues of social justice, equal education and liberty through education, with a learner-centred approach underpinning the teaching methodology
 - CAPS focus has shifted to a syllabus-type curriculum, embedded in an instrumental theoretical framing and with a teacher-centred approach