

Hon Julia Gillard MP

**Minister for Education. Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations
Minister for Social Inclusion**

The Hon Kevin Rudd MP

Prime Minister

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Joint Media Release

First Steps Toward A National Curriculum

The Prime Minister and Minister for Education, today announced the appointment of Professor Barry McGaw as Chair of the government's new National Curriculum Board.

The Board will be established by 1 January 2009, and will oversee the development of a world-class curriculum for all Australian students from kindergarten to Year 12, starting with the key learning areas of English, mathematics, the sciences and history.

There has been a longstanding need for a single, high quality national curriculum in Australia. The Rudd Government is today acting on this need.

Australia currently has 34 separate organisations contributing to the development of curricula and more than 18 different senior History and English courses.

This has created significant disparities in educational attainment between states and territories.

Student achievement in maths and science and literacy and numeracy benchmarks varies widely between each state and territory. For example:

- New South Wales is the only state to better the average of Year 8 students reaching the advanced international benchmark in maths and science.
- There is a 26% difference between states and territories in the proportion of Year three students who meet national reading benchmarks.

School retention rates also vary between jurisdictions with less than seven out of every ten students completing year 12 in some states compared to more than eight out of ten in others.

The National Curriculum Board will draw together the best programs from each state and territory into a single curriculum to ensure every child has access to the highest quality learning programs to lift achievement and drive up school retention rates.

It will also reduce disruption for the 80,000 students who commence school each year in a new state or territory, particularly our Defence families.

We need to ensure children get the basics right, but we also need to focus on the achievement of excellence.

We want to develop a rigorous national curriculum that helps Australian students and Australian schools compete internationally.

This requires that we lift standards not reduce them.

The new National Curriculum Board will comprise representatives from each of the states and territories, and three representatives from the Catholic and Independent sectors.

Professor McGaw is a renowned educational expert with considerable experience at both a national and international level.

The government is delighted that Professor McGaw has agreed to contribute this considerable expertise and lead the new National Curriculum Board in its development of a world-class national curriculum.

Professor McGaw is currently the Director of the University of Melbourne's new Melbourne Educational Research Institute, and formerly Director of Education in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development based in Paris.

Professor McGaw has expressed his enthusiasm at the opportunity to work collaboratively with the education community to ensure all young Australians are equipped with the essential skills, knowledge and capabilities to thrive and compete in a globalised world.

<http://mediacentre.dewr.gov.au/mediacentre/MinisterGillard/Releases/FirstStepsTowardANationalCurriculum.htm>