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)
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 handing
  - 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
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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
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<tr>
<td>SUPRA</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>• Common European Framework of References for Languages</td>
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<td>MACRO</td>
<td>System, national</td>
<td>• Core objectives, attainment levels</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Examination programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>MESO</td>
<td>School, institute</td>
<td>• School programme</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Educational programme</td>
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<td>MICRO</td>
<td>Classroom, teacher</td>
<td>• Teaching plan, instructional materials</td>
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<td>• Module, course</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Textbooks</td>
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<tr>
<td>NANO</td>
<td>Pupil, individual</td>
<td>• Personal plan for learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Individual course of learning</td>
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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, e.g., **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 recurriculation.

- **Theoretical framing, approach and organising principle:** CAPS is not a mere repackaging of the NCS, but a full recurriculation.
  - 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.