

National Report Summary

ERO publishes evaluation reports on education issues of national importance. This summary of a recent national report captures the key points and highlights findings which you may find useful. The full report is available on www.ero.govt.nz.

The Key Competencies: Realising the Potential of *The New Zealand Curriculum*

This report explores current thinking about the importance of building the capabilities of young people as part of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC). It outlines what the key competencies are, why they are important, New Zealand's journey with thinking about the nature and potential uses of key competencies, and where this development fits in the international context. This serves as a companion piece to *Developing Key Competencies in Students Years 1 to 8*.

The key competencies in the global context

The key competencies introduced in the NZC in 2007 are *thinking, managing self, relating to others, participating and contributing, and using language, symbols and texts*. This introduction of key competencies in New Zealand took place during an international move in education research and policy based on three main drivers:

Change in how knowledge is viewed

Traditionally, education has centred on knowledge memorisation, but this has become less useful since the internet has made information accessible to most people. It is now vital that students can search for information, be critical and discerning about its relevance and truthfulness, and appropriately apply that knowledge.

Change in the nature of work

Routine tasks, such as data entry, are becoming increasingly automated. This leaves a higher proportion of tasks that require judgement,

creativity and other skills. It is these competencies that teachers need to develop in their students to prepare them for the future job market.

New global challenges

Many of today's global issues do not have an agreed solution because they occupy multiple domains: social, economic, political, environmental, legal and moral. Schools should prepare students for global challenges by teaching skills that are transferable to unknown and complex situations.

The *Definition and Selection of Competencies* (DeSeCo) project by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) proposed education reforms that focus on teaching students to understand how knowledge is created and how to appropriately apply knowledge, rather than teaching knowledge recall. Several influential international contributors have identified the need for students to have similar capabilities, including the *Center for Curriculum Redesign* (CCR) and the *World Economic Forum* (WEF). As part of the Future of Education and Skills 2030 project, the OECD has developed the *Learning Compass 2030* to extend the work started by the DeSeCo project.

New Zealand's key competencies originated from initial work for the Ministry of Education about how best to translate the DeSeCo developments into the New Zealand context. The work was also informed by the *Curriculum Stocktake*, undertaken by the University of Waikato.

The definition of key competencies vary internationally. However, there are common themes and exemplars for effective implementation of key competencies to equip students with the capabilities they need for the future. These include teachers:

- preparing students for a complex world, in which challenges have no simple solutions
- using 'could be' language to help students answer open-ended questions, which encourage students to think critically and creatively
- working with families, linking learning content more closely to the real world
- focusing on learning, with attention to growth mindset, metacognition, learner agency, and shifting priorities for learning

The New Zealand Curriculum and current thinking

Problems facing implementation

Barriers to effective implementation of the KCs include:

- system-wide confusion over the KCs and their place in students' learning
- teacher opposition
- clarity of benefit
- assessment being a work in progress

Sufficiency of detail, guidance and opportunities to learn

The NZC provides insufficient detail to help teachers understand what the key competencies mean for students and how to integrate them in their practice. The [New Zealand Council for Educational Research](#)'s four-phase framework shows the potential of key competencies to transform students' learning experiences. However, ERO's companion report, *Developing Key Competencies in Students Years 1 to 8*, found that most schools were not effectively supporting the development of key competencies in their students.

Coverage of twenty-first century skills

The New Zealand Curriculum key competencies do not cover all the twenty-first century skills identified by the World Economic Forum, such as digital literacy. Digital literacy and fluency, and other literacies, such as media, data, financial and global literacies, are not explicitly considered.

How the key competencies can work together

The NZC does not discuss how key competencies can work together, for example, to develop leadership skills. Given its importance, some guidance from the Ministry as to how the key competencies can be used to enhance leadership would be helpful for schools.

Curriculum support for schools and teachers

Ministry support for schools and teachers to develop their students' key competencies has been limited in recent years. Resources could be updated to reflect current thinking. Building teacher capability to fully implement key competencies would complement the Ministry's priority of supporting schools to develop their local curriculum.

Conclusions

The New Zealand Curriculum introduced the key competencies in 2007, as a response to new demands placed on the current generation of students by technology shifts, future market-based demands and global challenges. It is now timely for schools to refocus on how they build their students' key competencies.

ERO recommends that the Ministry supports leaders and teachers to fully realise the potential of the NZC through unpacking the key competencies to provide clarity for all teachers about their meaning; and through providing more resources, including examples of how to develop key competencies in teaching practice.

This support should result in improved practice and opportunities for students to develop key competencies and achieve personal growth and academic success, enabling them to adapt to change and enhancing their lifelong learning.

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