

Scrap HSC for national test: new boss

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The nation's new curriculum chief says a national secondary school certificate is needed to replace the HSC and other state-based leaving certificates.

In an interview with the *Herald*, Peter Hill, who begins work as chief executive of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority on Monday, said a national certificate would not come about in the next few years. "But we can start laying the foundations for it," he said.

"In the short-term, it's not appropriate. In the longer-term, yes, I believe that we need a national certificate."

Dr Hill said a national certificate could be achieved while maintaining important differences between state and territory schools systems, but it should wait until the national curriculum was complete.

The first stage of the curriculum, covering English, history, maths and the sciences from kindergarten to year 12, will be introduced in schools in 2011. Geography, the arts and languages come in stage two.

"[A national certificate] is a much bigger task, with very high-stakes consequences, and in any case it logically comes after you've sorted out the issues with the compulsory years," he said.

In April, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development urged Australia to consider a national certificate, arguing that it would bring national consistency to education standards and allow easier movement of students between states because of common standards.

A spokeswoman for the federal Education Minister, Julia Gillard, said the Government was not considering changes to existing state and territory arrangements, but that the curriculum authority would advise on "the best way to ensure world-class curriculum and assessment outcomes".

The Victorian Education Minister, Bronwyn Pike, said: "The introduction of a national certificate is the next most obvious question that will need to be considered once the national curriculum is fully implemented. Victoria's VCE is of a very high standard and we are committed to maintaining that standard."

The NSW Education Minister, Verity Firth, declined to comment.

In the Howard years, Coalition education ministers Brendan Nelson and Julie Bishop pushed the idea of an Australian Certificate of Education, but opposition from states and territories scuttled the plan in 2006.

Dr Hill, who oversaw the controversial introduction of the Victorian Certificate of Education in 1987 as head of that state's curriculum and assessment board, said Australia was a small country with a limited talent pool from which it could draw to develop curriculum.

"Our interests are not served if each state and territory has to reinvent the wheel of curriculum. I believe with a national approach we have a better chance of teaching quality."

Dr Hill's first day will be spent at a meeting of federal, state and territory education ministers in Brisbane. They are expected to discuss proposals for broadening the national curriculum to include subjects such as economics, information technology and physical education. They are also expected to approve the format in which information about every school - including national test results, staff and student numbers, and socio-economic profile - will be published. The information is due to be published online by the end of the year.

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/scrap-hsc-for-national-test-new-boss-20090925-g6a3.html>