

NSW CURRICULUM REVIEW: 2018 CONSULTATION SUMMARY



NEW SOUTH WALES EDUCATION STANDARDS AUTHORITY
(NESA)

SUMMARY REPORT

APRIL 2019

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Contents

Introduction 4
 The NSW curriculum review was announced in May 2018 4
 The Terms of Reference reflect input from key stakeholders 4

Consultation activities to support a community conversation 5
 Analysing the data 6
 Demographic data shows good engagement across the community 6

Key themes from the consultation 8
 There was strong consistency across priority issues 8
 1. The purpose of schooling in the 21st Century 9
 2. Knowledge, skills and attributes every student should develop 11
 3. How could the curriculum better support every student’s learning? 15
 4. What else needs to change? 22

Introduction

Over 5,000 individuals and organisations provided direct input into the first public consultation phase of the NSW Curriculum Review (the Review). Many more shared their views and experiences as part of representative responses from teacher associations, parent bodies, employer organisations or other community groupings.

This report provides a brief summary of themes from these submissions, made to the Review between September and November 2018. It includes a selection of recommendations and key comments from sector organisations and stakeholder groups.

Views from over 1,800 children and young people are summarised in a separate report, developed by the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP), available on the NSW Curriculum Review website.

The NSW curriculum review was announced in May 2018

In May 2018, the NSW Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, and Minister for Education, Rob Stokes announced the first comprehensive review of the Kindergarten – Year 12 curriculum since 1989.

The Review aims to enhance the effectiveness of school education in New South Wales to:

- provide an education that engages and challenges every child and young person in learning, rewards them for effort, and promotes high standards
- prepare each student with strong foundations of knowledge, capabilities and values to be lifelong learners, and to be flourishing and contributing citizens in a world in which rapid technological advances are contributing to unprecedented economic and social change in unpredictable ways.

The New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA) engaged Professor Geoff Masters, CEO of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) to lead the review.

The Terms of Reference reflect input from key stakeholders

In April, draft Terms of Reference were developed as the basis for targeted consultation with key stakeholder groups. Consultation took place in May and June 2018. The draft Terms of Reference were then revised to reflect stakeholder feedback and were subsequently approved by the NESA Board and Minister for Education.

The final Terms of Reference were released on 3 September 2018 to coincide with the launch of public consultation and can be found on the [NSW Curriculum Review website](#).

Consultation activities to support a community conversation

The Review Lead, Professor Geoff Masters, has led a broad community conversation to inform his draft report. People involved in planning and delivering education, from early childhood to tertiary, were invited to contribute, as were young people, parents and carers, employers, and community members. This included groups and individuals from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, NGOs and youth agencies, multicultural communities, and industry associations.

Consultation and engagement activities have included:

- **Public roadshows:** 14 face to face community 'town hall' style meetings held across NSW.
- **Targeted stakeholder consultations:** over 50 meetings with organisations, including those representing school sectors and systems, teacher associations, teachers' unions, principals' groups, parent groups, tertiary education providers, and business and industry groups.
- **Focus groups:** Focus group meetings were held in roadshow locations around NSW. They provided an opportunity for Professor Masters to talk to those with a particular perspective, including voices outside of the education sector.
- **Roundtables:** Roundtables have supported engagement with the early childhood and vocational education and training sectors, as well as non-governmental organisations working with young people and the multicultural community.
- **Targeted engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community:** Targeted consultation meetings were held with community, including young people, around the State. Public consultations and targeted meetings have been held on the NESAC Commitment to Aboriginal Education and these findings will also inform the Review.
- **Targeted engagement with young people:** Led by the Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYC), a mixture of focus groups, school visits and a survey were used to engage young people. Young people also provided online feedback via the NSW Curriculum Review consultation website.
- **Online feedback – short submissions:** the form allowed members of the public to submit a short online response up to a maximum of 500 words. 1720 short submissions were received.
- **Online feedback – long submissions:** organisations or individuals were able to contribute a written submission with a 5,000-word limit. Attachments could be uploaded to provide feedback beyond the word limit. 481 'long' submissions were received.

Analysing the data

The analysis was completed using NVivo software and using a machine assisted qualitative analysis model (machine learning). A purposive sampling frame was used to select the submissions to be hand-coded, over sampling from smaller groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people from rural and regional areas, to ensure their perspectives were adequately represented in the analysis.

Demographic data shows good engagement across the community

Table 1. Summary of online respondents to the Review

Community group*	%
Respondent type	
Teachers/ Principals/ School executives	64.0%
Parents/ caregivers	17.6%
School students	9.6%
University or VET sector	1.9%
Employers	0.5%
Other	6.3%
Total	100%
Sector	
Government	61.5%
Independent	19.5%
Catholic	11.1%
Other	7.8%
Total	100%
Location	
Metro	74.3%
Rural or regional	25.7%
Total	100%
Age profile**	
Younger than 15 years	1.3%
15 to 24 years	9.4%
25 to 34 years	12.3%

Community group*	%
35 to 44 years	25.6%
45 to 54 years	29.4%
55 to 64 years	17.9%
65 years or older	4.1%
Total	100%
I am	
An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person	2.0%

Notes: *Per cents calculated from totals for each community designation; missing data is not included in the denominator. Not all submissions completed all community designations.

** Of individual respondents making online submissions.

Key themes from the consultation

There was strong consistency across priority issues

At the broadest level, submissions to the Review expressed the desire for a future NSW School Curriculum that is simple, flexible and concept-driven to allow children and young people to develop qualities such as creativity, curiosity and critical appraisal.

There were common views about broad areas for change, these being allowing more flexibility for teachers in delivering the curriculum by simplifying the curriculum and reducing mandatory content. Many key stakeholder organisations indicated support for retaining discipline-based curriculum and content. Some called for the introduction of new subjects or courses into the curriculum, which presents a challenge for simplifying the curriculum.

Issues were also raised about a perceived lack of continuity in students’ learning pathways. Many respondents suggested students’ needs are often not met at key transition points, such as between primary and high school, and for high school students who choose to pursue a non-academic pathway.

Table 2 shows the top five most frequently mentioned topics across online submissions. In face to face consultations these topics also dominated. There was a great deal of consistency across different parts of the community with regard to the importance placed on these five issues, with some small differences in hierarchy. Educators and parents/carers ranked the importance of developing ‘soft’ skills as the first priority, whereas students and employers placed slightly more importance on preparing students to be lifelong learners. Input gathered by ACYP shows that children and young people believe developing the skills to be a ‘lifelong learner’ is necessary preparation for life after school, characterised by a dynamic job market and changes from technological advances.

The desire for greater teacher flexibility was regularly viewed as necessary to enable teachers to meet a diversity of student needs. This issue was frequently discussed alongside concerns regarding the ‘crowded curriculum’ and the way in which the volume of content and other requirements (many beyond the curriculum) were considered to be a key constraint on teacher flexibility.

Table 2. Top five most frequently mentioned topics in online submissions

Overall Topic rank	
1	Developing ‘soft’ skills, including critical thinking, logic, teamwork and communication
2	The purpose of school is to prepare students to be lifelong learners

Overall Topic rank

3	Ensuring core literacy and numeracy skills achieved
4	Flexibility for teachers to teach relevant programs / meet the needs of students
5	Overcrowded curriculum

Most respondents provided views based on the four high level questions provided on the NSW Curriculum Review consultation website. The questions are linked to the Terms of Reference:

1. What should the purpose of schooling be in the 21st century?
2. What knowledge, skills and attributes should every student develop at school?
3. How could the curriculum better support every student's learning?
4. What else needs to change?

1. The purpose of schooling in the 21st Century

Main themes about the purpose of schooling in the 21st Century:

- preparing students to be lifelong learners
- preparing students for life after school
- helping students achieve their potential
- learning about, and contributing to, broader society and culture.

1.1 Preparing students to be lifelong learners

One in five submissions identified the purpose of schooling as helping students to develop the skills to support lifelong learning. Teachers, who regularly stated the purpose of school in terms of certain attributes, noted most commonly resilience and knowing *how* to learn to support lifelong learning. Supporting lifelong learning was thought to enable students to adapt to changing economic and social conditions and contexts. Students were almost twice as likely as parents or educators to identify this as a purpose of schooling.

1.2 Preparing students for life after school

Preparing students for adulthood, so they can function successfully—at work, in relationships, in further education and in the broader society was considered important across all groups.

Students tended to express this concept as helping them make it in the 'real world.' Key stakeholder organisations, particularly those representing a specific vocation, defined

readiness as being skilled for their vocation, and to be a valuable employee. Some educators expressed a strongly held view that seeing the purpose of schooling only through the prism of preparing students for work is too narrow.

The purpose of schooling should be to provide every student with the opportunity to be as prepared as possible for their life as an adult. For most this will be entering the workforce. For many it will involve further education first. We can't train every child for a job because they will all have different jobs. We therefore need to teach them how to be independent, responsible, functioning citizens of the world. [Teacher]

The kinds of important societal contexts students need to be prepared for in the 21st Century that were identified included the changing nature of employment and technology, having to interact as part of a digitally connected world and at a global level with diverse cultures.

1.3 Helping students achieve their potential

Parents and educators particularly, believe helping each student reach their personal potential is a key purpose of schooling. It was felt that if students are achieving their potential, they will possess the necessary skills and attributes to successfully meet life's challenges. These ideas are related to another regularly mentioned theme of ensuring the curriculum is student-centred and driven by individual learning needs and interests.

If we equip kids with the skills to reach their full potential no matter what area that may be in, we will be churning out young people who will be able to apply themselves and be versatile in whatever they choose to do after the schooling years. [Parent]

The purpose of schooling should be to build resilient, creative individuals who respect one another's differences. Each child's unique capabilities should be harnessed to develop their strengths and improve their confidence. [Parent]

1.4 Learning about, and contributing to, broader society and culture

A purpose of schooling, identified by many, is to produce 'good' citizens: those who are moral and act ethically and who can engage in and contribute to society in a positive way.

[The role of schools is to...] develop the 'whole person' – prepare students to be informed, active, moral and ethical contributors to society. [Independent Education Union (IEU)]

Some submissions noted that whilst schools contribute to developing students' citizenship behaviours, the influence of family, community and the broader society also have important roles to play.

Another purpose of schooling, mentioned most frequently by educators, is that schooling is fundamentally a way of transmitting accumulated societal and cultural knowledge, for

example foundational knowledge of scientific enquiry, history, geography, and information and other technology.

Schools should give grounding in the key facets of culture: music, art, literature, mathematics, history, science, etc. and an understanding of how different ways of thinking have culminated in the world we live in today. This is the best way to prepare students for the creativity and adaptability needed to create a future. [Teacher]

The NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) strongly argued that in order 'to address the past and properly contribute to 'Closing the Gap' a core purpose of schooling in 21st Century NSW must also be to meaningfully incorporate local Aboriginal cultures, knowledges, pedagogies and languages' in the curriculum.

2. Knowledge, skills and attributes every student should develop

There was clear convergence of opinions about the desired *skills* and *attributes* students need to have at the finish of their schooling:

- General capabilities, including critical thinking, logic, teamwork and communication
- Core literacy and numeracy skills

There was less agreement about what should be considered essential *knowledge*. Educators, parents and stakeholder organisations variously advocated that knowledge of one or more of the following—mathematics, statistics, languages, information technology, technology, literature, science, engineering, history, geography, arts, environment, finance, psychology, civic society, other cultures and music—is essential.

Beyond specific recommendations on individual disciplines, two points were mentioned more frequently than others in online submissions.

- Continued focus on arts, music, and languages, as well as STEM subjects.
- More effective inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, culture and language.

2.1 General capabilities

Knowledge and skills that every student should have includes resilience, collaborative skills, creative and problem-solving skills, social interactive skills, team working skills, financial literacy, mathematics and scientific skills. [Secondary teacher]

One-third of all submissions identified developing skills, including critical thinking, logic, teamwork and communication as key outcomes of schooling. While often referred to as 'soft skills' the NSW Secondary Principals' Councils made the point that:

"they are not "soft skills" which are optional or inferior to the content knowledge of subject disciplines; rather they are modes of learning that require affective processes as well as cognitive demands."

Much of the commentary on skills was talked about in the context of preparing for and improving students' prospects for getting and keeping employment in a dynamic, global market. Being able to function in diverse cultural contexts was also a common theme, as was gaining skills that would enable the student to have functional relationships and fulfilling personal lives. The most commonly mentioned essential skills, including those referred to as 'soft' skills, included:

- Critical thinking, sense-making, problem solving and research skills, which are vital for future employment prospects and in life more broadly.
- Social and interpersonal skills, to enable students to interact successfully with others in their work and personal life.
- Communication skills (verbal and written) and comprehension, again to ensure positive interactions at work and at home.
- Creative thinking and being able to innovate.
- Accessing, assessing and filtering information, especially critiquing the veracity of digital information.
- Developing citizenship skills and global competencies.

These skills were generally not viewed in isolation, and the point was frequently made that students need certain foundational knowledge before they can apply broader skills of critical thinking, problem solving and creative thinking in their work or in further study.

Need for deep knowledge in disciplines to then develop skills and attributes. [History Teachers Association of NSW]

Critical and creative thought is knowledge dependent so far, more emphasis on this is crucial. [Teacher]

The NSW Department of Education called for improvement of the integration of 'general capabilities' within a discipline-based curriculum, to strengthen curriculum delivery and the development of higher-order skills.

2.2 Literacy and numeracy

Literacy (making and creating meaning), particularly listening, speaking, writing and reading need to be explicitly taught to students using the content and context of specific subject areas. Literacy is fundamental to a student's future - and it is increasingly unlikely they will learn it anywhere else. [Secondary teacher]

A common theme across community groups and sectors was that students should leave school both literate (reading/ comprehending/ writing skills/ speaking) and numerate, as these are essential for students' successful function in work and life. Literacy and numeracy

capabilities were viewed as being core to the achievement of other desired outcomes, but there were various suggestions for ways to achieve this. These suggestions were sometimes linked to themes about the curriculum and syllabuses being overly complex and over-prescribed. In particular, making it difficult for teachers to address literacy issues for individual students when they need to 'move on' to cover required content areas in the curriculum.

Review respondents also talked about 'literacy' in broader terms, for example, in terms of students needing to have knowledge and understanding across a range of subject areas, most commonly mentioning scientific, digital and financial literacy. The English Teachers Association NSW clarified the distinction between the study of English, and literacy in reading and comprehension.

Many suggestions were made on the most effective approach for teaching literacy and numeracy, with no clear majority. Examples include:

- Literacy and numeracy be integrated across the curriculum
- Phonics, especially programs like THRASS (Teaching, Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills) for all students
- Use arts subjects to support literacy and numeracy
- Implement a new course, Advanced Reading Skills Course
- Actively intervene with individuals if literacy is below standard. Specifically, provide additional support to students with below-age literacy
- Re-frame the English syllabus to focus on comprehension and communication of ideas that deeply appeal to young people
- Use real world applications to teach literacy and numeracy.

2.3 Creative arts and Languages, as well as STEM

'... studying and engaging with the arts helps students to learn expression, communication, creativity, imagination, observation, perception, and thought.' [Create NSW]

Many respondents in support of the Creative Arts, made comments that implied a perceived lack of balance between arts and languages and the STEM subjects. For example, the Australian Education Union was critical of the *'cries to skew the curriculum towards STEM subjects'*, arguing this *'unbalanced fashion toward these areas of knowledge further skews the balance and breadth in the curriculum.'*

By contrast, a number of respondents argued for STEM to be at the forefront of learning, but this was generally not at the specific expense of arts, music and language.

Studying a 'foreign language' was considered as a necessary area of knowledge for students by many. The Modern Language Teachers Association of New South Wales identifies a number of the reasons mentioned:

- Nourishes the mind and builds tolerance and understanding of other cultures

- Prepares students to be global citizens
- Conveys a competitive business advantage in a global market
- Helps students learn and communicate better in their own language.

A diverse range of commentators indicated support for mandatory language studies in the early and middle years (K–10) and indicated concern about the relatively low numbers of students studying languages for their Higher School Certificate (HSC). Various reasons were given for this phenomenon. One submission suggested the lack of take-up in the HSC is because to achieve high marks when studying languages is more difficult and time-consuming compared to other subjects.

Access to language teachers was also noted as a key constraint on the ability of schools to offer a diversity of language options.

In the context of an overcrowded curriculum, the NSW Secondary Principals Council suggest that languages as a mandatory requirement for early secondary years be reconsidered (this suggestion is made for other key learning areas also). It is proposed that there could be more scope for local school decision-making, based on community priorities. It is acknowledged, however, that the balance with providing students with a breadth of subjects is 'crucial'.

2.4 Support for Aboriginal cultures, languages and histories

All curricula should have, as an underpinning foundation, Aboriginal perspectives and principles of learning. [NSW Secondary Principals Council]

In addition to the desire for an improved focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and knowledge, support for students to have opportunities to study Aboriginal languages was noted by many respondents. Some respondents indicated that learning an Aboriginal language should be compulsory for all students to assist in understanding Aboriginal culture and perspectives. There was also strong support from students for increased opportunities to gain a greater knowledge of Aboriginal languages, and Aboriginal culture and history more broadly.

to address the past and properly contribute to 'Closing the Gap' a core purpose of schooling in 21st Century NSW must also be to meaningfully incorporate local Aboriginal cultures, knowledges, pedagogies and languages' [NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group]

3. How could the curriculum better support every student's learning?

A number of key themes emerged across the consultations, capturing both current concerns, and also suggestions for how the curriculum could better support the learning of every student.

Key themes:

- The current curriculum is overly complex and overcrowded
- Teachers want greater flexibility to meet the needs of students
- Curriculum requirements are exacerbated by compliance requirements
- Proficiency-based, rather than age-based, progression through the curriculum is needed, to meet individual student needs
- The curriculum must be inclusive to meet the diverse needs of every student
- Standardised assessments are having a negative impact on teaching and learning
- Vocational education and training (VET) pathways must be stronger
- The HSC could be strengthened. The focus on the ATAR must be reduced.

3.1 The current curriculum is overly complex and overcrowded

A key theme of consultation feedback from educators and key stakeholder organisations was the perception that the primary and secondary curricula as 'overcrowded', 'cluttered' or 'crammed'.

There isn't enough time to teach the current curriculum in any depth. The fun you had with your students has been sucked out of education. My students are struggling. I am overwhelmed trying to keep on top of the current expectations in teaching. [School executive]

Submissions indicated that the complexity and content-heaviness was often because of difficulty in identifying what is mandatory and what is optional content. Educators reported that they often 'skim' through the curriculum, feeling overwhelmed for themselves and their students. Teachers often described the consequence of a cluttered curriculum on their sense of efficacy and workload.

Another factor identified as a contributor to overcrowding is the range of knowledge and skills that sit outside the formal curriculum, but that are also expectations of schools to deliver. Examples of this kind of content included: road safety, water safety, dental hygiene and healthy eating. A number of submissions believed that these types of extra-curricular learning demands were crowding out time that should be focused on literacy and numeracy outcomes and foundational knowledge of the sciences, art and history.

With virtually every social problem that emerges, schools become the mechanism for

societal change. There has not been one statement suggesting the removal, or de-emphasis of any of the myriad areas which have become school responsibilities. [NSW Primary Principals' Association]

For students, overcrowding and teachers' imperative to move quickly meant there was less time to understand 'why'. Students' submissions expressed a desire to understand why content is relevant to them, and to learn at greater depth than they currently do.

*Students need to know what a subject is (e.g. What is maths?) and *why* they are studying it. They need to not only rote learn, but to understand the content by being given a simple outline of the academic principles of each subject, as well as an explanation of the specific study skills needed to learn a subject effectively. [University student]*

The areas of study in the new curriculum need to be reshaped to reduce content and instead focus on strategies and topics to engage, extend and enrich the learning of every student. [Big Picture Education Australia]

Some stakeholder organisations, including those representing teachers, schools and parents talked about ways content could be decided on. A few explicitly mentioned that ongoing review processes/ cycles should be built into the curriculum to remove outdated content or refresh content to keep the curriculum relevant, flexible and simplified.

3.2 Teachers want more flexibility to meet students' needs

One of the most frequently mentioned comments across public meetings and online submissions, was the need to allow more flexibility for teachers in delivering the curriculum by simplifying the curriculum and reducing mandatory content. Teachers in particular, spoke in terms of needing flexibility to be able to exercise their professional judgement; to identify and teach relevant and engaging topics / areas of interest to students, and also to develop programs that were more responsive to the learning needs of individual students.

I would argue that any curriculum should balance a healthy level of content knowledge, whilst providing teachers with the room to engage in meaningful and deep thinking about this information. [Member of School Executive]

Constraints to flexibility again referenced the 'crowded' curriculum, and the impact that had on allowing teachers sufficient classroom time to provide more localised and responsive teaching content. Assessment requirements and tools were also noted, in some cases, as a limit on flexibility.

A small number of teachers commented on the risks associated with making the curriculum more flexible without adequate professional learning. One risk noted was the possibility of teachers interpreting the curriculum/ syllabus differently and therefore disadvantaging students taking common assessments.

3.3 Curriculum requirements are exacerbated by compliance

Teachers—and some key stakeholder organisations—say schools are also overburdened by compliance requirements, including risk management, data collection and reporting. A commonly made point was that the administrative or compliance-related tasks must usually be completed on top of schools' core work of delivering the curriculum, which takes teachers away from what they were trained to do.

The time restraints on teachers is becoming overwhelming, intense programming, high data driven standards and extracurricular responsibilities on top of mountains of marking pressures has torn the focus away from what individual students require and made our career into an administration heavy workload. [Secondary school teacher]

A common administrative burden schools experience is from data collection and reporting. None of the submissions suggested that compliance and risk management activities should not be done, per se. A handful of submissions argued that quality and individual outcomes have not improved, despite the focus on compliance and hence, that a more pragmatic view should be taken. They suggested a revised focus which supports quality delivery outcomes, as well as ongoing professional competency, but reduces the time burden and relieves the compliance pressure on schools.

Related to this was the suggestion that compliance drives dependency. Some submissions suggested teachers practice according to the 'rules', without thinking critically about what would work better or benefit students, their school and their own professional practice.

We have been deskilling our teachers and as a result their efficacy is low and they spiral into... being told what to do rather than using what they know works best based on their expertise, experience and professionalism and leading at the local context. [School executive]

3.4 Proficiency-based, rather than age-based, progressions

Submissions across a range of stakeholder groups suggested it is inappropriate for a curriculum to be stage-based, when students' learning needs are diverse and come from different starting points.

The leading criticism was the expectation that students' learning outcomes can be defined by and assessed according to discrete stages. Many respondents argued that under the current curriculum teachers cannot properly meet the needs of students whose learning is outside the expected range for their chronological age. Teachers, in particular, described how children whose learning is behind for their age often move grade levels inappropriately, falling further and further behind.

A number of stakeholder organisations raised concerns with regard to age-based achievement expectations, and the impact on student learning:

Ignoring readiness of students to progress and failing to provide revision leads to poor student internalisation of concepts and entirely unsurprising failure in standardised testing such as NAPLAN. [Independent Education Union]

The current curriculum requires all students to follow the same progressions, and there is therefore little scope for students to meet the curriculum outcomes at their own pace or in ways that suit their own needs. Also, as cohorts in schools are based purely on age, there can be enormous gaps in a single cohort in terms of the most and least advanced students... [Federation of Parents and Citizens Association of NSW (P&C Federation)]

(Pre-colonial, Aboriginal) curricula were not directed at specific age groups or delivered within confined contexts like today's 'classrooms'. Education was aligned and directed to one's readiness, capacity and progress... [NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (AECG)]

3.5 The curriculum must be inclusive

A commonly described view was that learner variability is the norm and the curriculum responds poorly to students' diversity. Respondents criticised the lack of scope in the current curriculum for students to identify and nurture their own passions and learning pathways.

The education system does not cater to the differences among students. [Student]

The submissions identified groups for whom the current curriculum was considered to not be meeting the needs, including students who are gifted and talented; those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; or those with language, learning and literacy difficulties.

The review of the NSW curriculum is an opportunity to value and uphold the dignity of students with disability to access a robust, meaningful and personalised curriculum on the same basis as their peers. [SEPLA NSW]

Parents and key stakeholder organisations representing specific groups want a future curriculum to be more inclusive and equitable — for children with disabilities/ children with neurodevelopmental and mental health conditions, and gifted and talented children— regularly noting the desire for the curriculum to be more 'student-centric'.

Key stakeholder organisations such as ADHD Australia, Parents for ADHD Australia, the Australian Association of Special Education, and Family Advocacy agreed that teachers need specific professional training to support the learning of students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and students with disabilities, including those on the autism spectrum. Some organisations also called for additional resources and processes to support inclusion of students in the classroom.

A number of submissions called for greater inclusiveness of Aboriginal cultures in the curriculum.

Before starting their schooling and outside of their school hours Aboriginal children are learning their Aboriginal languages, they are learning Aboriginal English and they are being immersed in, engaging with and learning through the oldest continuous culture in humanity. But, when they step onto Australian school grounds they are subjected to a significant cultural shift where all too often there is little or no value placed on speaking Aboriginal Languages, Aboriginal English and practising and learning through Aboriginal culture. [NSW AECG]

One student described the kind of inclusiveness that they wanted from their schooling, in a way that was reflected in the sentiment of a number of submissions:

Aboriginal students need and must get their education but not at the expense of their Aboriginality...it needs to be understood that while schools are preparing Aboriginal students to participate in the wider democratic society, schools must also prepare and support Aboriginal students to participate in Aboriginal culture and society. [Aboriginal student]

3.6 Impact of standardised assessments

Many comments focused on secondary school assessment structures (HSC credential, and ATAR scaling mechanism), but also extended to NAPLAN assessments in primary school.

Criticism most commonly related to:

- unnecessary stress placed on young students
- negative outcome of 'teaching to the test'
- the barrier it creates in meeting individual needs
- the perverse effects of league tables
- tutoring culture, and perception that you cannot achieve without it.

The most common perspective was that HSC examination formats are too narrow in scope and encourage rote learning. Criticism of NAPLAN related equally to the testing itself, as well as on the public reporting of results and league tables. There was also common criticism that both these assessment formats focus on content, not learning processes.

Removing the high stakes and contested discourse of standardised testing such as NAPLAN may enable more valid, authentic and less pressured assessment practices. [Western Sydney University]

Many students, parents, caregivers, teachers and key stakeholder organisations felt that summative assessments and the pressure of examinations were responsible for causing issues around student wellbeing and mental health.

While the structure, format and accessibility of assessments in the curriculum was commonly debated, the need for the mechanism to ensure every student's learning progress was measurable was commonly agreed upon.

Some respondents called for more emphasis on formative assessments and less on summative assessments to support the delivery of curriculum objectives and for a more flexible and student-centric assessment approach. Assessment activities were seen as most valuable when they were used to assess students' performance and progress over a period of time, not in one moment.

The curriculum should build in opportunities (sufficient time) for deliberately spaced retrieval and demonstration of learning, and support formative assessment. [NSW Department of Education]

3.5 VET pathways must be stronger

A key criticism of the current curriculum is that it doesn't equally support or value non-ATAR or vocational education and training (VET) pathways to the extent it does academic pathways.

We need for students to have choices that will allow them to choose a pathway that is relevant to them and their future. The HSC is only relevant if you have an academic pathway mapped out and for those who wish to leave school and get a job it is totally irrelevant. [University educator/ manager]

This criticism had several layers, including that there is insufficient support for VET programs and that pathways are not clear for students who are required by law to stay at school but who want to pursue non-ATAR pathways into further education. The current system was also criticised for not providing these students with adequate career planning and support.

There is too much focus on the university pathway, with there being a paucity of knowledge of other options. Schooling needs to meet the needs of the 60 per cent of students that are not heading to university post-school. [NSW Business Chamber]

[We must] ensure that VET courses of study undertaken in senior secondary years provide the foundation for, and clearly articulate to, Certificate III qualification pathways post-school. [NSW Department of Education]

Respondents that raised this issue often talked about there being a stigma associated with VET, and that pathways to vocational education are under-supported. They argued that change is needed to introduce new and improved pathways for students not going from school to university; especially as there is a requirement to stay in schooling until the age of 17. The call was made for the curriculum to place an equal emphasis on VET, and of industry partnerships to be further developed as meaningful pathways to further education and employment.

Stakeholder organisations suggested several ways these pathways could be strengthened. The National Association for the Visual Arts suggested VET specialist subjects could be outsourced to vocational training institutes, while the NSW Business Chamber suggested an 'industry-led careers hub' in partnership with schools and embedding work experience programs in the middle/ senior curriculum. TAFE NSW called for VET pathways to be

strengthened through, amongst other suggestions, teacher training, mandatory work placements and Certificate III pathways.

Suggestions from other submissions included flexible school timetables to better support the study of VET subjects; bringing in more experts in subjects, to support and (as some suggested) in addition to teachers.

3.6 Strengthen the HSC and reduce focus on the ATAR

As Catholic Schools NSW pointed out, the curriculum does not stand alone from the 'eco-system of pedagogy, assessment, credentialing, regulatory requirements and the structure of schooling.' As such, respondents took the opportunity to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the HSC as the end-of-school credentialing system, and the ATAR ranking mechanism.

While there is a clear difference and purpose between the Higher School Certificate (HSC) credential and the ATAR scaling mechanism, a large proportion of respondents critiqued the two synonymously.

Many believed that the final assessments in secondary school only recognise and reward academic knowledge and performance and do not recognise other important student outcomes. Some also criticised the impact on subject choice for scaling purposes, and the negative impacts of published league tables.

The HSC is no longer useful as it is plagued by gaming, plagiarism, [and] academically shallow learning. The exit credential should not be de facto the ATAR. [Principal]

The HSC should be re-imagined, allowing greater opportunities for students to demonstrate collaborative and creative problem-solving skills. [Drama NSW]

The NSW Department of Education recommends that the NSW Curriculum retain the HSC but enhance its capability to act as a valid capstone assessment of content and skills. [NSW Department of Education]

The most common perspective heard from students was that the examination formats of the HSC are too narrow in scope and encourage rote-learning. Students and parents feel the need to celebrate all types of intelligence, as not all students perform well in these types of examinations.

The ATAR is a scaling mechanism used to rank student achievement for university admission based on a student's HSC results. Many respondents called for decisions about university admissions to be detached from the end-point of schooling, noting that the majority of school leavers do not move directly onto university. Some specifically sought consideration for:

- what other opportunities exist to construct alternate (non-ATAR) pathways

- the need for parity of esteem between VET and academic subjects in the HSC and ATAR
- ensuring that assessment does not drive the curriculum.

4. What else needs to change?

Most submissions agreed that the curriculum should be redesigned or adapted to better support teaching and learning and, assessment and reporting in the 21st Century. The specific suggestions for *how* the curriculum could be redesigned and presented to better prepare students varied and sometimes conflicted. Where implications of any changes were explicitly discussed, these tended to focus on implications for pedagogical practice, teacher workload, teacher professional learning, assessment and resourcing of teacher training and the school system as a whole.

4.1 Improving the integration of curriculum objectives

A common area of change advocated for was a more ‘integrated’ curriculum, by which respondents variously referred to characteristics such as a curriculum that: incorporates more project-based learning; and where identified commonalities are recognised and there is no duplication of content across learning areas. Benefits of this approach were identified as being improved opportunities for authentic, inquiry based, cross-curricular tasks. Many suggested that this would support more personalised learning, which often led to discussions about smoother transitions and continuity of disciplines across the schooling years.

In addition, discussion of ‘integration’ was also referred to by many key stakeholder organisations in the context of embedding of literacy and numeracy (and other general capabilities) across all disciplines and key learning areas (KLAs).

The overarching implication for the curriculum is that skills and capabilities must be embedded within the context of discipline knowledge. The question then becomes how to embed capabilities to foster deep learning and mastery of key learning areas. [NSW Department of Education]

4.2 Engaging parents and community partners in the Curriculum

Many acknowledged the importance of parental engagement in a child’s learning. There were several calls from parents and schools for a reduction in specialist terminology and jargon in the current curriculum to allow greater parental engagement. There were calls for bettering ways to engage parents and carers in the curriculum and assessment structure, so they are able to access resources and other tools to help children progress in their learning.

Many of our parents feel that they understand little of the curriculum and as such, are removed from their children’s learning. Drawing parents into the curriculum means knowing the community in which you work. Often, schools need to go

beyond the gate to 'involve families in the learning lives of their children'. [Council of Catholic School Parents NSW ACT]

Parents need to be empowered in their role as their child's principal education and careers advisor, and have greater access to information regarding the core components of the Curriculum, and the career development opportunities available to their children. This should be applied from the early school years all the way through to the end of secondary schooling. [The Smith Family]

4.3 Evidence base for change

Another theme was the desire for any new reforms to be based on research/evidence about what is effective and to learn from high performing education systems internationally. Education systems in British Columbia and Finland were frequently referenced in this regard. Other countries and regions referenced were Singapore, the Netherlands, and Louisiana.

A number of stakeholder organisations and individual respondents commented on the necessity to 'get the politics out of decision-making in the curriculum' and others to practice caution in responding to fads in education.

4.4 Support for implementation of reforms

Respondents were largely positive about the Review and the opportunity it gives them to influence and bring about positive change for students, communities and teaching practice.

A common view expressed was that educators including teachers and academic experts should be consulted about how to implement changes.

Reforms should be something that do not simply happen to teachers but are done in consultation with teachers. [Independent Education Union]

Some key stakeholder organisations and individual respondents noted that any changes would need to be managed actively with an appropriate timeline, professional development and supporting infrastructure.

There were general calls for more support and resourcing if a new style of curriculum is to be introduced. This included the need for better teacher support and training. A number of stakeholder organisations commented that flexibility in the curriculum must be complemented by additional teacher support through information materials and training.

Some remarked that the current level of resourcing for support to teach new syllabuses is insufficient and must increase including for technology in the classrooms and keeping systems up to date and equity.

Yes, we are given a reasonable timeframe to become familiar with the syllabi, but each new one seems to have lots more involved in it. This can be overwhelming. Make them easy to use and practicable. [Member of a school committee]

Several key stakeholder organisations also called for more professional development to support the delivery of specialist or subject content—Australian Major Performing Arts Group, Engineers Australia, National Advocates for Arts Education, NSW Environmental Education Centres (EEC) and White Ribbon Association.



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