Submission: NSW Curriculum Review

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**Attachments**

The following two attachments are previous submissions by the Northern Sydney District Council of P&C Associations which flesh out some of the matters in this submission:

Attachment 1

* Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools (Gonski 2.0)

2 November, 2017.

Attachment 2

* Review of BOSTES, NSW now NESA.

April, 2016

Summary of Key Points

* Current outcomes that include wide variations between both “like” and “unlike” schools is unacceptable.
* Our current school outcomes are deteriorating relative to other leading countries, and a move to a 21st Century approach needs to be pursued vigorously now. We can do much better.

The need for progress is urgent.

* An overall strategy and associated implementation plans need to be developed and enacted across all components of our school education system, not just the curriculum component. All components need to work together to get the best overall outcome.
* The Curriculum is crowded and needs to be made easier to use and to match new 21st Century schooling strategies.
* Best practice change management and project management must be implemented to build trust; to ensure expeditious, efficient and effective implementation; and to achieve the required outcomes which will benefit students, teachers and the broader community.

# Aim of the Review – General Remarks

We strongly agree with the Aim of the Review as set out in the Terms of Reference, as follows:

*“ … to enhance the effectiveness of school education in NSW to:*

* *provide an education that engages and challenges every child and young person in learning, rewards them for effort and promotes high standards, and*
* *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”.*

This Aim Statement has a timeless aspect, enhanced by reference to current global realities. It is also broadly in line with the latest (Dec 2008) Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians agreed and made by all Australian Education Ministers (the Melbourne Declaration).

Following the Aim Statement is this sentence, with which we take issue:

*“The Review will consider the strengths and weaknesses of the current NSW curriculum, its relationship to the Australian Curriculum and its accessibility to all NSW students”.*

**In reality, the Aim Statement cannot be achieved by just considering one part of the overall process of educating our young people from pre-school onwards.** The overall process includes the following components:

* government regulation, funding and policies;
* curriculum
* teacher training and development;
* credentialing, testing and assessment systems;
* school policies and implementation strategies;
* family and community issues;
* … and most importantly the students.

We are heartened by the fact that NESA has encouraged submissions which go beyond just curriculum at the public roadshows which it has conducted.

**We are concerned that a review restricted to curriculum will result in a continuation of last century’s curriculum being polished yet again at great expense, whilst entrenching “business as usual” when significant change is needed.**

We have high expectations of this review, and high hopes that the government will expand the review to examine the best way to direct and manage the formidable task of converting NSW schools to a 21st Century system.

We are not experts in schooling, but parents and the broader community do have a key interest as advocates for our children, and for the best outcomes for our society.

The magnitude of the task, and the time required to implement the first iteration of system-wide 21st Century capability, is such that a strategic program based on best practice project management principles, integrating all system components to optimise the whole, will be required.

To date, decisions on the nature of schooling and the details of implementation have largely been taken and influenced by select groups within the industry. Best practice requires broader skill sets, broader real participation and a focus on contemporary needs.

A main barrier to change in the past has been custom and practice built up over many decades combined with the lack of an integrated change vision and strategy; a lack of will in some areas of management and politics; active and passive resistance by vested interests; and a lack of a trusting compact with teachers and their representatives which would facilitate real change. Parents also need to be convinced.

Due to long-entrenched custom and practice, there is a tendency to see relatively small changes as big and full of possible scary consequences. Thus outbreaks of innovation tend to fizzle out over time, and real, beneficial change tends not to be implemented across the system.

We see that there has been some good progress in NSW over the last couple of years but there is a long way to go.

Change is a journey and there is usually a range of ways to achieve better outcomes. It is better that we get on with the change that is needed, despite the probability of some hiccups, and the certainty of changes in strategy over the life of the change program.

**Going South**

There is a concept that we will call “going south”. South is a direction which leads to the vision or “ultimate goal”. There is a variety of pathways and transport modes leading to the ultimate goal, and the various pathways often end up with different travel times. Some journeys are long and winding, but nevertheless the outcomes are better than staying put. However, on the way, the ultimate goal can change over time, necessitating a modified travel plan ……..

# Why change?

As noted above, Curriculum forms an important sub-system which is part of the total system that delivers education to our children.

Reform of the Curriculum should therefore be planned and implemented in the light of the future vision for education and as part of a comprehensive set of short, medium and long term strategy and implementation plans.

Our slipping performance compared to other nations is a concern for our economic future, and is letting our children down. In addition, the wide variation between the performance of schools and within schools is an equity issue for the students and a concern for our broader society and economy. This variation is present between schools in similar SES circumstances, and in schools in differing SES circumstances.

A comparison between the 20th Century system outcomes versus the desired 21st Century outcomes is shown diagrammatically on the next page (Learning Outcomes: Conceptual - 20th vs 21st Century).

The One-Size-Fits-All approach <https://tinyurl.com/nswfutures2005> identified formally in a landmark NSW Department of Education report in 2005 is still in place. It is a system which has worked very well in the past and put us amongst the world’s best performers. The problem with being a best performer (or the current “high performing NSW Education system” as described in the review’s terms of reference) is that there is often a reluctance to change until it is too late. There is even a reluctance to pursue incremental change. The current One-Size-Fits-All system is system and employee focussed, not student focussed, and it is now disadvantaging our children. The best thing that the government and our professional education community can do is to be upfront about this and get on with an effective, sustained long-term change program. (See the one-size fits-all diagram next page, possibly wrongly attributed to Einstein).

The information in documents listed under “The Review will have regard to:” provide, between them, a strong case for considerable change and many suggestions which can inform the new strategy. There are, of course, some differences in approach which will continue to be argued into the future, but these differences should not be used to delay progress which can end in reverting to a position of “Do Nothing”.



# What is 21st Century Schooling?

There is some consensus amongst educators in broad terms as to what constitutes 21st Century schooling. We have outlined our view below, but there will be a range of views no doubt.

The important thing is that this Curriculum Review gives rise to a whole system strategy and concerted action to implement, bearing in mind that there will be flexibilities within the strategy and changes with time in line with learnings and needs.

The profession and its advocate organisations need to engage constructively in mapping out their future, and this will require the building of sustained trust between the interested parties.

The NSW Department of Education has made some steps towards the goal of 21st Century education, particularly in relation to the design of new school facilities. It has also implemented the principles in a number of locations, including in the new schools built or being built as a result of the campaign we began in 2011 when the looming school capacity needs in various areas of the state were not understood by the Department.

Our fear is that these initiatives may be lost through the tendency of long standing organisations to smother change.

**21st Century schooling** involves the whole “system” meeting the student - often called **“personalised learning”** - rather than the student being dished up a standardised, age-based, inflexible curriculum driven learning environment which is what happens now. In the NSW Department the concept of “personalised learning” has, in the past, represented a little extra attention to students in some categories, but within the same inflexible, age-based framework.

Students who get left behind generally stay well behind for their whole school life whilst the classroom offering forges ahead irrespective. Students who are quick learners get bored. So do many students in the middle through lack of interest in the subject matter or teaching and learning environment. It could be said that institutionalising children in such an environment for 13 years is quite unkind to say the least, particularly as we can now do much better. Teaching and Learning which does not maximise engagement is also an inefficient use of resources.

# Outcomes for Students

Ideally, all students would be able to meet their full potential through being optimally engaged by subject matter and teaching methodology that is a perfect fit for their individual attributes.

Students should all attain the minimum knowledge and skills required to operate in our contemporary society, along with a balance of higher order knowledge and skills to allow them to make the most of their lives.

Ideally, students should all develop capabilities at their own personal pace and learning attributes. Capabilities in basic and higher level skills of literacy and numeracy; capabilities in subjects that match an individual’s special interests and preferences; general qualities such as problem solving, creative thinking and decision making; personal qualities such as self-awareness, empathy, tolerance, assertiveness and resilience, and so on. In other words, a well-rounded confident individual who can interact happily and productively with others.

In this vein, the Finkel Report (P6. Note from the Chair), referenced in the Terms of Reference mentions the concept of workplace related T-shaped skills, which can be applied to life in general. The vertical bar on the T represents the depth of related skills and expertise in a particular field or fields, whereas the horizontal bar is the ability to collaborate across disciplines with experts in other areas and to apply knowledge in areas of expertise other than one's own.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T-shaped_skills>

# Student Pathways

There needs to be greater use of other pathways, apart from the primarily academic HSC. The current HSC needs a revamp to match the objectives and strategies to be developed for 21st Century learning. A single high stakes exam at the end of 13 years of schooling appears to be contrary to the objective “that every student reaches their full potential”.

There should be other pathways or options for students such as:

* Seamless entry to a TAFE style system. Unfortunately options for combining TAFE with school have diminished in recent years. The opportunities under this option need to be revitalised, as it provides better satisfaction and outcomes for many students and has the potential to be more cost-effective than staying at school only.

Victoria offers Vocational Education and Training (VET) in both the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) or Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), and there would be some learnings from that system.

* Specialist streams in some schools/institutions that provide for P-Tech type education, which potentially runs from Year 9 to Year 14 and providing a tertiary qualification
* At least 10% of academic students accelerated through high school to leave for University after Year 11, thus making savings that could be redirected to areas of greater need
* Greater use of technology for niche markets. Two existing examples:
	+ Aurora College offers rural and remote students in NSW an opportunity to study English, maths and science selective classes <https://tinyurl.com/auroracollege>
	+ Royal Far West School, Manly used to offer an outreach reading program to country children, using Manly volunteers trained in a system called Multi-Lit, communicating one-on-one with a child in their remote classroom via a Skype-like system.
* Greater use of technology more broadly. Newish technologies like Virtual Reality are increasingly being used, along with video conferencing and other technologies, to excite and engage students. The pace of uptake of these technologies has waxed and waned and there is potential for more effort in this space.

# Decluttering the Curriculum and Red Tape

We hear complaints from teachers about too much material in the Curriculum/Syllabus and Red Tape.

Both areas are blamed for reducing the effectiveness of the teacher’s time.

One of the characteristics of any documented system is that they can grow like Topsy - “improvements” usually add tasks, often without removing tasks that have been there for a long time, but still have to be carried out, even if these tasks no longer add value.

**Decluttering:**

In the case of the curriculum, the documents are reviewed and updated by subject technical experts.

These people are dedicated to their subject, and strive to produce the best document possible for their subject area. This does not always produce an optimised outcome, either for the study of the individual subject or the full study program.

One attendee at the Mona Vale roadshow said that he was a curriculum writer in 2000. The syllabus material was originally supposed to be akin to a manual with optional dot points that helped a teacher in delivering the curriculum. His claim was that the dot points had now taken on the nature of items that must all be ticked, leading to superficial coverage in a race to tick all the boxes.

Whether or not this is the case, it raises the question of whether there should be manuals with helpful model lessons, and supporting video and other material to save each teacher in the state time in assembling programs and lesson plans, as well as improving the quality of the learning. The argument goes that this would allow teachers to use their time more effectively. We know this subject is quite controversial but it is even more reason why it needs some serious attention.

Another claim is that the Curriculum itself has become too full to be effectively taught.

Curriculum development needs to be in line with the 21st Century schooling strategy that we have advocated elsewhere in this document.

We note that NESA has web-based subject support materials and a program building tool.

**Red Tape:**

There has been a couple of attempts to reduce the so-called “red tape” going back a few years. The focus on “red tape” is bound to fail in large organisations, because the culture is generally one of retaining control, preserving power bases and upholding standards, even when these standards no longer meet business needs. Standards aren’t bad of themselves and they are necessary – there just needs to be an appropriate balance between standards and innovation, and ways to change standards when necessary

In times of external change, systems such as our school education system need to be re-engineered to meet contemporary business strategies and to take advantage of efficiencies and capabilities of newer technology. Processes and forms that are no longer relevant or useful need to be discarded.

# Change Management Processes & Tools

Implementation of serious, long term change is not generally a strength in Australian school systems.

We suggest the use of external expertise and consultation with other large organisations that have undergone change.

There are many tools available to assist change. Here are two examples:

**Customer Journey Mapping:**

This technique could be used, for example, to gain an understanding of

* a student’s journey by day, week, year or preK-12
* a teacher’s journey by day, week, year or career

This helps to design effective processes, and to put people in the shoes of others, with obvious advantages.

**Co-Design:**

There are many references on the web. Below is an excerpt from one such site.

Co-Design can be adapted for many uses, including design of educational strategies, design of curriculum, design of school facilities, design of lessons, design of job descriptions, etc. It is in use in the Department’s Educational Services Division, but elements of the idea, if not the name, have been used in other areas of the Department and NESA for many years.

In domestic life, buying a new kitchen from a specialist supplier provides a day-to-day example of Co-Design – with the designer providing ideas and options, whilst the user picks and chooses to suit their needs and modus operandi.

<http://designforeurope.eu/what-co-design>

“Co-design reflects a fundamental change in the traditional designer-client relationship. The co-design approach enables a wide range of people to make a creative contribution in the formulation and solution of a problem. This approach goes beyond consultation by building and deepening equal collaboration between citizens affected by, or attempting to, resolve a particular challenge. A key tenet of co-design is that users, as 'experts' of their own experience, become central to the design process”.

# Information and Communication Technology

Technology, particularly interactive information and communication technology, is an important enabler along the journey to the moving target of achieving 21st Century schooling objectives. There is no doubt that the information revolution has made research, investigation, learning, collaboration and general communication on almost any subject matter much easier and productive for students today than in previous times.

In terms of the Curriculum, there is a need for greater emphasis on how to use technology safely, including how to minimise present and future negative ramifications. Students are often digital natives, adept and confident in using the technology, but naïve when it comes to the ramifications. This is in contrast to the situation of many teachers whose skills in using interactive technology are behind those of their students. Special attention therefore needs to be paid to the means by which students are taught the higher order skills required to manage technology safely and optimally.

One of negative ramifications arises from data privacy issues, both from illegal activities such as hacking, and from legal activities such as data mining by service providers.

Other aspects include the various impacts on relationships, which requires a Curriculum and teaching methodology which engages students in depth.

Other issues of concern involve the interests of the dominant global suppliers such as Google, Microsoft, Apple and Facebook. In our current circumstances where the pace of change is historically high, these corporations with overwhelming market share tend to have great influence on decisions and systems used in customer organisations in general, and in our schools in particular. There is already concerns amongst our members that this drives up costs to students, and exposes them to hidden negative ramifications.