

Standing Committee on Social Issues
Inquiry Into Impacts of Harmful Pornography
On Mental, Emotional, And Physical Health

24 March 2025

Post Hearing Responses

QUESTION 1 PAGE NO 3

The CHAIR: Can I ask, with regards to how that syllabus is delivered across different types of schools, is that the same? Does it change in delivery in a public school, in a private school, in an independent school?

What's mandatory and what's optional with regards to how schools deal with that?

PAUL CAHILL: Both the outcomes and content of the syllabus are—we describe them now as essential content, which means effectively they are mandatory. They need to be taught across schools. We are conscious that across the sectors, different schools have different ethoses, and certainly the materials can be taught appropriate to that ethos, but it needs to be taught. We went to a lot of trouble to make sure that the language we were using in the syllabus didn't water down what we wanted students to learn, but also that that it could be taught appropriately across the range of schools that exist in the State.

From a very pragmatic point of view, we were very cautious with the language as well, because there is sensitivity around the issue of pornography. I'd hate it misrepresented that we were teaching students in stage 4 or stage 5 or even younger to engage with pornography. We've been very careful with the language we've used, but we've been more explicit with the syllabus. We do actually have the example of pornography twice in the stage 4 and the stage 5 syllabus which didn't exist previously. We're giving a very clear steer to what we are expecting schools to teach.

The CHAIR: I've got one more, and then I'll pass over and see if my colleagues have more questions. I've certainly got lots more. I wondered with—two things, actually. Would it be possible for us on notice to get that syllabus content?

PAUL CAHILL: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: That would be really helpful. Thank you.

PAUL CAHILL: I'll get you a copy of the syllabus itself, but also some annotations that I've got as a tab to that.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I'd appreciate that.

ANSWER

In 2024, the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) released the new Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) 7–10 and PDHPE K–6 Syllabus, to be implemented by 2027. The syllabuses are available online at <https://curriculum.nsw.edu.au/learning-areas/pdhpe>.

New syllabuses, including PDHPE focus on essential content which prescribes the learning entitlement for all students in NSW. That is, the knowledge and skills that every student has a right to know and needs to progress in their learning regardless

of which school they attend. Essential content identifies the core skills and knowledge necessary for developing teaching and learning programs.

Students in Stage 4 and Stage 5 in the content area of Respectful Relationships are required to:

Stage 4 (Year 7 to 8)

- Examine external influences on sexuality and sexual health behaviours and recognise the impact these can have on their own and others' health and wellbeing

Stage 5 (Year 9 to 10)

- Discuss how the portrayal of sexuality and sexual health in the media and online content may influence people's attitudes toward safe, respectful and consensual relationships

Schools have the scope to support teaching and learning with syllabus examples that are consistent with the school values and expectations of the community.

QUESTION 2 PAGE NO 4

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: Sorry, are you saying that you don't think there's a connection between growing levels of pornography use by young children and sexual abuse of children on children?

MEGAN KELLY: No. I know that the evidence is telling us that there is an issue there, absolutely, and that's part of the work that we are doing. It might be an appropriate time to speak to the Respectful Relationships education program that we are delivering as part of the work of the team that I lead. That program is funded through the Commonwealth Consent and Respectful Education funding there, as well as New South Wales primary prevention into—sorry, I'm just pulling up my notes here so I can get the details right—prevention of domestic family and sexual violence. In that program we are looking at how we can support effective teaching around these matters to address those harmful effects and to take a preventative approach to it, actually, so that we can stop some of those behaviours from emerging, I guess, as a result of that exposure.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I understand that you're in the process of curriculum renewal and that the PDHPE syllabus is relatively new. How long has the new syllabus been operating in schools?

PAUL CAHILL: Well, it's not. To be fully implemented I think it's '26 or '27. I'll take that on notice. I think it's '27. But schools are able to begin. Anecdotally there are a number of schools I know have begun to be early adopters of the curriculum, but effectively it's either that date '26/'27, but I'll get the specific date.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: So currently there would be no explicit teaching about pornography in high schools in New South Wales, necessarily?

MEGAN KELLY: We also have designed and we're implementing another program, a course for our year 11 and 12 students, which is called Life Ready. That's a 25-hour course that all of our New South Wales public school students engage with. There is content in there that is addressing issues around respectful relationships, consent, coercive control, and pornography is addressed in that course.

ANSWER

The new Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) 7–10 Syllabus, which was released in 2024, is to be implemented in all schools by 2027. Schools can plan and prepare to teach the new syllabus in 2025 and 2026. Schools may choose to implement the syllabus during this planning and preparation phase.

QUESTION 3 PAGE NO 5

Dr AMANDA COHN: Thanks so much for the evidence you're providing today. There have been a fair few questions already about the syllabus, specifically relating to respectful relationships and consent. I'm also interested in what is being taught specifically about sexual development. In the written submission, you've helpfully pointed out the Children First framework, which identified that a lack of access to reliable information about sexual development can result in young people turning to online social media content and pornography for information. What is the framework in the syllabus currently for that specific information about sexual development and sexual behaviour?

PAUL CAHILL: I'll take that on notice, because there's a bit of specificity in it. The focus of the syllabus tends to look at healthy manifestations of sexuality and sexual expression. The whole notion of respectful relationships is predicated on the fact that we're trying to teach students to know about their responsibility for their own wellbeing but their responsibility for the wellbeing of others. That is manifested in the behaviours that students may engage in. Within the syllabus, we teach what are appropriate behaviours. Also, we teach the fact that there are a range of things external to the student, like online environments, that really have an impact upon the way in which students understand the world in which they live and the way they behave. I'll send you the specific details in terms of what the syllabus says, but that's the general framework in which we operate.

ANSWER

The current PDHPE syllabuses (2018) and new PDHPE syllabuses (2024) take a holistic, strengths-based approach to learning about health and wellbeing.

In the new PDHPE K–6 syllabus:

- Students in Stage 1 and Stage 2 (Years 1 to 4) learn about changes in physical development and hygiene, and self-care practices that promote health and wellbeing.
- Students in Stage 3 (Year 5 and 6) students learn about puberty and life changes.
- Stage 4 students learn about the impact of change, including adolescence and puberty.
- Students learn about permission, personal boundaries, recognising signs in unsafe situations and seeking help.

In the new PDHPE 7–10 syllabus:

- Stage 4 students investigate the laws of consent and describe how consent, respecting people's choices and communication can create safe and positive relationships. Students explain and apply skills and strategies to give or deny consent, including communicating assertively and respectfully.
- In Stage 5 students examine strategies that enhance safety and positive experiences in intimate relationships, including effective communication, respecting people's choices, personal boundaries and affirmative consent. Students also learn how the media and online content may influence people's attitudes toward safe, respectful and consensual relationships.

Schools have the scope to support teaching and learning with syllabus examples that are age appropriate and consistent with the school values and community expectations.

QUESTION 4 PAGE NO 5-6

Dr AMANDA COHN: Thank you. I appreciate this is going to be taken on notice as well, but there is a specific recommendation in the written submission about "providing access to evidence-based information and advice about sexual behaviours for children and young people." We've had an extensive discussion about schools and school curriculum, but I'm interested in understanding what other information the New South Wales Government provides that young people can access online or in the community in terms of public education.

MEGAN KELLY: One of the things we do is work closely with other government agencies—DCJ, Health—and accessing their resources is a part of that provision, and also working with our academic experts in the field. We need to understand what the current research is telling us to develop that advice and materials for our students as well. There's a range of things that we want to do there. We also need to listen to our students and what their lived experiences are. As we're developing materials, it's hearing from them and co-designing and testing it with our students before we roll it out more broadly. It's a multi-pronged approach to where we're getting that evidence base from, both State and nationally, as well as the work that we do with our own students too.

Dr AMANDA COHN: Are you able to provide us on notice with some of that work that already exists?

MEGAN KELLY: We can for the work that already exists. There's a body of work to come as well.

ANSWER

Curriculum and Resources

The Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) Program is funded under the Commonwealth Consent and Respectful Relationships Education (CRRE) Measure and NSW Pathways to Prevention: NSW Strategy for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence 2024-2027. The program supports NSW government primary and secondary schools to deliver age-appropriate, evidence-based learning on respectful relationships.

Through the NSW curriculum and Life Ready course, students build critical media literacy to question explicit content, stereotypes, and industry-driven messages.

The department has existing resources for current curriculum delivery and is developing new tools, resources, and advice to embed content on respectful relationships, coercive control and consent.

Support for staff and schools

Teachers, school leaders, and staff receive professional learning and system-wide support to deliver respectful relationships education effectively. Professional learning includes working with experts to develop sensitive, age-appropriate resources.

The program promotes whole-school, evidence-informed approaches to address gender-based violence and promote gender equality.

Teachers have access to quality-assured, expert-reviewed materials, with contributions from student advisory groups like DOVES (Department of Student Voices in Education and Schools).

Online Safety and Cross-Sector Collaboration

The NSW Department of Education's Cybermarvel online safety awareness program, based on the eSafety Commissioner's framework, provides resources to school communities to help deliver comprehensive learning on several online safety topics including safe and respectful online behaviours, awareness about online sexual exploitation and safety on social media and gaming

The department offers the [eSafety Commissioner's professional learning](#) in our learning management system to help school staff safely manage critical online incidents and report online abuse.

Information from the [eSafety Commissioner website](#) is shared with students through curriculum based lessons, enabling them to find support and know how to respond to and report incidents of abuse or bullying.

QUESTION 5 PAGE NO 6

Dr AMANDA COHN: Thank you. That's helpful. This is a question for Health, but you're representing the Government's submission today, so I appreciate this will be taken on notice. I'm specifically interested in Sexual Assault Services. I've worked with a number of those practitioners previously who are really excellent and provide a really important service. The written submission says that: Despite having an extensive network, NSW Health Sexual Assault Services experience significant demand and waitlists.

On notice to Health, could you advise the Committee what the barriers are to expanding those services and what would be needed to address the unmet demand and waitlists for sexual assault services at the moment?

PAUL CAHILL: Yes.

ANSWER

This question would be best answered by NSW Health rather than the Department of Education.

QUESTION 6 PAGE NO 7

The CHAIR: We've reached the end of our time this morning. Again, thank you for being here and also representing the Government as well. I think Ms Carter wants to put one more question on notice.

The Hon. SUSAN CARTER: I'm conscious that you're Education rather than Health. I note in the submission discussing the Safe Wayz and the New Street Services that a key priority of these services is to address children and young people's access to pornography. If it was possible to have more information about how that was achieved, I'd be very grateful.

ANSWER

This question would be best answered by NSW Health rather than the Department of Education.