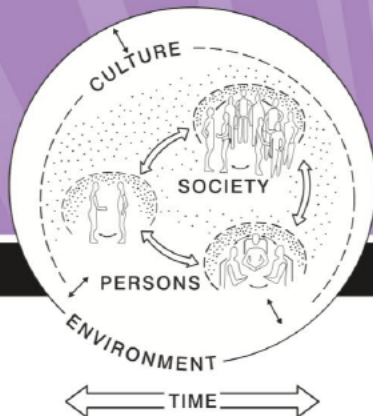


## **INQUIRY INTO REVIEW OF THE NEW SOUTH WALES SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

**Organisation:** Society and Culture Association of NSW

**Date Received:** 9 August 2020

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# Society and Culture Association

Founded 1984

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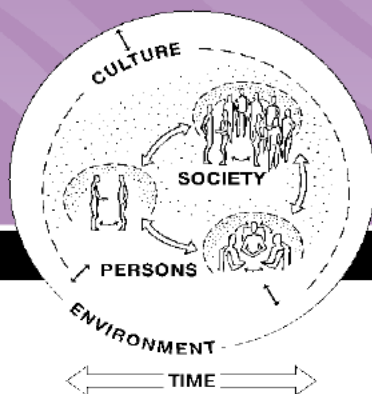
Hon Mark Latham MLC  
Chair  
NSW Parliamentary Review of NSW School Curriculum  
NSW State Parliament  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

## **Submission to the Inquiry into the Review of the New South Wales School Curriculum**

On behalf of the Executive, the Committee, our membership and the past, present and future students of HSC Society and Culture, I submit this feedback in response to issues raised in the Master's Review of the NSW School Curriculum.

Sincerely,

Louise Dark  
President  
Society and Culture Association  
9 August 2020



# Society and Culture Association

Founded 1984

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Society and Culture Association (NSW) submission to

Inquiry into the Review of the New South Wales School Curriculum

Portfolio Committee No. 3 Education

NSW Legislative Council

The Society and Culture Association (SCA) supports teaching and learning in Stage 6 Society and Culture throughout rural, regional and metropolitan New South Wales. We represent 262 individual and institutional members across all school systems and are active in providing quality professional development, educational resources and dynamic events (live and webcast) for Society and Culture students and their teachers to attend and access. The SCA is committed to promoting a love of learning and enhance their educational achievements for both teachers and students.

Further information on our diverse programs can be viewed on our website: [www.sca.nsw.edu.au/](http://www.sca.nsw.edu.au/) or by referring to our syllabus: <https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/hsie/society-culture>

The SCA held meetings and conducted a questionnaire to our membership specifically focused on key issues in the Curriculum Review Report which pertain to Society and Culture and the broader curriculum review process. The questionnaire was open for responses to be submitted over a period of four days, and the number of responses generated within that short time is a clear indication of the commitment and value of our subject to both students and teachers across the education community.

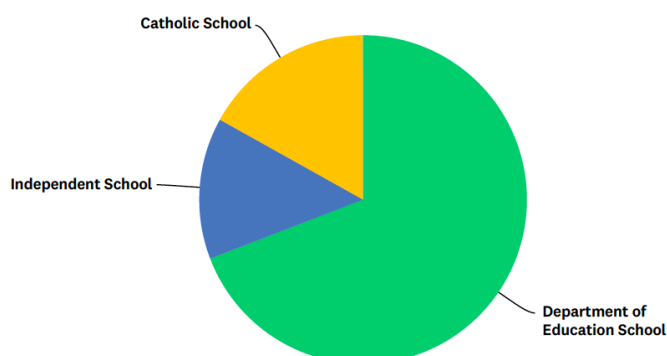
Firstly, to address the scope of research by the SCA for the purpose of this, and other submission related to the NSW Curriculum Review: Responses from our members provided feedback from 201 individuals including teachers, current and graduate students from regional and metropolitan NSW with respondents from Department of Education, Catholic and Independent sectors. This feedback provides both qualitative and quantitative data which has been applied to the responses in this communication.

**Our  
respondents  
were:**

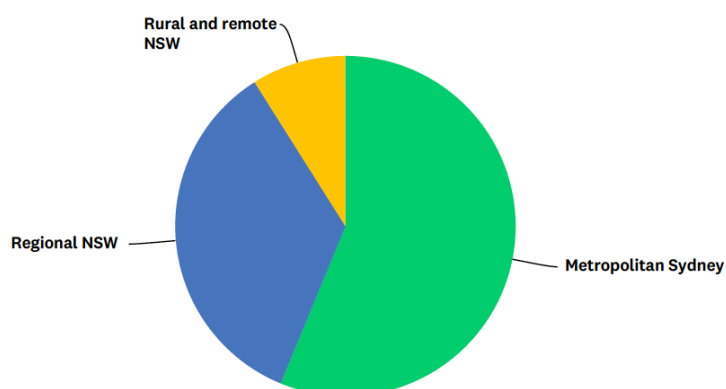
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
A teacher	65.67% 132
A current student	28.36% 57
A graduate student	4.98% 10
Other (please specify)	1.00% 2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>201</b>

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	Parent of graduate student	12/8/2019 10:39 PM
2	Past year 11 student	12/4/2019 11:49 PM

Representing the following sectors:



Within these regions of NSW:



In the broad reach of the review of the NSW curriculum SCA has supported the process of enquiry, made submissions at each stage and endorses many of the key visions for change evident in the Masters Curriculum Review Report. However, there are some key aspects of our current curriculum which Masters has not acknowledged and we draw these to the attention of this Parliamentary Committee. As a professional teaching association, the Committee has provided the following concerns and recommendations for consideration, using the Parliamentary Review terms of reference as a framework for our insights.

## 1. The extent to which the Masters Curriculum Review addresses its terms of reference, including:

### (a) Curriculum content, flexibility and pedagogy

The very nature of Society and Culture as a stage 6 subject allows for a contemporary pedagogy approach to delivery of content (such as visible teaching and learning), where all the knowledge for the classroom is not always held by the teacher but also the students. Society and Culture has considerable flexibility within the content options (Core – mandated but flexibility within the country study, conceptual examples and a contemporary context. Students study two out of four possible depth studies, with a flexibility of focus studies and genres within the depth studies. Additionally, the Personal Interest Project (PIP) provides significant flexibility based on student interest. The syllabus content is accessible and highly relevant to all school demographics due to the choices available for focus areas

allowing for a meaningful experience and a high level of relevance for all students, where much of the content delivery can be collaborative and draws on the insight of students, ensuring that their perspective is valued.

**Conceptual Learning:** On page 86 of the Master Final Report it is stated “*For too many students, school learning is a process of memorising facts and routines with limited conceptual understanding*” and this goal to promote conceptual understanding across the curriculum is important however Masters at does not substantively acknowledge the existing focus of conceptual learning already taking place in NSW schools.

Society and Culture is fundamentally a conceptually based subject. The voice of our teachers and our community on this matter are evident below:

- Respondent 1 *The S&C classroom utilizes conceptual learning better than any other course in the HSC. The fundamental and additional course concepts give students a framework to build their analysing and critical thinking upon. A S&C students' ability to apply course concepts in an abstract way is one of the most rewarding parts of teaching the S&C course.*
- Respondent 5 *The importance of conceptual learning in S+C cannot be overstated. In my everyday classroom, consistent use of concept definitions alongside applicable examples form the keystone for students to be able to develop and apply their understanding of society and culture and thus interpret all of its facets as they operate in the world around them.*
- Respondent 12 *S&C is a highly conceptual course by its very nature, as is evidenced by the syllabus and HSC marking guidelines. Deep conceptual understanding is essential to problem solving and to the creation of new ideas, products and solutions. As Bialik and Fadel note, 'by internalising the most important concepts... students are better equipped to deal with multifaceted problems and have a more diverse set of tools with which to interpret the world'. This is what S&C does.*
- Respondent 25 *My Society and Culture experience was almost entirely conceptual learning. We developed a deep understanding of the society and culture concepts in order to be able to genuinely understand and interpret questions and situations around the world*
- Respondent 47 *Society & Culture is a concepts-based subject. Each topic begins with lessons around associated concepts. This can make the subject challenging for students who prefer more black and white content. However, it is evident when watching a student develop throughout this course that their understanding of the concepts allows them to become open-minded citizens of a global world. The concepts taught in this topic prepare students to navigate political, cultural and ethical issues they may come across outside of the classroom (especially in the workplace).*
- Respondent 83 *Concepts are obviously central to S&C and they are a constant reference point for understanding content and case studies. However, having HSC exams frames this in a reductionist and abstract way instead of giving student the opportunity to apply skills to real problems/issues/topics. E.g. students could apply their research and communication skills through journalism and media production for publication.*

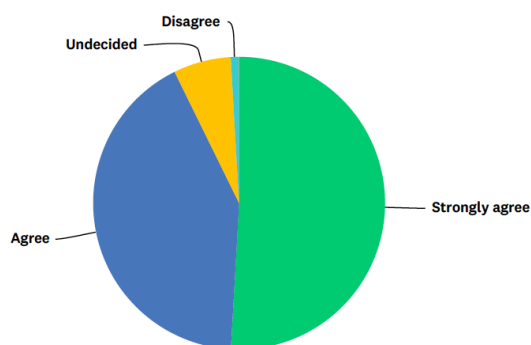
**In summary:** The structure of the Society and Culture syllabus is built around a conceptual context. At the time of the Society and Culture syllabus development in the 1980s, this was seen as an incredibly innovative approach to teaching and learning. Today, this subject continues to hold a unique and vital place within the NSW curriculum. This focus allows for student to launch into analysis and critical thinking in a distinctive way and fosters a capacity to understand the social and cultural world, their world, in powerful ways.

**Recommendation:** The Society and Culture course must be retained to ensure these unique qualities are not lost and that it be used as a guide for other subjects to develop conceptually focused pedagogy and teaching and learning practice.

**Integrating Theory and Application:** On page 80 of Masters Final Report it is stated: *The principle of integrated learning seeks to eliminate this dichotomy by making every subject in the senior years a rigorous, high quality course that integrates and prioritises both theory and application. For some subjects, this will mean introducing a greater focus on practical applications and skills in knowledge application. For others, it will mean a greater focus on the theory underpinning practical applications.*

Across both Preliminary and HSC Society and Culture studies require integrated learning and the deep understandings of social theory and that this be applied to real world situations. The experience of our teachers and our community on this matter are evident below:

- Respondent 1 *The PIP, most particularly when students are highly engaged with the process of undertaking and completing it, is probably the best example of Integrated Learning (combining knowledge, skills, theory and its application) taking place in the S+C course. Having said this, the current syllabus provides endless opportunities for integrated learning, for instance when looking at the theory and operation of social constructs, nature vs nurture, communication theories, social change theories, elements of popular culture (commodification, commercialisation, mythology), the adaptations of belief systems and ideologies to modernised society, reasons for conformity and nonconformity, and finally pluralism within Social Inclusion and Exclusion.*
- Respondent 4 *Integrated learning is at the heart of the Society and Culture course. Take for example the concepts which are consistently integrated throughout all topics, and applied in new situations. The PIP allows for students to combine their knowledge of contemporary sociological issues, skills and theory and create an original work. Furthermore, the preliminary course is extremely important for setting up the foundations for the HSC course and transference of knowledge, skills and theory. The Society and Culture course should be considered a shining example of the HSC when it comes to integrated learning.*
- Respondent 12 *Society and Culture as a course is an amalgamation of many different theories of study and academic subjects; in its essence, it represents integrated learning. Coupled with the PIP, the subject allows broad cultural understanding through applied knowledge that represents not only the Society and Culture course, but multiple fields of study.*
- Respondent 34 *Society & Culture is a unique course due to its variability. While students learn theories (and develop knowledge) about social processes in the classroom, it is a course requirement that they then go and investigate these in a practical context. I feel that this feature of the subject enhances its relevance to students who can apply their learning to their own experiences as they make sense of the world.*
- Respondent 61 *Theories of change are learnt and then applied to a case study in class and applied again by the students in the PIP, in a practical manner.*
- Respondent 64 *My ex-students often tell me how well S&C prepared them for university and other learning.*



← Does the S&C syllabus allow for these elements of integrated learning (combining knowledge, skills, theory and its application) within the course?

The Report identifies a commitment to a long-term agenda to develop a more integrated approach to learning in the senior years through the development of a limited set of rigorous, high-quality 'advanced courses', each of which incorporates both theory and application. The SCA would like to emphasise the

representative voices of our teachers and our community to address elements of an integrated approach that already exist within learning in the senior years:

- Respondent 1 *The S&C course already does all the things that have been listed as important in the interim report. The S&C course should be used as a model for others courses to learn how these things can be embedded into their pedagogy.*
- Respondent 5 *The overall importance of S+C to the NSW curriculum is again something that cannot be overstated. No other course on offer to NSW students provides a deeper, more engaging or more skills-enhancing approach to the knowledge and practice associated with the study of anthropology. With its tenet of teaching students 'social and cultural literacy', in my experience this course more than any other equips future society with knowledgeable and empathetic students who have the skills to investigate and report back on any aspect of society which concerns or interests them.*
- Respondent 8 *Simply put, no other course in the HSC is worthier of the title 'rigorous, high quality and advanced' as the Society and Culture course. S&C is vital to the NSW curriculum as it is relevant to our learners, deals with current real world issues and equips students with an incredible array of knowledge, and skills that can be applied beyond the school gates. We must ask ourselves 'What is the purpose of schools and learning'? Society and Culture ensures our students have an understanding of themselves and the world around them, equips them with the skills to solve real world problems and a sense of social justice that is unparalleled in the NSW curriculum. This is surely part of the purpose of an education.*
- Respondent 17 *Society and Culture is a unique part of the HSC. It provides an opportunity for students to undertake a subject that opens their eyes to new societies and cultures, in addition to preparing them for their future interactions. It is of vital importance to offer a subject such as Society and Culture to support the elimination of prejudices, racism and exclusion. The course supports the building of cohesion, acceptance and harmony in a diverse and multicultural society.*
- Respondent 18 *Society and Culture is the most influential course in shaping young people. It empowers, encourages, educates and excites students and allows them to actively engage in the world around them. It allows students to develop their own personal branding and awareness of social issues. It provides a platform to create change and promote empathy. It is a well-rounded course that encourages different perspectives and respect. Every student who has graduated this course has graduated as a better human who is more engaged with the world around them. Society and Culture is the most powerful tool students can have to help equip and support them once they graduate high school.*
- Respondent 34 *S&C is the only course which allows students the freedom to explore their world in an independent and self-directed way. It is the only course where their microworlds genuinely connect to the curriculum framework. Student choice is at the heart of them, as is the responsibility to challenge their personal experience with rigorously researched public knowledge.*

- Respondent 50 *I feel that S&C is one of the best courses as it is a high-level and advanced course, but still accessible by all students. It allows for student choice and many students return after completing the course stating that it really helped prepare them for life after school - particularly at University level. I feel that the course should remain as part of the curriculum and I would be incredibly disappointing if it was removed.*
- Respondent 77 *S&C is one of the most important courses in the NSW curriculum. Not only does it encourage a student to recognise their self-concept and personal and social identity, it also allows them to empathise with different cultures and ask meaningful and respectful questions about different cultures and environments. A lot of students I have taught have gone on to join the UN or Amnesty in a bid to improve the plight of people worse off than themselves. The PIP is the finest example of the application of the theory of S&C.*

**In summary:** The words of our students, teachers and wider community are a clarion call for the qualities of this course. Many of the innovations called for in the Interim Report and final Masters Review are already being attained by Society and Culture. This course is a cornerstone for innovative teaching and learning and preparing students for the future. There is an overwhelming positive response to how Society and Culture combines knowledge, skills, theory in its application of meaningful 'Integrated Learning'.

**Recommendation:** The achievements of this course must not be lost in potential revisions of the NSW curriculum. The integration of theoretical understanding in classroom practice allows students to develop a deeper understanding of their world and how apply this both academically and practically.

#### **(b) Quality and relevance of the evidence-base underpinning the recommendations (compared to CESE findings)**

The SCA is supportive of this aspect of the Curriculum Review and agrees that aspects of research within the review are underpinned by evidence. Many of the recommendations are well considered and evidence based, and elements of these recommendations can be linked to CESE findings. It is also important to acknowledge that any changes that occur based on the recommendations of the curriculum review incorporate the eight themes presented by CESE to ensure these changes are effective.

#### **(c) Recommendations for student-centered 'progression points' and 'differentiated learning' in schools and whether such initiatives are research-based and proven to be effective**

The SCA is supportive of this aspect of the Curriculum Review, especially in regards to the need for differentiated learning within school. There have, however, been significant concerns raised regarding the ambiguous nature of progression points. The statement that *'in the new curriculum, students in the same year of school may be working on different syllabuses at the same time. The underlying principle is that learning is maximised when learners are presented with appropriately challenging material, rather than being under-challenged by what they already know or over-challenged by what they are not yet ready to learn'* (Page 83) raises many questions for teachers. While we appreciate the need to present students with appropriately challenging material, this is often achieved through differentiation, as opposed to entirely different syllabi. The challenges of managing this seem considerable. Although Society and Culture could potentially adapt to this model, there are concerns on the impact it could have on the depth and range of learning. How is it feasible to expect individual students to attain the depth of understanding this curriculum review is aspiring to achieve when the teacher is potentially teaching 24 different students 24 different things at the same time? There are also additional concerns regarding the manner by which the validity and reliability of this measure might be attained. Even with moderation, teachers interpret the simplest samples of student work differently. If there is no regulation of how teachers 'judge' whether a student has achieved a minimum standard



(and the existing grade structure is not to be used for this purpose) then how it is meant to be achieved? There is significant potential for inconsistency across school context.

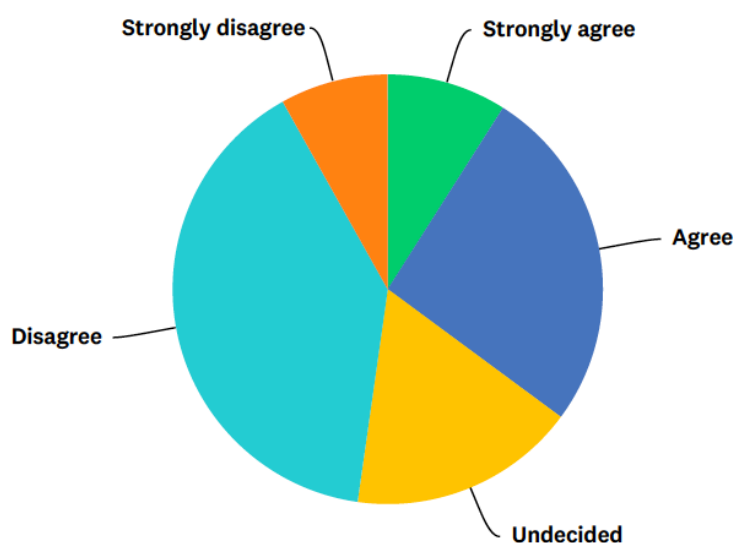
#### (d) Relationship with the national schools' curriculum

SCA is broadly supportive of this aspect of the Masters Curriculum Review.

## 2. The extent to which the Masters Review meets key Government policy objectives, including:

#### (a) Addressing concerns about the overcrowding of the curriculum

**“Crowded Curriculum”:** A strong focus of the Final Report has been to argue the notion that there was a very ‘crowded curriculum’ in NSW schools with too much content. As part of our evaluation during the Interim report period, we asked that *“The Interim Report identifies that there is an overload of content in many syllabuses. To what extent do you believe this applies to the S&C syllabus?”* Respondents were then asked to explain reasons for their responses and if they identified ‘agree’, to provide details regarding which dot points/sections of the syllabus could be removed. The responses from our members revealed:



*The voice of our teachers and our community – their representative responses:*

- Respondent 5 *Society and culture is conceptually based and comprises of a research project and thus has struck a perfect balance of rigour and content without overloading it with content.*
- Respondent 7 *The non-prescriptive nature of the course is actually perfect for addressing the 'overload' in other courses. It allows the teacher the professional judgement to create a unit of work that addresses the syllabus but also gives plenty of flexibility.*
- Respondent 12 *I don't believe that the course is as content heavy as other subjects such English, Legal Studies and Business Studies. The Personal Interest Project does place pressure on teachers to establish a balance between providing enough time for students to work on the major project while still progressing through the course at a sufficient pace. I believe that students also struggle with establishing this balance.*

- Respondent 24 *Syllabus dot points are flexible and intersect with each other. There's a real emphasis on learning skills and concepts and building on how students apply them across the course. Content can sometimes be as much or as little as your class demands. Our syllabus is not too content heavy. However, it is an issue with the curriculum in general.*
- Respondent 26 *I enjoy the rigour of the current syllabus. It may be a demanding course, but there's nothing in the syllabus that students don't need to know. Challenge them with as much as possible about this complex world, I say.*
- Respondent 35 *As a concepts-based course, Society and Culture naturally involves deep discussions with students that can result in lessons going over time allowances. I feel that these discussions are vital to ensure students develop social and cultural literacy. However, due to the plethora of dot points to 'tick off', I often find myself cutting these important discussions short in order to finish content.*
- Respondent 41 *I feel that this is the only syllabus that I teach that isn't overloaded. I think it is well balanced.*
- Respondent 42 *The combination of the content requirements for the core study, two depth studies and PIP can be untenable for students, especially those within limited or distant access to resources.*
- Respondent 53 *In my experience we had a lot of content given to us, which for a standard subject I would see fit but because we had the major work comprising 40%, I think it would have been more manageable to have a slightly lower workload which we get a deeper understanding of rather than a surface level of a number of topics. In saying this, the workload was doable but required a lot of work at home to keep up (student response)*
- Respondent 58 *I am a relatively new teacher to the subject, but at times it does feel as if you are rushing through the content to ensure you cover all the dot points in the syllabus. I feel that you cannot address them all adequately and in depth. As in the Exam there are two 15 mark questions, that may only address a couple of dot points, student can be at a disadvantage if all dot points are not covered equally.*
- Respondent 66 *There is little room for depth due to the content required, especially in the 'depth studies' and elective topics. We always run out of time. Because this course is unique to senior years there is a lot of terminology and conceptual understanding that takes time to develop in the preliminary course. This results in too much content there.*
- Respondent 74 *I feel, compared to other subjects, S&C has an appropriate level of content*

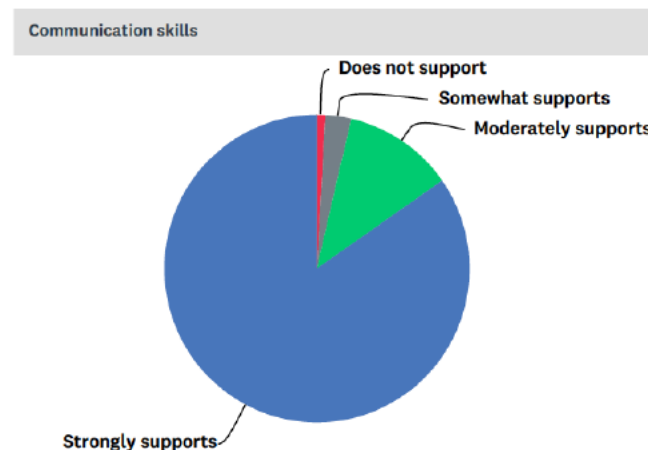
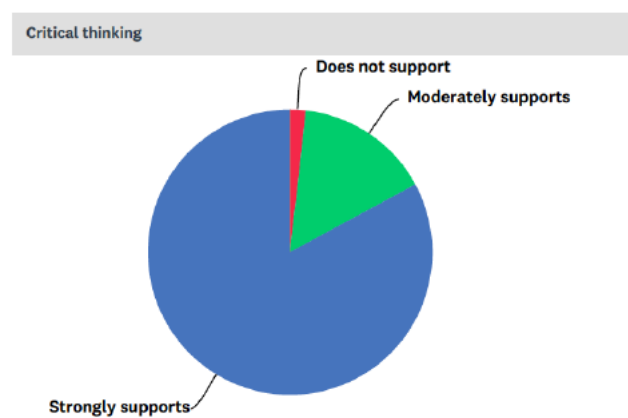
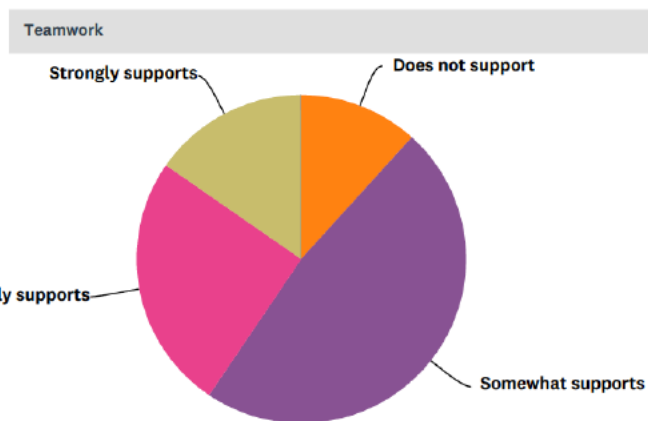
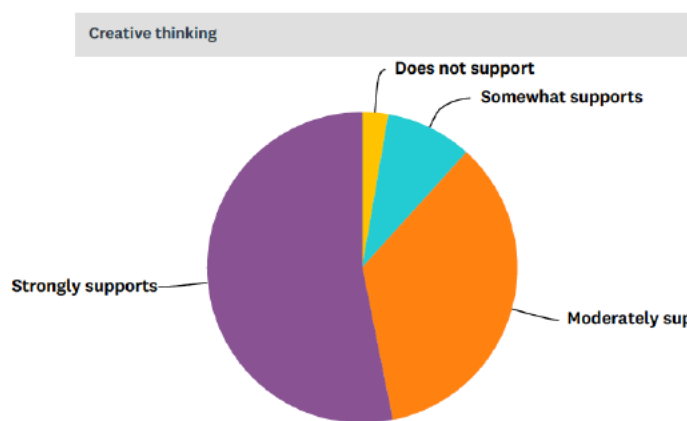
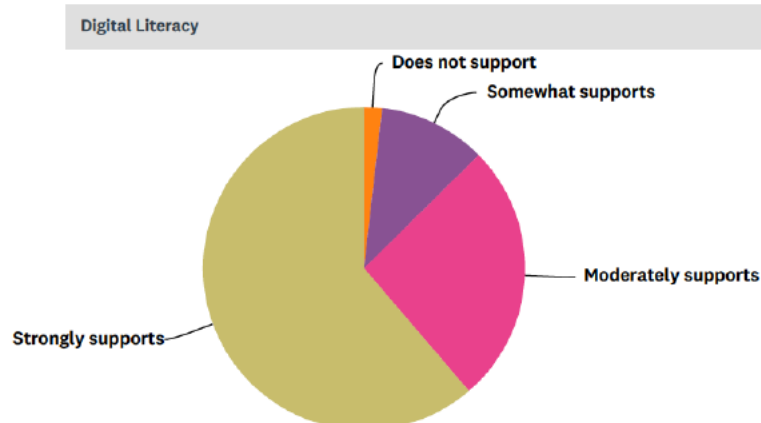
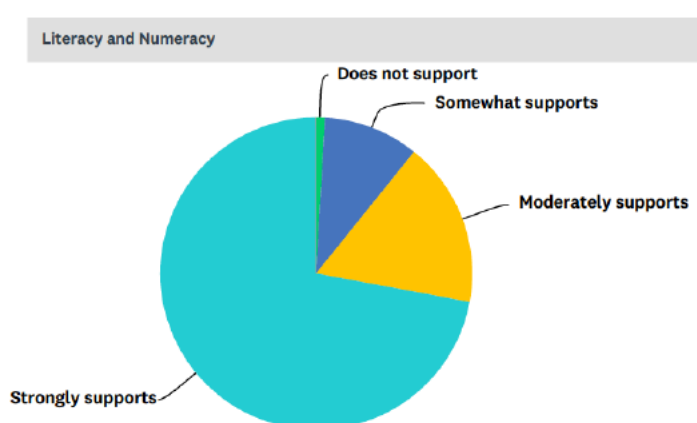
**In Summary:** There is evidently some divided opinions in our community regarding idea of content overload in Society and Culture. There is evidence to discern that teachers new to the subject do find that the syllabus focus on conceptual understanding rather than prescriptive content requires some adjustment and may encounter some difficulties addressing the range of required learning. However, the more experienced teachers are well adjusted to the course requirements and actively embrace the conceptual learning model that is undertaken within a contemporary context. Society and Culture provides a template for innovative courses of the future which are driven by conceptual understandings instead of a reliance on content focus.

**Recommendation:** SCA would welcome any review of syllabus content which we have actively supported in previous curriculum reviews. However, we would not support the jettisoning of any key syllabus focus for the sake of minimising the perceived demands on our senior students at the expense of developing deep holistic knowledge, skills and understandings. Additionally, there have been key concerns as to what this may actually look like within a new curriculum setting as no concrete examples have been provided, especially considering the somewhat ambitious timelines and targets that have been presented. Furthermore, there are also concerns about how this might conflict with other goals regarding specialised knowledge and skills and the consideration that eliminating bifurcation of subjects may exclude some students. Society and Culture can potentially be modelled as an exemplar syllabus that

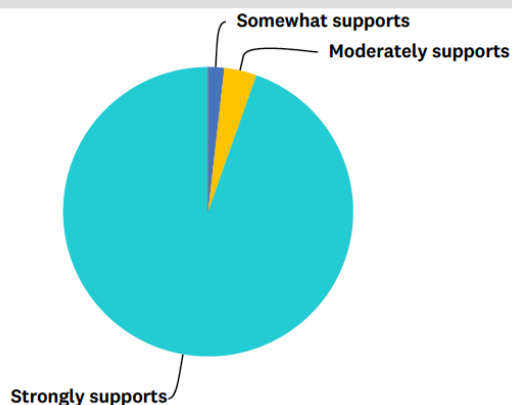
can relieve a possible curriculum overcrowding as teaching and learning content is developed from a conceptual focus

**(b) Ensuring students’ acquisition of excellence in literacy and numeracy as well as deep knowledge of subjects.**

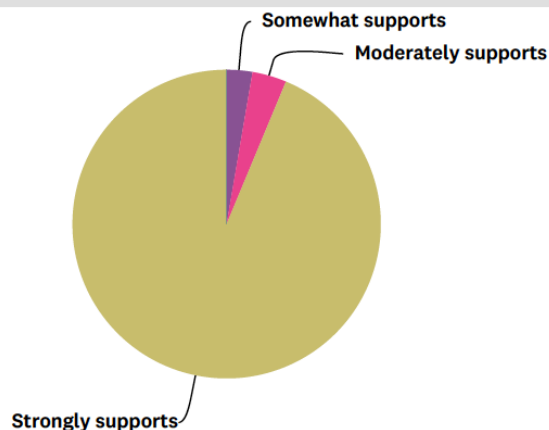
**Literacy and Numeracy and Deep Knowledge:** Our research identified the following evidence regarding current Society and Culture practice in these areas:



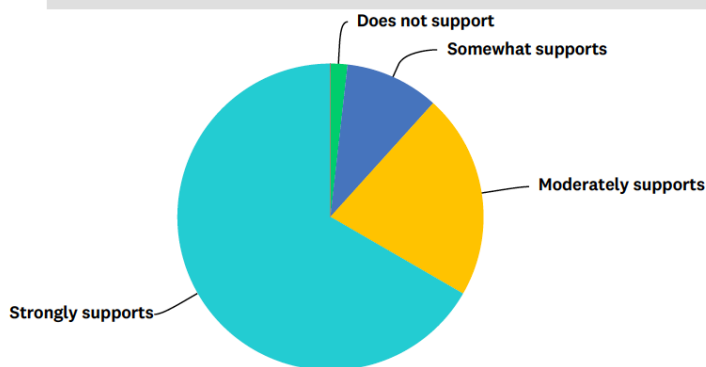
Research skills



Interpreting information and data



Problem Solving



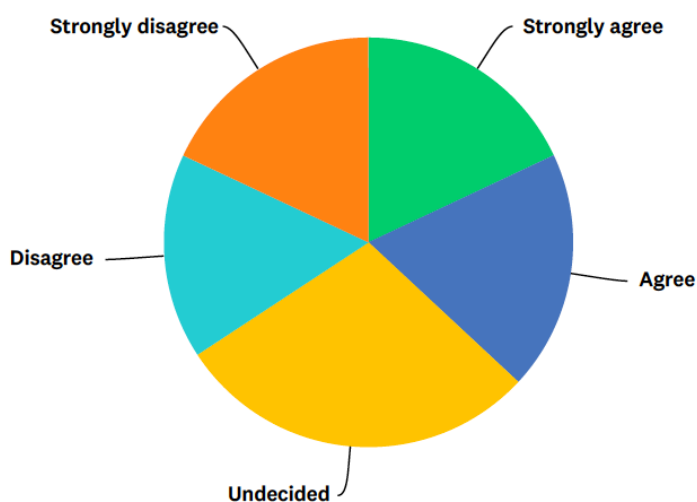
The voice of our teachers and our community – their representative responses:

- Respondent 4 *S&C is a highly skills driven course. The skills developed in S&C help students with their other subjects, and is wonderful preparation for tertiary study, and life in general.*
- Respondent 15 *The PIP enables students to show a wide range of abilities from designing focus questions, primary research, analysing secondary research and interpretation and analysis of data.*

- Respondent 20 *The PIP is fundamental to the course and underpins its approach to integrated learning and critical thinking. It gains tremendous credibility as an externally marked project and provides students with a range of 21st Century learning opportunities.*
- Respondent 26 *Society & Culture requires students to discuss societal issues, understand the actions of others, conduct theoretical and practical research, and navigate ethical discussions in an appropriate and respectful manner. It is for these reasons that the subject caters to all these skills to a high degree.*

Further research of the nature of the Personal Interest Project in the context of the proposal the introduction of a single 'major project' as a standalone component revealed:

**Do you support, in principle the recommendation for a Senior Project? →**

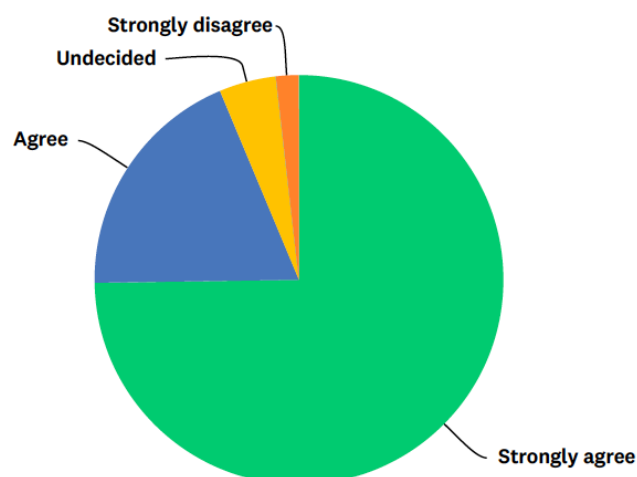


The Personal Interest Project fulfils the requirements of the proposed 'major project' →

What would be your response if the PIP were to be replaced by the proposed 'major project' and removed from the S&C syllabus?

The voice of our teachers and our community – their representative responses:

- Respondent 6. *Very unhappy - I feel that the fact the PIP is externally marked adds a strong element of 'seriousness' to the project for students. There is a wide array of fantastic events, resources and discussion surrounding the PIP in its current form which not only encourage and support students in undertaking and completing the PIP, but also provides an excellent professional development base for teachers new to S+C. Also, we have such a great corporate marking process for the PIP which I thoroughly believe, very importantly, results in fair marks being given to every student, as well as significant professional development for all markers, which goes straight into adding value to students.*
- Respondent 14 *I think that this would be terribly disappointing and harm the integrity of the course. The PIP is integral to the course and gives students skills they gain nowhere else in a structured and scaffolded environment. The external marking of the PIP is important, it gives it extra merit in the eyes of the students and keeps the process fair.*
- Respondent 58 *I would be disheartened as I believe the Personal Interest Project is an excellent task which fulfils, as you suggested above, the idea of the "Major Project". This also demonstrates that Society and Culture as a course represents some of the best curriculum design as it allows students to explore their own interests and critically analyse and assess knowledge in the creation of their project. Even though the PIP is a large and complicated project, I am a strong advocate for it and would like to remain as part of the syllabus.*
- Respondent 77 *Not supportive. The PIP is the foundation of the course as social and cultural literacy and many other skills are taught through this. I have had MANY past students say the PIP is the sole part of the HSC that prepared them for university studies, workplace and life. I would not support its removal.*
- Respondent 94 *The benefit of Society and Culture is that the PIP allows students who may struggle with exams to have access to achieving higher because it is worth 40%. If this is removed does this mean that it will become part of the internal assessment and thus some schools will reduce the meaning and the workload that is attached to this. I feel that having the PIP as part of the syllabus, shows students the skills of research and analysing data something that they will need in University*



**In Summary:** The extraordinary capacity of Personal Interest project within Society and Culture that successfully drives so many students in their skill acquisition is to be heralded. We are concerned that the significance of this project may be impacted by the curriculum review, as it encourages the development a generic project, which may lose the depth and breadth of achievement evident in the Personal Interest Project. We strongly encourage the taskforce to consider these perspectives and retain this unique and distinctive aspect of the NSW curriculum with the Society and Culture syllabus.

Our teaching community has identified a thoroughly positive response to how the Society and Culture Personal Interest Project develops the full range of skills (except Teamwork - due to the nature of the project). This should not be lost in the planning for change in a curriculum review, as these skills are inherent to the work requirements of a successful research project. The PIP process typically takes nine months to complete. The unique skill set required for the PIP necessitate long term commitment, and are embedded across all aspects of the Society and Culture course in order to encourage a continuum of growth and development.

**Recommendation:** the strength of the Personal Interest Project in developing literacy, numeracy and associated deep knowledge and skills affords a clarion call to support the McMasters Review to develop project based learning to NSW curriculum. However, the expertise of this work developed in Society and Culture must not be lost or diluted. The integrity of the Personal Interest Project must be maintained to ensure this unique and benchmark project continues to be a feature in the NSW curriculum.

### **(c) Professor Masters' explanation for NSW declining school results and the role a revised curriculum can play in reversing this decline**

Whilst the focus on deeper learning and developing applied understanding is to be commended, our Association has reservations with some of the 'back to basics' rhetoric evident in the Report. If there will be a reduction in specialised subject areas this would lead to significant limitations in subject choice and opportunities for students in NSW schools.

**Metacognition and 'Depth over Breadth':** On page 51 of the Master Final Report it is stated *Researchers define metacognition as awareness and understanding of one's own thinking and learning processes. This includes a learner's knowledge about themselves – their current levels of attainment, strengths, weaknesses and ways of learning.* And on page 52....*found strong support for greater flexibility. The revised curriculum is described as 'concept-driven' with a greater focus on core concepts and an emphasis on 'depth over breadth'.*

**In conclusion:** SCA absolutely supports the focus on improving results but not at the expense of curriculum diversity and whilst the mantra of 'depth over breadth' may sound appealing we hold to the real goals of curriculum change to deliver on a focus for student to attain the capacity for metacognition and learning that is relevant to each student's personal experiences. This is where a genuine depth of knowledge and understanding takes place. The only humanities subject which attained any focus or discussion in the entire report was History. This lack of recognition of the existing diversity in the curriculum did not reflect positively and meaningfully on the current context in schools.

**Recommendation:** The SCA would encourage the Inquiry committee to consider that our syllabus focus of personal experience being a complimentary study to public knowledge be strongly considered as a viable technique affording students the best opportunity to attain metacognition.

### 3. Other matters of public concern and interest in the development of the NSW curriculum:

#### a) To what extent, if any, 'cross-curriculum priorities' are needed to guide classroom content and teaching

The SCA considers cross curriculum priorities, such as the general capabilities framework, inclusive educational practices, such as differentiation and the embedding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives as an essential component of our pedagogy. These play a vital role in guiding the development and delivery of classroom content and teaching. Providing *'greater priority to core concepts, principles, big ideas and disciplinary ways of thinking and working'* can be viewed as *'a positive alternative to, and protection against, expecting students to learn large volumes of relatively superficial factual and procedural knowledge'* (Master's Review, pg.17), and cross-curriculum priorities play a role in enabling greater depth of understanding of content. Arguably, the inherent conceptual nature of society and culture already achieves this. Some concerns are evident when considering Masters statement that *'the range and mix of subjects that students should study in secondary schools was considered a crucial topic for discussion and resolution, and inevitably would require 'a negotiated compromise'*, especially as there have been limited concrete examples provided regarding how this may occur.

#### b) To what extent, if any, knowledge and the curriculum are 'socially constructed', requiring the teaching of source verification and fluidity principles

The nature of Society and Culture as a subject ensures that students within the course have a genuine understanding of the term 'socially constructed', utilising skills of socio-cultural literacy that have been developed within the course to unpack perspectives and effectively analyse reasons for continuities and changes within Society. Any curriculum should be relevant and reflect the need to learn and analyse. New knowledge is socially constructed and a strong syllabus must accommodate this understanding. For example, Society and Culture has achieved elements of this idea through using the term 'technologies' within the updated syllabus of 2013, hence allowing for future technological developments. Overwhelmingly, the SCA supports the statement by Masters that *'broader changes in society, and particularly increasing globalisation and advances in technologies, have changed forever the world in which students live, including future employment possibilities'* and has a firm belief that source verification and fluidity principles are an essential component for student success. In an era of 'fake news' it is vital that students develop the skills to *'show critical discernment towards information and the media'* (Society and Culture syllabus pg. 25).

#### (c) Whether and to what extent schools should be involved in the 'social and emotional development' of students, as per the Melbourne/Alice Springs Declarations, and growing popularity of 'wellbeing programs' in NSW schools.

The SCA whole heartedly agrees that student wellbeing is a framework for success (CESE, Theme 7) and would like to emphasise that as teachers, we understand that sometimes the support schools provide is the only time students have access to assistance. There is clear evidence that wellbeing programs support young people as they learn, and student engagement is raised when issues of wellbeing are addressed effectively. However, we would also make note that there is a seeming assumption that part of the driving force behind the review was student wellbeing, and it therefore follows that there is also an assumption that 'uncluttering' the curriculum will then have an impact on wellbeing. It is somewhat disappointing that there is no clear space for wellbeing within the review as it currently stands.



Elements that underpin wellbeing have been somewhat addressed by statements on pages 11 and 14 of the report, which discuss *‘the importance of emotional engagement in learning’* and the *‘unique potential (of schools) to contribute to a ‘just and healthy society’ by promoting more equitable outcomes, enhancing cultural understanding, reducing the impact of socioeconomic disadvantage, and promoting social cohesion and social mobility’* and our research indicates strong support for this statements, through the discussion of student agency:

The voice of our teachers and our community – their representative responses:

- Respondent 1 *When students are passionate about what they are learning you are able to witness a different level of engagement. The PIP allows students to understand what their own learning motivations are which will help them succeed at university and their further careers.*
- Respondent 8 *Student agency is very high in my Society and Culture classroom. Students are given much choice about the topics that they explore and the style in which they choose to learn. The PIP process has an extremely high level of student agency that is evident from the moment students choose their research topics to the day they submit them for their HSC.*
- Respondent 12 *The Personal Interest Project is a prime example of student agency as it is a PERSONAL INTEREST Project - by its very nature it promotes opportunities for students to build on their strengths and pursue personal interests and passions in order to improve student motivation and engagement. When students have a level of control over what and how they learn they are also supported to develop skills in self-regulation and independent learning and are likely to develop higher level.*
- Respondent 30 *I agree that students are more motivated when they feel an engagement in what they are doing but this does not exclusively come from their own choices, I feel it is incredibly important in how the material is taught. Knowing your students’ strengths/interests/passions and being able to use that to deliver content with scope to extend into student directed learning is a better combination. My concern is the assumption that all students in my S&C class are independent learners – some are, but others need a little more help, while some are far from this and may never become so.*

The Society and Culture curriculum assists students to understand the reasons for social change and the complexity of growing up in a changing society, helping students to question why and visualise implications and strategies to manage change. Additionally, the personal experience focus of Society and Culture connects with students and affords emotional engagement. to their lives. The level of student engagement and agency evident in the typical Society and Culture classroom is an inspiration to behold and a vital aspect of this is how the syllabus requires learning to synthesise *personal experience* and *public knowledge*. This distinctive quality ensures students grow to appreciate the relevance of their own lives and the lives of others of what they are studying, building sociocultural literacy skills such as empathy and concern for the rights of others, the ability to view the media with critical discernment and to research ethically and effectively.

#### **(d) Adequacy of the content and depth of teaching of Australian history, pre- and post-1788**

The SCA would like to emphasise that a wide range of HSIE subjects (including Society and Culture, Legal Studies, Ancient History, Modern History, Extension History and Geography) provide significant scope within the syllabus for this to be addressed. Syllabus options provide flexibility, while also supporting teacher expertise and student interest. Recent revisions within Modern, Ancient and Extension histories have furthered the opportunity for the teaching of Australian history, both pre and post 1788.



**(e) Given the importance of English literacy across the curriculum, adopting the most effective evidence-based approaches to language acquisition, especially for reading and writing.**

Literacy across the curriculum should continue to maintain its priority, as addressed within the general capabilities' framework. As previously discussed in element 2b of this submission (the extent to which the review ensures students' acquisition of excellence in literacy and numeracy as well as deep knowledge of subjects p. 9-13), writing in Society and Culture requires a sophisticated understanding of the subject metalanguage, while writing from a conceptual basis also enhances language acquisition. The development of the PIP (as a mini thesis) requires students to research and synthesise their thoughts conceptually in a written document and therefore supports language acquisition as communication to an audience.

**(f) Role and effectiveness of vocational education syllabuses in NSW schools**

The Review appears to suggest the current 'stream' approach or bifurcation is not ideal. Whilst this does not necessarily impact the subject of Society and Culture, it may have a significant impact on our students (further insights related to this may be found in our recommendations on p. 9). For example, the option to study VET courses as an ATAR course or not, provides required access points for students to continue their learning while developing skills for the workplace and it is clear that vocational educational syllabi have an important role to play within NSW schools.

**(g) Effectiveness of NESA in curriculum development and supervision**

The SCA feels that NESA's effectiveness in curriculum development and supervision has improved significantly over the past five years. NESA has played a vital role in creating a relevant curriculum for students in a society that is changing quickly, while also aiming to ensure that the timing of a syllabus release does not negatively impact on schools and staff. Many stakeholders are increasingly aware today of NESA's ability to supervise and support schools. However, it also needs to be considered that their engagement with teaching associations could be refined. There are a significant number of teaching associations who are acknowledged for running highly effective professional learning for curriculum support with access to a large majority of teachers in NSW, yet professional teaching associations do not have a formally recognised place during consultation and development processes with NESA.

**4. Any other concerns regarding the Legislative Council review or Curriculum review**

**Timeframe for submissions to the legislative council:** Associations and other relevant stakeholders were only notified of the Legislative Council review in early July during the school holiday period, giving limited time for research and consultation to occur. This may have limited the range of evidence that can be provided and potentially, excluded some key stakeholders from the submission process.

**'Stakeholder' engagement and consultation:** While both the Curriculum review summary and final report mention that the *'implementation of the new curriculum will need to occur over a number of years to allow new syllabuses and curriculum features to be designed, developed and piloted in schools. Stakeholder groups, particularly teachers, should be closely involved in all phases of implementation'*, the exclusion of teaching associations as a specific stakeholder is a failing of the report and must be challenged to ensure that development is collaboratively owned. Additionally, although recommendations from the summary report provide a generalised timeline for review and design, there are limited concrete examples of what the changes will look like and additionally, a lack of explicit details regarding the consultation process involved in any changes to occur.

The SCA would like to provide their overall support for the curriculum review process as a healthy and consultative way to manage meaningful change. Although the HSC is of a global standard of curriculum we should not settle for past achievements, but should drive to innovate for ongoing best practice not only in a global context, but also in a way that is relevant and meaningful for an Australian context and our students. As a distinct focus of the Society and Culture course, change is embraced. However, it is also vital that the strength of our current curriculum and the capacity that currently exists should not be jettisoned just for the sake of change.

Thankyou for your consideration of this submission.