

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

**Organisation:** The University of Newcastle, Priority Research Centre for  
Physical Activity and Nutrition

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A feedback commentary to the committee's discussion paper on the review of the New South Wales school curriculum on behalf of the Priority Research Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition (PRCPAN), The University of Newcastle.

### **A progressive and integrated culinary nutrition education approach for the renewed New South Wales curriculum.**

On review of the committee's discussion paper we suggest there is significant scope moving forward to implement a progressive and integrated culinary nutrition education approach within the revised NSW curriculum. Reinforced by evidence that supports schools as the ideal setting for nutrition education<sup>1,2</sup> and teacher led lessons identified in recent literature as an effective approach for nutrition content delivery<sup>3</sup>. With the focus of the new curriculum to have students develop deep knowledge and understanding<sup>4</sup>, more opportunities for basic nutrition concepts could be integrated that provide students with the essential life skills for positive and sustainable health behaviour outcomes. This would be a bold move to reduce some key chronic disease statistics.

We recommend that together both nutrition knowledge and skills are a must in considering what is core content, indeed a pillar of foundational education curriculum for the present and future generations of NSW students<sup>5</sup>. In aligning with the need for a back to basics approach<sup>4</sup> we recommend focusing on connecting nutrition knowledge with essential food and cookery skills. Nutrition education programs that have a combined knowledge and skills development component offer stronger outcomes to better ensure students have the core tools to form solid and sustainable healthful dietary practices<sup>6, 7, 8</sup>.

All students deserve the opportunity to acquire nutrition knowledge and develop essential food and cookery skills that will enable them to live a healthy life and reach their full potential. Therefore, as the current learning areas for K-10 are to remain<sup>4</sup> it is important culinary nutrition education be successfully integrated into mandatory curriculum across compatible learning areas such as science, math, personal development, health and physical education (PDHPE) and technologies in a connected manner similar to a cross curriculum priority. With an overhaul of the whole curriculum and creation of new syllabuses for all learning areas and at all stages imminent, it is a key time to investigate how teaching nutrition and essential culinary nutrition skills can be done effectively to result in better informed and able school leavers<sup>5</sup>.

Previous studies have identified students understand the importance of nutrition education but often the lack confidence in implementing the practical aspects of the national dietary guidelines due to a disconnect between knowledge and skills or perceived importance for how their current food behaviours can impact future health outcomes<sup>9</sup>.

Providing a greater focus on nutrition knowledge and skills in the new mandatory NSW curriculum is an essential step toward implementing an evidence-based approach and improving the health outcomes of future generations of NSW students.

Nutrition being taught across different learning areas is not a new concept with many health focused organisations such as Oz Harvest's FEAST program<sup>10</sup>, Sugar by Half in conjunction with Australian Dental Association and Cool Australia<sup>11</sup>, Cancer council<sup>12</sup> and our team at the University of Newcastle (CUP's<sup>13</sup> and Australian Eating Survey<sup>14</sup> programs) having already developed and evaluated feasible nutrition education teaching tools. The prevention through education approach of these learning resources highlight the potential opportunity to refocus vital nutrition education concepts within the revised mandatory NSW curriculum.

**The focus of these programs echoes our previous recommendations to implement a cross curriculum integrative approach to nutrition education with a focus on nutrition knowledge and skills development<sup>15</sup>.**

In supporting recommendation 8.1<sup>4</sup> we are also encouraged by the committee's endorsement to review extra-curricular programs including those with a nutrition focus and find effective ways the content can be added into the new curriculum being created. As extra curricula programs are not mandatory, not all students receive the same opportunities and the short term or single exposure of some of these programs means limited long term impact to student health behaviours<sup>2</sup>. Effectively integrating nutrition education into mandatory curriculum would ensure all students are equally exposed to this important content. As an example, our team has developed and evaluated the Back to Basics Cooking Club and Healthy Lifestyle Program for primary school age children in the afterschool care setting which has been shown to increase vegetable intake<sup>16</sup>. This program has potential to be translated into a classroom setting and scaled up across the state.

We suggest three key considerations to developing an effective nutrition education for NSW students:

- Provide a **progressive** approach: offering nutrition education modules at several time points such as years 3, 6, 8 and 10 for increased exposure and opportunity to meet different life stage needs.
- To reduce content delivery burden, by creating an **integrated** approach across several relevant learning areas such as science, technologies, math and PDHPE.
- Create a **connected** approach that links each of these separate learning modules across years and learning areas to show connections and build on previous content reinforcing the subject's importance to schools, teachers and student learners.

**We would welcome the opportunity to discuss ideas and strategies about how these above recommendations can be achieved with our team currently working on several projects with the above aims.**

Thank you for considering our feedback.  
Yours sincerely

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