

**Submission
No 122**

**INQUIRY INTO ARTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION AND
TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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Submission

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Introduction

As this committee well knows music and drama are critical to the vibrancy and the growth of our schools and our communities. That is why a strong curriculum that reflects these subjects, and their vibrancy is vital. Recently NESA released syllabuses in Drama and Music that fall short of teacher, student and industry expectations.

While I have concerns about changes that are shared by my academic colleagues (see attached letter) to both Music and Drama syllabuses this submission will focus specifically on Drama education. I have been a teacher and researcher in drama education over 30 years. My professional experience encompasses:

- Examining thousands of student performances
- Working as Senior Marker, Judge and Chief Judge in the NESA Drama Examination process
- Researching drama and theatre internationally
- As a syllabus developer in different capacities of several drama syllabuses. I was engaged by NESA to provide feedback on the current draft syllabus until my resignation over process and content issues.

Executive Summary

This submission provides critical evidence regarding the proposed changes to the HSC Drama syllabus, which fundamentally threatens the educational integrity of HSC Drama in New South Wales and beyond.

Background

The current HSC Drama syllabus is predicated on performance as core knowledge. Students currently develop and perform upto 12-minute works that represent months of collaborative preparation, creative development, and critical artistic exploration. Each student is assessed individually.

Key Findings and Concerns

1. Impact on learning

The proposed syllabus

- Systematically reduces opportunities for student-led performance
- Diminishes the transformative power of creative expression in education

- Contradicts established research on the benefits of drama learning (see attached research summary)
- Creates a dis-continuum between K-10 and learning in 11-12 (HSC)
- Places more emphasis on written examinations. The present HSC examination weights 60 (practical) 40 (written). The proposed syllabus will move to a 50% written weighting. This change will disadvantage students who already struggle with written work but excel in performance.

2. Learning Outcomes

Currently the existing syllabus Performance in HSC Drama (See evidence sheet attached):

- Develops complex collaborative skills
- Builds communication capabilities
- Encourages creative problem-solving
- Provides authentic assessment of student capabilities
- Creates lasting learning beyond traditional examination methods

3. Consultation Concerns

The writers and several officers within NESAs had produced serviceable drafts for consultation. At the eleventh-hour unknown officers within NESAs changed the drafts that these writers and experts had created and released a disfigured version of the current syllabus. The current draft is unteachable and unworkable and, in my view, will lead to the demise of the subject.

The current consultation process is fatally flawed:

- Limited genuine engagement with educational practitioners before the release of the consultation draft.
- Disrespect for teacher and expert perspectives on the development of these documents.
- Apparent prioritization of administrative perspectives
- Minimal consideration of expert pedagogical input

4. Systemic Implications

The proposed changes represent a broader trend of:

- Reducing creative educational opportunities
- Narrowing curriculum assessment methods
- Applying a narrow view of best practice assessment
- Privileging administrative efficiency over educational effectiveness

Recommendations

1. Remove the current draft and restart the process with a draft that resembles those developed within NESAs before the flawed consultation draft was released.
2. Maintain Group Performance as a central assessment component
3. Preserve the current balance between performance and written work in the examination.

4. Conduct a comprehensive, transparent consultation process that values teacher expertise.
5. Prioritize expert educational input from practicing teachers and academics
6. Maintain the integrity of drama as a transformative educational experience
7. Undertake an inquiry into NESA's processes as they relate to Arts syllabus development and renewal.

Conclusion

These proposed changes risk creating a diminished and unfair educational experience that fails to recognize the profound learning potential of drama education. NESA has not met its own standards in this process for transparency or quality. This shortfall should result in a new consultation process and an inquiry into the syllabus reform processes as they relate to the arts. Students in NSW schools deserve learning opportunities that reflect the vibrancy and diversity that the arts offer. NESA's processes have put the opportunities in grave risk.